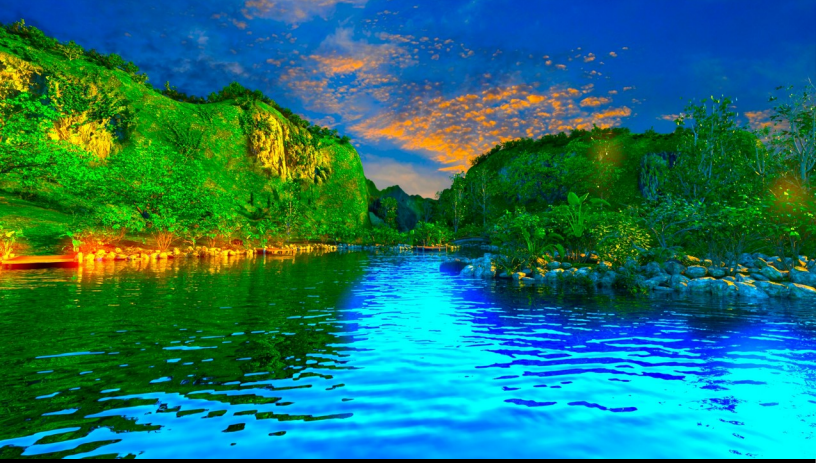


Everland



A Light Novel



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by JesusForSinners.com

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Prologue

Mary's life is a train-wreck. She bounces from one job to another...one man to another...one tragedy to another. After an attempted suicide, her life collides with a big-city psychiatrist who thinks he has all the answers until he uncovers the mystery of Mary's childhood...a mystery that's too fantastic to believe.

Join Mary, George, Peter, and all the rest as you too discover the wonders of Everland!

Chapter 1



George briskly walks through the halls of the cold and sterile hospital in which he works. Through the phone pressed firmly against his ear, Angela his wife, is frantically scolding him.

“I know, honey, I was just about to leave and they brought in an attempted suicide. I just need to check on her and then I’ll head home”, says George as his mind jumps between his wife and the new patient that urgently awaits his arrival.

“The final planning meeting for the rally is tonight, George, and Moira needs help with her math!”, says Angela, who’s voice trembles with a mix of anger and panic.

“I know, I know, I’ll leave in 10 minutes, I promise. Tell Moira not to worry about the math, we’ll get it done. I love you, darling, I’ll be home soon.”

George, dispensing of his phone in a convenient pocket, arrives at the nurses station, “Hi Nana, which room is she in?”

“Holding room 205, Doctor”, says Nana, a veteran nurse twice George’s age with twice the experience, who can only smirk as George arrives at her station, clearly distracted by the crisis at home.

“Do we have a file on her yet?”, asks George.

“Not yet. All she does is mumble to herself. One of the medics thinks he might have heard her say ‘Pam’.”

“They found her on the Center Street bridge?”, George inquires.

“Yes, they got to her just as she was about to jump. It’s a miracle she’s still alive.”

“More like nice timing”, George responds dismissively. “OK, I’ll check on her, then I have to leave. There’s apparently a math crisis at home.”

“From one emergency to another”, Nana chuckles.

There are special rooms for suicides; empty and heavily padded. While devoid of things available to cause further harm, they add to the institutional coldness of such places.

As the latest inhabitant lies in the corner crying and mumbling, George slowly pushes open the door and makes his way inside.

“Please take me back. Please...”, sobs Mary.

As with many suicides, Mary looks aged beyond her years. Her shaved head reveals the scars...some new, some well

worn...of a traumatized life. Her skin clings loosely to her bones as her muscles have been self-consumed by a body lacking the necessary nourishment. Mary wears her hospital scrubs more like a blanket than clothing.

“Pam?”, George tentatively inquires.

“Pam, I’m Dr. Davies. I’m a psychiatrist.

“I understand you’ve had a rough night”, George says as he clumsily attempts to lighten the mood.

George’s attempt at dialog goes unnoticed by Mary as she continues her pleading, “Please Peter, please take me back...”

“Is Peter your boyfriend, Pam? No

breakup is worth taking your life over, you know”, says George as he confidently deduces the source of the evening’s events.

“Please take me back...”

George is puzzled by Mary’s lack of response to his bedside manner, something with which he has always taken great pride. “I’d like to talk with you more about this. Maybe tomorrow after you’ve had a chance to rest.”

“Please Peter...”, cries Mary.

“Tomorrow then”, George confidently concludes. “Just try to relax, Pam.

You're safe now. Everyone here wants to help you", as a tinge of compassion breaks through George's attempt to control the situation.

After a passing moment of curiosity, George retreats to attend to his other emergency at home, leaving Mary to plead alone, oblivious to his departure.

Chapter 2



George's occupation affords him certain material luxuries. His home is large; certainly more than sufficient for three people. And while the elevator ride to the 48th floor makes grocery shopping a bit of a chore, his perch atop the city further re-enforces his presumed place in society.

As he makes his way through the door and announces his presence, George is greeted with varying flavors of welcome.

“Angela! I'm home!”, George calls out to Angela.

“Moiras in the dining room!”, Angela yells back.

As Moira races to the door, her progress is hindered only by her struggle to keep her pirate hat...a favorite accessory...affixed at a stylishly skewed angle.

She locks her arms around George, giving him a firm squeeze and cheerfully exclaims, “Daddy!”

“Not any more!”, George yells back to Angela, updating her on Moira’s location.

Moira is a stout, energetic girl. She assumes command of every situation. Ten years hardly seems like enough time to establish this level of confidence and presumption but parents have a large

influence on a child's view of themselves.

Moira's mood suddenly changes as she pouts, "Math hates me, dad."

George responds with knowing resignation, "Math hates all of us, sweetheart. Math has plagued the Davies' for generations. That's why I'm a psychiatrist and not an engineer."

"Well, I want to be a pirate! I don't know why I have to know math", Moira protests.

"Dealing with unpleasant things builds character, sweetheart. Let's see if you and I can endure this together", sighs

George.

As George and Moira make their way to the dining room table...upon which the dreaded math homework rests...Angela, with almost as much energy as her daughter, rushes to greet George, albeit, with somewhat less enthusiasm.

“There you are!”, scolds Angela.

“Sorry, honey, society is crumbling all around us and the fallout lands on my desk”, a beleaguered George responds.

Assured of her own importance, Angela counters, “Does society have to crumble when I’m late for a meeting?”

“We’re expecting over 500 demonstrators at the rally and at least 3000 spectators!”, Angela proclaims with a sudden shift from anger to conceit.

“Mommy’s going to save the planet!”, cheers Moira as Angela flexes her slender biceps in a pose reminiscent of a victor at a boxing match.

“That’s good. Maybe we’ll have fewer people trying to hurl themselves off bridges”, George says as he brings the conversation to the more mundane issue of human trauma.

“Is that what this patient tonight tried to

do?”, asks Angela.

“A young woman. Sounds like a bad break-up or something”, George responds.

With righteous indignation, Angela hurls back, “Another victim of the patriarchy! When will women learn that they can do just fine without a man?”

“Unless they need help with math”, George says with a wink in Moira’s direction.

“George! Don’t teach her that!”

“Aren’t you going to be late for your

meeting?”, says George in an attempt to free himself from the conversation.

“Yes! I need to go!”

“Bye mommy!”, wave George and Moira as Angela rushes out the door with a slam behind her.

George steels himself as he takes Moira by the shoulder, “OK, Moira, it’s time to face our demons. The math homework awaits!”

Chapter 3



George's office is only slightly less sterile than the padded room in which Mary spent the past twelve hours. George's attempt to infuse visual recreation into the decor has had little impact on Mary as she stares distantly out the window. Even George's entry into the room has done nothing to redirect Mary's attention.

“Hello, Pam. I'm doctor Davies. Do you remember me from last night?”, asks George as he settles in behind his desk across from Mary.

As Mary continues to her long gaze outside, George attempts once again to get her attention, “How are you feeling this morning?”

After an uncomfortable pause that fails once again to capture Mary's attention, George continues to prod, "I know these things can be uncomfortable to talk about but I want you to know that I'm not here to judge you. I just want you to know that you can trust me and that I'm here to help you in any way that I can."

As George continues to wait for Mary's focus to shift from the window to him, he refrains from any further queries and presumes the diagnosis that he had reached so quickly the night before, "I know relationships can be difficult...and when one party loses interest, it can be devastating to the other. Pam?"

Mary, realizing that the annoying pest that keeps buzzing around her is not going away until it is satisfied by her attention, finally turns to George and asks, “Why are you calling me ‘Pam’?”

George, surprised that one of his presumptions may be erroneous, stutters, “Oh! I’m sorry. I heard your name might be ‘Pam’. My name is Dr. Davies but you can call me George.”

“I’m Mary”, Mary coldly replies as her attention is soon captured by George’s peculiar office décor.

“Who does your decorating?”, Mary asks

snidely.

“Huh? Oh!, my daughter, Moira”, George says with an uncomfortable chuckle. “She has a thing for pirates. She was very excited when I told her she could help decorate my office. Little did I know what I was getting myself into.”

Fully stocked with all the necessary paraphernalia: a spyglass, a compass, a variety of jugs and mugs, a hook for those lacking a full compliment of appendages, an array of hats, and even a truncated cannon which appears rather operational; any pirate of decent repute would be quite at home in George’s office. Nevertheless, Mary returns George’s chuckle with a

mix of bemusement and disdain.

“A lot of the patients like it. It’s whimsical...puts people at ease”, George playfully explains.

