



In this fictionalized biography, the life of Lewis—or as his friends knew him, “Jack”—is intertwined with literary works that impacted him. As each chapter unfolds, young readers are encouraged by the creativity, wisdom, and humility of Jack, while gaining an appreciation for the heart shaping power of books.

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# THE LITTLE END ROOM

“If you don’t go with the tide of a dream—  
if you resist—you wake up, you know.”<sup>2</sup>

—E. NESBIT, *THE STORY OF THE AMULET*

Jack tiptoed across the creaky old floorboards in the attic, making sure to duck under the low beams. He had learned the hard way after a few close calls. He was taller now, almost eleven years old, and the risk of banging his head in the attic was a genuine possibility. Jack had been just seven when they first moved to Little Lea, the house his father had built.

Little Lea looked like a house straight out of a storybook, the kind where children embark on adventures and disappear with sandwiches and chocolate cake with no one noticing! It had many windows, chimneys, and roof tiles that Jack’s father had fretted immensely over during the rough Belfast storms. Sometimes in their beds, Jack and his older brother Warnie could hear the tiles rattling as the wind howled and rain beat against the windowpanes. Despite this, the house still

exuded a cosy and secure atmosphere.

The familiar smell of wood, old books, and musty dressing-up clothes surrounded Jack, making him wish Warnie would hurry home for the rest of the summer holiday. Jack had only a few weeks left before he would leave Belfast, Ireland, and join Warnie at boarding school in England. He couldn't shake the feeling that his father just wanted them out of the way. Their best times were the holidays at home, especially Easter and Christmas, but the summer break was the longest one, lasting about six weeks.

Jack and Warnie had created a hideaway in the attic. The hideaway was filled with secret doors, winding corridors, and cosy nooks perfect for reading and letting their imaginations run wild. They'd spent hours up there, undisturbed even by the house staff until Warnie left for school. Then their parents wanted Jack to spend more time with them in the living room, where a warm fire crackled, and the topics of conversation were always interesting.

Life in the house had been busier when their mother was alive and well. Life was different now. Since their mother had died two years ago, Jack and Warnie had watched their father grow sad, irritable, and impatient. He didn't seem to have the time or capacity to raise two sons. The boys knew he was grieving, as they were, but no one showed them how or gave them permission to cry, talk, or be angry. So, they took their sadness to the corners of the attic and to each other.

Jack missed his mother. He missed her voice in their big house, her irresistible joy, and the long days of stories and French and Latin lessons. Even though his governess, Miss Harper, was strict and often hard to like, she had been there to support his mother in teaching him, and together they made learning at home a positive experience. Jack's

mother, Flora Lewis, had set the tone of the home, the pace to their days, and had an amazing ability to make his father laugh—even when he was scolding the boys for running down Little Lea’s long corridors.

Jack settled onto a long plank of wood, cleverly propped up by an equal number of books on each side. Warnie had made it during his last visit, saying, “This place needs more seating. What if we wanted to invite guests over?” Guests? Little Lea hadn’t hosted many since their mother passed away. She used to delight in brewing a large pot of Irish tea, baking a large, cream-filled sponge cake, and adorning the kitchen table with plates, cups, jars full of freshly picked flowers, and a tea tray.

Among her friends, she was known for telling lively stories, listening with deep interest, and refilling teacups relentlessly, whether guests wanted more or not. Sometimes the boys were allowed to stay, but often, the ladies wanted to have the boys’ mother all to themselves. The whole family knew that Flora Lewis’s gentle manner and attentive ear comforted many in the community.

Jack seated himself on the bench, grateful for his long trousers as he wanted to avoid a splinter. Beneath the bench lay his cherished and worn copy of Edith Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet*. Jack relished its telling of ancient times. As he leaned down to retrieve the book, a familiar voice interrupted him.

“You’re not reading that old thing again, are you?” Warnie asked, his voice coming from the far end of the attic as he stepped into view.

Jack, facing away from the staircase, jumped in surprise. Turning around he shouted, “Warnie! When did you get back?”

Warnie, with his familiar, slightly rumpled look and a playful grin, had skilfully avoided the noisy parts of the old wooden steps as he crept up the staircase. The soft creak of the floorboards was barely

noticeable, and neither was he until he spoke.

Jack hopped up from his seat, put the book on the bench, and hurried over to hug his brother. “Good to see you, old chap,” said Jack, mid-embrace.

Earlier, Jack had heard his father leave the house but hadn’t even wondered where he might be headed—he’d gone to collect Jack’s brother from the train station!

“What does that matter, my boy? I’m here now,” Warnie replied, striding back toward the bench with his arm around his little brother’s shoulders. “Father spoke little on the way back from the station. Is he like this all the time now?” asked Warnie.

Warnie and Jack sat side by side on the bench.

“Father is quiet, more serious than ever, and understandably very sad,” Jack replied. “He’s lost so much, along with mother.”

