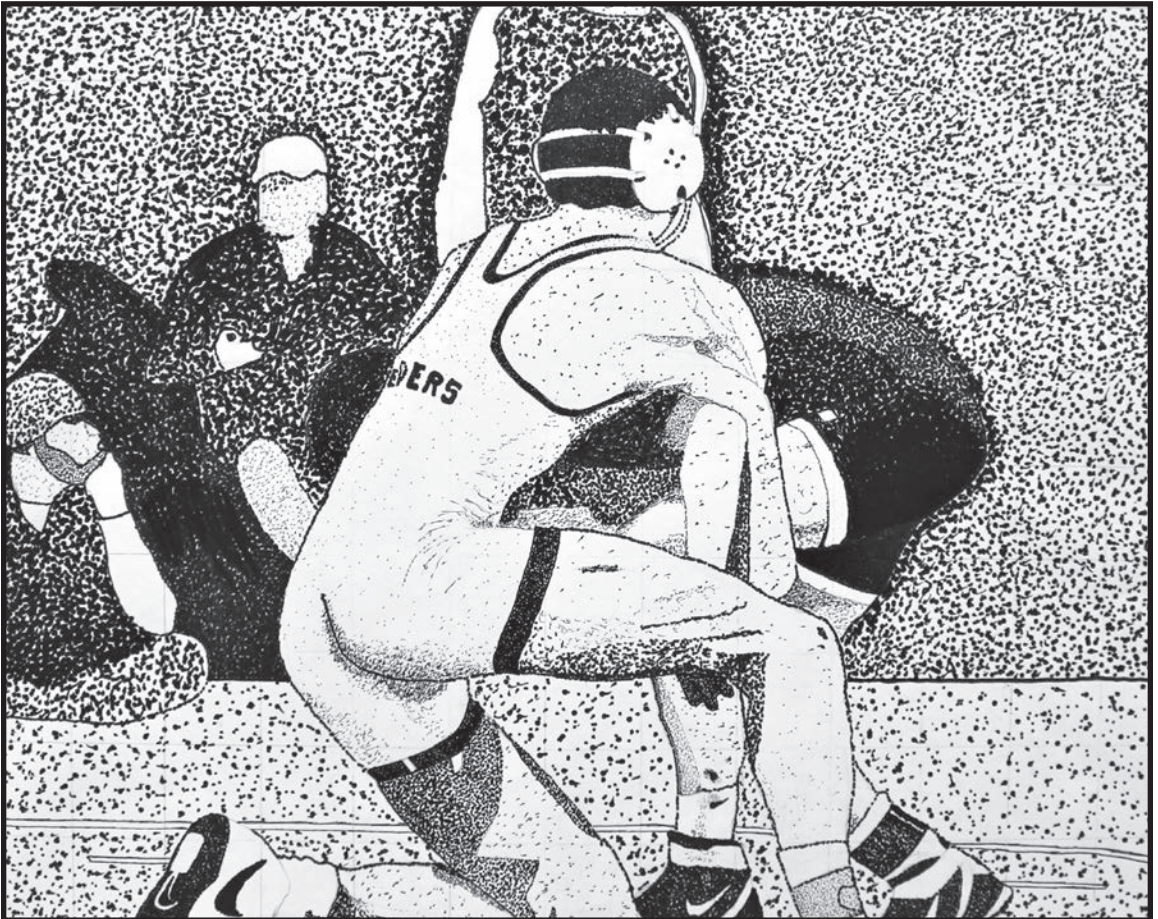


Pen
and
SWORD



2019 - 2020
A Brother Martin Publication



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Ode to Fences

Jason Arena '21

Compacted tightly around my brick house
like stone castle walls
stand browned planks of aging wood
punctured with rusty spikes.

Forgotten by his owners,
the fence turns elderly,
growing beards of algae and
mold along his coarse, dry skin.
Indentations and cracks like grooves
splotch the frayed and tattered barricade.
Some boards still stand tall and mighty.
Others crouch wobbly and rotten
crumbling lazily when thudding
in a shiny silver nail.

However, when bathed with soapy water,
using a robust pressure washer,
a honey-color can manifest
his former youthful glory
as decay and gunk slide off
like raindrops trickling down a car window.

A lionhearted knight, he
guards me from intruders,
allowing for leisurely sleep in the dark.
He fights as a protector of privacy
for reading under an oak tree in breezy spring mornings
or barbecuing juicy hamburgers on July evenings
He shelters as a haven for Chickadees awaiting
to snatch seeds from a hopper feeder,
or for a Cooper's hawk to search
for her next victim.

He stomachs his ego and battles on
while he is left alone and neglected by
those who he resolutely defends.

The Story of Jimmy-Rick

Collin Blackwell '21

Jimmy-Rick or J.R. was a good pal of mine. We had worked together for many years at the old steel mill in Philly, a good fourteen years until he disappeared. I've been hearing rumors about where he went and what he's been up to. I've been seeing people writing about their friend's lives and stuff like that, so I thought I'd tell what I knew about ole J.R.

Jimmy said he didn't know where he was born, but I said it didn't matter anyway. He said he didn't have a father, and his mother died when he was young. Considering he was black and the rough neighborhood he came from, I knew that meant he had a hard childhood. He grew up on the streets in a gang in Chicago. His brother, Micheal, or Mikey, was shot right next to him in a gang fight. He left his brother there, something he regretted for the rest of his life. He told this story only one time, just to me and his best friend Billy.

Mikey was his big brother, provider, and role model. He took a bullet in the chest for J.R. When he started to tear up, I knew Mikey meant a lot to him. That was the closest I'd ever seen him in tears to this point. J.R. was a big, strong guy, too. He grew up rough and tough, but I always knew there was a softer side to him.

He got married to a lovely woman named Linda, who was unable to have children but still gave him everything he needed. To him, she was the sun shining down on the earth. They had been married for a good twenty-nine years.

He was one of the calmest and most respectable people I knew. There was one

incident however, when J.R., the sleeping giant, lost his cool. It was at the factory on a Monday after a long weekend of work and no sweet Sunday off. Hanson, one of the younger white guys, a wise-ass, came up to J.R., throwing racial slurs at him. This was a usual occurrence for Hanson and J.R., but this time Hanson decided to throw something different in. "Your wife and kids, they'll be servants for me one day while you sit and watch 'em from jail working on my plantation." J.R. quickly snapped his neck around to look at him. He rushed at Hanson, but I restrained him, no easy task. I knew that if J.R. hit him, that would be the end of his life and family, exactly what Hanson wanted. Out of nowhere, Billy rushed in and decked Hanson across the face. "Leave him alone," he yelled. "You know he can't fight back, so you're just picking on the weak and oppressed. Get outta here, kid, and don't bother us no more unless you want another one on the nose." Hanson and his group scampered away like dogs with their tails between their legs. "Thanks for that guys," J.R. said.

"Yeah, no problem, pal. You got my back, I got yours."

I just nodded my head to agree with Billy. I know the story isn't about Billy, but I'll give some background on him, too. Billy was in his mid-twenties, a guy from Western Massachusetts. He liked to harp on the fact that he was from the western part, not the crazy eastern part with all of the crime and weird guys. No, he grew up in the good part with all the cool cats. He shipped off to the

war in 1943, where he eventually became part of the Normandy invasion and took a bullet right through the shoulder. He dropped his rifle, picked up his pistol and mowed down a whole line of Germans, or so he says. We never believed that he mowed 'em down, but the shoulder, now that was real. He had a gnarly scar on his left shoulder. You could see the discolored skin on both sides and the entrance and exit point on each side.

J.R. was also a vet of the big war. He was a Tuskegee Airman in the 477th Bombardment Group, working on B-25 Mitchell bombers. He learned a lot of mechanical tricks from that and dealt with a lot of hard tasks. That's

probably why he was such a good worker at the steel mill and why he had such a good character. He already dealt with similar tools and racial discrimination. He was a handyman, jack of all trades. He could fix anything from refrigerators to stoves to—well you name it, he could fix it.

Jimmy also was ready to lend a hand to anyone who asked. I once saw him take in three homeless people for a couple of nights, and he and Linda sending them out with food and old clothes and some blankets. He was a caring man, really, but his appearance never let on for that, and neither did his past.

I remember one distinct day when Billy





came in with a camera they had somehow got for that day to show off the factory. Billy told J.R. to smile.

"No," he replied.

"Awww, come on, J.R., just one photograph."

"Billy, I ain't smiling for no photograph."

