

Footprints

Megan Brown burrowed her hands through the golden sand, scraping her nails against something hard. She retrieved her hand, sucking the blood off her sore fingers. An hour later, she had ~~shoveled~~ ^{shovelled} through the grains of sand, briskly cleaning, dusting and brushing until the source of what had drew her blood was clear, crystal clear, like the glistening, shimmering waves that crashed onto the shore behind Megan's back. More uncovering, and two sets of footprints appeared, bare footed, one clearly an adult and the other a child. They led to the hungry mouth of a cave, waiting to snap its jaws down on more people and waiting to snap its jaws shut, trapping them inside. If you were to go inside, all you would be able to see would be a young woman, an otherwise empty beach, an azure blue ocean and a cloudy, troubled sky.

Millions of years ago, and a few miles away, they started running. They: three figures; one tall, two small; bare feet slapping against the mountain rock. A storm was advancing on them like a ~~not~~ pack of wolves, ravenous and wild. They were at the top of a mountain - a disastrous place to be at that clock tick. Highest mountain in the area, they were on, but it meant that they could see for miles, despite the smoky black, livid clouds surrounding them. It also meant that they could see the irate sea, smashing against a... cliff! Cliffs meant caves. Caves meant shelter. They knew what ~~to~~ they had to do.

Cheetahs, sprinting down the mountain scree, scrambling down the steep slope with a fire burning ~~inside~~ ^{inside} them. It was a life or death situation. Avalanches ~~cascaed~~ cascading down mountains. Thunder growling. Wind screeching and howling. Lightning flashing through the sky, piercing the black sky, the colour of a murky pond. Trees collapsed, too weak under all the pressure of heavy snow. ~~Worries~~ Worries chewing away their confidence, the tallest figure viewed their surroundings, planning a route to the cliff edge. Frantically, the three of them stumbled down a slope with their target in sight, although the icy snow was deepening by the second; unless they were fast, death would pounce on them. Slipping. Sliding. Falling. Tumbling. In their interrupted wake, disruption echoed, whilst an inaudible, perilous avalanche started behind them.

Silently, the avalanche advanced on one of the two children, who had fallen behind because of the conditions. ~~It~~ Exhausted legs refused to scramble for grip and the other two could only watch in horror as the child collapsed, unaware of the predator that was prowling towards him. Unaware of the fact that he was the prey.

Burying the child entirely, the avalanche swallowed him with a gulp. It glided down to the right of the only two remaining alive things for miles (the trees had been bitten through by huge masses of snow and boulders, which had bounced off rocky mountain tops). Gone. Lost. Forever. The trio had become a duo. Dead. There was no point ~~who~~ even attempting to find the concealed boy, for he had no chance at survival now - more snow had fallen, so he would be at least three metres under snow and any noise he made would be inaudible. So, two silhouettes continued running across the horizon.

Barely alive, their feet thudded against rock, where the snow hadn't reached. It had stopped snowing and had started ~~hailing~~ hailing. It stung your skin and made it tingle to your finger tips. Salt soared inside your mouth. And the cliff edge dropped away a few metres in front of the two people, ~~going~~ peering down to the rocky beach. There was only one way to do it. Heart booming in their chests, they ~~for~~ searched for a ledge roughly half way down the cliff, like desperate animals foraging for food. The hail gradually stopped and a light rain began. It pirouetted down and soothed their skin and hair. Only two huge jumps. Only three hundred risks. Only one option. And this was it.

Nerves gnawed at the tallest figure; even though the storm had passed, there was still one screeching inside their head. They shuffled about ~~edgily~~ apprehensively, sat on the cliff edge, before, with a yelp, they slid down to the crumbling ledge. Unaware of the danger, the young figure copied and swung ungracefully until they were ~~hang~~ hanging down and swinging. One last breath of bravery... and they dropped! Down, down, down, to the ledge - now a slit of trembling rock, moments away from plummeting down to the beach. They both caught their breath, heaving but only half relieved. Phew! Now, they could just drop to the beach and to safety.

