

Thinks and Things

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The Invention

Everything that ever existed, once started out as just a thought. For this world to last and keep evolving, people need to keep thinking. The problem is, original thoughts are running out quickly.

One of the last original thoughts was of a flying machine. For a thought to become a thing, one needs to truly believe in it.

Failing is part of succeeding. Without failure, there wouldn't be any light. Light bulbs, that is. When attempting the impossible, you will fail numerous times. But then your machine flies. Your phone call is answered. Your light bulb lights. Your television broadcasts news from around the globe. Your remote control turns the volume up. You beat the computer at solitaire. You're on-line.

Meet Thinksandthings. He's partially responsible for thermostats, x-ray machines, and notebook paper with perforated edges. Also, add to that list, super balls, fruit scented markers, and roll top desks. He's old, bulky, seven feet tall, and elusive. That's all the Fixer knows about him. The Fixer has been sent to track him down and fix some of the things he turned into things. Thinksandthings takes thoughts (or what he calls "thinks") from people and turns them into things. But not with a wave of a wand. Turning thoughts into things can be instant or it can be a slow process, taking several to hundreds of years. Thinksandthings helps out a little here and there, gets the ball rolling, so to speak.

Once upon a time, a 13-year-old male stepped into an arcade. The type of arcade that's meant only for those ages eighteen and up. He inserted a coin into one of the machines. The boy cranked the handle, watched a lady dance a jig and teasingly, start to take off her top. The faster he cranked, the faster the pictures flipped and the faster she would take off her clothes. He cranked and cranked but the top stayed on. Right before the last several dozen pictures were about to be flipped, the manager of the arcade came back from the restroom. He found the boy and escorted him out to the sidewalk. He kept the boy's coin and the paper girl kept her shirt on.

During one of his many travels, Thinksandthings happened to be in close proximity to the young boy that same night. As the boy was in the midst of falling asleep, he thought it would be really boss if there was a machine that could show you pictures of naked girls instantly. No more cranking and turning of a handle just to see one girl naked. Instead, it would take just one click of a button to see a different naked girl. Click the button again and see a different naked girl. *Yeah, it could happen*, the boy thought just the moment before he fell asleep.

And that is how the Internet was invented.

Let it be emphasized, original thoughts are running out. To keep the world running at its fast pace, Thinksandthings scours the globe, finding people who truly believe in something and makes it real.

However, a number of people truly believe in unoriginal things but that will only keep the world going for a short while. Those tend to be thoughts of children and in some cases, mental patients.

Small children are truly free thinkers. Granted, children are often baby-sat by the television and godfathered by mass media. However, dreaming and thinking begins far long before babies can even focus their eyes on their mothers.

Our story will begin within a story. It begins in a well known, old, much loved children's tale about cannibalism, Hansel and Gretel.

The Witch

It's hazardous when people fall in love with paper people, live out their digital fantasies, or succumb to a scary book. Books and other forms of entertainment offer escapism-literally.

Children don't choose their fantasies freely like the grown-ups do. Instead of believing that oneself can fly on a broomstick, they believe that the candy they just eaten will make them blow up like balloon. Instead of believing that wardrobes, houses, and tollbooths can take you to lands that don't exist, they will believe someone or something is hiding in their wardrobe or house. Or tollbooth too, if they happened to have one of those in the basement.

When I say that it's hazardous when people turn books into things, what I mean is that the Fixer has to chase down flying monkeys, find Captain Hook in the middle of one of the seven seas, and locate

confused male-romance-novel-cover-models in the middle of shopping malls across America.

Fear is a powerful emotion but it's not the most powerful. The Fixer has met the Witch before and she tricked him then. The Fixer believes every person has a bit of good inside of them, sometimes it needs a little light or water to grow. However, the witch is not a person. She is a thing. Since she is a thing, she has no emotions. She runs on pure instinct and that instinct tells her to hunt.

The Fixer met the Witch not long after Hansel and Gretel's father told them a story he made up to lull them to sleep. Unfortunately, the father neglected to tell them that it wasn't a *true* story. Thinksandthings took that think and thus, it became a true story.

In the story, two children ignore warnings from their father to not wander into the dark woods without permission. The children sneak off, get lost, and come across a house made of candy. A very nasty witch owns that house. She locks them up in a cage and feeds them all the cakes, candy, and cookies they could ever possibly desire in a lifetime. Everyday, the witch (who has, or rather had really bad eye sight) poked through the cage, grabbed the children's fingers to monitor their progress. The witch's plan all along was to fatten the children up and cook them in the oven for a special meal.

Fortunately, these two children were quick thinkers for they took the bone of a chicken and tricked the witch into thinking it was Hansel's finger. The children also trick the witch into climbing into an oven and they were able to escape.

But what most versions of this story will not tell you is that the witch never died. The Fixer came along soon after the children fled and fixed the situation before she succumbed to a fiery death.

After all this time, the witch has lived in the thoughts of children. Until a librarian mistakenly placed a copy of the tale in the non-fiction section at Billy Godfrey's school.

The Witch was lying lazily on her green and pink pastel striped couch, fanning herself with an index card of a lemon spritz cookie recipe. She had been baking all day and the house needed cooling off. But not until she got her fix.

She heard footsteps outside, crunching the fallen autumn foliage that the melting snow revealed. She woke up and rubbed her eyes. She had fallen asleep with her contacts still in her dry eyes. She sat up and listened closely to the footsteps now, they sounded tiny and smelled sweet.

Flour stained her bubblegum pink blouse but she didn't care. She took a quick look in the hallway mirror. Messy red hair in need of a hair straightener, stained clothes, pink eyes with raccoon rings. *Lovely*. The footsteps were getting gradually louder. *Too late to do anything with you*, she sighed at her twin.

She could envision a tiny finger reaching out to ring the doorbell.

She opened the door and was pleased to find a plump boy, about age eight, standing on her doormat, "*If you lived here, you'd be home now.*"

"Hi, there," she greeted him. He didn't respond. *Perhaps he had been wondering these dark, scary woods for a while. Probably starved. Disoriented. Delicious.*

"Are you lost, little boy?" she asked. He nodded. "Are you hungry?" She grabbed his plump little hand and laughed. He took a step back. She didn't let him go.

"I was just about to pull out a batch of cookies from the oven. Want some?"

She opened the door a little wider with her other free hand, the boy peered in. Down the hallway, he saw mountains and hills and rivers of goodies. Chocolate truffles, frosted sugar cookies, petit fours, peanut brittle, perfect squares of caramels, powdered lemon bars, and peanut butter fudge.

He saw dipped white chocolate pretzels, a big pot of chocolate boiling on the stove, bowls of cookie dough, pitchers of frothy orange creme and raspberry lemonade, and a German chocolate cake ready to be frosted.

Enticed, the boy stepped in eagerly and threw out whatever caution he had to the wind, the squirrels, and to the trees.

"Help yourself," the Witch said as the boy reached for a gingerbread man cookie.

The Witch's house was nearly impossible to find. It was off the map and in the middle of the woods.

Luckily, the Fixer noticed mutant dandelions growing near his next client's location.

Not so luckily, the half eaten goodies (the coffee flavored biscotti was left untouched) and a few bones on a cookie sheet was all that remained in the house. The Fixer didn't bother to close the peppermint door when he left.

He bent down on one knee to examine a dandelion. This particular dandelion was not the normal kind. Normal dandelions don't grow together, intertwined in one big stalk.

When mutant dandelions appear, that means two things must have happened. One, something is missing and needs to be found before repairing can be done. Second, something irreversible has happened. Sadly, in this case, it was death. Death cannot be undone.

Now, sometimes a think may cause a previously dead person to return to the earth but they can never take on their previous form. The dead person in question may come back in the form of a ghost, zombie, or angel. It depends on the type of think.

The Fixer has long since mastered the technique of detaching himself from the death of any of his clients. Everything that starts must come to an end. Although, nothing really truly "ends."

After doing what he can, the Fixer places his ax, hammer, and a box of nails back into his tool box and takes out his logbook. He sharpens a graphing pencil with a knife. He sits down on a freshly cut tree stump and begins to write.

Name: Billy Godfrey

Location: Thief River Falls

Think: The Witch from Hansel and Gretel

Thing: The witch and her house far off in the woods of Thief River Falls.

Status: Pending

Comments: Unfortunately, the boy has expired. The Witch, as of today, has not been located. House is boarded up, securely.

Broken Dipper

"I don't get this," said a boy with an unkempt mop of hair and big, round chestnut brown eyes to his grandma. Arlan dropped his star constellations book to the floor and placed the telescope on the top of the stack of textbooks and "Get Well" cards lying beside his bed. He grabbed an old sweater sitting at the foot of his bed that once belong to his grandfather and pulled it over his head.

"Here-let me show you what the constellation looks like again. It's called Ursula Major," Grandma flipped through the book. "Keep your eye out for a falling star and wish on it."

Arlan sighed. "If the moon is God's thumbnail, then maybe falling stars are his tears," lamented the boy.

She sat down on the edge of his bed and pointed out his window, "I can see the Dipper out tonight. Can you spot it?"

The boy gazed out the window and past the top of the evergreens as Grandma walked across the room to place the book back on the book shelf, but it fell. She picked it back up again and placed it more carefully underneath a pop-up book of dinosaurs.

Arlan thought someone should make book shelves with guard rails, like there are for beds for the very young and the very old.

"I don't see it. It isn't there," he stated plainly.

"It's right there, I'll show you," Grandma went to the window but couldn't find the Dipper now.

"That's strange, I saw it just a moment ago. Oh, well. I'm tired, my brain is tired, and I bet you're tired as well. Maybe you'll feel better in the morning. Goodnight, sweetie."

“Night, Grandma,” the boy rolled over and shut his eyes.

The Grandma Farm

When children are born, they have no concept of gender. But soon after birth, they learn the rules. Pink is for girls and blue is for boys. Girls play with dolls and boys play with action figures. Girls have piggy tails and boys have short hair. Girl wears pants, dresses, and skirts. Boys wear pants. Girls have friends who are girls. Boys have friends who are boys. Girls whisper secrets. Boys kick each other. Girls braid each other's hair and giggle. Boys start imaginary wars and burp.

When it comes to little girls, the Fixer has had to repair thinks that involved rainbow slides and pet ponies that appear out of nowhere. The Fixer once came across a little girl who had a think that resulted in having her place of residence located inside the local shopping mall.

When it comes to boys, the Fixer has interrupted plenty of wars. One boy wanted to be really tall, so he grew to be over seven feet in height in one night. One boy ran around so much, using his hand to make a weapon (sound effects emitting from his mouth), that his arms turned into machine guns.

Have you noticed that in movies, when stunts are being performed, that it's so embarrassingly obvious that it's a stunt double and not the actor? Well, it's not always a stunt double. Sometimes little boys want so much to be like their buff, action movie stars that they *think* themselves into the movie at the most pivotal, dangerous stunts.

However, fantasy is part of what keeps this world running.

Many of the last century's best known things were originally thinks by science fiction writers. Robots, lasers, super computers, landing on the moon.

Cloning.

It doesn't take much to turn fantasy or science fiction into horror.

Matt's black Labrador was rolling on its back, basking in the sunlight. Matt picked off a stringy booger from the dog's face and let him lick it off his finger. Bored, he picked a dandelion and sung to himself, “Mama had a baby and it's head popped off.” On cue, Matt popped off the top half of the dandelion and was left holding the stem.

Brian, Matt's older brother, found a dead crow earlier that day and was currently trying to fashion a necklace out of its bones, “Hi Shadow #3.” The dog wagged its tail.

“Stop saying that, this is the same Shadow we've had all along. Look there!,” Matt pointed towards the dog's ear. “Same patch of fur missing.”

“Mom and dad replaced him again,” replied his brother Brian. “Feel that perfectly square bump near his ear. Remember when we were babies and a van hit Shadow? And Mom and Dad brought him to the vet?”

“Yeah, he came home the very next day,” Matt traced the square with his finger.

“No, we got Shadow #2 back the very next day. A whole new dog, just with the same genes. And then it got hit by another vehicle and smashed to smithereens again last week,” Brian flipped up the label of his shirt so it stuck out and started to scratch the back of his neck.

“Did you even see the dog get hit?”

“I was there, I had a front row seat. Cloning is possible, you know. At least, with some animals such as dogs. No way a dog could have survive having its brains splattered everywhere. Some of it landed on a tree. If you want, I'll show you where.”

“No. Shadow is fine now.”

“Yes, Shadow is fine now. He's so incredibly okay now that he doesn't even have a cast or a limp. And they found all the bits of his brain and used a funnel to insert it back into his skull. Not!”

Brian bent down and pointed out the square bump, “Feel that perfectly square bump near his ear.”

"I already touched it," Matt started to rub Shadow #3's belly, "No, Shadow. I don't believe him. I don't believe him."

Matt stood up and watched his brother string a bone onto a piece of cord. "You know, you really shouldn't touch dead things. Did you really find that bird or did you use your sling shot to kill it?"

Brian, not looking up, "Doesn't really matter. If there's a puppy farm full of Shadows, then certainly this stupid bird can be replaced by one of its clones."

"I could tell Mom what you're doing, you know," Matt threatened.

Brian stopped stringing, looking deep in thought and replied, "Bet you five dollars that Shadow #3 will get hit by a car too, just like his clone and the original."

