

THE FINAL TEST

BY TARA SHARAN

It was the last day of fifth grade at Bridgeview Elementary. Today, the last day of school, was the oddest, the strangest, and the most peculiar day of the school year. Four best friends were doing a lock and key challenge made by the principal as the final part of a test to enter into the Secret Spy Society for the Enlightened. The future depended on these smart kids, and it was their job to conquer it.

While everybody else was in their last lesson of elementary school, four children of room 5b were standing in the locked gym. Pepper was the first to get started. She ran to the small box on the stage and pulled out a letter. "What does it say?" asked Violet. James read it out loud over Pepper's shoulder.

*"Beneath the golden doorway
And through the golden door
See what is seeing
Know what is not to know
Eat the poison apple
Take the golden cure
Back through the back door
And under the cracks in the floor
Live to understand
Learn to live to the core"*

James peered at the paper. "What is the golden door? It mentions that the cure is also golden, but I see no golden door, nor any golden cure." He gestured to the room around him.

"Door!" yelled Pepper. Everybody turned to her. "Door rhymes with cure!"

Violet sighed. "Very insightful, Pepper."

"What does it mean by cracks under the floor?" Oliver dropped to the ground and felt underneath the moss. He sighed. "Nothing here." They all thought for a while. Suddenly, a muffled squeal came from Violet. "I know! Look at the first letter of each line. Look what it spells!"

James gasped. "Basketball!" he shouted. All of the children ran to the large bag that held the balls. They rummaged through the sack until they found a bright orange basketball. Taped to the side was another letter. Violet read it out loud:

*"My start is the square in the middle of the middle
My heart is in the beginning of beginning
My end is at the end of the end
You can use me to open the door"*

“Let’s just try random combinations,” said James, walking over to the lock.

“Wait! Don’t do that! There are 26 letters and 10 digits, which adds up to 36 per place, and there are three places! That’s over 40,000 combinations!” cried Pepper.

“And anyways, I think I know…” whispered Oliver. Everybody’s heads whipped towards him. “Look! What is the middle of the words, ‘the middle?’ ”

“I guess…the letter ‘i’ ?” asked James, counting on his fingers.

“Bingo! And since ‘i’ isn’t a perfect square, it must mean the number one! And a heart could refer to the center of a body, or in this case—” Oliver said.

“The center of a word! So the second digit or letter would be in the center of the code. And ‘b’ is the beginning of ‘beginning’ …” added Violet.

“And then the end of ‘the end’ is ‘d!’ ” cried Pepper.

“So the code is ‘lbd’ !” said James.

The kids rushed to the door and entered the code. The door opened, and the kids stepped outside. And then, they saw the most spectacular thing: a box. A box containing their beautiful, glamorous admission letters to the Society!

**THE END
OR IS IT?!**