

The Queen's Loss (Part II)

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,799

Connections

Writing

During the climax, how could events have happened differently? Rewrite the climax and provide an alternate ending for the story.

Art

Create a collage that portrays your interpretation of one character from the story. Present your work to the rest of the class.

Reading A-Z

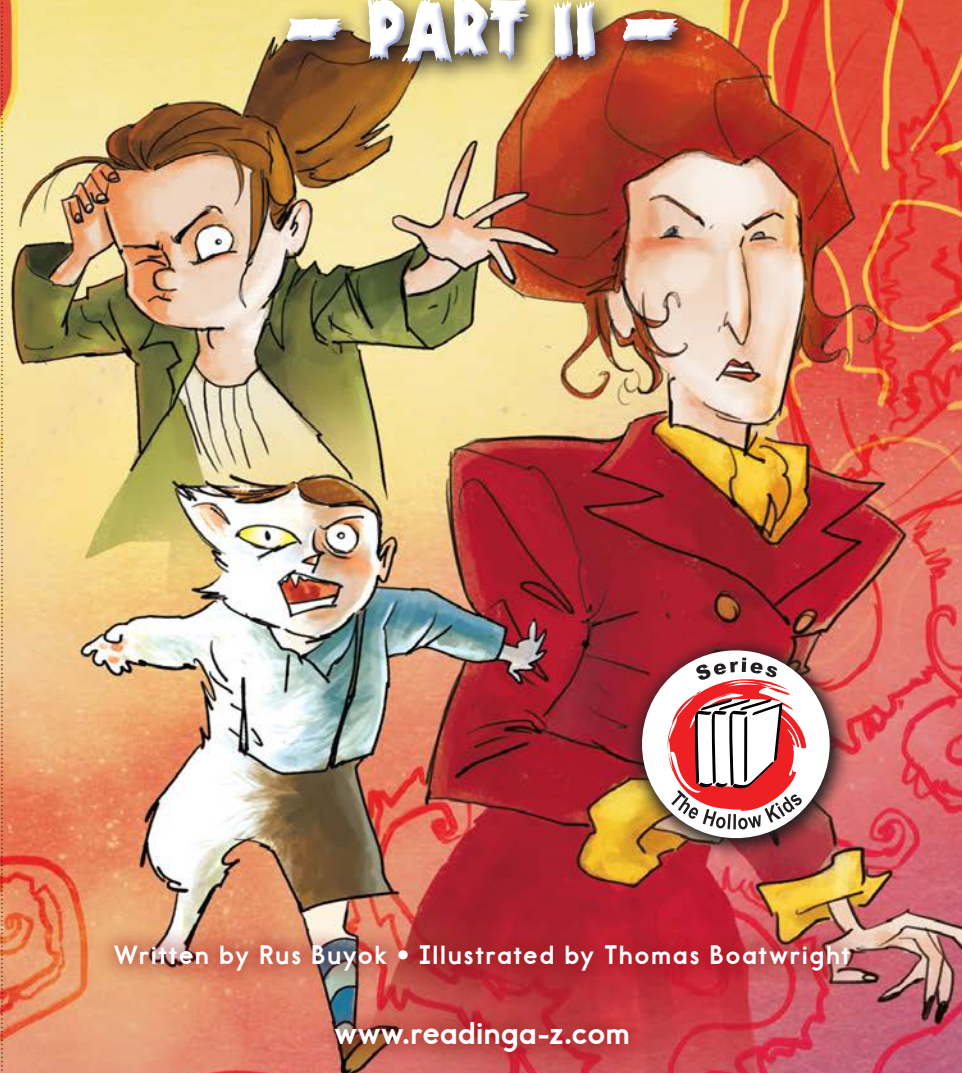
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LEVELED BOOK • Z

THE QUEEN'S LOSS

— PART II —



Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

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Focus Question

How and why has Qynn and Sarah's relationship with the Queen changed?