"You're boring me. I'm going inside," he left the backyard and Shadow #3, using its back foot to scratch at the square-sized lump.

He found his mother stacking plates in the dishwasher, "Go kiss Grandma, she's not having a good day today."

Grandma came to live at his house less than a year ago, to be taken care of by his parents. She lays in bed mostly, sleeping. The children aren't allowed in her room unless granted permission. Not that the children really enjoyed being in the company of an old woman with sunken eyes and more liver spots than a firehouse dalmatian has spots, but they kept up the occasional appearance to please their mother.

Matt opened the door, stepped in and walked up to the side of her bed.

"Hi, Grandma," he whispered. She didn't awake. *Good*, he thought. He didn't actually want to kiss her cold cheek.

The door flew open and Brian walked in. "Hey, Matt. Hey, Grandma! How are you doin'? Seeing any dead relatives yet?"

Normally, a comment like this would only manage to provoke a rolling of the eyes from Matt. But something was amiss. "She looks deader than usual, don't you think?"

"That's 'cos she probably is. Get a mirror or something with a reflective surface and we'll see if she's breathing."

Matt sorted through a dresser drawer. "All I can find is this," he holds up a metal toenail clipper.

"Bring it here," Brian takes it and held it under her nose. "Nothing."

"You can't really tell," concluded Matt. "Too small."

"Mom and Dad will probably make a trip to the Granny farm later tonight and pluck a new one, with all her memories downloaded inside her brain," Brian popped open the clipper and made an impromptu back scratcher.

"How is that even possible?"

"Look for signs, little things that are different about her tomorrow. You'll see." Brian took the nail clipper and started to cut the label off of his shirt.

The boys were watching television when Mom came in, running a brush through her hair, "We're taking Grandma to the doctor this evening. Just a little check-up, no worries."

Brian raised his eyebrows and gave his little brother a knowing look.

Grandma returned sometime during the night. Before the cereal could even be poured, Brian and Matt asked to see Grandma. "We want to welcome her to the family," explained Brian.

Mother gave him a puzzling look. Matt clarified, "We want to welcome her *back* home."

"Oh, okay. But only pop in for a second, she needs her rest."

Grandma was just as still and cold as the day before.

"Looks the same, but is she? Look for clues." Grandma opened her eyes, Brian was quick to say, "Oh. Hello. How are you?"

"I'm fine, but my neck is itchy. Can you fluff my pillows?"

The boys looked at each other, glaring at each other to be the one to touch Grandma.

“She's tired, boys. Let Grandma get her sleep,” Mother walked in as the boys retreated out. She bent down and put her hand on the wrinkled forehead of her own mother, “Mom, how are you feeling?” Grandma looks up with cloudy eyes, “I'm fine, but my neck is itchy. Can you fluff my pillows?”

Brian closed the baseball player poster door and sat on the bed, “Ah, not a clone this time. But just wait a few more days until she kicks the can and you'll see.”

“Actually, I spotted a clue. She *is* different,” Matt insisted.

“Yeah, what was it?”

“She said her neck was itchy.”

“Yeah, so?”

“You've been itching your neck since the dog got hit by a car.”

“The tag's been bugging me.”

“Let me look at it,” Matt insisted. Brian obliging turned around for him. The boy's skin protruded a square shaped lump of stretched flesh. “It's a chip!”

Matt swung around and felt the back on his neck. “No, can't be. It's just a zit.”

“You know, there are a few other weird things that I've kinda noticed lately. Grandma kept repeating things.”

“Yeah, she's old.”

“But you're not. You've been repeating stuff. There's only one way to find out if you're a clone. You have to try and remove the lump.”

Brian used his fingers to try and squeeze the chip out of his freckled skin like a pimple.

His attempts were fruitless. “You have to break the skin,” prompted Matt. “Try the nail clipper.”

Brian tried but the nail clipper was much too dull. Brian let his arms fall down. He thought about this for several moments, then responded, “Get me a knife.”

Name: Brian Lincoln

Location: International Falls

Think: Human and animal cloning

Thing: Clone-dog (black Labrador). Clone-Grandma. Clone-himself.

Status: As is

Comments: Got to the boy just before he tried to remove the chip and quite possibly, would have erased all his memory. Might experience some glitches, such as mixing up dates of events and names of faces with similar features. Should live a fairly normal life, as normal as it can be for a clone.

Nail clipper-very interesting tool, purchased one for my tool kit. I understand it's primary purpose is to shorten nails but I thought that was what teeth were for?

A Living Carousel

You need all the pieces of the puzzle before you can glue and mount it into a picture frame and display it in your house. That is, if you enjoyed puzzles.

The Fixer often feels that he's living in a big giant puzzle. It's rather difficult to solve when one can't see all the pieces and they keep shifting around. For the Fixer, puzzles are not a way to pass a Sunday afternoon. It's just part of the job description.

When a piece goes missing, the Fixer needs to find it before making all the necessary repairs. Once the puzzle is in the glass frame and put up on the wall, it's forever. One little piece, missing or misplaced, can ruin the whole big picture.

The Fixer stood on the fairgrounds, after hours. It was spooky, in a retro B-grade movie kind of way. Neon painted fiberglass clowns grinning hellos at the gates. The smell of burnt corn dogs and fried donut holes. Everything-on-a-stick and puke covered dandelions in the grass.

It was one of the last carnivals with a genuine freak show and not some “snake lady” covered in green paint and cornflakes. Real freaks. People born without limbs, people two or seven feet tall, people who weigh five hundred pounds, and ladies who have beards.

The Fixer followed the yellow path of dandelions. The further he walked, the more mutant dandelions he spotted. The Fixer increased his pace. There was no sign of any patrons or carnies anywhere except for a man with white hair in a ponytail, standing in between a carousel and a helter skelter.

The operator switched the power on. The ferris wheel started spinning round and round with invisible patrons and the lights glowing.

This was clearly no ordinary carousel. This was one of the last running, antique, two-story, hand carved with the ring box still present carousel. The Fixer gazed up at the mermaids falling off the outside of the carousel, warped with old age.

The Fixer glanced down and saw a horse start to trot off the platform, the operator shooed him back with his hands.

The Fixer looked back up at the mermaids. They weren't figures weathered of old age, they were dead and decomposing. Nails had been driven through their chests to secure them to the carousel, long before Thinksandthings walked through the carnival, when they were just wooden figures.

The Fixer watched the carousel spin. Swans, horses, zebras. All very much alive. All very much had half a pole extending from their backs and another half a pole from their stomachs. The Fixer assumed that these creatures did not die since the pole was carved as part of the animal, not inserted into it. The Fixer quickly noted a large space in between a pair of pink and turquoise horses.

“What's missing?” he yelled to the operator.

“The lion. It escaped. Ran through the crowd, headed south. People assume it was part of the freak show act but that didn't stop them from panicking,” the carny pushed a ladder to the side of the carousel. “It was horrible, a huge stampede of people. Animal control are at the gate. There isn't enough time-I have no idea how to explain this one.” The operator took out a hammer and started to climb the steps of the ladder.

“Leave the mermaids where they are.”

“But they're dead!”

“I know, but everything needs to stay together. I'll take care of this.”

The operator climbed back down and sat down next to a purple ostrich. “I don't know what happened,” the man started.

The Fixer already knew what happened. Or rather, what mostly likely happened. Thinksandthings was, undoubtedly, walking nearby and perhaps some little child was enjoying his ride on the ferris wheel for the very first time. The child looked down across the park, seeing everything. Everything looks so tiny when you're up high.

The child glanced over the edge of the chair and probably saw the roller coaster, the games and the big stuffed animals to be won, the hot dog and lemonade stands, and the bumper cars. Probably squinted and saw people making cotton candy, tossing rings onto the tops of glass bottles, and riding the animals on the carousel.

The carousel is way across the park from the ferris wheel. So far away that the animals almost look real.

That doesn't matter too much now. All that matters is that Thinksandthings couldn't have traveled far but first, the animals will have to be moved.

Name: n/a

Location: Brainerd

Think: Living animals on a carousel.

Thing: A living carousel.

Status: Pending

Comments: Carousel moved to an undisclosed location. Operator sworn to secrecy and will continue to make repairs and general maintenance to carousel, as well as care for the animals.

The Boy Who Can't Do Anything

A bad think is like an infection. It's like you're a fish caged in a tank of glass. Someone drops a small drop of black paint into the water. It spreads slowly but surely over the entire surface. You can no longer see. You lose your sense of direction and keep hitting the glass again and again.

Eventually, you hit it so many times that it knocks you out (or at least makes you numb) and you start to sink to the bottom of the tank. You just lie there. Not thinking about anything now, not even one bad or good think. Not thinking may be even worse than thinking bad thoughts.

People start to notice when certain things disappear, as the result of not thinking. Inventions, songs, poems, mathematical equations, whole tribes of people. Gone.

You may have noticed it in small ways. Stories on sitcoms get recycled, the news becomes duller. The radio sounds like a record on repeat. Food in restaurants taste bland. Life becomes boring in small ways that add up fast.

Arlan lived with just his mom before she was institutionalized. Arlan has no dad. His dad left the family before he was born. Arlan was okay with that, he didn't need or want a daddy.

Arlan's mom was occasionally mom-like, as in she provided food and clothing for him. However, it took Arlan a while to realize that certain things, such as accusing the neighbors of spying and invading her privacy every time the refrigerator started to hum or calling the police when something gets misplaced in the house, are not necessarily normal modes of behavior for parents or anyone, for that matter.

The teacher was speaking but Arlan was only picking up on batches of words here and there. He left his mind to wonder. When the teacher caught him daydreaming, she said his name, he looked up. Pleased with having caught his attention (for the time being), she continued on lecturing. When this happened, he couldn't remember what he had just been thinking about. Like going into a room to find something but never remembering what the thing needed was.

The teacher was now passing out the tests and every child in the room was hurriedly bubbling in the answers, racing against time.

The boy looked down at the words and discovered, that's all they were. Just words connected together in some nonsensical way, nothing making sense.

The boy lazily bubbled in answers, an A there, a B there, and so on. The odds of passing were in his favor.

The boy got to the last page of the exam and read the instructions at the top. He was able to pick out phrases here and there, "...writing your essay...be half your grade. Please select one...questions to answer..."

The boy glanced down at the questions. All words again.

"I can't do this. I can't do anything," he thought.

He got behind in his classes and he kept thinking that same thought over and over again until it

became true.

Now, he really couldn't do anything and doctors couldn't explain why. Perhaps these were the doctors of the body and not of the mind. So the little boy lays in bed all day long, not doing a thing.

It's starting a chain reaction. One infectious thought attaches onto others. Other children are starting to fall ill, perplexing doctors all across Minnesota. It will eventually spread slowly across the country and soon it will travel across the ocean. Unless the Fixer can find the source (namely the boy). Only trouble is, when an infectious think becomes a real thing, there are no dandelions to follow.

The Tooth Faerie

Children often eavesdrop on adult conversations (or listen when adults assume that children can't hear them even if they are standing right in front of the child) and then fill in the blanks for things which they don't completely understand.

Thanks to children, the Easter Bunny never dies. It's not until the child reaches a development milestone that the thing, whatever the thing may be, fades. However, more often than not, the think will linger. The Easter Bunny is reborn every year through the minds of small children, the think gets passed down through older brothers and sisters.

Sometimes two thinks intertwine and it's hard to get them untangled. The Fixer has to fix it as soon as possible before everything (literally) becomes a big giant rubber band ball.

Sometimes thinks contradict each other or conflict with established rules and orders of this world. Normally, the dead can't come back to life. Normally, unicorns and centaurs don't exist. Normally, one man cannot possibly possess all the money in the world.

Normally, little boys don't give birth to faeries through their belly buttons.

Joey was playing in the dirt, helping his older brother and sister make mud pies. Mud pies have to have the right consistency. Too much water can ruin an entire pie.

Joey learned everything his knows from his brother, Marcus, and his sister, Jessica. He poured a little water from the hose into a plastic box of dirt and mixed the ingredients with a stick. He plopped a couple handfuls down on a paper plate.

Jessica, who could make three pies while Joey was still stirring his first, tweaked the display, "This one is lemon, this one is vanilla, and this one is chocolate."

Joey stuck his finger in the chocolate one, which Jessica swatted back, "No! They're for the customers!"

Children are great pretenders. That is why most of the Fixer's clients average six years of age. Most children, however, do have a little rational guardian angel sitting somewhere inside their brain. When most children pretend to be firemen, putting out a fire, it doesn't require an appointment with the Fixer (or the local fire department). Most of pretend play is just pretend. However, several small children tend to suspend belief. Case in point: Joey licked his finger clean of chocolate and took a few more fingerfuls when his sister was busy cooking up a "butterscotch" mud pie.

Joey had one last lick of the chocolate pie when his tooth came in contact with a twig. As he spat out the twig, a baby tooth flew onto the ground.

Joey picked it up, marveling.

"Jessica! Joey lost a tooth," Marcus set down the hose.

"Oh, you're going to get a visit from the tooth faerie tonight, lucky!"

"I got a dollar last time," boasted Marcus.

"Liar, she only gives out quarters," retaliated Jessica.

"Look at that!" Marcus exclaimed, not interested in the argument any longer. A cracked blue robin's egg lay on the ground. Two robins chirped in a tree nearby.

“The birds and the bees are at it again,” noted Jessica matter-of-factly.