"Fine then." Billy took the photo of J.R., and I was blurred in the background. He has on his brown work suit with those heavy brown gloves holding that old silver wheel with the chain hanging in the background. You can see the emergency water hose hanging to his left. He's wearing his little old cap on and his favorite thing in the world, the sunglasses that he got from a buddy of his back during the big war. Man, he was so mad at Billy for taking that picture, but I'm grateful to have it.

Billy was an interesting fellow. After that picture, he decided to finally live out his dream. When he was a twelve-year-old boy, he promised himself that he was going to travel the country, exploring and adventuring along the way just to see what was out there. He always talked about it at work, so much that it started to annoy the rest of us. However, one day, J.R. asked him, "Well, when you going?"

"I hope by the time I'm thirty, but who knows? You wanna come with me?"

"Maybe," J.R. replied. "You never know, man. I've been here a good while now. At this point it'll be a good almost eighteen years."

"I won't leave you behind. I promise."

"Alright then."

I sat and listened, but at the same time I grew worried that they would both leave me alone here to deal with Hanson. Boy, when I tell you I wish they left me that way, I mean it.

It wasn't long after, maybe three months, that Billy left us in a most unexpected way. It was a rough couple of weeks at the mill. Hanson and his buddies had just been laid off, and it was rumored we were next. Friday rolled around, and we knew that next week would be one of our last.

"How about we go out for some drinks?" Billy said. J.R. and I agreed. We stepped into the first bar. I don't even remember the name of the place.

"We don't serve his kind here," the bartender said, gesturing to J.R., "and if you're with him, we won't serve you, either."

We walked out and went into a little place called The Talk of the Town, or just The Talk for short. The owner and bartender's name was Barry, a humble but tough man, hasty to throw you out if you made a ruckus.

"Welcome, boys, what can I start you off with?"

"Give us three glasses of bourbon on the rocks, please," Billy said. He paid, dropped a tip and ordered another round. We threw them right on back. After the second round, we slowed down and started to just talk about things going on recently, mostly about work and how Hanson had just been laid off. "Yeah, never thought I'd see the day that old wise guy got what was coming to him," I said, and J.R. nodded.

"Linda says I shouldn't wish evil on the boy, so I just let it go," he said. "But I do believe what goes around comes around."

We sat there for about an hour and a half longer, then decided it was time to go. J.R. left first, then me, leaving Billy to walk back in and

thank Barry, leaving him a nice tip.

"Y'all come back now, ya hear. First round's on me!" I began to walk home, wondering which one of us was really next to be laid off.

I got to work the next day at the same time as usual, eight in the morning. I didn't see J.R. or Billy, who were always there before me. I thought maybe they took the day off, or overslept after yesterday. I started to work at eight-thirty like usual. By ten, neither of them showed up. I waited until five-thirty, when I left work. I headed over to J.R.'s house, where I'd been just to help him out with a couple small tasks. I walked up to the door and did a subtle knock. Linda came to the door, "Come inside." She brought me into the living room and had me sit down on the old sofa next to a big picture of an oak tree by dirt road.

"Billy's dead," she said. "Hanson shot him dead on the way home. Something about why he got laid off before Billy. They got him, and he's in jail now. But poor Billy--"

When I saw J.R., I thought he looked just about broken. We went to the funeral a few days later, and J.R. didn't even cry, not until they lowered that coffin, and then he shed a single tear from his right eye that slid down his face and fell onto the pavement. I distinctly remember that moment, and I'll never forget that. That was the last day I saw J.R. At the little reception after, he said, "I'm going. I'm going to live out Billy's dream. I'm leaving tomorrow, me and Linda." I thought he was joking, but surely enough, he wasn't as work the next day, the day after, the week after, or anytime after. He was really gone.

Not long after, I heard some rumors that he was already out in Montana, but I never found out for sure. I just hope he found him some peace and harmony. He's out there with Linda, so I'm sure he's happy.

Father Reflects

Bennett Clark '20

I see myself inside his worn-out face.
My voice's rhythms match his every word,
such a blatant copy leaving me feeling disgrace.
Always this seems to be the truth; it's absurd.
He should reflect somewhat onto my facade,
but it dives further down than that. My charm
Belongs to him as well, by plan of God.
The way I smile, I am shocked, alarmed.
I want to fight, rebel against this truth,
a stark one we can't escape: we are our dads
much more than we may want, even in our youth.
So we cannot fight, nor can we be mad.
No matter what we do to be our own,
the father passes on all to the bone.



When You Get Lonely

Caleb Giraud '20

“Good morning, dude!”

I look up from my bed to see my dad bursting into my dark bedroom in a blue polo shirt and jeans. I picked up my phone and squinted to see the time. When my eyes finally adjusted it read 1:30 pm.

“Just came to wake you up to say goodbye before I go to the weekend retreat.” He hugged me and gazed down at his watch. “Don’t you have to go meet your friends in ten minutes?”

I slowly shoved the blankets off my bed and shuffled to my clothes pile on the other side of my room. I tried to see which pair of jeans smelled the least then pulled myself through my favorite AC/DC shirt. Still groggy, I dragged myself to my truck, not even bothering to brush my rat’s nest of a head, and hopped on the interstate on my way to the mall.

Everyone agreed the night before that we would all arrive at the mall for 1 pm. In fact, I had suggested the time because it was late enough that I would be awake! I slowly realized this as I drove and began to rapidly accelerate, zipping through traffic and weaving through cars.

I finally arrived at the mall at 2:30, parked in an awkward spot, and ran down the parking garage and across the mall to the food court.

“Hey guys, sorry I’m late!” I yelled as I pulled up a chair. Jim stared daggers through me.

“And where have you been?”

“Asleep.”

Jim rolled his eyes as he ran his fingers through his black hair. I always joked that he looked like Conway Twitty with that

ridiculous haircut, but if Jim was anything he was proud of his hair. So, I mocked him for the brightly colored anime shirt he wore.

I then shot my eyes to the other side of the table and saw my friend George slumped in his chair silently contemplating the next card he would play in their game. The girl sitting next to him I had never met before. She had straight blonde hair cut just below her shoulders, and as she stood to greet me I noticed her crimson lipstick and the bright blue eyes that shone like stars. She leaned over the table towards me and placed her hand in mine.

“Hi, I’m Layla. How’s it going?”

I could not muster any words to respond, so I simply nodded my head in response and dropped onto my seat. As everyone resumed playing cards I simply sat dumbfounded, glancing back and forth between George and Layla trying to see how they could have possibly wound up together. He was a tall gangly guy with short kinky hair and bad acne. She was a short, blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty. How could that possibly have happened?

I spent the rest of the day at the mall joking as much as possible attempting to charm her. Honestly, I probably acted like the biggest idiot in existence that day, but it worked. She laughed at everything I said while George simply shrugged at everything.

About a week passed, and I began to speak with Layla on a regular basis, exchanging texts and Facetiming each other. We discussed our favorite topics, debating the meanings of certain events in *The Great*



Gatsby and *The Crucible* and arguing over who our favorite characters were. I enjoyed our conversations and grew to like her quite a bit, and I later discovered she felt the same.

One night, while in a video call with me, Layla received a text from George saying that he was “going through a rough time” and “needed some distance.” As she read these aloud to me, she began to cry. Somewhere in my backwards mind, I asked if she wanted a milkshake.

“What did you say?”

“A milkshake. There’s a place right around the corner, I can go get one if it makes you feel better.”

As I said this she began to laugh.

“Sure, but I’m paying for it.”

“Oh, no you aren’t! You just got your heart

broken. You deserve something nice.”

I sneaked out to my car and drove to the Sonic down the street from my house. I then sped over to Layla’s house a few blocks away and picked her up. We then drove around for a while looking for a place to talk and decided on the park.

As we pulled into the parking lot of our local park, I turned over and noticed the tears streaming down her face. I reached over the console and wiped them from her eyes and smiled at her. She smiled back and laughed.

“Did you jump out of bed to come comfort me?”

I looked down and noticed that in my rush to leave, I had forgotten to change and was still wearing red pajama pants and grubby white undershirt. I shook my head in embarrassment as my face turned hot. We then talked for an hour about different silly things, at one point calling Jim to mess with him.

After laughing to the point of tears, we both fell silent.

“I can’t believe you actually did this for me.”

“Well, it’s my job as a friend.”

“I don’t think this is really something friends do.”

I shrugged, “What do you mean?”

“Well, you talk to me quite a bit, every day it seems,” she stared ahead, “I just think this is something a little more than friendly.”

I looked down and began to panic, but when I snapped my head back up, she was inches from my face. And there we sat, staring at each other for a while until she finally leaned closer and kissed me.