Words to Know

debris	plummet
deluge	prevalent
emanating	torturous
formidable	tsunami
gestures	vex
melancholy	wracked

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Correlation

LEVEL Z

Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50



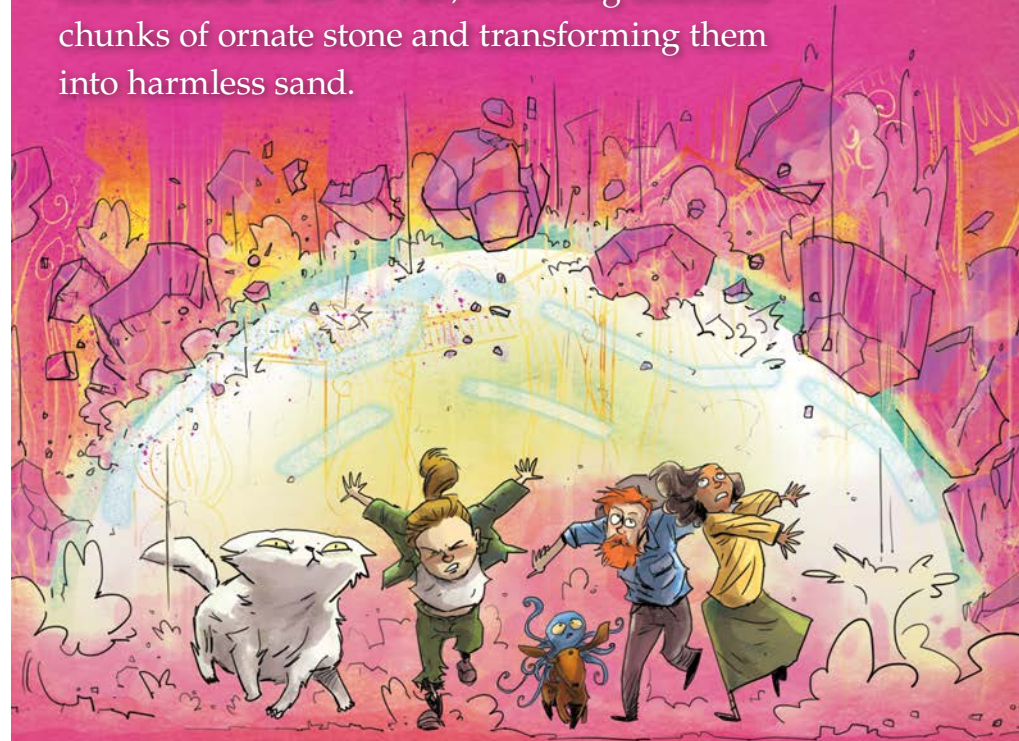
After I refuse her offer, the Queen commands us to be gone and begins to climb the dais with a dismissive wave of her hand. I sense the sands around me begin to shift and change as the floor rises toward us like a glittering **tsunami**, causing the mutated cephaloids to release everyone and flee.

I can't—won't—let this happen. We've come too far.

"No!" I scream and slam my foot onto the ground, sending the force of my will at the upsurge and splitting it in two with the sound of a great boulder shattering.

"Mother, stop this!" Thomas bellows and bounds through the fissure with the rest of us close behind.

The Queen pauses on the stairs. Her head drops slightly as she snaps her fingers, and the entire room reverberates as the ceiling begins to collapse. I concentrate on creating a protective shell around us as we run, deflecting immense chunks of ornate stone and transforming them into harmless sand.



"I commanded you to leave," the Queen's voice explodes around us as more **debris** hurls through the air and the ground becomes like thick porridge flowing in the opposite direction, slowing us down. Her attacks are unfocused, like the desperate flailing of an angry child, and I'm able to counter each one easily.

Soon we are ascending the stairs of the dais. The Queen's expression is pure fury as she glares at us, but I have seen enough tantrums from Jake to recognize the **melancholy** underneath.