“The birds and the what-what?” asked Joey.

“When two people kiss with their tongues, like they do in France, a baby starts to grow in your tummy. Those two birds have been K-I-S-S-I-N-G!”

“I'm never kissing no one. Never,” Marcus scooped up a big handful of mud pie filling.

Joey's stomach gurgled. “Stop eating the pies! They're not real, you know,” his sister warned.

Joey's dad entered the kitchen carrying a plastic bag and a bottle of disinfectant. “Hey, buddy, how are you feeling?”

“Not so good,” Joey nibbled on a soda cracker.

“Do you want to see your tooth dissolve in a glass of soda?” asked Dad.

“What about the tooth faerie?” inquired Joey

“The tooth fairy will still visit you, don't worry. We'll put your tooth in a glass of soda and overnight, most of it will have disappeared,” Joey's dad touched his forehead, checks for a fever and while finding none, kissed the top of his hair.

“Okay,” Joey sighs, still unsure if the tooth faerie would visit him or not.

Let it be known (or at least several soft drink companies want it to be known) that placing a tooth in soda will not do a whole lot to the tooth. However, since Joey is a very impressionable child and Thinksandthings happened to be in close proximity that evening, that tooth dissolved almost entirely in the glass of soda.

The tooth faerie, with her wild, high hair and her green tinted, slimy body crept up to Joey's pillow to retrieve the tooth but it wasn't there.

Sometimes this happens. Sometimes she gets to a kid after the parents have slipped a quarter or a dollar (sometimes even a twenty note these days) under the pillow.

It should be mentioned that tooth faeries do not exchange money for teeth, they steal teeth. They will not leave a house empty handed, either.

The faerie checked the house thoroughly, starting with the parents' bedroom. She searched through drawers, purses, and cabinets. She crawled under under beds and rugs. She scanned the floor, looked into every nook and cranny of the house, and even peered into the trash cans. Nothing.

After rooting through black banana peels and carefully maneuvering around a plastic bag of vomit, the tooth faerie flies to the kitchen counter and spies the glass of soda.

Oh, yes. She has found the tooth.

Tooth faeries use teeth (not just human teeth) as weapons. Tooth faeries are small, fragile creatures who don't fly very fast. Teeth are great for using as a device to blind cats and dismember frogs. The teeth with silver fillings are used as peace offerings to birds who have a liking for small, shiny things.

The tooth faerie dives for the tooth, brings it to the surface. Dripping in the sugary beverage, she holds opens it up to the microwave clock light to see it the best she could. Half dissolved in a glass of soda. Totally useless.

The tooth faerie flinches her green little fists, she flies back into Joey's room. He's sleeping sweetly.

She grabs a hold of his lips and opens his mouth up just enough to squeeze in. She immediately starts kicking each tooth as if they were doors. None would budge.

Next, she stands on his tongue and spies the littlest one. *This tooth will do*, she uses all of her strength to try and rip it out of his gums.

The boy wakes up, feels something a bit slimy and hairy moving across his tongue. *A spider crawled inside my mouth!*

He spits out the tooth faerie. She's drenched in spit and Joey trembles, turns on his lamp.

Not a spider, he feels a bit relieved. He squints at the thing he spat out.

It's the tooth faerie! It's the tooth faerie, he wants to shout. He digs under his pillow and fishes out a dollar bill. Before he can thank her, she flees.

Name: Joey Sawyer

Location: Hibbing

Think: The tooth faerie. Also, babies grow in the stomach and are birthed from the belly button.

Thing: Boy complained of pain in the abdomen, trip to hospital, appendix was needlessly removed.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Birthed one small faerie (3 inches, one ounce) through the navel before alerting parents to the pain he was feeling. Faerie flew away upon my arrival. Tooth faeries have a life span of about seven days (if they aren't picked up by a crow or eaten by a cat), so I'm going to close this case.

Tried a sip of the soda-who knew cherry and cola made a great combination?

Death by TV

A few familiar notes of a song had Elaine running from her bedroom to the living room, where the television set sat. "America's favorite family entertains you in the comfort of your own living room," an announcer voiced over through a montage of clips of the family from various episodes.

The Show, "The Denny Hour", is older than Elaine's father but they both enjoy watching it. While most of the gags in the sitcom were worn out even way back then, but the idealism of the fifties is what draws them in.

"The Denny Hour" consists of the antics of the Day Family. "Spend the night with the Days!" the original promos would broadcast across black and white television screens in America. The family consisted of Father, Mother, and Denny Day. White and non-nutritious like white bread.

Their world seemed to be confined within the white picket fences of their home. The biggest anxiety a child could possibly face in this idealistic world is to have Spotty missing for a couple of hours.

Elaine wondered one day as the episode ended with family laughing about something yet again and the credits started to roll (Elaine had memorized everyone from the set designer to the Spotty's trainer), how is it possible that this family of three fit inside the television set?

"Because we're little!" Denny proclaimed when she asked him.

"Do you like living in the television? Do you travel to other tvs?" inquired Elaine through the air vent.

"It's all right. We don't travel to other places, just yours whenever our show comes on. Speaking of which, the show is almost over. I have to go now, talk to you tomorrow!" The little hand slide through the slot again to wave goodbye.

"Goodbye," Elaine turned up the volume and watched until the last of the credits had rolled.

While Elaine was preparing for bed, her father was tracking the shipment of a high-definition, flat screen television. Elaine thought about asking her friend Denny if Spotty could slide through the television tomorrow. *It would be fun to have a pet*, sleepily thought Elaine, *even if it's a little one*.

As Elaine was about to step off the school bus the next afternoon, Tommy (the resident bully of said school bus) yelled out from the way back, "Hey, can you bring me your TV?" Then he laughed at his own obscure joke.

Elaine ignored it, as she usually did with Tommy's feeble attempts of friendship in the form of dumb jokes. But when Elaine stepped off of the school the next afternoon, she was confused to see the television at the end of her driveway, with a piece of paper duct taped to it that read, "FREE", she understood what Tommy had meant.

Elaine ran inside with just one thought racing over and over inside her head, “What happened to Denny?”

Elaine opened the door and was greeted by a stream of profanities, unleashed by her father.

“Where's the receipt? The company sent me a faulty flat screen!” her father started kicking out the box it was delivered in.

Elaine was advised by her mother to go and stay in her bedroom for a bit.

Elaine tried to listen to some music but it was drowned out by words such as, “smoke”, “fried”, “piece of crap”, and “shoddy”, provided by her father.

It wasn't until the third song in that Elaine remembered to check on her friends.

Elaine ran into the living, finding no television. Her father stepped into the house, dragging the old television set back in. “Sorry, kiddo, but we're stuck with this thing until the TV company sends us a replacement.”

Elaine ran outside to the end of her driveway, where the still smoking television sat against a garbage can.

The flat screen television was now partially cracked due to a man's large leather boot coming in contact with it. Elaine was scared but knew what she had to do.

She broke the remaining cracked pieces. The new television doubled as a mass tomb. Inside laid three little people plus the family dog, every little bone crushed. Elaine's father only managed to watch the opening credits to “The Denny Hour” before the television started to make a couple of funny noises. Four funny noises, to be exact. As soon as America's favorite family magically transported into the family's home via the flat screen as their show started, they were instantly flattened to death. Their blood was just beginning to cool down and dry.

A very small funeral service followed immediately. Elaine dug a small hole next to her hamster's burial spot and buried the family together as one nuclear family unit.

Name: Elaine Pace

Think: The people on the television are also inside the television.

Things: Three little people living inside a television.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Most of the details were taken care of by Ms. Elaine, as I found out upon my arrival.

Mr. Green

Mrs. Miller gave the students several warns and enticing bribes to be on their best behavior tomorrow morning. She would be gone the whole day tomorrow but she would still be in the building, in a series of long meetings.

Starting off Monday morning with their usual meeting sitting Indian style in a circle (or what politically correct teachers today refer to as “criss cross apple sauce”) sharing what they did this past weekend.

“On Friday night, I went to a birthday party. Then I had a dance recital and then I went to another birthday party.”

“I had a baseball game. Then I went to my dad's house and we went to Wisconsin Dells. Then we came home and watched a movie at the mall.”

“I went to the playground with some friends and we had a basketball game. Then on Saturday I went to the gym with my dad and we went swimming. Then I visited my cousin's farm and went horseback riding.”

After each kid shared what busy lives they have (and the teacher vaguely recalling that she spent most of her childhood weekend watching cartoons), she prepped them for a substitute (or what she

referred to as a, “guest teacher”).

After gaining their eye contact and attention, she gave them a small speech about giving the guest teacher more respect than they give her. She went on for another minute (the attention span of small children is infamously short), clapped her hands together and ended with, “I’m sure you all will be just wonderful for Mr. Green!”

This broke their focus-they all burst out with billowing laughs and commentary that’s as clever as the jokes printed on a taffy wrapper.

“Mr. Green! I wonder if he’s related to Mrs. Purple!”

“Mr. Green! I bet he’s a frog!”

“Or an alien!”

Mr. Green was the talk of the playground. “Hey, we get a frog for a teacher tomorrow!” the class would chirp to the other kids.

The next day the children came into the classroom, after pulling off rain boots and jackets and found a plump little man up at the white board, writing, “Mr. Green” with a black dry erase marker. As soon each kid entered the classroom, they fell silent.

A green hand was moving across the board, writing the list of daily assignments, copied from a note left by Mrs. Miller. Mr. Green went back and underlined his name as the bell rang. As if the class could forget.

“My name is Mr. Green and I will be filling in for Mrs. Miller today. I understand that you are reviewing shapes.”

He went to the overhead projector and took out a manila envelope of colored transparency pieces of shapes. Yellow squares, purple circles, red triangles, and blue trapezoids came tumbling out. Mr. Green sorted them out on the overhead, so the pieces wouldn’t overlap each other.

The class volunteered their answers freely without having Mr. Green call on them until there was just one last shape remaining that hadn’t been identified.

“Which color is the octagon,” he asked. No shouting out of answers, hands remained unseen from the substitutes view. Hannah’s head was itchy but she feared that Mr. Green may mistake her scratching hand for a volunteering one.

Mr. Green peered over her desk to view her stickered name tag, “Hannah, what do you think?” “I don’t know,” she said.

“We just finished discussing this. Who wants to help out Hannah? How about Jake?”

“Um...the yellow one?” answered Jake.

“Nope, let’s see, who I haven’t heard from yet today,” Mr. Green looked around the sea of students. The ones who had been called on earlier that day sat still but confident in their chairs. Those who have yet to be called on sat still but only because they had a clinging hope that they blended into the background and would remain unseen.

“How about...Zachary?”

The students looked at each other. Of all the names Mr. Green could have chosen, he picked out Zachary. Zachary who had more in door recesses than the entire grade have accumulated thus far into the year. Zachary who had more than enough notes sent home to fill a composition notebook. Mr. Green walked in front of Zac’s desk.

“You like to be called Zac, right?” asked Mr. Green.

“Yes,” politely answered Zac.

“Take a look at these two shapes,” Mr. Green held up a yellow plastic circle and a green square.

“To review, a polygon needs to have at least three sides. Which color is the octagon?”

There was no backing out of this one, every student stared in unblinking anticipation.

Zac took a long pause before finally saying, “Green.”

Mr. Green looked at Zachary for an uncomfortable moment until the word “Great!” slipped out

from beneath his curled lips and then continued on with the lesson. A collective sigh fell over the classroom.

Name: Mrs. Miller's 3rd grade class.

Location: Maple Grove

Think: Mr. Green is green.

Thing: Mr. Green's skin is a light green hue.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Color faded as soon as the class left after the final bell. Reminded me of a few previous clients with similar cases, Georgina Brown, David White, and Jackie Black.

The Baby-Sitter with Eyes like Cameras

People often complain of Big Brother and his invasive intrusion into their everyday lives, in the form of security cameras and microphones.

However, offer someone a million dollars (or even much less) to star in their own reality television show and they'll sign up right away and help with the installation of cameras.

There is no reality in reality television. It's planned, written, edited, produced, and glorified. We want the world to know our name but we don't really want the world to know what we're like.

We don't do certain things when we know we're being watched. We don't always know who's watching us or what they're thinking.

Except Jenni. She knows who's watching. God is watching.

Jenni woke up early and had to pee. She hated the fact that she always had to pee in the morning. When that happened, she would usually walk to the bathroom half asleep and forget that there were cameras in there. At every possible angle, too.

She crept quietly to the bathroom. She closed the door and grabbed a towel off of the shower rack. She sat down and draped the towel over her legs, letting it touch the floor at each end. She pulled down her pink pastel panties and peed as silently as she could.

Sometimes she couldn't help but pee loudly, at other times you couldn't hear her pee at all. She wonders why that is.

"God is watching you, everywhere," her mother reminded her last night before she left on a weekend trip.

"Even in the bathroom?" Jenni had asked.

"Everywhere," her mother replied sternly.

"How?" Jenni asked.

"Well, he's God, of course. If a man kills another man, stood at the gates of heaven and was being judged by God and God asks him if he ever killed a man. No, he says. But then God pulls out a picture or plays him a video of him killing the other man. God knows everything and doesn't forget. He has eyes like cameras."

Eyes like cameras, she let her mind free think for a while. Probably like compound eyes. God is a fruit fly except with an infinite lifespan. I'd still try and squish him.

