



Hasan Taha Alkan

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Short Story Creative Writing Club

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Efe Doruk Kültür

Efe Öztürk

Yücel Efe Öztürk

Azra Tattan

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

LOCKED CLASSROOM *Asiye Sena İlhan* 4

THE LAST TIME *Azra Kanlıbaş* 8

BROKEN VOWS *Azra Tattan* 10

THE REAL VALUE *Ceren İslam* 15

THE THING INSIDE *Efe Doruk Kültür* 16

MICHAEL THE GREAT *Efe Öztürk* 18

LAST 2 DAYS OF A DEAD *Ege Sabri Çelikkaya* 21

THE BIGGEST SINGER *Emel Karaman* 26

THE BUBBLIEST RECIPES *Esmanur Akgünler* 27

LOVE TO REVOLUTION **Hasan** *Taha Alkan* 32

SAVE THE DEMON *İsmail Görkem Ünal* 35

CHARLIE’S EMERALD *Kaan Damar* 39

OATHS AND ORDERS *Mehmet Kağan İlhan* 40

THE MAGIC BOOK *Mert Göçer* 44

HORROR HORROR HOUSE *Nehir Buluş* 47

KING OF THE BASKETBALL *Ömer Bahadır* 50

THE JOURNEY’S END *Onur Kaan Tekçikıkçı* 52

IN THE LIBRARY *Özge Nur Toraman* 55

JOHN J’S BIG REVENGE *Refik Derbentli* 57

DREAMLAND *Serra Bulut* 59

DEIMOS THE CONQUEROR *Yağız Han Köklüdağ* 62

THE LAST STRANGER *Yücel Efe Öztürk* 65

INTRODUCTION

Welcome reader, to volume 9 of the Short Story Creative Writing Club's short story magazine. Congratulations to every single writer who contributed work to this collection. You've gone through the various stages of brainstorming, planning drafting, and finally editing your work and here result of all those weeks of hard work. I hope the readers both appreciate and admire the effort that has gone into bringing these stories to life.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported my students in their journey to becoming writers. When you read these stories please keep in mind the effort and passion the writers put into them, but most of all, thank you for reading.

A special thank you to Serra Bulut for her poster and to Esmanur Akgünler for the front cover design.

Editor

Cameron Beale

LOCKED CLASSROOM

Asiye Sena İlhan

It was the one of usual days. Dylan and his friends had breakfast together like every morning, then they left their small cafe near the school. They were joking and pushing each other while walking, and after that they spread to their classrooms. While Dylan was walking to his own classroom, he passed by the office of the math teacher, who was always friendly, middle-aged and a bit odd, at that moment, he heard a weird sound from inside. He thought to himself,

"What is that sound?"

It was like somebody was vomiting. He slowly opened the old office door, which was still strong but had paint peeling in some places. Between the big bookshelves and the math notes that filled the room, he tried to see his math teacher, who was bent over. He noticed that his teacher, who was in his early middle age and had some gray between his black hair, was holding his head and trying to loosen his tie. As Dylan tried to look more inside, the annoying sound of the old door echoed in the room. The math teacher, who was bent over in pain, suddenly froze when the disturbing sound echoed through the room. At first, he lifted his head quickly from where it was hanging down, turning it first toward Dylan and then toward the direction of the noise. Dylan, startled, wanted to close the door and leave immediately, but when the teacher straightened his crooked posture and kept staring at him, he gave up on that idea.

"If you came for the results, they haven't been checked yet. Maybe they'll be announced next week," the math teacher said.

Dylan pushed the half-open door wider and revealed himself to the teacher. Now, the mess inside the office was even more visible; piles of papers covered in dust from staying in the same place for so long, half-eaten chocolate cookies, and many books of completely different kinds that clearly had nothing to do with mathematics.

"So this man is capable of doing things other than mathematics," Dylan thought.

After noticing Dylan, the math teacher placed his usual warm smile on his face. Stepping a little closer to him

"Oh, so it was you, Dylan." he said.

Dylan was now completely inside the room. At that moment, ignoring what he had just seen, he made up something completely random. Getting a little closer to the teacher, he said,

"I just came for the results, I'm sorry for disturbing you."

The teacher placed a smile on his face, but this time it was different from his usual one. He looked at Dylan for a long moment before finally replying, “Oh, well then.”

Realizing that he didn’t want to stay there any longer, Dylan left the teacher’s office without saying another word. As he walked through the corridor, he noticed that the number of people had started to decrease, so he quickly headed towards his classroom.

When he entered, he looked around and walked towards some classmates he wasn’t very close to. They started having small daily conversations. One of them, a brown-haired boy whose name he only knew, was complaining about how pointless the homework was and how boring Mr. Brown’s classes always were.

It was Mr. Brown’s class now — the math teacher’s

The group sitting nearby started laughing the moment they heard their teacher’s name. Most of the students never took him seriously anyway, but these ones enjoyed annoying him even more. Mr. Brown usually remained silent or simply sent them to the principal’s office. However, during their last class, things had gotten worse. Nate, one of the students, had tried to throw a paper ball into the trash — at least, that was what he claimed — but it had hit Mr. Brown on the head instead. Furious, the teacher had slammed the board with all his strength, and after that moment, everything had become even more chaotic.

The class, which was already strange enough, suddenly became even weirder when the math teacher entered. The room fell into complete silence. Mr. Brown walked in quietly, his eyes stopping on the empty seat of Sue, who wasn’t present. After staring at it for a few seconds, he turned his gaze to Dylan.

“Where is Sue?” he asked.

The fact that he chose Dylan among all the students made him feel uneasy, but he decided to ignore it for the moment. He looked at the empty seat again and then back at his teacher.

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen her today,” Dylan replied.

Without saying anything else, Mr. Brown turned back to the board and started writing a few questions about the topic they were going to study that day. Nate and his group continued laughing and making strange noises at random moments. The teacher didn’t react at all, his face was completely expressionless. Maybe he was even a little angry.

While writing on the board, he sometimes paused, took a deep breath, and went back to work without a word.

There was a problem with the smart board; its light kept turning off and on at random moments. Suddenly, Mr. Brown turned to the class with the same smile he always wore.

“Look at this, our board is broken. Let’s go to classroom 104,” he said.

Hearing this, the students stood up and started leaving the room, chatting as they walked.

Dylan was at the very back of the group when he felt a hand grab his arm, making him stop. He turned his head and saw Mr. Brown. The teacher was trying not to laugh, but his face looked both excited and stressed.

“Where is Sue, Dylan?” he asked again.

Dylan could feel his anger rising. What does this man want from me? he thought. Taking a deep breath, he said, “I told you I don’t know. I’m not even close to Sue,” and quickly pulled

his arm away. He walked quickly toward the door, hearing the teacher call out behind him, but he ignored it and continued on his way.

When they entered the new classroom, everyone took their seats and waited for the teacher. Mr. Brown came in with the same blank expression he had worn since the morning. This classroom, located next to the storage rooms in the basement, was rarely used. The paint on the walls was peeling, and the air smelled musty, like an old storage room.

While Dylan was thinking about this, the teacher continued solving problems on the board. Suddenly, an unpleasant scraping sound echoed through the room the sound of a door opening. Everyone turned their heads slightly toward the noise.

When Sue appeared, Mr. Brown's face suddenly changed.

"Sue! You're finally here. Now our class is complete," he said with unusual cheerfulness.

He continued teaching as if nothing had happened, but something was off. He kept turning around to scan the class with his eyes, then randomly changed his position and muttered,

"Everything is exactly as I wanted."

Even Nate and his group, usually the loudest in class, were disturbed by his behavior and remained silent, focusing on solving the questions he wrote on the board. While the students were busy with their work, Mr. Brown walked around the classroom, checking their answers.

When he reached Nate's desk, Dylan slowly raised his head and watched them. Nate, who sat in the far corner by the wall, looked at the teacher with confused eyes. The closer Mr. Brown leaned in, the more Nate tried to pull back. Dylan watched them with confusion, growing as tense as Nate.

While this was happening, the rest of the class stayed focused on their work. Then Mr. Brown turned his head to Dylan, as if he wanted him to witness what was about to happen. Locking eyes with Dylan, he suddenly grabbed Nate's arm and twisted it hard to the left. A loud cracking sound and a deep scream filled the room. Everyone turned toward the noise in terror and watched as Nate collapsed onto the floor. Dylan suddenly stood up and started walking towards the teacher. Encouraged by his action, the others began to follow him and move closer to Mr. Brown too. The teacher first glanced at them, then at his pocket and in an instant, he pulled out a gun and pointed it directly at Nate.

Screams filled the room. Many students dropped to the floor, while others rushed desperately to the door, trying to escape. Mr. Brown let out a loud, almost joyful laugh as he looked at them "Go on, try it. See if the door opens," he said, enjoying the panic even more. Dylan, like everyone else, was trembling, not knowing what to do. Nate began screaming and crying louder the moment he saw the gun. Seeing him cry, the teacher leaned over slowly, grabbed Nate by the hair, and pulled his head closer to his own face. Nate stared at him, shaking and crying and then suddenly spat right in the middle of Mr. Brown's face. Mr. Brown took a deep breath, then kicked him hard in the stomach before pressing the cold barrel of the gun against Nate's forehead. Nate continued screaming like he was having a breakdown, while the teacher just stared at him with a hysterical laugh.

Dylan gestured quietly to a few students, showing them they needed to approach the teacher together. A few of them began moving slowly toward Mr. Brown, but when a girl from the back shouted, “Please stop!” the teacher turned around quickly and noticed them. Furious, he pointed the gun at them and started shooting at their ankles. Everyone except Dylan fell to the floor, screaming in pain.

The moment Dylan saw his classmates collapsing, he dropped to the ground too and tried to crawl backward. Mr. Brown, still pulling at his own hair and tearing it out in clumps, slowly approached Dylan. Sometimes his face twisted as if he was about to cry, and then he burst into laughter again as he stepped closer.

“I warned you, Dylan,” he said in a deep, broken voice. His steps slowed, and he tilted his head to the side, almost as if he pitied him. “You followed those idiots. I warned you, Dylan. You weren’t stupid, you understood. Or maybe you just ignored it like the others!”

His whole body was shaking, veins bulging from his head. He was breathing heavily, almost like he was about to vomit. Then he raised the gun and pressed it against Dylan’s forehead. The sound of sobbing echoed through the room. Mr. Brown was both crying and laughing at the same time. It was as if his whole body was on fire. His finger tightened slowly on the trigger.

“I warned y—”

A loud noise suddenly echoed through the room, the sound of a metal and wood chair crashing into the wall. Mr. Brown’s eyes rolled back, and blood began pouring from his head. Dylan immediately jumped on him, grabbed the key from his pocket, and ran to the door.

At the same time, the other students pushed the gun away and started helping the injured. Screaming, crying, and chaos filled the corridor as everyone — wounded or not — fled the classroom. Dylan was the last one to leave.

Before closing the door, he turned around and looked at his math teacher one final time. Blood was drying on his face, and he was lying unconscious on the floor.

“Stupid man,” Dylan whispered, and locked the door behind him.

They never saw Mr. Brown again after that day. All they ever heard was that he had been taken to the hospital.

THE LAST TIME

AzraKanlıbaş

I heard a gun sound. That's all I can remember.

I got up a few seconds ago. I don't know where I am, and also I don't know why Simon is sitting next to me. Where are we? Where is my wife? "Tristan! Are you okay? I've been waiting for you for hours." Simon was the one speaking. "Simon... Where are we?" Both my head hurts so much and my legs won't move. Simon isn't looking well either. He's trying to speak though. "I don't know where we are, but I know that we have to go to the hospital." He was right. I've lost a lot of blood. I'm standing up and Simon is trying to help me even though his leg is bleeding. There is just one question in my mind. Where is my wife?

A few hours ago we came to my place. We couldn't go to the hospital. Simon is wanted for five different criminal records. The moment we go to the hospital, we'll get caught.

At least, my scars aren't that bad. Simon suddenly stood up. My ears are ringing so bad that I didn't hear the door. It was Patrick who came. He is a neighbor of mine. Simon doesn't like him. In fact, he hates him. Since it was 11 pm, Simon didn't open the door. Why is Patrick here? I have a big doubt about him. I think he likes my wife. Speaking of my wife, I haven't heard from her. I sent her a few letters today, but I don't know if I'll get a reply. She is bipolar. I hope she hasn't worry too much about me. I don't know how many days she hasn't been able to get in touch with me. I can't go to the police due to the Simon's condition. I have been hiding him for 3 years.

In the morning, I woke up because of the good smell of something. I went to the kitchen and I saw Simon preparing breakfast. We sat at the table.

"So... what are we going to do?" Simon looks so worried. "I will look for my wife. You can come if you want." Simon doesn't want to go outside but he accept.

We get in the car and Simon turned on the car. I can't find my wallet since we got home yesterday. My drivers license, my id and my money were in it. So it was a good thing Simon came. How would I drive without my license? By the way, I don't know where to look. My wife, Julia moved from London to Brighton one year ago. She had come to visit me here a week before I had the accident, but now I don't even know if she is still here.

Simon and I searched Julia for three days, but there wasn't a single trace of her. I've started to think that either she left or, worse, that she's dead. Because she wouldn't have gone without seeing me.

A few days later, the bad news arrives. Simon and I were sitting at home when we startled by the sudden sound of the doorbell. I opened the door, it was the mailman. He handed me a letter and left. I opened it; it was from Patrick. It said that my wife had died.

I cried for days and I didn't even have the courage to go to her grave. On top of all this grief, I had questions in my mind. Why was Patrick with her when it happened? I knew they were friends, but why had they met in Brighton?

When I finally gathered my courage, I took Simon with me, and we went to Brighton. Now we have been here for four days. I decided to go to Julia's house, thinking that maybe her family was there, and I set off.

I arrive, and it's dark now. No lights are on in the house except on the terrace. I'm going to walk around the house and look at the terrace, but I don't know what I'll see. Someone from her family? Or someone else who moved in.

Terrified, I returned back to the house. I saw Julia on the terrace. I called Simon, and he said I might have been hallucinating from grief. I didn't want to stay there any longer.

Since that day, wherever I went, I started seeing her. I went to the cafes we used to go to together, she was usually there. I went to the park where we first met, most of the time, I saw her there. I was about to lose my mind... until I last saw her.

Last night, I went out for a night walk. I went to the park I always go to. Suddenly, I started hearing familiar voices. Two people were talking. "It's getting very dark, Patrick. Let's go back home." It was Julia. I had gotten used to seeing her, but I didn't expect to hear her voice. I was scared. Why was she talking to Patrick? How?

He answered: "I've been waiting for years for days when I could meet you like this comfortably. Now, everyone who has keeping us apart is gone, and we can stay here for hours together."

I felt like boiling water was poured over me. All my doubts were true. But I wondered, how are they communicating?

"Patrick, please don't bring this up. It took me a very long time to forgive you for what you did, and now you're reminding me of it. If it comes out that you killed him, you'll spend years in prison and I can't be apart from you any longer. And on top of that, you sent a letter to his house as if nothing happened."

In that moment, I realized that the one who had died wasn't Julia.

BROKEN VOWS

Azra Tattan

The night was cold, but not as cold as the little boys' bodies. They were freezing, but their little hands still searched for some food. The blonde explored the surroundings of the trash while the brunette dug through the garbage.

"You know, when I first met you, I thought you would die in a week. You were just so little and—" Rafael started to speak while grinning, but a flying Coke bottle interrupted his sentence. Rafael laughed and groaned as if he was hurt.

"Just shut up and find something to eat. We are digging trash because you decided to throw our last piece of bread to someone," Samuel said irritably.

"But he was an asshole. It was well-deserved." Rafael shrugged; his grin was still on his face. Samuel rolled his eyes, but a small smile formed on his face.

"Well, now look at us. We are digging trash to avoid starvation." Samuel added as if Rafael were unaware. When Rafael opened his mouth to speak, a screeching sound interrupted him. Both of them immediately looked towards the sound to see many black SUVs. In the blink of an eye, the back street echoed with gunshots.

"What the—" Samuel got off the trash and crouched next to the bin. "Get down," he yelled at Rafael, who was still watching the event.

"They ambushed someone." Rafael yelled to Samuel to make his voice heard over the gunshots.

"So what!?" Samuel looked toward Rafael as if he had grown a second head. "You are not thinking of helping him, are you?" Samuel added, even though he knew the answer.

