

Pen
and
SWORD



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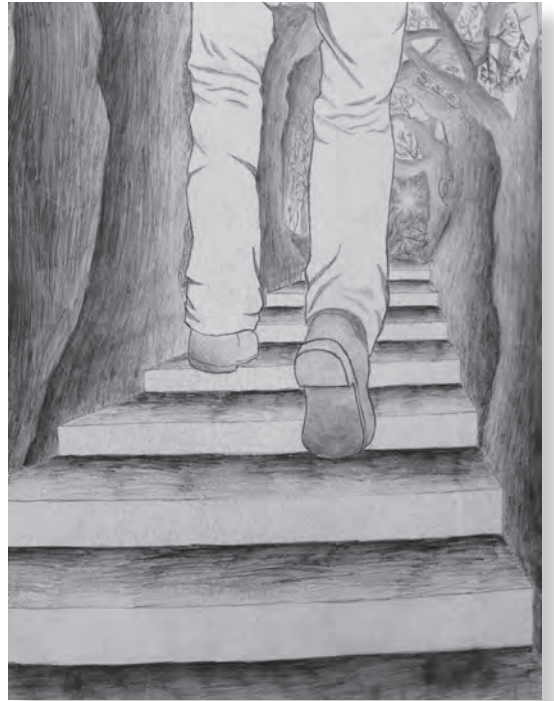


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Ode to Interstate Guardrail

Stephen Corcoran '17

I feel motionless as you course
with aggressive speed, chugging
towards some unknown modern
intention. I often wonder
about the stories written in
ashen scars, about the peeling
industrial yellows, tattoos on your
sun-pulped metallic skin.
I can barely count the faded
flashes of color: yellow to
black, a great garter.
With your fanning crown,
you are the cobra of the urban wild
tipped by cautious flaunting
gems, warning anyone who dares
approach--
How do you run so freely
through the Earth's municipal strands
like veins of protective gold? Deep
within your metallurgical formation
lies a savage, mesoamerican
jungle spirit, a feathered serpent.
The ambient hum of vehicles
mimics the ancient instruments
that pleased you centuries ago--
the screaming aztecan hearts,
an ignorant commute of
monotonous orchestra that obscures
your name, Quetzalcoatl,
but finances your
protection with
gasoline and
blood.



Coach to Runner

Abram Bernstein '20

Well, kid, I'll tell you:
Life ain't no easy race.
It's got rough terrain,
and sharp turns,
and fatigue,
and roots sticking out of the ground--
tough.

But no matter what, I keep running,
I keep making passes,
and picking up speed,
and taking risks early
that might not work out for two miles.

So boy, don't you slow down,
don't let your head fall,
don't you get passed up,
'cause you'll regret it at the finish.
Don't you fall now--
for I'm still racing, kid,
I'm still running,
and life ain't no easy race.



Lights, Chaos, Failure

Will Leonard '17

The canary spotlights cleared the stage as I exited the stage after a thrilling performance with my castmates. Adrenaline pumped through our veins. We felt invincible. Then, Wendy showed up. The lights hit her ebony hair in a heavenly aura. Her friends sat by her as they waited for their parents to bring them home. The chance to ask her out was mine for the taking. Everything set itself up for a perfect storm.

The mayhem had started a few months before. The school day dragged on like any other with one exception. I saw everyone talking with their friends as usual, except Wendy. Something within me changed when I saw her. She appeared as never before, her angelic voice chiming like a choir of a thousand angels in heavenly bliss. No one ever looked as astoundingly perfect as she did that day.

What am I supposed to do, talk to her? I thought to myself as Wendy passed by me at recess. This has never happened before. Why did this happen? How could this have happened? I staved off the thoughts of what had caused it and focused my attention on what to do next. I need someone else's opinion. I wonder if Maria knows what to do? She has to know. The next day, I went to see if my friend had the advice I sought. Maria rightfully served me the truth.

"This won't end well. Dating is complicated enough when it involves people that care," Maria said. "Girls like her aren't worth the effort." My head kept screaming

that she was right, but my heart hesitated.

"Looks can be deceiving. Never judge a book by its cover," I argued. Maria's face boomed with indifference.

"Go ahead," she continued. "If you insist on impressing Wendy, you gotta be honest and tell her how you feel." My heart was racing. She had laid the tract out for me. The only question was when.

The solution to my conundrum settled in faster than the venom of a black widow spider. The play! She's bound to see it with everyone else at some point. It's now or never. The decision forced itself upon me to tell her my feelings after the show.

"Does that really seem like the best idea?" Maria implored. What she failed to realize was my reality gave me the proposal of letting the post show energy carry me through. What if I can't do it? I have zero experience with this dating scene. I reasoned with myself and Maria, "This is something I have to do. I have no other option."

"At least try not to have your hopes skyrocket only to burn while reentering the atmosphere," she reluctantly agreed.

Too late, I thought to myself. There is no way this can go horribly wrong. The worst Wendy can do is say no, right? I ignored the little voice in my head telling me to forego the whole operation. My hopes were set like the stage scenery for the evening's performance.

The stage glowed anew, covered in lights of golden yellow, blood red, and a rainbow

of other colors. The mahogany brown flats of the village clashed with the concrete gray of the castle. Everyone in the cast and crew bounced with energetic hope for the show. I bounced with hope for another reason. What if she doesn't show? What would I do then? Then, I saw her. Her flawless skin glistened in the sunlight of the window. The ashen

black curtain that served as our cover from backstage to onstage covered the rest of what I could see of her. The hopes set themselves higher than a shooting star zooming past Earth into parts unknown. Now all I had to worry about was making sure the play went off without a snafu.

The play, Beauty and the Beast, Jr.,



managed to whip up the best performance for the evening. Lights and sound managed not to entangle with cell phone reception, which was an accomplishment itself. The ensemble stayed in perfect harmony. The leads and I all triumphantly became our characters and earned the applause of the audience. My biggest challenge crept just around the corner.

Wendy stood there with her friends while I stood there trying to hype myself up, waiting for her friends to dissipate. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. It's now or never. I continued the self-hype as I walked up to her. You'll never forgive yourself if you don't do this. You need to do this in order to get practice with it. The last thing I remember saying to myself was, "The worst she can do is say no," before I walked up to the challenge of telling Wendy how I felt.

