

Volume 2

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Excelsior's Bookshelf

Contains poems, short stories, essays, and book reviews by our peers and club members.

Created by the Inklings

The 2024-25 Inklings

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Make sure to keep an
eye out for our
mascot; Professor
Inky!

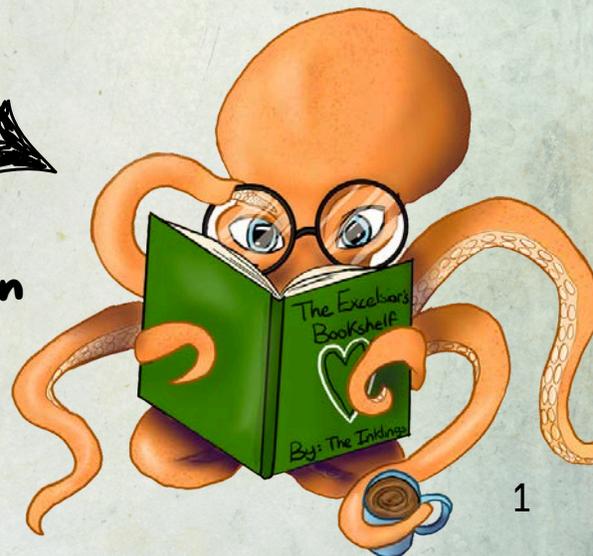


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Student names are presented in accordance with parent permission.

Poems

Poetry is when an emotion has
found its thought and the thought
has found words.

~ Robert Frost



Ice Skating

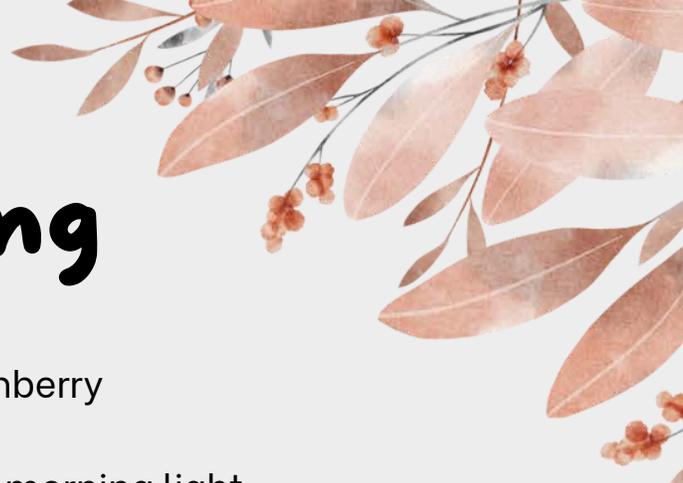
by Sienna McGill

The snow falls like powdered sugar upon the frozen lake.
That means it's time to skate.
Harder than it looks, but still tons of fun.
Plus it's free of mud.

One new skater stands, having a ball,
Watching all of her friends fall.
The only one who learned how,
While the others watch and say "Wow".

When winter rolls around the girl will be on the ice,
Skating around like a bird in flight.





Chatting

by Aliza Grace Fortenberry

Birds greet each other in the morning light
With a good morning and a how are you?
Soon their songs, sung soft or loud,
Start to overlap and stop and resume,
But they long for more than their own to hear
Their sweet, praising song; God's ears.



Pangolins and a Zookeeper

By LJ Fay

Joe, A pangolin,
Loved to cuddle,
He arrived on my doorstep,
In a small little bundle,

Where he came from,
I had no clue,
So I took him in,
What else could I do,

He walked on two feet,
With his arms in the air,
He curled his tail around my finger,
And he followed me everywhere,

He became my best buddy,
My friends knew who he was,
Pet him all the time,
Just because,

He rolled in a ball,
When he was scared,
He did it so quickly,
I was never quite prepared,

Slowly,
As the years went by and by,
He looked sadder,
As though he might soon cry

Then, one day,
One just like him came,
At my doorstep, there she was,
Joe's spirit flared again a flame,

But I wondered,
How could it be,
That two pangolins
Came to live with me,

The second pangolin,
I soon named Polly,
And the two
Were both quite Jolly,

I continued to ponder,
The unsolved mystery
Of Joe and Polly,
What was their history?

I only found the answer,
When I saw the sign,
It said quite plainly,
Pangolin's missing: of them nine,

It was for the zoo,
Across the street,
To find the pangolins,
Quite a sum was offered as a treat,

But to Joe and Polly,
And their new children, Pete and Max,
I had become attached,
To give them away would be a tax,

So I went to the zoo,
Told them of their pangolin I had two
I offered them a price,
With which I was being quite nice,

They agreed to let me have Joe,
And Polly, Max, and Pete too,
With the exception,
That they could help their health as they grew,

So happily we all lived,
Until an odd, odd day,
When a koala named Nick arrived,
And I didn't know quite what to say,

8 years later,
At the zoo, I became master
All the animals listened to me,
And there we lived happily ever after.



The Lord Was Here

By E.V. McCall

They say that the Lord
is hidden, and they speak the truth.

But I have felt the veil draw back
in the dead of night,

When all hope was gone and
a single star shone out above the trees.

I have felt Him walk beside me in the overgrown garden
when His breath warmed the hands of my soul.

I have felt Him in a song
when my chest went tight and my world
went golden,

when the cry of the melody flew over the trees.

I have found Him between pages,
under sweaters in autumn,
in my mother's arms,
on summer grass.

And the towers of stones
stand in the wilderness of my mind, saying,
“the Lord was here.”



I Wish I Could Soar



By Avi Hoffman

I wish I could fly
Like a bird in the sky.
I wish I could be free
To be where I wanted to be,
And without a care
Soar through air
But oh, how I wish I could soar.

I wish I could soar
Like a bird in a net no more.
Fly over mountains and valleys
Fly through the streets and the alleys,
If I were a bird, I would be regal
Perhaps a falcon or eagle
But oh, how I wish I could soar.



Numb

By LJ Fay

I sat in the cold,
Owning nothing but one coin of gold,
Numb are my fingers, ears, and toes,
Cold, wind, and snow are their greatest foes,
I bundle in a blanket, warm and soft,
I wish I had a home, bed, or even a barn's loft,
All I get is the shelter of a bench in the park
And a lamp for when it gets dark,
As the day progresses, the feeling grows,
The wind grows harsher as it blows,
The world moves around me,
With normalcy,
But I don't feel it,
I am numb.

The Canoe or the Man?

By Cosette McKeen

We're all each born in our own canoe,
Upon a river of bluish hue.
We float along of a leisurely rate
Unaware of our certain fate.

Upon each of our journeys we all collect
Trinkets and such of our own intellect.
We think that we are having a ball
That is, until the waterfall.

The waterfall claims each and every victim
And it seems our fate is sure.
But there is one way to avoid this fate
And one Person with the cure.

He reaches out from the waters edge
And calls us each by name.
We see Him over the canoe's ledge
And claim all will stay the same.

Why don't we want to reach for Him
And live for 'er and 'er?
It's because of all we've gathered
And for all our stuff and cares.

But for those who swim to the Man on shore
He takes them by the hand.
And leads them to His Heavenly Father
In the other happy land.

The Dreamer

By Paloma Rosario

Late is the hour, or so the town square clock chimes
Deep, melodic reminder to, "Hurry home! It's past nine!"
But alas, no deep sleep, adieu to mere breathing,
My stubborn head clears all, soon lost in dreaming.

Gardens of moonlight my shoes wander for hours,
Marigolds awash in bioluminescent shower.
The world is a haze, its robe imaginary twilight;
On the tip of my thumb, a night moth alights.

What's this? O great moonlight, meeting both foe and friend
Cast your gaze on this dreamer, this thinker, and send
Whispered spring in a breeze, the zenith of summer
The song of a wood elf, sweet tune of nature's hummer.

In meek smallness I stand, but what greatness within,
My heart stirred, soul awirl, despite my coat frosted thin.
Though short are my years, my wisdom's not what it seems
For I take after a man, and few were wiser than he.

"Treasure life," were the old chap's words, "remember one thing.
For what is coming tomorrow will tempt you with its sting.
But though today grief we feel, with time we all heal,
And through all be empowered knowing our Lord is real.
Fear of death? What, should I fear that log over there?
For to our Lord death be that log, harmless, stripped bare."

My mind held to his words, and his words held my mind
In a way that was good and selfless and kind.
So come, dreams! Meet this dreamer, flood her mind and her head.
Just promise me this: don't stay long; I need to get to bed!

In memory of and dedicated to my grandfather, Don Rieland

Short Stories

If a book is well written, I always
find it too short.

~ Jane Austen

The Battle of English World Lit

By Isabela C

We overlooked a large clearing, two trenches on either side. Trees in the space between the two trenches were scarce, and bushes were even scarcer. Wind rustled the long grass that swayed in the breeze, unaware of the tension that was stretched taut.

To the left of this clearing, whispers with alarmed tones drifted up, becoming even faster as the enemies of our heroes appeared from their trench to the right.

Megan, Avalon, and Aubrial clutched large essay guns in their hands, their faces determined as they loaded them carefully. The mini-essays were extremely reactive, and if one got hit by a mini-essay, they were infected instantly with the essay bug and then joined the essay trio.