She wiped under the towel, dropped that into the toilet, and pulled up her panties. She hung the towel back on the shower rack, flushed the toilet, and washed her hands with birthday cake scented soap.

Or maybe God is a man in a room with walls and walls of television monitors. Watching everything.

A candy sprinkle came loose from the soap and fell down the drain. *Right on top of the camera,*

noted Jenni.

Jenni took the soap and dug out more candy sprinkles with her “Enchanting Mistress” painted nails (dark green with silver glitter). She let those fall down the sink and onto the camera as well.

Jenni likes to play games with God. Sometimes she sits on the couch and reads for hours. But then, she realized He could see what she was reading. She doesn't read the fun parts of her mother's romance novels anymore. She doesn't watch much television anymore. If God insists upon watching her day and night, she's not going to make it worth His while. Hopefully, He will realize how boring she is and leave her alone.

She sits on the couch for several minutes, watching the cameras watch her. She can't see the cameras but she knows they're there. Sometimes she even takes a roll of packaging tape out of the desk drawer, puts a strip on her skin and pulls it off. Cleans off the dead, dirty skin cells.

But today, she was not reading the magazine that lay on the coffee table or picking off dead skin cells from her nose. She was not watching the television either when there was a loud knock at the front door. She was being boring on purpose. If God wants to watch what she's doing every single second of the day, he shouldn't be entertained by it.

She opened the door. “Who are you?” Jenni asked with wide eyes. A tall man wearing a trench coat took off the cowboy's hat he was wearing, and shook her hand.

“Just call me the Fixer. I've come to uninstall the cameras in your home. They'll be gone for good at last. Are your parents home?”

“No.”

“Where are they?”

“They'll be back tomorrow morning.”

“Who's watching you?”

“God is, of course,” Jenni found this to be a perfectly, reasonable answer.

“Well, it'll only be three minutes. A second over and my service charge will be free. Do you have a watch?”

“No...but we got an egg timer!” Jenni raced up back the steps and into the kitchen to get the chicken shaped timer. The Fixer stepped in, set his box down and picked out a few tools.

“Are you ready?” he yelled up the stairs.

“Yes,” Jenni replied. “I set it at three minutes. Ready...set...go!”

The Fixer walked up the stairs and started with the bathroom. The tools were unlike anything Jenni has seen in her garage. The Fixer worked fast and she tried to watch what he was doing. “Don't get too close, these tools are mighty powerful,” the Fixer warned. Jenni listened and didn't question because what does she know about tools? But then again, she isn't one to question.

The Fixer showed Jenni the cameras he pulled out tiny little things that look like mechanical eyes. While he worked fast, Jenni knew there was way too many cameras to find all throughout the house. *No way he'll be able to finish in time*, she lamented.

The Fixer entered Jenni's room. He took out a camera from each corner of the wall, plus even one from a teddy bear that she didn't know that existed.

The Fixer started to walk into the living room when the plastic chicken started clucking in the kitchen.

“It's free! It's free!” screamed Jenni.

“So it is,” smiled the Fixer. “It'll be a minute or so more and then I'll be out of your way.” The Fixer took down a still life painting of a field of dandelions and took out a small camera that was stuck behind its frame.

The Fixer scanned the newspaper before getting out of the truck to greet his next client. No signs of the lion. However, there was an informative, if humorous, how-to article on what to do with the abundance of dandelions growing this season. There was a recipe for dandelion tea that the Fixer tore

off and stored between the pages his log book. He finished writing, closed the book, and then drove off to his next client.

Name: Jenni Boule

Location: Duluth

Think: God is baby-sitting her by the means of hidden cameras.

Thing: Cameras installed in every crevice in house.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Cameras uninstalled. May need psychiatric evaluation.

Disassembling Heaven

A lot of people tend to think of the after life in terms of “up there” and “down below.” After death, if you are able to walk up the stairway, you've been good. If the stairway leads you to the basement, you've been bad.

The Fixer knows that there is no heaven or hell. At least, not in the concepts of what most humans conceive. Many people have asked the Fixer about this. The only best answer he can come up with is, “All there is, is just here and over there, like a bridge.”

Another very common misconception of heaven is that people grow wings and become angels after they die. This makes the Fixer laugh. Angels are snotty, who would want to be like them?

Sometimes the Fixer can only fix certain things by taking ideas apart. That's how you find out what went wrong. Most of the time, it's faulty wiring. A little reasoning or persuasion can correct most problems, if the thinker lets it.

A huge hauling truck pulled up in front of house number 9181 on Hogan Street. Kellie's dad was napping on the couch to a droning television talk show while she was being as quietly as possible to build heaven in her backyard without waking him up.

She heard the truck as she was hanging a cloud while nearly tripping over a long haired man, who was relaxing on a lounge chair. She didn't think much of the truck that she heard, until the Fixer stepped in her backyard.

Backyards often double as graveyards. It's no surprise to the Fixer to see ghost pets floating casually in the backyard. Despite one of the dead pets being a fish and another already having a pair of wings, they were flapping around, hovering above their nine-year-old former owner.

“Are you Kellie Lallin?” he glanced at his clipboard as he set down his toolbox.

“Yes?”

“Unfortunately, I am here to inform you that the city of Duluth prohibits its citizens to build a heaven on residential property without a license. Do you have the forementioned license?”

“No, I'm only seven,” Kellie replied.

“Well, I'm sorry ma'am. I have to haul everything out.”

“Am I in trouble?”

“No, no. Just as long as everything is cleared out, you should be fine.”

A narrow building, proclaiming, “Hall of Records” stood under a blossoming crabapple tree (the Fixer knew he was definitely going to need his compacting tool for that) and a giant screen projected bird eye's view of panoramic images of earth in 3D was playing at the other end of the backyard.

The Fixer took out a coil of rope from the toolbox and corralled a cloud. He held onto it like a kite as he walked to the hauling truck in front of the house. Kellie followed. The Fixer let the cloud float to a back corner of the truck.

He packed boxes of records and rolled up the huge screen. After loading some filing cabinets, golden pillars and coaxing an unicorn with some potato chips that Kellie found in her house, she asked, "Where is all this stuff going?"

"Over there," the Fixer said matter-of-factly.

He got into the truck, the long haired man taking shot gun, sets his toolbox down on the sleeping bunk behind the front seat, and started the engine. He rolled down the window, "Say, you didn't see a guy that was about seven feet tall passing through lately, did you?"

"Um...", Kellie started, "I don't remember."

The Fixer tipped the brim of his cowboy hat, "Have a good day, ma'am."

Name: Kellie Lallin

Location: Duluth

Think: Heaven exists in the form of simple minded clichés

Thing: Clouds, unicorns, harps-the whole spiel.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Heaven disassembled.

To Suburbia She Goes

Dressed in primary colors and huge red wooden apples stretching the lobes of her ears down to the ground, Ms. Mancel dabbed a few drops of lavender oil onto the back of her wrists to relieve her headache. She ran her fingers through her thinning hair and adjusted her school bus shaped name tag. The Witch was ready to greet the kindergarteners.

She charmed her way into a teaching position without a teaching license. Being a witch and all, that wasn't hard to do. She charmed the Fixer once before after all, a long time ago. She cunningly convinced him, as well as many others, that she's a frail female and utterly helpless.

All the materials were prepared, worksheets printed off, name tags taped on the tables, and procedures outlined nicely in the lesson plan book (with a few modifications penciled in by the Witch).

Ms. Mancel, better known as simply the Witch, looked at the clock and dashed off to meet the children as the buses began to pull up.

Ms. Mancel spied a few kindergarteners bouncing on their seats, smiling out the window to no one in particular. The students got off the bus and were sorted into two lines. Immediately, one little girl with brown pigtails started to cry. However, the children were sorted into two lines: one line for Ms. Mancel's class and one for Mr. Hanson's class.

As the class filed past her and she bent down to sniff the head of one plump pigtailed girl, "Unspoiled, fresh," the witch thought. She sniffed the head of the other, "Diet of vegetables, fruit, no deserts and only the leanest meats, we'll leave this one for the birds."

After introductions and a short getting-to-know-you game, Ms. Mancel started a math lesson.

She drew a pattern on the white board, one red dot and one green dot. She asked the children how many dots she made. "Two!" Then she repeated the pattern. One red, one green, one red, one green. How many now? "Four!"

She opened a package of red licorice whips with her teeth (the plastic "Safe-t" scissors she found in her desk drawer couldn't even cut a piece of paper). She distributed these along with cups of sugary fruit flavored cereal and threw away the lip stick stained wrapper.

"Who can count to four for me?" Most of the children raised their hands. "Count out four pieces of cereal and show them to me!" The children who had previously raised their hands did what they were told, the others copied off of them.

The Witch walked around and observed, “Good! Once you have counted to four for me, you can eat your cereal.”

Ms. Mancel transitioned into the art lesson. She placed bowls of all sorts of different candy and poured the rest of the contents from the cereal box for the students (which they started to eat right away) and passed out glue bottles and paper plates. “Make a picture of yourself or someone you love!”

The kindergarteners spent the next twenty minutes working hard to create renditions of themselves or mom or dad or Superman, using candy corn and chocolate chips.

“Line up for lunch! Today we're having Party Pizza, Crazy Carrots, Silly Strawberries, and a Carmel Sweet Roll. Remember to eat everything on your tray, it's very important. You need to eat *everything* to grow up big and strong.” The children raced to be first in line to try the crazy carrots and silly strawberries.

At the end of the day, Ms. Mancel accompanied the children out back to the buses. The kindergarteners ambled slowly to their destination. It was the nap time snack that did them in; a gourmet cheese plate with two different kinds of crackers and green grapes on the side.

A few more weeks and they'll be ripe, smiled the Witch.

The Faux Vampire

Erin's fingers were still curled in the shape of the game controller long after she defeated the bad guys, won the game, and jumped up with her arms in a victory V. She wanted to run and tell her older brother who was still pathetically stuck in the department store, killing zombie saleswomen in the same game, but Erin knew she must not disturb her family for they would be waking up in just a couple of hours.

Erin has been up for three whole days. At first, her mother thought she was just being disobedient but how many fourth graders can really stay up the whole night without succumbing to sleep?

Then the next night, same thing. The sleep would not come. Her father blamed sugar. Her mother said Erin must be having a bout of insomnia.

Then the third night. The worry lines and crow's feet started to dance more on her parents' faces.

Did she accidentally swallow some pills? Did a stranger give her some suspicious candy? No and no, Erin was quick to reassure her parents.

However, Erin was not reassured. Her list of symptoms included: up all hours of the night, pale complexion and Aversion to sunlight (sort of). She licked her own blood once and didn't vomit. She was beginning to believe that she was a vampire.

She examined her teeth in the mirror, no fangs yet. There was still time as it was just months since her last baby tooth fell out. Her long bangs needed cutting and she knows that a vampire's hair grows back instantly. She promised herself that if she stayed awake for another night, she would cut her bangs. Not because she had an urge to defy her mom, who wanted Erin to grow out her bangs but for purely diagnostic reasons.

Tomorrow, she would go to the doctor. Tomorrow, her parents will get answers and perhaps receive a prescription to make the girl go to sleep and stop snooping around the attic because she's dying of boredom.

One hour is a long time for a child. There are several hours occurring in one night and there aren't many quiet activities that Erin enjoys doing. She tried sewing clothes for her dolls but kept poking her finger with the needle. She tried reading but nothing piqued her interest. She recently took up beading and beaded several bracelets for everyone in her household plus she sold a few to her classmates. She even took the beads out of the now broken dream catcher she made at camp three summers ago to complete the last bracelet she made. Erin asked her mom to buy some more but Mom was quick to shoot down that request with a stern, “No way!” In all honesty, thirty-three plastic beaded bracelets is

quite for any one household.

After discovering that Erin had rearranged the cans and boxes of food in the kitchen by alphabetically order, Mom granted Erin special permission to use the computer during her next night of insomnia, if she felt inclined to do so. Provided that if she were to play any music or watch the same funny cat videos for the umpteenth time, she would have to wear headphones.

Before logging into her account, she noticed her brother left some ridiculous computer game out. "I have nothing else to do," she figured. She had just exhausted her collection of cartoons on video tapes and read all of the junk mail in the house and sorted it into piles.

She was still silently cheering when she heard someone at the door. She froze and her mind ran instantly away from the zombie saleswomen, the corrupt police force (you would have to pick up an unbelievable amount of gold coins just to buy them off), and street cart vendors who try to run over the game player.

Erin knew she should probably hide in a closet or go wake up her dad. But since she's been up for so many hours without an end in sight, she's lost sense of time as well as common sense.

There was a light knocking at the door, as if someone knew that only one person was awake in the house but not the others. Erin opened the door.

She looked up at the stranger with the cowboy's hat. He was tall, yes, and he was strange, but there was nothing alarming in his presence.

"I know you have an appointment with the doctor later this morning, but I think I could squeeze you right now, if you don't mind. My schedule's a little tight."

Erin nodded yes and let the man walk inside. She followed him into her bedroom. He pulled out stethoscope and checked her heart rate. He shined a light down her throat and into her ears. He tested her vision. Whether or not she passed these little check-up tests, the Fixer wouldn't know. He just plays the part. Then he pretended to notice the broken dream catcher, hanging on a bed post.

He pointed to it, "Well, there's your problem!"