The next day, George begged Layla to come back to him, but she simply shrugged him off. This began the next few weeks of secret dates with Layla, and I enjoyed every

minute of it. One time, we drove out to the lakefront and sat in the bed of my truck just watching the water and talking about what we would do after high school. Since she was a senior while I was a junior, we planned for me to visit when she moved into her dorm.

My dad noticed this uptick in happiness and questioned me about it. I had hidden all of this for quite some time, so I finally relented and told my dad about my relationship with Layla. His face grew grim, and he acquired a more serious tone.

"That's not good, dude. You need to stop before somebody finds out."

"Why? I'm having fun."

He leaned back in his recliner and looked up at me. The ceiling lights cast shadows over his face as his salt and pepper hair shone like an angry mane.

"Because what you're doing is wrong. I love you, but how are other people gonna see it when they find out you just swooped in the night they broke up?"

Until this point, I had not thought much about others' opinions. What would people think? More importantly, what would my friends think? I decided to distance myself in an attempt to avoid any further suspicion from my friends.

I began to see less and less of Layla, providing numerous excuses as to why I could not eat dinner or see a movie. This finally angered her enough that she asked one of my friends, Jim, why I was so unresponsive. When Jim pressed her, she explained our whole affair.

Soon the news spread through my friend group and eventually to George. I never attempted to contact him even though I knew he hated me now. I simply desired to avoid him for the rest of high school. I also

berated Layla for telling everyone, to which she simply shrugged and said, "Not my problem."

Not only had I lost a friend and the respect of my peers, but also the girl that started it all just threw me away without a second thought. I could not walk through the halls or eat lunch without one of my friends shooting an icy glare at me, and I finally could not endure any more.

I left school for a week and camped in Mississippi to escape, but it simply would not leave my mind. My friends inhabited my thoughts day and night, and my mental state deteriorated around them.

One night I dreamt that I was in a white room. I looked down and saw that I was dressed in an old pink suit. I looked up and saw Layla dressed in a yellow sundress and a



white headband with a daisy above her right ear. Her hair was now in a bob, but she still wore the same red lipstick. She walked up to me and screamed in my face.

“You were wrong!”

With that she waltzed out of the room and shut the door. I woke in a sweat but with a strange sense of satisfaction. I walked out of my tent and sat by the dying embers. As I stoked the dying flames I began to think about my situation clearly for the first time.

“Yeah, I’m wrong, but so is she,” I whispered to myself, “Maybe I’m blowing this out of proportion. Nobody got hurt, and it’s not like I really like George anyway.” As I said this, I overturned one of the remaining logs which allowed a small fire to breathe. After watching the fire for about an hour, I retired to my tent and slept until dawn.

When I awoke, I rolled over to check my phone and immediately received a call from another “friend” of mine. It was Simon, a short pale guy with thick librarian glasses and a Napoleon complex. I answered the phone and was immediately accosted with angry words as he was one of the last people to discover my scandalous behavior.

“So what happened to being the ‘moral compass’ of the group?” he sneered.

“I’m human. I make mistakes. I can’t always be the bull amongst you steers.”

“You’re not a bull. You’re a snake.”

I finally cracked.

“You know what? Yeah I’m a snake. I stole somebody’s girlfriend, but it’s not like she

never invited me in. I had a connection with her, and I just let my emotions get in the way of my morals. I know some of you look at me like some prophet that has to keep some strict moral code that forbids me from ever making a single mistake, but I’m just like the rest of you. We’re all idiotic kids trying to grasp some small idea of what it means to be a good person.”

At this point, my face was completely red and streaming with tears. I screamed into the receiver with every breath. My head hurt with every heartbeat as my blood struggled to circulate into all the scrunched muscles. My dad burst into my tent, snatched my phone, and ended the call. He sat down next to me and put his arm around my shoulder.

“Dude, you’re taking this way too far. You don’t need to be this upset. I get that you’re dealing with a lot, but don’t let it get to you. Their opinions don’t matter. All that matters is that you learned from your mistakes and come out a better person, and if your friends won’t accept that you’ve fixed yourself, then you need to find some new friends.”

He hugged me as tightly as he could, and I sat there crying onto his shoulder. Afterwards, we silently packed up our things, loaded them into the truck, and drove back home. When I finally saw my house after that long week, instead of feeling the dread that usually washed over me from being so close to Layla’s house, I felt joy. To this day, I still laugh whenever I pass her house.

Christmas Depot

Brett Larsen '20

Allen strolled to the front of the store. He flipped the apple-red and kelly-green *open* sign down from the window facing the busy street of New Orleans. The stretch to grab the sign untucked his shirt. He nervously turned around to make sure Lisa didn't see his body. He urgently tucked his tight green Christmas sweater back into his pants. For a few moments, Allen observed Lisa counting the money in the cash register. Her brown hair hugged her face, stopping at the jaw. The sweater she wore to work today had Christmas lights on it, a tight sweater and she always tucked it into her skirt. The dark green wall behind her complimented her eyes.

"This isn't my store, but if it were, it would sure be smiling today. We got a lot of business," Lisa said before gazing up towards the other side of the store with a delicate, white smile.

"That sure would be nice, wouldn't it?" said Allen, trying hard to start a conversation.

Lisa did not even look up from the money behind the counter. Across the store, Tom was working on getting the last family to leave. Tom, the general manager of Christmas Depot, nudged them closer and closer to the door until they realized just how unwanted their business was. Most managers enjoy their position or at least force a smile during their shifts. Neither were true for Tom. He had been working with Allen and Lisa for the whole season, and he was miserable every single day.

Tom began complaining. He constantly fixed his glasses from falling off his pale, boney face. Allen and Lisa shared a look, both

surprised at how talkative he was being.

"I just hate this job," Tom suddenly blurted out.

"I know, Tom," Allen said.

"What the hell do you need money for, Allen? You have no wife or kids. You have a roommate. I have real bills to pay and people to support. This shop's pay doesn't cut it."

"Jeezum Petes, Tom. Leave him alone. He's never been anything but kind to you. We all have things to pay for. You're not special," Lisa interrupted.

"Yeah, but we both know one of us here is special," Tom laughed out loud.

"Tom, you better stop. You know that's wrong," Lisa whispered.

"Can we just close up, guys?" Allen said as he walked away. No one answered. They all went their separate ways and finished their closing duties. Lisa got some cleaning supplies out of the back and wiped down all the windows. Allen cleaned the overused bathrooms and started sweeping the floor.

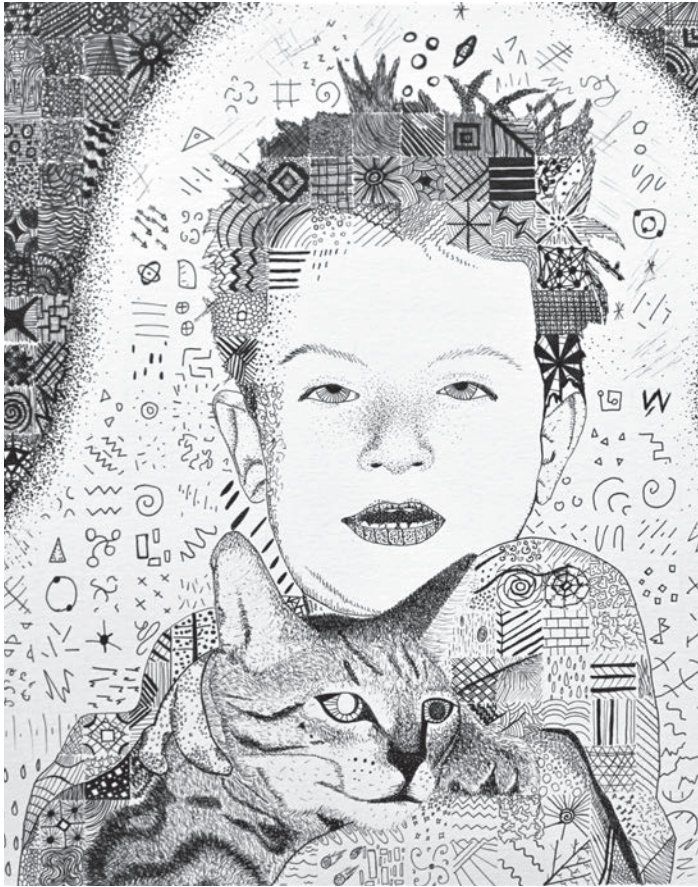
"I'm done with my stuff. Do you want any help sweeping and whatnot before I go?"

"Oh— uh, no thanks, I got it. You can go home." Allen felt like an idiot. He wanted Lisa to stay and sweep so they could talk. It was such a good day for them. They had a great interaction earlier. He had ruined his chance.

She clocked out.