"Hey. How you doing?" I blabbed on as the words processed in my mind but spewed out my mouth. "Like, I wanted to tell you... er." Wendy stood there looking perplexed as I just came out as said it: "I have a major crush on you." She stood there a minute before she shot out her response.

"I'm flattered, but I'm planning to become a nun right after I graduate high school." Shock and confusion spread like wildfire all over my body. I thanked her for her honesty and left to clean up my station backstage. A nun?! What was I thinking? Surely the considerate worst case scenario would've been to just say I don't like you like that back to me.

Maria confirmed her shock at the response: "You're kidding, right?"

The power to say otherwise left me

bitterly cold. "I was prepared for rejection, but this was a nasty surprise," I confided in her.

"Wendy already has a boyfriend."

"You're joking. Please tell me you're joking."

"I can't."

"At least it can't get any worse, right?"

"Um-" Maria hesitated before responding.

"There's more?"

"She's Lutheran, dude. You never had a shot."

That self-discovery caused a reanalysis on everything that had just occurred. Why did she feel the need to lie to me? Am I really so pathetic you'd have to lie just to spare my feelings?

"I'll always be here if you need someone to talk to. Trust me, she wasn't worth it anyway," Maria said. I returned home waiting to see how I would feel after getting a good night's slumber.

That night obliterated most of the feelings I harbored for Wendy. The rest of the week deteriorated the few I had left. I insisted on giving her the benefit of the doubt and played along with her game. Most of my friends did not believe me, but I realized it did not matter. The people who deserve my care use honesty even if it hurts. Maria cared about me enough to tell me the bitter truth, no matter how much it hurt. She did not feel the need to lie so blatantly to me. No one else who cared for me would feel that need either. I thought to myself reflecting the entire situation: I can't believe I just went through all that. At least I have experience with the fact that some people just are not worth the trouble.

e minor

Colin Woodruff '17

subtle moonlight poured in
through the slightly cracked window
that waved goodbye to deep exhales
of her cigarette smoke

sounds of nearby cars and rustling leaves
took away the silence that would have
been
but left her violent eyes wandering
in any direction but mine

she didn't play piano
but found comfort in the sound of it
as she pressed down on the keys
of her mother's old yamaha
and let her tears fall
disrupting the ink of sheet music
that no longer served purpose

as she finished her cigarette
and let the shakiness of her hand
guide the melody she played
i realized that what she held between
her middle finger and index
could do for her what i was never capable of



The Temple of the Lord's Devise

Stephen Corcoran '17

The mighty hands of God in wisdom rise
To form the Nature of this wondrous place:
"Repay the temple of the Lord's devise!"

The many mountains and the endless skies
Rejoice in spirals 'round the sun to face
The mighty hands of God in wisdom rise.

In reverence, raging oceans' praising cries,
Like pulsing tides of God's divine embrace,
Repay the temple of the Lord's devise.

But man-made churches of the Earth disguise
The faith of men, and all our lies debase;
The mighty hands of God in wisdom rise.

Man's worship of stone churches shall demise
And bear him to the truth of Nature's grace:
"Repay the temple of the Lord's devise!"

The Lord's command for man, in loving eyes
Of stewardship, defines the human race.
The mighty hands of God in wisdom rise:
"Repay the temple of the Lord's devise!"



Family Love and Lasting Scars

Kevin Geraci '17

“Victory, you win!” The robotic voice crackled through my old and dying headset. I had just finished playing PlayStation with my friends when I heard the door to my house open.

“Hold up, guys, I’ll be right back,” I shouted as I ran from my room. As I emerged the sun pierced through the front door. The school year had just started, and I spent every weekend playing video games and watching Netflix. As I walked into the living room, the scent of a fresh rotisserie chicken wafted through the air. A si glee light illuminated the kitchen as my mother stood unpacking groceries.

“Hi Mom, so I guess we’re having chicken tonight?” I assumed as I walked toward the fridge searching for a Dr. Pepper.

“Hi Kevin, I didn’t see you there,” my mother whispered. Something was off. My mom was usually dying to tell me about her day by the time she arrived home.

“Everything alright?” I asked slowly.

“Come sit down. We need to talk,” she responded as she drifted toward the sofa. After we were seated, she spoke again. “Earlier today, Little Timmy committed suicide. They think it wa...”

My head started to spin. My eyes swelled with tears, and I thought I was going to be sick. I had stopped paying attention to what my mom was saying. It took everything I had from breaking down the moment she revealed the news.

Little Timmy had been living with

multiple sclerosis. It affected his eyes and weakened the parts of his brain relating to his ability to focus. He would go through entire days of migraines, and often retreated to dark rooms for hours upon hours in order to seek some sort of temporary relief. To make matters worse, the medicine he had been taking was apparently causing him to suffer deep depression. This, combined with the stress of unemployment, tipped him over the edge.

I had to be strong for my mother. She was suffering just as much, if not more than I was. I could not break down. I had to support her during this time, had to help her through this. She must have realized I was not listening because she abruptly stopped talking and instead embraced me. We sat on the sofa, gently weeping and holding each other.

It was hard to tell how much time truly passed, but it felt like an eternity. Eventually, I got up and walked to my room. The light shone in from the window, and incomprehensible nonsense spouted from my headset. He was gone. My beloved cousin was gone. I sat down at my desk. My eyes moved to the sword display set he had purchased for me just months before. Though I had seen him hundreds of times, it seemed impossible to recall his appearance. I tried again and again to remember his face, his voice, anything that could remind me of him. Had I already forgotten him? Disgusted with myself, I crawled over to my

sofa and under a warm blanket. I finally let tears stream down my face. I lay there for hours, crying and praying the same line over and over in my head.

"Let me see him one more time," I pleaded. "Just one more time." Eventually I drifted off into a restless, painful sleep.

Days later the time came when my request, like many things we beg for, came like a slap across my face. There, his face gray and cold like a tombstone, lay my cousin. My final gaze on his face came as he lay dead in a coffin. I could not control my emotions for a second longer. Silently I wept, comforted by my father. As I regained my composure, the unthinkable happened. The doors creaked loudly as Uncle Timmy and family entered the room. Uncle Timmy was not just my godfather. He was also a father of three, one of whom lay dead in front of me.