As Mary begins her return to the more appealing visual of the grey overcast outside the window, George finally says something that catches her interest.

“Do you feel like talking about Peter? Is he why you tried to jump off the bridge?”, George asks, not realizing the Pandora’s box he’s about to open.

“Yes”, Mary whispers sadly.

“How did you and Peter meet?”

Mary analyzes George before proceeding, attempting to determine his capacity to comprehend the tale she is about to tell.

“Our family moved to the city just before my freshman year of high school. My parents both had better job opportunities here. They were very excited.

I was scared to death though. I didn't know anyone in the city. I just wanted to go back home.”

“New environments can be traumatic”, George consoles.

“I grew up in a small town. My friends

and I had heard stories about people in the big city...most of them bad. I was so afraid I wasn't going to fit in. I felt like my life had been ruined", says Mary quietly, lowering her head.

"Did you tell your parents how you felt?"

"Yes, but they just tried to convince me that everything would be fine. I spent that whole Summer out on the balcony imagining all sorts of terrible things. I'd cry late into the night until I didn't have the strength to cry any more", says Mary as her eyes dampen.

As Mary relates her story, and tenses as she recalls the anxiety of those long-ago

Summer nights, she can picture the balcony high above the city and the figure that was watching her as she cried each night away.

“Sometimes parents get so wrapped up in what they’re doing, they don’t consider their kids’ needs”, acknowledges George.

“As the Summer drew to an end, I became more and more desperate. I just wanted to get out of there. That first day of school seemed like death slowly creeping at my door.”

“Did it turn out as bad as you thought it would?”

“No...

...and yes”, Mary answers with a wry smile.

George’s curiosity is certainly piqued as he senses there is much to be read between Mary’s lines. “Did you meet Peter at school?”

“No...I met him on the balcony”, says Mary as she gazes out the window with a longing smile. “He was just a twinkle of starlight at first. I noticed him only occasionally...but as the Summer drew to a close, I noticed him more and more.

Then one night I noticed the starlight

moving. I thought it was a plane at first but it moved strangely and seemed to be coming towards me.”

“Fascinating”, George responds with a whisper as he tries to analyze what he’s hearing. “Do you think you might have been imagining this; because of your nervousness about starting school?”

Giving the idea a momentary contemplation, Mary responds, “The thought crossed my mind but when he stood right in front of me--”.

“Right in front of you?”, a surprised George interjects.

A broad smile crosses Mary's face and her eyes soften as her memory takes her back to that consequential night, "Yes. He was dressed in white and had such a lovely smile. He looked barely older than I was but he had a gentleness about him that gave me no reason to be afraid."

So many years ago. Almost another life ago...another person. A slender 14-year-old girl with long flowing black hair. A faded yellow and blue shirt struggling for attention behind the overalls hanging from her narrow shoulders.

The memory of the sights and sounds of the balcony, the smells of the potted flowers, and the warmly caressing

Summer air made the distant recollection of Peter all the more inviting.

“Why are you so sad, Mary?”, asks Peter empathetically.

“Who are you?”, asks a startled Mary.

“I’m Peter. I’ve been watching you cry all Summer. It breaks my heart.”, says Peter with a tilt of the head and the tenderest of frowns.

As Mary’s brow furrows, she explains, “My parents brought me to this horrible place with all these horrible people. I just want to go back home.”

“There are bad people everywhere, Mary. There were bad people back home as well.”

“Well...yes...but the people here are worse! They’re all going to hate me. I’ll be an outcast.

I won’t have any friends at all”, says Mary in a hushed voice as she looks down and her clenched fingers. “Do...do you have many friends?”

“Yes”, exclaims Peter.

“Do you live in the city?”, asks Mary hopefully.

“No”, responds Peter.

A bit deflated at Peter’s answer, Mary presses on and asks, “Where do you live?”

“In a beautiful place. With kind people...loving people”, Peter says with a smile.

“Is it a small town?”

Peter’s eyes brighten and his smile grows as he answers, “No. It’s a vast place of colors and light and joy all the time.”

“It sounds wonderful!”, says Mary as she catches Peter’s contagious smile and her

eyes fill with faint tears.

“I can show you if you’d like.”

“Show me? But how?”

“You can come with me...tonight.”

“But...what about my parents? When will I be back?”, asks Mary with feigned confusion masking her eagerness.

“You’ll be back before you left”, Peter explains with a knowing twinkle.

“Would you like to go?”

As Mary battles her tears and giggles, she can muster only one response, “Yes!”

As Peter takes Mary by the hand and leads her to the edge of the building, Mary wonders if this is real or a dream. Is this how it ends? Is this how she's found...on the sidewalk below? Will her parents agonize over the thought of their daughter ending her life rather than facing the changes they forced upon her?

As they stand at the ledge of the balcony, Mary grasps Peter's hand firmly and asks, "Peter...am I going to die?"

"Yes...", Peter responds. "...but not tonight", he adds with a smile.

And with that, Peter leaps off the building

pulling Mary behind him! As they fall to the ground below, Mary is resigned, almost complacent, about the impending encounter; at least her misery will be over.

As the sidewalk rushes towards them, a sudden wind redirects their flight upward and onward! A giggle escapes Peter's smile as he looks at Mary's reaction to the abrupt change in direction.

“Hold on, Mary!”, Peter shouts.

Never intending to let Mary slip from his grip, Peter pilots Mary over the streets and between the buildings of the city. Under foot-bridges, down alleyways,

above the crowds of people; Mary, in just a few minutes, has seen more of her new city than she had all Summer.

As the wind blows through her hair, and Peter's firm but gentle grip secures her way, she almost musters a degree of curiosity about the city, as unknown places pass beneath her.

Peter leads Mary on a shallow descent as they head towards the ground below, not with a rush, as before, but a gentle meander like a leaf on an October day; the transition from flight to foot requiring only a simple step.

Peter, still guiding Mary with a soft hand,

leads their stroll down an empty street at the edge of the city. As the sound of feet on pavement gives way to soft grass under foot, so too the concrete buildings give way to swaying trees and flowers glowing in the moonlight.

Mary's eyes are wide and a broad smile dashes across her face. As she looks at Peter with calm amazement, the sound of gentle water fills her ears. Peter responds with a smile as he guides her gaze towards the small boat at the edge of the river ahead.

The curious craft, while looking somewhat like a boat, looks equally like a conglomeration of empty walnut shells

and flower pedals, complete with a very large leaf hanging from a slightly crooked tree branch.

As Peter lifts Mary into the boat, her concern about it's seaworthiness gives way to her anticipation of the destination. Peter takes his place across from Mary, his eyes and constant smile fixed to hers.

After an oddly long wait, Mary's anticipation overcomes her patience. "Do we have to row or something?", asks a puzzled Mary.

"No", Peter says with a smile.

Mary chuckles and asks, "Are we going

somewhere?”

“Oh, yes”, giggles Peter.

With outstretched arms only slightly wider than her smile, Mary feigns frustration with a firm, “Well?!”

After a hearty laugh and a very deep breath, Peter expels enough air to fill the leafy sail and gently, but earnestly, propels the craft forward. Mary’s amazement at the means by which their journey is launched, gives way to an excited expectation of the vast land of color and joy of which Peter spoke.

Peter eases into a reclined posture,

content to spend the journey at rest, his ever-present smile securing Mary's calm. The tiny river from which their journey started gives way to a watery expanse as the small craft and its happy passengers sail towards a moonlit horizon.

Chapter 4



Having joined Peter in sleep, from the gentle rocking of the self-navigating craft, Mary barely notices the warm water splashing onto her face. As the morning sun slips through her eyelids, a growing spray of water awakens her from her pleasant rest.

Her opening eyes focus on Peter, unmoved from his previous repose. The sight of him and his contented smile, even in sleep, brings a hopeful longing for such peace. Is their destination...this joyful land...the source of Peter's felicity? Perhaps his many friends are from where his happiness is drawn? Will they want to be her friends also?, Mary hopefully wonders.

Mary's contemplation is interrupted by the continuous deluge of water bedraggling her with increasing regularity. Fending off the onslaught with an outstretched hand to guard her face, she peers over the side of the boat and spots a frolicsome dolphin dislocating lavish volumes of water into the boat with its tail. The creature seems to chuckle at the arousal it has caused. Mary is equally amused by their journey's companion.

“Peter! Peter! Wake up!”, an excited Mary exclaims. “Look! A dolphin!”

Hearing Peter's chuckling at the front of the boat, Mary, turning to seek affirmation of her joy at the presence of the dolphin, finds her attention instantly arrested by the sight before her...an explosion of color and form emerging from the horizon...a vibrant glow and hues of every sort weaving between sky and land and water.

Mary's jaw drops in awe and a feeble attempt to speak is impeded by a lack of breath. Mary wonders if she is still asleep or if she had indeed hit the pavement after all. What is this that her eyes behold? A picture that her imagination could never paint.

Mustering all her strength, Mary gathers enough air in her lungs to faintly inquire of Peter, “Where are we?”

With a broad smile, Peter explains, “This is my home. This is Everland.”

Mary’s eyes fill with tearful joy as she teeters between cries and laughter. As the boat nears the white powdered beach ahead, the sapphire clear water reveals the shallows beneath.

Mary’s heart races with excitement as she senses the arrival at a home she has never

visited yet one for which she has always longed.

Finishing its secure conveyance, the boat gently nestles itself into the soft sand, the brightness of which is nearly blinding. As Peter guides Mary from the craft, her eyes strain to sufficiently indulge in the visual feast that surrounds her.

“Peter, it’s so beautiful”, Mary breathlessly exclaims.

