

Title: Curse of the Putrid Pit

Author: Helen Olsen

Treatment By: Eric Stolze

Mission Statement:

The story-within-a-story is a structure that brings a lot of endearment and clever layers to the table. It's a particularly potent approach for stories intended for all audiences and the entire family. It can ground a fantastical story in a real-world setting that can make the events relatable and convey a morality and a message with enough clarity to ensure it reaches the youngest (and therefore most important) recipients of all.

The tradition of this framework is continued with charm and great sincerity in "Curse of the Putrid Pit," and will be the framework for this adaptation as well. As per Ms. Olsen's wishes, the parallel story of Junior and his fellow scouts will be diminished considerably until it effectively bookends with occasional interjections around the larger story of Fannie Fibber and the Putrid Pit. With "Princess Bride" as a reference point, Junior and his friends will occasionally comment on the action to comedic effect and show the power of the central message as Junior takes it to heart. Regrettably, much of the subplot regarding the pranks from the girls' camp will need to be omitted for sheer narrative simplicity and focus on the Fannie story, though assuredly not at the detriment to readers' investment in Junior.

Ms. Olsen has crafted a fantastical world full of rich details and wide world-building, and the trick here will be to maintain as much of that scale as possible while streamlining, simplifying, and occasionally omitting for the interest of the screenplay's three-act structure. Specifics of Fannie's school life, certain beats in her return to Curious Corners, and additional beats in Dorius Pickle's subplot will be excised for such streamlining.

Above all, this is an effective fable about the importance of narratives and the importance of honesty all at once, and every scene of this treatment will be devoted to keeping that thematic balance and delivering the message with an even and engaging hand.

Logline:

A fantastical story about a young girl who learns the perils of dishonesty and the virtue of truth amidst a daring rescue attempt, all told within a campfire tale to a Boy Scout in need of some self-esteem.

Treatment:

SPLASH! JUNIOR (11), a young man in a Scout uniform, touches down into a mud puddle at the bottom of a shallow ravine along with a length of rope and his glasses, floating a few inches away. His fellow scouts, TANK, BRICK, and BABY FACE (all 11) laugh and mock him from the edge of the drop. Brick, the most antagonistic of the three, jeers as he points at a tree branch Junior just fell from and accuses him of lying about being able to climb. WILD BILL (50s), the Scoutleader, approaches the edge and instructs the trio to step down into the ravine and help Junior to his feet. Brick waves the muddy glasses in front of Junior, teasing him about his glasses. Bill scolds the bully. They use the rope to climb out of the ravine and they march onward into thick woods. Junior's muddy boots SQUISH, causing the kids to SNICKER.

The kids continue to rib Junior for his habitual lying while Junior tries to defend himself in vain. Bill listens to all of this as he stops and tells the Scouts to set up camp. Once the clearing is set up and the kids sit down, Bill asks the kids if they hear whispers. They roll their eyes. Junior wipes dirt off his glasses as Bill begins to spin a yarn about a young girl with a lying problem. Junior stops wiping and glances up, well aware of whom this story is intended for. With a master storytelling tone, Bill's voice rises to the treetops as he describes a fantastical place in the woods called Curious Corners.

CURIOUS CORNERS, seen from above in all its vivid and bustling energy. A crowded, lively town surrounded by woods, it has the appearance of a successful modern town but without any technological advancements, opting instead for walking and bicycles for its many RESIDENTS. The green gardens, vivacious Main Street, and network of dirt roads rush by as if from the perspective of a flying bird. But this is no bird we're flying alongside... it's FANNIE (11), a human girl who smiles ecstatically as she flies above her town with arms extended. Her name reaches her faintly: "Fannie... Fannie..."

Her eyes open. Fannie lies in bed in her messy bedroom. Her mother's voice is calling her name, warning her she'll be late for school. Fannie hustles through her morning routine, runs downstairs and hastily eats breakfast prepared by MOTHER (40s). With her mouth full, she excitedly tells Mother about her flying dream. Mother encourages her imagination and asks her daughter if she's been practicing for tomorrow's big concert. Fannie insists she did, though her voice and body language suggests the opposite. She promises her mother she's not lying as she grabs her backpack and runs out the door.

