

1. Write about an adventure you would like to go on. Feel free to take this in any direction.

A Voyage In

I read in a magazine once, too long ago to remember when, detailing that we know more about the far-reaching galaxies and myriad of planets and cosmic creations than the inner depths of our own world. Regardless of if it were true, I laughed at the mere idea. How silly it was that the promise of adventure, the zeal of the mysterious, prevents us from extracting the potential that lies within. But it was of no matter to me. I could understand that sentiment, for I was a coward of my own right, who tolerated the incessant static noises of the TV more than my own indigent temperament.

When prompted to imagine an adventure, my mind fell to a flatline. *Adventure*, I've existed much too long in a short life to remember such a trivial word. After grade school, I'd realized that the kind of mystical, medieval adventure that I always dreamed of would never be possible; no matter how much I wanted to drink the intoxicating elixir of magic, or draw my sword to battle evil, these things are impossible.

In the first place, risks are not to be taken in the real world; not like in stories of enterprise. Once you begin to understand that life can be made a habit, that washing over the nuances of activities one mustn't be bothered with, existing becomes much more bearable.

Yet compelled by some natural inquisition, and maybe an over-prolonged sense of boredom, I picked up my pen and decided to write once more. It had been years since I'd last done so, but I had longed to enter the world of writing, to pour out the remaining colors and intensities of a tinted mind, to delve inside the magical world of creation, of danger, of risks. And so, it had begun like this:

The valleys were made of crimson, but one could hardly call them bold. Majestic as they were, they were paper thin, towering amongst the dappled pine forests. But the sun—the brilliant sun—peeking out from the mountains, was a golden ember of a pulsing heart that invigorated life as it foresaw the kingdom.

Here, our hero made her entrance, brushing aside the last of the thick cover of leaves that densely populated the forest ground. It was this that uncovered the view of a new world. Unravelling her map, she checked; our hero had made it to the Kingdom of Self: the mystical world where people come to discover uncovered secrets. She set out for the nearest tower.

Clambering up the cobble stairs, she was met face to face with a weeping statue. From it, its tears pooled into the floors of the chamber. Our hero looked deep into the dull azure reflection, entranced by its allure.

“Why are you weeping?” she called.

“I've lost something very dear to me and I can't seem to find it,” replied the statue. The intricate details of the statue's marble face etched every contour of grief, but its tears broke apart the face with the ripples of its reflection.

“What exactly did you lose? Surely I could help you search for it.”

“That’s the sad part,” the statue said, gazing steadily into the open nothing. “I can’t remember.”

What a curious way to start a prose, I began to think to myself. But it couldn’t be helped; my pen took control of the paper. Despite popular belief, writing is never a conscious activity. None can understand the depths of a creative mind or the way it envelopes the chest and sparks through one’s fingertips. Maybe that’s why it becomes so intriguing.

“But I am certain that if I find it, I’ll know what I’m looking for.”

“What can I do to help?” Our hero, wholehearted and pure, asked of the statue.

“Search,” it urged, “For somewhere within the Kingdom of Self it is hidden and lies in waiting. It has been taken by one of the three evils that plague the kingdom. Defeat them, and you may find what I am looking for.”

And there, the adventure began, as all adventures do.

Our hero first trekked through the Pass of the Youthful, and travelled through the Forest of Lies, to the Meadow of Forgiveness, and through the Caverns of the Unknown.

The journey wasn’t very difficult. Our hero was courageous and bold. She walked down dirt paths and left behind sandy walkways. Even the mountains seemed to cave in towards her presence. Civilians and nobles alike knew her name and loved and respected her.

But as the days went on, her energy became weary. And upon this vulnerability, came her first endangering encounter...

I couldn’t help but stop to notice the rain that began oozing outside my window. I was at a loss, I couldn’t think of a villain strong enough to faze such a worthy hero. There wasn’t much she had feared: not spiders, nor ghosts, nor even death itself.

My mind turned to then, *what do I fear for myself?* I slumped at my desk for a few, noticing that the sounds of the rains cease to stop pouring once I tuned into the silence in between each droplet. Sitting back up, I continued.

Isolation was a fat, bearded man. He munched on crackers regularly and one couldn’t help but notice the bits of his lunch that still remained in his unkempt beard, but Isolation doesn’t notice anything at all. One may have mistaken him as an average middle-aged man if they weren’t careful, but then again—no one sees him at all.