"Why do you insist . . ." the Queen starts, but trails off. She looks at all of us, but I can tell she is avoiding looking at Thomas.

"Mother," Thomas says quietly. The word tears through her, and I can perceive a slight chink in her furious armor, which gives me an idea.

I concentrate on Thomas, imagining him as the boy who led us out of the Hollow so long ago, except I take away his ghostliness, making him look like a real boy. The white fur silently transforms to skin and clothes, and Thomas, the boy, stands before the Queen.



The Queen's lips constrict, and her eyes soften. Tears begin to gather and run down her cheeks, leaving streaks in the dust that has settled there.

"Oh, Thomas," she whispers. "I'm sorry. It was . . . It was never supposed to be like this."



We hear the sound of glass cracking and shattering around us as the stained-glass windows on either side of the dais break, and Jake and Sarah tumble out in a **deluge** of sand.

"What happened?" Sarah asks groggily before she sees her mom and sprints toward her. The two share a tearful embrace as Sarah cries, "It's really you. It's really you."



Jake squeals with glee and says, "That was fun! Let's do it again." Uncle Jasper and I gather him into the biggest hug. "Ugh, you're crushing me," Jake says.

The reunion is short-lived, though, as sounds of destruction continue to erupt around us. We can see the night sky through the crumbled roof and the incredible towers, which have begun to snap and **plummet**, disintegrating into glittering, glowing grains of sand. All around us, the palace begins to collapse, falling to the ground in great plumes of sparkling dust.

For such an impressive structure, its destruction takes only minutes, and as a breeze begins to clear the dust clouds away, we watch the collapse spread outward, consuming the solid areas as far as we can see. Beautiful dunes shimmer in the moonlight around us.

Soon, the brightly colored heads of cephaloids begin to emerge from the sand, and Seth greets each with complicated tentacle **gestures** that seem to mean they know each other.

As this is happening, I return my attention to the Queen, who has suddenly become ancient: her brown hair has turned snow-white, and her porcelain skin is wrinkled and nearly translucent. She looks shrunken and frail within her dress, and I realize she must have been using the power of the sand to maintain her youthful appearance.



Thomas clutches one of her withered hands, and she gestures with the other for me to approach.

"Thank you, child," she says in a raspy voice, "for refusing me and forcing me to realize what I was doing."

Her body is **wracked** by a dry cough for a moment before she turns her attention back to me.

“Many years ago, I was Tatiana Porter, and I lived in Porter’s Mill with my husband and our children. It was the happiest time in my life—so full of love. I stumbled upon the doorway in the cave by accident one day and found myself in this marvelous world. I brought the children here, and we created such lovely things.

“Then one day, Thomas, my dear child, the only child of my own blood, fell deathly ill, and we could do nothing to save him. His passing was **torturous**, and I felt every moment of it. After, everything changed, and I became adrift in my sorrow. I couldn’t bear to live in the mill anymore, surrounded by children I knew would grow up and leave me, so I started to spend more and more time here, where everything was within my power to control.

“In time, I became lonely and began to miss my family terribly, but I feared returning to the other world, the real world with all its pain. I was becoming very adept at manipulating the sands, so I decided to create my own versions of the children who would stay with me forever. With time and monumental effort, I recreated my children—even my dear Thomas—as perfect replicas, and I took care to ensure their best qualities were **prevalent**.

“For years, I was happy again—happier than ever, really, since I could give my children here unending joy. They never wanted for anything, they never fought or argued, and they always obeyed me. In time, their perfection started to **vex** me, and I couldn’t understand why—until I remembered that they weren’t really my children, and they never could be. They were too perfect to be human, so I tried to modify them to make them more . . . natural, but I failed.

“I was becoming increasingly weaker and suffered great difficulty in manipulating the sands. The children noticed this and begged to help. I couldn’t bring myself to return to the world where my real children would be long gone, so using almost all the power I had, I sent my new children over with instructions to bring another person back to assist me in regaining my strength.