General Trent and his sidekick, Bella, had had grievous losses; they didn't know if they were to survive this next rain of essay fire.

"General Trent!" Layla cried from her place, her bill blaster held in shaking hands, "they're getting ready to fire!"

General Trent sighed. This is what he got for joining English Literature. "Sound the alarm. When I say, 'hit the deck', HIT. THE. DECK."

Layla nodded and passed the message to the others.

The smell of fear was thick and plagued the air. Jonas sensed the worry and doubt of his fellow soldiers and decided to do something about it. He stepped onto a stool and started to hype the soldiers up, rousing tired and worn spirits. "We've got this, guys! We can beat 'em! We just have to.... Well, just win!"

Somehow, it worked and the soldiers concentrated with renewed vigor.

General Trent fingered the grenades at his sides, his mind working through the chances of them winning. It was not good. But he couldn't bring himself to tell his men that their future was grim.

"Sir! We've got a telegram from President Cutler; it's the next question for the book we're currently reading." Bella held out a piece of paper with trembling fingers. "Do we have time for responses before they fire?"

"I don't know." Trent looked at Bella's fear-filled eyes. He was the leader. It was his job to take care of his soldiers. He had to stay strong for them, even when he was feeling hopeless.

"But we have to stay strong, Captain. If we lose hope now, we'll never win."

"Yes, sir." Bella whispered, her tone discouraged.

"None of that, soldier! What did you say?!"

"Yes, sir!" She said, more determined.

"Better."

"Look there!" Jonas called, pointing where another joined the essay trio.

"It's Mya! This is not good, General!" Bella said, "Mya is an excellent thinker; she just increased the damage on the mini-essays!"

“How are we doing on those responses?!” Trent bellowed, his voice carrying far.

“We’re almost there!” Layla yelled back. “We’re running out of ammunition!”

“THEY’RE GETTING READY TO FIRE!” Bella shouted.

Trent scrambled for answers as the loud calls from his troops echoed around him. Jonas ran up to him, “Sir! I don’t think the bill blasters are going to be enough!”

Trent opened his mouth to answer, but was cut off by the loud bang from the essay guns.

“HIT THE DECK!”

The soldiers dove to the ground, covering their necks and heads with their arms. Dirt and grass rained on them, eloquent words bombarded them, some getting hit and then, with thoughtful expressions, tromping to the other side.

Three shots later, and all was quiet. For a few moments, General Trent hoped. “How many were lost?” he asked Bella, as soon as the ringing in his ears stopped.

“Five. Almost six. I was able to dodge one, but it was close.”

Turning away from her, he raised one arm, “READY.” The soldiers tightened their hold on the bill blasters. “AIM.” They watched as the essay trio and their strategist jumped into their trench for safety. “FIRE!” Trent brought his arm down in an arc as his troops pulled the triggers. Their responses flew toward the enemy, crashing into enemy ground.

Cheers sounded from the soldiers, but Trent noticed that none of his men returned from the opposing army. His jaw clenched. They couldn’t survive much more of this. His eyes caught a flash of color from his right and looked at Bella, who held a shield similar to Captain America’s in one hand. He shrugged to himself as he drew his plunger gun and adjusted his military helmet.

Before long, another barrage of fire from the mini-essay guns hit them from all sides, but this time it was rapid fire. “RAPID FIRE! GET DOWN!” Layla shrieked, and dropped to the ground. The others followed suit.

But sadly, many were lost to the enemy.

Adrenaline pumping through her veins, Bella walked to General Trent, her face covered in dirt. “Sir! The bill blasters aren’t enough! What are we going to do?!”

Trent took a deep breath. It was time to be truthful, even if it hurt. “We’re running out of options, soldier.” He watched her as she bowed her head.

“I don’t think we have any more options, sir... This is going to be a battle not easily won.”

No, he thought, they weren’t going to win, period. He raised his eyes to the sky, searching his brain for answers when an idea came to him. But it was extremely risky. “There is still one option... but it’s not a favorable one.”

Bella lifted her head, her brow furrowed. “What option is that, sir?” She asked, but then her eyes widened as it suddenly struck her. “No. You can’t be talking about that option.”

“I didn’t want to do it... but if the enemy fires with an attack as heavy as the last one, we may have to resort to that option.”

Bella battled with this newfound information in her mind. There wasn’t a clear way to foreshadow what would happen if they did this... But, what did they have to lose? “Sir, it has come to a certain extent... If we don’t make it out, it was an honor to serve you.”

“Likewise.” Trent gazed at his men who awaited his instruction. He gritted his teeth, and prepared to give the command. “Get the mic.”

Layla gaped at the General. "The mic?!" She squeaked.

Trent sighed. "Yes, the mic."

He heard Bella gulp. Yes, it was risky if they didn't have the right words, but if they executed it just right, they might win this battle.

Three soldiers stumbled toward Trent and Bella, one carrying a tripod, the others carrying something that looked like a cannon. It was long and tube-like, with a handle at the end instead of a trigger. The barrel pointed at Trent for a moment, and he stared at its depths. Time to kick some butt, he thought.

They set up the tripod and attached the cannon with a lot of grunting and orders from Trent on how to position it.

Finally, it was finished, pointing toward the enemy. Trent nodded in satisfaction. "Sir! We're ready to load!" Jonas said, rubbing his hands together mischievously.

With a low laugh, Trent replied. "Load and fire when ready."

Chuckling, Jonas and Layla loaded the cannon with a response that was good, they hoped. Jonas stood behind the massive weapon, and with a nod from Layla, he fired.

BOOM!

The troops and their General covered their ears as a large blue ray burst from the machine. It spread across the clearing, meeting yelps of fear as it collided with its target.

Hollering in joy and triumph, General Trent led his tired troops toward the enemy trench, armed to full with bill blasters and comment grenades.

"DO YOU SURRENDER?!" Trent shouted. "YOU'RE SURROUNDED!"

Megan, Avalon, Aubrial, and Mya emerged from their hiding place, their hands in the air as their soldiers flocked to their sides. "Truce!" Megan pleaded.

Trent and Bella exchanged a look, a silent conversation between them before he nodded.

"How about, we agree to at least a few mini-essays, no more and no less is my condition." With these words, the mini-essay jumpscarers and their strategist stood a little straighter, hope on their faces.

"Excuse us a moment, please." Trent said. He turned his back to them, and in whispered tones asked his mates whether or not they should be trusted.

"I don't know." Said Layla. "They took almost all our troops..."

"Well, I think they can be trusted. All of them are known not to break a promise," said Jonas, nodding to emphasize his point.

"I'm with Jonas," Bella said, "he's right about them, but to be honest I still have my doubts too."

Trent sighed. He hated it when he was the tie-breaker. Too much pressure. But he knew what was right, so... He straightened, faced the girls, and thrust out a hand. "We accept your truce." Megan, with a large grin on her face, took it.

So, the mini-essay jumpscarers and the non-mini-essay jumpscarers, thankfully spent the rest of English World Literature in harmony.

Well..... Until the next question that had both groups fighting tooth and nail again.... But that's a story for another day. *Tips hat* Good day to you all.

The Unsatisfied Squire

By Gabriel Bordet

There once existed the small country of Guise. One side crawled with hellish Gnomes, the other was inhabited by moiling villagers and skilled Knights. King Rodnac, a ruler in Guise, was well aware of the wicked and deceptive ways of the Gnomes, and he strived for a way to rid his Kingdom of their devilry. One morning, it was declared to all the land that King Rodnac was gone. With his leave, he remained his power in his highest-ranking Knight, Sir Driskoll the Daring. As Regent, Driskoll was trusted to operate the Kingdom under a special set of instructions given by the King.

For reasons yet unknown, the King's absence had continued for ten years. Many believed he had deserted them, while others anxiously awaited his return.

Within Guise was the enormous King's Estate. Five villages encompassed it, and one granite castle towered over them all. In the finest village lived the noblemen, including Driskoll, his wife, and only son. Driskoll often had to divide his time between his duties at the castle and his family at home. His son, Winston, was in line to continue his legacy and thus was training to become a Knight.

Winston was fourteen years of age. The sun shone through his window, lighting up his gold hair and elucidating a sparkle in his crystal blue eyes. He had easily passed his trials as a Page. He often sought each day to read books and solve puzzles.

One afternoon, Winston's mother, Mathilde, returned to the house after spending the day collecting herbs from the neighboring villages. The sound of the wooden door creaking open, followed by the swift sound of it locking shut, diverted Winston's attention away from the book he had been studying.

"What news of the war, mother?" he politely inquired.

"The Knights are holding a blockade around the Kingdom's outskirts. Your father has told me it should discourage the Gnomes from advancing into the villages for a spell, but there's no telling for how long."

"You were gone for a long time," Winston noticed.

"Yes. The Gnome underground raids have been targeting our food merchants. It's made food scarce. Fortunately, your father quartered Knights to protect them and their products from those callous beasts. If only the war had never begun—"

"It's all the King's fault!" Winston interrupted brusquely. "If only he hadn't demanded father to start such a stupid war. It's a wonder why he still takes orders from a traitor."

