Spencer   
Mr. Lane  
Language Arts 2  
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Within the Binding

    The smells and sounds of the city were thicker than usual on this Sunday morning. Imogene woke me up a little before sunrise which was not like her in the slightest. I could tell something was off when the fumes of breakfast collided with my nostrils. I could taste the eggs and bacon; my mouth began to water. We rarely had this nice of food, only on Christmas and Lynnell's birthday. Imogene told me to put on my cleanest pair of pants and nicest shirt, for there was someone here to see me. Immediately I thought she’s sending me away, as her heavy tread of a footfall clanked up the stairs.

She left through the blanket hanging in my room that acted as my door. I went to the tiny sink in the corner and washed my face and hair with its rust colored water.  I found my only pair of trousers and slipped them on, with the t-shirt that had only one tiny tear on the back which could be tucked in.

    Through the blanket I went and up the stairs. I tried to ascend as quietly as possible. The old rickety steps did not agree. Every inch I moved made more noise. By the time I got up into the kitchen, Imogene and Lynnell were sitting at the kitchen table with a guilty looking man. The man stared at me awkwardly with a twinkle in his eye. Imogene gestured for me to take a seat. I didn’t. Something told me that I didn’t want this man sitting in the LaDeghar’s kitchen.

    “Eryck, take a seat.” Imogene gave me the look I knew only too well. Eyes bright blue with a nice warm smile that masked what she really felt inside. She got up and got us all two strips of bacon and a heaping pile of eggs.  While she was getting our food, the strangely familiar man scrutinized my face.   
    He finally spoke. His deep crackling voice rang through the kitchen with such energy that Imogene stopped scooping eggs out of the frying pan.

“Well boy, it’s been too long. The last time I saw you, you could barely touch my knee.” He wasn’t a tall man but made up for the lack of height in his plumpness. I stared at him with a dumbfounded expression.

    “What do you mean? I have never seen you before.”  
    “Nonsense. I know more about you then you know about your own self, for Pete’s sake! Heck, when you were just a toddler I was the first person your parents ever introduced you to. Who do you think brought you to Imogene’s place when your parents died?”  
    “Um...uh.. I don’t know. Imogene only told me that my parents died in a car accident and that I showed up on her doorstep not even knowing my own name. Who do you think you are barging in on us like this?”   
    “Eryck! That is no way to speak to your uncle,” demanded Imogene.  
    “Imogene, give him a break, how would you take this news as a thirteen year old boy? I, for one, would be feeling exactly what Eryck is; anger, astonishment, and a sense of wonder. Cut him some slack!”   
    Eryck sat in pure silence while they quarreled back and forth. Imogene put the platters of food down on the table. Without even the slimmest desire of hesitation, the man picked up his fork and dug right in to Imogene’s food. I couldn’t believe how “at home” he felt with himself.   
    “Eat up, you’re going to need the extra energy,” proclaimed the man. I looked at Imogene with a questioning look. She bowed her head and passed me a plate.   
    As soon as the last bite of egg hit my lips, the man reached into his bag, pulled out an old tattered brown book, and threw it on the table in front of me. Little did I know, but that book was going to change my life forever.   
    “First of all, what is your name, and how do you know me?” I asked the man. He replied, “I met you long ago even before you were born. Your parents are best friends of mine, and I am your godfather. My name is Jebidiah Barnes, but you call me Jeb. Hurry up and finish eating. We need to get a move on.” Did he really expect me to go with him? I just met this stranger.   
    “What is that book?” I asked Jeb.   
    “Your past, present, and future,” Jeb said, “it also holds all of your parents’ history. The first page starts on the day your parents met. It also includes their adventures, jobs, and your birth. Did you complete the challenge?” I was frozen to my chair.   
    “So wait, you have left me here for 11 years, not knowing anything about myself or family, and now you expect me to just go with you, and to where?” Imogene had barely spoken a word since Jeb had arrived, until now.   
    “Eryck, you need to hear Jeb out on this. Tell him you have completed the challenge, and be on your way. You were the best one that has come through my chancel. Good luck.”

I could hear my heart pounding in my ears, and the blood draining from my face, leaving me looking extremely ghastly and terrified. Jeb said, “Just say the words, ‘I completed the challenge,’ and we can be on our way. Then I will explain everything I can.”

    “I, uh, um... I completed the challenge.” Immediately things changed. I was still in Imogene’s kitchen, but Imogene was gone. All of her furniture and silverware were suddenly vibrant and not plain and colorless like before.   
    “Alright, well let’s begin. Open the book and look at the first page. Good place to start,” Jeb announced.

I replied, “Tell me about my parents first.”

    “That’s not how this ordeal works kid. You do as I say, and then you get your precious answers.” I did as he said. Something latched on to the bottom of my belly button, and both Jeb and I, along with the book, were lurched into an unknown world.   
    There we stood, in the middle of the African Jungle. Strange calls could be heard from high in the mountains. The moisture in the air instantly began to dampen my clothes and hair. Everything smelt of rain and vegetation.   
    “Where are we?” I asked.   
    “The African Jungle. Eryck, this is where your parents live and where you were born.”  
    “How did we get here?”  
    “When you complete the challenge, it takes all of your kind to where your parents are.”  
    “What do you mean my kind?”  
    “Apprentices. As an infant your parents decided they didn’t want you growing up around their work. They applied you to the apprentice program, and you were accepted. Your parents wanted you to experience what it was like to grow up as a normal child in the middle of New York. When you turn thirteen and a half, you become reunited with your parents. Your parents are actually extremely wealthy scientists who study the life of the African Jungle.”  
    “So you are telling me I have been living in a dump with Imogene for 11 years to grow up as a “normal child” just because my parents wanted me to? So you and Imogene do this kind of thing a lot?”  
    “Yup, that pretty much sums it all up. Ready to meet your birth parents?”  
    “I guess.”  
    “Up that path, take a right at the blue tree, walk about 15 paces, take a left at the tiger statue, and you have arrived. Good luck.”

I turned around to look for the path and saw one tiny little dirt strip that led straight up the side of the mountain.

    “Wait, you aren’t coming with me?” but as I turned around, Jeb had vanished on the spot.   
    Up the trail I went. The blue tree was actually just a giant spruce tree with a spray painted blue stripe.   
    The house was nothing like I expected. Actually, it wasn’t much of a house at all. It was a three story tree-house with at least six different chambers. Just what I had always wanted, a tree house. On the outside there was an exotic painted sign that read, *The Gemhanson’s Home.* I was in shock. My legs begin to lock, my lips began to quiver, and my arms, well I couldn’t feel them. They were numb. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of the most gorgeous birds I have ever seen, a Giant Toucan. Then, from behind the toucan, on one of the many platform decks, appeared two figures, a man and a woman, who seemed to be my mother and father. With the tears in their eyes and the way they were embracing each other.  
    “Mom? Dad?” I darted right up to the high platform. I was home at last. We hugged for over 20 minutes. Once we had hugged each other senseless they showed me around my totally awesome new tree-house of a home and introduced me to their “pets,” ...all 46 of them.   
    That night, after I ate one of my favorite dinners; Macaroni and Sausage pizza, I fell asleep to the sounds of my parents laughter/crying mix and the sounds of my second new home; the jungle, from my very own tree-house bed.