"Come on, Sam," Rafael said before running towards the gunshots. He didn't look back as he was sure Samuel would go after him. While he was running towards the ambushed car, he saw from the open door that the man was injured and bleeding heavily. Almost all of his bodyguards were down; there were only two remaining.

"What the hell are you thinking, Rafe!?" Samuel yelled after him while running towards the man inside the car. "I will kill you." He added while Rafael was grinning.

"Good luck," Rafael said as he saw a Molotov cocktail thrown towards the car. His grin dropped when he realized Samuel was close to the vehicle. With an instinct, Rafael ran with all his power and kicked the Molotov, sending it away from Samuel and the car. Just seconds later, a Molotov exploded loudly.

"Get down!" a man yelled before Rafael could process his actions. Rafael bent down without questioning the voice. A bullet passed right where he was standing a moment ago. The man who warned him fired his gun, and all the sounds stopped. Rafael was still in his place for several seconds before he heard Samuel's voice.

"Rafe?" Samuel's voice was thick with fear. Rafael immediately got up and went inside the car. Samuel was pressing the man's wound; there was a lot of blood inside the black SUV.

"Are you okay, Sam?" Rafael asked while trying to determine if all the blood was from the man. Samuel's eyes immediately found him.

“Thank God you are okay, I thought something had happened since you were silent,” Samuel spoke worriedly. The man smiled weakly; he was losing so much blood.

“You kids, why didn’t you just run?” The man asked with a raspy voice.

“They ambushed you, no? It was unfair.” Rafael answered the man while the bodyguards came and took the pressing the wound job from Samuel.

“We couldn’t just leave you here,” Samuel added, even though he was terrified. He hid his bloody, shaking hand. Rafael held his arm to support him. They were sitting on the back seat of the SUV while the bodyguard was bandaging the man’s wound. The man smiled at them.

“Even grown men do not have your courage,” the man said with a low but firm tone. “Are you guys hungry?” he asked. Rafael nodded immediately. The man turned to his bodyguard before speaking, “Take these kids, they will now be under my protection.”

Rafael and Samuel sat silently in the back seat while the black SUV started to move. Their hands were together, after all, they had sworn to be by each other's sides no matter what.

20 Years Later

“You have to understand, I had no choice,” Samuel spoke while pointing the gun towards Rafael. Rafael laughed dryly before saying, “Oh, did I ask?” Samuel’s face was mainly blank, but Rafael knew better than that. He knew Samuel could never have done this to him. But apparently, he was wrong about a lot of things.

“You betrayed me.” Rafael looked at the gun, which was towards him, as if he pitied the weapon.

“I never wanted it to—“ Samuel tried to explain himself somehow, but Rafael interrupted him.

“We knew, Boss knew there was a traitor among us. He told me to be careful, but I couldn’t have possibly guessed it was you of all these people. What now? Are you going to kill me? Do you even have enough courage for that?” Rafael’s words were cold, just like his eyes. Samuel’s eyes twitched for a second before he lowered his gun.

“You know I can’t do that. You’re like my family, Rafe.” Samuel said while he was putting his gun back in his belt.

“People don’t betray their families, Samuel,” Rafael said in a firm tone. “You’re dead, I hope you know that. The Boss won’t forgive you.”

“I know,” Samuel spoke before rubbing his face tiredly. Rafael felt even angrier at his indifferent tone.

“So that’s it? You’re just accepting your death? I fought for years only to protect you. You can’t just throw it away.” Rafael said after he grabbed Samuel by his collar. Rafael was full of rage, and he felt so disappointed.

“I never asked you to do all of that.”

“What about our promise? It meant nothing to you?” Rafael asked, his hands still tightly gripping Samuel’s collar.

“I’m sorry, Rafe. I don’t know what to say.” Samuel’s eyes had lost their coldness; they were full of emotion now. Rafael couldn’t figure out the exact emotions, but suddenly he felt sick. He let go of Samuel’s collar and turned away; he couldn’t stand to look at those eyes anymore.

“I just wish I had never met you,” Rafael said before walking out slowly. Samuel, as always, a coward, didn’t stop him.

Rafael walked out of the room and then the building. He passed many dead bodies, who were his companions once. They were all dead because Rafael was so blind. He was blind to the signs; he never suspected Samuel, even though the Boss warned him. Rafael took a taxi and went straight to their base. During the taxi ride, he only blamed himself.

He was in front of the Boss in the blink of an eye. His head was ringing, but he still bowed respectfully. Rafael knew the Boss was aware of the events; he always was.

“Rafael Cortez,” the Boss acknowledged him with a nod. “Tell me, why didn’t you bring him here?” he asked coldly. Rafael couldn’t remember the last time he used that tone.

“I can’t,” Rafael said, his voice weaker than he wanted.

“But you will, yes?” the Boss demanded.

“I can’t kill him, Boss.” Rafael looked up to meet the Boss’s gaze. The eyes he saw could kill a man with their sharpness.

“We won’t forgive betrayal, you know that better than anyone. You killed people for less.”

“But—,” before Rafael could finish his sentence, the room’s door opened. Their gazes turned to the sound, only to see Samuel walking in with two guns pointed at him. Rafael's blood ran cold at the sight. One bodyguard cut the unnecessarily long silence with an explanation.

“He came here on his own, Boss. We wanted to escort him since he’s a known traitor now.” The bodyguard’s voice sounded disgusted. He looked at Samuel so hostility as if he hadn’t laughed with him yesterday. Rafael tried hard not to move and be disrespectful towards his boss.

“Look, Cortez, you don’t want to kill him, but apparently he wants to die.” The Boss spoke with an amused tone. He dismissed the bodyguards before continuing to talk. “You know, I never really liked you, Samuel. You were always doubtful and cowardly, unlike Rafael. You were always such a burden to me and especially to him.” The Boss pointed to Rafael. He gave a long breath before taking his gun out and handing it to Rafael. “Now, Cortez, get rid of the burden.”

Rafael remained unmoving, looking towards the gun with confusion. He thought their boss loved them both and that they were a family. But apparently, he was wrong again. While Rafael was staring at the gun, Samuel walked towards him.

“Just do it,” Samuel said with nothing in his voice. Rafael looked up to meet his gaze. And suddenly, he realized Samuel wasn’t even surprised to hear what the Boss said.

“What are you not telling me?” Rafael asked. “Please be honest with me just for once.” his voice sounded tired.

Samuel briefly looked at the Boss before starting to speak. “I knew he never liked me. He only wanted you, and he made it obvious. He treated me like shit, the bruises you saw were always him, not just a random street fight.”

“Why— Why didn’t you tell me any of this?”

“Because you were so happy. You were happy because you thought you had found a family. But this—” Samuel pointed at everyone in the room. “This is far from a family. It’s just a lie. A lie for the Boss to use your insane skills, a lie for me to see you happy.”

Rafael felt sick; he didn't know what to do. He just wanted to wake up from this nightmarish dream. Eventually, he looked to the Boss to see his reaction. He only saw amusement in that gaze, as if they were performing an act.

"Is this funny to you?" Rafael asked with a serious expression.

"No, it's not, but I'm glad we can finally get rid of him." The Boss said with a small smile.

"I'm not killing him," Rafael said. Only a second later, the Boss's expression grew cold. Samuel suddenly held the gun and pressed it to his chest, moved Rafael's finger to the trigger.

"I'm sorry, Rafe. I'm so sorry. I never wanted to betray you, but I couldn't stand it anymore. Please pull the trigger, I want it to be you." Samuel's voice suddenly sounded broken. Even his hands were shaking slightly.

Rafael shook his head and tried to get away from Samuel. But Samuel's firm grip prevented him. "No— No, I don't want it."

"I wish I could stay longer with you." As soon as Samuel spoke, a gunshot echoed in the room. With a reflex, Rafael closed his eyes only to feel the blood that splattered on his face. But it couldn't possibly be Samuel's blood because Rafael was sure his finger didn't pull any trigger. After several seconds, he opened his eyes slowly. Only to see no one in front of him. He was sure Samuel was there a second ago.

"It's that easy." The Boss spoke while putting his gun in his belt. "You're being overdramatic."

Suddenly, something inside Rafael broke. He felt rage in every bone. But the only thing he did was to lower his gaze to see Samuel's dead body on the ground. There was a red pool beneath him already. Rafael couldn't press the laugh that came to his throat. The laugh sounded wrong. He dropped to his knees and checked Samuel's heartbeat. His hands were awfully shaky for the first time in his life. Shaky hands reminded him of little Samuel, and his anger grew bigger.

He tightened his grip on the gun and got up. A second later, he pointed it at the Boss. His shaky hand was still now. And for the first time in a long time, he was sure about what to do.

"You killed him." Rafael pointed out the obvious thing with only hatred in his voice. "He saw you as his father his entire life."

"That's bullshit. You wouldn't betray your father." The Boss spoke with an irritated tone.

"You pushed him; he had no other choice." Rafael turned on the gun safety. The Boss laughed; he didn't seem concerned about the gun pointed at him.

"You're just kidding yourself. Everyone has other chances. Samuel just chose to betray us, and you're so blind to see it. He could've done a lot of different things than that."

Rafael was getting angrier with every other word he said. And deep down, maybe he even agreed with the Boss. The dead body in front of his feet was preventing him from thinking clearly, but he couldn't have cared less.

"Just shut up," Rafael said. His voice was firm, unlike his hands. He looked at his shaky hands; he never wanted this. He never wanted to point his gun at the Boss. That was against everything he had ever lived for. He had risked his own life to protect Samuel and The Boss throughout his life.

"I'm going to kill you," Rafael said.

“Well, I guessed this the moment I met you.” The Boss shrugged. “You’re just so weak when it comes to your loved ones. That is a big flaw. Samuel never deserved your care; you’re just wasting your potential.”

Rafael was feeling sick from all this. He thought maybe everything would be okay if he pulled the trigger. And suddenly, he realized that the gun was pointed towards the wrong person. Without thinking any further, Rafael pointed the gun at his head.

“No— What are you doing?” With sudden panic, The Boss tried to get close to him. But Rafael took a step back and saw the concern creeping into The Boss’s eyes.

“This way, everything would be simpler,” Rafael said calmly. He was sure about what to do. He had already made his decision.

“You can’t—“

“But I will.” Rafael took a deep breath before pulling the trigger. The only thing he saw before everything went dark was The Boss’s terrified face. And the only thing he thought of was Samuel. In the end he was glad to be able to go to him.

THE REAL VALUE

Ceren İslam

“Jack, there is something I’ve wanted to talk to you about for a while.”

“You can talk to me about anything, Richard.”

“Jack, we built our dream company by working really hard, and we overcame big challenges together. We achieved great success together, but now I want to do my work alone.”

After what Richard said, Jack was shocked, and he couldn’t even speak because that wasn’t a conversation that he expected.

“You want to end our partnership?”

Richard nodded in agreement. After that conversation, Jack accepted his brother's request even though he didn't want to. A few weeks later, they parted their company entirely. Jack didn't even mind if his brother got a bigger share in the company. After that, Richard founded his own company as he wanted and ran it successfully for many years. But he never spoke to his brother. Over time, things started to go wrong in the company, and Richard's company began to go bankrupt. So, Richard decided to sell his company, but none of his friends supported him. A few days later, a buyer was found for the company. When Richard went to meet the buyer, he saw that the buyer was his brother Jack, and Richard was shocked.

“ You’re the buyer?” he asked.

Jack smiled gently. “ I couldn’t let your company end like this.”

First, they sat down and talked about what they had been doing for years. Jack told Richard that he had built a very successful business life in London.

“Richard, even though we haven't spoken for years, you are my brother and I will always have your back.”

Jack offered Richard the opportunity to run the company together, and Richard, regretting the way he had treated his brother years ago, he realized that the real value was family. They decided to make a fresh start together. They continued their business and social lives happily together.

THE THING INSIDE

Efe Doruk Kültür

It was 2047. The massive spaceship named Spacering was moving in the black void of space.

The long journey from Earth to Mars depended on four minds on board the Spacering. There was Joel, the brave Captain who led every part of the mission. Arthur, the silent and brilliant Engineer, made sure the mechanics were perfect. Ellie, the most successful Doctor, was ready for any problem. And Mary, the brilliant Physicist, kept her eyes on the stars and the ship's path.

In the first two weeks, everything was very calm. They drank coffee, did sports, and did their duties. Everything was simple; there was no adventure. They were waiting to arrive on Mars.

Then the day came.

The crew was having breakfast. Joel looked at the breakfast table, but Mary was not there. "Where is Mary?" he asked. His voice was worried.

Ellie went to the physics lab to check. The door was slightly open, but the lock was broken. She looked inside. There was nobody in the lab. The floor was wet, and there was a strange, black, slimy trace. Ellie's heart beat fast, and a cold sweat covered her hands.

Ellie quickly came back. "Mary is missing!" she shouted.

Arthur and Joel rushed to the lab. The spillage was very strange. This was not an accident; it was a problem. Obviously, there was something inside the ship. They did not know what it was, but they had to find out. Everyone was very silent and scared.

Joel took control; his voice was stern and serious. "Stay close. Everyone stays together," he ordered. "Arthur went to the security cameras immediately. Ellie, come with me to the lab. We need to know what we're dealing with."

When they arrived at the lab, the situation was worse than Ellie said. The metal door lock wasn't broken; it was more like it had melted.

Arthur's panicked voice was heard on the radio. "Joel... I saw something on the camera, just for a second. It was big and fast. It climbed into the vent."

Suddenly, the leading lights of the ship turned off. Only the weak red lights of the emergency system have remained. They heard a loud noise from the ventilation system. Something was in the walls with them. It was trying to find them.

"We have to reach the bridge. The doors there are strong," Joel whispered.

They moved through the dark corridors. They could hear it moving through the pipes above them.

They turned a corner and saw something. On the floor was a ventilation grille. In front of it was Mary's computer, which was cracked. A few meters further, a large hole had been

burned through the metal corridor floor. The same acid that had burned the door in the laboratory. There was no sign of Mary. She was just gone.

Suddenly, they were shocked by a loud scream in the corridor. The monster dropped from the ventilation.

It was tall and thin, a frightening skeleton covered in shiny, slimy black flesh. Its long head was eyeless. Its teeth were too sharp, and they were bloody. When it moved, the black flesh on its body changed shape, like thick oil moving over bone. Joel, Ellie, and Arthur stopped breathing. Their feet felt heavy, and they could not move.

"The airlock! It's our only chance!" Arthur shouted, which is down the other hallway. "We can throw it out into space!"

The creature let out another scream. It started to come towards them; it was running impossibly fast.

They were not going to make it.

Joel acted first. The Captain pushed Arthur and Ellie towards the other hallway. "Go! Run! I'll slow it down!" he ordered. Joel quickly picked up a heavy fire extinguisher and threw it at the monster's long, eyeless head. The creature stopped for just a second to turn its head.

This was enough. Arthur and Ellie turned the corner and ran as fast as they could towards the airlock. They heard a terrible, wet sound behind them. Joel was screaming.

When they reached the airlock door, Arthur quickly put in the code. "Hurry, Ellie! Hurry!" he shouted. The metal door started to close slowly.

Ellie looked back. Joel was on the floor. The monster was over him, its sharp teeth moving quickly. Then, the thick door closed with a loud thud. The screams of Joel could not be heard anymore.

Arthur's hands were shaking. He pushed the airlock's emergency button. "Open the outer door! Now!"

Ellie was crying. "What about Joel? We left him!"

"It was him or all of us," Arthur whispered, his voice broken. "This thing must not reach Mars."

With a loud hiss, the outer door of the airlock opened to the black void of space. A strong rush of air pulled everything out. The vacuum quickly pulled the monster's body, the black, slimy trace, and everything else away from the ship and into space.

Arthur looked at the empty airlock chamber. They were safe. But the silence in the ship was now louder than any scream. Two of the four crew members were gone: Mary and Captain Joel.

Arthur and Ellie slowly walked to the bridge. They had lost their leader and their best physicist. The ship was still moving, but the journey to Mars would be long, cold, and quiet. They knew one thing: the thing was outside, but the fear was inside.

MICHAEL THE GREAT

Efe Öztürk

A long time ago, in an era when the world was more advanced and powerful than it is today, there was a shining city named Nova. Its streets were bright with crystal lamps, its buildings reached to the sky, they invented almost everything to make their lives easier, and its people believed nothing could break their power. But inside Nova lived a boy who was unaware of his power.