"Now, Winston, you must understand," she insisted. "Though the King left, he must have had a good reason to, much like he must have had a good reason to start this war. Knights like your father are loyal to Lord Rodnac, and you must be too as you are on the path to becoming a Knight. You are a very privileged young man, son. Do not overlook that truth."

Winston narrowed his eyes and returned to his room with a frown, ready to resume the book he had been reading. It was a history book on dangerous monsters such as dragons, ogres, and leviathans from the King's archives. He had been given it by his father when he was six years of age but had never read it before until the topic of the "Great War" arose recently. A page description detailed the Gnome:

A demented, nightmarish creature typically 1 - 1.5 meters in height. Has a deathly pale, stone-like appearance littered with warts. Has 1 - 2 straight, cone-shaped horns sprouting from the head (length and size vary) and ears that resemble those of a goblin's. Sharp, rotten teeth are exposed in a permanent smile or frown (variable). Other attributes include large, bright blue glowing eyes; long, sharp, thick claws used for burrowing; and a tapered nose. Typically sighted wearing stolen, tattered garments. Can travel on 2 - 4 limbs. Extremely fast and agile. Possesses great intelligence in the fields of alchemy and trickery. Possesses reactive cells that can bond easily with potions, allowing for unforeseen and extraordinary physical enhancements. Omnivorous diet. Lives only in dark areas, particularly caves and large trees. Only lives in large groups. Afraid of bright light. Fatalities include a stab to the heart and brief exposure to Nocuous Thistle (brink of extinction). Extremely dangerous. Do not approach.

Once again Winston's research was interrupted, but this time by the sound of his father entering the house. He sprang up from his bed in delight to greet him at the door.

"Father!" he lunged at him with an embracing clutch.

His father smiled lightly at the gesture but rushed his stay.

"The day is thinning, Winston. It's almost nightfall," he said urgently. "You know the Gnomes become more daring when it's dark. If we hurry, we might be able to fit in an hour of training for you."

"Yes, father," Winston responded rather discontentedly. "I'll prepare my armor right away."

The two made their way to the village square and exercised sword fighting against one another. The topic of the war came up eventually.

"Do you think we can defeat the Gnomes?" Winston asked.

"Utterly," his father replied almost instantly. "Have more trust in your people, Winston. For generations, our family has served under the monarch. We can overcome any threat that dares take us on."

"I just wonder...the food, the Knights, and all the resources we've lost because of the war... What if the war had never started? What if we never agitated the Gnomes? If it were up to me -"

"It's not up to you!" Driskoll raised his voice, before calming down. "It's up to the King. Have faith in him."

Winston was ready to call out the King as a traitor, and ask once and for all why his father still believed he would someday return. He wanted to tell his father that he didn't want to be a Knight if it meant serving an absent King, but he knew he would express severe disappointment in him. He didn't want to dishonor his father's legacy or his family heritage.

“Yes, father,” Winston said softly, withdrawing his sword and looking down.

“It’s past time I get back to my post. The men require me. Get some rest, son,” his father told him, placing his left hand on Winston’s shoulder before leaving the scene.

It was quiet that night; nothing but the sound of chirping crickets could be heard outside. A full moon lit up the sky. Winston lay thoughtfully on his bed amidst the serene setting. He offered himself a serious choice: honor the King, his father, and his predecessors by becoming a Knight, or create his own future away from the Kingdom. It was at that moment when what he thought was a brilliant idea occurred to him. He concluded that the best way to satisfy both sides was to “die” honorably in battle. To do this, Winston would fake his death, flee the Kingdom for several years, and return when he was sure his father had recognized the King’s treachery. Though proud of his conception, he still required a plan. Before that, however, Winston shut his weary eyes and fell asleep.

...

When morning arrived, the sky was dim. As the clouds moved in furiously, Winston began preparing himself with a plan to satisfy his desires. He knew he would need to strike a bargain with the Gnomes in exchange for making it appear that he was taken captive. He scanned his books for instructions to concoct enhancement potions which he would then plan to bribe the Gnomes with. He found a recipe for a growth compound, but it required Wormwood, Merg Mushrooms, Argon Amber, and Giant Saliva for it, which were rare ingredients. Winston decided to try his luck at finding these requirements in the King’s castle. So there he arrived, and was met by two guards patrolling the entrance.

“Ay, sor. Not souw fast,” the man on the right side halted him.

“It’s only a boy,” the other man on the left mocked.

“I’m the son of Regent Driskoll,” Winston proudly asserted, “and I’m here to see my father.”

“An ow do we know that?”

“Please,” the left guard scoffed. “He isn’t lying. Go ahead, boy,” he said, retaining his spear.

Winston rushed in and tried to discreetly navigate the castle interior without alarming any more guards. He knew he was searching for an alchemist laboratory or archive room. Rather than entering each room, he peered through the cracks in each door to distinguish what each contained. With no success, Winston ended his search in the throne room and saw that his father was not present within. He walked down the aisle leading to the throne and located a door on its far left. On the King’s throne lay the instructions he gave Driskoll to uphold. It appeared to be a small, solid gold tablet. However, Winston refused to glance at it due to his belligerent hatred for the document and its decision to begin the war. Behind the conceals of the door, Winston was pleasantly surprised to find the King’s archives and the ingredients he required inside. He pulled out the potion recipe he had stuffed in his shirt and followed the instructions to the best of his ability. Winston stored the liquid in a container and made his way out of the castle. Hours had gone by, and the guards ignored him upon his leave. Winston knew that the war intensified daily, so he had to implement his plan that very night.

...

When his mother finally fell asleep, Winston, dressed in his armor, left his house, taking the potion with him. Most of the Knights protected the inside of the Kingdom that night, rather than the borders, allowing Winston to venture into the forest unnoticed. The brewing clouds let out droplets of rain as Winston progressed deeper into the woods. Eerie noises surrounded him—ones he could not recognize. Light mist plagued the forest as he bravely pressed on. Suddenly, a violent creature leaped from the sky and toppled Winston to the ground face-front. He saw two others rapidly approaching him.

“Wait!” Winston yelled for his life, struggling to get back up. The Gnomes paused. “I have something for you!” He quickly brought out the glass container holding the liquid enhancement. “Let me keep my life and you can have it. I have a proposition for your leader.”

“Hahahahaha!” one cackled viciously. “You don’t think we can take it from you and kill you?”

“No!” Winston shouted. “It’s just that I—,” he stuttered, “I have information regarding the war. I can help you. But I’m no use dead.”

“He is a crafty one,” the second said.

“I like him!” the third proclaimed psychotically. “He is a traitor.”

“I am not! I just don’t want to be a Knight. I need you to help me escape my destiny.”

“We like your style, young blood,” the first affirmed. “We will take you to Lord Griglesnorf, at your own risk. He will decide what you are worth.”

Winston never imagined a creature so hideous as the Gnomes. Deeper and deeper into the mystical forest the Gnomes herded Winston. At the end of the journey sat Lord Griglesnorf in his throne of jagged wood. He was similar in appearance to his minions but taller and bulkier, with an unnerving crown-like shape growing from his head and an elder white beard from his crooked chin. All around him in the trees and in the ground were thousands of laughing Gnomes.

“What is this filth you have brought before me?” Griglesnorf demanded. “He walks unchained?”

“He has a proposition for you, master. And he possesses a potion he would like to offer to us in exchange for our assistance in a matter of his,” one Gnome explained.

“A potion we cannot prepare? Insolence,” the Gnome King scorned.

“It’s a growth mixture. It contains rare materials that—” Winston tried to clarify.

“Enough,” the King stopped him. “Priddelforf, take it and drink it.”

Priddelforf jerked the potion from Winston and consumed it. Nothing happened.

“This foolish child forgot to collect fresh ingredients,” Griglesnorf sneered. “Vidgamsit, Mocksid, Grateloose, chain him up.”

“No! Wait! I can help you win the war!” Winston pleaded.

“You already helped me win the war.” Griglesnorf chortled. “You brought me the son of my enemy.”

Winston was shoved into a small cell underground and chained to a hard, stone wall inside it. He knew the Gnomes were likely using him as bait to lure the Knights onto their territory.

...

For the rest of that night and most of the next day, Winston sat alone in the prison, thinking about his mistakes.

Amid his humility, the doors to the prison entrance abruptly burst open. Two men on horses came through and with their swords easily broke through the cell and chains restraining Winston. They were the two guards Winston had deceived before.

“Ah—I told you ‘e wa trouble,” the first said with a chuckle.

“Come on lad, the King wants you back at the castle,” the second ordered, loading Winston on the horse.

“The King?” Winston was puzzled.

As they exited the underground chamber, chaos strewed the grounds. The Knights and the Gnomes fought brutally, with thousands on each side. The sun was shining so brightly that evening that the Gnomes were at a debilitating disadvantage against the noble Knights. The battle awed Winston. As he and the guards raced through the Gnome’s forest and the plains leading to the castle, they watched as giant catapults demolished the forest secreting the Gnomes.

When they reached the castle, Winston was escorted to the throne room. His father was waiting for him, pacing.