Their shivers could - CRACK! The ledge ripped open and fell, like a broken heart. As time slowed, two silhouettes tumbled, head over heels. Hearts climbing into throats, crashing against the cliff face. One of their hands reached out and grabbed a jutting rock. But the other? Still descending through the air at break-neck speed, tucked into a tight ball and heading towards doom.

The child lay on the shore, quivering and shaking with many broken bones. Another leap from the child's mother, down onto the beach, next to a miracle. It was a miracle that she was alive, let ~~alone~~^{alone} her son. Although they weren't safe yet. They never were. Waves menacingly dragged themselves up the beach and sprayed them, adding to the numbness of the harsh weather. ~~The~~ So, the mother hauled her son over her shoulder and stumbled towards the cave.

Murky and gloomy, the cave's mouth gulped them down, whilst the boy slid off his mother's back, and they both walked into the cave.

They died the next day. Starvation, illness, injury, hypothermia. Who knows? But they had made it to their destination.

Megan Browne stood in awe next to her discovery. She didn't know what its story was. But, deep inside the ~~cave~~ cave, two skeletons remained: one large; one small. And a few miles away, underneath shrubs and thriving wildlife, another small skeleton rested.

Tiny paws, big trouble

By Marcie A, Lyndhurst Preparatory School

On July 22nd, the Smith family set off from their home to go to a lovely resort in Italy for the summer holidays. They own three dogs but couldn't find anyone who would take care of them whilst away, so they decided to bring the dogs with them! Seemed like a great idea at the time, but little did they know, it was the worst decision ever.

The family began their drive to the airport, with their three mischievous dogs barking and howling in the boot of the car. I think it's best I introduce to you these three trouble-making dogs. First up, we have Arlo [the eldest of the group] who is a dalmatian and is an energetic pup who's never out of breath. Then, we have Baxter, a fluffy poodle. He looks cute and cuddly, but he could chew through your shoes in seconds! [I would advise you to keep your shoes out of reach when he's around]. And last, but definitely not least, we have Chief, a Great Dane, who really lives up to his name. The bossiest dog around!

They had finally made it to the airport after a twenty-minute drive which had felt like a lifetime to Mr and Mrs Smith. As they jumped out of the car, they soon realised that the reason their drive to the airport felt like forever was because they had a flat tyre THE ENTIRE TIME!!! Mr and Mrs Smith were frantically scratching their heads, wondering how this happened? The children on the other hand, very quickly realised what the problem was, there was a giant hole in the tyre. But little did they know, the dastardly dogs had secretly just completed their first mission of ruining the humans' holiday: BURST A HOLE IN THE CAR TYRE... Because dogs don't want to go on holiday to Italy, they want to stay at home.

The exhausted Smith family sat down in the waiting room, the children bursting with excitement. Then it hit them. There was a gentle beeping noise followed by a calm voice coming from the airport announcement speaker. "Hello, welcome to Gatwick Airport. This is your flight to Istanbul, boarding will begin shortly, thank you." Everyone began to panic. Mr Smith turned to his eldest son with a furious look on his face. "YOU WERE IN CHARGE OF CHECKING THE DEPARTURES BOARD!!!" Mr Smith yelled. His son looked up at him and gently explained, "Well..... Istanbul, Italy, they both begin with an I. What did I do wrong?!"

Mrs Smith stood up and loudly screeched, "ALRIGHT EVERYONE, WE HAVE TO SPRINT TO THE RIGHT PLANE, HURRY! AND DON'T PANIC!"

"Last call for Milan, Italy" they heard over the speaker. After their Olympic race across the airport, the family, red faced and out of breath, arrived at the correct boarding gate for Italy. "We made it." sighed mum, thankful she had decided to wear her best running trainers that day. No sooner had they arrived at the gate than it was time for the animals to take their place in the hold – the area of the plane where pets had to travel. This flight had lots of pets boarding so the airline nicknamed it "Pet Express". The family said their farewells to the three troublemaking pooches. As The Smiths turned to board the plane themselves, they hoped with everything that their holiday journey would now run smoothly.