"What?" asked a confused Erin.

"A broken dream catcher. Instead of just catching nightmares, they caught all of your dreams. That's why you haven't been able to sleep these past few days."

He played a few rounds of Egyptian Ratscrew until the Fixer noticed she stifled a yawn with her card hand. Her reflexes, which are crucial to collecting cards and winning the game, were getting slow and sloppy. He turned off her lamp light, packed up his tools, and closed the front door.

Name: Erin Dickens

Think: Displaying symptoms of a becoming a vampire.

Things: Insomnia due to broken dream catcher.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Fixed the dream catcher with a bit of twine. Client is dreaming as we speak, and the catcher should catch just the bad ones now.

Down the Rabbit Hole

Dreams are thinks, too.

Nearly everyone in the world has had that dream where you're falling but you wake up just before you hit the ground. However, some people don't wake up before they hit asphalt. Take Alice Liddell, for example. Alice was a real little girl who once lived not too long ago in England. She had a dream she was falling down a rabbit's hole and never woke up once she landed.

If you don't wake up just before you hit the ground, you will get stuck in the dream. The dreaming

may continue for just a few hours or even years. Sometimes people never wake up.

Alice dreamed for days, she couldn't be woken. If you want to know more about Alice and her excruciating ordeal, the whole encounter is further detailed in a book called *Alice in Wonderland*, by her friend Lewis Carroll.

Another little girl by the name of Dorothy had a very similar dream. Except she lived in Kansas and she dreamed it was a tornado that lifted her and her house up and she fell into a fantastical land. That incident is also recounted in a book called *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

Our client today did not have a falling dream recently but daydreamed that she lived inside of Alice's world. A dream within a dream.

Maggie was sitting under a willow tree reading a tattered book, not knowing that a sticky orange peel was hanging from the corner of her mouth. She stopped reading and shoved her hand down a glass jar of orange marmalade, trying to scrap up enough for a mouthful. Her dandelion crown slipped down her forehead, she took it off and laid it neatly beside herself.

The Fixer found her and two other empty jars by her feet, "How do you do, Ms. Linden. I got a call about a hole in the ground that needs sealing."

"Yeah, it's between those two bushes over there," Maggie licks her fingers clean. "It's *really* deep."

The Fixer gazed down the hole, "Looks like a rabbit burrow. A pretty sizable rabbit made that."

He retrieved a flashlight from his toolbox and shined it down the burrow. Nothing but blackness. It was hard to tell whether the blackness meant that that was the end of the tunnel or if it just kept on going.

He spotted a wooden shelf jutting out of the dirt to the left side. The first shelf was empty but the lower shelf held a ceramic tea cup shaped as a cat. A little further down on the other, he spotted a wire bird cage, hanging off a tree root.

After sealing the hole, the Fixer tipped his hat to the girl still reading under the tree and walked back to his truck. He felt a slimy creature succumb to its death under his boot. He found a stick and scrapped off the three inch caterpillar from the sole.

Name: Maggie Linden

Location: Moorhead

Think: Alice in Wonderland.

Thing: Giant rabbit burrow in backyard.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Hole is sealed and new grass has been planted. May have stepped on a smoking caterpillar.

The Fixer reclines his seat in his truck, surrounded by half a dozen newspapers. He scans the pages for any mention of a lion sighting. No mentions of disappearing kids, just kids who have fallen ill with a mysterious ailment, not able to leave their beds.

On the good side, perhaps some of these thinks have faded over time. One can't kill time but time can kill a lot of things.

On the bad side, perhaps these thinks are really good at hiding and scheming plans.

The Fixer turns the page of the paper and skims an article about a new controversial exhibit featuring the bodies of cadavers. Quotes from principals, parents, and religious leaders in the community all had something to say about whether school aged children should attend the exhibit or not.

The Fixer saw a black and white photo of a red headed elementary teacher and students gazing up at a body on display. That mess of red hair set off a series of stings down the Fixer's throat.

The Durtle

Children and adults everywhere just lost their last thought.

Ever walked into a room to get something and then once you're there, you can't remember what it was? Or you raise your hand to answer a question and once you're called on, your mind goes blank? That's what happens when a think causes something to disappear.

Every once and a while when a child goes missing, not because of a cannibalistic witch, but because they don't believe in themselves. However, Thinksandthings has a mostly positive track record of granting things that help the world, not hurt it.

The problem with low self-esteem is that it acts like an infection. The same can be said of happiness. It's like when someone yawns and then you feel compelled to yawn as well. When someone smiles, it's hard not to smile back.

The Fixer isn't certain what's happening with Thinksandthings. He needs to find out what's going on and report back to The Boss. The Boss has an unlimited amount of patience but last night, time stopped for one full second. All of the things that the Fixer has fixed have been in close proximity to each other, he should be closing in on Thinksandthings soon.

The platypus. The ferret. The hamster. The star nosed mole, the pygmy, the sucker footed bat, and even the blob fish. The mule and the puggle. Komondors, sloths, and introducing...the durtle.

All of the above were dreamed up by people. When the Fixer approached the very first mule in the world, he wasn't too sure if he should leave the case file "as is." The puggle was pushing it. But the durtle. The durtle is just plain ridiculous. *It's almost as Thinksandthings wants to be found*, thought the Fixer.

Ben was perched on several phone books at his dining room table, coloring with crayons. A handmade birthday card, still wet, stood against a vase of dandelions. Thinksandthings was going through the five-year-old's portfolio. He pulled out several crayon drawings of the durtle. A cross between a dog and a turtle. Basically, a dog with a turtle shell.

Ben switched over to water colors. He dipped his plastic paint brush into a paper cup of water and tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to turn the rock hard ovals of cheap pigment into something usable.

He swiped the brush across the paper but only managed to rip and smear a lumpy stroke of color across the paper. "Do you want me to color your portrait again?" offered Ben.

Thinksandthings looked at a growing stack of paper, dripping of colored water, causing all of the portraits to stick to each other.

"Can you give a message to someone for me?" Thinksandthings glanced at the cat clock with the moving eyes and tail. He had been watching Ben color for hours and hours. He couldn't wait any longer.

"To who?" asked Ben.

"A man who wears a cowboy hat," Thinksandthings paused as he composed the message in his head for he could not write very well in the English language. "Tell him to meet me where the dandelions don't grow. Can you remember?" Thinksandthings was waiting until Ben was looking him and had his full attention.

He repeated, "Tell the man who wears a cowboy hat to meet me where the dandelions don't grow as soon as possible. Got it?"

"Yes," Ben picked out a lemon colored crayon.

The Fixer did drop by soon after Thinksandthings left. He collected the Durtle and the eggs as Ben wiped his tears away, having said good-bye to "Sam." The Fixer put "Sam" and the eggs in a box in the

back of his truck (the Durtle bites twice as hard as any dog or turtle).

“Are you a cowboy?” Ben asked once the Durtle was out of sight.

“No,” the Fixer, having been asked that many children, “I just like to wear the hat.”

“Oh. Okay then,” Ben selected a thin tipped paint brush and painted a pair of wings sticking out the backside of a monkey.

Name: Ben Mathiason

Location: Fergus Falls

Think: The Durtle

Thing: Half dog, half turtle hybrid.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Eggs collected. Wax sticks as coloring utensils-simple yet innovative. Must try sometime.

The Fixer buys his daily heap of papers-national, state, and community-and drinks his fruit smoothie with a straw. He tried coffee once and couldn't fathom what the big hype was about. He starts with the small, local papers first and then works his way up. Among them was a small write-up for a church bake sale and a review of a mason sponsored pancake breakfast.

Also, there was a very small bit about a supposed bear or some equally large animal, visiting and vandalizing a convenience store a week ago. The bear, if it was indeed a bear, busted the door down, stole a few sandwiches and then left.

Demon Eyes

First impressions are like living snapshots. Those first two or three seconds will play over and over permanently in the minds of everyone who meets you, like a scratched DVD.

It doesn't matter how successful or how down-and-out a person may become, people are forever haunted by their former selves. There's always an outline, tracing the former self. An actor's first major film role is forever implanted in the brains of millions. This is why so many child actors can't go from have been pigtailed and playing with talking pets to seductive, gun blasting vixens. When children are first born, that image is will be imprinted in the minds of their parents, even if those children grow up to be old and fat.

Here's something you've probably heard before: the eyes don't lie. Cut a picture of someone so that just the eyes are showing and you will see true self at that particular moment. Lips are fraudulent (anyone can smile while in distress and in turn, sometimes crying can be mistaken for laughing) and words that come from them mean very little.

However, with that said, pictures can lie. Pictures lie all the time. There has never been a picture that has ever told the truth, as Alex will find out eventually.

Alex was hiding in a locked bathroom, waiting for the arrival and hopefully, a very quick departure of his cousins. His mother, Elaine, promised a cookie to lure him out but with no success. The only thing left was the cotton swab.

Elaine stood on her toes and reached for it, at the top of the door frame. She pushed it into the knob, turned, and opened the door.

She found her son, in the bathtub, knees hugged to chest and wrapped within the shower curtain.

“What is the matter with you?” said Elaine in a way that wasn't asking a question but making a declaration, the only way that parents know how.

“I don't want to see my cousins, don't make me!” shivered Alex.

“They've been waiting forever to see you! Now stop this at once and come out!” she grabbed his hand and lifted him out of the tub.

The sound of plastic ripping and as well as a hysterical shouting match was heard from the living room, where Alex's cousins were eating chocolate chip cookies and sipping sour lemonade.

Elaine carried Alex into the room. “Hey, Alex,” she started, “Say hello to Joe and Kate.”

Alex slowly turned around to face them and was greeted by their bright, glowing red demon eyes. Alex promised himself not to stare but he couldn't *not* stare. Alex waited for a hole to be burned through his forehead, like Cyclops. Or until they turn him into a red-eyed demon. He wasn't entirely sure but he felt his forehead becoming warmer.

“So, kids, tell us about your trip to Jamaica,” Alex's mom offered more cookies.

Kate picked out a chocolate chip, sucked on it, as her brother excitedly went into great detail about swimming with dolphins.

“Sounds like you two had a blast. Your parents sent us some pictures. Wish we could go to Jamaica one day.”

The pictures were, in fact, on Elaine's fridge right at this moment. The dolphins and the cousins were clipped under some cartoon character shaped magnets. The same bright, glowing red, overexposed eyes smiled in every photograph.

Alex felt his mind seeping down into his arms and legs, like a swarm of bees buzzing around inside of him. He was too young to know that this was the start of a panic attack. He felt like his mind was floating away and he had to sit still and focus so that it wouldn't. He could feel his heart pounding against his chest, pushing his rib cage against his skin.

“Alex, are you okay? You look sick. Let me feel your forehead, honey,” Elaine brushed a curl away from his face. “Honey, you're burning up! Go lay down in your room, I'll be there in a minute with a thermometer.”

The swarm of bees inside of him suddenly flew away. A smile crept around the corners of his mouth while he was walking back to his room.

Just before shutting his bedroom door, his mom called out, “And don't rub your eyes! Looks like you have might pink eye.” she went back into the living room to talk to the cousins.

Name: Alex Kendall

Location: St. Cloud

Think: Photographs only tell the truth.

Thing: Cousins with big red, glowing, out of focus eyes.

Status: Pending

Comments: It appears that only Alex is able to see the glowing eyes, which is a bit of a relief since they are in route to Florida via airplane. Perhaps with time and age, the redness will fade out.

Dysfunctional Stars

The Fixer often questions, from time to time, the things that people do. Why do people expect others to give them presents on the anniversary of their birth? Why do people think lost pennies found on the sidewalk are lucky or dropped by dead relatives? Why do people say, “God bless you,” after someone sneezes, even though the human race now knows souls do not pop out that easily?

Popping out souls is a long process. Grim reapers only wish that a simple sneeze could pop out souls because then their work would be done. They'd get to take the day off.

But more importantly, why do people wish on balls of gas?

Have you ever blew out your birthday candles and then hesitated when someone asked you what you wished for? You always make something up. You might say something like, "I want this thing that one can buy in a store," or "It's none of your business!"

However, very few people truly wish for nothing on their birthday. If Thinksandthings is nearby, or even invited to your birthday, this would not be a good thing. If you wish for nothing, then you get nothing.

Arlan labeled a sheet of notebook paper, "Birthday Wish List." His grandma requested that he make one and he wanted to make her happy.

Arlan has wished on many stars before, none answered. Not that Arlan expected his secret wishes to be answered. That's magic and magic isn't real. Or else it doesn't work., he concluded a long time ago.

Arlan tried to think of toys that he wanted but couldn't think of one. He tried to remember watching commercials on television of plastic junk but he couldn't recall any names.

He put the paper and pen under his bed and look at a star through his bed room window.

He did not wish upon the star, he pleaded on it, "Can you make my mom better?"

Buried Treasure

Jordan drew a treasure map with crayons while wearing a black plastic eye patch. He drew it on the backside of a local health food store flyer that came with the junk mail. He included a vague outline of the street he lives on, his house, his friend Micah's house, his school, and the playground.

The tip broke off as soon as he placed the crayon onto the paper. After "X"-ing the spot with a firehouse red crayon, he blew off of the waxy shavings his cheap crayons left behind. He placed the broken crayon back into its spot amongst all the other waxy stubs.

