



Book Two
Lyceum Challenge
J. Z. Colby



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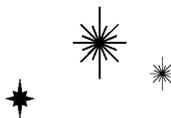
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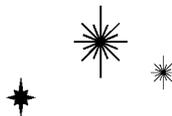
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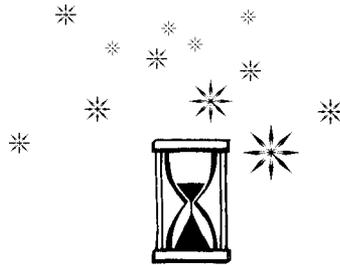


Lyceum Challenge

Book Two of J. Z. Colby's original Lyceum story

**by
J. Z. Colby**





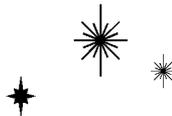
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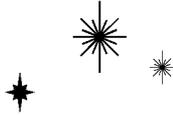
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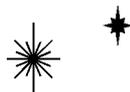


**For “Liberty”
who loved horses almost as much as boys.**

**For “Ashley”
whose landings were as light as a feather,
but who never found the training she wanted.**

**For “Shawn”
who was born in the wrong century,
and whose love for Sarah was never known.**

**For “Sarah”
who took refuge in her music
for as long as she could.**

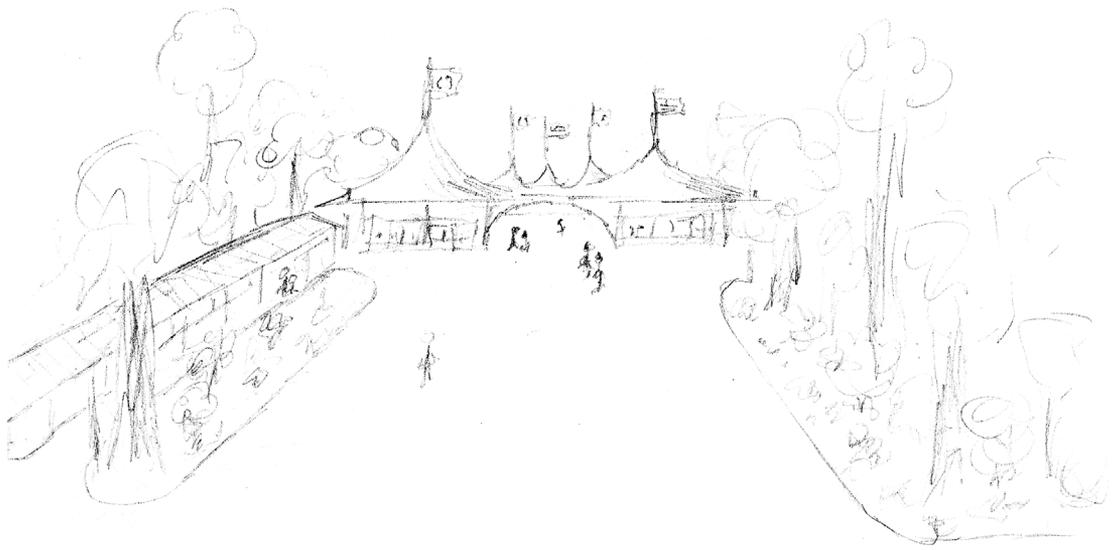


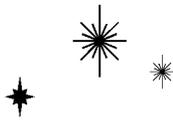


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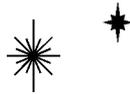
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“I’ll work as fast as I can on my music, even at night if I have to, but I don’t want to be ugly when I die.”

— Jenny



Chapter 1: Jumping in with Both Feet

On the afternoon of her acceptance to Lyceum, one very happy and proud fifteen-year-old was walking back toward the Main Lobby from a picnic table where she had been going through the *New Member's Handbook* with her contact person.

“Nancy,” Liberty said, “will you be my mentor?”

“Wow... I'm very honored that you're asking, Liberty. But you know, you can take your time making that decision.”

“I know. But I'm sure I want *you* to be my mentor, so I don't see any point in putting it off.”

“Well, I am available, and we do have a lot in common. Let's say tentatively *yes*, and if you still feel good about the idea in a few weeks, we'll make it official.”

“Okay. Thank you!”

“You're very welcome! Actually, I think it will be good for both of us.”

They entered the Main Lobby, where about fifty people were lounging or peering at the art works.

“When can I start my classes and work?” Liberty asked.

“Relax! You just finished one of the most intense weeks of your life, in case you don't remember!”

