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Children's Book: A Tale of Three Heros

The Kulera Woods has been untouched by humans for centuries. The animals living in the forest learned to thrive and formed communities where they could live peacefully in their villages. Wolves, deer, bears, birds, squirrels, rabbits, snakes, insects and many more live in villages within these woods, working together to maintain the harmonious lives of everyone. But, everything quickly changed on one dreadful, dark morning.

Luciana, a wolf cub of six years, was experiencing wonderful dreams until she was suddenly woken up by a raucous noise outside. She immediately jolted up from bed, and ran outside to see what the commotion was about. The minute she stepped outside her already opened door, Luciana was left in horror as she watched several buildings and surrounding forest burn. There were already several elderly animals attempting to quench the raging flames with water buckets. To her left, Luciana could see several young children sitting near the village elders, the leaders of the village. Many of them were sobbing, with tears steadily flowing down their furry cheeks, and calling out that they wanted their parents. The elders attempted to calm the children down to no avail. The chief elder, a gigantic owl who was rumored to be as old as time itself, looked through his satchel for something specific. He extracted a conch shell and blew into it. Almost immediately, the sky became darker than it already was as dark clouds ushered forth and heavy rain promptly began to fall.

Luciana stood in horror as she noticed how at least half of the village was destroyed, with many trees surrounding the village charred and burnt, essentially leaving the trees dead. If it wasn't for the chief elder's conch shell, the whole forest would have burnt down. Luciana rushed to the chief elder.



“Chief Elder, what has happened? Why was there such an extensive fire? What did I miss while I was asleep? Where are my parents? The door was wide open so they must have hurried outside in a rush. Also, ...” Luciana spoke quickly, not giving the elder enough time to actually respond.

“Slow down, young one,” the elder replied, “breathe. Several weeks ago, we received a letter saying that a rascal of the name Mr. Dromedary publicly announced his intention to take this world as his own and turn everything to desert. He never took any action afterwards and we assumed he would not be a threat. But, I guess he has finally decided to make his move.”

“So, is Mr. Dromedary responsible for the fire? Did he try to destroy our village?” Luciana asked.

“He very well did. And I have some news that may be hard for you to hear: he has taken all the adults fit enough to challenge him and his plan. That includes your parents who were performing their duty as village guards.”

Luciana’s eyes widened at this information. “What? But, there is no way. My parents are super fast and super strong.” Luciana began to sob. “They can’t... have been... beaten by... Mr. Dromedary.” The elder eyes saddened as he wrapped his huge wing around her, providing her with enough protection to calm her down. Once she recollected herself, she asked, “if my parents are gone and every other adult is gone, then who will stop Mr. Dromedary?”

“I am unsure,” replied the elder, “all that are left are the young and the old, none of which are fit to stop a thug such as Mr. Dromedary.”

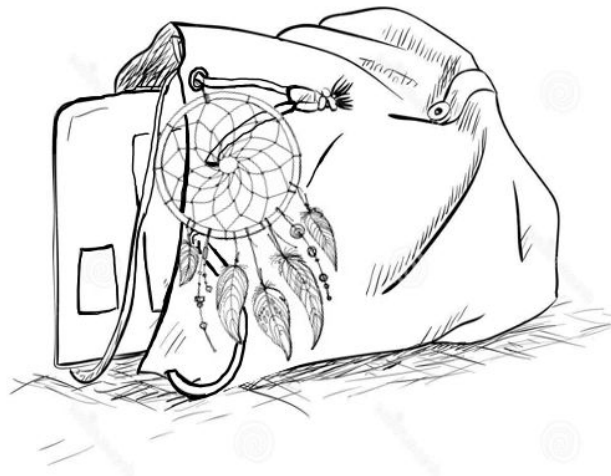
Immediately Luciana stepped out of the wing the Elder had laid over her shoulders. She straightened her back and with a sparkle of determination in her eye, she declared, “if no one else

can stop Mr. Dromedary, then I will! I will do whatever it takes to save my parents and the other villages in this forest.”

The Elder sighed, “Hoo. I would tell you that it is too dangerous for you to go. But, I have seen that look in your eyes before in your mother. She was so set on doing something that nothing I would say mattered. It seems you have the same tenacity and courage as her.”

With the elder’s words, Luciana brightened up. “Okay! So, tell me where to go and I’ll make Mr. Dromedary wish he never set foot in our village!” Luciana stretched her claws, showing she was ready to beat Mr. Dromedary to a pulp any second.

“Hold on just a second, child. You can’t very well hope to defeat him with physical strength. You are a child, after all. Take these.” The elder gave her the shell from his hands and then reached into his satchel and took out a dreamcatcher. The intricate woven pattern of the dreamcatcher, similar to a flower, and the wonderful assortment of beads and feathers attached captivated Luciana as she took it in her paws with awe.



“This is beautiful! But, how is this supposed to help? These are supposed to catch bad dreams.”
“This, young one, is a very special dreamcatcher. If you make a wish to protect someone while in proximity of the evildoer, it will seek the evildoer and trap them in the dreamcatcher, where they can no longer cause any harm.”