"Oh God, Timmy--" my dad gasped under his breath. Uncle Timmy looked awful. His eyes were red and puffy from crying but also weighed down with layers of bags from lack of sleep. He had always been a skinny man, but this was a whole new level. It was as if he had not eaten in days.

"Dad, I think we should move away from the casket," I didn't think I could handle confronting my uncle in his current state.

"No, he will want to see you. Just stand off to the side and wait," my father directed.

I started to protest, "I really don't think that's a good idea, Dad. I mean, what could I possibly say that could cheer him up?" Even if I did know what to say, never in a million years could I build up the will to say it to that broken, destroyed face of his.

"It's not what you can say, Kevin," he explained. "It is who you are and what you mean to him."



At the time, I thought I understood what he meant. As time passed, the more I realized I truly didn't. What I represent? True, I was his godson, but that was it. He had another son and a daughter standing at his side. He needed to have time with them, not me. It was not until years later that I realized everything. He did not just need me, he needed everyone. Everyone together mourned Little Timmy's death. Whether you were friend or family, brother or sister, mother or father, we all felt the same pain. Sure, some of us may have felt more than others, but the pain remained regardless. In the end, I did not face my Uncle that day. Call it cowardice or awkwardness or anything else, it doesn't matter. The bottom line is that I ran. I ran away from the pain I was feeling, kept it buried deep down inside of me. I left it there only to emerge later that same day.

Soon after that, I learned of the job given to me. I had to carry my dead cousin's casket into the funeral and back out again. When my mother told me this, it took all I had to keep my lunch down.

"Me?" I asked, half-scared and half-shocked. "They want me to carry him onto the altar?"

"Yes, Kevin," my mother said in a soft and calm tone. "Uncle Timmy asked that you do this for him. He wants you to be part of this ceremony so that you will always remember your cousin."

Minutes later, I found my hand resting on the coffin. The polished wood felt smooth and cool beneath my sweaty palms. As we walked in, I felt the entire atmosphere change. Before people were crying, saddened

by our great loss. However, the moment we crossed the door's threshold into the Church, I could feel the overwhelming depression within the room. Something about seeing us walk Little Timmy up to the altar changed them.

As I reached the altar, my family's faces started to change. At the time, I did not understand. I would not come to comprehend what they were feeling for months to come. They had all finally accepted he was truly gone; they had come to accept that they would never see him again.

That night we all gathered at my grandfather's home. Though we all did our best to lift the mood, we felt emptiness. Someone was missing, someone who could never be replaced.

We had many talented guitar players in the family, so live music came with every family gathering. As the night came to a close, someone started to play a song. It was "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen, Little Timmy's favorite song. This was the second and final time I cried in front of my family.

To this day, whenever I hear the song, I am reminded of him. For a while, whenever the song came on I would do whatever I needed to get it to stop: change the radio station, hit the skip button, or even completely leave the room. However, the song slowly shifted from an awful trigger for that terrible day to a pleasant reminder of the loving cousin I used to know. A reminder of all the times we had shared, both good and bad, and all the times we never had.

A Never Forgotten Face

Kevin Geraci '17

As I remember your deep, vibrant face,
a unique scene of deep, distant regret,
set to engulf me in endless disgrace,
unfolds in front of me; I can't forget.
For I cannot forget the times we shared,
a day, a month, a year, it passed too fast.
You left me with enduring pain, unprepared.
What I would give to go to days long past.
It is not fair for you to leave my life.
If I could hold your face just one last time,
if I could only make you a loving wife,
to switch places with you I'd do anytime.
But this cannot be done, so here you lie;
I pray to God as I begin to cry.



The teapot wailing,
stream reaching for the ceiling,
white fingers cry for help.

Once red, brown, rotting,
I looked up to see the branch--
healthy apples fall.

-- Stephen Corcoran '17

Shark, king of the sea,
no one ever sees you cry:
tears soon join the tide.

Deafening silence--
let the view do the talking.
It's louder that way.

-- Colin Woodruff '17

The brain works too much.
Let the mind breathe and relax
to dream and create.

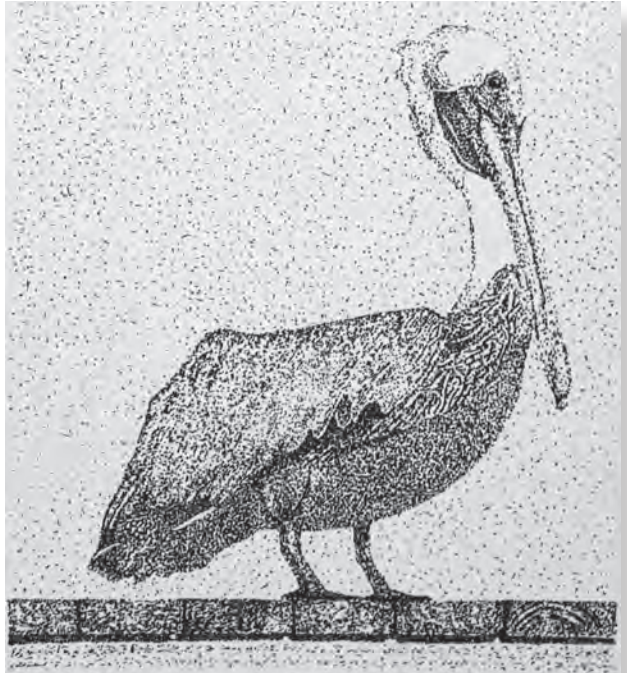
-- Guillermo Valladares '17



The flag suffers as
protesters beg to protect
the country they burn.

Across the cross, You
endure the pain of all the
sins of Your people.

-- Elden Patrick Newburger '17



Eclipse the daylight.
Darkness spreads over the land.
Black moon shows in time.

-- Dawson Miller '17

Does Death Feel?

Vaughn Griggs '17

Does Death feel pain? Does he, Pale Bones, lament
when he may take a life away? I pray
that he can shed some bare, dry tears while bent,
peering into graves and seeing gray.
He drags his scythe across the ground, and yet
his arms grow weary. Death does hear the tale
We tell ourselves, yet we owe him a debt
of feelings we don't truly show; we veil.
The guy can feel, you know? He thinks his work
Will bring him love. He dreams for one who will
distinguish beauty in his work. A smirk
Will rise upon his face when thinking "Kill."
His skull can titter quite a bony grin,
for Death does know that he can feel within.