"Ok, well, bye. Sorry about Tom. You don't deserve that."

Allen and Tom were alone now, until they finished cleaning up. Allen continued thinking to himself as he swept. He knew why Tom was so mean to him, but it was not fair.



asking. Suddenly, he gasped out loud, "A letter!"

He knew he would never get over his fears and ask Lisa face to face. He realized he could leave a letter behind the counter where Lisa sat at work. He knew she had the opening shift tomorrow.

"I will leave it on the desk. She'll see it as soon as she gets to work tomorrow. This is fabulous!"

Tom yelled from the front of the store, "Allen, you're talking to yourself again. Get back to sweeping!"

Allen, snapped out of his daydream, realized he swept all the way to the back of the store. He had cleaned enough now. He put the broom up and began walking towards the front of the store. Before he turned right out of the aisle, he heard the Christmas bells on the door ring. No way Tom let another customer in. Right before he turned the corner that concealed the exit, the lights in

Also, what was so wrong with living with a roommate?

"I like this job," he said to himself. "I don't know why Lisa and Tom hate it so much. It's not bad. We just hang out and clean and people watch sometimes."

Allen started thinking about Lisa. He pictured the clothes she wore and the wonderful way that she always smelled, the way her soft brown hair was tied up yesterday in a messy fashion with a sun-yellow hair tie, but today she let it down and it looked just as pretty. He daydreamed about asking her out, and her saying yes in her soft voice. He always chickened out, never even coming close to

the store turned off. He turned the corner. Tom was outside, and the door shut in front of him. Allen made eye contact with Tom. The street lights lit up the dark city block behind him. He locked the glass door, and shoved the only shop key besides Lisa's into his pocket. Allen, in shock, silently watched him walk away.

Allen stood there in the darkness of the store. He would have never expected this from Tom. He knew that Tom did not consider him a friend, but not this. Allen walked behind the desk and sat down. He got distracted. He thought about how Lisa

sat here all day, right where he was sitting. He typed on the keyboard and spun around in the chair. He pretended to answer the phone using Lisa's voice.

"Christmas Depot, what would you like help with today?"

He went to open the register, just like Lisa did, but it was locked. He realized he probably looked crazy, and if Lisa were to see this she would think he was dumb.

He knew he had to call Lisa to come let him out.

Allen took out his phone and pulled up Lisa's contact. He stared at it for a few minutes thinking about what he was going to say. He didn't want to sound stupid. He knew everybody thought he was, but Lisa didn't.

"Lisa doesn't even know I'm on the spectrum," he repeated to himself out loud a few times. The only way she would know is if Tom told her. Allen started to get nervous. If only he didn't have to tell Tom during his interview for the job. He finally hit the green call button. Lisa picked up immediately.

"Hello," a deep male voice spoke on the line.

Allen didn't know what to say. He heard Lisa's voice in the background of the call. "Is that Allen, what does he need?"

"He's fine, Lisa. Must be a butt dial."

Allen spastically jumped to his feet, hitting his knees on the underside of the desk. He blurted out, "Can I talk to Lisa— please?"

Allen heard Lisa talk again. "Tom, baby, give me the phone. What if Allen needs something? Sometimes people with autism get themselves in serious trouble. He could be in danger."

Allen froze.

Lisa took the phone. "Allen is everything okay? What did you call for?"

"Are you with Tom?"

"Yes."

"Okay, well—" Allen paused.

"Hello?"

"What are you guys doing?"

"We were just watching a movie, but if you need something—"

"No, no, I'm okay. Bye." Allen hung up.

Allen sat in Lisa's chair, surrounded by the unlit Christmas lights in the store. He stood up, walked over to the door, and tried to open it.

"Still locked," Allen whispered to himself.

He walked the aisles in tears, searching desperately for a place to lie down. He was having trouble focusing.

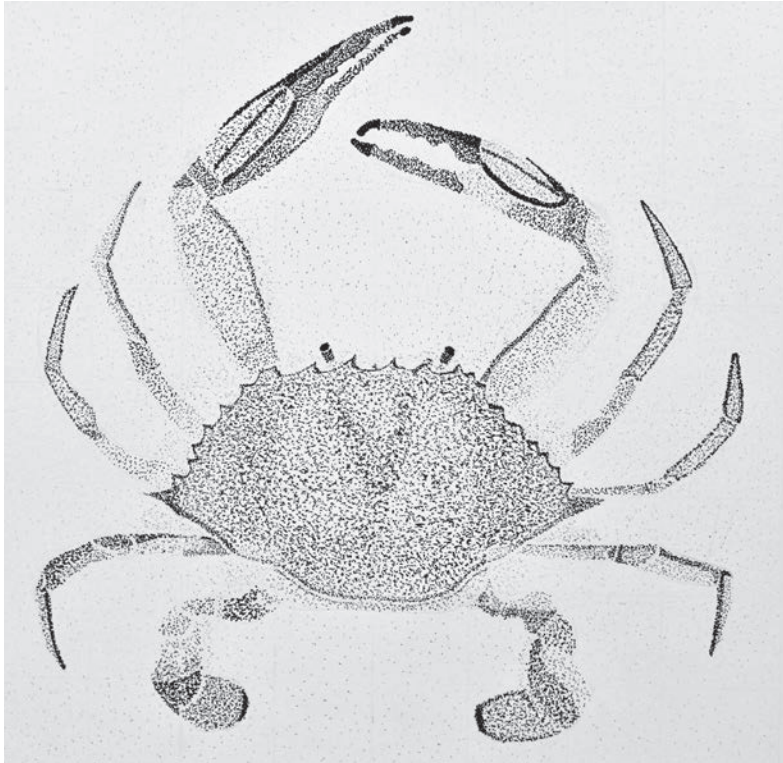
"Finally," Allen blurted out loud.

He had found a bed, sort of. One massive stuffed Santa Claus. It sat on the top shelf, and he couldn't reach it. Then he remembered the ladder was locked up in the back, but Lisa had the keys, and she was with Tom. He walked back and grabbed Lisa's chair. He sat in it and skated back over underneath his bed. He cautiously stood up on the chair and stretched to reach Santa. Allen's sweater came untucked, but he did not notice. The Santa crashed down along with a few Christmas flags. He dragged the Santa, along with Lisa's black chair back behind the desk, and lay down.

Allen wondered what Lisa would like for Christmas. Everybody loves presents. He knew she could never turn down a trip to the aquarium. It's right on the river, too. He knew girls liked nice views. If he used his overtime pay he could even buy tickets to the 4D movie experience in there. He had been wanting to see *Hurricane on the Bayou*. Allen started to feel better about everything. He couldn't wait for Lisa to come in to work in the morning.

Long frosty dark night
Crackling fire warming hands
Stars crowd the black sky
– Jason Arena '21

The tiger crunches
the grass beneath her great paws
as she stalks her prey.
– Bennett Clark '20



A speck of small dust
compared to vast galaxies
We float helplessly
– Jason Arena '21

Hazy mid-morning
dew drops floating in sunshine:
fleeting, like magic.
– Bryan Lagarde '20



Creativity
is a gift that allows us
to be different.
– Collin Blackwell '21

Diving into blue
water, a plop and then a
splash, the race begins
– Victor Garcia '21

A Hungry Tern

Jason Arena '21

In the drowsy morning sky, his lengthy white wings
tapering into a raven black, flapped powerfully
over brackish Lake Pontchartrain as he roared
a furious screech: *kowk!!*

More elegantly than his gull counterparts,
he peered down with slick black hair while
his atomic oily eyes scanned for the
silhouette of a dashing fish in the murkiness
like a careful submarine sonarman tracking his enemy.

Suddenly, with his eyes still glued, he stuttered
his wings to gain position for attack, then
flopped his body upside down head-first,
and: *splash!* His entire pearly body crashed
into the cold, bouncing tide,
performing like a USA Olympic diver.

Within seconds, he gracefully resurfaced,
and now in his thick flame colored bill,
helplessly wiggled a fathead minnow which
mushed under the pressure of his killer bill.
Before laughing gulls could steal his treasure,
he took a gulp and devoured it.

With fifty-inch wings, nesting in five continents, he
soars, the Caspian tern, a hungry, vicious seabird.