“Winston!” His father exclaimed. “What happened? Did those wretched monsters kidnap you?”

“Uh....actually, father, I went to them,” Winston nervously answered.

“W—what do you mean? You would dare abandon your family legacy to ally with those Gnomes?!” he scorned.

“Quiet down, Driskoll,” said an unfamiliar voice. “Let’s not forget your own poor choice.” King Rodnac walked out of the archive room.

“Yes. Forgive me, sire.” Driskoll turned his attention to Lord Rodnac and bowed. “I believed we had the power to win the war. But in my underestimation, we lost so many good men.”

“Which is exactly why I specifically stated in my instructions not to start a war, and keep peace until my return,” the King said.

Winston then understood that it was his father who defied the King’s orders by starting the war.

“If I might be so bold, my Lord,” Winston blurted out. “Why did you leave and why for so long? And why were our people without knowledge of your true intentions?”

“I was gathering Nocuous Thistle, you see, a plant powerful enough to take the life of a Gnome within seconds of exposure. I searched far and wide and attained enough to defeat the entire Gnome army. Our men are using it to drive away the Gnomes as we speak, young Squire. As for why I told no one of my intentions, I was worried the information would fall into the wrong hands. Withal, I did not want to confirm results or raise false hope in the lamentable event that I did not find any Nocuous Thistle. Why, I suppose I assumed incorrectly that my people’s faith in me would be enough to cast away any doubt.”

An expression of clarity absorbed Winston’s face. At that moment he realized that the King had never deserted the Kingdom, but was out in uncharted land risking his own life to save it. He wanted to be a Knight again.

Driskoll approached Winston with a tight hug which he gladly received.

“What’s past is past,” the King stated, “and what wrong was done has been washed clean through forgiveness.”

“I read about Nocuous Thistle in a book, but its location was never specified. How could you know where to find it?”

King Rodnac chuckled. “Who do you think wrote those books, Squire?” he inquired with a beaming smile.



Our Mascot “Inky”
submitted by CMB

Beyond a Clique

By Cosette McKeen

“Is that Bethy?” Hazel Traid asked as she and her brother pulled up to the church where the homeschool choir rehearsed every Thursday. Bethy attended the Traid’s church with her husband and four kids, but this was the fourth week of choir and Hazel hadn’t noticed her before.

“Sure looks like her,” Jude answered, hopping out of the car and shouldering his backpack. “Come on.”

Hazel grabbed her bag and went inside; she was soon greeted by her friends who were chatting quietly by the door. Soon, her handbell group was up, which was immediately followed by the high school choir, after which she went into bells again.

While waiting for Jude to finish bells, Hazel noticed Bethy come inside and start up a conversation with another mom. Hazel fought back the urge to go over and say hi. She mustn’t interrupt their conversation.

That Sunday at church, Hazel asked Bethy if they were attending the homeschool choir.

“Yes, we are! I used to go there when I was a kid. Why? Did you see me there?”

“I wasn’t sure at first, but by the time I was, you were in a conversation and we were about to leave.”

“Oh that was nice!” Bethy shifted her one-year-old daughter to her other hip. Hazel opened her mouth to reply, but the sound of the service bell sounded through the hall and she went and sat with her family in the makeshift pews of folding chairs the school would allow them to use.

The Traids were good friends with the Masons; Mrs. Anna Mason was Bethy’s elder sister by ten years. Hazel’s dad got into a deep conversation with Mr. Mason and the two families were the only ones left in the school building.

Hazel was standing by her mom who was talking to Anna when her mom said, “Hazel told me that Bethy is going to choir. Is that true?”

Anna nodded. “Yep, and she hates it.”

Liesl Traid’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Hates it? What do you mean?”

Anna stopped her chuckling and replied, “Well she used to go to that choir when she was in high school and I think she really enjoyed it. But I was talking to her the other day and she doesn’t like it at all. She says everybody has their own little cliques and no one will really talk to her. They are civil enough, but not friendly. I doubt she’ll be doing it again after this.”

Hazel zoned out and began thinking of all the homeschool moms who sat around the round tables in the waiting room at choir. You know, it’s true! They do have their cliques! As Hazel thought more and more about it, she began to feel uncomfortable that she had never noticed. Then a thought struck her.

Are we kids cliquish? Are we leaving people out? Hazel thought of the girl who always stood alone but had been friendly enough to greet her when they were standing beside each other, waiting for their turn in the choir room.

That was several weeks ago and I've never paid any attention to her.

Unfortunately, it was two more weeks before Hazel remembered that she should have been more friendly and wanted to make a change about it. Being prompted by a chapter in a devotional, Hazel stepped into the choir building with a smile on her face. She quickly looked around for someone who was standing alone, but seeing none, went and greeted some friends before going to bell practice. They were released after twenty minutes instead of the usual sixty.

"You guys are really, really, close to peaking and I'm so honored to be your teacher. Have a good rest of your day! Oh and there's a tote of candy. You may take one, if you like." And with a smile, Mrs. Wood let them go.

Standing out in the hall, Hazel quickly spotted the one girl standing by herself. She excused herself from her friends and timidly walked over.

"Hi! Cazieh, right?"

Cazieh's eyes shot up. "Wow, that's impressive! Most people don't remember my name."

"Well, it's kind of easy because I have a cousin with a similar name."

Over the course of five minutes, Hazel learned that Cazieh was in the younger half of ten children, the only child attending choir, she lived by the airport, had seven pets, and her birthday was last week.

Soon the middle schoolers began to pour out the door, and the high schoolers gladly made way for them. High fives were exchanged and the high schoolers filed into the choir room.

No one can be perfect, but being a light for the Lord and greeting those who stand by themselves is something those people will not forget for a very long time. Compliments also can be carried with someone for years, while the person who gave it, won't remember it at all.

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12



Home at Last, Thank God

By Ashe

“How did you get here?”

You snap out of your daydream, realizing that you are being spoken to. It’s two in the morning and you are sitting in a bar with a drink in front of you. The man behind the counter is staring at you, looking amused and concerned.

You shrug and sigh. How did you get here? That was a funny question. You felt like you’d been here all your life.

“I guess I just took one wrong turn too many times.”

The man nods and sighs and turns back to pouring drinks. The only other person in the bar is a tipsy-looking man in the corner. Even bars are quiet on Tuesdays.

You look back down at your drink and swig the rest, then groan as the headache sets in. Your mind hurts as much as your heart. You shouldn’t be here, but here you are.

“Alright, time to go.” You think the bartender is talking to you, but he’s looking right at the drunk man in the corner.

“No, no, oy, just one more drink.”

“Nope, no, you’ve had enough drinks. Get out.”

“Oy, you don’t close till four.”

“I don’t care if we stayed open until the cows came home. My bar. My rules. You’ve had way past the legal limit, now get out.”

You listen as the scuffle goes on and the drunk man is finally removed. With a huff, the barkeeper marches over to the counter and pats down his forehead with a towel.

“What do they think I’m runnin’, a daycare?”

You almost smirk as the man continues to mumble, laying out various words you know your father wouldn’t have let you say.

Your father. Oh gosh, your father.

Why did you bring it up in your mind? You glance at the door where the drunk man had been unceremoniously tossed out. You almost feel bad for him. Poor fellow. Did he have a ride home? You certainly didn’t.

“So, you want another drink or something?”

You look up at the man and shake your head, sliding him the last of your cash. The man takes it, then looks at you with concern.

“Hey, you got somewhere to sleep?”

You shrug. “Nope! Guess I’ll just sleep on the street.”

The man nods again and looks confused.

“You gonna throw me out too?”

“No, no, I- it’s just... haven’t I seen you somewhere before?”

“Yep.”

“Where?”

“In the news.”

The man’s eyes widen. “So you’re–”

You nod. “Yep. Till I went bankrupt.” You curse. “No curing bankruptcy!”

“Gosh...” the man looks at you in awe. “What’s your secret?”

“Don’t go bankrupt!”

“No, I mean, before that happened, how did you get... you know, where you were before?”

You shrug, and then sigh. Your eyes begin to sting. “Well, I... I come from a rich family.”

“Oh, oh, okay! I see how it is.”

The man turns back to his drinks and starts to pour more. You wonder who he could be making them for. There’s clearly no one coming.

“Well, uh, you better skedaddle.”

“Fair enough. Thanks.”

“You too.”

And then you leave, tired, worn, and more depressed than when you came. Your mansion is gone. Your car is gone. Your friends all left you, you have no food, the last of your money you just spent, and now you feel funny.

You lean against a light pole and groan, but then you smile a little when you remember the last time you were in a situation this helpless.

It was college, Friday night, and you and your buddies had been out too late and you couldn’t find your car. Your buddy had all left with a girlfriend and you were left alone. You couldn’t think straight and your mind hurt. So what did you do?

You called your dad.

“Oh gosh...” you’d cry if you had strength left. That night you had marched up to the nearest phone booth and phoned your dad.

Now you feel like a slob. You had money at one point, and now it’s gone. You had family at one point too, and now it’s gone as well.

“What am I doing?!”

You disturb a raccoon and a stray cat as you scream. You have spent your whole life trying to get somewhere, and now where are you? Nowhere.

“Maybe... maybe I can go home.”