“Thank you. Now, I should prepare for my journey.” Luciana quickly returned home to grab her satchel from her room, stuffing it with food, water, a cloak, a blanket, and a bed roll, in addition to the shell and dreamcatcher.

Just as Luciana was about to set off, she heard two very loud screams of “Lucy!” Luciana turned around to find her two friends, Oliver, a bear cub, and Amelia, a young raven. Typically, Oliver

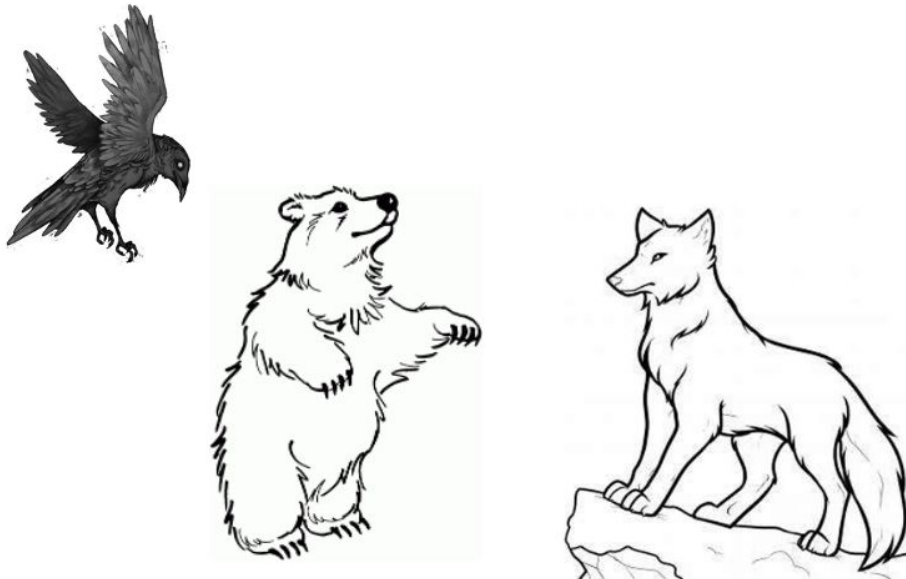
had shiny brown fur and Amelia had sparkling black feathers, but both were covered in soot from the fire. They had backpacks on.

“We are coming with you. We know where you are going and we want to help!” said Oliver. “Thanks, Oliver. But, this is too dangerous. I can’t possibly ask you to come with me,” replied Lucy.

“We need to come with you. We both want to help get our parents back,” Oliver said, with tears already in his eyes.

Amelia instantly gripped his shoulder to comfort him, turning to Lucy to declare “there is nothing you can do to stop us from joining you.”

Lucy looked at them for a second and then cracked out a smile, hugging them both tightly. “Well, alright. Let’s go!” With that, they stepped side by side into the forest.



The nearest village was two days away, towards the southwest. The three spent all morning walking through the forest, looking for any signs of Mr. Dromedary. As the sun reached its highest point through the dark clouds, Oliver’s stomach began to grumble. Lucy began to laugh but was interrupted by her own stomach. Amelia joined in. Lucy’s face reddened as she suggested that they take a break for lunch. Oliver and Lucy prepared the campfire, collecting dry twigs and grass from the nearby area, while Amelia looked through their packs to prepare the ingredients. Once the campfire started, Amelia prepared the stew over the flames and within half an hour, the pleasant smell of the porridge wafted through the air. They poured it into bowls and ate.

For the next few hours, the three young children walked through the forest without much issue. As they walked, the dark clouds seemed to dissipate and the sky eventually opened up. But soon, the sky began to darken once more as the sun set, causing the forest to become creepy. Every

breeze of wind through the trees sounded like a wicked howl. Amelia decided to light her lantern, but it didn't seem to help with reducing the unease the friends began to feel. Instead, wild shadows were cast about and everyone seemed to be on edge as night fell. Every time someone stepped on a branch Oliver would gasp, which frightened the rest. After enough times of being startled by Oliver's gasps, Lucy asked to set up camp, to "eat dinner, rest, and continue our journey in the morning." Oliver seemed relieved and quickly agreed to the proposition.

They once again set a fire and prepared dinner for themselves, this time a savory, healthy stew made with vegetables and meat. After eating, they played a riddle game popular in their village for a while as their food digested. Then, they laid out their bed rolls and took their blankets out of their packs. They went to sleep for the night and woke up in the morning to silence. Typically, small birds could be heard chirping in the woods in the morning, yet there was no chirping. Lucy thought this was quite strange but chose not to say anything to prevent her friends from worrying.