“Follow me”, Peter instructs with a smile.

As Peter leads Mary from the beach

through a thin stand of palm trees, her head pivoting to catch every sight, the landscape opens to a vast field encircled by mountains seemingly close enough to touch.

A gossamer glow envelopes everything. The electric colors of flowers are myriad. The grass ripples with the gentle breeze as the trees sway in time. Even the sky is a cocktail of blues and purples and reds. The air is light and perfumed with the sweetness of foliage. The harmony of birds dances on the wind.

“Where did this place come from?”, asks an awe-struck Mary.

“Our Great King prepared this place for us”, Peter explains.

“King? What King?”

“The King of Everland...and the King of every land”, says Peter with smile.

“Huh?”, questions Mary. “Well, perhaps I could meet Him some day.”

“I would like that...and I’m sure He would as well”, says Peter.

“He would? He doesn’t even know me.”

“He’s known you your whole life, Mary”, says Peter with a knowing smile.

“What?”

As Mary busily ponders Peter’s responses, she is suddenly interrupted by a firm nudge at the back of her thigh.

“Ooof!”, grunts Mary.

As Mary turns to confront her assailant, the surprising site of a rather mischievous

goat fills her with delight.

“Hey! What are you doing?”, she playfully chastises the goat.

“You’re it, Mary!”, explains Peter.

Suddenly, Mary is encompassed by squirrels and beavers and sheep and ponies, even a nimble cow.

As he and the animals run around, Peter instructs Mary, “You have to tag someone!”

After a successful swipe at a playful fawn that ventured too close, Mary, giggling with delight, tries to maintain a safe distance while still enticing the current pursuer.

It is a maelstrom of fur and feet. With new participants joining in, seemingly from out of nowhere, Mary has only now noticed another girl in the frenzy. As the girl approaches, Mary is put at ease by her broad smile, her gleaming white teen and white robe contrasting her tan complexion.

“Hello, I’m Wendy”, says the girl.

“Hi, I’m Mary.”

“And you’re also IT!”, laughs Wendy as she lunges at Mary.

With a quick tag Wendy leaves Mary momentarily stunned, feigning offense at the trickery employed to tag her. Mary races around looking for her own victim. A young boy, with a sufficiently short stride, further inhibited by his knee-length robe, catches her glance and makes for an easy prey!

“You’re it!”, exclaims Mary with a smile.

“No, I’m John!”, the young boy proclaims.

Suddenly, the giggling and laughter of the swollen group is broken by a distant shout!

“Kiiiiites!!!!”, yells Michael from across the expansive field.

Mary squints at the distant figure holding a full clutch of kites that strain to escape his grasp.

Peter, Wendy, and John look at each other with knowing excitement and shout with

one voice, “KITES!!!”

As the trio bolts across the field, Mary is frozen in lingering curiosity.

“Come on, Mary!”, Peter urges as the gap between them widens.

Mary, lagging behind but ushered along by the throng of four-legged friends, is relieved to find that her tardy arrival has not exhausted the supply of kites.

Peter, grasping a kite for Mary, instructs her, “Hold on tight.”

“Don’t worry, it won’t get away from me”, Mary says with assurance.

A smiling Peter corrects, “Make sure that *you* don’t get away from *it!*”

And with that, the dainty construction of wood, paper, and string lifts Mary from the ground and into the air! With a firm grip on the string, Mary’s priority turns to guiding her kite so as to avoid the other pilots who have joined her in the sky.

Everland, however, is devoid of such tragedies; the slow realization of which

calms Mary, allowing her to enjoy riding the breeze with her new friends and the furry onlookers below.

At the end of a day full of friends and adventure, sights and sounds and sweet smells, Mary and Peter recline on the beach, relaxing in the serenity, as the sun dwindles on the horizon.

“This is such a wonderful place, Peter. So beautiful”, says Mary with a sense of calm she has never known before...even back in her small hometown. “I love the animals. And Wendy and John and Michael...and the kites. It’s all so marvelous. I want to stay here forever.”

“You can...”, says Peter.

A wave of exhilaration sweeps over Mary as Peter continues, “...but not today.”

“What?! But why?”, asks a shocked and deflated Mary.

“This isn’t your home, Mary.”

“But I want it to be.”

“Me too”, says a hopeful Peter, “...but it isn’t today; you’re just visiting, Mary.”

As Peter stands and extends a helping hand to bring Mary to her feet, she is both baffled and hollowed by her apparently imminent departure from Everland.

“But...I don’t understand”, says Mary as the memory of that melancholy boat ride back to the city revives her grief. The reality of the cold sterile office in which she sits jolts her back to the present. She looks out the window into the grey gloom as her eyes seem to search for that path back to Everland.

“Then he took me back home.”

George, intently staring at Mary, is nearly frozen with bewilderment at her story. Mary turns her gaze from the window to investigate the way in which her tale was received.

“Do you believe me?”

After a brief hesitation, George responds, “Uuhhh...I believe you had an experience that seemed very real to you.”

With a sneering frustration, Mary turns back to the window.

George attempts to recapture Mary's attention, "Perhaps next time we can talk about school."

Mary, no longer feeling the need to respond to George's mutterings, leaves him in the unfamiliar position of clambering for something to say.

George uncomfortably stutters, "I...I'll have the nurse take you back to your room."

As Mary retreats to her own thoughts, George's journey to the door to retrieve Nana is sporadically interrupted by a

contemplation of Mary's tale. George is normally quick to relinquish any doubts about his ability to decipher a situation, however, in this case, he is deeply unsettled by Mary's intriguing report.

Chapter 5



Not normally one to take his work home with him, George is captivated by Mary's story. Oblivious to Angela, who is sitting on the couch next to him, he wonders what Mary's elaborate tale could mean? George tries to tie the characters in her story to the mental illness that he has already concluded is the reason for Mary's self-destructive actions.

Angela, fingers feverishly dancing across her keyboard, is absorbed in her own world; albeit, slightly more aware of George than he is of her.

“There! Everything's done. This is going to be a HUGE rally”, Angela exclaims

confidently.

“I’m going downtown early. You and Moira don’t have to go with me; you can just bring her down later but you’ll need to be there an hour before it starts or you’ll never get parking”, Angela instructs.

“You’re taking off work early Friday, right George? George? George!”

“Huh? What?”, George responds with a start.

Angela repeats her query with a frustrated

tone, “You’re leaving work early Friday, right? To pick up Moira from school and bring her to the rally...right?”

Still only half focused, George mutters, “Work...yes.....work....” Suddenly aware of the consequences of giving Angela anything less than his full attention, George gushes, “Right! Yes, taking off work early Friday. I’ll be there!”

“With Moira, right?”, snaps Angela.

“Huh? Oh! Yes, with Moira!”

“George! You’re not going to forget her, are you? George, I’m practically putting this whole rally together myself. Do I really need to manage *you* as well?! Please help me here, George!”

“Yes, yes, I’ll take care of Moira. We’ll be there, don’t you worry.”

Angela expels a disdainful sigh as she returns to her laptop.

“Angela...”, George sheepishly asks, “...what would you do if something happened to me? I mean...if I left you... or if I died?”

Angela casts a scornful glare in George's direction, not out of any concern for his health but to signal her frustration with his distraction. "Is there something you'd like to tell me, George?"

"No! No, no!", George quickly responds in an attempt to keep Angela from exploding. "It's this patient at work...the one who tried to jump off the bridge. She seems to have been deeply traumatized by this break-up. This Peter guy, whoever he is, must have really done a number on her. She's concocted this entire fantasy world with him at the center of it. He seems to have been the

only happiness she had and once he left, her whole world disintegrated.”

Angela seizes the opportunity to express her disdain for a society that does not bend to her will, “And this is why I’m raising our daughter not to be dependent on a man! When are women going to learn that we are strong on our own?! We have just as much value as a man whether we’re with one or not!”

Realizing that he has failed in his attempt to control his wife’s always-lurking rage, he assuages, “Yes, of course, dear, but not every woman has the advantage of your enlightened guidance.”

“Well, maybe that should be the *next* rally I put together”, says Angela with a snarl.

“And I’ll be right there supporting you!”, George panders; at which Angela grunts her disdain.

Chapter 6



George is running late this morning, which suits Mary just fine. She sits in George's office, not because she has any desire to be psychologically probed but because she is obligated as part of her residence. Should George not show up at all, an hour spent gazing through the window at the grey outside would be preferable to the opaque fog of George's tedious questioning.

The calm is abruptly broken by George's rush through the door and hasty trek to the chair behind his desk.

“Sorry, Mary. I was late getting in. Lots of activity at home this morning...”,

George explains. “My wife has been organizing a climate change rally downtown. Today’s the big day. My apologies, again.”

Mary casts a disapproving gaze at George, not because of his tardiness but, because of his breach of her quiet.

George delivers an uncomfortable, “Sorry.”

Collecting himself, George says, “I was hoping we could talk about school...the new school you went to after moving to the city. Was it as bad as you thought it

would be?”

“It was...but in a different way”, says Mary as her gaze turns to the floor..

“Would you like to tell me about it? What was the first week like?”

“It was like I thought it was going to be. I was the new kid from out of town. No one knew me...but they already had their opinions.”

“Kids can be very cruel”, says George

“So can adults”, responds Mary with a glare.

“Do you want to tell me what happened?”

“Everything you’d expect. No one would talk to me unless they had something terrible to say.

One girl stole my mechanical pencil...it was a gift from my grandmother. When I went to tell the teacher, the girl lied and said it was hers. The teacher said she had known this girl a long time and didn’t know me at all, so she’d have to believe her.”

