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| gem | soulless | quivering | jungle | bedraggled |
| glittering | exhilarating | rainbow | box | infused |
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Each Ten Word Tale is written using 10 words suggested by children.

The Panama Frog is inspired by 10 words chosen by pupils at The Roche School, London.

Can you spot these words - gem, jungle, soulless, quivering, exhilarating, glittering, rainbow, box, bedraggled, infused?

**The Panama Frog** by **Julie Sharp**

1

When Priya walked home from school on the last day of term she was very fed up indeed. Her dog, Jack, greeted her when she arrived home but Priya only patted his shaggy head absent-mindedly. Her mum called up from her studio in the basement. “Priya, is that you?” Priya ignored her and stomped up the four flights of stairs to her attic bedroom, her bad mood getting worse as she stomped. This was going to be the worst summer holiday ever.

Oceans of time stretched ahead, without any oceans. While her school friends spoke of trips to Florence or Florida, while her friend Hamish went to see his granny in Scotland and her friend Sasha prepared to set off to Devon tomorrow, she, Priya, would be stuck in the soulless summer of a deserted Wandsworth with no friends.

She quite understood why.

It was the roof.

Priya lived close to her school, The Roche, in a short row of beautiful old houses. The other houses in the row were tall and wide. Priya’s house was tall and very thin. The roof in question was Priya’s roof: Priya slept at the top of the house with a window facing the river and a skylight through which she and Jack loved to gaze at the stars or moon or at windy clouds on deep blue or at just the plain airy brightness of the sky. This roof was going to collapse if it was not repaired

Currently the roof and windows were covered in dark sheeting. Monday to Thursday mornings, Priya was not allowed in her room because of the roof men, working away. Priya’s mum, Amira, had to work because they needed to pay for the roof, and because they needed to pay for the roof there was no money for a holiday.

It was no one’s fault; still, Priya felt cross. Jack arrived at her door, wagging his tail and panting; followed by Amira, also panting, with bran muffins and two mugs of hot chocolate balanced precariously.

“Of course you’re cross,” said Amira, listening to Priya’s complaints. “I’m fed up too. I don’t like having to work on three projects at once; it muddles my head.” Amira, a party designer, was currently working on a jungle-themed party in Peckham, a pirate-themed party in Putney and a rainbow-themed wedding in Wimbledon. “But you never know. Something might happen.”

Something was to happen that very night.

2

That night, Priya lay awake for a while, listening to the sound of the wind rattling in the plastic sheeting and fell asleep to dreams of being attacked by carrier bags.

Suddenly into her dream came the sound of crashing and tearing. Priya was awake in a second, switching on her bedside light, and reaching for Jack, who was barking so hard every part of him was quivering. Hanging through the plastic sheeting where the roof had been, was a human leg!

In a second Priya’s mum was in the room, phone in hand, shouting loudly, “I’m calling the police!” so the owner of the leg could hear, and dialling 999. In another second, the leg had disappeared. Amira and Priya hurried downstairs, jamming the attic door shut behind them for safety.

A few moments later, three police officers arrived. While Priya answered questions about the leg, Amira served hot drinks and cake, feeling, as she said afterwards, as if she was running a police café. A message buzzed through to the officers about a robbery round the corner.

“Got to go. It might be connected to whoever was running over your roof,” said the sergeant. “We’ll be in touch tomorrow.”

Priya and her mum watched the policemen run off round the corner of Armoury Way and into Frogmore.

Being awoken by a dangling leg and having police in the house was oddly exhilarating. Priya was in no mood for sleep. Her mum would not let her stay upstairs in case a whole intruder fell through the now-torn ceiling. They brought down anything extra precious, like Priya’s jewellery box and some favourite books, and Priya and Amira lay on a sofa each, snuggling down to talk about it all.

Priya was worried about the robbery being in Frogmore. It was a little road with lots of large buildings as well as houses and flats. Her school was there; she loved it dearly and could not bear the thought of it being burgled. Her mum suggested perhaps it was the warehouse, Panama Antiques, heavily guarded by high walls, topped by silver spikes that looked sharp as scissors.

“Speaking of antiques, don’t forget you’re shopping for George in the morning.”

Priya nodded, tired now. As the sun came up and fingered its way through the blinds, they stopped talking and fell asleep.

3

The next morning Priya rang Sasha, already on the way to Devon, telling her about the leg, the police and the robbery until Sasha’s train went into a long tunnel and the signal completely disappeared. The police arrived and began clambering over her bedroom and on to the roof to examine the hole in daylight and search for clues.

Downstairs the sergeant, Sam, was telling her mum that she had been right last night. Panama Antiques had been robbed.

“What’s been stolen?” asked Amira.

“Pre-columbian treasures apparently,” said Sam, “but no details yet.”

“What does Panama Antiques *do*?” asked Priya.

“They specialise in finding valuable objects from Panama owned by dealers, collectors and even museums, in Europe and elsewhere,” said the sergeant. “Then they buy them and send them home to Panama.”