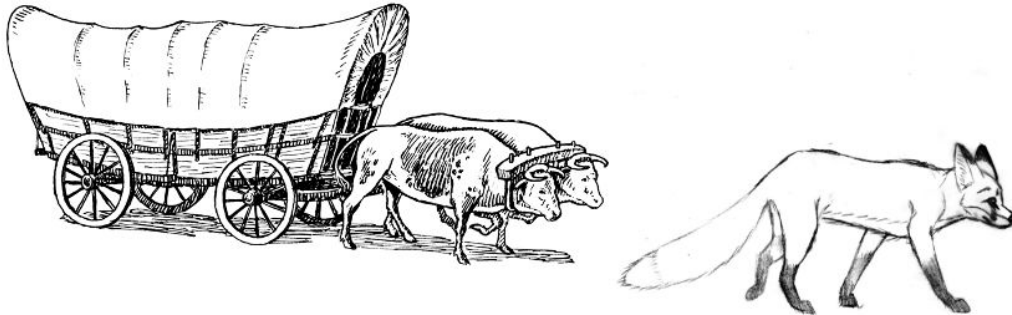
They packed up their belongings, after eating some leftover porridge from the day before, and headed to the village, which was only about eight hours away now. After six hours of hiking through the forest, they encountered other animals. Dozens of animals with wagons were heading in the opposite direction of the village. An elderly fox leading the stream of animals saw the three children first and greeted them.

"Greetings, young ones. I do not know where you intend to go but you should avoid going in this direction."

"Why is that sir?"

"A heathen has attacked our village and set it aflame just an hour ago. We attempted to extinguish the fire but it would not end. We had to flee our village and leave behind everything that we weren't able to save."

With this, the three children looked at each other with worried expressions, and Lucy asked if Mr. Dromedary was responsible for the destruction of his village. The fox nodded his head solemnly.



Lucy immediately turned towards her companions and cried, “we must be too late. We have to go and see if Mr. Dromedary is still there. Come on, let’s hurry!” With that, the three of them darted in the direction of the village despite the warnings from the villagers. They dashed at full speed and did not stop until they reached the burning part of the forest. Once there, Lucy took out the shell from her satchel and blew into the shell as a call for rain.

They eventually reached the village to find nothing there but ash and charred stone foundation of buildings. Mr. Dromedary was nowhere in sight. “He must have left already. We were too late!” Lucy screamed out.

“Our camping time must have been too long,” Amelia suggested.

“Well, we need to get to the next village sooner. We should take as little rest as possible. Which way is the closest village?” Lucy asked.

Oliver replied, “three days east of this village.” They set off, walking at a moderately brisk pace. This continued until night came.

“We need to stop. My feet hurt and I’m so hungry! Lucy, can we at least rest for twenty minutes?” Oliver proclaimed.

“Hmm. Alright. I guess it won’t hurt to rest for twenty minutes,” Lucy said, “I’m pretty hungry too.”

Amelia proceeded to make a quick meal for the three of them. They quickly scarfed down the food while resting their feet and then proceeded to continue their journey east.

The cycle of skipping their sleep and only taking rests to eat continued for the next few days. Consequently, after each day, they began to notice a change in their bodies. Only a day passed after leaving the previous village, and Lucy noticed a change in their tummies and arms. It was

clear they were slightly flabbier than before but it didn't really affect their speed so she paid it no mind.

On the second day, everyone was clearly chubbier. Their legs, cheeks and the rest of their bodies were fatter. They weren't able to walk as quickly as before and had to take breaks more often. They lost their breath quicker and couldn't handle their extensive hiking as easily. Because they weren't traveling as far anymore, everyone seemed to be annoyed, especially Lucy. Amelia tried to tell a joke while they were hiking to pass the time.

"Why did the student try to eat their homework?"

Lucy and Oliver thought about what the answer could be. Lucy asked, "Is it because he didn't have a dog around?"

"No."

Lucy attempted again, "Is it because he did have a dog around and he was bored and decided to play tug of war with the dog using his mouth and then ate it?"

"No," Amelia said once again.

"Well, then what is it?"

"Wait, Lucy. Oliver, do you have an answer?"

Oliver looked puzzled and said, "Well, I'm not sure if this is correct. But, is it because his teacher said it was a piece of cake?"

Amelia jumped, not very high because of her chubbiness, and said, "Yes! That's it. Great job, Oliver."

Lucy began to frown. "Well, that's a stupid joke!"

"Don't say that it is stupid just because you couldn't answer it. I personally think it is a great joke."

"No, it's not! It's stupid. It's super stupid!" Lucy refused to listen to Oliver or Amelia for the next ten minutes. While Lucy typically wasn't very good with jokes, she never acted like a sore loser. Amelia found it strange but didn't say anything for fear that Lucy would yell for no reason.

On the third day, their change was so drastic that they could hardly recognize each other. They were twice as fat as they were at the beginning of their journey. At this point, Lucy could not ignore it any longer. "What is going on? Why are we getting fatter? We will never get to the next village if this keeps happening."

Oliver replied, "I think my mom told me something about something like this before." Oliver's mom was the village librarian who would often share with Oliver the things she learned while reading the library books.

“Well,” Amelia asked, “do you remember what it is?”

“Hmm. No... I don't. I really wish my mom was here.” Tears began rushing down Oliver's eyes.

“Quit your blubbing, Oliver! We won't find your parents until we defeat Mr. Dromedary. So, there is no point crying,” Lucy yelled. Oliver ignored her and continued to cry. Lucy became irritated, causing her to push Oliver hard enough that he almost fell over.

“I told you to stop crying, you stupid coward!” Amelia noticed the change in Lucy's eyes, like they were the eyes of wild wolves that cared for no one else. They were angry and harsh. Oliver stopped his crying only to acquire a similar look as Lucy. Unnatural anger that did not belong filled both of their eyes.