“What did your parents do when they found out?”

“I told them I lost it. If I had told them the truth, they would have created a big scene at the school and the kids would hate me more.”

“I’m sorry they did that to you.”

“I was in this big city, in this big school, and I had never felt this alone in my whole life.

I would dread going to school every morning and then I'd come home and cry all night. I never got my homework done, my grades were bad...which gave the kids a reason to tell me I was stupid too...and my parents got so upset at me; they told me I'd never amount to anything without an education", says Mary as she fights back tears.

"How long did this go on?", asks George.

"The whole first semester."

"Oh, Mary. I'm so sorry."

“I kept begging Peter to come back. I looked for him every night...but he wasn't there.”

“Peter was supposed to be your prince on a white horse but he let you down”, reasons George. “When we build people up in our mind, it can be devastating when they let us down. It can feel like our whole world is crumbling.”

“That's not it at all”, responds Mary in frustration. “Peter did come back...”

Mary's recollection of Peter brings a smile to her face as she recalls that night

on the balcony when Peter's long-awaited return broke her endless longing. As his comforting face came into focus through her parting tears, Mary was at once frustrated at Peter's tardiness and joyfully relieved at his presence.

“Where have you been?!”, asks Mary with frustration and desperation.

“I was hoping you would ask for help”, explains Peter.

“I did”, insists Mary.

“Not from me”, smiles Peter.

Before Mary can fully ponder Peter's puzzling response, her heart begins to flare in hopeful anticipation as his warm gentle hand takes hold of hers.

A smiling Peter asks, "Are you ready to go?"

Suddenly the gloom and grief that hung over Mary for months lifts as she and Peter once again step off the balcony and glide through the city to the craft that will...at long last...return her to Everland. Her relief and excitement prevent any sleep from intruding on the journey. Every moment closer to this land of light

and color separates her from the torments of her daily life.

As Everland comes into view, giggles break to joyful laughter; the ethereal pigments barely obscured by Mary's euphoric tears.

“Where are we going, Peter?”, asks Mary as their course corrects slightly from her first visit.

“To my home”, explains Peter.

“Oh! Wonderful!”, an excited Mary proclaims.

As Peter's boat sails past the point of their first landing, the waterway narrows to a river lush with plants dancing gently in the fragrant breeze. The kaleidoscope of flowers shrouding the banks of the river wrestle for Mary's attention with the boisterous colors of the sky above.

As the river winds through the narrow valley, Mary glimpses fancifully carved cottages, held aloft by towering pillars, lining the hillsides. As they reach their destination, their faithful craft nestles into the bank of the pond from which the river springs.

Guiding Mary from the boat, Peter leads her along the gently meandering path to the winding staircase that leads to his home aloft. Mary's feet seem to float as they overcome one step after another until arriving at the terrace fronting Peter's home. As Peter guides Mary through the narrow wooden door into his habitation, Mary is touched by the simple and easeful surroundings.

Charmed by Peter's home, Mary exclaims, "Oh, Peter, it's lovely! Did you build this?"

"No. Our King prepared it for me", Peter explains.

Mary's momentary ponder is interrupted by Peter's exit to the terrace. As Mary follows, the breathtaking panorama below fills her eyes. The valley, river, and pond blend into a tapestry of colorful trees and flowers that fade into the luminous atmosphere as it spreads towards the horizon.

“Do you want to go swimming?”, Peter excitedly asks.

“Swimming? I don't have a change of clothes.”

“Don’t worry, you won’t need one. Come on, let’s go!”

Peter grabs Mary by the hand and races her back down the staircase and along the winding path. As they break for the pond Peter lets go and dives headlong into the water, leaving Mary hesitating on the shore.

Emerging from the pond, Peter urges, “Come in, Mary, the water’s perfect!”

“But...what about my clothes?”

“Just jump in!”

Throwing caution to the wind, Mary hurls herself into the water. As she surfaces, Peter prompts, “Let’s go!”

“Go where?”, a nervous Mary asks.

“Under!”

“Under? OK, but I can’t hold my breath very long.”

“Oh yes you can”, Peter says with a smile.

As Peter disappears under the surface, Mary ingests as much of the flowered air as her lungs can hold. Confident that she can withstand the airless depths for a good 30 seconds, she descends to the shallows of the pond.

Safely submerged, Mary's eyes slowly open to a squint. The normal aqueous blur is missing and she beholds an underwater spectacle of light and color. Between the dappled sun beams, glowing fish of every kind and color fill her view. Bright reds flashing by her, blazing pinks and blue above and below. Some of the aquatic creatures, not satisfied with one emblazoned color, flow through the water like dancing rainbows.

Through the color and light comes Peter navigating the depths and shallows as if he were born to them.

“Follow me!”, encourages peter.

Mary, concerned that her air supply is about to be exhausted, returns Peter’s invitation with an abrupt and uneasy shake of the head. Pointing to her puffed cheeks, she makes clear her plans to return to the surface for resupply.

Peter, unquenchable smile at the ready, grabs Mary’s hand and pulls her deeper

into the watery kaleidoscope.

At once Mary's thoughts turn from bathing in color to drowning in the depths of the pond. Feeling her frantic pulling and flailing, Peter ceases his decent and turns back to Mary and grins his simple instruction, "Breathe!"

As Mary expels the exhausted air from her lungs and reflexively fills them again, rather than the choking flood she expects, a fresh supply of sustaining air has filled her with both oxygen and delightful surprise.

“I can breathe!”, Mary exclaims.

As Mary’s panic turns to joy, she follows Peter to the bottom of the pond. There, among the pearlescent sand, sprouts a whimsical bouquet of plants and blooms that tickle Mary’s legs as she swims by.

While the colors and light above the surface took Mary’s breath away, the breath that she retains under water makes the enjoyment of the swirling colors even more euphoric. As Mary and Peter glide and dance through the gentle currents, a familiar friend appears.

“John!”, Peter exclaims.

“Peter, it’s time to go!”, John urges.

Peter turns to Mary and says, “Let’s go, Mary!”

As the group resurfaces and exchanges one lushly saturated landscape for another, Mary has hardly let go of her excitement from the pond before she is consumed by the excitement of the next adventure.

As Peter climbs out of the water and begins his trek through the valley, he

turns to Mary and says, “Come on, Mary!”

“Where?”

“To the City of The Great King!”, says an excited Peter.

“But...I have to let my clothes dry”, Mary explains.

“They were never wet”, a smiling Peter insists.

As Mary takes inventory of her clothes

and hair, she is surprised to discover that she is dry from head to toe. By now she has come to expect wondrous things in Everland.

As Mary chases John and Peter into the woods, her imagination fills with contemplation of the City of The Great King and what she will find there.

As the trio emerges from the woods, the attention of another of one of Mary's senses is arrested. As she stops in her tracks, she says with a puzzled tone, "Peter, wait. Do you hear that?"

As Peter and John look at each other and smile, Peter says, “Come on, Mary.”

As the woods open to a field filled with knee-high reeds topped with puffs of white, John notices a figure in the distance, “Wendy!”, he shouts. Wendy waves at the group as she runs toward them.

As she does, Mary tries to understand what she’s been hearing, “Is that...music?”

As Wendy arrives at the group, she greets the trio with a smile, “Peter, John! Mary,

so nice to see you again!”

Still puzzled by the sounds, Mary proclaims, “It is music! The most beautiful music I’ve ever heard.”

As the group continues its march to the City of the Great King, Wendy asks, “Is Michael coming?”

“He’s already there”, John explains.

“And singing!”, Mary exclaims after realizing the sound. “But...where is it coming from?”

“The King’s city. It’s for Him”, explains Peter.

“Who’s singing?”, asks Mary.

“Everyone”, Peter responds with a joyful smile.

Mary’s pondering of the music and Peter’s responses to her questions has positioned her at the back of the pack. As Peter, John, and Wendy move the group along, talking among themselves, Mary asks, “But why are they singing?”

“They’re thankful to The King”, says Peter.

“For what?”, asks Mary.

“For rescuing us”, explains Wendy.

“From what?”, a confused Mary asks.

“From us!”, John smiles.

“I don’t understand”, Mary says with resignation.

As the group make their way through the field, and the singing in Mary's ears grows louder, she is suddenly frozen in her tracks by the sight of The City of the Great King floating in the sky!

Enormous volumes of clouds, alone in the dazzlingly colored sky, suspend the gleaming white city.

The wall surrounding the city glisten as the pearlescent marble reflects the candy-colored sky. The buildings and spires inside the city radiate light from their opaque crystal form, each topped with roofs of shimmering gold and emerald and sapphire.

Mary's legs can barely hold her up as she gasps in amazement at the sight. The chorus that emanates from the city fills the air and shakes the ground beneath her; the vibration electrifying every nerve in her body.

Peter, seeing the affect that the City has had on Mary, walks to her side. "The City of The Great King."

Mary's eyes flood with tears. "Oh, the singing! Oh, the site of it!", as the words barely escape from her quivering lips.

"Come on, let's go!", John eagerly

prompts the group.

With that, John and Wendy run toward the City.

“We’ll be back in a bit, Mary”, says Peter.

“Huh? Aren’t I going with you?”, a surprised Mary asks.

“I’m afraid you can’t go with us”, Peter explains.

“But..but why not?”, a disheartened Mary asks.

“You’re not a citizen of Everland.”

Surprised, Mary responds, “A citizen of Everland? But... What do I have to do to become a citizen?”

“The King chooses you.”

“Then I have to go speak to Him!”, Mary desperately exclaims.