You haven’t thought of that before. Oh, well, you’ve thought about it. But you haven’t considered it. How could you go home now? What would Father think?

“I... can’t go home. I mean...”

But maybe...

“Dad, I can work in the factory.”

You nod to yourself. Your father also wanted you to work in the family business. You could get a job there. He would hire you. You were family. You might earn enough money to get back on your feet.

“It will be okay. It will be okay.”

And that’s what you tell yourself the entire way home.

The entire bus ride, hitchhike, and walk home, you keep telling yourself it will be okay.

You finally are back in front of your house. You can hear a dog bark and you see cars in the long driveway. Some of the employees must be here for a company party.

“Now is not a good time, is it?”

Oh well. Here you are. You sigh and catch a glimpse of yourself on the gate. Sloppy hair, disheveled clothes, and you haven’t bathed in weeks. At least you’re sober.

So you walk up the driveway. You know your father will kill you. You know he’ll wring your neck, tired of you. You can hear him now. “You have the nerve to come back here, after what you’ve done? After you waste my good money and tarnish my name?!” Yep, you have it coming to you.

Oh no... is that him now? It can’t be... it is. Here he comes, running up the driveway, racing right towards you. Why is he running? He has bad knees. Is he that mad?

You freeze in the driveway, knowing that when he gets to you, it will be bad.

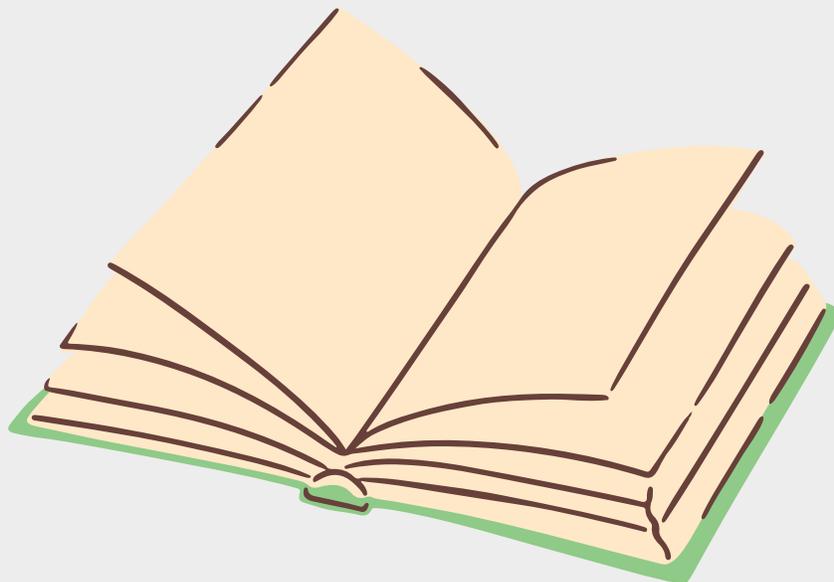
And he comes rushing right at you, his face in an indescribable expression, his breath heavy. He races up to you, pounces on you, and grapples you into a hug so fierce you both nearly fall over.

He wraps his arms around you and practically strangles you. His tired old lips kiss you a thousand times as if you were still a child. You feel startled, out of sorts. Isn’t he supposed to be angry? You messed up your whole life. Shouldn’t he be mad?

Your father takes your battered face into his worn hands. “Oh thank God. Thank God you’re safe. Thank God, you finally made it home.”

Write what should not be forgotten.

~ Isabel Allende



Never Alone

By Hazel

I collapsed onto the ground, panicked. “What am I to do?”, I thought, not wanting to face the truth. I. Was. Lost.

I thought about how I got there, in the middle of the forest. “I’ll be back soon, I’m just going for a quick hike,” I had said to my mom earlier. We were staying in cabins at the park campgrounds here, and since I’m twelve years old, my parents are letting me go for short hikes by myself. “Alright hon’, love ya’! Be back in thirty minutes or less,” Mom had called after me, as I zipped up my deep blue jacket.

From there, it was your typical “getting lost” story. I came to a fork in the path, a snake slithered nearby, which made me fly through the forest on the left path, because I was nearest to it, and I don’t remember which path I took after that.

As I sat on the ground catching my breath, my mind went back to the present, I tried to think what to do. “*What was it that my parents said to do if I was ever lost?*” I thought. “*Oh yeah! Blow the whistle in my backpack as loud as I can, then stay put.*” I ripped my backpack off my back and unzipped the top. I dug through it, trying to find the whistle. “*Where is it?*” I thought. “*It’s always in my bag!*” I dug around some more, and realized it wasn’t there. As I practically turned my backpack upside down looking for the whistle, I noticed a hole in the bottom of the compartment where I always kept my whistle. “*Oh no, how did it rip?*” I thought back to the part of my hike where I met the fork in the path. I did remember hearing a little rip, but I was too focused on getting away from the snake! “*Maybe the bag caught on some brush and ripped it.*” My heart pounded in my ears. “*How am I supposed to get back to the cabin? My parents are going to be worried sick about me!*” I took a few deep breaths. “*Just like the Bible says, worrying won’t add another hour to your life. What things do I have in my backpack?*” I dumped the contents of my backpack onto the ground, and looked at everything. I had a small bag of trail mix, my journal, my water bottle, a pen, my friendship bracelet I got from a friend I met here, and wait a minute... my phone! I picked it up, and tried to find a signal, but there wasn’t one. I groaned and picked up my journal to write instead.

I’m lost. No joke, that’s reality. I’m sitting here on a rock in the middle of the forest. My options are staying put and waiting for a miracle, or trying to find my way back to the cabin. I’ll probably get more lost if I try to find my way back, so I’ll go with the first one. But first...

Dear God, I’m lost. You already know that, but I need your help anyway. Please send someone, preferably my family, to come and find me and bring me back to our cabin. In Jesus’ name, Amen

As soon as I stopped writing, I heard a noise. Out of fear I threw all my stuff back into my backpack, zipped it shut, and dove behind the rock to hide. I heard voices.

“I think it’s up here,” one said. “*Are they talking about me?*” I thought.

“I may need a break soon,” another said.

I peeked over the rock to see hikers. I suddenly jumped up and waved my arms in hope.

“Help! I’m lost!” I yelled. The hikers seemed startled, but asked me a few questions.

“Where are you staying?”

“Where are your parents?”

“How did you get lost?”

“My name is Abby, I’m twelve years old, and me and my family are staying in a cabin at the campgrounds here. My parents are in the cabin; they let me go on a hike. Then I saw a snake, started running, and I don’t remember a whole lot after that,” I rambled on. “Please help me.”

“We will,” one said. “We know the way back to the campsite, but we’ll take you after we see the big treehouse.”

“Is that what they were talking about when they said ‘I think it’s’ up here,” I thought.

“It’s not far from here,” another said. “It’ll only take a bit.”

“Okay,” I agreed reluctantly.

So we set off, and hiked for a while. As the hikers chatted away, I stayed quiet. I passed the time by looking at the nature that surrounded us, and thinking. *“I wish they would’ve just brought me back right away and not have brought me along on their hike,”* I thought. *“It’s like they don’t care – they just want to bring me back when they get time for it.”*

“You alright?” one of the hikers asked me; he must’ve noticed the worried and frustrated look on my face.

“Uh,” I said, not expecting the question. *“Should I tell them I don’t want to go to the treehouse, that I just want to go back to the cabin? My parents are expecting me to be back by now.”*

“So, are you?”, the hiker asked. All the hikers were looking at me now.

“Um, yeah,” I lied. “Can’t wait to see the treehouse!”

The hikers seemed satisfied with my response, so they looked at the path ahead of them, continuing to hike.

What seemed like eight hours later, we finally arrived at the treehouse. It was giant, with big gaps in it for windows, a roof, and a spiderweb net.

“Woah,” I breathed. “Could we stay here for a little bit?”

“Of course! That’s why we came,” one said.

“Great!” I said, running up to it. I climbed the rope ladder, and took a step into the treehouse. There were four small bean bag chairs, and an entrance that led to the spiderweb net. Running out the net, I jumped up and down on it, climbed all over it, and then finally just plopped down on it to rest. Hiking, climbing, and jumping are a lot of work without rest. By that time, the other hikers had joined me, and we were all enjoying our break from hiking.

“So,” I said, while climbing up one of the walls of the spider web net. “How long are we staying here until we go back to the campsite?”

“About twelve hours,” they said.

I stood in shock. I could’ve said, *“Oh okay, sounds great!”* to lie, but instead, I said, “twelve hours?!”

“Yeah, we’re staying the night.”

“But my parents wanted me back to the cabin in thirty minutes, starting when I left the cabin. I’ve already passed that amount of time, and don’t need to pass it any more. My parents are most likely already worried sick about me. I don’t need them to worry anymore.”

They didn't know what to say. I had come along and ruined their day. I told them I was lost and needed to find my way home, they took me with them, we arrived here, and now I was trying to make them take me home already when they had other plans to stay the night. I had no other option though; what's a girl to do?

"Listen," one of the hikers began. "We're staying the night, no matter if you are or not." I'm pretty sure my heart fell to my knees. "I have a map, and if you want to leave now, you can take it with you and find your own way back. What do you say?"