The flight for the humans was very uneventful, nice plane snacks, colouring in for the children and an in-flight movie. However, back in the hold, where the pets were, things were about to get chaotic. Somehow, Chief's cage had not been secured properly. Although he wasn't supposed to, this meant he could roam free. But he wasn't going to have all the fun on his own. He made his way back to the cages to go and rescue Baxter and Arlo. Their tails wagging with excitement, they were so happy to finally be free! Looking around they were met with the sad faces of all the other pets in cages too. Birds, cats, hamsters and even a hedgehog – all wanting to share the same fun on their journey. The kind doggy trio knew what they had to do. They set about releasing all the animals and in just a few minutes, everyone was loose! With vibrant feathers everywhere, cats hissing and screeching, hamsters doing what they do best (pooping) and one little hedgehog waddling around, living his best life.

When the plane landed, The Smith family were swiftly met by airport security bringing their three dogs to them shaking their heads. "These dogs are trouble and not welcome in Italy again!" After the most eventful journey of their lives, at least now they could continue their holiday in peace..... or could they???

Autobiography: Into Auschwitz - The First Days of Survival

by Anushree K (Year 6)

Merton Court Preparatory School

I had barely awoken when the shouting began. The train was heaving with bodies, the air sour. I felt overwhelmed, pressed in on all sides, like an animal on display. A wave of foul smells hit me - pungent vomit, stench of unwashed bodies - each breath harder than the last. Someone whispered a Yiddish prayer. Someone else cursed under his breath. Many simply stared ahead, hollow-eyed. I stayed silent, listening to the relentless rhythm of the wheels as the train lurched forward. None of us knew exactly what awaited us, but fear settled over the carriage like a heavy blanket.

As the hours dragged on, I tried to steady myself by thinking of home. The children's laughter - Antoni's stubborn pride, Helena's gentleness, Klara's endless questions and Ludwik's bright smile. I clung to those precious memories as the train rattled into the unknown.

When the doors finally opened, bitterly cold air rushed in, sharp enough to sting. I stepped down anxiously. Soon a sign loomed above us: 'Arbeit macht frei'. 'Work sets you free'. I had heard the phrase whispered in fearful tones, but seeing it carved into reality was something else entirely.

A guard's pale, blue eyes locked onto mine - icy, unblinking, cutting through me like a blade. Behind him, tall fences crowned with electrical wire enclosed the compound. A prison. No - something worse.

A sudden crackle of electricity sent a flock of startled crows shrieking into the sky. Their cries echoed across the yard, a sound that made the hairs on my neck rise.

They stripped us of our belongings, our clothes, our names. I became Prisoner 7857, a number brutally tattooed on to my arm and into my identity. They marched us to Block IV, where I tried to sleep on hard, wooden bunks stacked like shelves. That first night, I lay awake listening to coughing, shivering, and the quiet sobs of men who tried to stay strong but couldn't anymore.

The next morning, before dawn, we were dragged outside for roll call. The biting cold cut through the thin striped uniform. Frost settled on our shoulders as we stood for what felt like hours. Some men fainted. Others swayed but refused to fall. I kept my eyes forward, repeating my children's names in my mind like a prayer.

After a while, I was deemed fit for labour. Men, women and even children were marched out to work. My nostrils flared at the charred, acrid smell drifting across the camp.

Everyone feared the buildings it came from. Rumours spread like wildfire; whispers of people who entered and never returned. The official causes of death were always harmless words - pneumonia, exhaustion - but we all knew how far they strayed from the truth.

The fields stretched endlessly, bleak and desolate. Thunder rolled overhead and lightning cracked across the sky as if the heavens themselves were furious. Rain soaked through my uniform. A wave of terror washed over me as I thought of my wife and children. It felt as though fate was pulling them further out of reach.