One Beginning

Devin Sambola '17

“Let’s move. You don’t want to be late,” the bus driver hollered as she parked the bus.

Groaning, Shawn lifted his head up from his backpack. He had been sleeping on the grimy seats, trying to catch up on sleep from the flight over. Shawn was used to this routine by now: fly to a new city, lie awake on the plane dreading the first day of school, and drooling on the bus after finally drifting into an uneasy sleep. As Shawn pushed himself up off of the bus seat a backpack flew into his head.

“Sorry bout, that dude. You all right?” questioned a tall, blond-haired kid.

“Yeah. Fine,” Shawn answered.

As he entered the line of exiting students, Shawn noticed for the first time a girl walking up the steps to the building. She wore ripped jeans and a stained shirt with her backpack slung over one shoulder, but the most noticeable feature was her hair. Her hair took looked like she had never prepared it or even brushed it. As Shawn walked to his first class, he soon realized that he had noticed the subject of everyone’s conversation.

“What’s with her? Have you ever seen her talk to anybody?” asked one girl as Shawn walked up the steps.

“No. She has no friends, and it’s probably because she is a freak. I mean look at her hair. Who keeps their hair up like that? No wonder she has no friends,” another student responded.

Shawn soon left the hall and went into his ninth grade history classroom. He saw the blonde-haired kid and gave him a quick wave. The blonde-haired kid saw his wave and broke off from his group of friends and walked over.

“What’s up, dude? Funny running into you here. You got a name?” the blonde haired kid greeted as he walked across the room.

“Yeah, Shawn. What’s yours?”

“Philip, you new here? I don’t recognize you around here. What’s your deal?”

“I’m new in town. My Dad’s in the army, so we move around a lot. I just got in town last night.”

“Your dad’s in the army? Cool. So, how you like this wonderful school?” Philip asked, raising his arms around to the shabby classroom.

As the bell rang Shawn saw the girl with the messed-up hair enter the classroom across the hall. Then Shawn met his history teacher, Mrs. Smith, in his next class. Mrs. Smith had taught for several years at this school and had gained the reputation of the most boring teacher who ever walked the campus. Soon, Shawn lay sprawled on his desk, quietly snoring. As the bell rang Shawn jolted awake in time to leave Mrs. Smith’s classroom reprimand-free and head over to PE class.

The PE class interested Shawn, especially since he had just rejuvenated himself with a power nap. Best of all the coach, Mr.

Brochlan, skipped a boring monologue and took the students outside for kickball. Shawn lined up with the rest of the students and realized that the girl with the funny hair was in his PE class. As Mr. Brochlan chose kickball captains, Shawn edged his way over to her.

“Ugh, I can’t believe we are stuck with Lucy in this class. Can’t she just drop out and leave us all alone,” one girl complained behind Shawn.

“I know, what do her parents do, dumpster dive for a living? I mean, look at her clothes. She really should be embarrassed for wearing them to school, especially on her first day,” another student replied.

“Shawn,” Philip yelled picking for one of the captains. Shawn let out a groan and ran over to his new team with furrowed eyebrows. “What’s wrong, dude? You look like you wanted to be stuck with the losing team,” Philip commented when Shawn arrived next to him.

“I’m just a little confused, that’s all. Jetlag or something.”

“What about? You know how to kick a ball right,”

“No, not about kickball. Don’t worry about it.”

“Come ‘on, you can tell me. Who else is gonna show your sorry butt the ropes?” Shawn asked as they jogged to outfield.

“Fine. Why is everyone so mean to the girl with the crazy hair?”

“Who? Lucy?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen her three times today, and she hasn’t talked to anybody, but everyone complains about her. I know she can hear

them. What’s her deal?”

“Lucy is a freak. Look at her.”

“Her clothes are a few years old. So what? Have you even talked to her?” Shawn asked as he ran and caught the kickball.

“Why would I? I get you’re new here and all, but at this school you have one beginning. You chose your crowd, and that is your group. You think I got the group of friends I was talking to earlier by sitting with freaks,” Philip asked as he followed Shawn to the infield to wait for their turn to bat.

“At this school you have one beginning. You have to choose if you want to be



popular, or go out of your way for a stranger,” Philip explained as he walked Shawn to the back of the line. “I mean, yeah, being nice is good, but if you want popularity don’t break the status quo.”

The bell rang and Shawn looked back at the kickball field to see everyone was running to the cafeteria. Philip took his hand off his shoulder and looked at him with contempt.

“Remember, you get one beginning,” Philip said as he ran to the cafeteria.

By the time Shawn arrived at the cafeteria the lunch line had died down, and he received his pizza and bottled water and started looking for a table. Shawn saw Philip and his posse at one table and after scanning the cafeteria realized Lucy was not in there. He went outside and saw her sitting on a bench by the playground by herself. Shawn walked over to her.

“This seat taken?” Shawn asked as he approached Lucy.

“What’s it look like,” she responded as her shoulders straightened and her jaw clenched.

“So what’s your name?”

“Look I am not an idiot. I know you were put up to this by someone so who was it? I bet it was Philip or one of his cronies.”

“Look I just wanted to get your name and I ---“

“Lucy.”

“What?”

“My name, it’s Lucy. You can leave now.”

“Why would I want to leave?”

“Look, I’m not an idiot. No one ever comes and sits next to me unless they are put up to

it as some sort of initiation process into

whatever group they want to join. So you’ve done the task. You can go now.”

“What are you talking about? I just wanted to come sit down and eat my lunch with you.

Is that a crime?”

“Wait, are you serious? Why on earth would you want to come sit with me? I’m a nobody here. Has no one explained the rules here? You get one--”

“Beginning and you pick your crowd. Be a jerk or a jock or a loser, yeah. I got the speech. I’m Shawn by the way,” he said holding out his hand.

Lucy looked at his hand and then into his eyes and slowly reached her hand out. As Shawn shook her hand, her shoulders started to drop and her jaw slackened.

“You’re new, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I just moved here last night.”

“Explains why you’re sitting with me. You must be new if you sit next to Lucy the freak,” she said with a hint of sarcasm in her words.

“Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. Why is everyone such jerks to you?”

“I wear ripped jeans and a stained shirt.”

