

A watercolor illustration of a tree branch with a yellow fruit and a butterfly. The branch is brown with red and black spots. The fruit is yellow with red spots. A butterfly is visible on the left. The background is light blue with small blue dots.

7th Grade State Winner

The Wish of Friendship

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Melanie skipped through the orange grove imagining the beautiful days of winter laid out before her. She was a bird set free from its cage, flying carelessly above the world. Melanie plucked an orange and peeled back the smooth skin, taking a large, juicy bite. She headed toward a shimmer she had seen over at the end of a row of trees and pulled back her blond hair.

"I wish Toffee was with me," she sighed, "Christmas time makes things seem lonely." Toffee, Melanie's big Australian shepherd, had sadly died last winter. Melanie wanted another puppy, but with her mom and dad away so often, she would have to gain responsibility before owning one. Melanie sighed and threw away the orange peel.





Kicking up dirt with her boots,
Melanie reached the end of the row,
where she had spied the shimmer.

"Woah," she whispered. There was a
light coming from an orange blossom
at the top of the tree.

Melanie scrambled up the tree excitedly, with short rapid breaths. "Hey," she tapped on the blossom and then let out a squeal of astonishment as, unbelievably, a tiny, sparkly fairy in an orange dress flew out, looking wildly around.

"Oh!" exclaimed the fairy, who had spotted Melanie. "Well, I suppose that you are a human girl, aren't you."

"Um, yes! My name's Melanie," Melanie smiled cheerfully at the fairy.

"Ah, I see. Well, Melanie, nice to meet you and all, but I am very busy and must leave immediately." The fairy turned to go. "So, good day."





"Wait!" Melanie pleaded, "you're a fairy right?"

"Yes, and your point is?" the fairy replied.

"Well, don't fairies always grant wishes if someone finds them?" Melanie asked.

"Oh, um yes well, listen Melanie, if you can grow one perfect orange by the end of the vacation, and bring it to me in this tree, then I will grant you any wish you want. Fair?" the fairy asked.

"Yes," Melanie grinned, "and thank you! I'll grow that orange in no time."

"I'm sure you will." Then the fairy dove back into the blossom, and Melanie climbed down. She knew exactly what she would wish for: a puppy. Smiling, she ran home.

