

**The Last Night
of**

Summer

by
**Kevin
Fontenot**

Illustrated
by
Colin Throm



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Illustrations by Colin Throm

For Anna Kate, Christopher and Caroline

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Christopher's Mommy and Daddy tucked him into bed after the last day of a long summer.

"Good night, Christopher," said Dad.

"Get some rest," Mommy said. "Big day tomorrow. You're going to have so much fun, riding the bus to your first day of school."

But Christopher was afraid to ride the bus. And he didn't want to go to school. That night he thought he would never fall asleep.



The next morning, Christopher awoke in a most unfamiliar place.

He found himself upon a giant leaf on the longest branch of the tallest tree on the edge of a never ending forest. Christopher shivered.

“Hello.”

Christopher turned with a start. Before him stood a real live monkey.

“Hello,” said the monkey again. “Who are you?”

“My name is Christopher.” He rubbed his sleepy eyes. “I’m far from home. And I simply must get down from this tree.”

Christopher thought for a moment. “You’re a monkey. I bet you can climb as well as anyone in this forest. Can you carry me down to the ground?”



“I can climb as well as any animal in the forest,” said the monkey proudly, “but I can’t climb with you on my back. If you can climb on your own, then I’ll show you the best way.”

Christopher was very afraid, but he and the monkey were able to make it down to the ground. But once they were down, the monkey ran up the tree.

Christopher was alone again.

“Hello,” said a voice from above.

Christopher looked up and saw an eagle perched on a low lying branch.



“Hello,” said Eagle once more. “Who are you?”

“My name is Christopher. I’m lost and afraid. And I want to go home.”

“Well,” said the Eagle, “I don’t know the way. But if you want to leave the forest, you should ask the King. He lives over the mountain and across the river.”

“Could you carry me over the mountain and across the river?” Christopher asked the Eagle. “I certainly can’t climb that far myself. And I’m very afraid of heights.”

“I can fly over the mountain, but I can’t carry you on my back. I could show you the way through a pass in the mountain if you like.”

Christopher was afraid, but he followed the Eagle who showed him the way over the mountain. Christopher could climb much better than he thought he could. He wasn’t as afraid as he thought he’d be.

When Christopher had made it across the mountain, the Eagle left him. Christopher was alone again. “I’ll never be home again,” cried Christopher.

“Why are you crying?” said a voice from down below. Christopher looked down to see the largest turtle he had ever seen. “Why are you sad?” asked the Turtle.



“I’m lost, and I’m afraid,” said Christopher. “I’ll never find my way out of this forest.”

“Where are you going?” asked the turtle.

“To find the King,” Christopher replied. “The Eagle told me that the King could help me find my way. He helped me across the mountain. But the Eagle has gone, and now I don’t know what to do.”

“I know the way,” said the turtle. “The King of the Forest lives across the Great River. The Great River is my home. I can take you there.”

Christopher smiled to hear this news. He followed the Turtle to the Great River.

“Here we are,” said the Turtle when they arrived at the shore. “The Great River is the largest river in the forest.”

The river was large indeed. The current moved very quickly.

“Turtle,” asked Christopher, “can you carry me across the river so that I can speak with the King?”

“I cannot,” answered the Turtle. “The river is wide and the current is strong. I cannot swim it with you riding upon my back. I can show you a place where the river is not quite so wide, and the current is not so strong. Do you know how to swim?”

“Of course I can swim,” said Christopher, “but the river is too wide, and the current is too strong. I’ll never be home again.”

Once again, Christopher cried.

Now the Turtle was old, and he was wise. He believed



Christopher could cross the river, but he knew that first Christopher needed to believe in himself.

“Boy,” said the Turtle sternly, “wipe your tears.”

Christopher stood, wiping his own tears.

“We turtles move slowly. We carry a heavy shell everywhere we go. Nearly everything we do is hard. But we can do many things. We are strong, and we are wise. Despite my heavy shell I can swim across the Great River many times in a day. How did you get here, boy?”

“When I woke this morning I was on a giant leaf atop the tallest tree in the forest,” he replied. “I climbed down from the tree and crossed over the mountain to get here.”

“Well,” replied the Turtle, “if you were able to climb down from the tallest tree in the forest and cross the mountain, I’m sure you are strong enough to swim the Great River in order to speak with the king.”

Suddenly, Christopher was not so afraid. “Turtle, would you show me the way across, so that I might swim the Great River and return to my home?”