His name was Michael Hunter. He looked like an ordinary boy, but his body controls the world. When he slept, the sun set. When he got angry, lightning struck.

Far away, Michael's stepbrother Sam Hunter lived with pain. Years earlier, Michael had vanished, and everyone said he was dead. Sam believed it too, until some whispers reached him: Michael was alive.

The whispers were true but it was dark whispers. A malevolent figure named Alex Black, the captain of a covert team, had captured Michael. Alex's goal was clear: control Michael and run the world. Alex created a small world in Nova for Michael, resembling a giant cube, so Michael was a prisoner within it. However, he couldn't understand this because Alex's world was different from the everyday world. Usually, when Michael slept, the sun set, but Alex created his world differently than usual so that Michael wouldn't understand.

Michael lives an everyday life, or so he thinks. He wakes up, washes his face, and goes to his job like a normal person. Alex and his team, to keep Michael, whom they had confined to his own little world, from noticing anything. Alex's team built this world from scratch and they controlled Michael since that. All people who live in Alex's city are like non-player characters in video games. Their lives are only for him. They went to their jobs in the same way, with the same people, but their clothes changed daily, and their speeches also varied. So, it was a routine life for Michael because those people made it happen. The team worked in Alex's Nova hemisphere. Their room was invisible from the outside, but they could see from the inside, and there were hidden cameras everywhere in the Nova hemisphere. Hidden cameras were watching Michael at all times.

Sam heard the rumours, and he wanted to avoid his stepbrother, Michael, from Alex's Nova hemisphere because Alex used Michael for his own selfish goals, which were also bad. Sam has a plan to escape. Alex wanted to have an obedient and intelligent team. Sam is clever, it's true. However, he was someone who appeared obedient but was actually playing a role for his own purposes. Alex revised his team every year with unknown people who had no connection with anyone, because this team would be so secret. Anyone outside the team who learns this will meet a certain fate: "Alex Black destroys them." However, Sam's goal was clear, and he would do everything necessary to achieve it.

After a while, Alex revised his team, and they selected Sam for their team. However, Sam shouldn't have let anyone notice anything. Sam's duty was similar to brother's power: fixing sunset and sunrise.

After everything returned to routine, Sam put the plan into action. He had gone to his brother's house and awoke Michael. Sam explained all the information about him and said, "We're gonna run away from here as soon as possible." But Michael didn't believe it. Michael yelled at his brother and said, "Get out of there!". There was a stepsister whom he hadn't seen in years, and there was a life in Alex's Nova hemisphere as a prisoner that Michael was unaware of. Sam had nothing to prove to Michael. The plan failed.

Michael continued to live his routine life, but he always had a question mark in his mind. Michael constantly said, "What if Sam is right?". And slowly, Michael grew aware of something. People always went to the same place at the same time; there were a few changes in the world. Everything repeated itself. However, Michael still couldn't believe the truth. Digesting the truth was so difficult for him.

After he became aware of something, he began to look around carefully. He woke up and opened the TV. It was the same program but it was normal. He walked to the job. Everyone he greeted was greeting him in the same way at the same time and in the same place, and he began to see this everywhere.

Then Michael began to think he ran the world, but he couldn't handle the psychological burden of this situation, and decided to commit suicide. He made a rope out of the curtain in the room. He lifted himself onto the bed and wrapped the curtain, resembling a rope, around his neck. He hung the curtain on the ceiling, and he was ready for suicide. His feet were on the bed, and he slowly moved his right foot outside the bed. After that, his feet were entirely outside of the bed, and the curtain choked his neck strongly. Michael's vision began to darken, and strange things started to happen. Michael's life flashed before one's eyes like a filmstrip. Michael saw everything about him; he controls the world, and he is aware of it now, but there was a physiological problem. When Michael dies, the end of the world will come. If that happens, Michael will have killed the whole world. Just then, Alex's cameras captured this scene, and the team rushed to rescue him. Michael is back from the death's door.

Michael lives normally for a couple of days because he escaped detection. At the same time, his eyes were on his brother. Michael wanted to escape from this prison. He tried to talk to his brother, but Alex had suspected Sam. Alex's rules were getting hard. But one night, Sam and Michael made a plan and decided to escape. Michael knows the map of the Nova hemisphere, and there is a hole that nobody knows except Michael Hunter. When the time was right, they began to escape in secret. Firstly, they went to the basement of Michael's home. They should have dug a tunnel that opens to the outside, but it wasn't an easy task. They dug for three hours because if they stopped, they would fail, and they knew "Alex Black destroys them" was a word. Perhaps Alex didn't destroy Michael, but Sam will undoubtedly die. And Alex woke up for no reason. He looked into the cameras. Alex saw the brothers! Alex raised the alarm, and the team went to Michael's home. The brothers were so unlucky. The team caught the brothers, and they put them to sleep with injector.

No longer does Alex control the world with evil. But Michael was not just Michael Hunter, he became aware of him now. It's not just the world it's managing now, but itself too. He became Michael the Great. He was constantly being this, but he was aware of it at this time. He knew his power, and he could use this. He worried about the uncontrolled

issues. Maybe he couldn't control it, and the end of the world comes. But he would make a choice. Alex couldn't stop him when he woke up. He must believe and strive to awaken the world as a whole. Then, he focused and focused only on this. He said to himself, "I must wake up". Finally, he forced his brain too much, but he felt like he was dead. He woke up and saw the room that they had locked. He thought about what he needed, and he was not Michael Hunter; he was Michael the Great. He got angry, and the lightning struck Alex and his team. Michael the Great used his power for evil, but it was for the greater good of the world. He didn't kill himself for the good of the world, but now he's doing everything he can for the evil of one person, who is Alex, in the world. In fact, the way to be a good person for the rest of the world was to do evil to Alex.

Michael the Great and Sam went outside the Nova hemisphere. Should Michael destroy Alex's team for the good of the world? He had to decide. But if Alex's team captured Michael again, the world could become even worse. He made his decision and destroyed Alex and his team with lightning. Michael and Sam build themselves a temple and Michael continues to control the world from there, isolated from everyone else. Rumors that he lives at the edge of the world continue to this day. Who knows, it may be true.

LAST 2 DAYS OF A DEAD

Ege Sabri Çelikkaya

31.12.2033. It was a snowy New Year's Eve. They were as boring as previous New Year's, as lonely as they were for Aegan Steel. His Christmas tree was set; however, there was no one to celebrate with. With pizzas that he ordered half-eaten and the record "Lonely Day" by System of a Down playing in the background, he was sitting at the table, lonesome. He checked the clock. It was 11.44 p.m. "Another bad day to be alive," he thought. As there is no one to celebrate with, he thought it was nonsense to be awake for the new year. Exactly, what was going to change? He quickly wrapped the pizzas, put them in the fridge, and went to bed. He immediately fell asleep. He could be the only one who entered the new year sleeping.

When the morning alarm rang, Aegan woke up easily, but as he opened his eyes, he saw something:

02.01.2034

What was that? The date 02.01.2034 appeared in his point of view like a hologram and did not move or even vibrate, as if someone else had just edited his eyes in an editing program to see the date. He thought he was in a dream. He hit the walls; his hands hurt. He nipped himself. It was real, but what was it? He should call the doctor, but what if he gets diagnosed mad? The moment that he unlocked his phone, he was horrified by the news that just popped up.

"Humanity is now against a problem that won't be solved."

He continued scrolling shaking. It was obvious. People who live with those who have seen the date 01.01.2034 have reported that they died. There were tonnes of tweets referring to the deaths. "People have people to report their death." Aegan sighed. Then he realized. He was going to die. "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die," he repeated, and his voice went higher as he repeated. "I'M GONNA DIE."

As he screamed for the last time, the noise came from the streets, and Aegan broke the window of Aegan's house. He was going mad, simultaneously, as was the crowd in the streets. His hands continuously shook, and the folks ached in Aegan's head. He arrived at the window whose windows were gone. His heart was fluttering. He barely stood and looked at the street where the window was. The street was a flood of people. Some were rebellious and shouting at the top of their lungs, while some were walking with a dull expression on their face, probably because they did not know what to do next. "It was done," said Aegan in a very low voice. It was done, not only for Aegan, but for humankind.

Time was ticking. Aegan drew his phone from his pocket and exhaustedly pressed the power button on his phone's side. It was 3.22 p.m. Where did the dates come from? How? He was going to die, surely, but what about the others? How are the ones who saw 2100 or over going to live? He put his phone back, thinking about all the scenarios in his head, and turned

his head to the window again. He took a breath, looking at the endless crowd. "Brainless." "Do you really expect that things are gonna reverse by walking purposelessly?"

"I need to do something," said Aegan, thrillingly roaming in his house. While roaming, a vibration came from his leg and poked him: "Press Conference of Solomon Doors on Dates of Death"

"You again! It is you! I must have known it!" Aegan said. Aegan used to work in Doors Technologies Corporation. Actually, everything was Doors in 2034. From flying cars to mobiles, operating systems, fast food chains, and any other sector that you may think of, Solomon Doors leads companies in them. Aegan was paid well, but he couldn't resist the long working hours. Actually, the equation works the same for everyone. You hate Doors, but if you try to take an honorable action and boycott them, you cannot boycott them because most of the companies that you may think of are owned by them, they fully control the remaining –Doors won't allow any company to surpass their companies.- and even the governments. Governments and Doors feed themselves mutually. Governments subsidize Doors and tolerate their dirty work by law, and Doors feed political parties and put their sycophants there. It is connections of nastiness. We are rotating back to Aegan, seeing the post.

"Sir, how do you think the dates of death will affect humanity, and are your companies going to take action about that?"

"That occurrence is not as crucial as it is exaggerated. I reckon people should continue their lives as if nothing had happened. Also, I would like to announce the "Doors Last Day on Earth Ticket" campaign:

You may use that ticket once in a lifetime. As you know your death date, you may use it anytime you would like before your death time. With this ticket, you will get access to Dopamine Bomb, Unlimited Food from Doors Chickens and Doors Burger with a discounted price...

Aegan couldn't resist anymore, and without shutting his phone down, he threw it on his bed. "How am I going to die?" he thought out of nowhere. "I'm gonna die eventually," he said. "I need to find the source before I'm dead." The sun was about to set. The last lights of the day brightened the skyscrapers of the Doors'. Folks started long queues for the Doors' sale points after Solomon's interview. Aegan, on the other hand, was determined. He was gonna spend his remaining life finding the source of this thing. He took his laptop from the case, put it in the middle of the desk, and grabbed a cup of coffee. He was ready to investigate.

He took the first sip of his coffee, opened his top-of-the-line computer, and entered the Doors' database. Theoretically, he had more access while he was working at Doors. However, with 2-3 minutes of coding, he could access the application as if he were an employee. As always, he typed something rapidly and got access to the database. But a vast, nasty sound came from his stomach.

"Jesus Christ!" he said. He hadn't eaten anything since New Year's Eve. "The pizzas!" he remembered. He headed for the fridge quickly and put pizzas in the microwave. While the pizzas were being cooked, he made a simple plan in his head. "First, I'll look up binaries to see if there is something unfamiliar. If not, I will continue searching for suspicious things on the app," he said and completed his planning. "Ding!" The microwave jingled to inform Aegan that the pizzas were ready.

As he opened the door of the microwave, air coming from it burned his face for a moment. "Oh, I'm burning!" he screamed. He washed his face fast and waited for the pizzas to cool down. After waiting for a while, he ate all the slices and got back to his desk.

Getting back to work, he broke into the binary of Doors' application. He checked the numbers. "0,1,0,0,1,0,0,0,1,0,1,1,1,0..." "Nothing special," he reckoned and continued scrolling. An endless road built with numbers 0 and 1. He checked the clock. 8.00 p.m. "I need to work as I will be dead just after the clock has turned 12.00 p.m." Aegan motivated himself by saying this sentence.

He checked all he could, Doors' social media accounts, and any clue he could find on the Internet for 2 hours straight. He scanned formal letters, news, but he couldn't find the source of the death dates. "Maybe it wasn't Doors darkening the universe again," Aegan said unhelpfully. "Maybe this time, humans of this age have seen a miracle. Maybe it was godly forces changing the universe." He desperately left his desk and jumped into his bed. Hope and time were running out. "Let me double-check the binaries." Aegan thought hopelessly and went back to the computer that he had left open on his desk.

As he had done about 3 hours ago, he opened the Doors app that he had received while he was, working for Doors. He did some basic hacking and entered the binary.

0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1... nothing was unusual. He scrolled down a little bit, continued scanning the lines in the app. 0,1... usual as always. 0,1,1,1... "Same, same, same," said Aegan while punching his computer table with anger, tension, and hopelessness.

He was stuck in the "skim, scroll, punch the desk" triangle. "From now on, it is not true to hope for binary," said Aegan, but what was it? "Jesus Christ."

01010101010101011111000000000000000000000000110101010100110010111111111101000000000101000000000010120340000000000000011111111010100000000...

01.01.2034... In a universe where only two characters exist, there were different numbers! And not only one! 2,3, and 4. "How did you invent this?" Aegan thought. In his 14 years of hacking and computing experience, he hadn't thought that. The probability of using different numbers. It didn't even come to his mind. Dazed and confused, he moved his mouse to the line containing the different numbers. His hands weren't staying still. He clicked. At the moment he clicked, an earsplitting sound came from his PC and the computer shut itself down immediately.

"What the hell is happening?" he said in a mad voice. He shook the monitor forcefully, pressed the power button frantically. The computer wasn't taking any electricity. "It ain't an ordinary malfunction." Aegan thought. "There was no short circuit, and besides the computer, all other devices are working, but as I pressed the numbers 01012034... Wait! This is the date when everything turned upside down! So the Doors had a hand in this! I knew it!"

But his computer was broken. "They probably set up a system, and if you find a smoking gun about them, your devices would blow up since they have been the technology monopoly," he said. Then he realized. "I need to take a picture demonstrating this crap as soon as possible! Before I'd be dead!" He went to his bedroom, opened his closet, and took his backup computer. He fulfilled all the steps to get to the Doors app. Then he stopped for a second. "What if I couldn't make it and prove their dirty work. I should post something referring to that like 01012034 code," he thought, but then threw it out because it was a very dumb idea, as the Doors control all the media, they would definitely delete a post that mentions the dirty work that they are doing. "No need to awake the giant," he reckoned. "Maybe they didn't notice that someone had reached their database. I need to do it silently."

He continued his process for breaching Doors. He opened the binary screen and got his phone. He scrolled down to the line 01012034 and started a live stream on his phone with the title:

"FOUND SOMETHING THAT IS GONNA CHANGE THE DESTINY OF HUMANITY!"

"What a lame title," he sighed. "I hope this nasty algorithm that is working flawlessly when it is used for commercial intentions will suggest this stream to strangers." Aegan started his stream with this sentence. He began with zero viewers, but the algorithm seemed to be working; 2,6,13,27... the watchers were multiplying. A loser with no one behind, was about to beat the Doors at their own game.

As time ticked, the number of folks expanding out of control began to lose their patience. Types of comments, such as "what is it, come on, bro, explain it," were increasing. Aegan took a deep breath and started talking.

"Dear citizens of humanity, our lives cranked up with the disaster we had, and as a person who is going to die in the next 24 hours, let me check the clock, in between 5 minutes and 24 hours and 5 minutes, I have things to tell you!"

"Come on, mister very important person!"

"You do not have anything to say, do you?"

"Hurry up, bro."

He was surprised and slightly annoyed because the crowd was so hungry for the big announcement. He took a long and deep breath again.

"Stuff that you are gonna hear will probably shock you and make you think I'm mad. The corporation that pledged you unlimited opportunities for your last day on Earth, oh how cute they are, aren't they -in a sarcastic tone. "Is he talking about Doors?"

"Bro is trying to go viral."

"Give him the attention he desires."

"Guys, I can look like a scammer who just wants more followers, but I don't live with anyone, I'm alone." He was becoming more furious since the audience was rude. The number of people and hate comments he was getting was increasing. "No wonder I'm single," he thought.

"Shut your mouth and just tell the thing."

"Bro, act normally."

"Did Doors fire you :D"

With an explosion of anger, he stopped explaining himself to the crowd. He switched his camera and held it towards the screen of his substitute computer. He made sure the 01012034 line was clear.

"Now, what were you saying?" said Aegan to the crowd. The hostility against the folks was felt in his voice. "I broke into Doors' software. Those numbers were in their binary code! They are fooling you, but you never quit crawling to them."