“That’s not the way it works, Mary”, Peter explains with an empathetic look.
“You have to ask for His help.”

A confused Mary asks, “But...what do I need His help for? Please tell me and I’ll ask Him.”

“You have to realize that for yourself”, says Peter, grasping Mary’s hand.

Frustrated and confused, Mary says, “I need help with lots of things, Peter. I need help at school. I need to go back to my hometown. I need friends! I need so many things, Peter.”

“You’ll have to leave the things you love, Mary.”

“The things I love? You mean my parents?”, asks a confused Mary.

“Other things.”

“I don’t understand”, Mary exclaims in sad desperation.

“Hopefully, you will”, says Peter.

As Mary’s eyes fill with tears, Peter rubs her hand and reassures her, “You stay here, Mary. I’ll be back.”

As Peter departs, Mary calls to him, “But Peter!”

“Ask for His help, Mary!”, Peter calls back as he heads toward the City.

“How will He hear me if I’m outside His City?!”, Mary shouts.

He can hear you, Mary! He can hear you everywhere!”, Peter shouts back with a smile.

As the memory of that day fades into the present, Mary recounts the bitter-sweet conclusion, “I stayed there in the field...

surrounded by the beautiful music...seeing that gorgeous city...but I couldn't go in."

"So Peter just abandoned you there?", asks George.

"No, he came back for me later...and brought me back here". Mary explains. "I'm not a citizen of Everland, so I couldn't stay."

"So, if you don't give up everything you love, then you can't stay in Peter's world", a cocky George concludes. "Mary, don't you see what's happening

here? This Peter person is obviously possessive and wants you to live only for him. You've constructed this whole world with him at the center of it. No wonder you were suicidal when he left you."

With incredulity and frustration, Mary responds, "You don't understand at all."

"I've seen this sort of thing before, Mary", George confidently explains. "Was Peter your first real love?"

"No...", Mary smirks. "...that was James."

“Oh... Uhhh...well...”, George stutters with embarrassment. “Perhaps next time you can tell me about James.”

“Perhaps”, whispers Mary as she stares out the window at the grey distance.

Chapter 7



As George and his family drive home from the rally, their car is filled with a mix of emotions. Moira is frantically tapping the screen on her phone, always consumed by whatever attracts her attention at the moment. Angela is exuberant with a sense of fulfillment and conquest, as she calculates her next opportunity to leverage her success. George is a million miles away deeply contemplating Mary and the world he believes she has constructed. Always seeing himself as uniquely astute, his curiosity about Mary is mixed with an insecure frustration that he has not yet uncovered Mary's true condition.

“...And the Regional Director said she

hadn't seen a turnout like that in years! She said she want's me to help our delegation at the National Conference!", Angela exclaims, her lips barely able to keep up with her thoughts.

Oblivious to Angela's ramblings, George looks in the rear-view mirror and asks, "Moira, darling, do the kids at school ever pick on you?"

Not willing to share George's attention with her daughter, Angela scolds, "George! Did you hear what I said?!"

"Huh? Yes...yes, the National

Conference. Very good, dear”, George says as he clumsily tries to recover from his lack of attentiveness. “Moira, honey, did you hear daddy?”

“They don’t pick on me any more”, explains Moira.

“Any more? You mean they used to pick on you?”, George asks.

“Well...a little”, responds, Moira.

“Why would anyone pick on her?”, Angela angrily interrupts.

“What did you do, honey?”, George asks.

“I just made friends with them”, Moira confidently proclaims.

Filled with her own smugness at raising such a child, Angela interjects, “Of course. Who *wouldn't* want to be her friend?”

“It’s not always easy making friends at school, Angela”, George instructs.

“Well, maybe for some people but not for

Moira”, Angela states confidently. “Isn’t that right dear?”

“Yes, mommy”, Moira dutifully answers.

“What’s this about, George?”, asks Angela.

“Oh, it’s that suicide patient. I thought I had her figured out but...”, says George.

“There are lots of crazy people in the world.”

“Angela! Crazy?”, scolds George.

“I’m sorry, I mean, ‘emotionally challenged’”, responds Angela with condescension.

“Moira, why didn’t you come to us for help when you were being picked on?”, George asks.

“I dunno. I just didn’t”, says Moira nonchalantly.

“We could have rescued you, honey”, assures George.

Angela looks at George with a strange glare, “Our daughter doesn’t need to be rescued.”

“There’s nothing wrong with asking for help, Angela.”

“Our daughter doesn’t need anyone’s help.”

“She needs our help to get home tonight”, George sarcastically retorts as he refocuses on the road ahead, ignoring Angela’s disquieting stare.

Chapter 8



The stalemate has become routine by now, Mary staring out the window, George staring at Mary, the uncomfortable silence hanging in the air. George is frustrated that Mary does not share his eagerness to uncover the root of her problem, as George sees it. It's as if Mary doesn't realize that George's sense of himself is tied up in his ability to deduce everyone's problem and rescue them from the danger he sees them in. Mary's silence is as much an affront to his pride as it is an unwillingness to talk to someone who has already dismissed what she says.

“So, why don't we talk about James?”, says a frustrated George.

“There are lots of reasons not to talk about James”, says Mary with a dry smirk.

“You said he was your first real love?”

“Yeah, kind of how you love a lost puppy.”

“I don’t understand”, a confused George responds.

Mary explains, “James came to school in the middle of the year. Now *he* was the

one no one knew.

The first week back from Christmas break, I noticed him sitting alone in the cafeteria at lunch. After spending the entire first semester sitting alone myself, I could sympathize with him.

I would look at him every day and wonder if he was feeling the same things I was feeling. He would catch me looking at him every once in a while. It took him two weeks to drum up the courage to come over and sit with me.”

“So you found a friend!”, George says

with excitement.

“Yeah, James and I hung out together. We got to know each other real well. We had a lot in common, actually. He came from a small town too. We talked about those things a lot...what it was like back home. We became close through that. It was great, we started spending more and more time together. Probably because we were the only ones we had to talk to...for a while”, explains Mary.

A puzzled George asks, “For a while?”

“James had one fatal flaw: He was really

cute”, Mary smirked. “The other girls started to notice him.”

“And you were on the outside again?”

“Actually, no. As James became more popular, so did I. His friends became my friends. I guess they thought that, since I was cool enough for James to like me, I must be OK.”

“And you and James started dating?”

“Yeah. I became really popular then. Everyone wanted to be my friend. We became quite the popular couple. I was

now one of the ‘cool kids’.

Sadly...that meant it was my turn to pick on the kids that weren't part of our group”, recalls Mary uncomfortably as she looks down and nervously clasps her fingers.

“Just like kids that had picked on you...”

“Yeah...”, Mary says with sad resignation. “I don't know if it was a way to make up for all the pain I had felt...by making others feel just as bad...”

It was pretty messed up...

But it didn't bother me at the time; I was having too much fun. We went to all the best parties. We were the 'fun' couple. That's when I first started drinking and doing drugs. That was another thing James and I experienced together for the first time. We were like kids exploring a candy store together...and we enjoyed everything we found.

My grades got a little better...but it still wasn't enough for my parents. But grades were the last thing on my mind.”

“What about Everland?”

“Everland...”, Mary’s words fade.

“Everland didn’t seem that important any more. My own land was looking pretty good.”

“And Peter?”

“Yeah... Peter...”, says Mary as her brow furrows and her hands fidget remembering that night on the balcony.

“You gotta go now, James! If my parents find you here, they’ll kill both of us!”, Mary slurs, whiskey bottle in hand.

“One more for the road”, James says as he puckers his lips.

As Mary closes her eyes and puckers, James quickly grabs the whiskey bottle and takes a hearty swig.

“Jerk!”, Mary feigning outrage. “Get outta here!”

As James climbs down the balcony and stumble backwards, crashing into the planters below, Mary scolds, “SSSHHHHHHH!!!!!”

As James picks himself up and staggers

away, a crooked smile dashes across Mary's face, pleased as she is with her circumstances.

“Hello, Mary”, says a voice from behind her.

“Peter!”, a surprised Mary exclaims.

“What are you doing, Mary?”, pleads Peter.

“I am havin' a paaaarrr-taaaay!”, says Mary as she staggers.

“You’re in trouble, Mary”, says Peter disappointingly.

“Trouble?! Things have never been better!”, exclaims Mary. “After being banished in the wilderness my whole first semester, I am now livin’ large!”

Peter’s once omnipresent smile has been replaced by a look of deep concern and sadness, “You need help, Mary. You need to be rescued.”

“Rescued? I have been rescued! James is my prince. He rescued me...and now we’re the most popular couple in

school!", says Mary with a smug look.

"You'll never be a citizen of Everland, Mary. What are you doing?"

"I don't need Everland...I'm queen of Mary-land!", Mary laughs as she staggers.

"I have a friend you should talk to. Come on, Mary, we can go now."

"Go? Oh, Peter, I'm tired...I've been dancin' all night!", says Mary as she dances around the balcony clutching her bottle.

“Once upon a time, you never wanted to leave Everland. Now you don’t even want to visit”, a sad Peter recounts.

Mary steadies herself and makes her way to Peter, “I’m too old for fairy tales, Peter”, declares Mary inches from Peter’s face. “‘Once upon a time’ is for kids.”

As Mary staggers back to her room and closes the doors, Peter is left alone on the balcony, forlorn over Mary’s worsening condition.

“I didn’t see Peter for a while after that”,

Mary says as she looks down at her hands, unable to look up at George because of the shame she feels recalling that night.

“And what about James?”, George asks.