“Yeah, I guess you're right. I just want to make sure I take care of my responsibilities. And I really do like going to school — as long as it isn't too boring.”

Nancy chuckled. "I don't think you'll have that problem here. Anyway, Brother Don won't have your class and work schedule for next week until Friday." They entered the Main Office. "And you won't be able to start some of your classes until September, maybe even October if they're on a quarterly cycle."

"Oh, I hope I don't have to wait that long to start the piloting class!"

"That one is very special to you, isn't it? Let's take a look." The tall lady sat down at a computer console. "Pilot training... the teacher is Sister Erica..."

"I've met her! She was co-pilot on the flight that brought us here!"

"That's right! The class meets... oh, boy, it's an intensive one. Tuesdays from one to four in the afternoon. And it says new students can join at any time..."

"Oh, please, can I start tomorrow?"

"Well, I don't suppose that'll be too much of a load for you. Your test scores take care of the prerequisites. Why not? I'll put you on the class list."

Liberty smiled at the lady she had quickly grown to admire and trust more than anyone else in the world... with the possible exception of her father. She wasn't sure which made her happier, being allowed to start the pilot training class, or knowing that Sister Nancy would be her mentor.



Ashley was loading dishes onto the same cart as Brother Paul at the conclusion of her first meal as a member of Lyceum.

"Hi!" she said.

"I owe you some information, don't I?"

"You do?" she said, confused.

"I promised to tell you the results of last December's evaluation week."

"Oh, yeah. You don't have to... I was just curious."

"I trust you'll treat the information wisely...?"

Ashley knew that wisdom was not a quality usually associated with twelve-year-old girls. She also knew that it was an expectation of all Lyceum members. "Yes... I will."

Ashley pushed the cart toward the dish room, while Paul carried a tub of dishes that wouldn't fit.

"Four persons were offered membership. One changed his mind and

declined, so that leaves three. Two joined but stayed non-resident, and the other is resident.”

“Sister Jennifer.”

“Right. Two others were offered a mentored preparation time, but only one accepted... you.”

Together they scraped food scraps and trash into the appropriate barrels and buckets, stacking the dirty plates on the counter where other members were putting them into racks for the trip through the dish machine.

“So that group only had a score of three... and a half!” she said, pointing to herself. They both laughed.



After chores, Ashley rejoined Sister Heather in the office to continue her orientation process.

“I just got a note from Sister Lydia,” Heather began as they sat down. “We’ve got three hundred and fifty people coming in for a funeral next weekend, and with other reservations, the Lodge is going to be packed. So she’s trying to free up as many rooms as possible for walk-in guests. She’d like you to move in with Tabitha by Thursday, get a cot and whatever else you need out of Stores, and then you can move into your own room on Monday or Tuesday of next week. This kind of thing happens once in awhile. I’ve already asked Tabitha, and it’s perfectly okay with her.”

“Sure!” Ashley said. “Sounds like fun.”

“You don’t need to even *think* about classes or work until next week. Just get settled, be helpful if anything comes up...”

“What about gymnastics?” Ashley asked with noticeable concern in her voice.

Heather smiled. “Oh, yes. Gymnastics. Let’s see when you can start. Have you ever used the General Knowledge Processor?”

“Yes. My friend Julie was teaching me. I only know the basics.”

“Good. You take the keyboard. Select *Education*... good. Then use a key word... yes, ‘gym’ is a good choice. There’s the class list... let me see... those first five are the gymnastics camps... next come the public classes... here we are, *Gymnastics 8-9-10, members*. Select it and press the *Detail* key.”

A new window of information appeared on the display.

“Wow!” Heather exclaimed. “That must be one of the most intensive classes we have! Monday through Friday, two to five. Brother Faelan is the coach. New students any time.”

“That’s just a basic gym schedule. When getting ready for a meet, it can go up to thirty or forty hours a week.”

“Well, well, I didn’t realize it was so time consuming!” Heather said. “Let’s see if we can locate Brother Faelan. Highlight his name and then select *Locate*.”

A plan of the entire Lyceum campus flashed onto the screen, and a symbol could be seen pulsing in the Asian Garden.

“And over on this side of the display you can see that he’s on free time, able to take calls. Now press *Call*.”

A few moments later a voice was heard. “Faelan here.”

“Brother Faelan, I hope we’re not interrupting...”

“Not at all — just sprucing up my garden.”

“Young Ashley was accepted this morning, as you know, and would dearly love to start gymnastics soon.”