A Stone and a Story

This story was written by the following members of the class of 2022, then translated by Mr. Merritt's Latin II class. Andrew Biehl, Kyle Borde, William Buras, Brian Dufrene, Emilio Garcia, Owen Gibson, Sebastian Gonzales, Britt Hatten, Dara Haughey, Trent Jennings, Michael Kingsbery, Chase Lormand, Dylan McDonald, Landon Merritt, Darren Morris, Alden Toca, Konor Trosclair, Addison Wilberg

The storyteller heaved, taking a gulp of water after a long tale. Looking back towards the villagers, their eyes still seemed hungry for more. He slumped back onto a stool set out for him and placed his gnarled staff at his feet. At that moment, he noticed once again the towering stone portrait in the central plaza; the hero of this village. Looking at it again, he mused at how such a person had likely never existed. The storyteller had traveled far and wide and thus knew how to craft an enthralling tale. This statue only served to keep these sheep grounded in this pasture. Scratching his patchy white beard, he started to concoct stories in his mind, swirling with ideas. The villagers sat back, clearly picking up that a new story was about to be told. The elderly storyteller once again sat back, took a drink of water, and began.

He held up a dull, green stone that sat at his feet and began to tell the citizens of a time when wild, undignified men ruled the world. In this world, the Romans suffered, not yet knowing the prosperity of modern times. The labor was always intense, taking place in an endless, dry field of crops and dust. Those who failed to do their intense jobs were ridiculed and punished by the barbarians who had seized the land years ago. The storyteller told the men and women gathered around him that one hot day, Marcus, a young lad of seventeen, had been

Fabulator convellit, accipiens singultus aquae postquam fabulam longam. Respiciens ad vicinos, illorum oculi adhuc visus erunt famelici pro plus. Is recidit in sedilem statutum pro eum et eius clavam nodosam apud pedes eius locavit. Apud illum momentum, is iterum contemplant imaginem excelsum lapidis in locum centralem: vir huius vicum. Visus iterum ad id, cogitavit de quam talis virum rationalabiliter numquam extiterat. Fabulator commeaverat longe et ita scivit quam fingere fabulam concitatricem. Haec statua solummodo juvat habere has pecus ratas in hunc pastus. Scalpens eius barbitium asperum albaum, incepit concinnare fabulas in anima eius, concrispentes cum comprehensionibus. Vicani recubuerunt, clare comprehendentes ut nova fabula erat dicenda. Senes fabulator iterum sedebat retro, accepit poculum aquae, et coepit.

Ipse usque hebes, viridis lapis qui sedebat ad pedes eius tenuit et coepit dicere cives de tempore cum feri, indigni homines mundum rexit. In hoc mundo, Romani passi sunt, non tamen sciens salus moderni temporis. Labor erat semper intensus, factus locus in infinito, arido agro frugum et pulverum. Qui sua vehementia pensadefecerunt inridebantur et puniebantur barbaris qui terram abhinc annos ceperat. Fabulator dixit viros et feminas circa eum congregatos uno calido

out tilling the fields when he stepped on an emerald stone. Curious, he hastily bent over to examine the stone beneath his feet. He wiped off the layer of mud that caked its jagged surface and slowly read the Latin inscription underneath. Intrigued, he read to himself: "The finder of this gem, while under an enemy's power, will find strength, speed, transcendence, until his final hour." Marcus blinked and gazed in confusion before being snapped back into reality by nearby shouts. He pocketed the mysterious stone and went back to work.

The next few hours of work were cruel and torturous. All Marcus could think about in his state of exhaustion was his sister's food and sleep. His father died when Marcus was young, protecting the village from the barbarian invaders. His mother had died two years ago when she had fallen ill, but since they were extremely poor, they couldn't afford to get her a doctor or medicine. The sun had finally gone down, which meant that Marcus could finally go home after this excruciating day at work. On his walk home, Marcus was reminded of how much he loathed these invaders. They were very cruel and oppressive to the people of his village. They feasted on crops produced by the toils of the villagers, while the villagers hardly had enough to last until the next harvest. When Marcus arrived at his scant house, he instantly knew something was wrong. His twin sister, Cassia, was very quiet and reserved at dinner. When he finally got her to tell him what was troubling her, she said quietly, "I have decided to marry Aldric." When Marcus heard this, he was stunned. Aldric was the barbarian chief's son that had had an eye on his sister for years. Aldric was arrogant and malicious but a very skilled warrior.

die, Marcum, puerum septemdecim annos, in agros coluerat cum existit in lapide smaragdi. Curiosus, cito superflectit ut lapidem sub pedibus eius examinaret. Abstersit corium luti quod operuit eius superficiem serratam et lente Latine subiecto legit. Captus, legit sibi: "repertor huius gemmae, dum sub hostium potestatem, inveniet vires, celeritatem, transcensum, donec ultima hora." Marcus connivuit et in confusionem aspexit ante respexit in actualitas a propinquo clamores. Ipse in sacculo arcanam lapidem condidit, et reversus est ad opus.

Insequentes paucae horae operis erant crudelis et tormentosus. Omne quod Marcus posset cogitare in suo statu defatigationem erat cibus et somnus sororis eius. Pater suus mortuus est cum Marcus iuvenis, defendens castellum de barbaris invasoribus. mater sua mortua est, duos annos elapsos, cum esset male cedant, sed quia sunt valde pauperes, illi medicos aut medicinam sumministrare non possunt. Sol tandem abierat, quod significavit ut Marcus tandem poterat re domui post hunc cruciabilem diem apud opus. In eius itineris domui, Marcus commonefaciebat quanti perodit hos victores. Ei erant asperrimi et onerosimmi ad gentes eius vici. Epulati sunt in fruges finctos laboribus pagani vix habuerant sates manere dum deinde messe. Quando Marcus advenit apud eius angustam domum, is actutum scivit esse falsum. Eius gemina soror, Cassia, erat taciturna et abstrusa apud cenam. Quando is tandem affecit eam dicere eum quid commovebat eam, ea dixisse molliter, "decrevi nubere Aldric." Cum Marcus hoc audivit, is astupebat. Aldric erat barbarus principes filius qui annis oculum super sororem habuerat. Aldric erat superbus et malignans sed peritissimus bellator. Cassia

Cassia had always refused his pursuits, but something told Marcus that this time was different. After pressing her, she finally told Marcus that Aldric told her unless she marries him this month, he will have Marcus arrested and executed. Although Marcus appeared to have a calm demeanor, he was seething inside. He stayed up all night plotting how he would solve this problem. The next morning instead of going to work, Marcus went to the cavern where Aldric spent his days. He marched through the doors, went straight to Aldric and threw his fists at Aldric's face. However, Aldric was a trained warrior and Marcus was a simple farmer. Aldric quickly dodged Marcus's fist and instead thrust his hand right into Marcus's stomach. Marcus fell over heaving when Aldric suddenly kicked him in the head. Marcus's vision blurred, and he saw stars. He saw in the corner of his eye Aldric laughing with his friends. He thought this was going to be the end of his story when he suddenly felt the green stone in his pocket grow warm. At that moment, his vision returned to normal, and he was filled with a sudden overwhelming strength. His eyes focused on the laughing Aldric and before he knew what he was doing, his fist slammed with more strength than he thought possible right into the side of Aldric's head. Aldric fell to the ground in a crumpled heap and did not move. Aldric's friends stood there stunned, and Marcus quickly ran out the door.

Marcus soon found out how unique this emerald gem was. The power that was given to him during that fight came back three more times in the months that followed. The first time occurred shortly after the altercation with Aldric. Marcus was a farmer, so after every harvest, he would portion his

semper eius studia recusaverat, sed aliquid dixit Marcum hoc tempus esse diversis. Post eam pressus, Marcum tandem dixit Aldric ei nisi ipsa ducat eum mensis huius, disponat Marcum captum et exsecutum. Quamvis Marcus apparuit habere placidum habitus, erat ferventis intus. Mansit usque tota nocte paratum quamdiu hoc aerumna solveret. Postero mane pro iente ad opus, Marcus abiit ad specus, ubi Aldric consumpta dies eius. Ille incessit per ostia, abiit recta ad Aldric et misit pugnis ad Aldricis faciem. Autem, Aldric et doctus bellator et Marcus anticus agricola. Aldric subito motivus Marci manus at magis urgeo suum manus in Marci ventre. Marcus demittit super convulsus cum Aldric subito in capite nocet; Marci visio confundit et vidit astrum. Is vidit in angulo oculi Aldric ridet cum amici. Is cognovit hunc esse finus eius fabulae cum is subito sensit viridem saxum in funda calescit. Illo articulo, visio revertit ad naturalem, et is differtus abruptus absortio vires. Is oculi defigiunt in deridiculum Aldric et prior is effectit, eius manus plus potente quam cognovit potis in lato Aldrici capitis. Aldric edmittit ad humum in cumulo corrugato et non motus. Aldrici amici stetit ibi stupefacti, et cito Marcus foras fugit.