"Okay," I said. "*Alone again,*" I thought. They handed me a map and a little bag of trail mix, and sent me on my way.

Plopping down on a big rock nearby, I opened the map. After a little bit of studying, I figured out what to do. So, I took the pen from my backpack out, and drew a line that led which paths to take to get back to the camper.

"*Alright,*" I thought. "*Let's do this.*" I hiked through the forest quickly, following the path I drew with my pen.

"Ughh," I groaned, dropping on the ground and opening the trail mix bag. I ate a little to get my mind off of the truth. I was lost. Again. "*What am I supposed to do?*" I thought. "*I'm never going to find my way back home.*"

"Abby?" I heard a woman's voice. "*It couldn't be, could it?*"

"Mom?"

"Abby!" She ran towards me and we embraced.

"I thought I was lost for good."

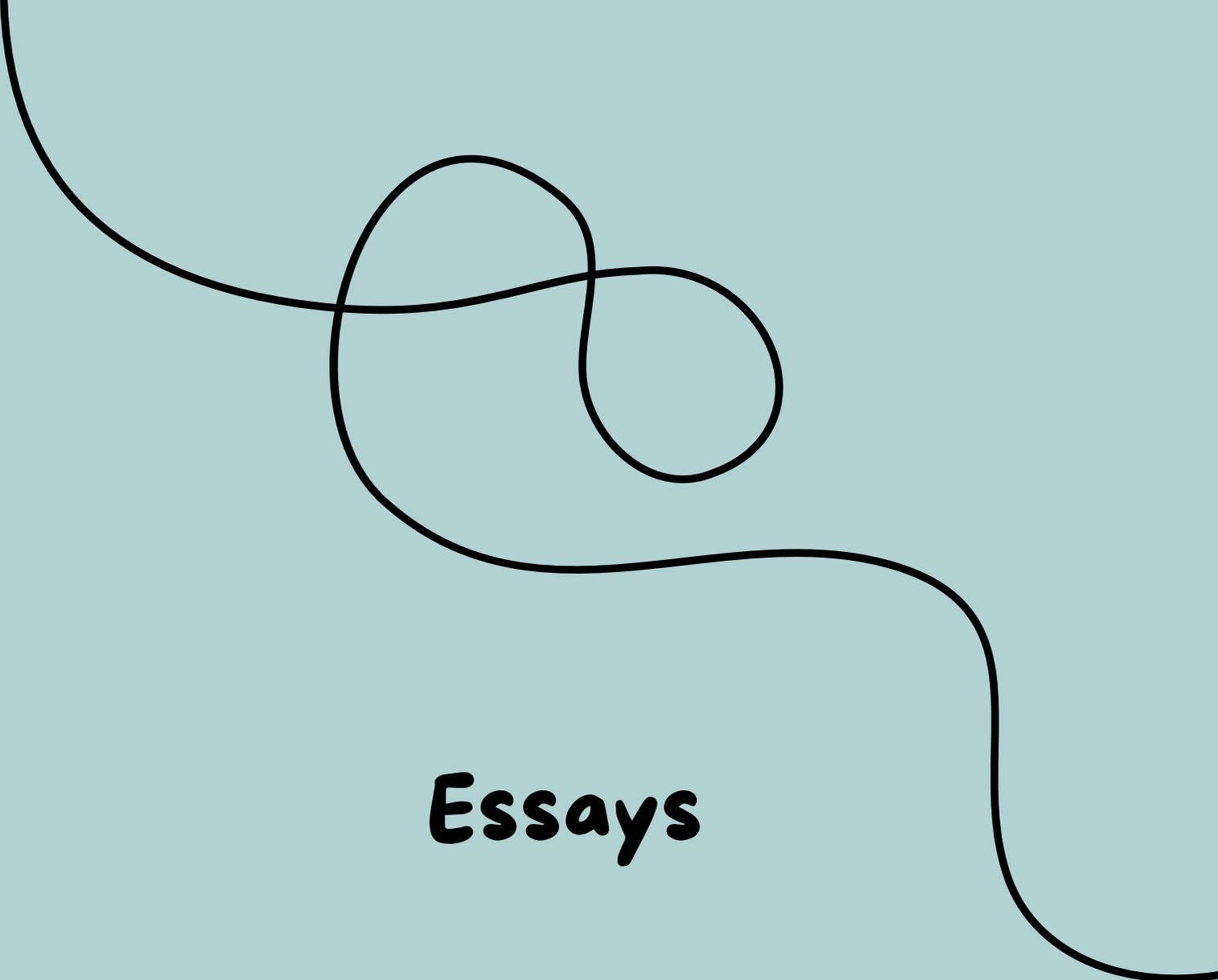
"I thought you were too! Let's get back to the camper and get some lemonade and cookies."

"Kay."

We walked together back to the camper and shared lemonade as I told what had happened that day.

I learned a very important truth that day. When I thought that I was alone, that was far from the truth; because with God, I am never alone.





Essays

The true alchemists do not
change lead into gold; they
change the world into words.

~ William H. Gass

Religious OCD

By Ashe

I have recently found out that I have something called “Religious OCD.”

I’m not quite sure if this is an actual term in psychology or if it’s just one of those made-up terms. I discovered the word on the thumbnail for a YouTube video I didn’t actually watch, so I’m not sure how accurate it is.

Though I don’t know how the video described it, if I were to describe Religious OCD, it would look something like, (noun) “the act of wanting to be perfect in your life and never mess up or disappoint God.” I had a strong desire to perfect my walk with Christ. I wanted to follow Him perfectly and always think about Him. Always. Be. Perfect. I was desperately scared of failing God. All of this messy perfectionism came from a very genuine but extremely misguided longing to be close to God, my Abba, and please Him. I truly wanted, and still want, to know Him on a personal level, to dance with Him, to please Him with my life. But what I think I’ve learned about life is that it’s a lot messier than it looks...

Sunday morning. Sunday is a holy day for many people. A lot of people go to church. Others just stay home and spend time with their family. Even secular people usually see Sunday as a day for rest and peace. For my family, it means video games and TV. Don’t misunderstand me. My family loves God. We just go to church on Saturday. Instead of chilling on Saturday and going to church on Sunday, my family’s schedule is reversed. Sunday is the day we hang out at home, playing games, watching SpongeBob, and enjoying each other’s company. So Sunday is a fun day for me, which used to be a scary thought for me.

Fun! Fun! Are Christians supposed to have fun? Christianity shouldn’t be fun! Should it? Or, it should at least be a little more holy. Yes, I swear that these were more or less my actual thoughts only shy of two years ago. Ask my mom.

I HATED the thought of having fun when I should be reading the Bible and praying (I guess it hadn’t dawned on me that reading the Bible and praying should be fun, too). Think of all the poor people being killed by terrorists in other countries! They weren’t having fun. So why should I?

It wasn’t until later that I realized that caring for people doesn’t mean murdering yourself in order to make them happy. And playing some games and watching some TV wasn’t going to send me to Hell. A great sermon I heard once said that you can honor God when you’re having fun, as long as it’s not sinful. I’ve had to slowly realize that a little harmless entertainment now and then isn’t going to ruin my relationship with God. In fact, I’ve realized that sometimes, when you look close enough, you can see God there too.

How about the “bearing each other’s burdens” thing? That’s a great thing for us as Christians to do.



Within healthy limits.

I've spent a lot of my time in my life thinking about others, praying for others, and trying to make them happy. Jesus died for me, I should serve others. Yes, that is true. And I still believe it. But the way I believe it looks a little different than it used to only a few months ago.

I've made myself miserable trying to be the perfect, caring friend. You constantly hear horror stories about people who had no friends and no one who understood them. I made it my mission to make sure that those horror stories never existed. Every setting and place I walked into, I made a determination that every person in there would be happy, and joyful, and know that God loved them, and I would be the one to do it.

But guess what God and my family have been teaching me? Guess what I've learned?

You can care for people. You can talk to them. You can tell them about Jesus. You can be their friend, share with them, and pray for them.

But you can't make them happy.

And you know what else I've learned?

You're not supposed to.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (NIV)

Notice that it doesn't say, "Make everyone happy."

God never made us to make everybody happy. He made us in order that we could show them to Him, so He could make them happy.

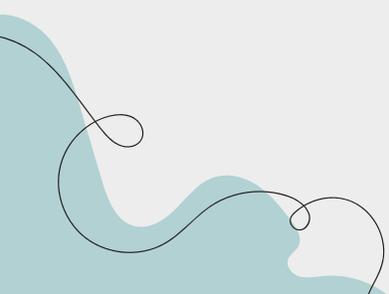
Everything is about God.

Do you know what else I've learned about Religious OCD? It's just Pride, the unholy sin, dressed up in fancy church clothes.

Trying to be perfect ruins your relationship with God. Whenever I was trying to be perfect, I was basically saying, "It's okay God! I've got this! I don't need your help! I know how to be a good Christian, I've been one all my life! So thanks, but I'm good!" I thought that I was trying to please God, but it was all just a cunning lie to keep me serving my flesh.