Before Amelia could say anything, Oliver and Lucy stretched out their claws and attempted to attack each other. Lucy tried to take a swing but Oliver grabbed it with his chubby paws. Oliver, while holding Lucy's chubby paw in place, attempted to attack with his free paw, only for Lucy to grab a hold of it. So, there the two of them were: very chubby children attempting to attack each other but never actually managing to. The most they could do was move slightly forward or slightly backward and exchange the position of their arms as they tried to break free but were grabbed again. All of a sudden, Amelia began to laugh. “Haha! You two look like a pair of sumo wrestlers. You don't know how ridiculous you look.” Amelia continued to laugh.

Lucy and Oliver lost interest in their fight and glared at Amelia. “Why don't you shut your mouth! You've become overweight too!” shouted Lucy. She stepped towards laughing Amelia and slashed Amelia's black wings with her claws. Blood instantly began to pour out of the wound. Amelia stopped laughing and instead started to cry.

Oliver turned his glare back to Lucy, “What did you have to do that for? Why do you have to be so mean?!” Oliver wobbled over to Amelia to check her scratch. “Look at what you did! She’s bleeding!” He immediately went to his backpack and grabbed some disinfectant and bandages. He turned back to crying Amelia and began to treat her wounds.

“Well, she should have kept her big fat beak shut! Who asked her to laugh?!”

“Don’t you feel sorry? Look at her, she’s hurt.”

“Whatever! It’s just a tiny scratch. Who cares?!”

Oliver finished bandaging Amelia and she stopped crying. She whispered between sniffles, “well, if that’s how you feel, then I don’t want to be your friend anymore! I’m going to save my parents and your parents and everyone’s parents all without you.” Amelia stood up, grabbed her pack, and began to wobble down a different path in the forest to the next village.

Oliver, seeing that Amelia was leaving, grabbed his own pack and said, “wait up for me, Amelia.” He turned to Lucy and said, “I hope you are happy with yourself,” before running after her.

Lucy wasn’t happy with herself. She was boiling with red, hot anger. She had never been this angry in her entire life. She just lost her friends and she couldn’t help but get even more angry. She could just feel the blood pumping in her veins, threatening to burst with all her anger. She grabbed her satchel with a great big harrumph and walked down the original trail. Anytime she began to calm down and feel lonely, she remembered the fight with her friends and got angry all over again. She marched angrily all the way to the village.

On her way to the village, she wasn’t able to eat Amelia’s tasty food and instead had to eat dry bread and jerky. As she chewed and chewed on the jerky, all she could think about was that Amelia was an awful friend who abandoned her, and the coward Oliver decided to join her. Once she reached the village, it had become nighttime and the flames could clearly be seen but were much smaller than the flames she was used to seeing in the past villages.

“Wait, does that mean I’m not too late?” Lucy asked herself. As she ran closer to the village, she saw Mr. Dromedary in the distance, surrounded by the screams and cries of poor, helpless villagers in the background. He was in the process of burning down the village by means of a flamethrower. Lucy was shocked upon seeing him. “Oh my gosh! He can fly!” He was standing atop a flying carpet which was hovering twenty feet above the ground, wearing a top hat, a monocle, and a swirly handlebar moustache.



Lucy took off her backpack and moved to grab the dreamcatcher from her bag. But, before she could take it out of the satchel, she heard the laughter of Mr. Dromedary. “Mwahahaha. Kneel before my greatness! Or don’t. It’s more fun if you don’t! Mwahahaha!”

“This jerk!” Lucy thought. “I lost my friends and my parents all because of him and he’s enjoying this?! He’s enjoying all this pain and suffering!” Lucy became so angry that she could feel the blood pulsing in her ears and temples. In her rage, she forgot about the dreamcatcher and ran towards Mr. Dromedary with her claws extended. Unfortunately, she was still very chubby and her run became very odd and slow. She was running so slow that Mr. Dromedary noticed her before she actually reached him. But, he had no care for the tiny, fat child and continued his destruction of the woods and village.

She finally reached his carpet and screamed, “Come down here, you monster. I will not allow you ruin any more lives!” While screaming, she tried to jump and scratch him, but he was too high up for her to reach. He glanced down at her like he was looking at a bug that he could easily squash.

“Leave me be, puny child. Go run and scream or whatever you creatures do during a situation like this.”

“No, I refuse! Come down and fight me, or are you too chicken?” “Mwahaha. Well, you certainly have cheese for brains and don’t know what the smart thing is to do.” He faced Lucy. “Fine, I will give you what you want.” The flying carpet underneath him hovered slowly down until her head was at the same height as his knee. As soon as the flying carpet stopped moving, Lucy attempted to attack his leg, but his leg was faster. Within a second, his hoof collided with her head.

Lucy’s head seared with pain and her vision began to darken as her ears began to ring. She soon began to feel the sensation of her legs disappear. But before she completely lost consciousness

and everything became pitch dark, she heard the sound of a conch shell, the pitter-patter of rain, and a very close “Tch!”

