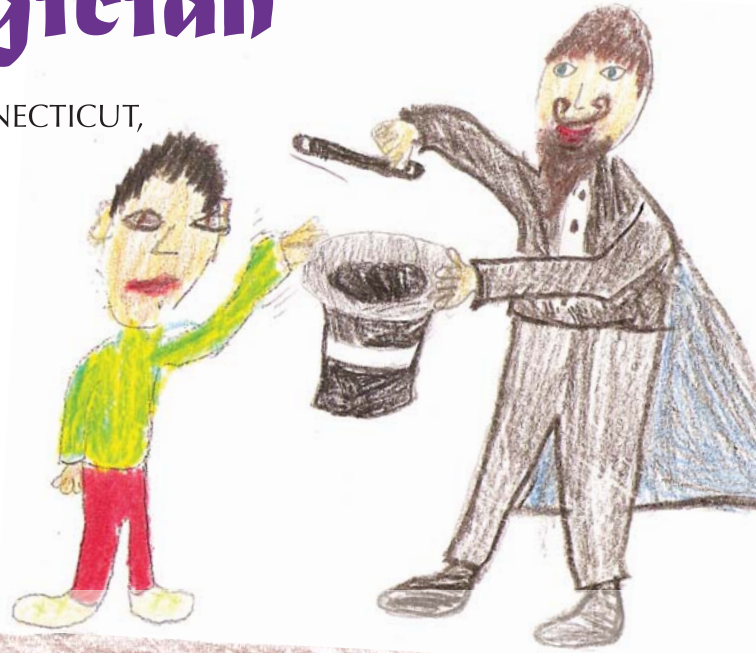


The Evil Magician

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I was nervous as I walked up the dark stairs to the stage of the magic show at the circus. The magician had called on me for a magic trick. I wondered what I was supposed to do...pull a bunny out of a hat? Jump inside a box and get cut in half? Whatever I was supposed to do, I didn't think I wanted to know.

As I approached the stage, I looked down at the people in the audience. I gazed at them until a stern voice woke me up. "Come on now," the magician said. I anxiously wobbled toward him and he said to pull a bunny from his hat. The magician took off his hat. My hands shook as I reached into the fancy black stovetop hat. Suddenly, just as my hand got into the hat, everything inside of the tent started to spin. Something jerked at my hand





and I was instantly sucked into the hat. I felt like I was being sucked through a tight tube. I couldn't breathe or move. My eyes squeezed shut. Just as I thought I was about to pass out, I appeared on a rocky surface. I took a deep breath. I wandered around wondering where I was. All around me, bubbling lava pools and odd shaped boulders seemed to move around in the dark, dank light.

I cautiously stepped into an enormous crevice and found a triple headed dragon that was resting inside. The huge dragon stirred and roared an ear splitting roar that knocked me down.

The dragon's first head was spiky and lumpy. It also had serrated teeth that looked like they could rip away the strongest of titanium.

Its second head looked much less ferocious, yet it breathed scorching hot fire that could burn down ten Amazon forests.

The third head was the most ferocious of all. Toxic spikes came out of the head. Heat pulsated from it like an oven. Its teeth were short, but very sharp.

The dragon lunged at me, and I dodged with break neck speed. I felt as though I was about to faint.