She catches up to her friend PEGGY (11), a shy but smiley classmate. She tells Peggy about her dream of flying but frames it as a fact, insisting she can actually fly. Peggy looks amazed as Fannie describes her flight over town as an actual event. DORIUS (11), Fannie's bully, emerges from the woods and tosses a mudball at Fannie, narrowly missing her. Fannie stands up to him stubbornly as Dorius accuses her of lying. Peggy

insists that Fannie would never lie to her; they're best friends, after all. Fannie nods, trying to hide her guilt. They walk past Dorius as he calls them names, trying to form another mudball but accidentally spilling mud all over his own shirt.

At the edge of town, Fannie and Peggy climb up a rope ladder, revealing their school – a massive structure amidst the treetops, resembling a sophisticated tree house. Other STUDENTS bustle through the halls as the BELL rings.

In MUSIC CLASS, MR. WOODWIND (40s) addresses his MUSIC STUDENTS (including Dorius) about the upcoming concert when Fannie enters late. Woodwind demands to know why she is late and she makes up an elaborate lie on the spot about getting lost in the woods, being attacked by goblins, and getting stuck in mud and having to fight to get out. Woodwind calls her out on her lie and tells her to take her seat and never to show up tardy again. Fannie sits down and pulls out her flute, tuning it along with the rest of the band. Dorius lowers his drumsticks and pulls a bottle of super glue out of his pack. He sneaks up behind her and, while she's distracted, pours the glue directly into her flute. As Fannie tries to blow into her flute, she accidentally sends a stream of glue across the room, spraying it onto the rest of the band and Mr. Woodwind. The entire band is thrown into chaos as people's hands and lips get stuck to their instruments. The more Mr. Woodwind fights to get the sticky sheet music off his hands and arms the more they stick. Fannie tries to defend herself, saying she didn't mean to and it was Dorius' fault. Mr. Woodwind doesn't believe her and sends her to the Principal's office.

In Principal Hook's office, Fannie looks out the window, distracted at a flock of colorful birds called "giggle birds." PRINCIPAL HOOK (50s) draws the blinds, angry at her for being so distracted. "Everyone in school calls you 'Fannie Fibber.' Did you know that?" Fannie's eyes lower to the floor in shame. Hook passes a note to Fannie and explains she has a choice. A colleague of his from university sent him a note. She can either volunteer for this as community service or serve detention the rest of the year. In shock, Fannie agrees to whatever the note says before she even reads it. Hook says she'll have to go that night as he hands her a folded map labeled "SECRET." On her way out, Fannie reads the note: "Need a subject to test my newest invention. Must be a liar. – Dr. Doohickey." "Doctor Doohickey?!" Fannie asks out loud as Hook slams the door behind her.

"...Doctor Doohickey?" asks Junior, back at the Scout campsite. The sun is setting and the scouts sit around a campfire, cooking hot dogs on the end of sharp sticks and awaiting the next line of the story with wide eyes. Wild Bill confirms: Doctor Doohickey, a not-so-mad scientist and inventor extraordinaire with a secret laboratory that no one in Curious Corners had ever seen. Some said he created monsters in that lab. Bill continues.

Back in her home, Fannie hides her secret map in her pack as Mother runs up to her excitedly with a letter from her father. Fannie temporarily forgets her troubles as she opens the thick envelope and reads the letter inside. Father's V.O. accompanies the letter as Fannie reads it: Father is still working valiantly alongside the other soldiers in a war

against “Sand Serpents.” For his bravery, he was rewarded the Medal of Valor. “Keep it safe for me till I get home, kiddo,” the V.O. concludes as Fannie reaches inside and pulls out... a heavy gold medallion with a thick cloth necklace. This is Father’s Medal of Valor. Mother wells up with pride. Fannie doubts she can look after it properly and wants to send it back. Her mother, disappointed, sends Fannie to her room.