Priya’s mum was impressed. She and Priya had seen an exhibition called *Art and Ownership* and now they were both very keen on countries being able keep their own treasures.

Priya passed the Panama Antiques warehouse every day. It had always looked alarming, with its sharp spikes, but if it was gathering Panamanian objects to send back to their rightful home then the spikes were doing a good job. She made a mental note to check an atlas or look up on Google where Panama actually was.

She set off to do George’s shopping, hoping she could carry everything on the way home. George was an elderly neighbour. Her mum called him a hidden gem because he was so kind (and an antique because he was so old); he had eccentric shopping requests. He did not buy a bit of everything, like Priya’s mum. George would have a project that needed quantities. He might ask for thirty onions because he was making pickle. Today it was oranges. Forty oranges for marmalade.

Priya had taken her rucksack and Jack. It began raining when she was almost home, managing well because Jack was behaving. As the path diverted down to the muddy bank of a small stream that fed into the Wandle, three things happened at once. Jack caught sight of a dog he did not know and started pulling and barking, Priya stumbled on the rain-wet pavements and the rucksack fell off her back, oranges flying in all directions.

After this slow-motion moment of madness, Priya acted quickly. She took Jack home and went back to gather the oranges. She could wash them and explain to George. There were three out of reach through the railings. She put her hand through and retrieved them but caught sight of something else. Something was glittering, even in the rain, very brightly. She stretched her very furthest. Her fingertips grasped it.

It was cold and heavy in her hand, a golden frog.

4

Priya raced home, oranges retrieved but forgotten and, arriving breathless and bedraggled in the kitchen, showed the gold frog to her mum.

“I wonder,” said her mum and rang the police.

“I wonder,” said Sam, or as Priya thought of him now, *their* policeman.

Priya had not touched the frog once she had got it home. She had put it on the kitchen table where she and her mum had stared at it, waiting for Sam to arrive. Sam did something Priya had seen in crime dramas: taking out his special gloves, he put them on and picked up the frog by a careful foot, dropping it into the evidence bag he produced from his pocket like conjuror.

Priya and her mother sighed as if they had been holding their breath. Sam asked Priya to show him where she had found it and soon teams of police arrived and began searching.

“Would you like to come with me to Panama Antiques?” Sam asked.

Priya’s mum gave her permission, so amazingly, less than twenty-four hours after walking grumpily home feeling bored, Priya was walking down the familiar road and through the spike-topped gates of Panama Antiques, with a policeman and a golden frog.

A very small lady, speaking what sounded like Spanish, quite madly and quickly, came rushing towards them. Sam explained that Priya had found something that might be one of the lost pieces. It had to stay in the evidence bag but could the lady examine it?

The lady took the clear bag in her long fingers, squealing with delight. In another torrent of Spanish the word *rana* came so frequently that Priya felt sure it must mean *frog*.

The lady then said, in English, that it *was* their frog, solid gold, nearly a thousand years old. She started crying and kissing Priya on both cheeks, saying *Thank you* and *Gracias*. Priya was relieved when Sam took her back home.

5

Back home Amira made mint tea and, while the green leaves infused and the minty smell filled the kitchen, Priya told her about the crazy Panama Antiques lady and the golden frog being a thousand years old.

For the next few days, Sam kept visiting with news. Priya was expecting she might have to identify a suspect from his leg but this did not happen. The police were however interested in the design Priya had seen on the sole of the shoe and the fish pattern on the sock. George came round with three pots of marmalade, which was delicious. Amira went back to working in the basement on her party projects. Priya talked to Hamish and Sasha who were very jealous of her adventures. She took Jack for long walks in Wandsworth Park and spent time researching Panama in the library and online, just for fun. Everything settled down into the quiet summer holiday Priya had once feared. Now it felt comfortably *safe*: nothing exciting but nothing frightening.

A news report came out with the headline, Gold Frog Lost and Found in Frogmore. Priya’s mum had asked that their names should not be used. Reading it, Priya felt as if the adventure had happened at a distance, to someone else.

One day, Priya had been at George’s with Jack, pickling spices, when she arrived home to find her mum looking shocked, holding a letter. Sam was there, grinning, so she knew not to worry. “I’ve brought news and a letter,” he said. “We’ve caught the man who came through the ceiling. We arrested him yesterday and the nasty scrapes on his leg and the mark you described on the sole of his shoe confirmed it. And he confessed.”

This did not seem a reason for her mum to be shocked.

“What’s in the letter?”

Amira passed the letter to Priya.

As she read it, Priya sat down too. She was so surprised she felt very shaky. Panama Antiques had written to thank her again and offered a trip to her and her mother to show how grateful they were: an all-expenses paid trip to Panama at the end of the holiday. Sam was offering to look after Jack.

“You *said* something might happen” Priya said to her mum, “And it did.”

“I don’t even know anything about Panama,” said her mum, “Apart from the canal … and maybe the hats … and I think they have sloths.”

“You can look for sloths,” said Priya, though she loved sloths too, “but I will be keeping an eye out for frogs.”

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