



The Fantastical Exploits of Gwendolyn Gray

B. A. Williamson

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B. A. Williamson's *The Fantastical Exploits of Gwendolyn Gray* bounces between fantasy worlds, spurred by the power of imagination.

Gwendolyn Gray saved the world—or so she thought. Her grey-skied city seems no better off than before, and she feels crushing apathy and sadness. A fearful turn of events brings back the Lambents, who hypnotize her classmates. But Gwendolyn can imagine things into reality, and that power may be the key to escaping the frightening Faceless Gentlemen.

Gwendolyn enters new worlds, including the Library of All Wonder and Faectoria, the land of faeries. Each new land is described in terms of its history, magic, and people, through the eyes of characters who guide Gwendolyn well.

Gwendolyn breaks the norms often, as when she ignores her mentor and pledges her self in service to the queen of Faectoria. As she adjusts to different settings, she learns how to balance her impulses with the advice of valuable allies. When she makes mistakes, she learns to live with their consequences and recover with grace.

Her travels lead her to the heart of her city, where she receives terrifying answers regarding the grim future of her world. She must decide whether she should do what is best for her world, or run away to join another one forever. The central villain makes her doubt even her previous belief that she knows what's best for her world; she searches for the inner strength to proceed in uncertainty.

The cheeky, unreliable omniscient narrator keeps things funny and light, even when grim evil is bearing down on Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn's cycles between depression and mania are foregrounded as elements of her wonderful personality, rather than as mere impediments to her success.

In the surprising middle grade fantasy *The Fantastical Exploits of Gwendolyn Gray*, self-acceptance is key.

LAURA LEAVITT (March / April 2020)

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