“I’m sorry,” said Warnie. “I hope he isn’t taking it out on you too much.”

Jack responded with a slight smile, and then jumped up to change the subject. “All will be well, Warnie. On to other matters, I hope school hasn’t squashed your imagination. There are adventures to be had in Boxen, and you are needed for its creation.”

Boxen was a make-believe world that Jack and Warnie had invented. Jack enjoyed writing stories about Animal-Land, while Warnie enjoyed tales about India. One day, they merged their ideas and created Boxen.

Unlike the serious adults who often forgot the magic of imagination, Jack and Warnie knew better. They understood the importance of late-night storytelling, drawing whimsical creatures and lands, and letting their boundless creativity run wild. They devoured literature

and drew inspiration from many of their favourite authors and illustrators. Just like the Brontë siblings, they knew that childhood was the best time for capturing those moments of innocent whimsy and preserving them forever in the pages of books.

Warnie stood and formally shook Jack's hand in a humorous yet sincere manner. "Ah, my partner in rhyme, let's get to work."

## AROUND THE TABLE

The boys had just settled into their old, comfy attic chairs with pencils and paper in hand when they heard their father's voice. "Boys, boys, can you hear me?"

"Yes, Father," echoed Jack and Warnie.

The boys quickly moved closer to the stairs to hear their father better. "Wash your hands and come down for dinner. You can help set the table."

"Coming, Father!"

Warnie made his way downstairs, but first banged his head on a beam. "Ouch, I haven't done that before!" he exclaimed.

Jack laughed. "It's a good thing being tall doesn't make you immune to the magic of the attic. Just because you banged your head doesn't mean you've outgrown it."

Warnie grinned, rubbing his head. "I'll never outgrow the magic—just need to duck!"

The boys were still laughing as they met their father in the hallway and the three entered the kitchen together.

Their father interrupted their fun with a stern reprimand. "You

boys need to stop all this silliness.”

The boys didn’t respond, but Maggie, their housekeeper, winked at them and passed them the plates and cutlery. “Will you eat in the kitchen or the dining room, sir?” Maggie asked Mr. Lewis.

“The kitchen is fine,” said Mr. Lewis. “The boys can set the table here.”

Jack and Warnie set the table for the three of them. “Smells delicious, Maggie,” said Warnie.

The warm kitchen was filled with the sound of clinking silverware and glasses being filled with water.

“I smell beef,” Jack whispered to Maggie.

“Only the best for you growing young men,” she quietly responded.

Mr. Lewis said, “Come on, boys, let’s sit. I’m sure Warnie has much to tell us of his learning these past few weeks.”

As they sat down at the clumsily set table to a delicious meal of roast beef, potatoes, carrots, Brussels sprouts, and gravy, Jack noticed a sudden change in Warnie’s mood. Warnie had been so happy to greet him and seemed excited to settle into their normal routines in their hideaway. But as their father mentioned school, Jack saw Warnie’s face fall, and the familiar sick look returned. Jack recalled Warnie telling him before how just talking about school made his stomach churn, and Jack felt a pang of concern for his brother.

Mr. Lewis pulled in his chair, tucked his napkin into the collar of his buttoned shirt, and cleared his throat. “Back together again, boys,” he remarked warmly.

Both boys smiled at their father, understanding the pain he endured each day, the same pain they felt—the constant absence at the table and in their home.

## DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

“So, what news of school, young man?” Mr. Lewis asked Warnie.

“Oh, you know, Father, the usual stuff,” Warnie replied, balancing a heaping forkful of vegetables in front of his mouth. “Learning arithmetic, reading and comprehension, Latin, and science.”

“But what about life there? How are the other boys?” Mr. Lewis prodded.

Jack saw Warnie’s pained expression, again, and it wasn’t because of the boiled vegetables staring up at him from his plate. “I guess everyone is just getting on with what they are there for, to learn. It’s not the happiest place, Father.”

Jack, feeling a bit uncomfortable with the conversation, asked his brother to pass the mustard. He then spread a generous amount of the hot English mustard onto his slice of beef and blissfully took a big bite, wincing slightly as the sharp heat tingled on his tongue.

Mr. Lewis gave Warnie a gentle punch on the arm and responded, “It’ll toughen you up, boy. We all need a bit of that.”

Jack looked at Warnie and gave him a comforting smile. At the same time, a knot was forming in his stomach as he thought about his turn to leave Little Lea and head to school.

Mr. Lewis, quickly changing the subject, turned to Jack and said, “What’s that book I keep seeing you reading? It must be good.”

All three began to cut their food and sip their water as Jack subtly (or so he hoped) pushed his Brussels sprouts to the side of his plate, with no intention of eating them.

