

Paisley Pupil

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English Composition I

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The Sea Monster and My Beat-Up Honda

“Paisley, you’re up,” Mr. Yip's voice crackled through the radio in my car. That morning when I grabbed a random car key from the Driver’s Education office, I wasn’t expecting to be sitting behind the wheel of the most banged up of all of the dated, white Hondas. I considered myself a pretty superstitious person, and the dents on the bumper and car door from my clumsy predecessors seemed foreboding. I didn’t think that was a very good omen. But I didn’t have time to dwell on my bad luck. I was next.

I gritted my teeth and signaled right into the testing area on the Driver’s Ed range. My heart beat fast and my knuckles were white as I gripped the steering wheel. *You’ll be fine*, I told myself. *Don’t think about reversing into a cone in the first 30 seconds of driving on the range. Oops, too late...*

For the past week or two, I had clawed my way through the embarrassingly painful ordeal that was Driver's Education. After battling the Kraken (straight-line backing), and navigating a treacherous hurricane (three-point turning), I was ready for the final boss. Now I faced the dreaded scourge of the seas, the gigantic Sea Serpent (loosely translated as “parallel parking). Lurking beneath the waves, the behemoth was ready to swallow me and my beat-up Honda at any moment.

But as Mr. Yip instructed me to pull forward to start my test, I felt a gaping maw open in my stomach. Even though I had practiced parallel before, I had never parked independently without any instruction. I’d done fine in those situations, but my on-going problem was my failure to remember the actual maneuver in the right order.

I was in conflict with myself because I knew *how* to do it, and I knew I *could* do it. But the invisible force of fear was just as much a barrier to me as the bright orange cones. Obviously, I wasn't anywhere near a life-and-death situation. And yet, sometimes it's in these simple moments that we learn the biggest lessons.

I took a deep breath and started my test. My internal monologue wasn't much help to me. *Crank the wheel to the right, and reverse, do I stop before or after the cone? Argh. Straighten the wheel. I think... Reverse a couple of feet.* The Sea Serpent slithered along the surface of the black water beneath me and my dumpy Honda. *Whoops, I did something wrong. Ok, roll down the window, check which way the wheels are facing...* The Serpent twisted itself underneath my valiant vehicle--counter-attack! *Turn the wheel a turn and a half to the left and keep backing until you see the reflections of the headlights on the cones behind you.* The Serpent disappeared beneath the waves. *A little more-- And... perfect.* About halfway through, I was sure I had missed at least three steps. Yet, slowly but surely (with plenty of unnecessary wheel corrections), I completed the parallel park (almost) perfectly.

"Good job, Paisley, you passed," Mr. Yip's voice crackled through the radio. I breathed a massive sigh of relief and pulled out of the park and continued practicing driving maneuvers. After the drive, Mr. Yip told me, "Honestly, that was one of -- if not the worst -- setup for parallel parking that I've ever seen. But you pulled it off!" He smiled. I laughed, and then cringed, after remembering that Mr. Yip had driven over 600 kids... Not only could I have the worst setup, but I could also come through and pass the test anyway.

I had been able to take a bad start and make it into something good. I was able to finish and take something from horrible to great. That experience, however small, taught me more about how success is achieved. It's interesting that you can start in one place, and through hard work, perseverance, and focus, you can end up doing far better than where you began.

In a way, it doesn't matter as much where you start, but more where you end up. What I learned from that experience was that you should avoid being a victim of your circumstances, because there is almost always a way out, if you're willing to look.

And maybe, sometimes, the only thing that's stopping us is ourselves. The Kraken, navigating a treacherous hurricane, and any other comparison I made wasn't the biggest beast worth slaying. It was my inability to have the confidence I needed. It turns out that the real "dreaded scourge of the seas" isn't parallel parking at all. It's the fear of failure that holds us back.