“James and I were the life of every party...until we weren’t”, states Mary sadly as she once again stares out the window, contemplating the fateful turn her life took that night.

“I didn’t know it at the time but I was getting in deeper and deeper...and getting farther and farther from Everland.”

Chapter 9



George's head has been spinning all day as Mary's story becomes more and more complex. His confidence in his understanding of her case is all but shattered. At least he has his home to return to. Making his way through the front door he is eager to search out a quiet corner where he can be alone with his thoughts. Emerging from the entry way into the living room, rather than finding peace, a sharp steel blade across his throat is the first to welcome him.

“Your treasure or your life!”, Moira exclaims as she steadies her favorite pirate sword coldly at George's jugular.

Collecting himself, both to avoid injury and to assuage his well-armed daughter, George responds, “Arrr, Captain Moira, you *are* my treasure *and* my life!”

“Oh, dad, you’re no fun”, says Moira in frustration. “Give me money!”, she insists with a gleeful smile.

“How about we feed you tonight instead?”, George responds as he makes his way to the couch, Moira hot on his heels, grunting and groaning.

As Moira joins him on the couch, George asks, “You don’t have a boyfriend yet, do

you sweetheart?”

“I don’t need a boyfriend”, Moira quickly responds. “I’m an independent woman!”

“You *are* your mother’s daughter”, George affirms with resignation. “Well, should you ever accidentally find yourself interested in a boy, do your old dad a favor and make sure he treats you right.”

“He’ll treat me exactly the way I tell him to”, states Moira confidently.

“I couldn’t imagine it any other way”, says George as he’s interrupted by his

ringing phone.

“Hello, Dr. Davies”, answers George.

“What?! I’ll be right there!”

“What’s wrong, daddy?”, Moira asks as George leaps to his feet.

“I have to go back to the hospital. One of my patients... There’s an emergency at the hospital. Tell your mom I’ll be back later.”

“OK...”, says a puzzled and concerned Moira.

As George races toward the door, he stops in mid-stride. Pausing and looking back, he rushes to Moira and hugs her tightly, “Be good, Moira.”

Chapter 10



It seems as though George just left the hospital but, as he races down the hall, he is oblivious to the length of his day, the panicked adrenaline rush gives him all the energy he needs.

The ever-present Nana stands nervously at her station waiting for George to arrive. As she sees him, she shouts, “She’s in holding room 205, Doctor.”

Arriving at Nana’s station, George asks breathlessly, “What happened?”

“She was late for dinner so I sent an orderly to check on her. He found her

hanging in her room from a bed sheet”, Nana answers, nervously wringing her hands.

“How long had she been like that?”

“Thankfully not long; she was still conscious.”

“I thought we were making good progress...”, a frustrated and bewildered George proclaims. “...then this Everland thing came up again.”

“Everland?”

“Just a coping mechanism, Nana. Some people need fantasies to deal with their reality.”

George makes his way to the padded room where he first encountered Mary. Opening the door, he finds Mary sitting in a ball against the wall crying into her knees.

George kneels in front of her and asks, “What happened, Mary?”

Crying frantically, Mary responds, “I threw away my last chance. I’m never

going to get to go back!”

“Everland, again, Mary?”, George responds in frustration.

“I’m so tired. Why can’t this just be over?”

“Mary, there’s so much to live for. You can have happiness again...like you had with James. Remember how he changed your outlook on life?”

“It never lasts. I want something that lasts.”, says Mary as she looks at George through rivers of tears.

“What do you mean?”

“When James discovered that every girl in school wanted a piece of him, he realized that he didn’t have to settle for just me.”

“Oh, Mary, I’m sorry. High school boys can be like that.”

“The only one I could ever count on was Peter. Even when I treated him badly, he still didn’t give up on me”, cries Mary as she recounts Peter’s return, finding her crying uncontrollably on the balcony,

alone and lost, unaware that he was near.

“What’s wrong, Mary?”, asks Peter, sad and concerned.

Her surprise at Peter’s presence is quickly overridden by her grief. “James dumped me!”, exclaims Mary. “Now I’m going to lose all my friends and I’ll be an outcast again! I can’t go back to that, Peter.”

“Mary, you’re focusing on the wrong things. You crave the very things you need to be rescued from.”

“I don’t want to be an outcast, Peter;”,

sobs Mary, “that’s what I need to be rescued from. I thought James had rescued me but...”

“You weren’t rescued, Mary, you were in even more danger.”

“What are you talking about, Peter?”, asks a frustrated Mary.

“What were you doing with James? With your friends?”

Setting aside a twinge of guilt, Mary counters, “I was having fun! For the first time since I moved to this terrible place, I

was having fun!”

“No, Mary, you were throwing away your chance at Everland. Why won’t you ask for His help, Mary?”

As Mary’s tears slow and she searches for escape, she says, “Maybe I need to go back to Everland. I had friends there...”, reasons Mary.

“You need His help, Mary. You need to ask Him to rescue you from these things. That’s how to become a citizen of Everland.”

“Can you take me back, Peter?!”

“You need to talk to the King first, Mary. You don’t belong in Everland right now.”

“That’s why I need you to take me to Everland, so I can talk to Him!”

“You can talk to Him anywhere, Mary.”

Mary, leaping to her feet, desperately grabs Peter and says, “Please, Peter, please take me back. I need to go back.”

“You can’t just go to Everland when

things aren't working for you here.”

“Oh, please Peter! Wasn't there a friend you wanted me to meet?”

As Peter contemplates, Mary squeezes Peter tighter. He can feel her whole body trembling through her grasp.

“I'll take you...” Peter warily replies.
“...but Mary, please don't waste any more chances. You don't know how many you have left.”

“I won't! I won't! Can we go now?!”

“Let’s go”, responds Peter nervously.

Something was different about this voyage to Everland. The warmth of the air has gone, along with the fragrance of the flowers. The colors on land and in the sky were muted and less vibrant. There was a silence to it all, an unease that permeated this place as though an intruder had broken through the gates.

Gone too was Peter’s ever-present smile, replaced with a troubled brow and an unsettled look. As they walked through fields and forests, not a word was spoken. Both Peter and Mary knew that

something was deeply wrong and any attempt to address anything else would be pointless.

Finally, Mary could no longer keep her concerns to herself, “Where are the others; Wendy, John, Michael? And the animals. Where is everyone?”

“They’re staying away”, a troubled Peter responded.

“Why?”

“Something has changed.”

“What?”

“You, Mary. Things are worse than before. You have many more things.”

“More things?”

“More things that you love instead of the King. These things don’t belong in Everland.”

As Peter walks faster, Mary rushes to keep up with him. “Where are we going, Peter?”

There's someone you should talk to."

"Who?"

"You'll see."

As Peter and Mary make their exit from a thick wood, a slender path in the tall grass winds its way up and down gently rolling hills. Mary struggles to keep up with Peter as he seems eager to arrive at their destination, hopeful that something can be said to Mary to help her see what's all around her.

“Where are we, Peter?”

“We’re here”, answers Peter as the tall grass gives way to a gentle clearing. A slight brook, normally sparkling is the blossoming sky, runs gently in front of a quaint cottage surrounded by gardens of flowers of every color; the whole area encircled with thick trees dotted with tiny colored buds. Normally glowing like Christmas trees, today they are dimmed along with all the colors of Everland.

As Peter and Mary near the cottage, a woman of greatly distinguished countenance emerges from the flowers to greet them, “Peter!”, a voice calmly calls

out.

Arriving at the cottage, Mary and Peter are greeted by Lily, who's dark hair is peppered with the white strands that come from a life long lived and one not without it's difficulties.

“Is this her?”, asks Lily, looking intently at Mary.

“Yes”, Peter responds.

With a gentle but serious smile, Lily says, “Mary. Peter has told me a lot about you.”

“He has?”, says a nervous Mary.

“Yes. About your other visits to Everland...and what you’ve been doing since.”

As Mary looks at Peter, surprised and uncomfortable, he returns her look with concern.

“Let’s take a walk, Mary”, says Lily, leading Mary by the hand. “We’ll be back, Peter.”

As Lily and Mary walk through the gardens, Mary asks, “How do you know what I’ve been doing since the last time I was here?”

“The King sees everything, Mary.”

“And He told you?”

“He sends messengers to help when people are in trouble.”

“Is that why He sent Peter tonight?”

“Yes...and the times you didn’t even

realize he was there.”, says Lily as she turns to Mary with a knowing stare. “These things you’re doing with your friends...your boyfriend...they’re wrong, Mary.”

“But I finally have friends!”

“Mary, don’t be distracted by the things right in front of you. There’s much more going on all around you.”

“You don’t understand”, responds Mary dismissively.

“I understand more than you know...much

more”, assures Lily. “I used to do these same things...and more.”

“What happened?”

“I was told I needed help...I needed rescue”, says Lily with a smile.

“Who told you that?”

“Someone like Peter; a messenger of the King.”

Mary ponders for a moment as the two pick up a tiny trail through the flowers

and trees.

“Things are different now. There’s a lot more pressure. People are mean”, a frustrated Mary insists.

“People have always been mean, Mary. There have always been bad things in the world. The question is, are you going to be part of that world or are you going to rise above and be part of this one?”, asks Lily as she stares intently at Mary.

As they make their way further along the trail, Mary ponders these things and quietly asks, “How do you just ignore it

all though?”

“You just give up.”

“Huh?”

“Mary, admit it, you like being part of that world”, Lily responds knowingly, noticing Mary’s guilty look. “But there are consequences for those things.”

“What kind of consequences?”