He snapped off the eye patch, folded up his mat and crammed it into his jeans, and ran out the door. He ran all the way to Micah's house but Micah was at his grandmother's, according to his dad when the door was answered.

So Jordan kept running until he arrived at the school's playground.

It was crowded, as usual, but Jordan knew his treasure was safe.

You see, according to his treasure map, the treasure is buried in a corner of the pirate ship.

This particular playground was built decades ago. There are plans to demolish it and build a new one, a la the American way. The playground has been deemed unsafe and falls short of current standards. The monkey bars are too high. The metal slides get too hot during the summer months. The rock surfacing should be replaced with wood chips. And the pirate ship is too scary. At least, according to the PTA meeting Jordan's parents attended last month.

The pirate ship is made of mostly wood, contains a stirring wheel, a ladder to get up on the "deck", a small climbing net, and a secret basement.

Most kids won't go in the basement of the pirate ship. As rumor would have it, some kid peed in there. Some kids can swear they smell a faint, but very distinct scent of urine. Despite the warning, Jordan and Micah play in there anyway.

Today, however, some big kid was already there. "Oh," Jordan said out loud, caught off guard.

The big kid turned around. He was missing a front tooth, had long hair under a red bandanna, and a gold earring in his ear.

"Where is it?"

Jordan looked around, confused.

"Where is it," the big kid asked again.

"Where is what?"

"You're not fooling no one. I know you know where it is," the pirate took him by the collar of his shirt. With his other hand, the pirate reached into Jordan's jean pocket and retrieved the treasure map.

The pirate examined it. He ran to the corner marked on the map, scooping fistfuls of sand with his hairy hands.

Jordan peed his pants, thus, making rumor become fact.

Name: Jordan Mozzer

Location: Plymouth

Think: Pirates are real.

Thing: Pirate digging for buried treasure in a school's playground.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Pirate was booked on suspicious activity and a copious amount of gold jewelry and coins. Pirates are hazardous. I haven't seen this many pirates since Peter Pan.

The Mole

A lot of thinks are born into things late at night, while one is reading while drowsy. The results of this may be when you spin a globe and come across a small little country you've never of with a name like Yheckaladi wedged between two big well known countries. It's quite a hassle when people insist on reading non-fiction books in a half dreaming state.

It's also a hassle when librarians mix fiction books within the non-fiction section. People will choose a book under the genre of "non-fiction" and will put all their trust into the author and believe in anything without questioning. Supermarket tabloids cause enough problems as it is.

The Fixer has a cold, hard spot in his heart for people who don't pay attention closely. Lenny Femmer was drawing little stick figures killing each other in his notebook reserved for writing observations in science class when he tuned in and heard the teacher comment, "...moles eat insects."

The bell interrupts the lesson and the teacher dismisses the class to go to the buses.

Lenny wondered how was it possible that he was able to go through all seven years of his life, not knowing that moles could eat insects. He made his mother go into the bathroom later that night to make sure that there weren't any spiders in the bathtub. After his bath, he scrounged around in the linen closet for any bandages but found an old can of mosquito spray instead. He doused every inch of skin that contained a mole with the spray. He applied an extra generous layer on one particularly large mole on his arm and his mother promptly made him take another bath.

The next day in science class, the teacher kindly asked the students to take out their observation journals for they will be observing beetles. The class obeyed and Lenny sat on his hand that had the large mole near the wrist. All the other students excitedly shouting off the names they were bestowing upon their beetles. Lenny sat quite still.

The teacher told Lenny to take out his journal and to begin the assignment. He did what he was told. Lenny watched the beetle poke around in a small paper box filled with soil. The beetle got the edge of the box but could not climb up. He wrote this down. This satisfied Lenny.

But his content was short lived when he discovered that this particular species of beetle could fly. Like Murphy's Law, the beetle landed on Lenny's shirt and crawled his way down to the arm that had the mole on his wrist. The beetle slowly crept toward the mole, not knowing its pending fate. Half of Lenny was scared stiff as a dead hamster, the other half was simply fascinated.

The beetle did a little tap dance on Lenny's arm, as though it couldn't decide which way to travel. The beetle headed closer to the mole and like a black hole, it sucked the beetle in.

Lenny thought about calling the teacher for help but what words would he use? "A beetle crawled into my mole," or perhaps, "There's a beetle that's traveling down my vein." Before Lenny could decide what to say, he softly whispered, "Oh, damn."

This word he just used, “damn” would have cost him fifty cents in the swear jar at home. His mother didn't like swearing, nonetheless it was his father who taught him how.

That fifty cent word was in response to the beetle still trapped alive and trying to break through his skin. It was like an invisible person was pinching his skin.

Name: Lenny Femmer

Location: Burnsville

Think: Misunderstood context of the word, “mole.”

Thing: Beetle sucked through skin pigment.

Status: Fixed

Comments: So many multiple meanings for words, how do they all keep track? Purchased a new dictionary, apparently words change meaning or use becomes discontinued. Still, a good tool to have.

On the Road to Self-Discovery

Lies can be harder things to fix since there's so many categories of lies. Black, white, big, small, compulsive, and so on.

Sometimes if you tell yourself something over and over and over again, it becomes true. Such as, if you tell yourself, “I am going to have a good day today,” then eventually you will have a good day. However, if you tell a lie over and over again, it doesn't exactly come true. It comes undone. It'll start out just like any other think on its way to becoming a thing. But it unravels.

One big lie is just like a shirt. Little lies are threads. If you tell one lie, you will eventually have to weave other little lies into it. But you may forget some of the little lies you weaved in and that can cause other lies to fall apart. Your shirt unravels and you're left standing in the cold, exposed.

All too often, the Fixer repairs damage done by lies, misconceptions and half-truths. These can be rather heart-breaking. Old wives tales, superstitions, and hearsay. People who use textbooks and scripture as tools of influence and control all too often make appointments with the Fixer.

The Fixer walks down a small rural road and comes to a house with a front yard fiercely populated with dandelions.

A man, presumably the father of the thirteen-year-old boy the Fixer was scheduled to meet today, was sweating, pulling dandelions out by their roots. He hears the sound of a man's boots stepping on the gravel. He looks up at the man wearing cowboy boots, “Oh, good. You're here.”

The dad sits down in a cheap plastic lawn chair under a shady tree and watches the Fixer apply the weed killer onto the lawn.

The Fixer drops a bottle of weed killer, drenching the last patch of dandelions in the yard with weed killer. His shirt and pants suffer the same fate.

“Mind I wash up inside?” the Fixer shows his wet hands as an offer of proof.

“Go ahead, the bathroom is up the stairs, to the right. Door's unlocked.”

The Fixer entered the house and went down the stairs, to the left. He knocked on a bedroom door, a voice called out, “What?”

“Hi, there,” the Fixer entered the room.

“Who are you,” the boy responded.

“I'm the weed killer guy your dad called earlier today. I came here to fix the dandelion problem.”

The boy was sitting on his bed, hands folded in lap, back facing the Fixer. The Fixer made his way over to the desk, stepping over some fallen books and picks up a tipped chair.

He walked up next to the boy, moved his hand back and fourth but the boy sat very still.

“Do you know what an urban legend is?” the Fixer closes the door for it was to be a very private

conversation. The Fixer explained a few things to the boy and went off on his way.

The Fixer tipped his hat to the dad that was still resting in the lawn chair, "Thanks so much for your help. These damn weeds just didn't want to die! I'd kill them, and then they'd pop up again the very next day! Sometimes they even pop up twice a day! It was maddening!"

"Anytime."

Confidential file

Pocket Lockets

Marla received a Pocket Locket for her birthday from her step-father. A Pocket Locket, for those of you who are not in the know, is basically a miniature doll house attached to a string that young girls wear as necklaces. Marla's stepfather, Henry, found the toy in the clearance bin. An ugly orange sticker on its clamshell packaging, covering the tag line, "They Want to Come Home With You!", at a local toy store chain. The toy is a knock-off of its cooler, older sister named Polly in the middle of the doll section, at full retail price.

Pocket Lockets are much bigger than it's more original sister, which might give a clue to why those doll houses have relocated to the clearance bin in the store. Not many girls want to wear a big, hulking toy around their necks. Also in the clearance bin were the knock-off dolls' brothers. Digital clock wristlets with an army theme.

Nonetheless, Marla was quite happy to receive her Pocket Locket but you wouldn't catch her wearing it outside the house.

The Pocket Locket came with one little doll named Brielle. The plastic doll house featured four rooms; bed room, living room, kitchen, bathroom, and as well as some movable parts. The bathroom came with a miniature toilet, the seat could be lifted up, as the package proudly boasts on the package.

Marla played with it for quite a bit of time on the first day she got it. She made little plastic Brielle eat the apples on the kitchen table (these, along with the doll itself, were the only completely removable, choking hazardous parts), sit on the plastic couch in the living room, and then sleep on the bed.

The second day that Marla played with the Pocket Locket, she could have sworn that the little, non-removable couch was on the right side of the living room.

She promptly forgot about this until the next day when apples were nowhere to be found. Unless her step-father or mother took to playing with her toys while she's not around, she could have sworn that the apples were left in the kitchen the last time she played with the little doll house.

"Well, they're small, honey. Little things can get easily lost," said her mother when Marla notified her that the apples were missing.

Perhaps, they are just missing, thought Marla, *and not eaten.* Marla placed the Pocket Locket on top of her dresser, brushed her teeth with bubblegum flavored toothpaste and went to bed.

The next day, Marla went to her dresser and opened the latch of the little plastic doll house.

"Well, nothing's changed. Thankfully," Marla sighed with relief.

Marla played with little plastic Brielle for a little bit and then got bored and closed the lid. She pulled the string around her neck and walked toward the bathroom.

She heard the distinct sound of plastic pieces crashing around in the plastic rooms. The apples were missing, and all that was left to rattle inside the house was the doll, Brielle.

"Maybe the toilet seat broke off," thought Marla.

She opened the latch again and the toilet seat was still intact. Marla flipped it open to see if the lid was loose and there was something most definitely in that miniature, plastic toilet. Something quite removable. Marla looked at Brielle but Brielle kept on her plastic poker face.

Name: Marla Benson

Think: Real, but very small, living doll.

Thing: Doll comes to life when the doll house and closed and rearranges furniture, eats the plastic food, uses the toilet, etc.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Doll and doll house collected and packed in storage.

The Endless Cookie Jar

Grieving comes in stages. Denial, guilt, anger, depression, and then acceptance. A single stage could last a year or a fleeting moment. The pain does fade over time but not after it hits you again, again, again, and again.

Sometimes thinks can waver and then fade out. This usually happens with small children once they start to approach a development milestone. Is there really some tooth fairy out there that pays for baby teeth? Is there really a fat, magical guy out there that wants to give children presents for just being good? Do rabbits really leave baskets of sweets once a year?

When thinks waver and fade with adults, it's usually because of one of two things. Mental disorders and those grieving the loss of a loved one.

Thinks and things that are the result of a mental disorder are probably the hardest things to fix. The mind isn't an easy thing to maneuver around. However, those kinds of things rarely happen.

Just Alzheimer's disease alone can trick the mind into thinking that people are younger, for example. The dead are still alive and living people don't yet exist (namely grandchildren), depending what point in time the mind has wandered back into.

Sometimes the mind wanders into a dark, dark room and then devours the key.

The Fixer didn't need to consult his address book, he knew he was at the right place.

Dog turds hid themselves among the tall, uncut grass. The bulging mail box could not hold any more weight, as it was hanging by a single nail. Flowers and plants laid tired and wilted in their gardens, like terminal patients on their death beds. However, the dandelions were standing over a foot tall. A season's worth of Sunday newspapers were choking in a mud puddle.

The Fixer steps out of his car and approaches a zombie kneeling on a foam pad, pulling out dandelions.

"Thank goodness you're here. Please excuse my appearance, not much I can do about it. Hi, I'm Cynthia," she pulls off a gardening glove. The Fixer shakes her hand carefully, as he doesn't want to accidentally pull anything out of socket, as zombies are fragile creatures. "But I'm sure this isn't new for you. I'm supposed to be in eternal rest but here I am-tending to the flower bed. He's inside the house."

Her skin was white, peeling in layers like an onion. As she was trying to pull a huge thorny weed out of the flower bed, the Fixer noticed the bone in her elbow looked as though it could rip through the skin if she tugged a little too hard. Her blonde pageboy haircut, however, was immaculate.

The Fixer walked toward the front door before she could pull that weed so hard that it would make her fingers (with the remaining flesh stretched over it) fall apart inside her gloves.

"I'll be in soon to prepare lunch," she hollered.

The Fixer shudders as the image of Caesar salad with fingertips crosses through his mind.

"Is she still there?"

"Yes," the Fixer accepts Clyde's second offering of chocolate chip cookies.

"I'm running out of tasks to give her. Luckily, the dandelions keep growing fast enough to keep her occupied for a while. I'm scared," he sinks under the comforter.

"Something is making her stay," thought the Fixer out loud. He gazes at Cynthia's husband, who has his hand down the ceramic cottage shaped cookie jar. In most zombie cases, it's either the person wanting the zombie to stay or the zombie wants to stay and take care of unfinished business.

"Do you have debts?" asked the Fixer.

"No," Clyde answered.

"Did you hire someone to kill her? Did you kill her?"

"No!"

"Just checking. Ruling out possibilities of why she might be hanging around. Did you two have children together?"