"Bro, it is just a couple of numbers. What is wrong with you?"

"I'm a computer engineer at Doors Technology, and I've never heard of a binary system including numbers other than 0,1. Doors had done something unique again."

"Dude, just hang up the stream."

"This man has shown the previous day's date and thought he changed the world."

"Fellow, you aren't the main character. Go get some sleep."

"This man has shown yesterday's date and thought he changed the world."

"This man has shown yesterday's date and thought he changed the world."

"The previous day." His voice showed how petrified he was. He had gotten carried away by the tension of the livestream. "I've entered the day I'll pass away," he thought. His heart was beating like a kick drum. He felt every beat inside of him. On the other hand, he was getting closer to death every second.

"Damn you all," he said and closed the broadcast. "Everything you undergo is comeuppance. You deserve worse." Dully, he looked at the computer. Numbers 01012034 were shining on the boring green-black binary tab. He went to his desk, reached for the mouse, and moved his cursor to the line. Bleakly, he clicked on it.

As he pressed the button, something miraculous happened. The green lights flashed and formed a silhouette. Aegan, watching both terrified and fascinated as the lights got bigger, shouted: "What is happening?" As the lights fell into place, the face became recognizable.

"I didn't expect you to be a tough cookie," said the hologram of Solomon Doors.

"What are you doing in my house?" Aegan replied with an angry voice tone.

"You know, I ain't gonna explain how I came here, or how I can illustrate myself as a hologram. I just wanted to congratulate you on your efforts. You almost had us, but with the help of the generation we had poisoned, nobody cared for your actions. Our dumb employees forgot to hide the binary. I wish I hadn't fired you from my company; it would have been a pleasure to work with someone like you."

Aegan, with a confused expression on his face, said, "Thank you." He suddenly remembered that he was talking to a modern-era demon. "Damn you."

"You have 2 minutes left. Do you have any questions you want to ask the emperor of the world?"

He calmed down; he had 2 minutes, so he should have used his time wisely instead of shouting at Solomon. He waited for a while and turned to the hologram:

"When will you be dead?" he asked in a low voice.

"Not before you," Solomon replied.

THE BIGGEST SINGER

Emel Karaman

On the night of the concert, Elora finally stood in front of a big crowd ready to face her dream. The projector lit up the stage with Elora's story, showing how she had grown from a shy, quiet girl into a confident singer who refused to give up.

Her best friend Mia checked the sound one last, making sure everything was ready, while the stage manager gave her an encouraging smile that seemed to say, "You're ready." The lights dimmed slowly, wrapping the hall in silence as every eye turned to the stage.

Elora felt nervous; her hands were trembling, her heart was beating fast and she felt a warm rush on her cheeks. But she took a deep breath and began singing. Each note reflected her hard work, practice, and courage. She remembered all the times she almost gave up. For the first time, she felt proud and ready to shine.

As she sang the first verse, her voice was a little shaky, but soon it grew stronger. The audience began to smile and clap softly, encouraging her to continue.

She saw Mia in the first row, waving and giving her a thumbs-up. That small gesture gave her confidence. She closed her eyes for a moment and let the music carry her. The sound of the piano and the rhythm of the drums made her feel free.

Each lyric reminded her of her struggles and dreams. Slowly, the nervous girl disappeared, and a true performer appeared on stage. The crowd started cheering louder.

When the final note echoed through the hall, the audience stood up and clapped loudly. She could not believe her eyes; people were cheering and shouting her name. Tears filled her eyes, but this time they were tears of happiness.

The stage manager whispered, "You did it," as he handed her a bouquet of flowers. Tears filled Elora's eyes—not of fear this time, but of joy.

Years of sacrifice had finally paid off. In that moment, she was no longer just a shy girl.

In that moment, she was not just a shy girl anymore. She was a singer, strong and shining.

THE BUBBLIEST RECIPES

Esmanur Akgünler

It was a wrenching, hot, and windy day on Venus, as Bubbly was sitting on the top of his house. Looking at the aliens of his dear motherland. They were all caught up in something with the light yellowish atmosphere. Some were dirtying their feet, hands, face, or their clothes, if you can call them clothes, and some were cooking dinner.

“Oh, poor dinner, the devastating, miserable baked mud pieces as if they were the most beautiful thing to eat for dinner!” Bubbly chuckled to himself, finding the situation quite amusing in addition to it being annoying, as he was swinging his feet.

“Only if they would let me use the master kitchen, only once, I would've cooked them beautiful gourmet meals. Perhaps then they would have realized that baked, boiled, or fried mud is not an authentic meal.” He was talking to himself, hoping someone could hear his truest wishes coming from the depths of his alien heart. Someone heard him, indeed. “Someone” was Weggly Woo, Bubbly's dearest friend. Weggly was a pleasant alien to be around. With her chubby cheeks, big purple eyes, and light brown, curly hair, it's a must to say that she was charming. When Bubbly was deep into his complaints, Weggly heard him.

She waved her hand as she was shouting, “Hi, Bubbliest Allie!”

Bubbly flinched as he was not expecting to hear Weggly's shouting. “You freaked me out, Woo Woo!” he shouted back, and they both chuckled.

Weggly hopped onto the top of Bubbly's house to sit next to him.

“What's the matter with you, my lovely friend?” Weggly said, with a concerned look on her face.

“I just can not stand this nonsense anymore, Weggly! How can they eat the bland mud meals and think that 'Mud is the best!'. I have to find a way to show them there are a lot better options to eat.” Bubbly grew angrier and angrier as he continued talking. Weggly nodded and gave a pat to his back while she was listening to him.

“You are right, my friend. But do not pout, please,” she said with a sincere voice.

“How can I not?” Bubbly said with a desperate sigh coming out of his chest. Weggly could not answer him for a few minutes. Therefore, they sat quietly and watched the mud-loving aliens as they went about their chores. As the wind blew its breath towards them, the smell of the dust itched their noses. Then suddenly, Weggly gasped. Bubbly turned to her, with a thrilled face, not expecting anything really.

“I just remembered! The other day, I was sitting on a rock when I heard Frou Fo talking about a place called, I can't exactly remember the name, but it was something like Heresa Istenbal,” Weggly said, in excitement, and looked into Bubbly's red eyes, which complemented the yellow of their fervent land.

“So?” asked Bubbly, without indicating he was also getting excited.

“So, he said they have the best food in there. Oh, I remember! It was Herise Istanbul! It's on the Earth. Maybe you can find a way to go there!” Weggly swayed with joy. Bubbly

laughed at her way of showing joy. Then turned his head to take a look at the illiterate aliens of Venus. He thought about the taste of mud, the smell of the dust, the sound of the carbon dioxide winds, and his dreams. That was when he made his decision; his dreams were the source of his will to live.

“I know it will be hard to find that place, to go there. But if I'm Bubbly, I will find a way. I will not let neither the mud nor the tasteless chefs of Venus take over my fate. I will create my own fate!”

The other day, Bubbly paid a visit to Frou Fo's house. As he gazed at the house, which was made from pale orange rocks, he took a deep breath and gave himself a little pep talk. However, before he had time to knock on the door, Frou Fo opened it with a huff.

"What is it that you want, little boy?" he said with a sizzling, grumpy voice and with an annoyed look on his face.

Bubbly took a few steps backwards. "Sir, I would like to come inside and talk to you about an important matter."

"Huh! I do not have enough time for little chukupos like you!" said Frou Fo.

Chukupos were small, trash-eating creatures of Venus. They would make tiny, ear-scratching voices while reaching for tasty trash in the houses. Therefore, Venus' aliens and chukupos totally had a beef.

"Chukupos? My important matter is about food, cooking authentic meals, and you, sir, are calling me a chukupo? I'm utterly upset by your words!" said Bubbly as he threw a hissy fit.

Frou Fo's expression softened as Bubbly mentioned authentic meals. Eyed him from head to foot. "Well then, come in. I would like to hear about your words."

Frou Fo's house seemed simple, but it had a mysterious scent, a pungent mix of earthy undertones and something sweet and unfamiliar. Bubbly knew the reason behind that mysterious scent. It was the same reason as his visit.

"Speak up, young man."

"Sir, I know you went to the Earth a few times. And I know that is a forbidden thing for me to talk about, but I need your help. I need to go to the Earth."

"The Earth? Are you out of your mind?" Frou Fo's high-volumed voice was making Bubbly tremble as he tried to hide his discomfort.

"Sir, I know, but I really need to go down there. All these mud things are getting on my nerves. I hate it here, sir. I am passionate about food, and I have to make my dreams a reality. I need to visit the place where they prepare the best meals and learn from them. So, nobody in Venus will ever have to eat that flavorless mud. Please, help me." Bubbly's words spilled out of his mouth with a fervor that was impossible to ignore.

"Do you know how long it took me to figure out how to go to other planets? Do you really think you can go there just by wanting it? There is no way that I can help you! Also, just like you said, it is a forbidden topic for you to talk about, and you want to not just talk but to use my transportation machine?"

"You have a transportation machine?" asked Bubbly in awe of the thought of it, imagining a device that could defy the laws of physics.

Frou Fo grunted. It seems like he shouldn't have said that. "Look, boy, I will only explain it to you once. You will see how hard and dangerous it is, and you will give up. All right?"

Well, Bubbly thought, I don't believe that is what's going to happen.

Frou Fo led Bubbly into a room at the back right side of the corridor. Brought up a variety of keys. Some were big and inlaid, while the others were small and simple. He picked up the smallest yet the most gorgeous key among them. Put it in the lock and opened the door. The room was dusty and smelly. The windows were covered with various pieces of rugs. In the middle of the room, a massive object was also covered up by rugs.

"Is that the transportation machine?" Bubbly asked with a sparkle in his eyes.

Frou Fo said nothing, slipped off the rugs with a quick hand movement, and revealed the big, wheel-like machine, as well as all the dust that was stored under the rugs. It was a metallic bubble with a seat in it. In front of the seat, there was a control panel with numerous buttons.

“This is ‘VF-25’, my transportation machine,” said Frou Fo with pure pride on his face, emphasizing the importance of the machine to him.

“This looks confusing, but it’s absolutely beautiful, sir.”

“I know it is, but don’t be fooled by its appearance. You are here because I wanted to show you how dangerous and difficult it is to use this device, not to show its beauty,” said Frou Fo, indicating his cautious thoughts in his mind.

“So,” Bubbly ignored the pinning in Frou Fo’s sentence, “will you show me how to use it?”

Frou Fo glared at him with storms in his eyes. “Of course not!” he said.

“But sir-” Bubbly’s voice was full of denial.

“Boy, shut up and listen. The last time I traveled to Earth was a total disaster,” he took a deep breath and continued, “I had a mission to complete, went down, did what I had to do, and when I tried to come back, my lovely VF-25 was, I guess, too tired. I could not keep it working; it just broke down every minute. Since I had a rush, I could not sit and try to fix it. I decided to keep going, and then, as I was just getting through the stars, VF-25 broke down again. When I was in the middle of the emptiness. I was scared and tried to communicate with our aliens. Somehow, only the communication tool worked. However, it took them three Venus days to save me. I was stuck in there for three whole Venus days. All by myself, in a tiny metallic globe. After that, I’ve never used VF-25 ever again. I am not even sure if it still works. Furthermore, I don’t wanna know.”

“Sir, I didn’t know about this.”

“Of course you did not, Bubbly. They have decided to keep our organization’s secrets more like an oath after that incident.”

“I now see why you were so aggressive about this at the beginning, but, sir, if this is a secret, why are you telling me and showing me these now?” Bubbly asked in whole snoopiness.

“Because I liked your passionate attitude. You’ve reminded me of younger me. Me when I first started to work for our organization, believing that I could change things in here. But no, I could only change myself, my worldview. And I wish someone would also tell me about these things. Maybe then, I would not try that hard to change aliens in here.”

After that, Frou Fo sent Bubbly to his home with a “Don’t you ever think about this ever again!” warning. However, Bubbly was going to think about that, for too many times, for too many hours, for too many days that have already passed within the blink of an eye.

One cold night, which was rare in Venus, Bubbly packed up his plan and his boldness. Sneaked into Frou Fo’s house, while his heart was beating like a drum from all the adrenaline caused by this illegal action. Earlier that day, when he visited Frou Fo, Bubbly had stolen the keys to the VF-25’s room. As evidence of the trust that’s felt by the lovely aliens of Venus, they would never have locked their house’s front or back doors. They would only lock the inside doors, only if it’s necessary. Thanks to that trust, Bubbly made it inside the house. Walked to the VF-25’s room on his tiptoes, unlocked the door slowly. When the lock clicked, and Bubbly looked at

the VF-25's hiding place, Bubbly thought to himself, *I'm sorry, Frou Fo, but I had to do this. This is my only chance.*

As he brought the VF-25 out of the house from the window, he gazed back at the house. *Perhaps I will never come back, and maybe you are right, sir, but I have to try.*

He got inside the metallic globe. When he took his seat, he realized there were slipknots all over the control panel. His eyes wide opened, his mouth opened partway slightly.

"Thank you, sir. Thank you," he said with a smile on his face. There was a note which was attached to a button that said "TO START" and "do not start it unless you absolutely need to" was written under it. Bubbly closed his eyes for a second, reconsidered his actions. Took a few deep breaths. Opened his eyes. Knit his golden eyebrows with determination as he pressed the start button. Clatters and grumblings came out of the metallic walls of the globe. VF-25 slowly got high in the air. As FV-25 was floating towards the stars, Bubbly looked down and saw Frou Fo with a weird expression on his face. He could not tell if it was anger or pride; maybe it was both. VF-25 kept getting further away, Bubbly kept glaring at Frou Fo until he couldn't see his face. And that way, a dangerous adventure, which is full of unknowns, has started for Bubbly.

LOVE TO REVOLUTION

Hasan Taha Alkan

In 17th century, it was a hot and hard day in the Arabian Desert. There was a little village 130 km from Dimashq. The Dimashq ruler's daughter, Fatma, wants to found a trade company. She came to this village because she needed people who knew the region. Fatma's group and the villagers met in the biggest tent of the village, but they didn't know what love could cause. Ali, chief of the village, and Mahmoud bin Abdoulazez are the most important people of the village. They led the meeting for the villagers. Fatma explained her goals and ideas and she needed to an advisor for this job. Mahmoud, Ali, Fatma and her group continued the meeting. After long discussions, they selected Mahmoud bin Aboulazez as the company's advisor. Then, the group came back to Dimashq. Mahmoud began to research the area for this job. Like one week, he thought, researched and wrote.

One week later, Fatma invited Mahmoud to Dimashq, and he went there. The city was wonderful. There are many fabrics, velvet and many goods. He went to palace quickly, and he was attracted to the palace. He looked his environment. Everything was fascinating. While he was waiting, some soldiers came and called him into the hall. When he saw Fatma in the palace, he couldn't take his eyes off Fatma. Her face and eyes were beautiful. Mahmoud fell in love. He could die for her. He wanted a break and went out of the hall. He couldn't do it. He picked up his concentration and came back to the hall.

Then, they decided on the location of the company's centre and the caravansaries, and they talked about the company's management and the construction of the buildings. After the meeting, Fatma gave a letter to Mahmoud for Ali. Fatma told him, "Don't read and give to Ali.". Then Mahmoud left the palace and hit the road to his village. Suddenly, he stopped near a rock and read the letter. He was surprised. Fatma was inviting Ali to Dimashq. Mahmoud couldn't understand. He didn't care about it. When he arrived at the village, he immediately went to Ali and gave him the letter. He returned home and thought about Fatma and her beauty. He didn't prevent him. He began to read a book to avoid love. He was a basic man, but she is rich, has a reputation, etc. He went out alone and walked to a deserted place. Maybe it was supposed to be, he thought. He sits for a long time. Towards evening, the sandstorm was beginning, so he had to return. He was feeling very proud, so happy and a bit of an idiot.

During the sandstorm, he didn't go out of his house. He was not talking to anyone. After a few days, Ali came to Mahmoud's house to talk with him before going to Dimashq. When Ali entered the house, he couldn't see Mahmoud, but there was a beautiful statue and many papers in the middle of the house. He couldn't understand this view. What happened here? He called

Mahmoud but couldn't get any answers. After a few minutes, Mahmoud came and was surprised because he hadn't expected Ali to be there.

Ali said, "What are these? You should destroy it! "

"I can't. "

"Why?"

"Because I love Fatma, he attracted me when I went to Dimashq."

"This is madness."