In her bedroom, she hides the Medal at the bottom of a desk drawer and packs her bag for the trip. She opens the map and observes it with trembling hands. The map suggests terrifying trails leading through the woods. Words like “DANGER” are scattered across the map. She folds it and stuffs it into her pack as she climbs out the window, down to the ground, and runs into the woods.

The sun sets as Fannie looks back and forth from the overgrown woodland paths around her and the map in her hands, desperate not to get lost. She hears a RUSTLING from the woods behind her. Lunging out from the underbrush comes Dorius, furious at Fannie for trying to tell on him at school. Dorius pushes Fannie down a steep bank of mud and brush and she lets out a frightened SCREAM as she tumbles down the mudbank. Dorius stands at the top, searching for her and asking if she’s okay. With no response from Fannie, Dorius turns and runs out of the woods, back towards Curious Corners.

At the bottom of the embankment, Fannie dusts herself off with a sigh and looks around nervously. The waning light from the sunset reveals thick brambles and perilous, swampy puddles everywhere. She checks her map. It’s stained nearly to the point of illegibility. She walks hesitantly onward and forward.

By moonlight, Fannie reaches the edge of a bubbling, gurgling lake at the bottom of a small drop. She can hear faint WHISPERS coming from the pit. She leans in, trying to get a look to find the source of the whispering, when a hand GRABS her and pulls her back. The hand spins Fannie around to face RAGWORT (30s), an elfish man covered in dirt and wearing a scowl. Ragwort tells her she almost fell into something called the “Putrid Pit.” Soon more MUDSLINGERS – fellow elfish rogues similar to Ragwort, appear from the shadows. Fannie begs to be let go and the Mudslingers balk at the prospect. She notices that each of them carry rudimentary musical instruments made from wood and found objects from around the forest, resembling guitars and reed instruments. Fannie pulls her flute from her pack and offers to exchange a song for her freedom. The Mudslingers agree and they begin to play along with their own instruments as Fannie plays a tune on her flute. Ragwort takes her to a dirt road and makes her promise to write a song about the Mudslingers in exchange for being released. Fannie enthusiastically agrees and, as she turns around to bid farewell, Mudslinger disappears into the night.

Fannie walks unsteadily along the dark trail until a large giggle bird perches on a low branch and begins talking to her. “Looks like you need a tour guide!” the bird says to a shocked Fannie. He introduces himself as GIGGLE HAWK and explains that a scientist invented a voicebox for him. “Doctor Doohickey?” Fannie ventures. Giggle Hawk nods

gladly and volunteers to lead Fannie to his laboratory when she shows the note from Principal Hook. Fannie runs down the path to follow the brightly colored bird, trying her best to keep up.

At Doohickey's laboratory, a large and Gothic castle surrounded by towering dead trees, Giggle Hawk perches by the door and encourages Fannie to go inside. She pushes the door open and enters the cobwebby main parlor within. Inside, rows upon rows of bookshelves hold more books than a person could read in a lifetime. A fluffy white cat wearing spectacles follows Fannie undetected, leaping from shelf to shelf nimbly until he introduces himself as TRUE BLUE, surprising Fannie even further. Fannie pulls a large book from the shelf and sets it on the floor, where True Blue nudges its cover open with his nose. Fannie stutters a bit as she attempts to explain herself to a cat. True Blue licks his paw to turn the page, bookmarks it, and tells Fannie to follow him as he scampers up a spiral stone stairway.

Fannie and True Blue open a door marked "DANGER!" and their hair stands on end from bolts of electricity zapping across the room within. DOCTOR DOOHICKEY (40s), his own hair on end, turns and greets Fannie warmly. They introduce themselves and Fannie tells him Principal Hook sent her. Excitedly, Doohickey leads her to a seat and enthusiastically chatters about his new invention to correct lying. "I just need to make sure my invention can distinguish between fiction and lie. A story can be the greatest thing in the world, but a lie is a truly dangerous and potentially disastrous thing." He pulls from a metal box... a NECKLACE with a beautiful green pendant in the center. He carefully places it around Fannie's neck and she admires it deeply.