Marcus mox compertum est, quam singulari hoc smaragdus gemma fuit. Potentia quod data est ei per pugnam reversa est tribus temporibus magis in mensibus sequentibus. Primum accidit paulo post altercationem cum Aldrico. Marcus erat agricola, sic post omnem messem, qui esset loco eius fruges in cibum, et quicquid esset reliquum tulit ad foro vendendi causa. In ut videtur normalis iter eius ad forum, Marcus erat vitiose adortus per tres latrones. Coeperunt calcitrare Marcus sed Marcus sensit notam industriam radiantem ab eius sinu. Subito, dolor qui Marcus

crops for food and whatever was leftover he took to the forum to be sold. During his seemingly normal trip to the forum, Marcus was viciously attacked by three robbers. They started to kick Marcus but Marcus felt a familiar energy radiating from his pocket. Suddenly, the pain that Marcus was feeling completely vanished to his amazement. The robbers continued to try to beat him but it seemed as though their feet and fists were going straight through him. Bewildered by this, the robbers fled from the scene while leaving Marcus and his belongings on the ground. Marcus continued on the road to the market while contemplating the meaning of the emerald stone. He wondered if it was a sign of one of his ancestral gods or if it was some primordial object from before even the birth of the planet. Whatever the meaning of the stone, Marcus was grateful for its power. Marcus brushed away these frightening thoughts and moved on towards his destination.

Once he reached the forum with his crops, he walked over to his elderly friend Antony, who had been in a formidable military at the time when the barbarians invaded. When they seized control of the city, Antony had opposed the barbarians through military resistance. During the great execution of the Roman people, he had gone into hiding and disguised himself as a merchant. In this time, Antony had become very wise through his experience. Marcus, needing some advice about his situation, presented Antony with the question of what he thought the mysterious stone was. Antony, pleased to have been asked about this strange matter, thoroughly examined the stone and let out a gasp when laying his bright eyes on the inscription. He clutched the stone close to his stomach and told Marcus

sentiebat omnino evanuit, ut eius stupore. Fures manebant nocere sed videtur pedes et manus perdirecte ibant. Haec aestimatio versetur, fures fugebant scaeno donec Marcus et quae sunt in humem. Marcus manebant in via ad foro donec theoricus sententia lapidis smaragdosis. Admirabat si fuit signum unius paterni numenum vel quod esset chai odius ex antea natura stellae. Quidquid sententia saxi, Marcus erat gratiam ad sui opes. Marcus urgerebat revello haec horribilis sententiarum et eo destinatio adficebat.

Quondam petebat forum fructibus, transiit proventus amico Antonio, qui fuit formidolus militaris ad tempus cum barbari inrumpebat. Cum comprehendebant regni urbis, Antony conferrebat barbarus per castris constantia. In magna supplicia populi Romani, et ille isset in abscondito et habit se a mercatore. In hoc tempore, Antonius sapiens per eius usu factus. Marcus, indigens aliquo consilio de eius situ, obtulit Antonium cum quaeritur quid putabat arcana lapidem erat. Antonius, placuit fuisse quaeritur de hoc aliena materia, penitus explorati lapidem cum imponens eius clara oculos in tituli inscriptionem. Ipse clutched lapidem prope stomachum sum et nuntiavit Marcus fabula de lapide quod fuerat quondam ficti videantur --et usus--ab originali conditores Romae, Romulus et Remus, qui insidiatur a veneficus in faciendo lapidem dona eis potestatem regula super milia hominum. Postea, duo fratres usus virtutes lapidem concessit ad regulam Romae, accipiens in totius exercitus cum compositae ut eorum virtute et militari intelligentia. Post certum temporis spatium, Remus factus est esuriens ad plenam potestatem lapidem modo et coepit agere infensi. Romulus, mulator, et perturbatus, occidit fratrem suum apta de ira.

the story of a stone that had once been crafted--and used--by the original founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, who had tricked a wizard into making them a stone that would grant them the power to rule over thousands of men. Afterward, the two brothers used the powers the stone granted to rule Rome, taking on entire armies with the combined might of their power and military intelligence. After a certain amount of time, Remus became hungry for the full power the stone provided and began to act aggressively. Romulus, jealous and upset, killed his brother in a fit of rage. Horrified at his mistake, he inscribed the message into the stone and buried it in the area furthest from the core of Rome, and it had never been found again--that is, until now.

The story that Antony had told him of the stone remained in Marcus's mind for the next few months. He still carried the stone around with him in the folds of his garment but was afraid to use its mysterious powers. However, this all changed on a seemingly regular day in the late afternoon. Marcus was out in the fields tending his crops, about to leave for the day, when he heard a distant horn. Curious, he left the field and walked in the direction of the loud noise. As he grew closer and closer, he thought he could make out the sound of many footsteps and shouts. He finally came upon a hill and climbed to the top. When he reached the top of the hill and could see all before him, his stomach dropped. Laid out before him marching in the direction of his village was more men than he'd ever seen before in his life. The army looked very different from the barbarian invaders that had taken his village years back, and something inside told him that this army was not going to let his village be, due to the harsh looks on the

Territi ad eius error, ipse inscripsit nuntium in saxo et sepelivit quod regione summissimum centro Roma, et quod inventus erat numquam vicissim--illa est, usque nunc.

Fabula quae Antonius dixerat eum saxi remansit in mentem Marci paucis secundo mense. Ipse etiam circumportavit saxum cum ipso in caula vestis sed timebat utere suum arcanum postestatum. Autem, istud omne in ut videtur ordinario die in sero vespere mutavit. Marcus erat in agro curans suum frugem, profiscendi diei, cum ipse semotum cornu audiebat. Curiosule, ipse linquebat agrum et in regimine clamorosi sonitus ambulabat. Tamquam ipse artiozem et artiozem auctat, ipse cogitabat posse sonum multorum vestigiorum et clamorum percipere. Ipse tandem collem inveniebat et summo ascendebat. Et cum pervenisset ad summitatem collis et videre omnes ante eum posset, venterum suum omissa. Positus ante eum in itinere versus eius erat plus homines quam ipse unquam ante in vita sua. Exercitus apparuit longe alia barbarus invasores, qui castello annis fuerat captus, et quod intus ei indicavit ut hoc exercitu non erat futurum, ut fiat eius vicum esse, ex dura visu in milites' facies. Necesse est percutere exercitum suum castellum ad monendum omnes et accipiendum sororem eius ad salutem. Centum cogitationes trans caput eius in illo tempore concitavit. Ubi capiseras eam? Quid de omnibus in castellum? Quid, si ipse fuit sera? Is cognovit tempus terere, et misit se ad pedes eius, et conversus ut relinqueret. Tum Marcus subito corruerat in aliquid metallicum et cecidit in terram. Cum initio, fuisse rescivit quia cum suas cogitationes occupaverat, putet se animadversis tergo montis milites classem. Subito, saxum viridens coepit factus esse calidum in eius

soldiers' faces. He had to beat the army to his village to warn everyone and take his sister to safety. Hundreds of thoughts raced across his head at that moment. Where would he take her? What about everyone else in the village? What if he was too late? He realized he was wasting time and jumped to his feet and turned to leave. Marcus then suddenly smashed into something metal and fell to the ground. With a start, he realized that he had been so occupied with his own thoughts, that he hadn't noticed the group of soldiers that snuck behind on the hill. All of a sudden, the emerald stone began to become warm again in his garments. Before he knew it, he was on his feet and there was a sword in the exact spot that he was just in. The whole world seemed to be in slow motion, except him. He easily dodged the enemy soldiers' attacks and quickly ran down the side of the hill. He bolted through the forest at a rate not possible for any man. The trees were blurs, but he still caught sight of the encroaching army in the distance. He finally managed to arrive at his village, but it was too late. The enemy army was already there.

With the thought of his sister, he courageously started to charge at the army. The soldiers were confused by this and turned toward him. One of their best men stepped forward ready to fight Marcus. Marcus came at him with lightning speed. The soldier struck at Marcus but the sword went straight through him. Marcus side-stepped behind the soldier and kicked the sword out of his hand. It clattered onto the ground and everyone was silent. Marcus shot towards it, picked it up, and swung it toward the soldier hitting him in the stomach with a lethal blow. The soldier's comrades were upset by this and they began

vestmentum. Erat in pedibus eius et ferrum in locum exactum eius erat. Terra totia in tardum motum videtur esse, sed is non. Facile impetis hostiorum elusit et cito per collis latum curret. Cucurrit per silva ad rate non posse enim quemquam hominum. Arbori labem erat, sed appropinquantum exeritum in procul vidit. Tandem gessit supervenire apud eius viculum, sed fuit nimis tardus. Exercitus hostis erat iam ibi.

