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The Tapeworm Emails and the Gloria Airmails: The Flip Side of Temptation

Mary McReynolds
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Twelve-year-old Jewel is at a crossroads. The end of times has come, and both demons and angels battle for her eternal soul.

The Tapeworm Emails and the Gloria Airmails: The Flip Side of Temptation is structured as two books in one. The first is told from the point of view of Tapeworm, an old demon guiding her niece, Wartmonger, in the effort to tempt Jewel to sin. The second book unfolds from the point of view of Gloria, an angel guiding another angel, Ariel, in the battle to save Jewel's soul and ensure her path to Heaven. Both parts of the book are written in the form of emails, and both describe the same events in very different terms.

Mary McReynolds's foreword reveals her inspiration for the book: the C.S. Lewis classic The Screwtape Letters, which involves a demon instructing his nephew in an attempt to taint a man's soul. McReynolds has risen above and beyond Lewis's concept, modifying the original idea in such a way as to modernize it and make it her own. Her inclusion of what she calls "the flip side of temptation," as conveyed through Gloria's airmails, is a twist on the original concept and serves to bring the story full circle.

Tapeworm's emails are as malevolent as could be expected of a demon. Her constant prodding of Wartmonger is filled with contempt for her niece as she urges her to work harder to tempt and torment Jewel, whom they both refer to as "Trinket" to trivialize the young girl's true worth. Tapeworm insults Wartmonger and speaks of Jewel as "brat" and her family as "jokers," sneering at their attempts to live Christian lives. She revels in the horror that has befallen humanity in the end times and impatiently awaits the further suffering to come.

In stark contrast are Gloria's airmails to Ariel, where the love for all of God's creations shines through on every page. Far from a mere "trinket," Gloria and Ariel see Jewel as a precious soul worth saving, as a child of God who deserves everlasting life in his Kingdom. In her effort to keep tempters like Wartmonger at bay, Gloria guides Ariel with loving and gentle wisdom, and together they rejoice in the moments when Jewel is able to turn away from temptation and look toward God. From one book to the next, the shift in tone and character between Wartmonger and Gloria is handled well, with the author flawlessly drawing comparisons and conclusions through the character's writings.

A challenge in writing a faith-based book is making it accessible to a wide audience, regardless of particular beliefs, and McReynolds achieves that goal here. She skillfully shares her message with humor and subtlety. Her conversational tone makes the book approachable and enlightening. Readers will be caught up in the story, hoping along with Gloria and Ariel that young Jewel will ultimately choose well and attain her place in Heaven.
JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (March 8, 2011)

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