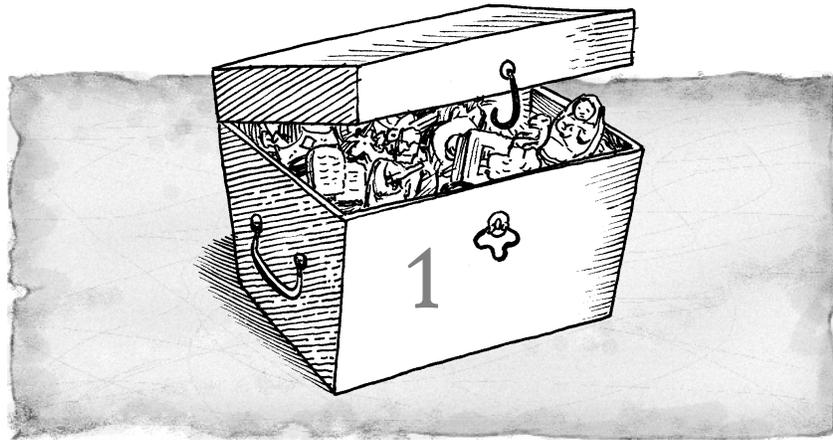


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The War

Amy slammed her locker door shut before the jumbled pile of books could fall out onto the floor. It was that most wonderful day of the month—the second Wednesday—when school was out early. That would give her a whole afternoon to spend at the “Trash to Treasure” secondhand shop. Who could tell what she might find? Of course, as he always did, the shop owner would let her explore it all she liked and use anything she found. That was because “Trash to Treasure”—part business, part hobby—belonged to Joe Maclusky, Amy’s grandfather. Amy turned in to Grandpa’s driveway and hurried past the battered blue pickup that he had used for his handyman service before retiring. She did not stop at the house, since Grandma went out shopping on Wednesdays. Instead, she headed straight for the brightly painted guesthouse at the back of the yard. She passed under the wooden sign reading “Trash to Treasure.”

“I just picked up this typewriter last week,” Grandpa was saying to a customer as Amy entered. “It needs a few repairs, but it’s really a better typewriter than this other one.”

“When could you have it ready?” the customer wanted to know.

“Check back on Monday and I’ll have it working like new,” Grandpa replied. Pleased, the customer left.

“Hi, Grandpa, how do these things work?” Amy said, all in one breath, pointing at the typewriters. Grandpa put a clean piece of paper into the typewriter that the customer had not chosen, and showed Amy how to type on the old machine.

“That’s one of the things I like best about you, Amy John,” Grandpa said. (Amy’s middle name was really Jeanne, but Grandpa had called her Amy John as long as she could remember.) “You’re always interested in new things.” Amy beamed at Grandpa’s praise and set to work. For quite some time she typed in silence except for the slow clack-clack-clacking of the typewriter keys. Finally she looked up and said, “Hey, Grandpa, what’s Marc doing?”

“Let’s go see,” said Grandpa, stepping away from the plumbing parts that he had been separating into piles. Marc had not had to make a locker stop before leaving school, so he arrived at Grandpa’s shop before Amy. He was busy by the back window, placing soldiers on a card table. Grandpa and Amy went to him and stood, watching.

Marc’s dark brown eyes were narrowed into a thoughtful squint. Very carefully, so as not to disturb any of the other tiny wooden figures on the battlefield, he placed a Union soldier opposite a Confederate lieutenant who waited, sword drawn, to meet him. Marc leaned back, looking with satisfaction on the miniature Civil War scene he had created. “See,” Marc said, pointing, “this cannon just shot off a ball into this group of soldiers here—that’s why they’re running every which way. And this horse just jumped over this wall.” Marc lifted the horse over the wall. “But it got its foot caught and fell,” and he lay the horse down on its side. “The rider’s over there where he was thrown. And this officer here has rallied his men and

is just about to lead a charge against the enemy.” As though Marc himself were the officer, he waved with his own arm in a “Come on” gesture. Marc possessed a true fascination for war. He scorned the superheroes that so many of his friends admired. Marc was interested in real battles, and he read whatever he could find about any war in history. His reading had convinced him that military victory depended most of all on good strategy—careful planning that made the best use of men, weapons, the surrounding land, and the weather. Clever gadgets or superhuman abilities were fine for make-believe, but real war was not like that. Now, looking up from the miniature battlefield he had created, Marc asked, “Grandpa, were you ever in a war?”