So, have I arrived? Absolutely... Not. I still mess up. Often. "Oh, wretched man that I am! What I hate, I do." Paul said that, by the way. Well, I'm paraphrasing, he didn't say it in that order, but he said something along those lines. Romans 7. You can read it to get a more accurate picture.

What I'm saying is, I still mess up. I still sin. And I hate it! But I'm not going to be perfect. I want to please God, but I'm not always going to. I've messed up a lot in my life, and to tell you the truth, it probably won't be long until you read another personal essay from me about another sin God's helping me conquer. God is showing me that He loves me and that all He wants from me is my heart. I'm trying to learn that.



The Balance of Loyalty

By M.A. Rice

What does it mean to be loyal? This is a question society has struggled with for eons. In many tough situations in life, when one is caught in the dangerous middle ground between good and evil, it can be hard to decide who or what to be loyal to. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, this dangerous middle ground is shown clearly. In the play, a group of conspirators kill Julius Caesar, believing him to be unfit to rule Rome. Among them is Caesar's good friend, Brutus, who, despite his love for Caesar, makes a murderous decision that alters history forever. Brutus is faced with an impossible choice: his country or his friend. In the end, his fatal decision not only touches his life but countless lives around him. In *Julius Caesar*, it is shown that all different types of loyalty are imperative, mainly those of loyalty towards one's country, one's family, and one's friends.

Loyalty towards a person's country is emphasized throughout *Julius Caesar*. Brutus, when speaking to the mob, demands, "Who is here so vile, that will not love his country?" (Shakespeare 3.2.30). The murderers of Caesar justified their actions by saying that it was "Not that [they] loved Caesar less, but / that [they] loved Rome more" (Shakespeare 3.2.20-21). Despite these men's unholy and bloody actions, their zest for their country is admirable. Brutus, for example, loved Caesar very much but he loved his country more. This is why he is called a nobleman, even by Mark Antony. Even though the conspirators' loyalty to Caesar was complicated, their loyalty to Rome never wavered.

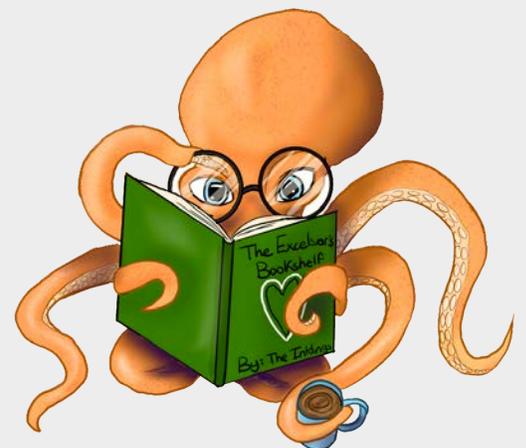
As loyalty towards one's country is portrayed in *Julius Caesar*, so is loyalty towards one's family. This is especially shown through Brutus' marriage. When Portia, Brutus' wife, humbly and gracefully approaches her husband to ask what is distressing him, Brutus' reaction is to say, "O ye gods, Render me worthy of this noble wife!" (Shakespeare 2.1.302-303). Many times in the novel, Brutus is called noble. His calling his wife noble was unusual for the time, as women were looked at as lesser than men, and yet, he gives her the same honorable title that is attributed to him. His intense love for her shows how essential it is to be loyal to someone's family. Yet, sadly, readers see that he was not loyal enough. Readers learn later that Portia died, as Brutus put it, from "Impatient of my absence, and grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony / Have made themselves so strong; for with her death / That tidings came. With this she fell distract / And, her attendants absent, swallow'd fire" (Shakespeare 4.3.151-155). Because of Brutus' actions in killing Caesar, Portia died. Even though it was not intentional, his loyalty towards his country outweighed his loyalty towards his wife, ultimately leading to the crumbling of their marriage. It is imperative to organize one's loyalties in a way that will not leave one with regret, and it is debatable whether or not Brutus made the right choices in this area.

Finally, just as loyalty to someone's family is highlighted in Julius Caesar, so is loyalty to someone's friends, no matter who they are and what they have done. This is particularly portrayed through the character of Antony. He says to the townspeople, "My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar" (Shakespeare 3.2.104). Even though Shakespeare had many faults, Antony loved him and would never dream of murdering his dear friend. Out of his grief, Antony swore revenge on Caesar's murderers. However, even despite his commendable loyalty towards his friends, he did not hate the enemy so much as to be consumed by bloodlust. He still called Brutus a nobleman, showing that Antony not only had great loyalty towards Caesar but to all his friends, no matter what they might have done in the past. Many wise lessons can be gleaned from this praiseworthy quality, as Antony is the real victor in the end because he chose friendship instead of murder.

In summary, the theme of loyalty is expressed through characters who were loyal to their country, their family, and their friends in Julius Caesar. The characters of the conspirators bring across the ideals of being faithful to a citizen's country, as Portia and Brutus show the importance of loyalty towards one's family. The characters of those loyal to Caesar showed the importance of friendship, mainly Mark Antony. However, these characters were not perfectly loyal in all of these areas. All of them succeeded in one area or another but failed miserably in the others. Many important life lessons could be drawn from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, but the greatest is to have a balance in someone's loyalties. One cannot be too loyal to one thing and neglect the other key areas of their life, lest they fall like Brutus and the conspirators, even if they are noble-hearted and have good intentions. This timeless play is still applicable to lives today, as there is much wisdom to reap from it.

Work Cited

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Screwtape Letters Persuasive Essay

By LJ Fay

Letter 1

Dear Azael,

Congratulations on finally becoming a guide! I decided to write to you about the human voyager you have assigned. She is young, only a child. The first tip I want to tell you as your advisor is this: Curiosity, patience, and hope are the virtues that form the arc of Christianity. In the beginning, a non-believer grows into a Christian through curiosity. Then, they become a Christian, have to wait patiently for his coming, and spread his word with patience for those learning. Lastly, as they grow as a Christian, they will find hope in Heaven with God. Never forget this advice, my brother.

Your voyager is now curious about The Way; you must teach her the Way with clear and precise wording. Clarity in understanding the Lord's word is essential for a non-Christian to convert. It is especially important for a girl as young and clueless as her. She has little understanding of the Way, though her parents are doing their best to teach her. You must increase her knowledge. The demon Screwtape, whom I will often reference throughout my letters, says to his nephew, Wormwood, "Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him [Wormwood's patient] from the Church." Screwtape wants to confuse Wormwood's 'patient' with jargon. You must do the opposite of this.

You can start by leading her away from her confusion and doubt. The word of the Holy Three says in 1 Corinthians 14:33, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people. When we worship the right way, God doesn't stir us up into confusion; he brings us into harmony. This goes for all the churches - no exceptions." Our Lord is saying that confusion can lead to disorder, which can lead to clashing of wills and sin. Confusion is a tool of the evil one to distract a non-Christian from the Truth. We must show the converted voyagers they can not know everything as our Lord does and show the ones who do not yet believe how much understanding they can have in knowing the Lord.

When I was still a guide, I had a young man assigned to me. He was not born a Christian. One day, I decided to show him the bible. It was lying open at his aunt's house because their family was Christian. He found it and began to read, curious about what it was. He started where it was opened in the first chapter of Luke and read through the whole book of Luke. I could tell he didn't understand what it meant, so I placed a desire in his heart to talk to his aunt. Later that day, the boy returned to his room with the bible after talking with his aunt. She had been pleased to see his curiosity for Christianity. She had told him he could take the bible home and read it, and if he had any questions, he could ask her. By then, I knew I had done my job well, for I had given the boy a person to talk to when he did not see the ways of the Lord. I knew it wouldn't be perfect, for no humans are, but it would be enough for him to see clearly. The boy is now safely in heaven with our Lord, and I was promoted to an official Angel of the Lord. Once a non-Christian has clarity in understanding the Word, he can then truly decide his beliefs. Always remember this.



As you can see from my example, clarity is essential for non-Christians to see the way. If only you guide her well, this little girl could become as great a Christian as any. I believe you can do it, dear Azael. If you doubt what to do in a certain situation, do not hesitate to ask for help. Please report about your new voyager to me often. I cannot wait to see this young girl grow, and I will advise you as best as possible.

Sincerely,
Your loving sister,
Ariel

Letter 2

Dear Azael,

In your last letter, you informed me your Voyager is going through a rough time and wishes for the past. I caution you to steer your Voyager away from this notion. Time can become an idol if a Christian puts too much hope in it. I have watched many young Christians fall away from the Lord because of this idol. If your voyager must hope for a time that is not the present. Let her hope for the future and pray to the Lord for things to improve. She is going through much pain, but if she puts her faith in the Lord, then she may get through.

However, I warn you: Looking to the future is good to the extent it helps humans focus on the present. If a person throws themselves into the future or past, they may be lost in it. Only let your Voyager look to the future as something that could improve her life. Let her think of the good things in the present and turn her away from despair. The past is the most dangerous of the three. The past has already happened, and it cannot be relived. If your Voyager is living in the past, pull her out as soon as possible. She will lose the feeling of her importance in the present.

