

## **His Father's Pen** — *First Place Winner*

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Royce's father had a beautiful quill pen. Royce used to watch his father write with it. There was nothing interesting in the words, dull names and endless numbers. It was the pen that held his younger self's attention.

The point, a shimmer of gold. A bright star against the harsh, domineering, black of the feather, like volcanic glass. Lacquer of some exotic and expensive variety had been lathered lovingly onto it during its momentous creation, giving it the sheen of polished silver. A gentle stream of navy blue ink poured onto the paper and molded itself according to his father's will.

It was the weapon of a mighty hero.

In his mind's eye Royce saw the greats; Cuhulain with his deadly spear Gae Bulg, Arthur with his mighty blade Excalibur, and between them, himself, wielding that wondrous pen. He imagined that any word he wrote with it would spring off the page and come to life. Royce had story upon story of his heroics with the pen. He would solve mysterious murders, fight monstrous monsters, and save a precious damsel who was repeatedly locked away with a sleeping dragon.

Alas, the beauty and wonder of it all was lost to his father, whose thoughts were only concerned with the pragmatic ideas of business and wealth.

The pen had been around before Royce's birth. He had asked his father about where he had gotten it, but Royce had received the usual answer to such questions of superfluous importance, "I don't know, and if my mind thought it unimportant enough to forget then so should you." His father went on writing. Neat, carefully drawn, numbers were filed into little boxes and next to each set were scribbled, barely legible, names.

As much as his father might have wanted him too, Royce could not forget about the pen. His pen, as he thought of it.

He had asked to use it on many occasions, but always was given an exasperated excuse, "I am working boy, Find a different pen, or No, that is my work pen." After a few years of this his father went so far as to forbid Royce's presence in his study.

And so he would sit outside the office for hours until his precious mother would come by and see him in his depressed state. She would be his shield as they entered the office together, but even still they were never allowed to stay long, especially his mother. She knew of his little obsession, and would chuckle under her breath as she listened to him describe, in depth, his adventures with the feathered pen. She had argued many times on Royce's behalf to be allowed back into his study and once for



his father to give him the pen. This had been met with resounding confusion, "We have plenty of pens dear. He does not need my work pen."

"It's special to him."

"The answer is no."

"At least let him be with you while you work then. He just wants to be close you!"

"Nonsense, a boy should be out exploring the countryside with his friends at his age, not getting cooped up in an office."

The conversation moved away from where Royce had been playing, under a table in the kitchen.

He did not come out, not until his mother found him under there, a concerned look on her tired face. Puffy, red, blotches sat under her eyes, like a crimson army laying siege.

Royce imagined taking the gold and black pen and smoothing away her worries with a single word, but all he could do was smile. That seemed to help, at least a little.

She helped him out from under the table and got one of the servants to fetch a glass of milk.

He gave her a great big smile, ear to ear, as she handed him the drink, and this time she laughed. The red had almost completely fled from her face, but the little wounds that dotted her slender arm would never quite fade away.

Time slipped by, tick by tock, but the pen was never forgotten to Royce, although he did his best to ensnare it in the recesses of his mind. But every time he would see it, sitting on a desk or in his father's hand, he could not help but stare. The image, born of innocence, was still so fixed so fresh in his mind; beauty, magic, heroics, excitement.

Then the pen would be gone and he would chuckle at the silly mutterings of his youth.

Tick by tock.

Finally becoming a man, his father said as it came close to his coming of age. Now Royce too wished he could be out exploring the countryside instead of sitting in his father's office all day, learning the finer points of running a business; how to keep your clients happy, how to get new clients, how to keep a good log, and many more dull things of that nature.

Every day he saw that pen. He even almost got to hold it once.

His father had spilled a container of navy ink and thrust the pen towards Royce to hold, who, in shock, did not take it. He could not take. Something inside of him could not get the muscles to respond, and then it was over. His father set the pen down and went to go get some cloth and solvent. Royce stared at the pen. He could not touch it, but at that moment he knew it had to be his. He'd rather that pen than the most



beautiful woman in the world. He'd rather that pen than all his inheritance. He'd rather that pen than his father.

He resolved to get it anyway he could. He would demand it of his father, who was not at the manor at that time, which gave Royce the opportunity for preparation.

He imagined every response, every excuse, his father could give as to why he needed this particular pen, and he removed them.

He had found every single pen in the manor and hid them in the attic, beneath a bit of torn up cloth. He had purchased a fine, new, silver and navy, quill as a present for his father, to replace the, "old and dated one" he currently used. He had finished all the work his father had to do upon his return, leaving him open for discussion. He had even sent a letter to his mother, telling her not to come visit Royce for a while.

Then the day came, and his father arrived. Royce waited until the servants had unpacked all his things, until after he had some food, and until, at last, he retired to his office.

Royce entered, the silver and navy pen hidden behind his back.

His eyes searched for his golden wonder, his Helen of Troy, but he did not see it. Likely his father had yet to remove it from it's black leather carrying case, which, Royce saw with much pleasure, was sitting on the desk. "Hello father. How were your travels?"

He looked up from the desk at Royce, "Ah son, what did you do with all the pens?"

I cannot find any of the extras."

"What about your pen father? The gold and black one?"

He shook an indifferent hand at Royce, "That old thing. I lost it somewhere along the road."

"Where did you lose it?"

"I don't know boy, and if my brain thought it so unimportant as to forget then so should you."

Without blinking Royce handed his father the silver and navy pen and sat down at the small desk in the corner.

He sat there a long while, staring at his father as he scribbled "Just like you forgot mother?"

His father looked up at Royce, his eyebrows sunk and his lips curled into a sneer, "Shut your mouth boy!" As he yelled he slammed the new, silver and navy, pen against the desk, leaving little wounds which would never quite fade from the tender wood, and snapping the silver and navy pen in half.



His father tossed the remains in front of Royce's small desk, "Get me another boy. I have work to do."

Royce got up and picked the two halves of the silver and navy pen off the floor. The point was still sharp. He looked at his father, and he wished he could forget.