But our hero was in peril: one touch and her insides would be exposed, as her inner flesh would seep to the outside of her skin. Her heart would become displaced and

sink to her stomach; or if luck prevailed, it would just harden. She would become unable to seek support and help. This was the threat such a monster posed.

“I see you have come alone,” he bellowed as his voice echoed through the cavern; and the caves, fearful of his presence, submitted and whispered his words back to him. “Such audacity. Thousands of heroes with more brawn, brain, and manpower have stumbled before me, none to have been successful.”

“I can defeat you alone, Isolation.” Courageous as she was, our hero put up a front as if she was not faltered.

She drew her longsword and took four calculated steps towards his right flank.

Even as he drew close, she built up walls in her mind to protect herself from him. She held her sword steady and firm but her eyes were slightly trembling.

Isolation lashed forward. She barely managed to evade his attack by sliding towards her left. He lunged forward again, this time swinging for her face; his claws just barely nicking the surface of her skin. Here, she saw an opening and went in for a counterattack, but he deftly evaded her swing, grabbing her right forearm.

Horrificed, our hero watched his ghastly magic nearly liquified her skin, and her arm began to bubble and boil: popping and fizzing of malicious skin; her insides surfaced and became exposed to the unforgiving world.

Vulnerability. That was the worst kind of pain. Pain crawled through her skin and shot her chest; pain hardened her soft heart, and it was pain that manipulated the gut-wrenching sensation. The cacophony of pain hence began.

I couldn't remember what I wrote after this. None of it was of much importance. Like always, the hero managed to escape, and was smooth sailing after that. Of course, with the first villain, never found what she would be looking for. No stories are interesting without prolonged conflict. Thus, I introduced another villain.

The next evil was of a strange nature. It was Isolation's sorry excuse for a father, who banished him to the lonely caves in the first place. It seemed to be a conglomeration of malicious intentions and horribly executed plans. It took the shape of an awkward, homogeneous naked-colored blob, and from its misshapen face, its misshapen fingers, it cocked and twitched sideways.

Word was that its ears were so terribly acute that it could hear a midwife's gossip from the next kingdom over. Thus, a victory over this one would be easy, for his weakness was his ears: a simple, and direct conversation, one of the most direct nature, would erupt his ear chambers, defeating him once and for all.

Confidently, our hero walked forward, for victory was nearly assured.

But this evil practiced sorcery that she couldn't have expected: dark magic known as JudGêMent, a spell that can seal the lips of the precarious forever.

The creature conjured up the spell—a brilliant flame of darkness arose into the air like a sea of a thousand silent stares, serious faces, surrounding her, caving in towards her like an imminent tsunami. The plants and bushes watched and snickered.

Our hero began to speak—but nothing came out of her weak lips. Understanding her inferiority, she raced towards the nearest cover and hid behind a bush at the nearest opening. Her heart beating, it pounded and reverberated through the forest, the trees trembling at each throb.

She figured if she couldn't directly speak to it, or confront it, she could pierce it with an arrow.

Drawing her bow, and her breath, she aimed steadily towards its heart. But her right arm, shrieking pains from Isolation's last vicious outburst, fired the arrow crooked and awry, completely whizzing past its target, instead hurting a bystanding, peaceful tree.

She winced as agony took over pain.

Knowing she would be unable to defeat such a powerful entity, she humbly retreated—without ever knowing its name. And thus she had failed again.

I was reminded of the time where I, too, was in a similar situation. *Backs turned, mocking faces, someone injured but not hurt.* But unlike her, I didn't fear the evils as she had; if you lock them somewhere away in the depths of the Self, they are easily taken care of; this hero was just too weak to do as such. But stories are stories, and what must be written must be written. I proceeded.

Her name was Doubt. The evil queen that ruled the Kingdom of Self. Doubt was furious that our hero had entered upon her kingdom so boldly without first paying tribute to her royalty, a violation of the highest order.

She was faced with a court trial, but not of due process.

"Speak now and defend yourself," the queen demanded. "You may not have anyone else represent you in court."

Doubt was known for never trying upon evidence: and merit was never considered.