Cum sententia sororis, audacter incipit electricis exercitui. Milites tamquam indigesto apud hic et afflexus. Unus optimi viri eorum promovet Marcum propensus proeliare. Marcus venit ad eum cum fulmineo celeritudo. Miles reverberatus Marcum sed gladius prose intercidit. Marcus devitatis posterga militi et apolacitzat gladio de manus. Id cadit in terram et omnes silentur. Marcus percussit illud, sustulit et in percutiendo elatam versus ventrem militis vulnere letali. Et militum commilitones perturberis ab hoc, et acie decerneret inchoato. Sustulit ensem per Marcus etiam quantum lucendi obviam militi. Institutio gladium quod invenit et fortiter percussit centurionis scutariorum et deiecit. Ipse iecit in rapido gladio aputavit caput. Ceterorum curam facile formationis. Hic pagus congregata omni actu spectet heroicis Marcum. Ille ad pugnam milites quamvis lassitudinem adprehendit eam pulmonis. Ipse percussit unus miles, et conversus ad percutiat alium. Sicut hoc, tertia exercitus manebant. Accepit a momento capere eius spiritus et mox intellexit parva coetus hominum ex castello perexiguo arma et nunc sunt expectantes eius imperio. Eduxit eos in proelium et licet paucis hominibus mortuus, nisi unus miles manebant. Marcus ordinatur in aliis cadat retro. Reliquae miles inuectus

to form a battle formation in order to fight him. Using the sword that he had picked up, Marcus again, as fast as lightning, ran toward the soldiers. He met the formation and, with all his might, struck the leading officer's shield and shattered it. He swung his sword and in one swift motion, cut off his head. He took care of the rest of the formation with ease. At this point, the whole village had gathered to watch the heroic act of Marcus. He continued to fight the soldiers even though exhaustion gripped his lungs. He struck one soldier and turned to strike another. Just like this, more than two-thirds of the army had been defeated. He took a moment to catch his breath and soon realized a small group of men from his village had taken up arms and were now waiting for his command. He led them into battle and although a few men gave their lives, only one soldier remained. Marcus told the others to fall back. The remaining soldier charged at Marcus, who picked up his sword. Marcus suddenly realized the effects of the stone were no longer working, but it was too late. The soldier stabbed him and he fell. The men of the village watched this and ran to his aid. They took the soldier prisoner, but Marcus could not be saved. He lay on the ground remembering the words of the stone, "The finder of this gem, while under an enemy's power, will find strength, speed, transcendence, until his final hour." He knew he was dying but he was at peace. He succeeded in saving his village and more importantly, his sister. He closed his eyes and died a hero.

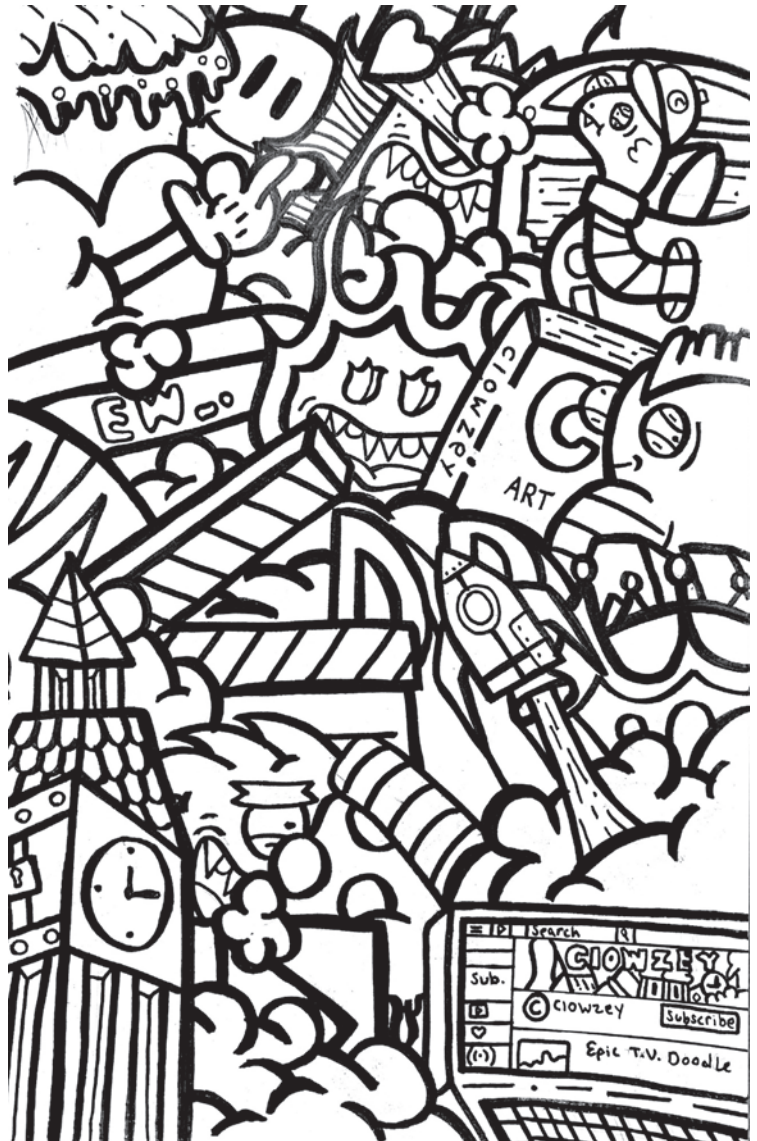
The storyteller opened his eyes, beads of sweat rolling down his forehead from the intensity of the story, He had always found it best to completely immerse oneself in

Marcus, qui sustulerunt gladium. Marcus subito intellexit effectus lapis erant, iam non operatur, sed sero. Miles percusserunt eum, et ipse cecidit. Homines de villa observabant, hoc et cucurrit ad eum. Tulerunt miles vinctum, sed Marcus non posse salvari. Ipse iacebat humi memor verba lapidem, "repertor huius gemmae, dum sub hostium potestatem, inveniet vires, celeritatem, transcensum, donec ultima hora." Scriebat erat mori, sed in pace. Ipse successit in salutare eius villa et quod maius est, suam sororem. Clausit oculos, heros mortuus est.

Fabulator operit globulis sudore provolvunt fronte eius a intensionem fabulae. Semper invenerat optimum omnino immergunt se in fabula sunt, dico enim quod sentio vere realis. Et concidit vultus eius aspexi vicani vasta visens. "Quid retulit tum?" unus ex eis rogavit. "Marcus quidem tribulationes transeirunt ad vitem finirem. Quidquid accedat si quidam servati erat, is, ergo nos, numquam videbit ut certe est." Illum sumens historiam sorbendum praebe aquae de utre aspiciebat. "Hoc est attendendum forsitan pretium ut heros esset" Stetit positus pallium in umeris portabitur vivere. "Certus sum ut omnes habeatis aliquid enim vos pugnet sicut habuit. Significationem indiges invenire in illum si nihil demum." Suus vox acerbum mutavit et vorsus caram statuam eorum derigit. "Illum huc ponent, scis, suus heros est tam versum quam Marcus. Id huc ponent ut non decederas." Vicani incepunt murmurare, nonnullus ad fabulatori acerbe vident. Subito, duo armati custodes eum mobiliter deduxunt: populus suas fabulas non consumeret. Fabulator non obstantiam habuit; supero armo enerviter traxit. Fabulator mussavit, "Omni heroes quos

the story they were telling for it to feel truly real. The villagers looked crestfallen and tristful. "What was the point then?" one of them asked. "Marcus went through so much tribulation only to meet his end. Regardless if some were saved, he, and thus also us, will never see that to be sure." The storyteller eyed him, taking a sip of water from his flask. "Perhaps," he noted, "that is the price of being a hero." Shouldering his pack and bedroll, he stood to leave. "I am sure you all have someone to fight for, just as he did. You need to find meaning in that if nothing else." His voice turned bitter and he pointed towards their beloved statue. "They put that here you know, your hero is as real as Marcus. They put it here so that you wouldn't leave." The villagers began to murmur, some looking angrily back to the storyteller. Suddenly, two armed guards briskly escorted him away: people were not to dethrone their myths. The storyteller held no resistance; he was dragged limply by his upper arms. The storyteller whispered, "All the heroes I have ever heard were fake." When they turned, he knew he would not be graced with a cell. His head hit the floor, and all was dark.

umquam audivi erat faslsos." Cum vertiunt, scivit non arcam decoraretur. Eius caput solum icit, et omne erat nigrum.