“Oh, yes. Tabitha and Karen have kept me well informed about Ashley. Level eight, right?”

Ashley nodded, tense with anticipation.

“That’s right,” Heather said.

“It starts at two o’clock. She’ll have to hurry... that’s only twenty minutes away. Sister Shannon starts them off, and I work with them at three o’clock on their elite skills...”

Ashley didn’t hear the last part of what Brother Faelan said. As soon as Heather gave her leave to depart with a wave of her hand, Ashley scooped up her notebooks and dashed for her Lodge room.



When Ashley arrived at the gym a few minutes before two, her leotard on and her hair band in place, she found Tabitha and Karen already there, goofing around just outside the coach’s office. At that moment Sister Shannon stepped out of the office, a slender lady of about forty.

“Here she is now, girls!” she said, noticing Ashley enter the gym.

The other two young gymnasts looked toward the door and then

immediately surrounded Ashley with a constant whirl of bouncing and chattering.

“Now we’ve got a team of three!” Tabitha said.

“We can do triad choreography patterns!” Karen said.

“Okay, girls, that’s a little too loud. Welcome, Ashley. I’m Shannon. Faelan just called and said you’d be coming. We want you to spend all of this week getting back in shape after evaluation week, and making sure your compulsory skills are all very solid. Do you think you can hold off on the Tsukaharas and the Comanecis for a week?”

“No problem,” Ashley said. “I spent some time in here yesterday, and I know I’m a little out of shape.”

“Good. Karen, it’s Monday, so do a good, long warm-up.”

“Okay,” she said.

They worked on some small mats off to one side, and Karen’s Monday warm-up lasted nearly half an hour. Most gyms would have considered several of the exercises they did as conditioning, and saved them for the end of the class when no one minded being tired to the point of stumbling.

Ashley handled it well, even though she knew she would have aches and pains for a few days. That, she knew only too well, was an inescapable part of gymnastics.

The warm-up over, Shannon appeared with three cups of fruit juice and a clipboard.

“Here are the level one through seven skill charts, the most comprehensive version we’ve ever found,” she said, handing Ashley the clipboard with attached pen. “Go through everything, and rate yourself one to ten. Don’t go past level two today.” Then the lady coach turned to Tabitha and Karen and began discussing with them the things they needed to work on during the week.

Ashley sat on the mat alone and studied the first page of level one skills. She smiled as memories from years ago returned, memories of sore muscles and cracked skin, memories of skills she sometimes couldn’t get right until the coach worked with her to find that one element she had been missing. She set the clipboard aside and got to work. Forward roll, cartwheel, chasse... she did them in every imaginable variation, and gave herself solid tens. Fouette, back

straddle roll, back roll... again tens.

Just as she was moving over to the balance beam, Brother Faelan entered.

“Hello, Ashley! Got your check lists?”

“Yep! It’s almost like being seven years old again!”

“I’ll let you just work with those charts for this week, but I’ll keep an eye on you for anything that I’m not comfortable with. Every coach is a little different, so I’m bound to find things. It won’t mean you’re not a good gymnast. But everyone has room for improvement.”

Ashley smiled. She had taken a gold medal in her state by being completely willing to accept unending constructive criticism and long hours of hard work. She had no fantasies that she could get anywhere in elite, world-class gymnastics without much more of the same.

Brother Faelan went to work with the other two girls, and Ashley selected a balance beam. Arabesque, revele walk, whip to feet, V sit... tens. Scale, body wave, run, hop... more tens. There were elements of Karen’s warm-up that had required more balance than Ashley was using at that moment. She did them all again, with variations, and then moved to the uneven parallel bars.

Back kick over, knee pendulum, cast hip circle. She could clearly remember struggling with them at age seven, until her upper body strength had begun to improve. Swinging pullover, under kip, glide swing. Tens. It would have been so easy to just launch into one of her bar routines, but she resisted the temptation. She could enjoy all her gold medal routines on Friday, she reminded herself.

Brother Faelan appeared.

“Let me see that glide swing again, please Ashley.”

She repeated the skill.

“Smooth, but it lacks something. Control. You look like you’re about to fall off. Try it with slightly bent elbows.”

She did.

“How did that feel?”

“Better... like my arm muscles were more ready for the next move.”

“Uh huh. You’re probably stretching out like that to compensate for your height. That’s not bad in itself... just so you don’t lose muscle control.”

“Thanks. I’m going to practice it a few times.”