Occasionally, I wondered why I was here at all. Anger surged through me. How could a man be torn from his family simply for believing something different? But my friends reminded me, quietly and bitterly, that whether I liked it or not, I was trapped in Auschwitz.

My hands bled from the back-breaking work. Bruises bloomed across my arms and ribs in uneven colours. Still, I told myself it could be worse. I simply had to believe that.

Then came the day I had feared. Officers marched past us in perfect formation, their black uniforms gleaming, crimson armbands, complete with the Nazi Swastika, bright against the grey world around us. They inspected us like livestock, their silence more terrifying than their shouts. I stood to attention, breathing shallowly, praying they would pass me by.

And now, here I am - waiting in a line that snakes across the yard outside Block IV. Perhaps we are being moved. Perhaps something worse awaits. I do not know. I only know that I miss my wife and children with a pain that feels like a hand tightening around my heart.

Whatever happens, I hold onto one belief: evil cannot last forever. Good will rise again. And as I stand here, unsure of my fate, one thought circles in my mind.

Will anyone remember me?
Will my children, their children or the ones after them know who I was?
Will someone, generations from now, speak my name?

I do not know.

But I hope, more than anything, that I will not be forgotten.

Author's note

This story was inspired by the experiences of my great-great-grandfather, Ludwik Szymura, who died in the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1941.

(796 words)

By Eavani G, Lyonsdown School

The sun beamed down onto the lush grass and blossoms adorned the garden with vibrant colours. White dots embedded the blanket of azure blue. I dug into the luxuriant grass as I planted roses in the bed of soil. While I toiled in the scorching sun, I noticed a mound of soil resting on the verdant flowers. I stepped closer to inspect the pile and examined it. Spikes shot up like daggers, and I stared wordlessly at the creature.

It was a hedgehog. But...a hedgehog with miniature wings tucked at its side. I had never seen anything like it. As I scrutinised the creature, I noticed a lilac nose and a pearl white stomach. In an instant, it flew into the air, I chased after the creature inquisitively as its wings fluttered in the clear atmosphere.

The wind sung along to the melodious birds and to the beat of the creature's wings. We passed roads, fields and streams until the creature finally came to a stop. The sky was now painted with streaks of honey yellow, oranges and pinks.

I stared ahead, shivering at what the creature had led me to: a shadowy wood. As if it did not have a care in the world, the creature ambled into the woods, beckoning me to follow... The trees were shrouded in mist, they were crooked figures with gnarled limbs. They wore cloaks of moonlit mist.

Gulping, I tiptoed towards what awaited me. The spindly branches of the trees reached out to me – attempting to capture me. Rotting leaves obscured the roots of the decaying vegetation. Twigs blocked out the only light escaping from the desperate moon. Stems from long lost plants twined together as if wrestling and attacking each other. Gloomy storm clouds rumbled threatening the whole of the woods.

I shivered. Not because of the cold. Because of everything around me. The rotting plants. The darkness engulfing me. not knowing where I was. The trees stood frozen, hiding what lay behind their masked figures. The wind moaned and howled as if in agony. Leaves fearfully muttered to one another as if alarmed of what lay ahead. I stared ahead at the tiny creature and my terror morphed into panic as I saw what lay ahead....

A deep ravine buried in a blanket of mist. A fragmented ladder that had split in the middle. I cautiously bent down to see what lay underneath the covered canyon. The mysterious creature took a single, nonchalant look and fell into the ghostly mist. I gasped as the animal carelessly dropped into the abyss and in shock I suddenly fell forward and darkness overwhelmed me.

I blinked and I opened my mouth to speak but no words came out. Underneath my head I felt a soft and nurturing material. I turned and I noticed some emerald green moss on the ground. I swivelled my head and I inhaled sharply in amazement, all around me - creatures just like the very one that had led me here – grazed on fresh grass. Willows guarded the sacred area. I knelt down to pet one and a needle-like spike dug into my finger. I did not care though. Not when I was here.