"No."

"Was she writing a novel? Does she own a small business?"

"No and no."

The Fixer looks at the towering stack of plates on the dresser, the remains of meals in the waste basket, and smelling a souring glass of milk hidden somewhere within the mess. "Can you cook?" asked the Fixer.

"No. I can barely work the toaster."

The Fixer thinks about this, while Clyde goes on to say, "My mom keeps wanting to come over to do laundry and dishes but I tell her no. No one else can see her but me. So, how can I explain all the cooking and cleaning? I can't tell them that their daughter has come back from the grave"

"Give me just one moment," the Fixer leaves the man in mid bite of a cookie.

A pile of drying dandelions laid next to a pair of shears. The front yard was now vacant, thanks to the agreement the Fixer made with the zombie wife. He exchanged goodbyes to the widower, got into his truck, wrote in his logbook, and then drove off to his next client.

Name: Mr. And Mrs. Clyde Bennington

Location: Winonya

Think: Wife is not really gone.

Thing: Zombie wife, tending to the needs of her still living husband.

Status: Fixed

Comments: One detail remains unfixed, the cookie jar. His wife had a little bit of business to tend to, she expressed fear that her husband would starve if she left. She agreed that as long as she knows he has something to eat, she will not visit again.

Dandy Lions

We all have so much negative space in our lives. Minutes we waste standing in front of a microwave or sitting before the television watching commercials. Nothing painted on the ceiling, nothing hanging on the fridge. Nothing under the table or the bed. Standing at a bus stop, quietly. Waiting in line, quietly.

Living life, quietly.

We think we fill the voids we feel. We may fill it with drink, work, friends, whatever. There's so much negative space that we just can't see. We only notice negative space when something is occupying it. When a roller skate is taking up previously vacant space on the stairs and we trip over it, it's only then that negative space gets recognition.

We are only granted so much time on this world. We aren't allowed to know when the proverbial clock hands will stop moving. We don't know when the final count down will begin but the clock face may still whisper clues:

“Five more times you will visit your grandmother.”

“Eighteen more trips to the park.”

“Nine-hundred-and-seventeen more times you will lock the front door.”

“Fifty-five more cups of coffee at your kitchen table.”

We have so little time and yet, we find the most meaningless ways to kill it. Most people don't even try to kill time in a creative manner. Perfecting cuticles, plucking every last little weed out from the garden, picking out balls of lint from clothing, and so on.

However, the Fixer is currently waiting for time to pass.

Upon first glance, several small kittens were crawling around a yard, trying to be the one to sit on Jacob's lap. The chubby, blonde, three year old boy pulled one by the tail, which let out a loud yelp.

Young children are often responsible for ridiculous thinks, such as thinking mythical creatures such as dragons are real. The Fixer can't do much but wait until the child reaches a developmental milestone. Until then, the Fixer will just have to hose down and clean up the damage the occasional fire-breathing dragon accomplishes.

As in today's case, the Fixer was hoping the developmental milestone would be reached within the next five minutes. Dandy lions are no fun to try and keep together, especially when their playful bites can take off a finger. The Fixer kept putting them into a cardboard box but they kept crawling out, increasing the bite marks on his hands.

“A dandelion isn't an actual lion. It's a flower.” The Fixer plucks a dandelion as an example but his words were falling through the boy's ear and crashing into the pavement. The boy takes the dandelion and starts to tear it apart.

“Why?”

“Dandelions grow in the ground.”

“There?” the toddler points to the cement driveway.

“Dandelions can't grow there.”

With that last thought, the Fixer placed the last cub into the box and knew where he must go now. He must go where the dandelions don't grow.

Name: Jacob Wilkins

Location: New Ulm

Think: Dandy. Lions.

Thing: Playful. Biting. Not so Dandy. Lions.

Status: Fixed

Comments: Ouch!

The Spy and the Robot

As mentioned quite earlier in our story, Thinksandthings can hear the thoughts of children and mental patients the loudest.

All too often demons ascend from hell (or the depths of one's mind) and the Fixer has to perform a mock exorcist. Space alien abductions are probably the most common of mental patients. Luckily, the Fixer has never had to do interplanetary travel, as alien abductees are always returned to their home (or a corn field, just miles away from their home) to tell their tale to anyone who is willing to listen.

The refrigerator started to buzz. Arlan's mom scooped a glob of peanut butter with a butter knife, "You hear that? Second time today, *second* time today." She stuck the peanut buttered bread slices together, dropped it onto a plate and handed the sandwich to Arlan, who was watching minutes tick off the clock in the dining room.

"Don't know why they feel a need to spy on me, I'm just a stay at home mom. Just trying to support my son," she went back into the kitchen. She took a broom and smacked the ceiling with the end of the handle so hard that bits of ceiling texture were falling down, landing in her hair. "We know what you're trying to do up there!"

The neighbors in question included a young boy named Taylor, who's in Arlan's class. Arlan tries to keep his mom away from his family so that Taylor doesn't find out about her and start to talk to people in school. Because those people will talk to other people. They might find out.

"Mom!"

"What?" she stares at him with a straight, blank face.

"They're not spying on you!"

"Well, if they're not spying on me, they're most definitely stealing from me. Remember my pair of good, expensive earrings? Remember how they were missing last week? Well, they showed up in my dresser drawer just this morning." She tucks the hair around her face behind her ear, the evidence of the neighbor's debauchery shining in her ear lobes.

She continues with shouting and broom smacking. Arlan puts his hands to his ears and shouted, "Stop being so stupid!"

"Oh, so, are you one of them now? Are you turning against me?" she looks at him and pauses, "Or perhaps, you were one of them all along!" she holds the butter knife to his chest.

Arlan doesn't know what to say.

"You're an impostor! You're no son of mine," she holds the knife so it's level with his chest.

And with this last thought, did Arlan look any different? Were the horizontal stripes on his shirt now vertical? Was he a little taller? A little shorter? Did his ears stick out a bit more from under his dark hair? Did the moles on his face and the birthmark on his left arm suddenly disappear? He is a changeling?

No. Thinksandthings did not pass near Arlan's mom. Or perhaps he did pass by and heard her thoughts but did not turn her think into a thing.

While the most original thinks are the loudest to Thinksandthings' ears, many of them are much too premature or unstable for this world.

All that Arlan knows is that something is wrong with his mom's mind and the doctors are trying their best to fix it while she rests in a new home.

Soon after this incident, Arlan moved into a new home, too. Arlan now lives with his aging grandmother. He's the new, weird kid at a different school. The kid that doesn't talk. The kid that doesn't smile. The kid with the mom in the mental ward. Arlan soon finds out that he shouldn't think out loud when reducing fractions or word problems in class. The teachers notice and whisper to each other too much.

Sadness melts into depression and numbness. Soon he arrives at a point where he's happy to be ignored, forgotten. Life is easy when the bully decides to give you an off day to practice blending into the background. Arlan thinks about asking his grandma to buy him clothes that matches the same hue as the halls and walls of school.

He gets anxiety attacks. He gets nervous at school because some days he isn't ignored. Some days he isn't forgotten. He doesn't want to go school anymore. First, he starts to fake illness. Then it turns into a real illness. Arlan can't focus on work when he's threatened on the bus ride to school. He can't think out loud anymore to help him with his work. He can't think right. He starts to think he can't do anything at all.

He's been staying in bed all day. Reading books, at first. Then he moves on to just looking at the

pictures. Watching television. Then he moves on to just having it on as background noise to fall asleep to. Late night talk show jokes are his lullabies. The television drains out his thoughts so he can't hear all of them. Unfortunately, Thinksandthings has already heard a few. Soon the boy will be thinking less. Just waking up around noon and eating. Then back to sleeping.

Arlan looks into mirror, hates what he sees. But soon, he won't look into the mirror at all. One day, Arlan won't recognize his reflection in a store window. That is, if he feels strong enough to get out of bed. After a little bit of time, he won't see himself at all. If you can't see yourself, you might lose yourself. He doesn't care to comb his hair, brush his teeth, or take baths unless nagged at by his grandma. Grandma may start to nag less and less. She's old and this is a losing battle.

Unless Arlan changes this thinking. But Arlan doesn't really talk anymore. "Are you hungry, Arlan," she might ask. "No, maybe, yes" are his choices. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Three words spoken out loud a day.

He speaks inside his head almost entirely now. Thinksandthings hears thoughts from all over the world but Arlan's are the loudest. The loudest are the most powerful. So powerful that Thinksandthings doesn't know if he is able to stop Arlan's thinks from becoming things now. The boy who can't do anything. Once a thing is created and set in motion, it's hard to stop.

You see, that one night not too long ago, when Arlan was looking for the Big Dipper, he thought two things at once. He thought that someone should invent guard rails for book cases. Thinksandthings heard this thought and opened the gate, so to speak, for this think to become a thing. But Thinksandthings hadn't closed the gate when Arlan thought the Big Dipper didn't exist simply because he could not see it. Now the door to the gate is stuck. It won't move. More things have been finding their way into becoming things that shouldn't be.

Sleep. Eat. Sleep. Arlan exists just to exist, not live. Arlan becomes like a machine. Machines don't feel.

So, did Arlan suddenly become a machine? A robot? Was he made out of bolts and steel and not bone and flesh? Could he compute complex calculations within a fraction of a second? Does he freeze up when he's presented with multiple tasks all at once? Does he talk in monotone? He doesn't need Thinksandthings to make this happen, he can do it by himself.

At school, Arlan unscrews his brain, takes out his mind, and places it in a happier place.

Because sometimes some boys would approach him, take him out of the comfort of the background. Arlan knew exactly what to do, the only thing he knew how to do. He pressed the "on" button inside of his head so he could become a machine.

I'm made of metal, no one can hurt me. I'm a machine. I'm a robot.

He took a hard blow the rib cage that was too hard to ignore.

Parts of me can always be repaired or replaced.

Another boy steps on Arlan's nose.

I'm bleeding, robots can't bleed!

Arlan begins to shut down. Just like a machine.

The Gingerbread Man

The Witch dumps out her purse and several containers of ointments, cover-up, concealers, shadows, and blushes scatter over a book case packed with books, games, and boxes of non-edible manipulatives. She applies her make-up for the fifth time this morning to hide the raccoon eyes which have been becoming darker and increasing in circumference over the past few weeks.

Today is the day. Oven is preheating. The children are finally ripe enough to be picked. The day before today, the witch had started a tale about an old lady rolling out dough to make a gingerbread man. The gingerbread man runs away but gets caught and eaten.

The kindergarteners, with the help of their teacher, prepared gingerbread dough and used plastic cookie cutters to shape them into men the day before, ready to be baked.

But now the doughy men have run off and escaped. Oh where, oh where to? The teacher continues reading a story book, ““Run, run, run as fast you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!”

She stops to drink a sip of water. The aspirin doesn't seem to be kicking in yet. Doesn't really matter at this point, the oven is waiting.

Ms. Mancel finishes the rhyming story and sits with her hands folded in a rocking chair, “If we all work together, you know what? I think we will be able to find the gingerbread men, catch him, and eat him. Now who's with me?”

All nineteen children jumped up, raised their hands, shouting, “Me! Me!”

Ms. Mancel instructed the children to form a line, with Rachel (the line leader of the week as the classroom's bulletin board says so) leading.

The Witch smiled at the principal as the class marched by his office, who smiled back, as she lead the children into the kitchen. The lunch ladies were more than obliging to offer their space for the sake of the children, as the school's food is trucked in and heated in plastic wrapped disposable trays and not cooked on site anyway.

The Witch knows much about her creation, how she came to be. As long as she keeps a low profile (or at least, flees the scene after having a little desert), she can outsmart the Fixer.

Little Rachel, our line leader for the week, knew nothing about the Fixer or Thinksandthings or how a think can become a thing. However, it was little Rachel that overpowered the Witch.

The industrial sized ovens in the school are huge. So huge, in fact, that it makes the kitchen look a morgue. The witch had the children wait at the lunchroom tables, she walked through the door to make preparations in the kitchen. She discards the dough the children had prepared into a recycling bin (she didn't bother looking further for the proper receptacle). She was so absorbed in hastily scraping off the gingerbread dough men with a spatula tha she would have noticed an empty spot in the middle of one of the pans.

A man steps behind the witch, shadowing her with his tall frame. She greeted him with a grimace on her face. He was like any other man, except with dark brown, grainy skin with a chalky, white flour on his arms and face. He look at the with his black beady eyes and full cherry lips, daring her to make the first move. He wore an apron and nothing else.

“Who are you?” laughed the witch.

“I'm the gingerbread man.”

The witch laughs even more.

The gingerbread man doesn't waver. He takes a step forward. The witch snarls. He grabs her wrists and she trips over her own feet as she spits on him. He grabs her from around and pushes her towards an oven. He opens it with one hand. She uses this moment to break away and feels something fall inside of her blouse.

She spies a stray cookie crumb fall to the floor. She smiles at this discovery. Instead of taking this chance to run away, she kicks in his shin until his ankle and foot detaches from the rest of his body. He grabs her by the hair and shoves her into the oven, head first as though she were a rag doll. She kicks him with her high heels in the neck and then his head. The smell of her own burning hair makes her gag uncontrollably. He shuts the door before he crumbles to dust on the floor.

Thinksandthings

When Thinksandthings makes one think become a thing, other similar thinks attach themselves to the originator. Take the boy who first thought of the Internet. He, by himself, did not create the Internet.