With bolts of electricity sizzling and streaking through the room, Doohickey pulls a strange metallic mirror around in front of Fannie and lets the electricity strike and run through the mirror. Before Fannie's eyes, the mirror becomes like a magic window playing images across the mirror. "A story can be a powerful thing..." Doohickey says, as images of Fannie's FATHER riding horseback through the desert play on the screen. "Dad!" Fannie cries out with joy, as the images segues to Fannie reading his letter with a smile. "But a lie," continues Doohickey gravely, "has the worst kind of power." On the mirror, a startling image: TEACHERS and STUDENTS gather at the bottom of the tree the school rests in, where PEGGY sits up and nurses an injured arm with tears in her eyes. When they ask her what happens, she admits that she thought she could fly, like "her best friend." Fannie weeps at the sight of her injured friend. Dorius runs into the frame, telling the Teachers and Students that "Fannie Fibber said she was running away." Everyone reacts with concern... until Peggy says bitterly, "She's probably fine. I'm sure it was just another lie." The images fade away on the mirror. Fannie stands up and gets defensive, declaring that no one in town would ever accuse her of lying. The necklace around her neck shrinks and shrinks, becoming so tight around her neck that she chokes and can't breathe. The green pendant turns black. "Quick! Tell the truth! Anything!" cries Doohickey, and all Fannie can manage as her face turns blue is, "... I'm sorry..." and the necklace returns to normal. Fannie catches her breath.

Doohickey and True Blue make a comfortable bed for Fannie so she can rest and regain her strength. Doohickey sits by her bed. Fannie asks Doohickey about the “Putrid Pit,” causing the doctor to SIGH and shake his head sadly. He tells her that what she saw in the pit wasn’t mud, but in fact transformed people trapped as prisoners in the pit. Much to Fannie’s horror, Doohickey describes a kingdom of goblins underground who thrived in darkness, feared light, and one day stole a geode that reflected and trapped so much light it was said to be like a second sun. Everyone who tried to rescue it was captured, attacked with melting dust, and tossed into the Putrid Pit to form a barrier between their kingdom and the outside world. Doohickey explains that the prisoners in the Putrid Pit can only be saved by a heart with pure honesty; hence, his motivation for inventing the necklace.

Back in the Scout clearing, with the flickering campfire the only source of light, there’s a snap of twigs in the dark woods around them that interrupts Bill’s story. The Scouts draw straws to see who’s going to get the short straw and investigate the noise. Brick reaches out and snaps Junior’s straw in two. Now it’s the shortest. Junior wanders into the woods with a lantern, deeper and deeper, until he hears more rustling and turns to see a COUGAR staring straight at him with glinting eyes. After a tense, still beat, the cougar runs away and Junior runs back to the campsite. No one believes he actually saw a cougar, not even Wild Bill. As he sits and reflects on his dishonesty, Bill begins the story again.

The following morning, Fannie wakes up with the necklace still around her neck. Doohickey gives her a large meal and tells her that, as part of the ongoing experiment, she must wear that necklace for an entire day back in town in everyday life. True Blue is following to supervise the results. Fannie agrees, packs her pack, and thanks Doohickey, readying for a long trip. Doohickey winks at True Blue and pulls a lever; blue light fills the bedroom – ZAP!— and Doohickey and True Blue are transported instantly.

ZAP! In a burst of blue light, Fannie and True Blue are back in Curious Corners, standing right in Fannie’s front yard. They recover their bearings and go up the stairs and inside, where Fannie’s mother looks ready to either cry or scream at the sight of her. She’s been looking for her all morning and demands to know where she’s been. Fannie starts to tell a white lie about being there the whole time and the necklace grows heavier and heavier, dragging Fannie down to the ground. Mother tells Fannie to get going or she’ll be late for the concert. Fannie had completely forgotten and tells her mother honest expressions of apology and love for her until the necklace’s green color returns and the heft goes back to normal. She and True Blue run out the door.