The crowd fell into a hush, the stares pierced across the room; the silence was the chill in her hands and the anxiety in her throat. Subjects all over the kingdom came to watch the trial: giants, trolls, dragons, witches, and wizards with great indignation. But not a word was said.

Our hero was silent. Tears welled up within her heart.

Here, torn from security due to Isolation's attack, choking for breath from JudGêMent—she was completely and utterly helpless.

And now Doubt's unfeeling gaze overpowered her too.

Her knees trembled, and so, she sat down because she couldn't stand up for herself. She was just so tired.

“I don’t know how,” she said. Indeed, our hero, while she cared for the people with kindness and love, who protected all those who were bullied, didn’t know how to help and love herself.

“Out of everyone I have tried,” uttered the queen. “You’re the most worthless.” And all our hero could do was hang her head.

There was no way out. She was no hero: all she could do was run away. No evils were defeated, no people were helped, and she had no friends; she left her home in search for adventure but left behind what remained of her, and her mind came tumbling down from there: the world was a brilliant shade of clotted blood and the walls of the room were wounded, ‘stop it,’ ‘stop it’ she cried, but there was not a voice to be heard or listened to, for her shrieks were always silent, and sounds don’t emerge from silence. No, no one cared about her, no one cared about me and—

I felt a drop of water hit the paper. It fell onto the words and bled through the lines, mixing into the ink, as it swirled around like an overturned turtle. *Ah, its eyewater again,* I thought.

I had hoped these pesky emotions, these annoying fears had been safely extinguished inside of me. But reading through my story again, I realized they emerged like a brilliant, blooming wildfire from my subconscious, laying waste to what little security I had left.

I should have known; the act of writing was always unconscious and vexing.

I despised my writing. Nothing was wrong with it, it just felt too *close*. Why, I asked, was the hero who was pure and kind with heartfelt intentions failing to defeat these evils? Wasn’t she strong and courageous? Wasn’t her strength in her independence, her lack of attachments?

No, my hero wasn’t perfect—she was soft-spoken and insecure, she helped others at the cost of herself, she was oblivious to the rest of the happenings in the Kingdom of Self. She was cowardly at times too, and occasionally minded, maybe too much, what others thought of her.

It was then, I realized how just little I knew myself. *But maybe that was a good thing too.*

I thought of the mystical Kingdom of Self. A vast, beautiful world, one I couldn’t fully tap into. Among the serpentine caverns and boisterous valleys, across looming cityscapes and fields of crimson, exploring and imagining intriguing thoughts, the journey of *self discovery*, while hard-hitting and occasionally somber, was one of the most indispensable of journeys I could ever want to go on.

I set the paper of my written story aside.

It would’ve been much easier just to take a hike through the Grand Canyon and called that a journey. It was always easier living in the vastness of this world than living with myself; much easier was it to venture around the nearby creek than to acknowledge the real reason why I was angry at *that* person for leaving. But because living within myself was an adventure, maybe the hardest of them all—I mused, maybe its not too bad.

Upon this realization, a gust of wind flooded within me, my palpitating heart began to animate, an abounding dimension burst and took control of me. The corners of my mouth were lifted in elation; a smile of the most instinctive kind.

Here, I began another story:

Our hero—I—began my journey not by defeating the three evils, but befriending them. And along with my two closest friends, side-by-side, we set out for the new world. And there, the adventure began, as all adventures do, in the magical Kingdom of Self.

2. If you won this scholarship, what would you do with the scholarship money?

If I won this scholarship, I'd spend the money on buying more art supplies. Since after taking AP Art in school, I have run out of most of my art materials and would like to restock on paints and canvases in order to keep painting. Art has always been one of my biggest passions, and while it can become increasingly hard to pursue due to academic restrictions, I believe that it is an important creative outlet to allow me to express myself. Art, along with writing, are the two creative pursuits that I want to develop and excel in.

I'd use the remainder of the money to buy books that are unavailable in local libraries. A lot of the literature I am interested in is not easily accessible in most libraries, and thus with the money I would be able to buy/read them online. I've always felt limited by my reading selections as I could only go to the library very scarcely due to transportation limitations. With the money I could buy ebooks and buy the hard copies online. This would be greatly beneficial towards me as I would be able to read more often, directly impacting my writing skills since works of great writing have always been a great source of inspiration to me.