“As a matter of fact, Marc, I’m in the middle of a war right now,” Grandpa answered.

Surprised, Marc looked up quickly to see whether Grandpa was teasing him. “You are not,” he said.

Amy jumped to Grandpa’s defense. “Marc, don’t be rude. Give him a chance to explain.”

Marc was used to Amy’s big-sister corrections. Most of the time she was nice enough about it, and she was usually right. He turned from her now and said, “Okay, Grandpa, what war are you in the middle of right now?”

Grandpa continued as though he had not heard Marc’s objection or Amy’s response. “It’s a great and terrible war I’m in. It’s not the kind in which people shoot and stab and blow each other up. Oh, no, it’s much more serious than that. Think of all the wicked characters in all the war stories you’ve ever heard. Think of the strongest and cruelest villains, real or imagined. The enemy in this war is stronger and crueller than any of them.”

Marc and Amy looked at Grandpa in surprise. How could their easygoing grandfather have an enemy as terrible as this?

Grandpa went on. "But the great thing about this war is that even though it's so hard and so long and even though the enemy is very powerful, this war is already won. Even the enemy knows that."

"An enemy that keeps fighting even when he knows he's lost? Why would he do that?" Marc asked.

"He's just that filled with hate and with the desire to do all the damage he can," Grandpa said. "He lost a long time ago, but he doesn't stop attacking. Sometimes it may look like he's winning, but he never really is."

"A good commander-in-chief has to see the big picture," Marc commented. "He can't just look at how one little skirmish turns out."

"Exactly," said Grandpa. "And this war is full of little skirmishes of all kinds, as well as the really important battles that could turn the tide of the whole war. You know, if you're interested, I'd be happy to tell you about some of the major battles. It might take a while because this war has been going on for centuries—"

This surprised even Amy. "Centuries?" she repeated.

"—but I could tell you a little bit each time you come to visit, and sooner or later you'd have a pretty good picture of this war."

"I'm game," Amy said. "I always like your stories, Grandpa. What about you, Marc?"

"I guess so," Marc agreed. "Grandpa *does* tell good stories. Are you sure these are stories about real battles?"

"Real battles," Grandpa nodded. "In fact, I've been making a collection of things that would remind me of those battles. Let me just go get my box." Grandpa went to the back part of his shop, the part where the things that were not yet for sale waited to be restored. There were brass pots that would be beautiful once they were polished, an antique clock missing an hour hand, drawers needing knobs, and chairs needing legs. This back part of the shop appeared hopelessly cluttered to most people, but not to Grandpa. He always knew just which pile contained what he wanted. Now he stepped over a once-elegant rocking horse that lay on its side, needing a new rocker

and a coat of paint, and reached for a box, about the size of a fishing tackle box. He picked it up by the handles fastened on the sides.

Grandpa came back to the children and held the box up for them to see. It was a wooden box, simply made, and painted lemon yellow. Grandpa smiled. “Your dad made this for me up at camp one year, when he was about Amy’s age,” he said. He set the box down and lifted the simple hook that held the lid closed, allowing the children to see inside. “I guess you could call it my war chest,” he added. As the children peered into the box, they saw many small figures—animals, people, and objects of all kinds. A number of them were carved from wood. Some were painted in great detail.

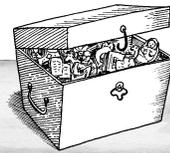
“Wow!” Marc breathed. “Where did you get all those?”

“Some I’ve collected from stores that sell miniatures,” Grandpa replied. “Others I’ve carved myself out of wood. I work on them at night, after dinner. Your grandmother sits and reads then, but if I read at night, I go to sleep. So I carve.”

“There are so many,” Amy said. “And they’re so detailed. How long has it taken you?”

Grandpa chuckled. “I really don’t know. I’ve been working on these for years. I’m in no hurry, you know. It’s just kind of a hobby.” Amy shook her head. There was always something new to discover about Grandpa. He had so many different hobbies; many of them had to do with working with his hands. Now Grandpa selected two figures from his box and closed the lid. “Okay, we’re ready to begin,” he said.

Psalm 35:1–3, 9–10



Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!
Take hold of shield and buckler
and rise for my help!

Draw the spear and javelin
 against my pursuers!
Say to my soul,
 “I am your salvation!” . . .

Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD,
 exulting in his salvation.
All my bones shall say,
 “O LORD, who is like you,
delivering the poor
 from him who is too strong for him,
 the poor and needy from him who robs him?”