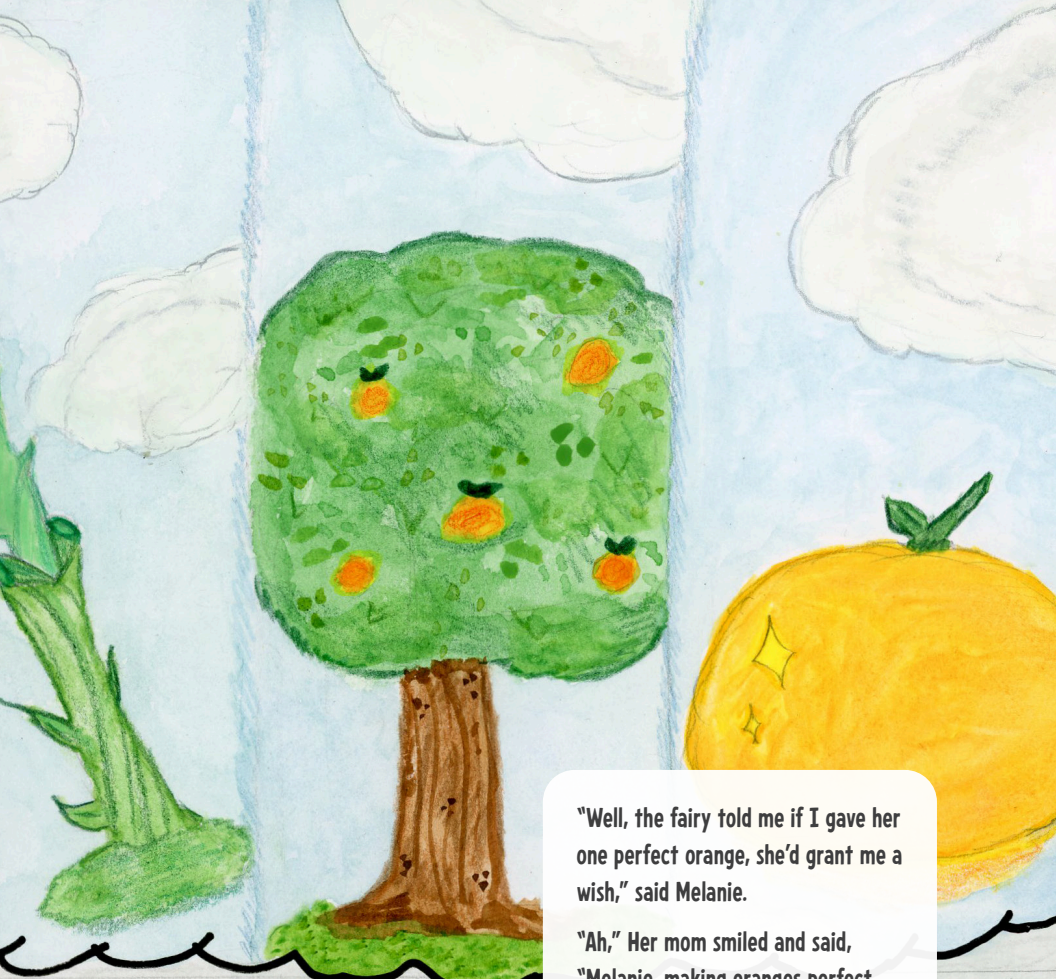
"Hi mom!" Melanie leaped through the door of her whitewashed cottage. "You will never guess what just happened."

"What happened, Melanie?" her mom asked.

"Well, I was walking through the grove, and I saw this sparkly thing in a tree, so I climbed and saw a real fairy!"

"Really? That's nice Melanie, anything else?"