“And that’s it? You just choose to wear that stuff and not brush your hair even if they judge you because of it? That seems kinda stupid,” Shawn blurted out without thinking.

Lucy looked up at Shawn with a grim expression on her face. The chained fence behind them cast a shadow across one side of her face. Her hair stood up behind her.

“Shawn, I am not going to be imprisoned by what others expect me to be. If somebody doesn’t bother getting to know who I am

before they judge me, then that is their loss. I choose to wear my clothes like this because I like the way they look and feel. If that's what others think is 'freakish' then I guess I am a freak," she said shrugging her shoulders.

"No, you're not. Trust me. What you just said is the most normal thing I have heard at this school. I don't get why everyone is so worked up with what others view them as either, but why do you stay at this school?"

"I love their art program and academics. It's one of the top public schools in the state. I plan on using my head even if everyone else is content with forgetting theirs."

"Heh, you know I like that. Are you always this straight to the point, or do you just need practice talking to people," Shawn said, risking a glance out of the corner of his eye.

Lucy inhaled, about to respond, when Shawn burst out laughing. Lucy looked around very confused and Shawn just kept laughing. Soon, Lucy realized that she had fallen for his trap and started laughing, too. They just kept laughing until Philip showed up.

"Shawn! What are you doing? Somebody will see you. Hurry up, it's not too late."

"Okay, dude, I'm coming," Shawn responded. "You coming or what?" Shawn asked looking at Lucy.

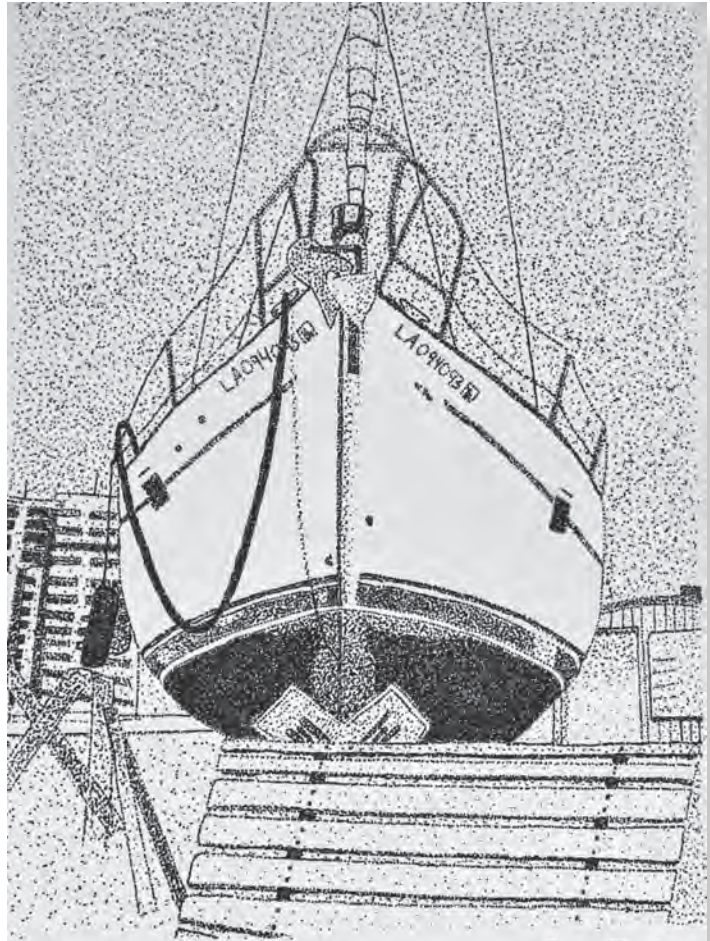
"Yeah, if you're okay with it," she responded.

"Let's do it, then."

Shawn and Lucy walked together into the cafeteria and sat at a table in the center of the building.

"What are you doing, you idiot?" Philip screamed.

"Enjoying my first day," Shawn replied. "You know at this school you only have one beginning," Shawn said as he turned to talk to Lucy.



Like Clock Work

Gavin Sambola '17

A faint buzz rumbled in the stiff khaki. Ben flipped open his phone as he parked his car. A sleeping infant wrapped in a blue blanket filled the screen. Little Jimmy can't wait to see you!, pinged onto the bottom of the screen. A somber smile formed at the sight of the child. I'll swing by the hospital right after work, replied Ben as he nudged the car door shut. Sounds great, see you then.

See ya then, replied Ben while he locked his car.

Knock-Knock-Knock.

"Hello, is anyone there?" Ben asked to the vacant security booth.

A squeaky chair screeched. A guard appeared in the booth and slid the window open with a half-hearted shove. The name Markus was sewn into the guard's jacket. His eyes lay on the old pocket watch he held in his hand.

"Excuse me, I—" but Markus in the window never let Ben finish his sentence. With a bony finger, the guard pointed to the yellow caution sign positioned on the glass. PRIVATE PROPERTY. NO TRESSPASSING.

"Hello, sir. I'm sorry to bother you," Ben started, "but I read in the paper about this night job and—"

"What doya want?" the guard blurted as he noticed Ben for the first time.

"I'm here about the night job."

"What night job?"

"The one advertised in the newspaper."

Markus stood in silence. Only his eyes moved. Slowly, he analyzed Ben from top to bottom. Markus, once satisfied, turned his gaze back towards the watch.

"Follow me," mumbled the guard as he glided towards a backdoor. The backdoor led to a long, narrow hallway.

"Where are we going?" asked Ben cautiously. The man marched onward in silence. "What type of job is this?"

"The kind you get paid for," replied the guard. The door at the end of the hallway led to into an empty parking lot. The stars pricked bits of light into the dark sky. Ben's boots scuffed the damp pavement as he walked. A vast fog filled the bare lot. Markus strode straight through the fog. Gradually, the man's paces slowed; the two came to a halt at the center of the lot.

"Are we waiting for someone?" Ben inquired.

"Quiet," Markus barked.

"So, what will I be doing?"

"Cleaning."

"What is it I will be cleaning?"

"Nothing if you keep asking questions."

In the distance the glow of headlights shined in the musky night air. As the vehicle came into view, Ben recognized the shape of an eighteen wheeler. The truck, upon entering the parking lot, parked right in front of Ben and Markus. An uncanny smile

crept across Markus's face.