When Lucy opened her eyes, she was in a tent. She rushed to sit up but felt too weak to do so. After half a minute, her senses returned and she slowly got up to look around. She was laying on top of a laid-out bedroll and she looked to her left to find her satchel. “What is this doing here?!” she exclaimed. She tried to remember what happened before she lost consciousness. The last thing she remembered was trying to fight Mr. Dromedary and before that, she left her bag on the trail, so it definitely shouldn’t have been there, wherever it was. She tried to remember what happened before then and she remembered her fights with her friends. “Oh, no. What have I done? I was so angry and mean to them. What came over me? I don’t feel so angry anymore. In fact, I feel better than ever.” She looked down at herself and saw that she was no longer fat! Her body was just as it was before their journey in all of its fit, muscled glory.

A deep voice called out, “I may have an answer to your question.” Lucy looked up to see a giant tortoise. Behind the tortoise were two familiar figures.

“Oliver and Amelia!” Lucy shouted. She leapt up and hugged the two of them. All three of them had huge grins and the old tortoise looked down at the three children with a wistful smile. “I’m really sorry about what I did before. I don’t know why I felt so annoyed and angry. But, it’s over now, for some reason, and I’m really glad to see you two.”

“We’re really glad to see you too. All of us were angry and irritated. But, it’s over now and the Hermit can tell you why,” Amelia said.

“The Hermit?”

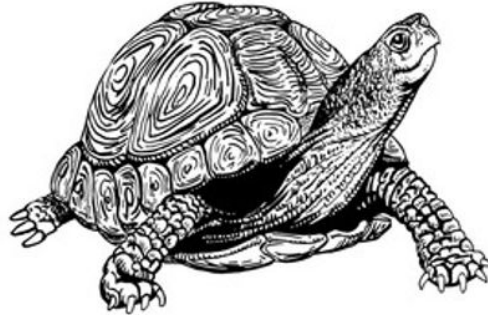
The tortoise spoke up. “That would be me. It was the title bestowed upon me once I forsook my true name in order to come on my pilgrimage and commune with the spirits in the nearby mountain.”

“So, did the spirits tell you why we were so angry?”

The tortoise chuckled. “No, child. I know why because of my experiences over the last few centuries.”

“Really, you’re that old! Okay, then. So, please tell me.”

“Why don’t we go and have a nice cup of tea while I answer your question.”



The four of them left the tent. Outside, Lucy saw many other tents littered around a wooden hut on a hill built next to a big lake. Many different animal children and elderly villagers were moving around the field next to the hut.

Amelia said, “these are all the villagers of the village you tried to save. When we came to the village, we found your satchel and Mr. Dromedary standing next to you. We grabbed the conch shell from your bag and used it to extinguish the flames. Mr. Dromedary fled once he saw that someone had foiled his plan. The villagers decided to come here since their village was destroyed and we carried you here since you were still passed out.”

Lucy looked around as the Hermit led them to his hut, which had a fireplace inside. He offered them all seats and grabbed the kettle sloshing with freshly-brewed tea. He poured a cup for each of them and took his seat on a cozy, giant armchair by the fireplace.



Lucy blew on the tea gently to cool it down and drank it. As soon as the tea landed on her taste buds, she felt calm and relaxed. “This tea is amazing. It is much better than what the Chief Elder makes.”

Once everyone took a sip of their tea, the Hermit told the children, “you know, it was very dangerous to do what you did.”

“Yes, I know. Children trying to stop an adult bent on destroying the forest is probably not the best idea. But, there is no one else who can do it. Mr. Dromedary has taken our parents!” Lucy responded.

“That is not what I’m referring to, child. Going without sleep for several days is very dangerous, especially to young ones like yourself. Sleep helps you develop and keeps you healthy. Amelia and Oliver have already told me what happened during your journey. The reason you gained weight and became so angry is because you did not sleep. Sleeping keeps your body, soul, and mind fit for any occasion or bump in the road.”

“Is that why my mom kept telling me to sleep every night on time in order to become as strong, clever, and disciplined as her?” Lucy asked.

“Exactly, child. I know that I will not be able to sway you off your journey. The spirits have revealed to me that nothing can stop you from doing so. So, I will help as best as I can. But, it will be best not to tempt fate twice. If you sleep, you are destined to succeed. But if you do not, dark things will await you.” The Hermit spoke in a grim tone that sent a shiver down Lucy’s spine.

After drinking their tea, the Hermit helped the children pack fresh provisions. He also gave them a bracelet. “This bracelet has been imbued with some spirit essence and it will guide you down

the quickest, safest path to where you need to go next. It will also help you in your moment of great need.” He slid the bracelet over Lucy’s wrist.

The three children smiled at the tortoise, thanking him for his advice and help. When deciding which direction to go, Lucy felt a strong pull from the bracelet to the north. They decided to follow where the bracelet told them to go, setting off to save the next village. Just as they were climbing down the hill, the Hermit called out, “do not forget what I have told you!”

They continued to go in the direction the bracelet was pulling them towards until night fell. “It’s night time. What should we do?” asked Oliver.

Amelia answered, “the Hermit told us that we should sleep. We should probably listen to him.”

“Yeah, I agree. So, how about we eat dinner and go to sleep?” Lucy said. They did just that.