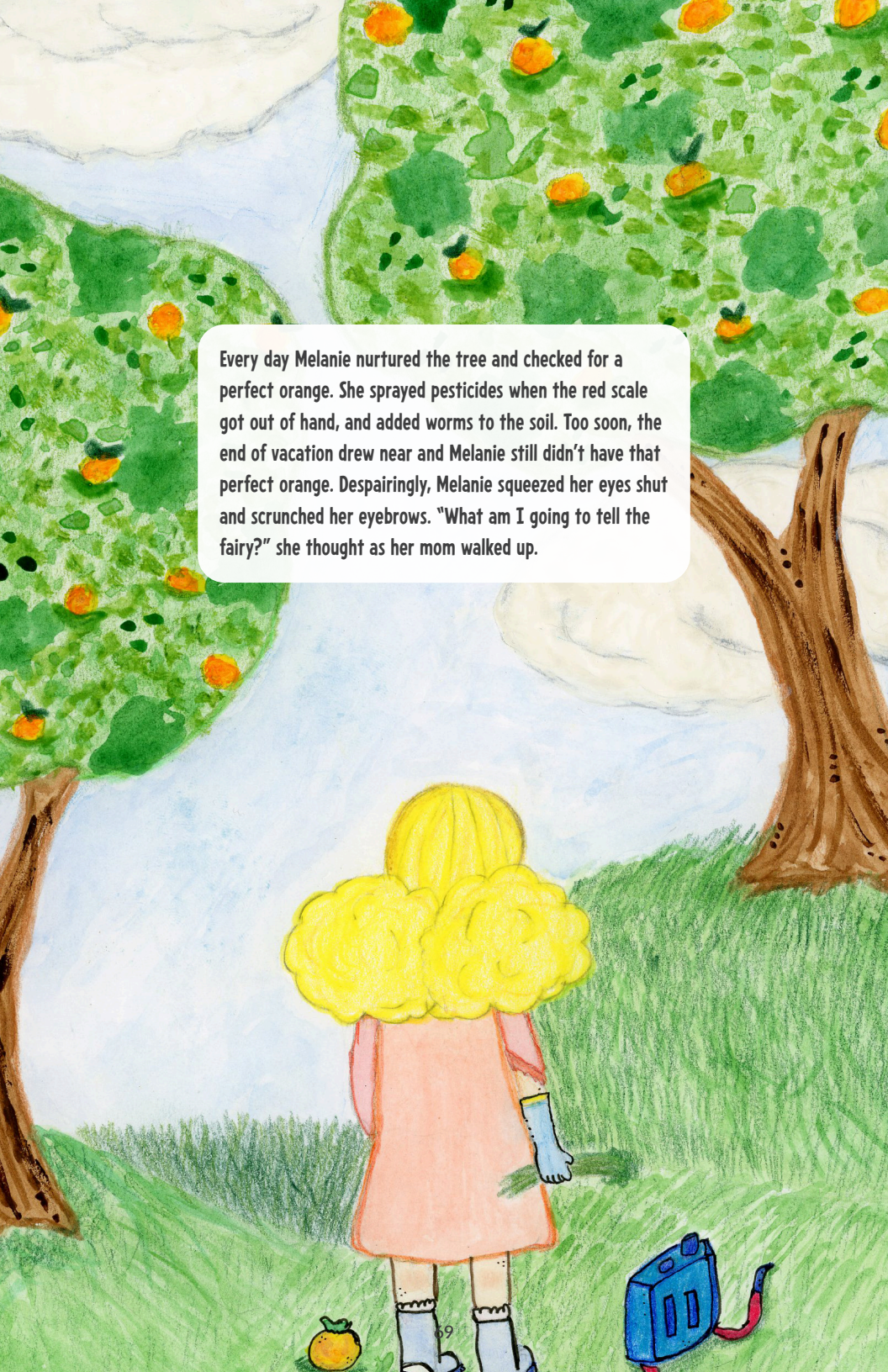


"Well, the fairy told me if I gave her one perfect orange, she'd grant me a wish," said Melanie.

"Ah," Her mom smiled and said, "Melanie, making oranges perfect requires hard work. To make oranges perfect and seedless, in a nursery, farmers will graft a seedless tree onto the rootstock of another orange tree. Then the young tree can be sold. Although we have one seedless tree in our grove, a lot of the oranges are deformed or too bumpy to be perfect. There are also weeds and pests to get rid of so the tree can thrive. Can you do all that Melanie?" her mom asked, drumming her fingers on the table.

"Hmm," Melanie ran a hand through her hair, then said, "Yes, I can do it!"