He may have passed the idea along to someone who knew something about computers. Then that person may have thought about it and added something to it. People keep adding and adding to a think and then eventually, it becomes a thing. Sometimes this process takes a second, one thought and just one person. Sometimes it takes several years and hundreds of thoughts and people.

When Arlan first thought the Big Dipper wasn't there simply because he wasn't able to see it one night not too long ago, that think was passed on. One thought attracts others. If the Big Dipper doesn't exist, maybe the Little Dipper doesn't exist as well. Maybe Pluto isn't a planet. Maybe humans didn't really land on the moon. Maybe there isn't such a thing as infinity. The world becomes smaller and there's less room for such nonsense as wishing on stars and the machines that can fly toward them.

Despite its name, nothing was blooming in the city of Bloomington. The trees looked thirsty, browned flowers drooped to their dusty beds, the yellowed grass was giving way to dirt, and the shrinking ponds and lakes were fast becoming desolate. A couple of sprinklers were spinning in a few yards but it was clearly a losing battle. A few hanging and potted plants were surviving but upon closer inspection, many were made of plastic.

A perpetual rain cloud was anchoring over one small gray house in particular.

The Fixer eyes a very tall man watering a dandelion in a decorative clay pot in the yard of that gray house. The neighbors across the street watch the tall, bald man in amazement, as to say, *Who would, not only water a weed, but encase it in its own pot?*

The very tall man sets down the hose, picks up pruning shears and cuts off some dead branches off of a crab apple tree. An old woman opens the front screen door, carefully carrying a pitcher of water to the man. The ice cubes collide into each other as she sets it down on a small, metal table. She engages Thinksandthings into a conversation.

The Fixer has mentally and physically prepared himself anyhow, just in case. His hand is absentmindedly opening and closing his toolbox, making a checklist in his mind of its contents. He opens the door of his truck and steps out. One foot in front of the other, that's how you do it. He stops a few yards shy of the man with the pruning shears.

Thinksandthings stood with his back turned to the Fixer, "About time. I've been expecting you for a while."

The Fixer's mouth opened and he couldn't help but reply, "Yeah, a funny thing about time. It's been slowing down."

Thinksandthings turns around and calmly states, "I know." He turns back around and continues pruning dead branches off the tree.

"I've had to fix multitudes of things-

"I know."

"Some of which cannot be fixed-"

"I know."

"And I've been looking for you-

"I know," Thinksandthings throws the dead branches away in a garbage can. "I see you finally figured out how to find me," Thinksandthings points at a shrub that looks like it'll crumble if the wind blows. "Dandelions, nor anything else has grown from the ground here all spring. No need for a weed salesman to pass through, which is exactly why you stopped here."

"You purposely caused things to disappear? You know, I can't quite fix or replace the Big Dipper," said the Fixer.

"I know, the first one was a mistake. Nothing quite like that has ever happened before. But I needed to get you here."

The Fixer rolls his eyes for he remembers the day when people across the world forgot how to tie their shoes. Luckily, he was able to fix that right away. But there was this other time when people across the world forgot how to use or make a mayply. Never heard of a mayply? That's because it's

been wiped out of existence. The case is pending and the Fixer is still working on it.

“A thought is just like a tree. It has roots, branches, and leaves. You have to carefully trim the branches that may cause harm. A rotted branch may be removed or else diseased buds will fall and sick trees will start to grow. These trees have thorns but no flowers, if they grow at all.”

Thinksandthings sets down his shears, picks up the potted dandelion and shows it to the Fixer, “Is it a weed or a flower?”

The Fixer thought back to his previous client. He left Jacob while crawling and picking the dandelions. The client would have most likely given a handful to his mother by now and she would have placed them in a vase with water from the tap.

Despite being a weed killer salesman, the Fixer can still appreciate the beauty of a dandelion since his clients can see the beauty of dandelion. Whether they braid chains to wear on their heads, gift a bouquet to their parents, or simply stop to smell them, a dandelion is a flower in their eyes.

“Yes. They're flowers.”

Thinksandthings eyes sparkled but then turned cloudy, “I haven't been able to get around much, covering a lot of ground was never a problem until now. I could change a think in Tibet, then in Canada, then Peru, all within a day. I could even find enough thinks within one square mile to keep me working for days on end. But now, it's rare that I find one in a day in any town. And when I finally find an original one, it's something ridiculous like the durtle. I know about the lack of quality in thinks lately. I can't hear anyone else until Arlan falls sleep. He's so loud when he thinks. I know the world doesn't benefit from a little boy having an insect sucking mole, but I needed to change some thinks into things to stop the world from slowing down. I knew you could fix those ones-and you did. But to have no thinks at all-well, that has much more dire consequences. The world can keep running on unoriginal thinks.”

“Running improperly.”

“At least it's running at all. I imagine you're not just here to find me but also to find the source-Arlan. I've been visiting him every so often to try and fix the problem myself. If a person changes his thinking, which can be a long process in itself or as quick as lighting a match for a birthday candle-whatever disappeared, if it's not really completely gone it can come back.”

“What about the witch and the lion?”

“The lion I'm not too worried about. It acts and behaves just like a lion,” Thinksandthings said this so plainly as though it were suppose to comfort the Fixer, “However, the Witch. A thing without a conscious, without a soul. Things don't have thoughts. They don't have emotions either. Yes, the witch was a concern.”

“Was?”

“She's been taken care of. I periodically scanned thoughts and tried to find anything linking to her. I found just one but that's all I needed. A parent in conversation with a principal of an elementary school. Complained that a kindergarten teacher feeds the kids too much sugar and they come home all wound up, not wanting to eat supper. But then, here comes the tricky part. I needed to find a think that could override her. She's rather powerful think-she lives in the minds of many. But I found one just a bit stronger.” He went on to explain the ordeal in fascinating detail to the Fixer.

“The Big Dipper dimming in the sky was my doing, purely accidentally. I'll have to take credit for that. Arlan's voice was the loudest on that particular night I passed through this city. He had a great, little think just moments before. He thought that someone should invent guard rails for book cases. What a great idea! Why haven't someone thought of that before?”

The Fixer looks towards the sky, knowing the Big Dipper was out there somewhere. The sun makes it too bright to see it in the day time, but now the Dipper's too dim to see it even at night.

“I opened the gate when Arlan thought of a guard rail for book case,” Thinksandthings points to his head. “But that other think-the one that caused the Big Dipper to fade got in. I can't close the gate. It's stuck, it won't move no matter how hard I try.”

The Fixer openly gazes at Thinksandthings' calloused hands, the rough, red skin on his face, and in particular, his severely hunched back. It looked as though something invisible, but of great weight, was sitting on his shoulders, like a demon traveling piggyback.

“But I'm glad you could make it out today, for today is his birthday. And I can't close his connection to me. His strongest thoughts made the Dipper disappear. It made those children get sick. He says he wants nothing. Who knows how a thought will translate into a thing, if it's a powerful thought? It could wipe out the Dipper completely. Worst case scenario: civilization. Best case scenario,” Thinksandthings slaps a mosquito dead on his upper arm, “We'll be rid of these mosquitoes once and for all.”

After a moment, Thinksandthings finishes, “It's too much. Too high, too many expectations. The whole world is sitting, resting, depending on my shoulders. I'm not sure if I'm right for it anymore. I can't move as fast or as far as I used to. Getting old, at least too old for this job.”

Candled Wishes

The Fixer brings in a small cupcake on a plate with nine candles, ready to go.

Arlan never been able to blow out all the birthday candles at once. His chances of that happening decrease each year with the addition of one more candle to his birthday cake. He takes a deep breath and blows out eight candles, leaving one.

“What did you wish for?” the Fixer asks.

“I didn't. Doesn't matter. Candles are just wick and wax, no wishes. That would be magic. Magic doesn't exist,” Arlan doesn't bother to blow out the last candle. Thinksandthings sets the plate down on top of a dresser.

Arlan looks at the Fixer's toolbox, “They call you the Fixer?”

The Fixer nods slowly, “Yes, I am. I fix things.”

“Can you fix people, too?”

The Fixer thought about a girl who once had butterfly wings but the Fixer knew the boy wasn't referring to extra extremities. “People are much more complicated to fix,” he said solemnly.

“Let's try this again,” Thinksandthings picks up the plate, the last flame still aglow. The boy listens but doesn't meet Thinksandthings eyes. “Do you want a pet? Money? New toys? Your own race car? A planet renamed after you? Live as a king for a day? Meet extraterrestrial life? What do you want most in the world? I can make that happen.”

“All I want is my mom's mind fixed. But that would take magic and magic is just an illusion. I saw a television special where they showed all of the secrets.”

“Let me ask you a question,” Thinksandthings held up a dandelion, “Is this a flower or-”

The Fixer steps forward and takes the dandelion out of his hands, “No! Don't. Don't ask.”

The Fixer's outburst heightened the boy's curiosity, “What were you going to ask me?”

Thinksandthings takes the boy's hand, helps him out of bed, and guides him over to the telescope. He motions the boy to peer through and asks, “What do you see?”

“Just the moon,” shrugs the boy.

“Just the moon! Don't you see the man on the moon?”

The boy looks confused. He hesitates but peers through the telescope again, “I can sort of see a face...yeah, I can see him! I can see him!”

Thinksandthings started to pace around the room, nearly hyperventilating. “If you can see it, if you can hear it...if you can *believe* it, it's magic,” cupped his hands around the boy's head.

“Close your eyes and listen carefully,” Thinksandthings whispered.

Arlan close his eyes and started to listen. After a few moments, Arlan opened his eyes, “All I heard was an airplane.”

“How is that not magic? A huge hunk of metal flying miles up, through the air, around the world?”

Sure, it could be explained by physics, but just because you can explain something, doesn't make it less magical.”

Arlan closes his eyes and listened again, carefully this time. Arlan heard the airplane flying over his house and the pilot using a radio to talk to somebody on land. He heard someone typing out a message on a computer and then the click of a mouse, perhaps to send it from Minnesota to India, China, or just next door. He heard a new born baby screaming and an artificial heart beating. He heard the hum and clicking of a sewing machine, putting together pieces of fabric with thread to create a one of a kind wedding gown. He heard water running and an electrical fan blowing. He heard dandelions growing, just starting to push through the dirt in his front yard.

Thinksandthings takes the dandelion out of the Fixer's hands, “Now I'm going to ask you a question...is this a flower? Or is it a weed?”

Arlan didn't hesitate this time, “It's a flower.” Arlan blew out the last candle successfully.

Return to the Living Carousel

Thinksandthings and the Fixer set off for Brainerd with the boy seated between them. Thinksandthings earlier suggested traveling by a non-conventional method but the Fixer thought it would be best to take his truck.

They walked through the woods for what seemed to be forever or five minutes. Depending on how long you think time actually passes. Time and clocks. Purely, a human invention.

First, a small cabin came into view. One light was in its kitchen window. Next to a cabin was a carousel, waiting for Arlan.

Then the operator came out of the cabin with a flashlight and started up the carousel. The carousel spun around and around, all the animals standing proud, hoping to be the boy's choice.

A stomping and crushing of leaves and twigs was heard behind them. The Fixer and Thinksandthings stood guard, as this was a disclosed location and no humans, besides from the kindly, old operator, were to know about it.

First, they saw a dark figure. Then, they heard a roar.

The lion had returned. He walks gallantly to the carousel and fills the vacant spot between a pair of pink and turquoise horses.

The operator opened the gate of the carousel for Arlan. The boy made his choice. The boy stepped forward and the carousel stopped. The boy climbed onto the lion's back. The boy patted the lion's head, the lion purred back.

The music starting to play, the lion roared again and the boy gripped the pole.

Thinksandthings and the Fixer watched. “I've been thinking about what you said, earlier,” the Fixer told Thinksandthings. “About the gate and the weight of the world on your shoulders-I think I know how to fix that. I've never done anything like it before-”

Thinksandthings raises an eye.

“But if you would let me try, I think I can do it,” assured the Fixer.

The operator shouted joyfully to the boy, “Reach for the ring! If you get a brass one, you get another ride!”

Arlan leaned over towards to the ring box but then pointed towards the sky, “Look over there! I can see the Big Dipper!”

The Fixer waved to the boy and the boy waved back. The lion bowed to the Fixer. *A very dandy lion indeed*, thought the Fixer.

The Fixer walked into a beautiful garden, full of trees with blooming white flowers weighing down their branches. He smelled a million different fragrant blossoms all at once and they smelled

wonderful. He saw miles and miles of dandelion fields beyond the trees.

The Fixer continued to admire the scenery before he got to work. He wouldn't be needing very many tools for this particular job. The Fixer opened his tool box. A screw, a wrench. He removed a rusted bolt from the gate and replaced it with a new one.

The Fixer tested the gate, it swung just fine now. It was fixed. He closed the gate, but not before taking one last look. It's not often that one gets to step inside and see the mind of the man in the moon, Thinksandthings.

Name: Thinksandthings

Location: Brainerd. Here. Over there. Everywhere.

Think: The weight of the world on his shoulders is too much to bare.

Thing: The weight is removed and the gate is repaired.

Status: Fixed

About the Author

Name: Crystal Johnson

Location: Bloomington, MN..

Think: A book about a man who changes thinks into things.

Thing: This very thing you're reading.

Status: Pending