As they run through town, Dorius and his POSSE of bullies step in front of Fannie and True Blue and taunt her. They make a move to take True Blue and the cat tells them off. The bullies are stunned. Dorius asks where the cat came from and when Fannie says he has no idea, her necklace takes on a life of its own, FLASHING bright colorful lights that blind the bullies and Fannie alike. Chaos ensues as Fannie tries to run blind and True

Blue pounces on the bullies, scratching their clothes while berating them with insults. As the bullies run they try to catch up to Fannie in a foot race, but they fall one-by-one as they trip or run into walls. Fannie rubs her eyes, regaining her sight as True Blue jumps onto her shoulder and they keep running through town, RESIDENTS shooting stunned looks at them.

The concert at Town Hall, an enormous white building with a reflecting pool behind it where hundreds of RESIDENTS sit not in chairs, but on floating rafts, tubes and water wings in the pool itself. Bleachers are set up for the Band, where Mr. Woodwind checks his watch, looking around for his missing members. Fannie runs up and delivers her crazy story for being late... and nothing happens to the necklace. Her wild story is entirely true. She takes her place in the bleachers as Dorius runs up and tells Woodwind he was attacked by a talking cat. Also true, but Woodwind's patience is at an end and he bellows at him and sends him back to the percussion section. As the concert begins, a FLOUTIST whispers accusations at Fannie, telling her that she hurt poor Peggy with her lying. Fannie can't take the guilt or the accusations, shouting that she's never lied. BOOM—a shock wave emanates from the necklace that turns the entire reflecting pool into a wave pool that rocks every member of the audience. The shock wave shakes the bleachers so tremendously that they ultimately collapse forward, sending the entire band into the pool, including True Blue. Fannie sinks under a fallen bleacher, sees True Blue sinking as well, and kicks herself free to scoop up True Blue and swim to the surface. She puts True Blue on the pavement and tries to pump water out of the poor cat. Finally, True Blue COUGHS up some water. He looks up at Fannie. He's alive... but can no longer speak. Fannie weeps, overcome with guilt. She promises she'll never lie again. True Blue nods, understanding perfectly, and taps Fannie's necklace with his paw. Fannie looks down at the necklace. She nods too. She understands.

Fannie and True Blue run back home and up to Fannie's bedroom without stopping to talk to Mother. She pulls Father's Medal of Valor out of the drawer, gives it a quick shine, and sees herself in the golden reflection. "No more Fannie Fibber," she says to herself assuredly.

Back in the Scout camp, the RUSTLING returns, once again interrupting the story. This time, however, the cougar enters the campsite from the woods and GROWLS at the Scouts, sending them scattering away from the campsite as Bill climbs a tree and instructs the others to join him among the high branches. Junior, however, has an idea. He slowly puts his glasses on... removes an archery bow from his backpack, and with utmost confidence he sends a hot dog flying far into the woods as the cougar goes running after it. The other Scouts climb down. Bill commends Junior for his hidden archery skills. He tells Brick pointedly that it's easy as long as he wears his glasses. Bill douses the campfire and they move to a new campsite to avoid the cougar returning. He pats Junior on the back as he continues the story.

Fannie and True Blue reenter the woods, but this time Fannie wears her father's medal around her neck along with the necklace. She slides bravely down the mud bank she was initially pushed down. The pendant on the necklace SHINES a radiant, steady glow to light the way.

At the bottom, she greets Ragwort and the other Mudslingers, ready for them all. She sings a song about Ragwort and plays a flute part to back it up. Impressed, Ragwort agrees to lead Fannie and True Blue through a secret back entrance into the goblins' lair.