He went back to the others, and she worked on the bars, remembering her beginning class and how three-quarters of the time was spent waiting for her turn on each piece of equipment. As she had climbed through the compulsory levels, the situation had improved, but she had never had such good access to the apparatus of gymnastics as she now enjoyed. And she wasn't going to let a moment of it go to waste.

As she finished doing everything she could on the bars at levels one and two, the other girls were taking a break and called her over.

"Learn anything new?" Tabitha asked, smiling.

"Actually yes. Discovered I had a little bad habit because I'm so short."

"You'll like Coach Faelan. He's not afraid to tell you about anything he sees."

"I like that," Ashley said, polishing off her cup of yogurt. "When's conditioning?"

"About four thirty," Karen said. "There's a campfire at my hall tonight, about nine. Want to come?"

"Sure. I want to work on my computer file after dinner, but I should be done by then."

"Great. Let's go back to work!"

Ashley went through the few vaulting skills that were listed, and then ran through all the other level one and two skills again. Her wobble on the balance beam had disappeared, and so she felt good about giving herself solid tens on all the beginning skills.

Brother Faelan led the conditioning, and it was an intense twenty minute workout of push-ups, sit-ups, knee bends, and handstand presses, all separated by running in place. At five o'clock, all three gymnasts were exhausted and sore.

"He's merciless at conditioning," Tabitha said in the locker room.

"The price of elite gymnastics," Karen said.

They all turned on a shower, standing back until the water was warm.

"What happens if we're on the chore list for setting tables?" Ashley asked. "We'd be late, wouldn't we?"

"The computer checks, and doesn't schedule anyone for before-dinner chores who has a class or anything that ends right at five," Karen explained.

The trio headed for the Dining Hall, laughing and looking forward to the following week when Ashley could begin to work with them at elite skill levels.



Shawn spent his first day at Lyceum finishing his computer files and studying his *New Member's Handbook*. He felt the need for everything about his membership to be just right, and he wanted to completely understand every facet of his responsibilities and opportunities.

Brother Jacob spent part of the afternoon with him, and arranged for Shawn to join him in his residence hall apartment for the weekend to help out with the impending room shortage.

“Since you’re not starting classes until next week, would you be willing to take an assignment this week, helping Brother Robert plan a funeral?” the bearded man said.

“Gosh... um... me?... um, sure! I even know something about that kind of thing.”

“Good. She was a very sweet lady named Phoebe Hutchinson...”

“Oh, yes. Sarah told me a little about her. She passed away just after I got here.”

“Right. The funeral is this Saturday, and she left a list of three hundred some odd people she wanted us to invite. That’s why the room shortage. Brother Robert said that if you could do it, meet him in the office at eight tomorrow morning.”

“Wow... my first assignment. I really appreciate you asking me. I’ll be there!”



That evening, Shawn began to wander the corridors and lounges of the Laboratory Complex, looking at the murals and exhibit cases, just to get a feel for the place. He overheard scientists and researchers talking who seemed to allow no place in their work for God, and others who were literally discussing Him as they passed.

After a swim and a soak in the hot pool, where Shawn was welcomed by several other members, he returned to the Lodge room called Redwood. After getting ready for bed and programming the wake-up alarm by the door for six a.m., he stretched out on his bed and opened the little book his grandmother

had given him.

The sincere religionist is conscious of universe citizenship and is aware of making contact with sources of supernal wisdom. He is thrilled and energized with the assurance of belonging to the ennobled fellowship of the sons of God. His consciousness of self-worth has become augmented by the quest for the highest universe goal — supreme values.



Ashley moved in with Tabitha that evening, and they were awake for a long time talking about gymnastics, boys, and other topics of common interest. Finally they both began yawning, and after Tabitha had crawled into her bed and was breathing softly, Ashley decided she had one more thing to do before another day went by. She crept down to the office of Tabitha's residence hall and located paper and pen.

July 31st

Dear Tim,

I'm so happy! I found out this morning that I was accepted! I went to the elite gymnastics class for the first time, and I'm going to work on all my compulsories for the whole first week. I start most of my classes and work next week. Everyone here is really nice, but it was scary for the last few days, not knowing if I was going to be accepted.

I still wear my broken coin all the time, except during gymnastics. I'm still glad, even more than ever, that I'm promised to you! My dreams are starting to come true again, beginning with meeting you, and then getting into Lyceum and being able to do gymnastics again. I'll call in a few days, and you can call me as soon as you get this letter.

I get four weeks of vacation every year, and I want to spend part of it with my parents and friends in Rapid City, and part of it with you.

I love you!

Ashley



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