"Right on time," he said as he returned his watch to its pocket.

As he spoke, the dented truck door clattered open. Pure darkness waited inside the eerie vessel. Markus whirled around to face Ben.

"Clean the contents," the guard instructed in a menacing tone. "You will get your money once the job is done. Ya get paid by'dah hour."

"What exactly are the contents?" Ben asked, his voice laced with skepticism.

"Dust. Wipe. Wash. Shine," Markus said. "Oh, heh, you might need these."

Markus reached his hand inside the darkness and produced a duster, a wash cloth, and an electric lantern.

"Goodies are in the back. Start walking."

"How long do I have?"

"Until you're done."

Gripping the lantern tightly, Ben crept inside the dark enclosure. Behind him, the trailer door closed behind him.

"Um... hey Markus, the trailer door fell down. Could you open it?" asked Ben.

"Nope," replied Markus.

"Why not?"

"Cause if I do, midnight mosquitos are gunna fly in and feast on your flesh."

"Seriously?"

"Start working."

Ben, trailed through the darkness, lost in thought.

Well, this officially is the weirdest job ever. I mean who hires a random person to clean a random truck at midnight? Why so secretive? Why so vague?

Bang-Bang-Bang.

Crick-crick-crick-crick-crick.

Probably rain, Ben thought to himself. No wait, it can't be rain. It wasn't raining when I came in.

Crick-crick-crick-crick-crick

Well, if it isn't the rain, and it isn't me, what could it be? Ben's face, although veiled by the darkness, suddenly paled. The contents. It has to be the contents. What else could it be? But what on earth makes that noise? Computer mice? No. jacks? No. Bombs? Bombs. Ben thought to himself as he reached his conclusion. It has to be bombs. It all makes sense now. The vague conversations. The midnight time schedule. The constant ticking. This truck is full of bombs. Slowly, Ben crept deeper into the container. As he walked, the sounds became louder. What am I gonna do. I can't run, Markus is waiting for me. I can't go to the police, I am guilty by association.

Suddenly, Ben's foot hit something. Ben, after cowering in a ball, discovered what he kicked. Lying beside his foot was a wall clock with its glass face cracked. As he waved his lantern around, he caught glimpses of more clocks. He found coo-coo clocks, grandfather clocks, desk clocks, and even watches.

"It's just a bunch of clocks," Ben mumbled to himself. The words echoed off the metal walls. "Just clocks! Why in the world would a person-- you know what, I don't wanna know. I just want the money, and I want to meet my son."

"Dust. Wipe. Wash. Shine." Ben heard from the other side of the vessel. He started working immediately. As the filth and grime was wiped away, the clock's face radiated

dimly in the darkness. One by one, row by row, Ben restored every clock to its former glory. Every hand dusted, every face cleaned, every gear polished. Three hours later, He turned the lamp off to admire his work. Rows and rows of clock faces shined brightly in the trailer. Satisfied, Ben started walking towards the other side of the vessel.

“Bombs. Really Ben, Bombs? Why anyone would put bombs in a trailer.” asked Ben rhetorically. “Wait till I tell Ava” Ben said with a chuckle. When he reached the other side of the vessel he knocked on the sliding door. When the door opened, Ben’s eyes squinted at the sight of the setting sun. The sky was a lush magenta that slowly darkened into a cool violet.

“What the devil?” exclaimed Ben as he stepped off the trailer. Ochsner Hospital was

hanging in royal blue lettering. Ben rumbled in his pocket and retrieved his phone. 6:45 PM.

“Operation starts at 7:00, better hurry or your gonna miss it,” Markus said. Ben, stunned speechless, returned the equipment to Markus.

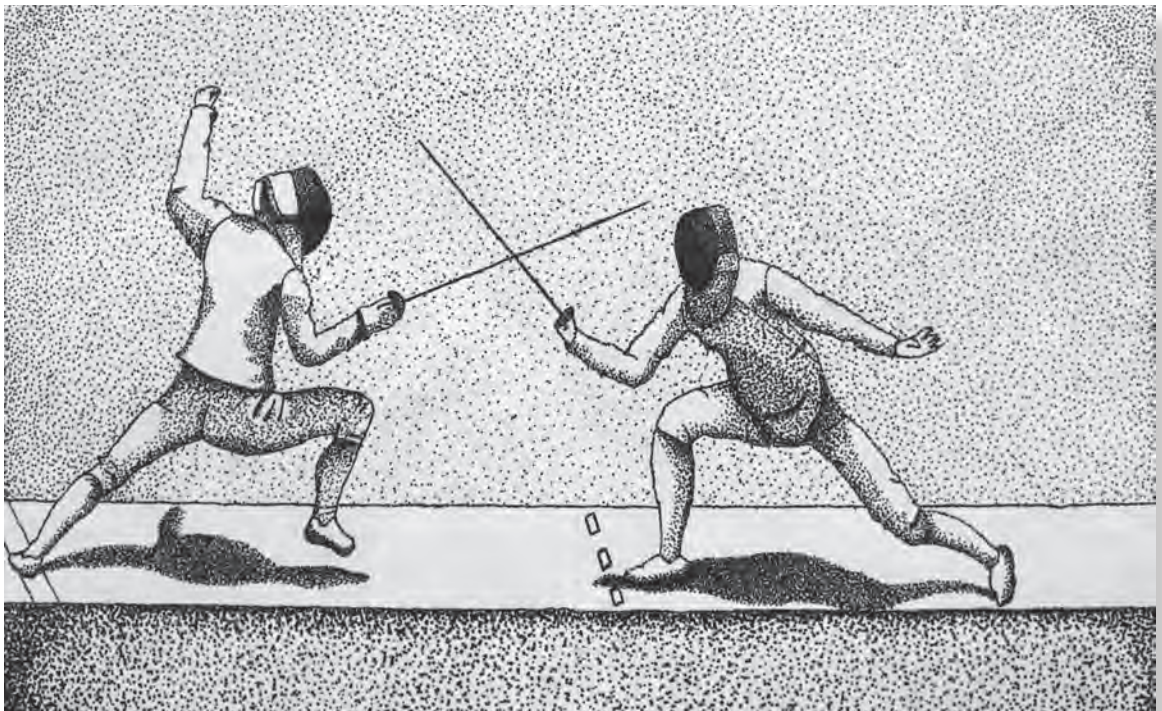
“This is impossible how in the-” Ben stumbled.