"Love is merely a madness. "

"You had better destroy it. I am going to Dimashq. "

Ali arrived in Dimashq and sat at an Inn. He was thinking about Mahmoud's actions. At this moment, Fatma came to talk with Ali. Fatma surprised him.

She said to Ali, "How can I say, I don't know."

"Please be calm. I am listening to you."

"Ali... "

"Yes, Fatma?"

"I, ... I love you."

"Are you serious?"

"Absolutely."

Ali didn't know what to do. She offered him to marry her. He wanted a week to decide. Ali immediately left the Inn and hit the road to the village. "These are crazy days", he said. He returned to his house and began to think about the complicated situation. He went to Mahmoud to talk about love. Mahmoud was so excited and happy. He wants to talk with Fatma and tell her everything. Ali now knew that Mahmoud would be a big problem. They had talked for a long time. The next day, Ali went toward Dimashq. He met with Fatma and said, "I accept your offer."

At these times, Mahmoud finished the statue and packaged his poems for Fatma, and got ready for the talk. He prepared his papers perfectly and practised his speech. Suddenly, a few soldiers entered the house and saw the statue and the poems. There are many pictures of Fatma. They were surprised because all of these are forbidden in this area. The Ruler had banned them. These are not rational. Mahmoud tried to persuade them, but they didn't listen. Arrested him and took him away to Dimashq. In the middle of the square, in front of the Government building. He looked at the public. He tried to persuade them. All of these were madness. This speech angered the people even more. Mahmoud was stoned by the people who live in Dimashq because he is a sinner. He died, but his love was still alive. Mahmoud's poems and statue still exist.

Ali and Fatma were watching the square from the government building. Ali was feeling regret, but it couldn't bring back Mahmoud. After the death of Mahmoud, many people learned about Mahmoud's fascinating poems, pictures and the statues. Some people collected them to protect against the Ruler's prohibitionist policies. More people adopted Mahmoud's ideas, but the government was suppressing them. Mahmoud's death was a scandal. It was supposed to forget. The people didn't forget it. Mahmoud became a symbol of freedom. Every day, the supporters were increasing, and the government was losing strength. So, many soldiers were attending the supporters. One day, a group of people started a rebellion against the government.

They pillaged everywhere, occupied every street, village and, every caravansaries. Power was beginning to fall into the hands of the rebels. The Ruler couldn't control his soldiers, money, or power. The government was forced to lose. There was a state of anarchy. The Rebellion had grown, and they marched to Dimashq. They had wanted to deal with the Ruler but he didn't accept it. He was an arrogant person. They attempted to brich the walls but the walls was too big for them. The rebels were patient and they will got what they wanted. The siege continued for weeks. Lack of water and foods was occurred in the city. Some soldiers were died. So, they had to give up. The rebels attempted to break the gate of city. The Ruler's soldiers was not healthy and powerful to defend. The rebels achieved, they opened the gate and entered the city. The city had fallen. The rebels entered the palace and caught the Ruler, the cabinet of government, Fatma and Ali. They were stoned by the same people in the middle of the square, in front of the Government building. They had freedom now. They built Mahmoud bin Abdoulazez's statue in front of the government building. Sooner or later, the people get what they want. Maybe love is the most powerful thing in the world.

SAVE THE DEMON

İsmail Görkem Ünal

It was a rainy day. Demons came to town again and began to take people out of their homes and tie them up. Human screams could be heard all over the town. The demon's army leader, Hadem, wanted a slave army composed of humans. Therefore, he took people from the town for his army. Everyone in the town was afraid that the demons would take them. In one of the houses in this town, Stew and Chester hid from demons. The demons were walking in front of the house. Voices were becoming stronger. Demons were coming for them. They heard the doors breaking. Stew hid in the kitchen cabinet and took a knife to defend himself. Chester hid behind the curtain in the kitchen. Demons opened the kitchen door and looked around. They smelt like rotten eggs. They saw Chester's feet under the curtain. One of them took him and dragged him outside the house. Stew saw everything between the cupboard doors, but he didn't do anything about it. He couldn't handle two demons alone. Another demon began to search the kitchen. Stew held his knife tight. Suddenly, he went out of the cabinet and stabbed the demon. The demon fell to the ground without making a sound. Stew ran to the house door quickly and looked around. Chester was gone.

Stew took a deep breath. Where could he have gone? What will he do now? He didn't know. He closed the door and went to the kitchen. He looked at the dead body on the carpet. The ground was covered with a gray liquid. It is the demon's blood. Both the demon and his blood smelled disgusting. He couldn't resist this smell. He went to the bathroom and washed his hands. He had blood on his hands. He started thinking in front of the sink. How could he rescue Chester? He needed to talk to her.

Stew left the body behind and went out the back door of the house. He went through the houses secretly. He stopped after ten blocks and entered a black house. The house seemed like a forsaken place. No demon cared about this house. He went to the living room. This room had a few pieces of furniture, a carpet, and a sofa. He lifted the carpet and opened the secret compartment under it. The compartment had a deep way. Inside the compartment, there were metal walls and a ladder. The walls seemed very old, and the ladder was broken. He entered the compartment and went down the ladder. At the end of the ladder, there was a door. He opened the door and came inside. A blonde, brown-eyed girl was sleeping on the couch. She is his friend, Amy. After Stew had opened the door, she woke up and looked at the door in fear. She was relieved to see Stew.

“What are you doing here, Stew?”

“Filthy demons kidnapped Chester!”

Stew said everything to her. Looked like he needed help. Amy thought about what they do. An idea came to her mind. I know someone who can get information about where Chester is. If we find the place where he is being held captive, we may save him.

“How can you take information?”

“Just trust me. I am very good at that.”

She left the room. Five hours later, she came with a map. She found where Chester is, and how they can enter there. She showed a place on the map. This place is the nearest demon castle to Amy's house.

“We will sneak into a car that brings food for the demons.”

Stew liked this plan, but he didn't understand how it was done. Amy explained the plan. First, they would block the road where the car was passing. Second, while the demons were removing the obstacle, they would sneak into the car. Then they would wait for the car to arrive at the castle and sneak in. Stew thought it was a dangerous plan, but he didn't have another choice, so he accepted that.

“Okay, let's do it.”

The next morning, they made a barricade to stop the car between the neighbourhoods and the demon castle. They waited until noon to sneak into the car. A vehicle arrived at noon. The vehicle had two demons inside, and it was old. Its wheels were about to break due to the weight. When the demons saw the barricade, they got out of the car to remove it. They started to remove the barricade with anger. They were distracted, so they didn't notice on the vehicle. Stew and Amy sneaked into the vehicle quietly. They hid in the compartment where the food was. Demons came in the vehicle after they had removed the barricade. They didn't notice Stew and Amy and drove the vehicle through the castle.

A few hours later, they heard the sound of the door opening. They heard demons talking, but they couldn't understand what they were talking about. A few minutes later, the vehicle stopped. Neither Stew nor Amy knew what to do after that. Stew stuck his head out of the car. He didn't see any demons. There were only freight vehicles around. Stew saw a black door between two yellow vehicles.

"We gotta go."

They got out of the vehicle. They ran to the black door. As they approached the black door, they heard demons laughing. Demons were behind the door.

"Hide the vehicles."

Stew and Amy hid the yellow vehicles, and a few seconds later, two demons entered. They were talking about a child who was being experimented on.

"Have you seen the child who did not die from the experiments?"

"Yes, I saw him. He must probably be in pain."

Stew got very angry when he heard this. He attacked the demons on the back. He punched one of the demons. But it wasn't effective as the demons had tough skin. Demons looked back. Both of them seemed surprised. When they saw Stew, they started laughing. Amy looked at him behind the vehicle, and the demons didn't notice her. Stew thought about how ridiculous what he had done was. He tried to escape and ran to the black door. Demons caught him in front of the door and then dragged him inside the castle, and they put him in prison.

A few hours have passed. There were dozens of cages around, but most of them were empty or the people inside were dead. Stew thought about what he had done and what he would do. Did they catch Amy? Did demons talk about Chester, or was he a different person? When he thought about this, one demon came in front of the cage. This demon had gray skin and two horns. He is bigger than a normal demon. Stew knew this demon. He was Hadem's right hand, Larobi. Larobi looked at Stew.

"You seem like your brother."

Stew hit the bar. He wanted to learn everything about Chester.

"Where is he?"

Larobi spoke calmly. He knew where his brother was, and he could save him. He offered a deal about his brother.

"I can save your brother, but it is not free. I am impressed by how you can sneak in. I wanted to replace Hadem, but I don't have enough power to beat him. I will give you a poison bottle and the key to your cage. If you kill Hadem, I will stop the experiments and release humans."

Stew was desperate. If he didn't do something about his brother, Chester could die.

"Okay, I will do it."

Stew took the map, poison, and key. Larobi smiled and started walking towards the exit door. Five minutes after he left, Stew opened the door and quietly ran towards the exit. He opened the door and looked around. The demons were not visible. He thought Larobi helped him. He knew where to go because he had looked at the map. He entered the door right in front of him. It was a small cleaning room. There were only a few brooms and a small hole in the room. The hole was so small that demons could not pass through it. He jumped into the hole. The hole was so small that he had to crawl through it. He could access every room through this hole. He crawled towards the kitchen. When he came to the kitchen, he looked inside the hole. The evil chefs were preparing food for Hadem. A few minutes later, the chefs leave the food in the kitchen to cool down. Stew quickly got out of the hole and poured the poison into the food. He took a sharp knife that was lying next to the food and went back into the hole. He thought it was easy. All he had to do was wait. A demon came to take the food to the Hadem and took the food. Stew started to crawl to get to the Hadem's room. When he arrived, Hadem began to eat, and there was no one else inside except Hadem. Hadem had one horn and pitch black skin.

Metal sounds were coming from his teeth as he ate. A few minutes later, he finished his meal, but he didn't seem to be affected by the poison. He stood up and walked towards the door. Stew didn't know what to do with what was happening. Then, suddenly, Hadem started coughing. The poison wasn't enough to kill Hadem, but it had weakened him.

Stew quickly came out of the hole and tried to stab Hadem. Hadem noticed him and stopped the knife with his claws. His claws were very sharp and dangerous. Stew threw the knife at the Hadem, and the knife got stuck in the Hadem's chest. Hadem kicked Stew. Stew fell towards the hole. He had no strength left to get up. The knife also failed to kill Hadem. Hadem walked towards Stew to kill him. Stew closed his eyes and accepted death. He waited for Hadem to kill him. But nothing was happening. He could hear Hadem's ragged breathing. He opened his eyes to understand why he wasn't dead. Labori stabbed Hadem in the back. Hadem collapsed to the ground. He was dead.

Stew was relieved. Now he could take his brother out of the castle. He looked at Larobi's eyes. His eyes were wide open. He looked crazy. Stew started to get scared.

"I made my part of the deal. Now is your turn."

Larobi laughed. He pulled the knife out of Hadem's back.

"Thank you for everything, Stew. Because of you, I can take Hadem's place. But there is a little problem. There has to be someone who killed Hadem, and it can't be me. So I will kill you and blame you for the death of the Hadem."

Stew was angry. He felt he was dumb. Larobi raised the knife. Just then, someone pulled Stew towards the hole. Larobi tried to catch Stew, but he was too big for the hole. Stew continued to drag until Larobi was no longer in sight, and he looked at who was dragging him. She was Amy. She had some scratches on her face. She wanted to tell something.

"I found him. Hurry. We need to be fast."

Before Stew could say anything, Amy had started to crawl quickly. A few minutes later, they saw a hole and got out of there. There was a small room outside the hole, and a person was lying on a long table. Stew looked carefully at the person at the table. He was Chester. Stew tried to wake up Chester. Grabbing him by the shoulders, he shook him.

"Chester, wake up! I came for you."

Chester opened his eyes. He didn't look fine. There were needle marks on his arms, and he had a fever. Stew started staring at Chester. It was like something was different about him. It looked like there was something in his hair.

"Chester, are they horns?"

CHARLIE'S EMERALD

Kaan Damar

When Charlie was a child, he dreamed about an emerald. He always wondered where the emerald was and what it meant. On his 18th birthday night, he saw the emerald in his dream again. In his dream, When Charlie saw the old man, he asked him who he was. The old man told him that he was the guardian of the emerald and that the real owner was Charlie. He then told Charlie how he could get the emerald.

When he woke up from his dream, he was very excited and immediately told his friends David, Ambessa, and Emily about the dream he had seen. After a week, they started preparing for the emerald adventure. The road to the emerald was very dangerous, so they had to be very careful. First, they had to pass through a dark forest with wild wolves, then cross a deep river full of piranhas, and finally enter the secret cave.

While they were passing through the dark forest, Emily was attacked by a wolf, but thanks to Charlie's heroism, she escaped with minor injuries. While they were crossing the deep river, Ambessa suddenly pushed Emily into the water, but no one in the group saw this except Emily.

When Emily fell into the river, everyone was very worried and tried to save her, but she was swept away by the current and disappeared from sight. Then Ambessa told the others that they had to leave or they would be lost too, and she tried to make them go. The remaining group had to continue, and finally, they arrived at the place where the emerald was hidden.

When they found the emerald, Ambessa suddenly grabbed it and started running away. While she was running, she accidentally activated a booby trap and locked the others inside the cave. As Ambessa was escaping, Emily suddenly appeared, caught her, tied her up, and took the emerald. Then Emily tied Ambessa to a tree and tried to find a way to save the group. Meanwhile, Charlie was trying to find a way out but couldn't. Luckily, Emily had already found a way to save them and returned with the emerald.

Three days later, the emerald found its real owner — Charlie. He sold the emerald at an auction and shared the money with his friends who helped him. They still had no news from Ambessa, but Ambessa had bad thoughts about them.

OATHS AND ORDERS

Mehmet Kağan İlhan

“We must take the patient to surgery immediately,” said Dr. Michael. The rush had begun again. The patient train had just arrived. Dr. Michael took a patient into the surgery when a bomb fell next to the hospital. Everyone knew what this meant. After a few days, the enemy soldiers arrived at the hospital and they took over the building.

But enemy commander Lukas was shot during the fighting and no one healed him. Dr. Michael had an oath to heal everyone who was injured. For this reason, he tried to help even the enemy commander. Enemy soldiers came and took him to a special room to heal their commander.

The doctor noticed something: the hospital wasn’t enough for all patients, so he insisted they close the floor to treat only one patient. After a difficult surgery there was no longer danger for Lukas’s life. Soldiers came and took the doctor to prison, and he thought he would never leave there again.

Until a rainy day. Soldiers came and took him out of his cell, and the most senior of them said, “Our commander wants to see you.” The doctor was excited because it was the first time he would be out in a long time. His blue eyes were shining. The soldiers took him to a barber because he was invited to dinner with the commander and he must look good. His curly black hair was trimmed and neat. After the barber, he felt better, and the last thing he did before dinner was put on a nice suit—and they gave him one immediately. After all this, enemy soldiers took him to a hotel. It was an amazing place, though it belonged to a land at war.

Doctor Michael waited for the commander for a while. A few minutes later, the door opened.

Michael’s heart was pounding. But it wasn’t the commander—it was a young soldier. His face was pale, and his hands trembled slightly as he spoke. “The commander will be here soon, but before that, I need to ask you something.” He pulled out a notebook and said, “Why did you heal him? He was your enemy.”

Michael raised his head. “To me, there are no enemies. My oath is to heal, not to kill. If I refuse to save someone, I betray my own soul.” The soldier froze, as if shocked by such an answer.

Then the door burst open again. Commander Lukas entered. His uniform was stained, his arm bound in a sling, and scars covered his face, yet he stood with unshaken pride. His sharp eyes locked with Michael’s.

“Doctor,” Lukas said in a harsh but weary voice, “you saved my life. You healed your enemy. Why?”

Michael stood firm. “Because I am a doctor.”

For a moment, Lukas said nothing. Then his lips curved faintly. “Perhaps humanity still survives because of men like you.” He raised his hand toward the soldiers. “Do not touch him. From now on, he is my guest.”

Guest. The word gave Michael little comfort. It meant safety, but it also meant he was not free.

From that day, Michael lived among the enemy. He treated wounded soldiers daily, and sometimes even villagers who were secretly brought in. His hands were stained with blood, his ears filled with screams, but his heart held fast to duty.

One evening, Lukas called for him. Maps covered the table. “Doctor, tell me honestly—do you believe this war can ever end?” Michael thought carefully before answering. “Every war ends. But the way it ends is what matters. If humanity survives, hope survives.”