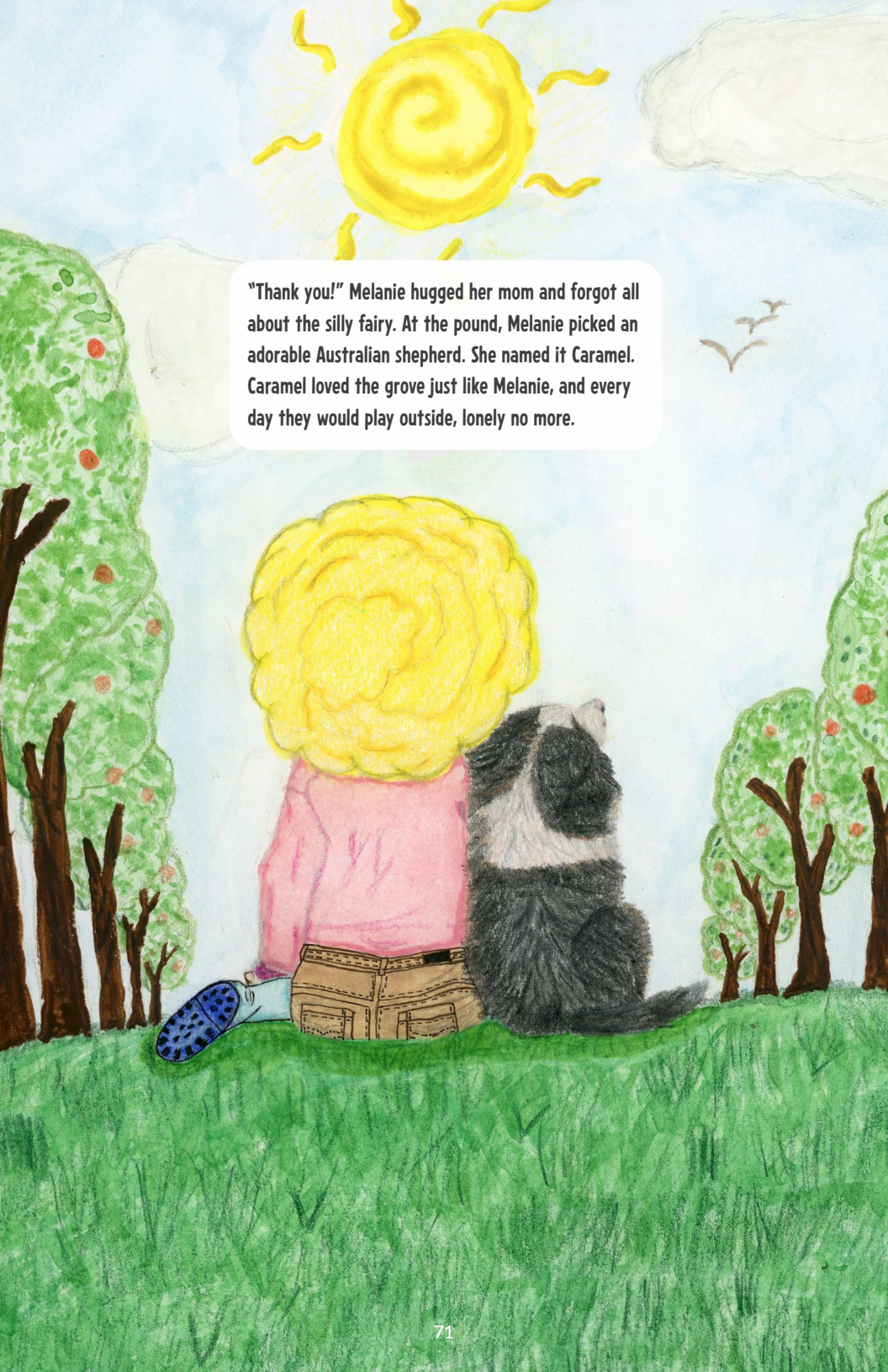
Every day Melanie nurtured the tree and checked for a perfect orange. She sprayed pesticides when the red scale got out of hand, and added worms to the soil. Too soon, the end of vacation drew near and Melanie still didn't have that perfect orange. Despairingly, Melanie squeezed her eyes shut and scrunched her eyebrows. "What am I going to tell the fairy?" she thought as her mom walked up.

An illustration of two girls in a garden. The girl on the right has long, wavy red hair, freckles, and is wearing a brown top with a yellow necklace and a blue skirt. The girl on the left has long, wavy yellow hair and is wearing a pink top. She has her hands covering her face, suggesting she is crying. In the background, there is a green tree with yellow fruit and a blue sky with white clouds.

"Hey, Melanie. How's it going?" her mom asked, brushing a caterpillar off a leaf.

"I can't do it!" Melanie cried. "It's impossible."

"I'm sorry Melanie, but it's hard to make things perfect," her mom said. "However, all your hard work has made me realize how responsible you've become. I called your dad and we've agreed that you're ready for a puppy."



"Thank you!" Melanie hugged her mom and forgot all about the silly fairy. At the pound, Melanie picked an adorable Australian shepherd. She named it Caramel. Caramel loved the grove just like Melanie, and every day they would play outside, lonely no more.