“Anyone ever tell ya you ask to many questions?” Markus asked, snapping his pocket watch shut.

“What?”

“Go. Run. For cry’en out loud your damn son is be’in born Ben! Are you gonna miss it again?”

Ben smiled at the old man and bolted into the hospital.



Ode to the Expo

Kevin Geraci '17

Your sharp, pungent stench drifts from nostril
to mind, shutting down all brain function.
The smooth, plastic casing that covers your oily core remains cool
against my sweaty palm.
Your cap creaks and squeaks
as it wrestles free from the tight seal
that keeps your valuable felt clean from pollutions.
You proclaim a magnificent screech as you carve the white board,
burnt into the mind of listeners.
Gone are the days of messy chalk that lingers
after its use was served. Instead,
we crave you, Expo marker, a colorful
smorgasbord fit for kings, the most sought-after
of all teaching supplies. All this praise for your
sweet, shiny juices that seep away from your soul. Then
you are tossed aside, swept into trash bins and forgotten.
I won't forget your deeds.



Only Option

Paul Boudreaux '17

It was a brisk day in the suburbs of New Orleans. There was a slight breeze from the southwest. The church bells rang out in a symphony. Many stood in the Church, looks of disbelief and sympathy across their faces. Soft hymns from the piano filled the air. A petite woman walks up to the podium and announces that the time period for the wake has ended, and that everybody needs to exit the church. All began to exit the Church, and family members of the lost one received all their condolences.

Tina was the widow of Frank, a tall and slender lady with beautiful blue eyes. Tina

worked at a local restaurant in the city where she waits tables. She earned about thirty-thousand dollars per year, fitting part of the lower middle class. Jean, father of Tina, was a recently retired maintenance man who worked alone for over forty years. Jean had slicked back gray hair and looks not skinny, but not necessarily fat. He had always been close with his only daughter, a genuine old man. Lastly, there was Jason and his siblings. Jason, the oldest sibling, was fifteen years old. Jason had long brown hair, a spitting image of his father. Jason had been led down a troubling past. He got kicked out



of school in the eighth grade and since then had been riding the streets, inserting himself in all sorts of mischief. The younger siblings ages were seven, five, and three. There were only a couple of people left in the Church. Tina appeared very emotional, pacing up and down the aisle.

“Come see, my children,” she cried out across the Church. “I need the comfort of you all right now.”

The three youngest of the distraught family ran to her, hugging her long limbs.

Jason stood there, a disinterested look on his face. He paces around, waiting to leave the Church. He didn't even have a look of sympathy. It appeared as if it were just another day. Jean, looking at Jason's reaction, felt that this would be the right time to have the conversation.

“Jason, come over here buddy,” said Jean

in an uplifting way. Jason rolled his eyes and walked towards his grandfather.

“What do you want?” Jason said in an aggressive tone.

“We need to talk. How about you take a seat.”

Jason plopped down on the seat, looking down at the kneelers.

“Look kiddo, I'm sorry, I know that this is really hard for you and-”

“I don't even care,” Jason blurted out, once more interrupting Jean.

Jean stared Jason in the eyes, the how-dare-you look. It was the first time in

Jason's fifteen year life span he had seen this look. Jean intensely focused on Jason's eyes. His fist clenched and started to shake. Jean took a deep breath and came back to his normal self. He surely had gotten Jason's attention. Jean knew he needed to stay calm.



It would be best for his daughter and other grandchildren.

“Jason, with the absence of your father things will be changing in your house. Your mother works very hard as it is. Now she is a single mother.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Do you know how hard it is to support four children with the amount of money she makes and the time she needs to put in to ensure the best for you all? It is almost impossible. Your mother, your siblings, and I need you to step up. You are not a child anymore. You are the father figure of this household. We all need you because without you, there will be no family.”

Jason tried to soak in all that his grandfather had said. He glanced down at the ground, then at his family in the back of the Church. He then started to show his emotion.

“What do I have to offer? I am just a dropout who can't even find his way in his own life. How am I supposed to support my whole family?”

“I know it is going to be tough, easily the toughest thing you have to do in your life so far, but it needs to be done. Would you rather work hard to support your family, or have your whole family living in a box under the interstate? This is your only option.”

Jason was silent again. His nose started to run and his head throbbed.

“I can't do this by myself. I need help,” he said at last.

“Of course you are not going to be alone. I will always be there for you. You know that. I can cook you meals and help out with



taxes and other expenses.”

“I am a forty-year veteran handyman. I can help out with the small things,” he said in a laughing tone. “I just need to have the commitment from you. It will be easier than you think, with the combination of you, your mother, and I, we can support this family. Remember, with God all things are possible.”

Jason looked up at the crucifix, then at his grandfather, and then at his mother and siblings in the distance.

“Alright, I'm all in,” Jason said, looking up at Jean.

They embraced for quite some time.

“Remember, I will always be there for you. Trust that everything will be okay,” Jean whispered into Jason's ear.

“Go and catch up with your mother. I will be over there in a little bit.”

Jason walked to his mother, whose arms were held open.

Lost and Confused

Guillermo Valladares '17

“There it is,” I said, driving towards Piggly Wiggly with my mom and sister, Ana. I looked outside the car window watching people walk in and out of the store.

“Mom, are we getting ice cream?” Ana asked.

“If y’all both be good, I’ll buy ice cream,” Mom replied. She pulled our car into the parking lot, and all three of us exited. Mom told us to grab her hand when we crossed the street, and Ana and I did what she told us.

As we all entered the store, I noticed the big candy section. I looked at the candy section with delight. A bright light, with a choir of angels singing, shined down the candy aisle. I was about to walk over and see the candy aisle, but my mom said, “Son, stay with me. Do not wander off.”

“But Mom, I just wanted to go see the candy section,” I said.

“I said no, and no means no!” my mom replied.

“Please, I just want to go see all my favorite candy,” I replied sadly.

“Hijo, I said no, let’s go!” she said angrily.

“Okay, Mom,” I replied. As we all passed the candy aisle, I glanced back in sadness. I

walked with my mom and sister to the produce section.

“Mom, what are we going to eat, and when are we getting ice cream?” Ana asked.