Lukas leaned back, silent, unreadable.

As days passed, some soldiers treated Michael with gratitude, others with suspicion. One morning, he overheard whispers: “A great assault is being prepared. This time, there will be no return.” The words sent a chill through his body. Such an attack would kill not only the enemy, but countless civilians and wounded too.

That night, he could not sleep. His thoughts twisted like knives. “What should I do? If I stay silent, thousands will die. If I speak, I will be branded a traitor.”

The next morning, he faced Lukas directly. “Commander, is it true you are preparing a massive attack?” The room froze. Soldiers glared. Lukas lifted his head slowly.

“Are you a doctor... or a spy?” he demanded. Michael swallowed hard. “I just want the truth. If this attack happens, you will slaughter the very people lying in your own hospital.”

For a long moment, Lukas said nothing. Then he waved his soldiers out. Only he and Michael remained. “Doctor, I too am weary of this war,” Lukas admitted. “But the orders come from above. My hands are tied.”

Michael’s eyes narrowed. “Your hands may be tied, but your conscience is still free.”

Lukas turned toward the window. “Perhaps you are right. Perhaps we are on the wrong path.” He spun back suddenly, voice low and sharp. “But if you repeat these words to anyone, you will lose your life.”

Michael’s mind burned with conflict. He had to find a way to protect the innocent, to stop the destruction.

Suddenly, the door burst open. A soldier ran in, panting. “Commander! The enemy is advancing—faster than expected!”

Lukas slammed his fist on the table, scattering the maps. “Prepare the defenses!” he roared. Michael stood frozen, his heart pounding.

The war had reached their doorstep, but the greater battle was inside him: stay faithful to his oath, or risk everything to save thousands.

And at that very moment, the door opened once more...

The door creaked open, and silence fell over the room. A messenger stepped in, his face pale. He carried no weapon, only a folded paper trembling in his hands. Lukas snatched it, read quickly, and his expression darkened. The assault was ordered to begin within hours. No delay, no mercy.

Michael’s stomach tightened. He knew what this meant: fire raining upon soldiers and civilians alike. He clenched his fists. He had sworn an oath to heal, not to watch innocents burn. His eyes met Lukas’s. The commander stood at a crossroads, torn between obedience and humanity.

At last, Lukas spoke. “Doctor, if I cancel this order, they will strip me of command. Another man will replace me, and the slaughter will still come.”

Michael stepped closer. “Then at least delay it. Give the people a chance to flee. Even one hour could save hundreds of lives.”

Lukas’s jaw tightened. He dismissed his guards and walked toward the radio. His fingers hovered over the transmitter. Finally, he pressed the switch. His voice was steady but heavy: “This is Commander Lukas. The attack will be delayed. All units stand down until further notice.”

The message spread like a spark. Soldiers exchanged nervous glances but obeyed. Outside, the guns went quiet. Michael felt his chest rise with relief. For the first time, the oath had bent the iron of orders.

But Lukas knew the cost. “They will come for me,” he said softly. “My men will call me a traitor.”

Michael answered, “History will call you human.”

Moments later, explosions thundered in the distance—enemy artillery pounding the outer defenses. Lukas straightened his shoulders. “Doctor, go to your patients. Do not look back.”

Michael obeyed. In the wards, he worked without rest. Nurses moved quickly, bandaging, carrying, whispering prayers. Civilians crowded the halls, children clinging to their mothers. Michael pushed his exhaustion aside. His oath gave him strength.

Hours passed like a blur. Then, at dawn, the noise faded. The attack never came to the heart of the city. Because of Lukas’s decision, thousands of lives were spared.

That evening, Lukas returned, his uniform torn, his face gray with fatigue. “They have removed me from command,” he said. “I am no longer their leader.”

Michael looked at him with quiet respect. “Perhaps you are more than a leader now. Perhaps you are a man who chose humanity.”

Lukas gave a weary smile. “Maybe. But the war is not over. Another order will come. It always does.”

In the days that followed, the hospital became a refuge. Villagers brought blankets, teachers gave lessons in spare rooms, and a violinist played at night. For brief moments, life returned to the ruins. Michael realized that even in war, humanity could bloom like a fragile flower.

One night, Lukas stood in the courtyard beside him. The stars were faint, blurred by smoke. Lukas said, “Doctor, I do not know how history will remember me. But I know it will remember you. The man who kept his oath, even when surrounded by enemies.”

Michael shook his head. “No. History will remember us both—the doctor who healed, and the commander who chose not to destroy.”

The war dragged on, battles raged, and cities burned. Yet in that corner of the world, in one battered hospital, a doctor’s oath and a commander’s decision created a spark of hope. And though the world may not remember their names, the lives they saved carried their legacy forward.

For humanity survives not through victory, but through the courage to choose life over death.

THE MAGIC BOOK

Mert Göçer

The weather was a gloomy and windy weather. A very normal day from the outside but equally interesting and mysterious from the inside. The bell rang. Everyone in school took a break time except three students: Martha, Kheenan and Khareem. They have known each other since their childhood. Even though they looked like normal people in everyday life, all three of them had hidden powers.

There was no one else in the class except them. At first everything was going smoothly until the lights went out and they saw a map on the board pointing to the school's backyard. Naturally, they were scared because it was the first time something like this had happened to them. Martha, after the scare session was over, said "Guys, I think we should go there, the place pointed on the map. I think it wants to show us something." After debating for a while about whether to go or not, they turned on the phone's flashlight and set off. There wasn't any people in the hall.

They heard mysterious noises like devilish laughter or footsteps. They were nervous but also curious about the mystery in the garden. Finally, they arrived at the mysterious garden, but there was a problem. A lighted box was lying on the ground. They impatiently opened the box. But the box was empty. They began to look at each other in surprise, and soon a voice shouted: "RUN AWAY FROM HERE!" They began to get scared, and then they started to run away. In front of them was a path that went on beyond the garden, and they had no other choice, so they followed it nervously.

Now they had entered this path, and they had no other choice. The rest of the path led to a forest — a lonely, silent forest. They went on, and then there were three circles of three people, and the path was a dead end. They screamed, and then they started to run away the way they had come. "Martha, we have to get out of here now," he said, and immediately the path they had come was blocked. They were now starting to get really scared. Because someone was right — a mysterious sound was telling them to do something. They argued and blamed each other for this situation, but eventually, they realized the only solution was to enter those circles. While Martha bravely agreed, Khareem and Kheenan were torn between going, because it was truly mysterious and terrifying.

After some minor discussions, Martha convinced her friends, buttoned up her jacket, and confidently entered the circle.

The light in her own circle was out, but the remaining two remained. Kheenan and Khareem

were forced to enter as well, and suddenly darkness fell; voices, laughter, and everything stopped. There was no sound, no sight. Just darkness, fear, and silence. And suddenly, the mysterious, hellish road with lava waterfalls on one side, and beyond, it was like a corner of heaven. They advanced, but then a roar was heard. This sound wasn't hopeful, because it was the roar of a giant monster. Instead of being afraid, the three friends remembered they had nothing to lose and bravely began to use their superpowers against the monster. Martha, using her sword, Kheenan's intelligence, and Khareem's special mouth movement, all began attacking the monster at once. Martha bravely ran ahead, leaping with her sword and striking the first blows. Kheenan, with his superior intelligence, predicted all the monster's next moves. Khareem, with his special movement, dealt the final blow, and the monster vanished. After exhaustion and a breather, they regained their composure and set off on their way.

They all relaxed at once, they thought the danger was over, but until the lights went out again and the sounds stopped. They were now used to interesting sounds, monsters and many other mysterious beings. Martha calmly said, "Everything is under our control, all we have to do is stay calm and act together. Trust me because I trust you too," she said and unsheathed her sword and took a deep breath. And as always, she bravely led her friends from the front. Khareem had a flashlight in his pocket, he took it out and told Martha. He gave it to me and when it opened, they suddenly saw a small baby toy. It was surprising, but there was no hope behind them because it was nothing more than darkness and silence. They looked at each other in surprise, Khareem, no matter what, we are together, come on, my friends, nothing can separate us.

"ATTACK," he said and dealt the first blow to the toy with his special movement. But the situation was not as expected. The monster suddenly disappeared and a square space opened under the ground, inside it was a one-eyed, orange-haired, armless and long-legged creature.

A creature was looking at them and smiled. In his hand was a map. This map was what they only needed to escape the magic land. They all said to the beast: What do you want from us? "Give us the map in your hand, otherwise we will destroy you and we will do it by making you suffer," they said. The monster continued to grin devilishly and then laughed, saying in a high-pitched voice, "Then come and get it." Martha prepared her sword, her courage, Kheenan's mind and Khareem's special move. At this moment, the monster shot them with a laser from his eye. When it was the turn of the 3 friends, neither Martha's strong blows nor Khareem's deadly mouth movement would work. Using his ability to understand what the other person was thinking, Kheenan realized that the monster wanted to take the soul of one of them and told his friends because fighting did not cause the slightest damage to the creature. Martha said, "If you are going to take the soul of one of us, that person should be me to get us out of this damn place."

Even though Khareem and Kheenana were against this decision, the monster's face was smiling, his only wish was to take the soul of one of them and take on the human body. Martha went towards the monster and even though her friends pulled her arm, she convinced them and the monster gave them the map again. In fact, He gave them the way to get out. After a long journey, Kheenana and Khareem found the exit portal from the island without incident.

When they put the map in the space on the ground, the door opened and they went out, but their minds were still on their dear friend Martha. I wonder what the monster had done to her or whether she was dead. Instead of experiencing the happiness of getting out, they felt sad and gave up hope on her. They set off sadly towards their homes. In the evening, it was cold and a thunderstorm started. Kheenana and Khareem were on their way to reach their homes. When they came to the junction, they said goodbye in a sad way because the three people were left on the path they started. They remembered Martha with tears in their eyes and after hugging each other, they separated to walk one to the right and one to the left. Just then, a lightning struck the place where they hugged.

And the voice that came after the thunder said, "Hey friends, are you going without me, or have you forgotten me?" And this was perhaps the most interesting day they had ever experienced, but it was also a tool that would strengthen a long-lasting friendship. They got tired, they believed in each other, they got scared from time to time, but in the end they managed to escape and remained three friends who were never separated again.

HORROR HORROR HOUSE

Nehir Buluş

One breezy summer evening, Zeyzo and Rio decided to go out together while they live their apartment, they encounter Huge and Plata from neighboring apartment. “Hey, look who’s here!” said Huge.

“Long time no see! Where are you two headed?” asked Plata.

“Nowhere special, just getting some air,” replied Rio.

Huge and Plata were thrilled to meet them. Plata mustered up the courage to ask, “If you’re not busy, can we go do something?”

“Sure, that sounds fun,” said Zeyzo.

“Yeah, let’s go somewhere together,” added Rio.

As they spent time together, Huge and Plata realized how much they liked the girls.

“They’re amazing,” said Huge. “I really like Rio.”

“Same here,” said Plata. “Zeyzo’s just... wow.”

The conversation soon turned to what they could do next. When the boys mentioned bowling, Rio laughed and said, “Bowling? That’s too easy.”

Zeyzo smirked. “What about something scarier?”

“How about a haunted house? Are you confident?” asked Rio teasingly.

“Confident? Of course I am!” said Huge proudly.

“You’ll see who screams first,” added Plata.

Although Zeyzo and Rio felt a little nervous, they didn’t back down. “Maybe... but we’re not quitters,” said Zeyzo.

The next day, the four friends decided to visit the scariest haunted house in the area — HORROR HORROR HOUSE. Plata made a quick call. “Done. Tomorrow at 8. Are we ready for this?”

“No,” said Rio, laughing, “but let’s go anyway.”

When they arrived a few days later, the girls already looked uneasy.

“I already hate this place,” whispered Zeyzo.

“Don’t say that, you’re making it worse!” replied Rio.

Huge and Plata tried to comfort them. “It’s just a game, don’t worry,” said Huge.
“If something jumps out, I’ll go first,” added Plata.

Inside the haunted house, tension filled the air. A woman named Estrella, the owner, greeted them warmly.

“Welcome, my dear guests. You’ll have fun, I promise,” she said with a mysterious smile.
“She’s too calm... that’s scary,” muttered Zeyzo.

Before they started, Estrella explained the rules. “Each room has a code. Solve it, and you can leave. Fail... and we’ll see.”

“Wait, what do you mean by ‘we’ll see’?” asked Rio nervously.

They entered the first room, and suddenly, the lights went out.

“I can’t see anything!” shouted Rio.

“Don’t touch me—oh wait, that’s you!” screamed Zeyzo.

Dark figures appeared around them. The room grew colder. Despite everyone’s panic, Huge and Plata managed to decipher the code with the girls’ help—but the door wouldn’t open.

“It’s stuck! It won’t open!” yelled Huge.

“This isn’t funny anymore,” said Plata.

Then, the figures disappeared. Estrella’s voice echoed through the speakers:

“It won’t be as you expect.”

“I think that means we’re in trouble,” said Zeyzo.

Moments later, new creatures entered the room. But these were no actors—they looked real.

“Those aren’t actors!” shouted Huge as one creature grabbed his arm.

“Run!” yelled Plata.

Rio froze in fear. “I can’t move!” she cried.

“Breathe, Rio! We’ll figure this out!” said Zeyzo, trying to stay calm.

Thinking quickly, Zeyzo came up with a plan. “If we stop them, maybe Estrella will talk to us again.”

“Good idea. Let’s do it!” said Huge.

Estrella, watching them through the cameras, saw that things were getting out of control. She realized that both of her sons—who were working as actors—had feelings for Zeyzo and Rio. Worried for them, she finally spoke again.

“Girls! Leave now. This game is over for you.”

“Finally! Let’s go!” said Rio. The girls rushed out of the room, leaving Huge and Plata behind.

“They just left? After all that?” said Plata sadly.

“Can’t blame them,” sighed Huge.

But once outside, the girls acted wisely. They told Estrella that Huge and Plata had forced them to come, hoping she'd release the boys too.

"Please, just let us out!" shouted Huge.

"We didn't want this!" added Plata.

Estrella hesitated, then called her sons to fetch the girls. They came with Estrella's old dog.

"Aw, a dog? Finally, something not scary," said Rio.

"Wait, that gives me an idea," whispered Zeyzo.

The girls secretly unleashed the dog, and Estrella and her sons ran after it.

"Go, boy, go!" yelled Zeyzo.

"Run, run, run!" laughed Rio.

They rushed back, opened the door, and freed Huge and Plata.

"You came back for us?" asked Huge, surprised.

"Of course. Let's get out of here!" said Zeyzo.

They escaped and promised never to visit a haunted house again.

"Never again," said Rio. "No haunted houses."

"Agreed," said Plata.

"At least we survived," joked Zeyzo.

"Barely," added Huge.

KING OF THE BASKETBALL

Ömer Bahadır

In the 2000s, a child was playing basketball on the street. He was different from his peers. He was very tall and he has very black skin. No one could beat him on the street. At home, situations were bad. They were having money trouble. He has not have enough money for living comfortably. Therefore, our boy Alexdar Nwkaeme works at a job and earns money for his family. He spent his youth on the street, so he learned to deal with difficulties. Abdullah Hunter noticed him when he was 16 years old. Abdullah Hunter supported him a lot and helped him become a basketball player. In this way, Nwkaeme's basketball story has begun.

At first, he was tired. Abdullah coach pushed him a little. Some years later, Nwkaeme joined a team. It wasn't easy to get along with other players in team but he got used to. Slowly started to show itself in matches. He played a lot of match. He was generally an MVP at the matches. It was time for the most important match of the season. They were playing against their arch-rivals. The atmosphere was tense.

Abdullah Hunter said "I trust you"

Match started. Nwakaeme played very well in the first quarter and they finished ahead by 10 points. The second half was terrible on the contrary, Nwakaeme was not good at all. During the halftime, Abdullah coach was very angry, but he still encouraged the team so as not to upset their morale. Then, he looked directly at Alexdar Nwkaeme.

"Listen to me," Abdullah's coach said in a strong voice. "The first quarter was excellent because you played as a team. Now, you are playing as individuals. Nwakaeme," he said, "I know you are the best player. But you cannot win alone. This is not street basketball. Look at your teammates. They are good players too. Pass the ball. Trust them. Win this game together."