As Amelia cooked, Lucy walked up and asked how her wing was. “My wing? It’s perfectly healed up. The Hermit gave me a herbal balm that caused it to heal up super quickly. Don’t worry about it.”

“Are you sure it’s alright?”

“Yes, I’m sure. Don’t feel guilty about it.”

They went to sleep on their bedrolls and woke up in the morning. They ate a quick breakfast and continued on their way for the next two days. They never missed a single night of sleep and began to feel great as a result. But, when they managed to get to the next village, it was ablaze. The bracelet, which was supposed to give them the quickest way, didn’t allow them to get there quick enough to stop Mr. Dromedary. Mr. Dromedary was gone by the time they reached the village. They use the conch shell to call forth the rain and extinguish the flames.

“Ugh. We still weren’t fast enough,” Lucy exclaimed, “if only we had gotten here sooner!” Oliver replied, “well, there’s nothing we can do about it. The only way we will be able to catch up is to not sleep. And you heard what the Hermit said, ‘in order to be able to defeat Mr. Dromedary, you need to sleep.’”

“But, how can we expect to get ahead of Mr. Dromedary when he has a flying carpet?!” Lucy paused for a moment and then looked up at her companions with a sparkle in her eyes. “How about we cheat the system?”

“What do you mean, *cheat the system*? How?” Amelia asked.

“Well, how about we sleep only one or two hours a night? That way, we can sleep, avoid getting fat and angry, and still have loads of time to get to the villages.”

Oliver and Amelia looked at Lucy with hesitant expressions. Oliver replied, “will it even work like that? How can we be sure that sleeping a little won’t still cause bad stuff to happen to us?”

“We don’t. But, I want to save our parents and stop the villages and forest from being destroyed. In my eyes, this is the only way.”

Amelia shrugged and remarked, “what could possibly go wrong that hasn’t already?”

They continued to follow the path the bracelet led them down and slept only for two hours, regulated by Oliver’s alarm clock. When Lucy first saw it, she was surprised. “What did you bring that for?”

“Well, I oversleep sometimes. My mom gave me this so I don’t fall into hibernation randomly.”

Lucy shook her head in disbelief. Yet, the alarm clock proved useful in preventing them from sleeping more than they agreed upon.



On the first day they went with little sleep, the adventurers worried that they wouldn’t be able to catch Mr. Dromedary in time. Their worries proved true when at the end of the day, they were too late to save the village that was very close in comparison to all the other villages they had to travel to. It was already in flames, and the remaining villagers already fled. They extinguished the flames with the conch shell and continued on their way.

On the second and third days, the atmosphere around the three children became increasingly dark and gloomy. Having already failed to save many villages, a cloud of hopelessness swirled around their brains, telling them that maybe Mr. Dromedary was too powerful and nothing could stop him. Likewise, Lucy was beginning to feel more afraid of Mr. Dromedary. The very thought of him made her tremble slightly in fear as her muscles tensed up.

On the fourth day, it only got worse. Lucy began feeling nauseous and felt her mouth dry up every time she thought about their future. In fact, Lucy couldn’t even fall asleep. She tried to go to sleep but failed as she felt more fidgety than ever. Instead of sleeping, Lucy decided to keep

herself busy by keeping watch and making sure nothing crept up on them even though the only possible threat in their part of the woods were mosquitos. Still, she kept her fears to herself and didn't share them with her companions.

At the end of the fourth day, they reached the next village. As they walked up, Lucy heard a familiar "mwahaha." She once again felt the sickening in her stomach and her heart began to pound quickly.

"He's here! Mr. Dromedary is here!" Amelia exclaimed, "let's catch him and put an end to this! Lucy, you use the dreamcatcher and Oliver and I will help the villagers and extinguish the flames."

Lucy responded with a shaky "okay." She took off her satchel and handed the conch shell to Oliver. He and Amelia ran to an area of the village that Mr. Dromedary wasn't currently burning up, in order to assist the villagers. Lucy extended her paw to grab the dreamcatcher but noticed how cold and clammy it was. She chose to ignore it. "We're almost done. I just need to trap Mr. Dromedary in this dreamcatcher and everything will be fine. Just hang on for a little longer," she told herself.

She took the dreamcatcher and began walking down the path to the part of the village where Mr. Dromedary was. With each step she took, her dreadful thoughts became more overwhelming.

The Hermit's words popped into her brain. "Dark times will await you." Soon, the words began to echo in her brain, as she felt her entire body trembling. Her heart felt as if it was a bomb waiting to explode. *Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump*. Lucy had never paid so much attention to her heartbeat before. As she focused on her heartbeat, it seemed to beat faster and stronger. Her chest started to hurt. Her fear and pain grew to the point where she felt that if she took one step further, she would die. So, she stood where she was, breathing quickly and deeply. She felt completely detached from the world as she watched the village with the veil of fear and saw her friends doing what they could to help as they called for rain, which caused Mr. Dromedary to flee. Once Mr. Dromedary fled, Lucy stared at the ground, continuing to tremble. It wasn't until her friends came to her that she came out of it.

"Lucy, what's wrong? Why didn't you stop Mr. Dromedary?" Amelia asked.