“At some point, you’ll be consumed by those things you love...the world you

love...and you'll lose your chance at Everland.”

“And then what?”, asks Mary uneasily.

“You'll have those things you love...for a little while...”, says Lily. “...and then...”

“And then...what?”, a troubled Mary asks.

Lily responds with a deep breath, “I don't like to think about those things. Those thoughts don't belong in Everland.”

Lily stops and squeezes Mary's hand and says, "Mary, you need help while it's still here for you. If you keep going where you're going, you'll never find Everland again."

"But I don't want to be alone", pleads Mary. "I just want friends. I just want to have fun."

"You're never alone once you're a citizen of Everland. Our King is always with us. He helps His children through that world and into this one. But as long as you love that world, you'll be a child of that world...and a child of the power of that world. You'll be a stranger to Everland."

As Lily and Mary walk, a deeper darkness begins to shadow Everland. The flowers along one side of the trail are matched with briars and thorns on the other.

As the trail ahead splits in different directions, Lily says, “There are two paths, Mary, just two.” As Mary instinctively turns towards the briars, Lily pulls her towards the flowered path and says, “You have to decide which path you’re going to take, Mary; but understand, once you head down the wrong path, it is so very hard to get to the right one again. Most people never do,

and they're lost forever.”

Lily guides Mary along the flowered path back to her home. Lily urges, “Don’t waste any more time, Mary. You’re so lost already. I’m afraid I may never see you back here again.”

Mary walks silently along, troubled as she contemplates the options before her: her desires now or her desires forever.

Arriving back at the cottage, Mary is greeted by a still unsettled Peter, “It’s time to go, Mary.”

As Peter and Mary leave the clearing and make their way into the woods, Mary silently wrestles with Lily's words and the desires of her own heart. She senses that Peter's concern is for reasons deeper than she realizes, but the pull of her heart and the pull of the world...a world she once hated...seem irresistible.

As George sits on the padded floor in front of Mary, desperately trying to absorb all that he's heard, he's left without words to utter or clear thoughts to think.

"I never went back...", Mary cries in desperation. "...I'm never going to get to

go back.”

As George cradles his head in his hands, he desperately pleads, “Mary, you need to let this stuff go...this fantasy you’ve concocted to deal with the traumas in your life. Can’t you see it’s killing you more than the traumas themselves?”

Mary is inconsolable and distant, standing at the edge of an abyss she can neither escape nor embrace.

“Please, Mary, please stop thinking about these things”, George pleads. “Get some rest and in a couple of days we can talk

about the actual things that have happened to you. I know you've been treated terribly. Let's deal with those things and give you some tools to cope with them."

As George rises to his feet, he desperately searches for something to say. Nothing seems to work. Everything he's learned, every clever approach and theory, ever confidence with which he has practiced his profession is left wanting. All he can do is resort to force of will.

"There are real solutions to your very real problems, Mary. They're here in the real world. If you let me, I can show you how

to find them”, George confidently exclaims.

Alas, even George’s ego-driven will cannot break Mary’s forlorn desperation. As she stares into darkness, her face awash in tears, all George can do is retreat in silence.

Chapter 11



Today it's George's turn to stare out his office window in deep contemplation. He canceled his appointments the previous two days and has hardly spoken to his family. He is faced with the untenable possibility that he has no answer for Mary's problem. Could it be? This is a reality that George's pride would never tolerate, yet the answer still escapes him. Mary's desperate search for Peter is matched by George's desperation to be right. If only he could find an answer that would give him that comfort.

George's search is so consuming that he doesn't notice Nana's knock at his door. After a few moments of patient waiting, Nana knocks again. George's

contemplation is finally broken by the third and loudest knocks.

“Come in!”, George shouts.

Nana slowly opens the door and guides Mary inside.

“You have a visitor, doctor”, Nana says with a gentle smile and a soft hand on Mary’s back.

“Mary! Come in...Please, sit down”, says George with wary eagerness.

As Nana sits Mary in her chair, George says, “Thank you, Nana.”, and impatiently awaits her departure so that Mary can occupy his full attention.

Mary’s normal pose, her eyes affixed to the distance beyond the window, is replaced today by a more insular self-embrace and a lowly hanging head.

“Mary, how are you feeling?”, asks George gingerly.

George’s question is met with silence and a barely perceptible rocking as Mary seems resigned to whatever fate lies

before her.

“You’re looking better than the other night”, says George, attempting to lighten the air.

“Mary, I was hoping we could talk about your loneliness issue. I’ve been thinking about this and I’m wondering if these people and places you create in your mind aren’t just a way for you to deal with your loneliness...when you moved to the city...when James left you...

What do you think? Can we talk about those things?”

Mary struggles to lift her head but is intent on locking eyes with George. “You’ve got this so wrong”, she says sternly. “I’ll tell you how I fixed my ‘loneliness issue’, as you call it:

After James there was Bill. After Bill there was Alf. After Alf there was Robert. And on and on.

I learned from Bill how to solve my ‘loneliness issue’.”

“What do you mean?”, asks George curiously.

Mary struggles to recount that night with Bill. The pain of the memory, and its later implication, burns deep in the pit of her stomach, though at the time pain was the farthest thing from her mind.

“Bill was...my first”, she confesses.

“Come on, let’s go”, Bill insists.

“I dunno...”, says Mary with trepidation.

“You’re parents are gone all weekend, what are you worried about?”, complains

Bill.

“It’s not that....”, says Mary nervously.

“Come on...don’t you love me?”

“I do, Bill. I love you more than anything.”

As Mary recalls that moment for George, she asserts, “I wasn’t going to let Bill get away like I did James.”

Little did Mary know at the time but when her and Bill went inside from the

balcony, Peter was outside waiting. Knowing how far Mary was falling, there was no semblance of the smile which had always adorned his face; it had been replaced by the painful visage of one witnessing a fatal act.

As Mary explains to George the realization she came to later than night, she remembers the contented smile on the face of her younger self as she was imbued with something that she could wield like a weapon.

“That’s when I realized how much power I had. I could make men do things if I just give them what they wanted”, Mary

asserted.

Her new found confidence manifested itself that same evening when Peter confronted her.

“Mary”, says Peter somberly.

“Peter”, says a confident Mary.

“When are you going to stop, Mary?”, pleads Peter.

“Stop? I’m just getting started!”, exclaims Mary. “I’m finally learning to

take control of my own life!”

“No, Mary, you’re being controlled by the people and things around you; the things that are right in front of you. But you’re not seeing the bigger things.”

“You mean Everland?”, says Mary with a touch of disdain.

“And more than that, Mary. There’s so much more but you’re not looking...or you don’t want to see.”

“All I know is, I have what I want. And I can get more; probably *anything* I want”,

insists Mary confidently.

“Yes, Mary, and that’s the problem.”

“Problem?! That sounds like Heaven!”

“Far from it, Mary.”

“Look, Peter. I don’t need your advice”, says Mary sternly. “I have things under control. You just need to let me live my own life and don’t worry about me.”

“I am *very* worried about you.”

“Well don’t be. Honestly, Peter, it’s really none of your business.”

“What about Everland, Mary?”

Mary’s brow furrows in anger as she rushes to Peter’s face and proclaims, “I don’t care about Everland, Peter. Maybe I was just dreaming about it because I didn’t have anything else. But now I have my life back and I’m going to make out of it whatever I want.”

“You’ll never make it back, Mary. You have to turn away from the path you’re on before it’s too late”, pleads Peter

desperately.

“I’m not going to turn away, Peter. This is my life, not yours!”

Mary turns her back on Peter and steps away, grumbling, “You sound like my parents.”

“You need to go, Peter.”

“Mary”, Peter implores.

“Please go, Peter!”

“But Mary...”

“Get out of here, Peter! Leave! I don’t want you here any more!”, Mary screams.
“This is my life!”

“And don’t ever come back!”, grumbles Mary.

With one more angry dart to hurl at Peter, Mary turns only to find him gone.

The pain of that memory fills her now with nervous discomfort. Fidgeting and angry, she tells George, “I never saw him again.”

“Mary! That’s wonderful!”, an excited George exclaims.

“What?”, Mary asks in shocked incredulity.

“Don’t you see? You banished this crutch you created; Peter...Everland... You took control of your life for the first time!”

Unable to control his excitement, not the least of which about his own perceived brilliance, George leaps to his feet and insists, “Now, if we can find out what caused you to regress, we can get you

back to where you were at that moment;
your moment of liberation!”

“Liberation?”, says Mary with profound
disdain.

As Mary rises to her feet, fists clenched,
she fixes her razor-sharp stare at George
and, through clenched teeth, says, “I’ll
tell you what my liberation got me:

An endless string of boyfriends. An
endless string of one-night-stands”, grits
Mary as she makes her way toward
George. “Wasting my life in bars...with
people I barely knew! Party after party.

Drink after drink. High after high. These are the only things I lived for!”

George’s enthusiasm has quickly vanished as he leans back on his heels. “Well, we just need to teach you to channel your control in positive ways. There may have still been some residual destructive tendencies...”

“Destructive tendencies?!”, Mary cries out angrily. “You mean sleeping with any man that could make me feel wanted?! You mean getting wasted so I didn’t have to think about how cheap I felt?!”

Mary marches towards George as his retreat quickens. “You mean bouncing from job to job because I couldn’t get what I wanted out of people? Because it interfered with the men, and the drugs, and the sex...because that’s all I had to make my life feel like it was worth anything?!?!”, Mary screams.

“And then when those things weren’t around, feeling like there was no point in taking my next breath?!”, Mary yells as she backs George against his bookshelf. “Is that what you mean by getting control of my life?!?!”