I heard a strange murmuring noise and behind me there was a sapphire blue waterfall. The waterfall was a silky silver staircase that whispered as the water fell into a huge curtain of shiny, shimmering blue. The stream wined through the grass like a glittering

ribbon. Above me the opaque mist had turned into snow white cotton candy. I felt slightly drowsy after the tiring adventure. So, I rested my dreamy head on the tender and gentle grass and fell asleep to the sound of the soothing wind and the pacifying waterfall. Then, I fell into a deep slumber

With a start, I woke up but not in the picturesque land I had fell asleep in but inside my bedroom – snuggled cosily underneath the covers of my bed. What a bizarre dream, I thought. It had all felt so real , so vivid!

Suddenly I felt a teeny-tiny prick on my hand, my fingers felt sore and a minuscule prickle was piercing my thumb over and over and over again.

Fossilised human footprints show a child and an adult running together.

Imagine their story.

Una's fossil grey, unblinking eyes had experienced too much for a child of nine; no child should have to see the horrific things she had. She was surprisingly slender. Too slender. Her hair was both blond, and brunette at the same time, like a talented artist had dabbed at it with their skilled paintbrush. Well, it usually looked like that. Several weeks on the run had made Una look unnaturally unkempt, no matter her aunt Marriana's attempts to look respectable. Freckles meandered across Una's face, resting on pale, ivory-coloured skin. Her hands were soft, delicate objects. Those hands were now clinging onto Marriana's clammy hands.

'Come on!' Una's aunt dragged Una along the sandy blanket of the beach. If Marriana related to Una's insatiable appetite for home, she didn't show it. But where was home? Una and her aunt were now at the water. The opaque water lunged at her, ominously edging forwards. Rocking precariously, a boat rested on the freezing pool. Una and Marriana sprinted forwards. As they clambered into the leaky boat, it lurched alarmingly. They set off, and the rocking of the boat reminded Una of a cradle.

Suddenly, time turned back, and Una found herself in a baby's cradle. On a bed next to her was her mother, Lidia, on the brink of death. Time then dragged Una forward, but not quite to the correct time. When Una's aunt told her what was happening in the world: how the queen had overthrown the loved, meek king; how she was now to be addressed as the 'great leader.' How Una's father had fled the country without Una. How they, together, would also flee.

'Una,' Marriana's words brought Una back to the present, 'keep rowing!' As Una glanced back, all she could see were footprints littering the beach. Footprints of an adult and a child. Footprints of refugees. Their footprints.

'Una, I,' Marriana hesitated. Una knew that there was something big her aunt was going to say. 'there's something I haven't told you about. Me and... and your mother, we had... have another sister. Stepsister. 'Oh,' Una responded. She knew it was a lame response, but she didn't know how to react. Why? Why now? Una didn't know why that mattered. Sure, it was interesting, but it didn't mean anything. Only Marriana knew why that information was so vitally important. 'Halt!' the queen's soldiers. They'd found them. 'Una! I know how to save you, but you have to trust me. Do you?' After a frantic nod, Marriana shoved Una into the icy water. When Una eventually scanned the top of the water, she saw the soldiers taking her aunt away. With the boat. Marriana glanced back. Una saw the look on her face. And she understood everything. Her aunt had meant to do this. To leave her. Leave her to drown. She could go back. Or to safety.

Then two and two clicked...

Una was someone who always tried to see the best in people, even when there was no best. Maybe her aunt had gone back to save the sister. Or... or maybe the sister was the queen. As Una thought back, she did remember a figure tenderly nursing Lidia. Always making her tea. Her mother complained it made her feel worse, but the figure told her it worked like medicine and insisted she drink it. What tea was it? Nightshade. *Deadly* Nightshade. This sister had killed her mother. And she would kill her aunt too.

Marriana had managed to escape from the soldiers and her evil sister and was now frantically searching the water for Una. She, of course, knew where Una really was. But she wouldn't, *couldn't*, admit it. She wouldn't admit that she'd let her sister down. The look on her face

wasn't what Una had interpreted. It was guilt, and regret. She hadn't wanted to leave Una. She'd tried to save her! She knew Una could swim. Why hadn't she? Why had she given up? Why? Now they were both alone in the world. Una and Marriana. They had both lost each other. Fate had driven them apart. They would never find each other again.