Nwkaeme listened to him in the 3rd quarter. The team started well in the match. The situation continued like this until the end of the match. After this match, no one could stop this team and now it was time for the final match.

The final game was the biggest night of the season. This was the biggest night of the season. Therefore arena was packed.

They played against the champions, a team called the "Iron Wall." This team was famous for its strong, perfect defense. The first half was tough. The Iron Wall stopped them every time. When the first half ended, Alexdar's team was losing by 15 points.

In the locker room, the players were sad and quiet. But Coach Abdullah was calm. He looked at the team. "They play like a machine," he said. "So, we can't be a machine. We need to be different."

He looked at Alexdar. "I want you to bring the street to this game," he said with a small smile. "Use your creative moves. Confuse them. But do it for your team. Create chances for your friends."

In the second half, Alexdar started to play differently. He looked like he was dancing with the ball. His moves were fast and surprising. The "Iron Wall" defense didn't know what to do. When defenders ran to stop Alexdar, his teammates were suddenly open. Slowly, they started to score more and more points.

With only one minute left, they were down by just one point. Then, they stole the ball! Alexdar had it. Only five seconds left. Three players from the other team ran to him.

Everyone thought Alexdar would shoot. The old Alexdar would shoot. But he was a new player now.

He saw his teammate, all alone, near the basket. He passed the ball. It was a perfect pass. His teammate caught it and scored an easy basket just as the game ended.

They were the champions!

The team ran onto the court and celebrated. They lifted Alexdar onto their shoulders. He saw his coach, Abdullah Hunter, smiling with pride. He started as a lonely king of the street, but now he was a true champion with his team.

Nwkaeme continued to play big in other seasons too. He retired at the age of 40. Then, he focused on his family. He died happily at the age of 90.

THE JOURNEY'S END

Onur Kaan Tekçikıkçı

We were on a big journey to prevent a disaster. We crossed rivers, mountains, and much more, but this was the hardest part of the journey: The triplet's lair. This place was a forest full of ruins, there was an accident a few centuries ago. Leading mages of the town tried to cast a spell for abundance but ended up summoning the triplet embodiments of doom. The city had perished because of this deadly accident and all that was left of that town was a wreck. Even after one thousand years those monsters still roam in these ruins and we needed to get through these ruins somehow.

"This is our last challenge," I said. Will and Laios stared at me, those blue eyes were carrying the burden of our journey along with one last hope to return home. They were tired, so was I. *But if we stop here all our efforts will be for nothing*, I thought as I looked to the depths of this forest.

We barged into the forest, everywhere and everything was black although it was daytime. I felt like I was on a knife-edge. The pine trees, muggy and soft ground, giant rocks were dark and were coming down on me. My eyes turned to Laios to calm down but he wasn't so different from me.

Time was flowing like a river. We walked in the dark for hours, as we got closer to the ruins I was seeing more and more claw marks on trees. Some of the trees were on the ground, some of them were still standing but they were all covered with claw marks. As we traced the marks we came across some ruins. These ruins were what remained of the city and were signs that showed we were getting closer to the heart of this forest which meant we were in the danger zone.

"Be careful, we are officially in the ruins. Those creatures must be close," I said, *Where are they?* My eyes were seeking cues for those monsters' presence.

"Be ready to cast a protection spell Grace," Will said. He was looking exhausted from the thrilling ambiance of this place, his emotions penetrated my body.

A sound echoed through the forest, something like a cracking sound and then another one followed by two more, then a sound of a falling tree hitting the ground. *They are here*. My head was hurting because of this sudden encounter, my feet were begging me to go back, to run away. But I kept going. As we followed what's left of the street we saw wrecked houses, abandoned workshops and broken walls.

"Oh my, can you guys think of all those people who lived here, what they have lived through when those creatures appeared in here," I said with a melancholy voice.

"Stay quiet," I whispered, as one of the triplets came into view. It was looking like a tall man, its body looked like it was made from shadow. Then I saw its eyes; two endless voids, two bottomless wells. It was darker than anything I have seen before and its head was like a broken mask. It looked like it was made from some white stone. It had some cracks especially around

its eyes, this mask was probably the last piece of their sealing, which prevents them from going out of these ruins.

A voice raised in my head, *I fought with countless creatures. But these ones are immortal*, echoed another voice. I felt an urge to run but my body wasn't moving. The fear I felt for these things was so intense.

I looked at Will and Laios, Laios's hands were on his sword's handle. His eyes were shining with determination, he was ready to fight, even though he knew it wouldn't work he would fight to the last drop of his blood. On the other hand, Will was trembling with fear, his eyes were begging me to do something.

The creature saw us, bent its head to the right side. Its dark bottomless eyes penetrated through my skin. *Quick do something!* Occupied my whole mind.

It all happened so quickly; the embodiment of doom started to run towards us and I cast a protection spell. It started attacking the shield.

"Shield can't handle this much power, it won't last long!" I screamed. A crack sound was heard and then another. My free hand signaled to Laios.

"Laios now!" The shield expanded and disappeared, creature stumbled and Laios leaped at the creature and swung his sword. It didn't do much except give us enough time to get up on our feet. We ran.

"It can't reach us now, not here," I said.

Will trembled, "What are we going to do? That thing is still there. How are we going to elude it?" He looked into my eyes. "Can't you cast a spell?"

"I wish," I said. "They are fast, powerful and most importantly immortal. You have seen their masks, it's what's left of their seals. Those seals were made from talented mages but it seems like even that wasn't enough."

"But you are one of the greatest mages of our time, are you sure you wouldn't be able to seal them again?" Will Insisted.

"There is no guarantee, maybe it can work but we may also die while trying it if it doesn't work," I said.

Laios put his hand on his sword's handle. "It seems like there is no other way, we have to try it."

My eyes met his. "Okay then, but you guys need to buy me some time while I'm casting the spell."

Will's eyes opened wide. "But they are immortal, how are we going to deal with them?"

Laios grabbed Will's shoulder, "We just need to stall them," he smiled. "Come on Will, we have been fighting with monsters since the beginning of this journey."

"But these ones are immortal Laios!" Will's voice sounded like he was crying.

Laios gripped Will's shoulder. "Just believe in yourself."

Will tried to compose himself. "I will try."

I stood up, "So here is the plan," I sat towards them. "You two will stall them till I give the signal. Then lure them to the city center and I will seal them."

"What will be the signal?" Will asked.

I grinned at him. "Trust me, you will understand."

In half an hour we were at our positions, my hands were waving at them to start the plan. They walked through the path and arrived at the city center.

“Heeeey triplets, we are here!” Laiois yelled. He looked around to see them, then one appeared on a building’s roof and then another one behind a pine tree. The last was inside a house. They were really triplets; same body shape, same white mask and same bottomless dark eyes. Laois and Will started to run through the forest, triplets were after them. I had to prepare this place for the spell, so I went to the city center and started the preparations. I started with the exterior part, I drew a vast circle with salt then continued with the other parts. *So firstly, I will activate the exterior circle which will immobilize them then I will activate the middle and inner part at the same time to weaken them. Lastly, I will release mana and cast the spell to seal them.* I was repeating the plan for the fifth time since I started to prepare the spell. After like an hour preparations were finished.

“I should send a signal,” I said to myself, my staff pointed to the sky and sent a firework, firework exploded with a booming sound. My staff levitated into the center to start the process. The flowing mana penetrated through my skin, I absorbed it to release when those creatures came.

“We are almost there, be ready!” Will yelled. Then I saw them at the edge of the forest. *Here we go,* I got ready to release the mana I kept inside my body. The exterior circle started to shine and a transparent wall started to rise from the salts. I was trying to activate the other parts of the spell when I saw that one of the triplets was aiming a spear-like wooden thing at me. A sudden pain rose from my calf, I fell.

“Grace!” I heard their voices but my sight wasn’t clear. Everything was even darker than before, like those dark bottomless eyes. *I have to get up, I have to save them,* these thoughts lead to another one; *I have to live.*

I stood up even though my sight was nothing but darkness, my friends' voices showed me the way. I listened even more carefully to hear the creatures’ voices. I heard their unique, terrifying sounds, *Fire!* I felt the mana leaving my body then I cast the spell. I lost my consciousness at that moment.

“Grace, can you hear me?” I heard Laois's worried voice.

“What happened?” I tried to open my eyes. “Did the spell work?”

Laiois pointed with his hand. “See for yourself.”

I saw three statues. “It worked huh,” I said happily and I looked at them. “I’m glad you are okay.” *My leg!* The pain came to my mind. I checked my legs, there was a bandage on my right calf.

“We managed to stop the blood flow,” Will said. He seemed proud of himself.

I felt a warmth in my heart, *we did it, it’s finally over,* I thought. I hugged them hard. “Let’s go home,” I said while hugging them.

IN THE LIBRARY

Özge Nur Toraman

One afternoon, after school, Emma wanted to go to the library. She was a shy girl, and she usually sat in the corner with her books. That day, she wanted to borrow a new textbook. While she was searching on the shelf, her small notebook suddenly fell on the floor. Daniel saw it. He quickly picked it up and gave it to her with a friendly smile.

Daniel said, "You dropped this."

Emma said, "Thank you," she whispered, looking down. Emma's face turned red. She liked his gentle voice and his kind eyes. They started to talk about books and school. Emma felt nervous at first, but Daniel listened carefully. Slowly, she felt at ease.

From that day on, Emma and Daniel saw each other almost every day in the library. At first, they only had brief conversations, but over time, their conversations grew longer. Emma felt more comfortable around Daniel every day. She no longer felt shy and could look him in the eye. One day, Daniel handed Emma a small notepad. On it was written: "Shall we have coffee today? Just to get away from the lessons for a bit."

Emma's heart began to race. "Okay," she said with a shy smile. After leaving the library, they went to a small café near the school. They were both excited but happy. Daniel asked Emma about her dreams.

Emma thought for a moment, then spoke softly, "I want to be an academic one day."

Daniel smiled. "It's great that you're always around young people," he said.

They talked for hours that day — about books, movies, and the future. Emma realized that time passed faster when Daniel was around. In the evening, Daniel walked her home. The streetlights were on, and the wind was light. There was a short silence outside the door.

Daniel said, "It was so nice talking to you, Emma."

Emma smiled. "It was so nice talking to you too."

Daniel smiled slightly. "I'll see you again at the library tomorrow, okay?"

Emma nodded. "Okay."

That night, Emma returned to her room. She opened her notebook and began writing: "I went out with Daniel today. I'm not as shy anymore. He gave me confidence, and I felt so good."

The next morning, she went to the library again. Daniel was there, waiting with two coffees in his hands. Emma sat down next to him, smiling.

The next day, the weather was cloudy, but Emma felt bright inside. She went to the library with a happy heart. Daniel was already there, waiting for her at their usual table.

Daniel said, "Good morning, Emma! I brought your favorite coffee."

Emma smiled. "You remembered!" They both laughed softly. They studied a little, then talked about life and dreams again.

Before leaving, Daniel said, "You know, I'm really happy I met you."

Emma blushed and answered quietly, "Me too."

And at that moment, Emma realized something beautiful, she wasn't just reading stories anymore; she was living one.

JOHN J'S BIG REVENGE

Refik Derbentli

Door opened by a stranger, then they entered John's house. John's mom said: "John, go to your room and hide under the bed!" John went to hide under the bed. When he was under the bed, he heard a gun noise, but he could see a little piece of the strangers' faces, so he understood they were the other country's guardians.

He waited 30 minutes under the bed, and when he realized the guardians left John's home, he went to another room in their house. Then the door rang. He saw at the door his grandmother, and he opened it with his hands, which had six fingers each. John asked his grandmother, "Where is the guardians' country?" She did not know, so they went to her house. Over time, John grew up and made new friends. He was a handsome, clever, and honest guy, and his friends were Alex, Sara, and Natasha.

Their families were similar to John's. They decided to take revenge on the other kingdoms. John and his friends started making plans for their revenge. First, they had to kill a dragon, which had one eye, red wings, and a big mouth. They went to the dragon's cave and made some noise to set a trap. The dragon came to the place where John's friends had set the trap, and it fell into it. They killed the dragon and took its teeth because they were necessary to enter the other country.

Then they walked to another dragon's cave, which was really terrible. They thought if they could close the dragon's eye, they could take its important and miraculous fur, which would help them defend against other monsters. Then they started walking through a mysterious forest to get another material for opening a chest, but they had to kill a spider with twenty legs and six eyes. They planned carefully. Their plan was to give the spider poison hidden in tasty and delicious-smelling food. They started the plan by hunting a deer. Then they took the poison and poured it into the deer's stomach.

The spider came slowly and noticed the deer. It started to approach the deer slowly. Then it started to build a web around it. After a while, it started to approach the deer slowly and started to eat the deer with its huge teeth. After eating the deer, it started to swing slowly and after a while it fell down. John and his friends carefully approached the spider and took the spider hair that was needed to put the guards that would come across them to sleep.

After they took the hair, sounds started coming from the nearby forest. When they turned their heads towards it, they saw a huge 8-armed, 4-legged and 4-eyed gorilla-like monster in the distance. They were startled for a moment and immediately hid behind a rock and waited for the sound to pass, but something especially caught John's eye. That was a magical stone hanging on the monster's chest. They needed that stone and they started making plans.

Their plan was as follows: first they would draw the monster's attention to a place on the ground where there was a gap large enough for the monster's leg to fit, and since that gap had been covered beforehand, the monster's foot would be stuck in that gap, and they started to put the plan into action, and it worked as they expected. Then they took out the magic stick John had brought with him, put the monster to sleep, and took the stone from its neck. Now, all the items that needed to be taken had been taken from the monsters.

They set off and reached the other kingdom. John put the tooth he took from the dragon into the hole in the door to enter the other kingdom, overcoming the first obstacle. Now they were facing guards. They immediately pulled out the hair they had taken from the spider and threw it at the guards, causing them to fall asleep. They had passed the second obstacle and entered the king's chamber. John took out the last thing he had taken: the magic stone they had taken from the gorilla. John held the stone up and shouted, "I want my revenge." This wasn't an ordinary stone. If the person holding it was pure of heart, they would do as he said. So, after John's words, everyone in the kingdom who had harmed him, his friends, and his family vanished in an instant. Thus, John and his friends had their revenge. They embraced each other, shout with joy and sharing their happiness.

DREAMLAND

Serra Bulut

“He is waking up.”

“Can you hear us?” He tried to take a break from the discomfort of the light hitting his face. He wanted to move his lips, but this was close to impossible with his dry mouth which hadn’t drunk anything for two days.

“He is opening his eyes.” He reclosed his eyes, which opened with difficulty. The lights were more uncomfortable than he thought.

“Now, I will give you an injection. So everyday activities easier to bear.” He felt the injection’s pain. But he forgot the pain quickly with the refreshment he experienced afterward.

He whispered, “What happened?” He saw the people looking at him with curious eyes for the first time. They were so ugly. And they were too dull to be considered ordinary.

“You had an accident. We found you hanging on your home’s ceiling.” He gulped and his throat stuffed. After he realized the contrast in the conversation. If he had an accident, how could he be hanging? He wanted to ask about the contrast in the conversation. But another nurse interrupted,

“Your throat may hurt for a while. But temporarily.” The dullness of the speech made him sick to his stomach. He tried not to vomit.

“We will be discharged you anyway; a nurse will accompany you.” She was another nurse. And her voice was not dull, just there was an artificial affection. This caused his nausea to increase. At that moment, he realized something too important.

“I don’t remember anything!” He said this with fear, but the artificial, affectionate voice nurse, who heard what he said laughed.

“Oh, this is just a small complication. It is always happening in situations like yours. People are coming to delete their memories. Also, your memory loss is temporarily.” He took his hand to his head with the discomfort of the conversation. He was easily using his body parts now. The dull nurse also realized this and started to speak with him.

“I think you can discharge now.” Nurses packed his belongings quickly. It happened really fast; he had not understood anything yet when he was on the street.

When they were walking on the street, the nurse turned him and began to speak,

“If you want, we can speak to receive your memory.” He suspected something. On the other hand, he didn’t understand why he was suspicious.

“Where are we going?” When he was asking his question, he looked around with curiosity. Everywhere was the same. Gray, long apartments extending to infinity. There was a

market among every ten apartments. And there was a pharmacy, a florist and a library next to every five apartments after the market. All of them were gray and monotonous. There weren't any people on the crossing.

"To your home." He grimaced to the nurse's dull voice. But then again he asked a new question.

"Why isn't there anybody on the road?"