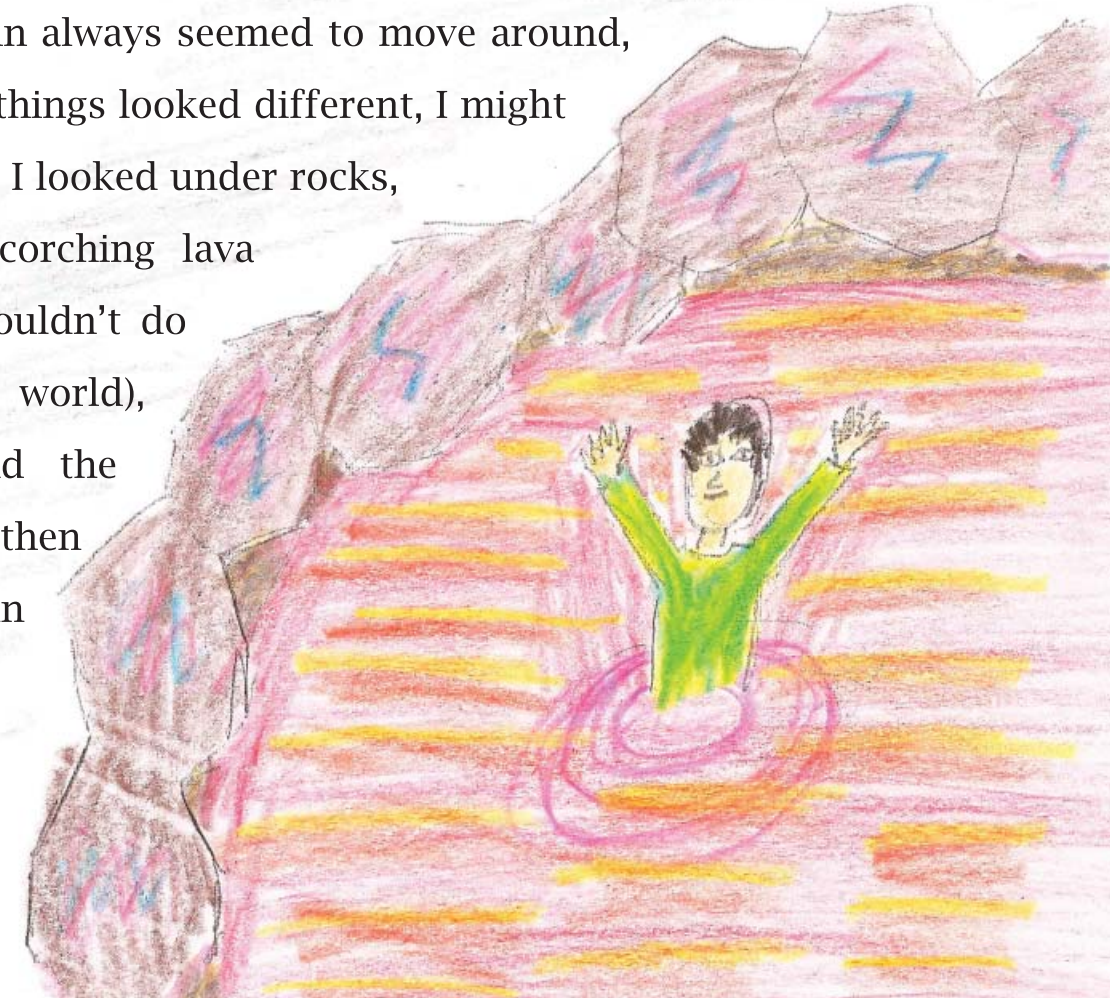
Just then, a glowing double-edged sword materialized in my hands. My mind raced furiously, and then I drove the sword straight through the dragon's heart. The dragon exploded into a shower of sparks. I smelled the acrid stink of burnt toast. Then the crevice I was in became smaller. It kept on shrinking, so I ran out of the crevice.

Puff! Puff! I panted for a while before looking back at the shrunken crevice. The



glimmering double-edged sword disappeared. Just then, a familiar, stern voice pounded in my ears. "Welcome to my terrifying death maze!" the voice bellowed. "Find the key to get out! You only have half an hour. If you fail to find the key, you'll be stuck in the maze forever! MUAHAHAHAHAH."

My heart pounded as my brain thought about what had occurred. I recognized the voice! It was the magician. I remembered what he had said about the key. I dashed around looking for an object that could be a key. The area I was in always seemed to move around, probably because if things looked different, I might lose my way around. I looked under rocks, I waded through scorching lava (which I probably couldn't do if I was in the real world), but I couldn't find the key anywhere. Just then the stern voice again pounded against my ears. "Only one minute left!"



I stood there horror struck. If I didn't find the key in one minute, I would be stuck in here forever. I worriedly looked for the key.

RUMBLE! I stopped dead in my own tracks. I looked around to see what had caused the mysterious rumble. Suddenly, something shiny caught my eye. I stepped closer to find that it was a key. Just then, the voice said,

“Five second left!”

“Four.....” I picked up the key.

“Three.....” I looked around for a lock.

“Two.....” I spotted one right next to me.

“One.....” I quickly put the key into the lock. I felt the same sensation of being sucked through a tube. I hoped that I was returning to the real world. Suddenly I appeared on the stage, dazed.



I was relieved to be back in the real world. My eyes drifted toward where the audience had been, but they were all gone. It seemed like two hours had passed, instead of only half an hour. No one was left inside of the circus, except for me. I started to worry.

I rushed outside and it looked as though it could be seven o'clock. I saw my mom standing in the parking lot. My mom was shouting, “Come on James, we have to go home now.” I dashed to my mom's shining red car. As I dashed toward the car I muttered to myself: “I am NEVER, EVER going to a magic show again!” As I hopped into my mom's car I thought about the evil magician and the strange world he had sent me to.