Task 3 Fantasy: Elina U, Salcombe Preparatory School

Elegantly, the sun shone a gossamer glaze on my window, as I woke up to a brisk morning ready to brush away the crisp, crimson leaves in my garden. I got out of bed, excited for the task, feeling the warm, radiant rays shine on me.

After having a jam sandwich, I hopped into the garden, in my pyjamas, ready to start my day.

I looked around me as flora and fauna waved at me and the dew on the trees sparkled in the scintillating sun. Rain drops hung on the edge of the scarlet roses at the corner of my garden. As I looked at the Midas kissed sunrise, I sighed in elatedness as I started my sweeping. Cheerfully the wistful wind whispered wishes in my ear, as leaves flew in the air, my eyes were surprised at how many leaves engulfed the garden. The wind had blown the leaves in every corner, and I was determined to finish before noon.

I held the broom tightly and began to stroke the ground full of rejuvenating rainbows which soon turn to a lush green patch of grass. Elatedly, bristles scraped the stones hidden beneath as piles of hazelnut, sanguine and amber leaves gathered. I just pushed the final heap to go in the compost until I felt something hard hit my broom...

I froze.

Cautiously, I bent down and brushed the leaves aside. Suddenly, a petite hedgehog was curled into a tight trembling ball; its spikes were dusted in soil, and its tiny black nose gingerly peaked out revealing a very painful bruise!

"I really didn't mean to hurt you," I whispered to it, "It was probably the broom which hurt you, poor thing." Suddenly, the hedgehog uncurled slightly and twitched its nose. But instead of scurrying away it looked at me with curiosity, which surprised me, so I carefully picked it up and decided to take it inside to see if it was ok.

As I lay, the hedgehog on the kitchen counter its spikes gradually became a glowing fire as it shone a golden but peculiar object at me which filled me with wonder...what could this symbolise? Is this something significant? All I knew was that this was no ordinary hedgehog. As I look at the hedgehog, I felt like it was trying to tell me something through the object?

After a few minutes, I felt that the place with the answers, was the library. That was where I had to go next!

As I went through the aisles of the library, different shades of colours adorned the books, but none showed the book with the answer I was looking for...

Colour of amber, lemon, fuchsia flashed at me, but the words showed only answers on literature or ecology. I was about to give up, until I tripped on a dusty old book with golden strokes on each corner.

As I blew away the microscopic dust on the cover, I opened the book to find an illustration of something called a wishing hedgehog, that can grant you one wish but only if it gives you the golden globe: A luminescent, glowing ball which would give you any wish but...

“The library will close in two minutes please get ready to leave.”

THUD!

Suddenly I jumped losing the book under one of the shelves, and I didn't get to even finish the sentence! What now? As I walked home, questions raced in by mind like logs rapidly flowing through the powerful current of a waterfall.

What was the end of the sentence? Was I the one the wishing hedgehog had chosen to have a special wish?

I picked up the hedgehog who was sitting on the countertop and let it rest on my hand.

Slowly it uncurled.

“You're the first to find it,” a soft voice whispered, quieter than the summer breeze.

I held my breath and looked at the hedgehog.

“You can talk!”

It gave a tiny nod, “Only when I need to.”

Slowly it revealed the small globe, but this time I understood it. Its surface a golden glow, but the inside felt warm and alive, waiting for someone to commence the magic.

As I looked at the globe and paused for a moment, one wish? My mind raced with greed, but none felt right. Then I looked at the hedgehog- small and injured but brave.

“I wish for you, all of you little hedgehogs, big, small, magical, normal ... well just to be safe.”

The orb blazed with light filling the room with warmth, but when it faded the hedgehog was gone.

In my hands lay a golden leaf.

I smiled.

That's when I realised the real magic wasn't the wish, it was the choice I made.