"Because everyone is at work."

He frowned.

"Elderly and children?"

"Elderly are at home and children are at school." The nurse stopped suddenly.

"We must buy a flower for you."

He couldn't understand.

"Why?" He was frowning still.

"Because the state gives us importance. We are all valuable. Buying a bouquet of flowers for the sick is a law." He was confused. When he decided to ask a new question, the nurse was in the florist. He didn't think anything for a while. After the nurse returned with a bouquet of white roses.

"Get well soon. These white roses are for you from the state. The state gives us importance. We are all valuable." He took the roses from the nurse's hand.

"What is the meaning of the 'state gives us importance'? Is this a slogan?"

"It is a bill. After the third world war, it was created to say that every life is valuable." He took a step back with the images that appeared in his mind. He blinked his eyes and asked with fear.

"Can you explain these laws to me?" The nurse's dullness increased and the nurse stopped.

"After the population decreased, population growth was targeted. 'We are all valuable' bill which was the beginning of everything, created this for. But it was not possible to protect every person with a wild, selfish, emotional human. If they could protect the person, providing social equality was impossible." When the nurse told them, the nurse wasn't affected by their own words.

"So single colour law has started to be used. People who move away from aesthetics, calmed down a bit. After social status has been removed. Thus, everybody was equal." He liked what the nurse said but there were things that confused him.

"But still, the injustices were not prevented; the only reason for this was the selfishness of the human. Selfishness should have been removed from humans." Other memories appeared in his mind. He was smiling, crying. He was ordinary. After he saw new memories, he was so

lonely. He was so lonely that no one was laughing or feeling anymore. When selfishness was removed from humans, there was nothing left.

“We have reached this perfect order when we remove selfishness from humans.” The nurse started walking. Maybe he started walking too but he didn’t realise.

While he was collecting every missing piece of his memory, he became even more lonely; he met his own selfishness. His selfishness made him different, making even his most ordinary behaviour anti-order. He didn’t belong to this system. He was a human, a selfish human. He smiled after he had remembered the accident of being hung on the ceiling.

He started to speak, “But is everything good now? Did wars, hunger, politics all over?” He already knew the answer. Even his asking the question was nothing more than a selfish person trying to justify himself.

“Everything is good, everybody is healthy. Every person is valuable. The ordinary is provided. Nobody is unhappy.” *Yes, he thought yes. Anybody isn’t unhappy. The happiness of others could not be sacrificed for the happiness of some, everybody is equal. If some were happy, of course, others would be unhappy. Happiness was a crime. Happiness was the same as selfishness. There shouldn’t be selfish people so that no one would be unhappy.*

“Your home is here. My task is up. Go home,” the nurse said. The nurse’s dull voice once again made him sick to his stomach.

“Thank you for bringing me home.” He entered his house without looking back. And last time to accomplish the job he could not achieve, to destroy selfishness, he climbed on the overturned stool, unaware of the dozens of ropes around his neck. Then he left his selfishness to a short-term nothingness with the rope he painted in the colours of hope.

DEIMOS THE CONQUEROR

Yağız Han Köklüdağ

A long time ago, around 2000 BC, there was a king called Deimos the Great. His only goal was to conquer the World. To achieve this goal, he had been fighting for years. He had fought in so many battles and defeated every one of his enemies. However, this did not always remain this way. In his last battle, he had been caught unprepared and had been defeated by his enemies in a very humiliating manner.

He was not expecting this attack by his enemies. The entire army was killed, and only a few people could escape. Luckily for him, he was able to escape with a very small number of men who had survived the battle, including his best friend, Ephesus. Ephesus was the scientist who had always been helping Deimos. He was a very old man with white hair and a long beard. He was a very calm man, and he knew that they would get out of this situation because he was working on a secret science Project.

At the last moment, before their camp was destroyed, he was able to come up with his plans for this project. Only he and Deimos knew about this secret project, the time machine. As soon as Ephesus finishes the production, Deimos was going to have the opportunity to fix every mistake he had made, and he was both going to take revenge on his enemies and he was going to achieve his biggest dream finally.

Deimos and his army were trying to get away from the enemy army after the big defeat. They were moving in the forest and were hoping for the enemy to lose their way and stop chasing them because the only hope left for them was to hide and get Ephesus to finish the work of the time machine. They had walked for hours in the forest; there were no more than 50 men left of Deimos's 10000 men. After 2 days of hiding in the forest and moving forward, hoping to find a village or a city where they could rest for a while, they were all exhausted and wanted to stop for a day. It was a very cold winter day, and they had no food left, so Demios decided to stop for a day and hunt. As his soldiers were hunting and starting the fire to cook, Deimos and Ephesus were talking and discussing what their next move should be. After they rested there for a while, they began to move again. Their first goal was to go to their country again and prepare for the war.

They travelled for weeks, and finally they were in their own city. Deimos was so angry about the defeat and he wanted to take revenge from his enemies as soon as possible. He started to find men for his army as soon as he went back because he didn't want to lose any time. He travelled around all his empire and took everyone into his army. While Deimos was preparing for the battle, Ephesus continued to work on the time machine.

They prepared for the war for three years. Deimos spent all his time thinking about strategies and training his army for the war. But his enemies heard that he was coming to attack them again, so they brought all of their armies together to stop him again.

Two armies were standing against each other. Deimos was standing on his horse and looking at his army. Everything had to be perfect this time, and for that, he had to make no mistakes. He commanded the army to march against the enemy as he was running at the front, on his horse. The armies came together and started to fight. After a few hours of fighting, the battle was still continuing. It had been a tough battle, and he was about to lose. He was standing in front of ten enemies, and there was no one from his army to help him. He started to fight them all by himself. He stood alone, sword in his hand, as his ten enemies surrounded him. There was only the sound of blades clashing each other and shouting of soldiers. The first one rushed, and he was cut down in a blink. Two came next; he stepped back, struck, moved again. Another fell, and then another. He fought without pausing, measuring every movement he does. He defeated seven of them like that, and he was sure that he could win the fight easily against those last three. But suddenly, he felt a sword entering his arm. One of his enemies went behind him very quickly and stabbed him on the back. Deimos had to continue the fight with only one hand. Blood was dropping from his arm. He defeated three men with only one hand and stood there for a while. He realised he lost this war and he knew he had to stop and use the time machine to start to look for Ephesus. When he found him, Ephesus was waiting for him to give the command to use the time machine. It was the first time they were going to use the machine, and if it did not work as they planned, the war would end, and Deimos's dream of conquering the World would be over. Then, Deimos ordered him to start the machine and go back in time when the battle first began. Ephesus started the machine, and it worked.

He was standing in front of his army again. This time, he had to try another strategy in order to win the war. He waited for his enemies to attack his army this time. He was going to stay and defend against the enemy's attack. He organized his army before the battle started, and after waiting for some time, they started the attack. His archers were shooting at the enemy while they were running at Deimos's army. The battle was very long, and just when they were about to win the war, Deimos was taken captive by the enemy, and his army lost the battle because of that. Ephesus was still hiding in the back and waiting for Deimos's order to use the time machine. But when he heard that he was captured, he decided to use it by himself. And he went back in time again when the battle first started.

After they went back in time, Deimos told Ephesus to hide behind the army so he could use the time machine. Then, Deimos went to the battle. He was thinking that he must win the war this time. And he started to attack with his army again. During the battle, the enemies found where Ephesus was hiding and they killed him. After Deimos saw that Ephesus was dead, he got so angry and sad, and then he realised he would never be able to fix every problem. He destroyed the time machine, and then he accepted that he had lost the war.

THE LAST STRANGER

Yücel Efe Öztürk

The man waited between soldiers who had come from different regions of Spain. While imagining, he closed his eyes around the dark and creaky ship's planks. The sunrays that leaked between the ship's old planks hit his face. Because of the darkness in the boat, he couldn't see the other soldiers around him. All of the soldiers got on this ship through the King's commendation. The man knew that no soldier was willing to go to any war. However, he couldn't see the soldiers very well, and he could feel the soldiers' tension and fear. Also, he had already missed his sweet sister.

Miguel suddenly heard a gunshot. The hole in the deck let him see the beach, but the light from the small hole blinded him. He looked around, even though it was hard. Commendar had already started to shout to the soldiers. Commendar had already started shouting to the soldiers running around.

"Go on the deck! Hurry up, ladies! We will protect the ship until it reaches the port."

Miguel went on the deck between the crowd. He could see the beach full of locals struggling to sink the ship. But their weapons were not enough for this. However, the commander wanted to scare the locals and show their superiority. Miguel only watched the locals' deaths. They had painted faces, dark skins, and weird clothes. Their clothes did not cover their bodies very well. After a while, the ship moved away from the beach. He could now see the dead bodies on the beach clearly.

Everyone felt silent. Miguel could not hear any voice outside the sound of the water. The crew closed to the port. Miguel noticed that the port side was more colorful and crowded. The small town behind the harbor had been designed like a Spanish town. He could see the salves sweeping the decks of ships from the boat while the ship was closing more and more to the harbor. When the ship arrived at the port, all the soldiers started getting off. Miguel noticed that the sound of the cannons scared people, and people began talking among themselves.

"What's happening! Did you hear the sound? I think those were the ship's cannons over there. Can you see the soldiers who get off the boat?"

People looked at the soldiers with curious eyes. The commander ordered the soldiers to line up. Then the commander started to greet the people. Seeing the commander's salute, the

Spanish people applauded the soldiers. The town suddenly turned into a festival area. The soldiers walked along the path leading to the town. As Miguel walked with the soldiers, he noticed the native women staring at him. It was impossible not to see his curly brown hair, green eyes, and swanky clothes. Everyone looked at Miguel with admiration. Meanwhile, the commander gave an order to the soldiers again.

“Everyone in horse carriages! Hurry up!”

While soldiers were getting on the horse carriages, Miguel noticed that the money that he had hidden in his pouch had been stolen. He immediately checked his surroundings. He could see only a lot of people and houses built at the very bottom of the town, which did not look like Spanish houses. He looked more carefully and saw an African-American man sneaking around among the people. The man had white and dirty shirts and loose, ripped trousers. His hair had been literally tangled with dirt. He was literally a slave. Miguel decided to follow the slave.

Miguel tried to get through the crowd. He walked behind the black man for a long time. They passed large squares and sometimes small, old houses. Miguel tried to disappear among the people so the man wouldn't notice him. The streets they passed grew quieter and quieter. Finally, the man came to a door. It was covered with a dirty curtain. The man parted the curtain and went inside. The house he entered was the back door of a shop.

Miguel began to hear voices from inside. A deep voice was shouting at the man who had entered.

“Here it is! And with a whole lot of loot. Good job, Jose.”

Miguel realized the black man's name was Jose. He pulled back the curtain. Ahead stood a man who looked a bit old, fat, and wealthy. Jose always called him Francisco, sir. At the end of their argument, Jose gave all his loot to his boss. As Miguel listened, he heard Francisco talking about a magical weapon. Miguel thought to himself,

“This could be the weapon I came for.”

As Miguel listened to their conversation, he realized that the boss had ordered the slave to find a magical gold coin. Only this gold coin, they said, could reveal the weapon's location. As Miguel listened, the sounds of their conversation grew closer. Then, suddenly, they stopped. Before Miguel could comprehend what was happening, a large, powerful hand pulled him through the door.

“Who is this? Someone followed you.”

“I think he's a soldier.”

Francisco immediately recognized him as one of the newly arrived soldiers. His expression changed, as if an idea had suddenly occurred to him.

“No one will find you here. If you want to survive, you will help us.”

Miguel tried to reach for his sword, but Francisco practically wrapped his arms around him like an octopus. Francisco nodded to Jose. Before Miguel could comprehend what was happening, the slave struck Miguel over the head with a stick.

After a long time, Miguel opened his eyes. He was in a small carriage, his hands and mouth tied. Jose, sitting next to him, looked at him. A girl sat opposite him. She had already captivated Miguel. Miguel thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. With her curly hair and green eyes, she was the only person who caught Miguel's attention. They drove for a long time. The carriage began to slow. Everyone got out. They were standing in front of a long, narrow path. As soon as Jose untied Miguel's mouth, Miguel began shouting. Francisco said in a deep voice...

“You heard all the plans. And you seem like a good soldier. You'll help us.”

But Miguel still didn't understand why Francisco had brought this girl with him. As they walked along the path, Jose suddenly started talking to Miguel. He tried to make conversation. Every time Miguel asked questions, Jose answered them.

“Who is this girl?”

“I don't know her very well, but I think she's a local. Sir Francisco said he brought her here for important business. Around here, we call her Esmeralda.”

“Where are we going now?”

“To find the gun, Mr. Miguel.”

After walking for a long time, they finally stopped behind a large rock. Miguel kept his eyes on Esmeralda. At that moment, Francisco was leaning against the rock, watching ahead. The huge man's face made it clear that something was wrong. Miguel looked ahead from another side of the rock. Where they were looking was a large crowd. Standing before the crowd was an imposing man. This man was Commander Arthur, whom everyone knew. A soldier in a Spanish uniform knelt before him. It was clear that the Spanish had been defeated by the English knights. The knights began to move away. Seeing the soldiers moving, Francisco emerged from his hiding place, and the others followed. All they saw was a wall overgrown with vegetation. Miguel noticed Esmeralda watching the stone wall intently. Just then, Francisco pulled a shiny, yellow coin from his pocket. He carefully gave it to Esmeralda. Esmeralda studied the wall for a moment, seeming to listen to it. Finally, she placed the magic coin in the center of the wall. After a moment of silence, strange sounds began to spread from the wall. Esmeralda was whispering something unintelligible.

“Wehe i kēia manawa, wehe i kēia manawa, wehe i kēia manawa...”

As Esmeralda spoke these magic words, the wall became smaller and smaller. It finally disappeared. It looked like a large cave inside. Esmeralda entered first. She didn't seem afraid at all. Francisco, Miguel, and Jose followed in that order. A light filtered into the cave from the

ceiling. This light illuminated a small chest. From a distance, it was easy to see that the chest was a relic of ancient times. Francisco said in a happy and surprised voice,

“The magic weapon was a chest?”

Meanwhile, Esmeralda had already started walking towards the ballot box. Miguel suddenly rushed forward to protect Esmeralda. But Francisco had already restrained him. It was as if Francisco knew everything. He began whispering things into Miguel's ear.

“She's the last witch. We must free her. The natives respect her here. America doesn't belong to the natives anymore. The world will never know it. The magic weapon is Esmeralda.”

Hearing these words, Miguel stared at Esmeralda for a long time. While Esmeralda was opening the chest, a loud explosion was suddenly heard. The opposite side of the cave had been almost completely blasted away. Dust was everywhere. No one could see each other. Miguel tried to figure out where Esmeralda was, but he couldn't see anything because of the dust. Slowly, Miguel began to see ahead. He saw a large, upright man among the smoke. It was Commander Arthur. He was looking at Esmeralda with his army behind him. At that moment, Esmeralda had fallen to the ground from the explosion. Commander Arthur began walking towards Esmeralda.

“We found it. The gun is ours now!”

At that moment, Miguel realized that Esmeralda needed to be freed. No one could wield such power. Miguel turned to Jose.

“You have to untie my hands.”

“You have to fight him, Mr. Miguel.”

Jose untied Miguel's hands, and Miguel drew his sword. The inside of the cave literally echoed with the sound of the sword.

“SHWAAAAANG”

Miguel started running towards Commander Arthur. He lunged at the Commander's arm with his sword. The sword had literally pierced the armor. Everyone was stunned. The Commander began to press his hand against the wound. Meanwhile, the Commander turned to Miguel, his other hand reaching for his sword. Now they were both looking at each other. Amidst the great silence, they began to swing their swords at each other. Only the crack of the sword echoed through the cave. The two soldiers fought each other to death. Meanwhile, Esmeralda had already stood up and opened the Chest. Amidst the crack of the swords, the Chest began to draw Esmeralda in, and in an instant, she vanished. With Esmeralda gone, the swordplay fell silent. Commander Arthur knelt in agony and collapsed to the ground. The Commander was defeated in front of his army. Miguel stood alone, facing the army. He didn't know what to do. But suddenly, a wind started blowing rapidly from behind Miguel towards the army. This wind began to collapse all the rocks on the cave ceiling onto the army. One by one, each knight was dying. Meanwhile, Jose began to shout at Miguel from his hiding place.

“Esmeralda did it. She is free now! She is free! She is free!”

END.