Sometimes, Jack found himself drawn to a particular story, though he couldn’t quite say why, especially lately. After his mother

passed away, he didn't know how to talk about the ache he felt inside. Instead, he turned to stories, which helped distract him from feeling sad. Every morning, when he woke up, the reality of her absence hit him again, leaving his heart feeling empty as he faced the fact that she was really gone.

"Jack, are you in there? Are you going to tell me?" asked Mr. Lewis.

Jack snapped out of his deep thoughts. "Oh, sorry, Father," he said, dropping his knife and fork onto his plate. He then began to narrate the summary of his beloved book:

"At the beginning of the book, the main characters—Robert, Anthea, Cyril, and Jane—are brothers and sisters who are being looked after by Nurse Green. Their father, who is a journalist, is away covering the war in Manchuria, and their mother has gone to Madeira with their youngest sibling for a break."

"Wow, that's a lot going on," remarked Warnie.

"Anyway," Jack continued, "they end up living in London in a boarding house where the children strike up a friendship with an Egyptologist, known as Jimmy."

"An escapologist, did you say?" said Warnie, smirking. "That Harry Houdini is incredible."

"An *Egyptologist*," Jack said sternly. "Let me finish."

"Yes, let him finish," said Mr. Lewis, attempting to steer the conversation along. When it came to the subject of books, his boys could talk all day.

"Okay," Jack continued, "so they live very close to the British Museum, where they get to explore interesting shops. In one shop, they help a magical creature named the Psammead\* who is trapped there, by

\* Pronounced: [SAM-ee-ad].

pretending he's a strange-looking toy animal and buying him."

"Ah, a Psammead! Does this mean they can make wishes?" interrupted Warnie.

"Sort of," Jack replied. "In the story, they find an ancient Egyptian amulet that's supposed to grant wishes. But they quickly discover it's only half of the real artifact. They need to find the missing half to make it work. So, they go on an incredible journey through time to find it. It's absolutely brilliant!"

"So, there are four children, a man who they call Jimmy, and a Psammead travelling through time? Sounds amazing!" said Warnie.

"It is," said Jack, suddenly getting very animated. "They travel to Babylon, Egypt, and ancient Cornwall, and they have encounters with historical figures like Julius Caesar. They can even speak and understand the local languages—well, the children can. For some reason, Jimmy can only speak and understand Latin."

Mr. Lewis raised an eyebrow and gave a half-smile. "He must have paid attention in school," Mr. Lewis said, glancing over at Warnie. Mrs. Lewis had often tried to get the boys excited about their Latin studies.

Jack went quiet, a thoughtful look on his face.

"Are you okay there, little brother?" asked Warnie.

"Where would you go?" Jack asked his father, looking around at his fellow Lewis men at the table.

"What do you mean?" his father replied.

"Well, if the Psammead were here, or I was holding an ancient amulet, what would you ask for? Where would you choose to go?"

"It's all a load of nonsense. It's just a story," replied Mr. Lewis gruffly. "How are we supposed to answer that?"

"With your heart, Father," said Jack quietly.

“And your imagination,” added Warnie.

Mr. Lewis went quiet and looked at the boys, tears forming in his eyes. He glanced up at the kitchen mantel above the small fireplace and gazed toward the picture of his late wife, then looked back at the boys.

“I know, Father,” said Jack, placing his hand on his father’s arm. “I miss her too.”

Warnie nodded.

Mr. Lewis suddenly yanked the napkin from his collar and neatly folded it before placing it on the table. He pushed his chair back efficiently, stood up, and then slid it back under the table with a firm motion. Just like a dog shaking off a scare or a fight, he said, “Come on then, boys, clean up and get to bed early. It’s church tomorrow.”

Jack held back a groan, but it was clear from his expression—and the mirror image of it on Warnie’s face—that church wasn’t their favourite Sunday morning pastime.

Maggie caught the boys’ attention as she cleared their plates. She looked down at each of them, as if to say, “Don’t let your father see your faces like that!”

With a quick nod of thanks to Maggie, the boys stood up and pushed in their chairs before heading upstairs. Jack went into Warnie’s room and plopped himself on the bed as Warnie unpacked his things from school.

“You know, Warnie,” Jack began, leaning back against the wall, “I can’t bear the thought of being dragged to church again this Sunday. It’s always the same old hymns and sermons.”

Warnie nodded, adjusting the pile of clothes beside Jack. “Yeah, it’s boring, isn’t it? And don’t get me started on the hard pews and the long hours.”

*The Little End Room*

Jack chuckled. "Indeed, and Father's stern glances whenever we dare to fidget or whisper."

"Well, we're together, and we can face anything together, even church!" Warnie said, cheerfully, then with a wave of his hand at Jack, he added, "Right, off my bed now, I'm exhausted. We can catch up more tomorrow."

Jack bid his brother goodnight and walked down the corridor to his room, glad that Warnie was finally home and comforted that they could face their sadness, adventures, and questions together.

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