As they enter the tunnel, the necklace's light slowly fades into darkness. The secret entrance to the goblins' lair is riddled with cobwebs, flickering torches, and scattering bats that swoop down towards Fannie and True Blue. The cat HISSES and swats at the bats as the necklace's light leads the way. They turn a corner to find a hideous sleeping GOBLIN GUARD sitting on a stump, snoring loudly. They try to sneak past him but a SHRIEK from a passing bat wakes the guard. He hollers for back up as Fannie and True Blue run deeper into the series of underground tunnels, turning left and right, climbing hastily down rickety ladders and splashing through puddles until they turn the wrong corner and find an entire army of GOBLINS waiting for them, teeth bared and torches burning.

Fannie and True Blue are marched into the lair of SWARTHOG, the disgusting Goblin King, who LAUGHS merrily at the sight of his new prisoners and leans in to sniff them. The other Goblins insist upon roasting them for dinner, but Fannie doesn't back down. She says she won't leave without the Light. Swarthog laughs at this and suggests to the other Goblins that they cook the cat first. Fannie begins crafting a story in honor of Swarthog's legendary rule and incredible abilities. The Goblins all gather round to listen to this story, especially Swarthog, as Fannie's story grows more and more sensational before culminating in, "... and I've never seen anything uglier." The truth of that statement sends BEAMS OF LIGHT radiating from the pendant, blinding all the Goblins. Fannie and the cat sprint out of the king's lair and into rooms glittering with golden light.

Inside the King's Vaults, there are gold pieces, jewels, priceless items and, in the center of it all, a beautiful geode radiating warm light. Fannie grabs the geode and they run away from countless fortunes' worth of treasure. True Blue sniffs the air to determine the way out of the tunnels while the Goblins give chase all the while.

Swooping through the tunnels, sending bats scattering in all directions, comes a large flying creature. But it's not a huge bat; it's Giggle Hawk, soaring into the tunnels to help Fannie and True Blue escape. He flies through the dark tunnels and our heroes follow right up to a wall seemingly made of slime. Fannie hears the same creepy WHISPERS from before; this is the Putrid Pit. The Geode begins to glow. Fannie holds her father's Medal before the light emanating from the necklace, magnifying straight into the Geode and sending a beautiful burst of light straight into the slime of the Pit. A surprising

reaction occurs as the slime congeals and transforms in response to the light. Soon dozens of PEOPLE are lying in the Pit, now a gaping, dry hole.

The Goblins approach quickly. The now-freed People climb out of the Pit as quick as they can. True Blue bounds easily up the dirt walls. Fannie can't climb fast enough. The Goblins advance fast, gnashing their teeth and claws, when – WHOOSH—Giggle Hawk grips Fannie by the shoulders and takes off, flapping his way out of the Pit and into the sky, missing the Goblin attack by less than a second.

Fannie can't help but let out a triumphant WHOOP as she flies high above the forest with Giggle Hawk as her pilot. They soar together until they're free of the forest and back in Curious Corners. Fannie asks Giggle Hawk to take her to the hospital.

Fannie visits Peggy in the hospital. Peggy's arm is mending quickly. Fannie apologizes and the two friends forgive each other naturally and easily.

When Fannie returns home, she finds a surprise visitor waiting for her: FATHER, home on leave. Fannie, mother and daughter embrace happily. Fannie shows him the Medal of Valor. "Kept it safe for you," she grins.

At the end of her long day, Fannie lies in her bed and looks over at the window to see True Blue, who says "Hello" in his same old voice. The Doctor fixed his voice box and sent him back for the necklace and the Geode, the experiment successfully carried out. Fannie straps the Geode to the cat's back with the necklace. She makes True Blue promise to come back: Fannie intends to write a book about her adventures... and call it "The True Story." The cat purrs as he leaps off the window and runs off into the woods.

Back to the Scouts. At the top of a hill, under the stars in the clear sky, Bill makes a new camp with the scouts. They all admit to loving the story and enthusiastically chatter about their favorite parts. Wild Bill announces bedtime as the Scouts lie down. Before he falls asleep, Junior thanks Bill for the story. "But... what happens to Fannie's father? What's the war with the Sand Serpents like?" "That's a story for another time, my young friend," Bill winks, "but it's an even better one."

FADE TO BLACK:
THE END.