"I... I... I can't-t do-o thi-s-s any lon-g-ger," Lucy stuttered out.

Oliver instructed, "wait, Lucy. Just calm down. Then, tell us."

Lucy tried to slow her breathing. For a second, she felt better. "Why don't we just stop this? What's the point? We are just a bunch of kids. We can't possibly hope to defeat Mr. Dromedary. He can incinerate us, quite literally. How could we think that everything will be okay and that we can do this?"

"What are you saying, Lucy? We are the only ones who can do this. The only other people who can do this are the elders, the children, or the adults from other villages that haven't been targeted yet," Amelia said.

“Ooh, why can’t we do that?! Why can’t we just go to a town that hasn’t been affected yet and get them to deal with Mr. Dromedary?”

“Well, first of all, it’s our responsibility. We said we would do it so we should stay true to our word. Secondly, all these villages we are going to depend on us to extinguish the flames. If it weren’t for us, the entire forest would probably burn down by now.”

“But, but—I don’t want to anymore. I can’t do this. The elders would have a better chance than us with their bad backs and knees. We are completely useless. Our parents would be better off without children like us!” Amelia and Oliver looked at each other, seeming to communicate with just their eyes.

Afterwards, Oliver told Lucy, “okay. Why don’t we just take a break, maybe have some tea? Maybe you’ll feel better.”

They grabbed their packs and found some nearby rocks, where Oliver and Amelia left Lucy to sit while they ventured further in the woods to grab twigs and grass for the fire. Lucy trembled slightly and, from time to time, checked over her shoulder. After coming back, Amelia began to boil some water in her kettle. Once her small kettle began to scream, she added some tea leaves and herbs to the kettle. After the tea was ready, Amelia poured Lucy a cup but didn’t pour anything for herself or for Oliver. Lucy took a big sip from her cup. After a few seconds, it felt as if a haze was set over her brain. Amelia told her, “well, go on. Take another sip.” Lucy did as she was told, only this time, instead of a haze, she felt extremely drowsy.

“What... was in... this tea?” Her head wobbled around and her eyes threatened to close. She tried to resist the effects but failed, as her eyes shut and she fell into a deep slumber.



She dreamt of her parents. She dreamt of her parents celebrating her birthday with her. She dreamt of them playing catch the wisp with her. She dreamt of them holding her in their arms

and saying, “no matter what happens, we will keep you safe. We will make your life the happiest in the whole wide world and you’ll have nothing to fear. So, don’t fret. Believe in yourself, believe in your friends and everything will eventually turn out all right.” The dream began to fade and her dream parents started to walk away.

“No, wait. Don’t go! Don’t leave me!” She tried to run after them but failed, as it was clear her running ultimately led to nowhere.

Lucy opened her eyes and a tear dropped down onto her cheek. Despite this, Lucy woke up feeling better, much better. She felt so much more assured, as her confidence was back. In fact, all the fear she felt before seemed nonexistent. Lucy felt like she could take on the world. She hadn’t felt this way in a long time and she wondered what could have caused her to lose this spark. No matter the reason though, Lucy felt that her parents helped her recover it. In fact, it felt like her parents imbued her with a part of themselves in her dream, saving her from herself and strengthening her.

Amelia was the first to notice Lucy had woken up. She quickly shook Oliver awake. “Come on, Oliver. Wake up.”

“Wuh! Huh.” He looked around with groggy eyes. “Did I oversleep again?”

“Lucy just woke up. Come on.”

Oliver got up and Amelia turned to Lucy. “How are you doing? Are you feeling any better?”

“Yeah, a lot better. But, when did I fall asleep and for how long?”

“You’ve been asleep for an entire day. Oliver and I realized that that you were experiencing really bad side effects of not having enough sleep so we grabbed an herb in the forest. The Hermit told us about this herb and its sleep properties and what it looks like so that if we ever had problems, we could use it to fall asleep. We put it in your tea.”

As Amelia said this, Oliver nodded his head at certain parts. “We’re sorry that we had to do that behind your back. But, you were getting really scary. You lost your courage and got super stressed out. A Lucy without courage is like a world without honey. Unthinkable!” Oliver said.

“I understand. Thanks. It was pretty scary to live like that.”

“So, do you still want to stop Mr. Dromedary?” Oliver asked.

“Yeah! Let’s get our parents back and save these woods!” Lucy replied.

“But, how are we supposed to find him? He could be anywhere by now,” said Amelia. “Wherever he is, we will find him and we will make him regret everything he has done. As long as we believe in ourselves and each other, everything will turn out all right,” Lucy said with a warm smile.

The three of them quickly packed up their stuff. Lucy extended her paw with the bracelet on towards the other two and looked at them expectantly with a grin. Oliver and Amelia grinned as well.

“Seriously,” Amelia said, “that is so cliché.”

Oliver said, “who cares?” and quickly held his paw on top of Lucy’s.

“Come on, Amelia. I know you want to,” Lucy said.

Amelia sighed and with a smile, placed her wing on top of their paws, completing the hand-stack. “We can do this, no matter what happens,” declared Lucy. Suddenly, Lucy’s bracelet began to twinkle and shine. The light began to spread, slowly creeping its way along their fur and feathers.