"It worked, and to my great surprise, someone came through the doorway: a kind man who said

he was lost in the cave. I convinced him he could never return, and he remained here, supporting me. It wasn't long before I realized that if I reached out to his consciousness with the sands, I could control him utterly and use his will as if it were my own.

"More people trickled through the doorway, and I became more and more **formidable**. The power was addicting—I could do anything, be anything, go anywhere—I was a queen. I ruled the entire world, but it wasn't enough—it could never be enough because the whole world could not replace the love of my children. I used the people who came through the door until their minds frayed and they had no will or imagination left. Then I sent them back through the door, bewildered and confused."



She pauses for a moment. Everyone has congregated around her to hear her story.

"I was frozen by my dread and sorrow, and the more people I dragged into it, the more suffering I initiated. I was trying to control everything and everyone else because I could not control myself."

She stops and is silent for a long time, her breathing labored as tears stream down her cheeks. No one speaks. We simply listen as the wind blows sand over the dunes.

Then, with a deep breath, she raises a quivering hand and a slit of light appears behind her, quickly becoming wider. Unsure of what's happening, we all watch anxiously, and soon we hear the echoing sounds of children's laughter. It's a familiar sound to Sarah, Jake, and me, and the children from the Hollow begin tumbling out of the light to frolic around in the sand for a moment before gathering around the Queen.



"Come to me, children," the Queen says, and then turns to us. "It's time for you to go home."

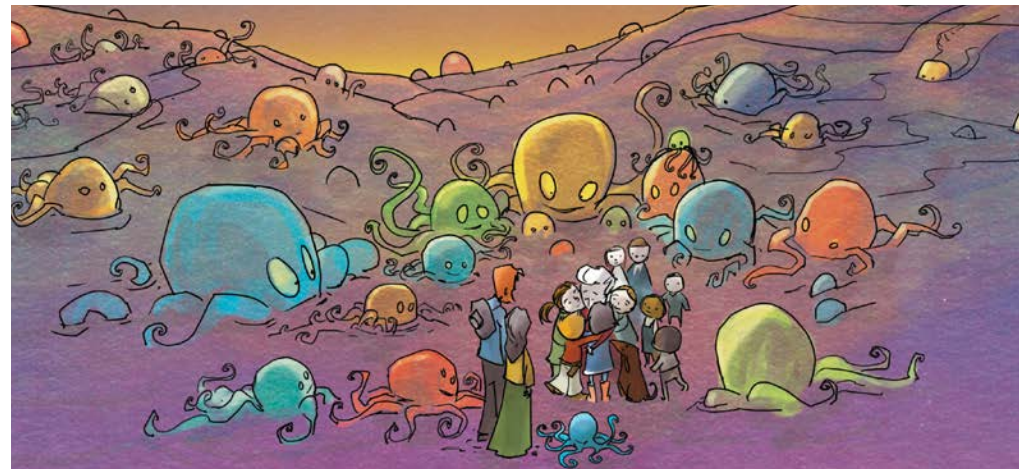
"What about you and the children?" I ask.

"We are home, and our time has come to an end. We must move on," her voice cracks slightly as she speaks. "Please, take care of this world and protect it from those who would do it harm. It is a wondrous place."



"We will," Sarah says as she kneels down and gives the ancient woman a hug. "Thank you for giving me my mother back."

Part of me still wants to be angry for everything the Queen put us through, but she's not that person anymore—she's Mrs. Porter, who did everything she could to maintain a fantasy rather than face the agony of reality. My heart hurts when I think of everything she's been through.



I kneel down and hug her too. "And for Uncle Jasper and Jake," I say. Her arms are weak, but she hugs us tightly. I look up to see Thomas standing nervously next to us. I wave him over, and he joins in the embrace.

Soon, all the children are in the hug, and it's impossible not to feel the love **emanating** from them.

As we finally pull away, I see Uncle Jasper shaking Seth's tentacle. "We'll come back to visit."