“Of course,” said the Turtle with a proud smile, “of course.”

The Turtle led Christopher to the narrowest part of the Great River where the current was not quite so strong. Though it took all the strength he had, Christopher swam across the Great River.

Christopher left the Turtle behind. Approaching the home of the King, he could hardly believe his eyes. Instead of the castle he



had imagined, Christopher saw the very last thing he expected—his own house, sitting in the middle of the forest.

Waiting at the front door was a tall man, smiling and watching Christopher as he walked. “Hello Christopher,” said the man. “I’ve been expecting you.”

“I am looking for the King,” said Christopher, who was afraid and greatly confused. “I was told he could help me get home.”

“Well,” said the old man, “you have come to the right place. I am King. And I think you’ll agree, this is your home. Come in.”

Christopher followed the king into the familiar house. To his right in the living room, photographs of Christopher’s family sat on the shelf over the fireplace. To his left was the kitchen table where Christopher had eaten dinner the night before. King sat down at the table, and Christopher sat beside him.

“What is this place?” Christopher asked.

“This is your home,” replied the king. “Do you not recognize it?”

“I do,” he answered, “but this forest, this strange land ... where am I?”

“Well, how did you come to be here?” The wise king smiled.

“I don’t know,” answered Christopher. “When I woke up this morning I was here in the forest at the top of the tallest tree. I was so afraid. But I climbed down from the tree, and crossed the mountain, and swam the Great River. All to find you, the King, because the animals told me you could help me get home.”



“Well, it appears my help was not needed after all, because here you are.”

“But this is not my real home,” answered Christopher. “My house sits beside the street. We have neighbors in every direction. There are no rivers or forests near my home. And there certainly aren’t any talking animals.”

Christopher was tired. More tired than he had ever been in his life.

“Rest, Christopher,” said King. “Go lay in your bed and sleep. I will see you in the morning, and all will be well.”

Christopher was confused. He missed his parents. He was too tired for any more questions and did as King asked. He flopped on his bed and quickly fell into a long deep sleep.

The next morning, Christopher awoke to a familiar but unexpected sound.

“Christopher,” called his mother. “Wake up, you’ll be late for school.”

Christopher jumped up from his bed and ran to the window. Outside he saw and heard the familiar sights and sounds of home. Children walked to school. Dogs barked. The oak tree in front of the house whispered with the breeze. Christopher was happier than he’d ever been before.

He ran down to the kitchen and told his Mom and Dad the whole story about the forest, and the river, and the king.



“Wow,” said Mom, “that’s quite a story.”

“Get dressed,” said Dad with a chuckle. “You’ll miss the bus.”

“You have to believe me!” cried Christopher.

“Now,” said his father.

Christopher dressed and walked outside to catch the bus to school.

“Was it real?” whispered Christopher. “Maybe Dad’s right. Maybe I *was* dreaming all along.”

Just then the big yellow school bus drove up to Christopher’s house. It was full of loud children. It smelled like gasoline. But Christopher was not afraid.

He approached the bus. When the door opened Christopher couldn’t believe his eyes. There in the driver’s seat sat the wise tall King he had met the night before.

“Good morning, Christopher,” said the king with a wink. “I’ve been expecting you. Have a seat. Let’s get going.”

Christopher smiled and took his seat, just as the driver had asked. As he rode off to his first day of school, Christopher did not know what to think, but there was one thing he knew for certain. In all of his life, he had never felt so brave.

The last night of summer Christopher finds himself in a mysterious new land. With the help of new friends, he overcomes his fears during a grand adventure as he tries to find his way home in time for the first day of school.

Suggested age range for readers: 4-8

Kevin Fontenot is a married father of three and a practicing attorney in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He is a lifelong resident of South Louisiana and attended college at Northwestern State and law school at LSU. This is his first children's book.

Colin Throm has been drawing ever since he was old enough to hold a crayon. Always surrounded by art and classic children's literature from Norse mythology to Oz to Dr. Seuss, he has not forgotten, even though he is grown now. While spending the past two decades working with computer graphics, multimedia, and interactive design, he still prefers to get his fingers dirty with pencil, ink, and paint. Enjoying classic illustration and cartooning, his work usually carries a sophisticated whimsy while his scientific background provides a solid foundation for realms of fantasy.

He is currently a full-time designer for Aviation Week in Manhattan, a part-time Aikido instructor at Rutgers College, as well as an occasional zombie.

Visit him at www.ccthrom.com

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