“What’s going on?!” asked Oliver.

“I’m not sure but I guess we’ll find out!” Lucy replied. The light fully enveloped the three and became extremely bright. Then, they all vanished from their original spot, as the light teleported them to a new location.

They looked around and noticed that they were in a completely new part of the woods. “Did your bracelet just teleport us?!” Oliver exclaimed. “That is so cool!” They were right at the entrance of another village. This village was the first village they had seen that wasn’t on fire.

“Why did it take us here? We should probably look inside,” Amelia declared.

“Agreed. Let’s go,” Lucy said. They began to walk inside the village. To their surprise, they saw Mr. Dromedary on his magic carpet with a genie lamp in his hand. A purple mist seemed to be moving inside the genie lamp. Oliver tilted his head in confusion as he wondered what Mr. Dromedary was doing. Lucy focused on the sound of the mist filling the genie lamp and eventually heard murmurs. Those murmurs soon turned into voices. She realized they were the voices of the adults Mr. Dromedary was stealing. “Those are the adults. I can hear their voices. That’s how he is taking all of them away. That genie lamp must also have our parents.”

“We need to stop him. We have the advantage of surprise. He doesn’t know that we are here. We should do something now!” Amelia exclaimed.

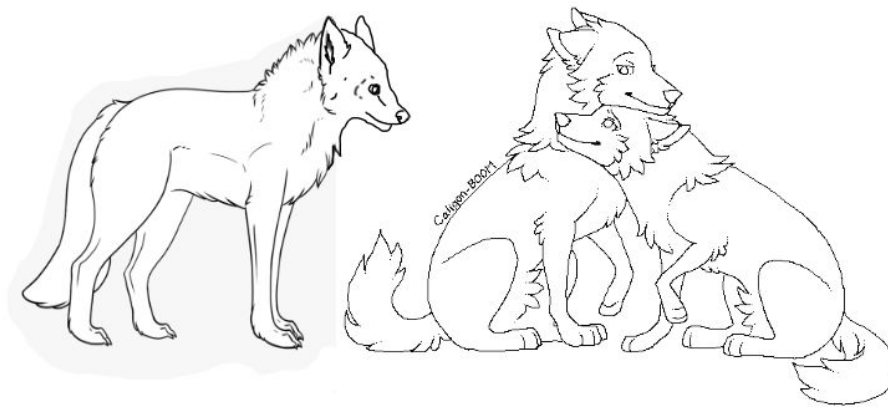
Lucy took the dreamcatcher out of the bag and attempted to do what the Chief Elder told her to: wish to protect someone. She wished to protect the adults he was stealing, but nothing happened. “It doesn’t seem to work while I’m this far away. Can you two distract him while I take care of the dreamcatcher?” Both Oliver and Amelia agreed. They took off their packs and ran in separate directions, in an attempt to split Mr. Dromedary’s attention. As they ran towards him, they began to scream at him.

Lucy was able to sneak closer once Amelia and Oliver made Mr. Dromedary turn in the other direction. As she got closer, Mr. Dromedary grabbed his flamethrower from his flying carpet. He pointed it at Amelia and there was nowhere for her to get out of his range. Just as he was about to

set her aflame, Lucy screamed “no!” and wished to protect her friends. As she wished, she thought about her parents, Amelia’s and Oliver’s parents, all the other adults in their village, all the elders and children they encountered whose houses were destroyed, and their missing family members. As she thought about all these people and concentrated on her wish, the center of the dreamcatcher began to shine with a vivid blue glow which traveled along the threads, spreading the glow to the beads, the wooden frame, and the feathers.

Once the entire dreamcatcher was covered in this blue glow, it turned purple and Mr. Dromedary’s body began to form into a mist similar to the mist of the parents he was trapping. But, his mist was a foul yellow. It traveled to the dreamcatcher and once its journey was complete, the blue glow went away. The only sign that anything unusual happened to the dreamcatcher was a new yellow bead. “That’s it! We defeated Mr. Dromedary. Someone grab the genie lamp and find a way to let everyone out,” Lucy screamed to her friends.

Oliver was the closest to the lamp and grabbed it. He glanced at it with a puzzled look and turned to Amelia, who shrugged. He decided to rub the lamp on a whim, which caused a purple mist to be released. The mist started turning into people and dozens of adults suddenly appeared out of thin air. Eventually, each of the three children saw their parents appear and they ran towards them to welcome them back by giving them a great big hug.



“Hey, Lucy. Are you listening?” Lucy was at home. It was three years later.

“Yeah, I’m listening. I just remembered something. You can continue.” Lucy was with two other friends, a deer and a squirrel.

“As I was saying, do you want to play catch the wisp? It might extend past bedtime but that’s the best time to play it. Oliver and Amelia said that they can’t because they need to sleep. But, what’s the point? It’s not a school night so why should we care about sleep? Wanna join us?”

“You would be surprised how important sleep can be. Sorry, I’m going to sleep too. I recommend that you do the same.” Lucy closed her door and went to her room, where she changed into her pajamas and jumped straight into bed with a big smile. She was ready to experience the wonderful dreams awaiting her, and to live her wonderful life its fullest once she woke up from her sleep.