After saying all this, I warn you again: it is best for your Voyager's thoughts not to be on time as she sees it but put her problems into our Lord's hands to deal with in his own time. Humans tend to focus on time the way they see it too often. The letters from the demon, Screwtape, will argue the same point in his 15th letter to his nephew, Wormwood, "The humans live in time, but our enemy destines them to eternity." Screwtape wants Wormwood to encourage this in his 'patient,' just as I want you to discourage this in your Voyager. The humans see the word "soon" in the Word of the Holy Three and see it how they see time, but the Savior will only come in the time of the Lord. In the Holy Book, in Mark 13:32-33, it says, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come." If the Father sees time differently from the way the Voyagers see it, then the Voyagers should not strive to hold to it too tightly.

I would love to know more about this "hard time" your patient is going through. The enemy's hosts might use it against her, but we might also be able to use it to our own advantage. Try to put into practice the things I have said to you here, and report them to me as soon as you can. You have done quite well so far. I am very proud of you and love you greatly; maybe soon you will join me in the house of the Holy Three as an Angel of the Lord.

Sincerely,
Your Loving Sister,
Ariel

Letter 3

Dear Azael,

I would like to offer you my condolences and congratulations. I hear your voyager has passed on to join our Lord, and you have been promoted to Angel of the Lord. I am very proud of you, my brother, but I wanted to write you this one last letter because I know the effect this little girl's death has had on you. I am writing this letter to remind you of the incredible truth of believing in the Savior: Death is not permanent with the Lord.

On Earth, Christians grieve every loss even though they know it is not permanent, and all who believe will see their loved ones again because they know they are still going to be apart from the ones they've lost until they are taken to the Father's house. I know you are conflicted with yourself because you know this girl is with the Lord, and her family will see her again. Yet, you still grieve for them because it may be a while. It is beneficial for humans to grieve and be sad, my brother, as long as they remember God's promise and don't lose sight of his mercy and love. Death to humans is life to the Holy Three. As I said in my previous letter, time is different for God. He will choose when the savior is coming or when a human's time has come to join him.

Life on earth is short, but life in heaven is eternity. This girl may be apart from her family for a little while, but they will be able to spend eternity with her once they, too, pass away. When my first voyager passed away, I grieved for his family, and I hid away because I was embarrassed about being sad when I knew the boy would be in our father's house. I didn't have an advisor because that program had not been launched yet. I felt alone. I came home that week, as you know, to celebrate. I talked to our Father, and he told me what I have now told you and praised me for my compassion. It was one of the times I have been most encouraged. I hope you feel the same.

I will see you soon, Azael, and I will always be here if you need help or comfort. Your voyager has gone through the arc of Christianity with curiosity, patience, and hope. You are learning quickly, and I am sure you will become a great Angel. Now is your time to serve the Lord. Serve him well. Avoid confusion, focus on time, and continuous thought about death. These things will only hurt your Voyager. Remember everything I have taught you, and never ignore a tip from another angel. This advice will most certainly improve your techniques as a guide. Now, I wish you good luck. In the words of the Lord, in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."

Sincerely,
Your Sister,
Ariel

Work Cited

Lewis, Clive Staples. *The Screwtape Letters: With Screwtape Propose a Toast*. HarperCollins Publisher, 2002.

Six Word Memoirs

To write well, express yourself like
the common people, but think like a
wise man.

~ Aristotle

Six Word Memoirs

Read it. Hated.
Finished. Loved. More?
Ashe

Life is hard, but
God provides.
Avi Hoffman

The reborn will
embrace love forever.
C M B

And yet the world
still turned.
E.V. McCall

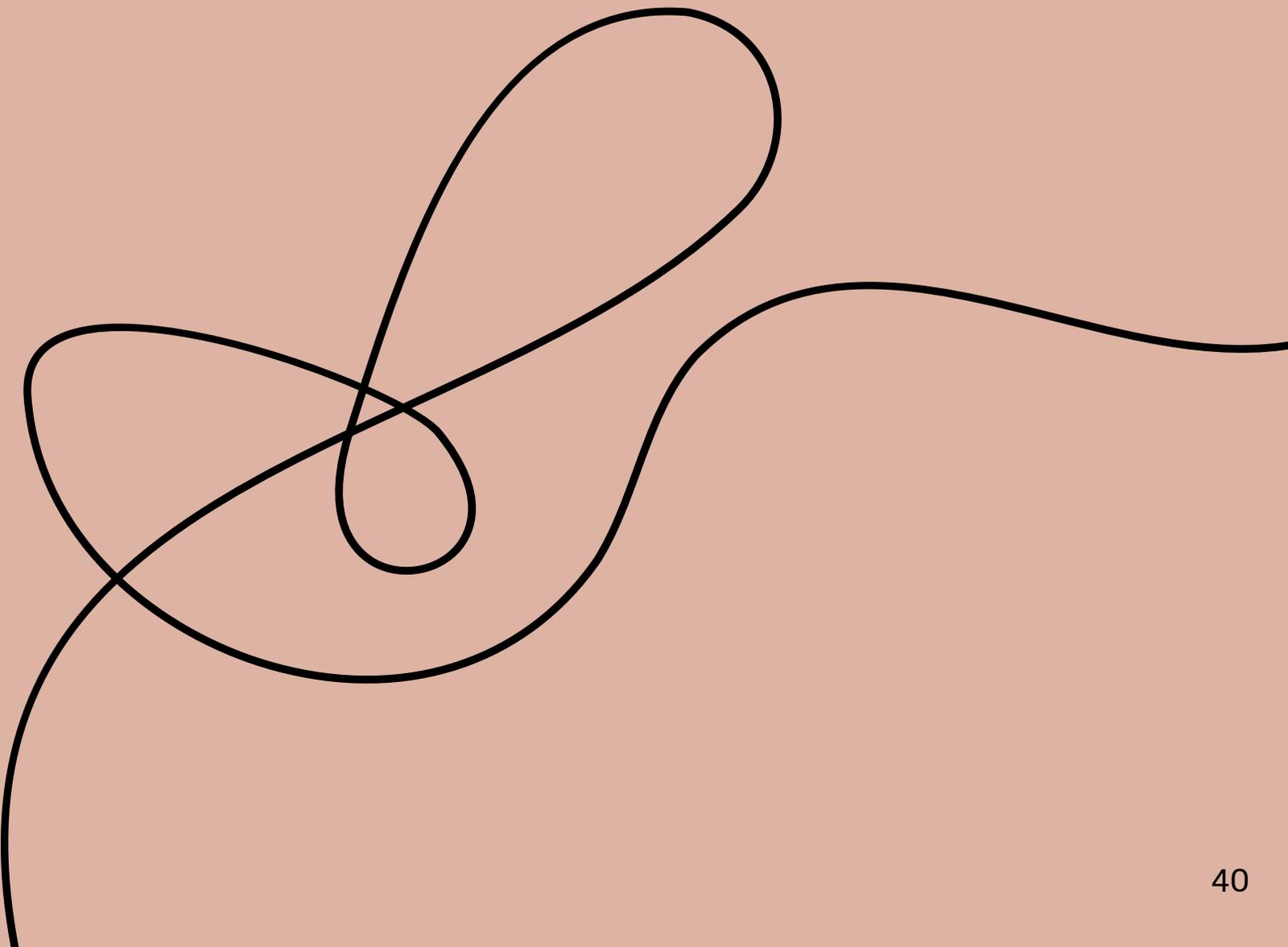
Stormy sky, sadly
sailor never found.
Avi Hoffman



Book Reviews

I do believe something very magical
can happen when you read a good
book.

~J.K. Rowling



Book Reviews



The Sword in the Stars by Wayne Thomas Batson

Reviewed by Ashe

Danger lurks, secrets abound, and the First One's promised Halfainin remains elusive. Will truth win?

The Sword in the Stars is a novel by Wayne Thomas Batson, first in a series of four. Set in the world of Myriad, the novel focuses on a number of characters, all whose stories intertwine. The main character is Alastair Coldhollow, a former assassin who struggles to get his life together while looking for the Halfainin, the First One's promised Pathwalker who is meant to defeat a great evil. When Alastair finds an orphaned baby he does not want to keep, his quest to find responsible parents for the child leads him down a path of strange truths and dark secrets, some of which involve the mysterious child. Will he find the truth in time, or is all of Myriad doomed? And just who is this child anyway? Read the book to find out!

Jack Zulu by S.D. Smith

Reviewed by Cosette McKeen

Jack Zulu is a new series that S. D. Smith has partnered with his son to write. It's about a teenage boy living in a town in West Virginia who discovers a gate into a world between worlds. His mentor coaches him and his two friends in the ways of the Waylanders and those whose worlds are connected to the Wayland. Jack and his two friends battle the evil that is rising with an unstoppable rate, but betrayal and hurt are something they must experience again and again. I love this series because of the genius plot twists and details that the authors weave into the story.

We hope you enjoyed the second volume of Excelsior's Bookshelf!

The Writing Club is an in-depth club that gives young writers a strong community of fellow authors. We learn about writing techniques, meet with professional writers, complete fun challenges, and share our work to receive feedback! To sign up, go to Excelsior's website and click "Writing Club."

We can't wait to see you there!