My mom looked at her, smiling, and said, “I’m not sure yet, and right before we leave, okay Mija.” After the produce section we proceeded towards the meat section.



My mom grabbed two big chickens and a package of ground beef. My mom then turned one way, and since she wasn't looking I decided to sneak off to the candy aisle and then quickly come back.

I tip-toed my way towards the candy section. I saw all types of candy. I could not take my eyes off the king-size Kit Kat. I could only think how delicious it would taste. I quickly grabbed it and dashed back towards Mom and Ana. However, when I went back, no one was there. I yelled their names, but no one answered. I retreated back to the candy aisle and decided to walk to all the places that we had been. I returned to the produce section. I did not see them. I only saw an old lady with her granddaughter. I decided to return to the meat section, but I didn't see them there. I

was walking shakingly around the areas that we had gone through in the store. As I was walking toward the candy section, I noticed that a man was following me. This man was wearing blue jeans, a black button down that was open, showing a white t-shirt. He wore Nike shoes, and these Harry Potter glasses. He looked old enough to be my grandpa.

I turned around and asked him, "Are you following me?"

"No, I am not," the man said.

"Okay, good," I said. I headed toward the candy aisle, turned down the aisle before that and ran as fast as I could and turned right. I quickly hid behind the shelves, peeked down the aisle, and noticed the man had turned in the same aisle and looked like he was searching for something. I overheard



the man talking to himself.

“Where did that kid go?” he mumbled.

I gasped and ran all the way to the opposite side of the store where the eggs, milk, and juices were. When I stopped running I looked back and saw that the man wasn't chasing me. I decided to take a breather and think what to do next.

“Aghhhh, why didn't I listen to Mom?” I whispered. I was trying to stop shaking and also needed to control my breathing. I knew I had to find my mom and Ana, but I also knew I needed to stay away from that man. I had never felt so alone in my life. I wanted to cry, but crying wasn't going to solve my problem. I started to think my mom must be worried about me that maybe she was looking for me, too. I mean I was her baby,

and I was sure I was her favorite kid. I heard footsteps and saw the man turn into the aisle I was in.

The man yelled, “Come here kid!”

I yelled, “Stranger Danger!” and started running. I didn't know why the man wanted to catch me. I just hoped I would run into my mom. I decided to run through the produce section and hide behind the big cabbage area.

The man yelled, “Where you at, kid?”

I sneaked off to the candy aisle again, and I was whispering to myself, “God, please I just want my mom back.” I glared at the king size Kit Kat angrily. It just stared back at me, laughing at me. I felt as if my greed and temptation for this Kit Kat wasn't worth it anymore. I wished I would've listened



to my mom. I feared I would never see her again. I would never return home to my family. Then something clicked in my mind. We had come for ice cream. I hadn't gone to that aisle yet. I ran towards that aisle and I saw that it was empty. I heard the man getting closer and talking to himself again.

"Kid, I'm just trying to help," the man said.

I ran off the opposite way and came to the conclusion that my mom and Ana had left me here, that they had forgotten about me. I knew that my house was a few blocks from the store and told myself that I could run home. I decided that was what I would do. I bolted towards the exit and noticed the workers looking at me crazily as I was about to exit the door. All of a sudden, I heard a voice yell.

"No, no, no, hijo adonde vas?!" I turned and looked at her with joy and ran to hug her and said, "Mom you left me!"

"You left me! I told you to don't wander off to stay by me," she said.

I looked up to my mom and said, "I'm sorry for leaving you. I will never leave your side again, Mom. I am so happy to see you."

"I am happy to see you, too," Mom replied.

"Haha, you crying baby, I told you to stay with us," said Ana laughingly.

"Shut up! And I know," I replied sobbingly. I saw that they had already proceeded to checkout and bought what they needed. I looked inside the bags and saw

produce food, meat, ice cream and noticed a king-sized Kit Kat. I felt guilty when I saw it, but smiled and knew my mom loved me. Before we left, I saw the man that was chasing me coming towards us. I panicked and started to say "Mom we need to run."

"Hey, I see you found your kid," the man said.

"Yes, I did. Thank you for helping me look for him," my mom replied.

"You guys know each other?" I asked confusedly.

"Yes, she asked for the entire store to look for you kid," the man replied.

"So, when you were chasing me, you wasn't a creepy old guy that was trying to steal me?" I asked.

"Nope, I was just trying to help," the man replied.

"Thank you sir, for helping me look for my son, I appreciate it, you have goodnight, sir," my mom said. We all walked to the car and I asked, " Mom you were looking for me?"

"Of course I was looking for you, I love you," she replied.

As we pulled out of the parking lot of Piggly Wiggly, I looked at the store and thought about everything that had happened. I didn't realize at the time that my mom just wanted to protect me and to keep me safe, that falling to temptation is never worth losing my family, that even when I disobeyed my mom, she still showed that she loved me.

Bland Walls

Elden Patrick Newburger '17

I can recall a time I played all day
on playgrounds before, after, and during
school time, a time I could keep this stress at bay
with no deadlines or due dates to keep my head stirring.
Class walls turned from orange, yellow, and red
to black, brown, and tan-- three colors, all bland--
that represent the interest I show,
and now it seems as if my dreams are banned.
I miss those days when I could sit and play
without a worry or concern about
future careers or lives of mine. Today
I wish to live right now without this doubt.
Yet still I look ahead to times less gray
when these storm clouds I see will fade away.



Bass String

Dawson Miller '17

Resembling some
black snake
slithering
over fallen
tree branches,
emitting
sounds when
pressed
like the devil
would have
made when
Mary stepped
on his head.
The roundwound
scales feel
rough

on the
slide down
closer to
the head,
fretting the
devil's screams
to even
lower
notes to
the point
it's nearly
inaudible.



Contemplating

Dawson Miller '17

I'm sitting here
on these
dark brown
wooden stairs
contemplating
my whole life.

I see
the light
behind me
as I look
down at
my shoes.
It's hard
to follow,
but I keep
a trail.

The haunting
black catches me,
leaving me
feeling all alone.
Happiness
is said to
come in
different forms,
but every time
it comes
my way,
it always
ends terribly.

I'm sitting here
on these
dark brown
wooden stairs
contemplating
my whole life.

With my
hands around
my neck,
I come
to realize that
this is it.
I've had my fix.
Please, stop
the pain.