“Mary! Mary! Get a hold of yourself!”

says George in a panic. Pressing against Mary's shoulders, he urges, "Please, calm down!"

"I went too far. Lily was right...I can't get back", Mary mumbles as she swings between yelling and sobbing.

"Mary, please.", says George nervously. "Calm down. Have a seat, please! I'm going to go get you a sedative. It will help you relax."

George slides trembling out from between Mary and the bookshelf. As he exits his office, he insists, "I'll be right

back.”

Mary stands unmoved, defeated and sobbing. Her body has been emptied of every feeling, every emotion, every love and hate. There is nothing more for her...except escape.

Through her tears, the twinkle of metal in the light catches her eye. At that moment, her way of escape becomes clear. The only hope she has left is the hope that it can all end soon.

With a deep breath, she heads toward the office door and turns the lock. Clearing

the tears from her eyes, she returns to the bookshelf and reaches for the pirate hook that had caught her attention.

As she looks skyward, her tears return. The only thing that strengthens her is the knowledge that all will be over soon.

She slowly returns to the window by her chair. So often she longed for escape there. “I can never go back”, she whispers.

This time she would ensure the outcome would be final. Mary presses the point of the hook against the vein in her other

wrist; her vision obscured for a moment by the stream of tears that ceaselessly flows.

As George attempts to enter his office again, the locked door, and the realization that his keys are in his desk drawer, coupled with Mary standing at the window, sends him into panic.

“Mary! Open the door!”, he yells.

As Mary turns to address the noise behind her, she quietly says to George, “I have no where to go.”

As Mary takes the hook to her wrist again, George understands what's about to happen, "Mary! No!", he insists.

"I have no where to go!", Mary yells through her tears.

"Mary! No, don't do it!", George implores.

"I threw everything away! I have nothing!", Mary screams as the pain in the pit of her stomach doubles her forward.

"You're just like everyone else! I don't

need more drugs! I don't need control! I had control of my life and look what I've done with it! I have no where to go! I can't get back!", Mary screams as she wails uncontrollably.

George is paralyzed.

"I should have just given up!", Mary screams as she pierces the vein in her wrist; a trickle of blood drips to the floor.

"No...", whispers George helplessly.

One pull of her arm and the hook will finish its course and end her misery. With

her last breath she cries, “Now I’ve lost everything!”

As the blood flow builds and the hook pulls against flesh, the gentle hand that first guided Mary to Everland, takes hold of her hand yet again.

“Mary”, whispers Peter gently.

Mary’s cries are uncontrollable. The warmth of Peter’s hand on hers saps all the strength she has to give a final tug.

“I want to go back to Everland”, Mary pleads through her tears.

“Just ask for help, Mary”, Peter gently urges.

“I need help...but...how can I be forgiven for all the things I’ve done?”

“Our King will rescue you, Mary.”

“But how?”

“Just let Him.”

The simplicity of salvation. The joy of rescue. Mary’s heart surrenders its love

of the world for the love of forgiveness and faith in the King by whom it comes.

Mary's tears mix with a gentle laughter as she drops the hook to the floor.

As Mary turns to wrap her arms around Peter and sees his joy once more, a beam of sunlight breaks through the window.

As the two look at each other with a knowing glance, they make their way to the window together.

Ever helpful, Peter opens the window and lifts Mary to the ledge. As George,

awakened from his fear-induced paralysis, tries desperately to open the door, Peter joins Mary on the window ledge, once again providing a gentle hand.

“No!”, George yells as his running start and stiff shoulder break open the door. His headlong tumble to the window is for naught as Peter and Mary leap into the air!

As George lifts himself from the floor and elevates himself to the window, expecting to see a gruesome tragedy below, the parting clouds and radiant sunshine correct his gaze skyward. There

he sees Mary and Peter flying to a horizon electric with color and light.

Mary's tears have been wiped away by the flowing wind. Behind her the greyness of a lost life. Ahead, an everlasting future of peace. And by her side, a friend who never gave up on her even when she had.

Mary surrendered that day. She gave up control of her life. She gave up her love for the things of the world. And she gained her citizenship to Everland.

Mary had many more years before she

would move to Everland for good. She served her King with her remaining days. He guided and protected her.

She found and married another citizen of Everland and together they had a daughter.

Mary told her daughter the story of Peter and the King and Everland. She looked forward to the day when she and her husband would go home to Everland forever, and prayed their daughter would someday join them.

Peter had many more adventures as well.

Many more visits to lost souls. The King always has work for His faithful messengers.

To learn more about The King, please visit, JesusForSinners.com/the-basics/

Afterword

An interview with members of the cast of
Everland.



JFS: We're here with the stars of the new Light Novel, *Everland*; Raj Ganipali who plays Peter, Seyuko Yamamoto who

plays Mary as a child, and An Chin Li who plays Mary as a young adult.

Welcome to you all.

An, I'll start with you. You played Mary as an adult. What appealed to you about this role?

An: Well, I think most adults, at some point, take stock of their lives and think, “If I had made different decisions in the past, would things have turned out differently?” Mary’s life obviously was turning out pretty horribly. I really wanted to explore that part of a character

who, wasn't just looking for things to be a little better or a little different but someone who, basically needed a total reboot.

JFS: I'm sure a question that all our readers are wondering, how traumatic was it for you to have to shave off all your hair for this role?! <HaHa>

An: Argh! I was the one who needed a psychiatrist after that! It has started to grow back now but it's not as long as it was before.

JFS: You also lost a lot of weight for the

role too, didn't you?

An: I lost SO MUCH weight! I was very happy when I could eat like normal again!

JFS: Seyuko, you played Mary as a 14 year old girl who had just left her small town for life in the big city. Young Mary had to deal with being an outsider. Have you ever had an experience like that in real life?

Seyuko: I haven't had an experience exactly like that but I think a lot of kids can feel like an outsider in different

situations. Some kids are just shy, some just can't seem to click with the kids around them. So, from that standpoint, I was certainly familiar with being an outsider. I've always been kind of shy and so I could empathize with Mary.

JFS: Playing a younger version of the older Mary, did you and An talk about the character and how to make sure they synced well?

Seyuko: Oh yeah, An was great. It was really fun trying to figure out how the personality of the older Mary showed up in the younger Mary, and vice versa.

An: Seyuko would tell me how she wanted to play Mary, for example, when she first met Peter. I took that and used that for the scenes when I was in George's office and thinking about Peter and Everland. It worked out great.

JFS: That must be hard having two actors playing the same character at different times in their life.

An: It can be but Seyuko and I had such a great working relationship that it turned out to be pretty easy.

Seyuko: It's easy when you have the

same goal in mind. I feel that this is a really important story. People need to understand that there are bigger things in life than the things that are right in front of us...there are things that last forever and we need to think about those things too. I think when everyone is trying to make sure that message gets across, all the work involved gets a lot easier.

An: I agree.

JFS: And Raj...you got to play the mysterious Peter. How was that for you?

Raj: It was great. I really liked the role.

The character is unique. He has a quiet peace about him. I actually had to work pretty hard to get there because I'm usually pretty hyper! <Haha>

JFS: It seems like you pulled it off pretty well. What did you like best about the character?

Raj: I liked that he was really deeply concerned about Mary. He was concerned enough to tell her things she didn't want to hear. That's a really tough thing to do but if we really care about people, we're going to be willing to do those things even if, at the time, people don't really like it. It shows that we care

more about them than about ourselves...I like that this character demonstrated that.

JFS: For all three of you, what did you like best about the story? Seyuko, you first.

Seyuko: I really liked Everland. It isn't hard to look amazed when you see all that. It really does just take your breath away.

JFS: An, what did you like?

An: Well, this is going to sound strange but, I read the J.M. Berrie book a while

back and I think the names and things in Everland are really funny. <HaHa>

JFS: <Chuckle> Yeah, that *is* pretty funny.

How about you, Raj?

Raj: The flying, I definitely liked the flying best!

Seyuko: Yeah! The flying! I liked that part too.

JFS: Haha!

Do any of you have plans to do any more Light Novels in the future?

Raj: Definitely. I think they're really fun. They're something that someone can pick up and read in a couple of hours and just have a nice story to think about.

An: Yeah, I really like the format. I think it makes these stories so much more accessible.

Seyuko: I hope we get to do more. I'm not sure what the writers are planning, but it does seem like the ending of

Everland keeps the door open for a sequel! <HaHa>

Raj: I hope so! I'd really like to do this character again.

An: My character might be too old for a sequel but we'll just have to wait and see what the writers have planned.

JFS: Well, I'm sure there will be other stories that you can all be involved in in the future.

An: I hope so. I think these are important stories. It's so easy to get

caught up in the frivolous things in life. I mean, we have so much entertainment now; so many distractions, the internet, social media, all that. Sometimes it's good to just stop and think about bigger things, like where we're going to spend eternity.

Seyuko: Things that are bigger than what's just right in front of us.

Raj: Yeah.

JFS: Yes, the book really hits on that point doesn't it?

Raj: It does, and I think that's really a thing to think about. What kind of stuff are we putting in our heads? What do we spend our time on? People always say that they don't have time for everything but what are the things that we're making time for and do they have any lasting value?

An: Yeah.

Seyuko: Yeah.

JFS: Well, I appreciate you three taking the time to talk with us. I'm sure the readers appreciate peeking behind the

scenes a little and meeting the real people behind their favorite characters.

Thanks to all the readers as well. We appreciate that you took time to read our story. God willing, we'll have more for you in the future!

Until then, Soli Deo Gloria!