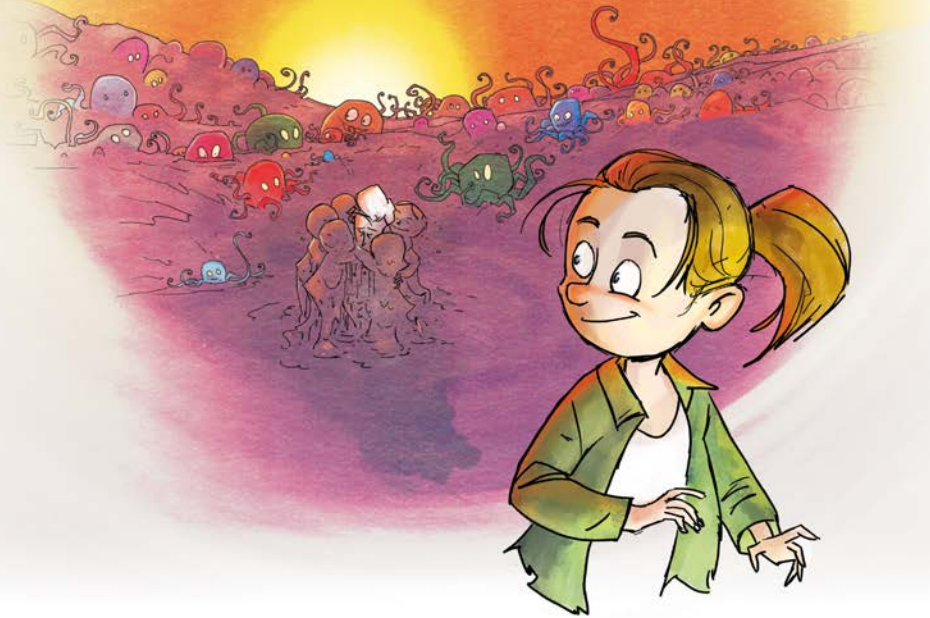
"I would like that," Seth replies. Odie, who has been licking Jake's face since they reunited a while ago, squirms free of Jake's arms and bounds over to Seth. With his tail wagging, he gives a friendly bark and licks Seth's face.

"Farewell, mighty steed," Seth says with a flinch and a laugh.

"Time to go," Mrs. Porter says to us, her hand beginning to droop.

We file through the doorway. I am the last, and as I take my final step, I turn in time to see the children gathered around Mrs. Porter in a close embrace. I can just see her face, and she looks truly happy. As I watch, the children dissolve into sand, gently covering their mother, and in the distance, I see hundreds of cephaloids joyfully swimming through the sparkling dunes.

I step into the light, ready to return home, and feel myself becoming weightless.



Glossary

debris (<i>n.</i>)	scattered pieces of something that are left after the rest has been destroyed or is gone (p. 4)
deluge (<i>n.</i>)	a large amount of something, such as rain, that arrives all at once (p. 6)
emanating (<i>v.</i>)	spreading out of or being released from something (p. 14)
formidable (<i>adj.</i>)	very impressive or powerful; inspiring respect or fear due to size, strength, or ability (p. 11)
gestures (<i>n.</i>)	actions or movements of parts of the body that express thoughts or feelings (p. 8)
melancholy (<i>n.</i>)	the state of being sad, thoughtful, and gloomy (p. 5)
plummet (<i>v.</i>)	to fall or drop quickly, usually from a great height (p. 7)
prevalent (<i>adj.</i>)	being more noticeable or important; occurring often (p. 9)
torturous (<i>adj.</i>)	causing suffering or severe pain (p. 9)
tsunami (<i>n.</i>)	a large, destructive ocean wave caused by an underwater earthquake, landslide, or volcanic eruption (p. 3)
vex (<i>v.</i>)	to bother, annoy, or frustrate (p. 10)
wracked (<i>v.</i>)	tortured or caused great pain (p. 8)