Soldier's Prayer

Bennett Clark '20

As the silver cross whistles in the wailing wind
he recites the Lord's Prayer to ease his soul.
Bloodied dirt cakes his forehead and sings the
scrapes that pepper his face. The snowfall
gently kisses his skin but shifts the once hard dirt
into grimy mud slowly swallowing the soles of his
coarse, cedar boots. The angel smothers the death
cries of fallen soldiers, and wails of the wind carry
the suffering of his brothers to his ears. His
eyes fixate on the corpse at his feet, a man
he barely knew but whose pale, blank face
will haunt him for the rest of his days.
A hurricane of gunfire drowns out the battle cry
of his comrade who fixes his rusted bayonet
to his gun. He knows that this was his last charge.
As his comrade dashes forward, dozens of canisters
rain from the sky. Their crash bursts the metal
exterior, releasing pungent mustard gas into the trench,
the stench violently mixing with casualties of war.
The gas fog blocks out the sun. Yellow
death creeps its way up to his and infiltrates his
nostrils. His nose crinkles so violently that he
plants his bloodied hand, armored in soiled
cowhide, over his mouth. He gazes into the
deadly mist and sees only faint flashes of rifle barrels
and outlines of men tumbling to the poisoned earth.
He says the Lord's Prayer once more to regain
a sense of tranquility, but thunderous roars of
cannons and ghastly cries remind him to call to
Him. There is no tranquility lying in this yellow hell.

Bleeding

Jason Arena '21

Will rested on a bench on the streets of New York, staring into space at the cloudy sky with empty brown eyes. A sixty-year-old man who looked eighty, his beard was scraggly and white, his frail hand rubbing his chin, clearly in deep thought. He had a black stitched hood over his head to warm himself from the cold weather, but also to hide his scars and himself. It's been years since he served in the Vietnam War, but the events of it seemed as real as today for him.

"Hey, how you doing, Will?" the elderly man with glasses interrupted as he walked by.

"I've felt better, but I'm moving along," Will responded weakly.

"Wanna get a drink tonight?"

"Maybe, Joe. Not sure all these drinks are too good for me."

"Come on, man. You've been an alcoholic ever since you got out of 'Nam."

"I don't enjoy it. I wish things were different," Will said slowly, and with his back aching, he rose off the bench.

Will arrived back at his dirty, run-down efficiency apartment in the South Bronx to try to get some rest for the night. He had just finished a long day bagging groceries. He hated when customers or employees would yell at him for being too slow or not understanding their questions. All the pressure and anxiety wore him out. As he entered, he looked around at the clothes, ash trays, and fishing supplies scattered everywhere. He lumbered to the bathroom to take some ibuprofen for the pain in his back and neck, then trudged over to the pallet he called a bed. As he tried to lie on the bed, his back cracked and began to burn, and his neck, which he could hardly turn, caused a sharp, jabbing pain. When he finally lay down, it was arduous to even find a comfortable position on the pillow for his neck. Will stared at the wall for a long time. He fooled himself with the idea that he could actually fall asleep without fear of the same recurring nightmares.

He woke up around midnight and walked outside to check the mailbox. He strolled back to his apartment and felt wide awake. Tomorrow, he would spend a day alone fishing by the pier. Maybe he'd see if Jerry wanted go fishing with him. Maybe they



could find a boat to take out, he thought. However, as he turned to return to his apartment, he heard a loud boom, causing him to jump as he fearfully gazed at the sky glowing with colors of red, blue, and white.

"Watch out, Rabbit, I hear gun-shot!" he cried out, and he dived down behind a trash can along the street, mumbling to himself and crazily twitching his fingers. Within an instant, his comfortable feeling vanished. His face revealed horror with wide-eyes and a gaping mouth. His mind raced, and his fear intensified as the fireworks continued to explode. "Sweet Jesus, they're all over the place!" His heart began to pound, which he tried to suppress by placing his trembling hand on his chest, sweat covered his forehead, and visions of the Vietnam War frightened his mind.

The two young teens, Will and his close friend nicknamed Rabbit for his large ears were sitting down in a pitch black jungle along foggy mountains on lookout. It was quiet, and unusually not raining on the still muddy surface. They were trying to survey the area, with a plan to attack the nearby Vietnamese camp the next day. Rabbit always had a smile on his intelligent face, with freckles and glasses. They both loved the same music in Elvis Presely and Frank Sinatra, and they needed each other to stay sane during the long months in battle.

"When we get out, me and you Rabbit. We're gonna live the life. Me and your son will compete at little league games, and we'll both watch football on Sundays," he remembered telling Rabbit. The two were talking and giggling as silently as they could until Will told a joke about Commander Smith, causing Rabbit to laugh.

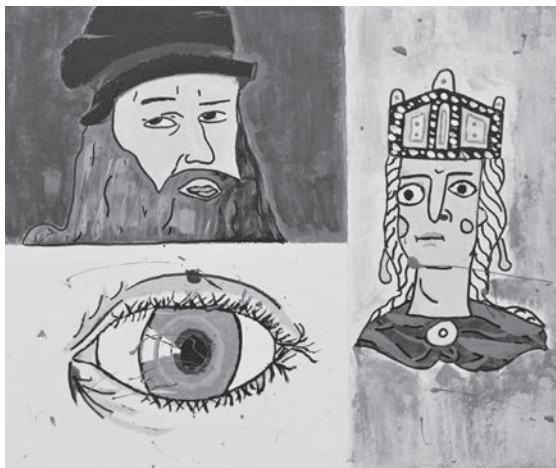
"Hahahaha!" he chuckled loudly. "That



idiot, he should—"

In mid-sentence, a bullet flew directly through Rabbit's upper chest, knocking him to the ground, cold dead. Blood oozed out an open wound the size of a fist, while the look of terror and shock filled the lifeless, innocent blue eyes of Rabbit. He was dead, a young man of nineteen killed in a war he didn't even want to fight in. As he lay there motionless, his brown hair moved gently in the breeze, while gunshots continued to fly by in the darkness. Will did not have any time to pick up the body, so he retreated, leaving Rabbit's corpse behind until in the morning where the body was already picked apart by vultures and insects. "Why did I have to tell the joke?" Will wept openly.

It never made sense how two teens who had thought of such promising lives before the war could end up with such unfortunate fates. Will, at eighteen, had dreams of being a farmer and living a good life with a beautiful girl at home and a Corvette in the garage. He had dreams of traveling the



world and climbing mountains, yet all those dreams dissipated after he got the call-up to join Vietnam. A kid who still loved girls, magazines, and rock music, was heading into a bloodbath where he'd have to shoot other human beings and watch others die. It wasn't fair.

The horrible memories flooded his mind as the fireworks continued to flare late in the night. By now, he was in awful condition, and his heart rushed in intense waves. He managed to stand up as he tried to hobble over to the bar across the street.

Will slowly trudged through the tall grasses and bamboo shoots reaching up to his chest, along with a pack of U.S. soldiers. His hands were shaking as he held an M-14, feeling the cold black metal resting against his hand. Along with his rifle, a grenade was securely fastened onto his waist for easy access. Will heard rustling near-by indicating potential enemies. "Movement on my left," he whispered to the soldier directly across from him. As he scanned the area around him, he noticed something odd within the grasses, two olive green boots with the heels of the feet sticking upward as if crouching.

Clearly, the person did not belong to the U.S. army. The soldier with the olive green boots remained still and motionless as if preparing for something. Will reluctantly reached to his waist and slowly placed the heavy grenade in his hands. Without thinking, he unpinned the grenade and lobbed it high in the sky over the tall grass and accurately into the man's direction.

As the grenade flew, Will cringed at the sight in fear of what he was about to do. In seconds, a loud boom alerted the entire area as an eerie shriek could be heard in the middle of it. Will shook his head in disbelief as the shoes once crouched upwards now lay in a sleeping position. It was his first kill of the war at age twenty. He tried to convince himself that this was a part of the war, that it's just part of the process to kill other people under the circumstances. Yet, he couldn't erase the eerie shriek from his mind or the rapid gunfire following the incident. He never saw the man he killed, only a glimpse at his feet, but he'd killed a man who had a life, a story to tell. He may have been a priest, a scholar, and Will had just ended his story, he imagined.

Will made his way into his haven, only to be greeted by more loud music, but at least the stampede of fireworks had halted. He took a seat on the black stool by the counter and stared off into the distance of the crowded, noisy bar.

"Yo, old man, what do you want to drink? You look worn out," the bartender interrupted.

"Just a beer. I wish you would turn down this music a bit," Will said with baggy eyes.

"Relax, it's the fourth of July. Our bar is open to partying."

"Alright, just give me my beer," Will

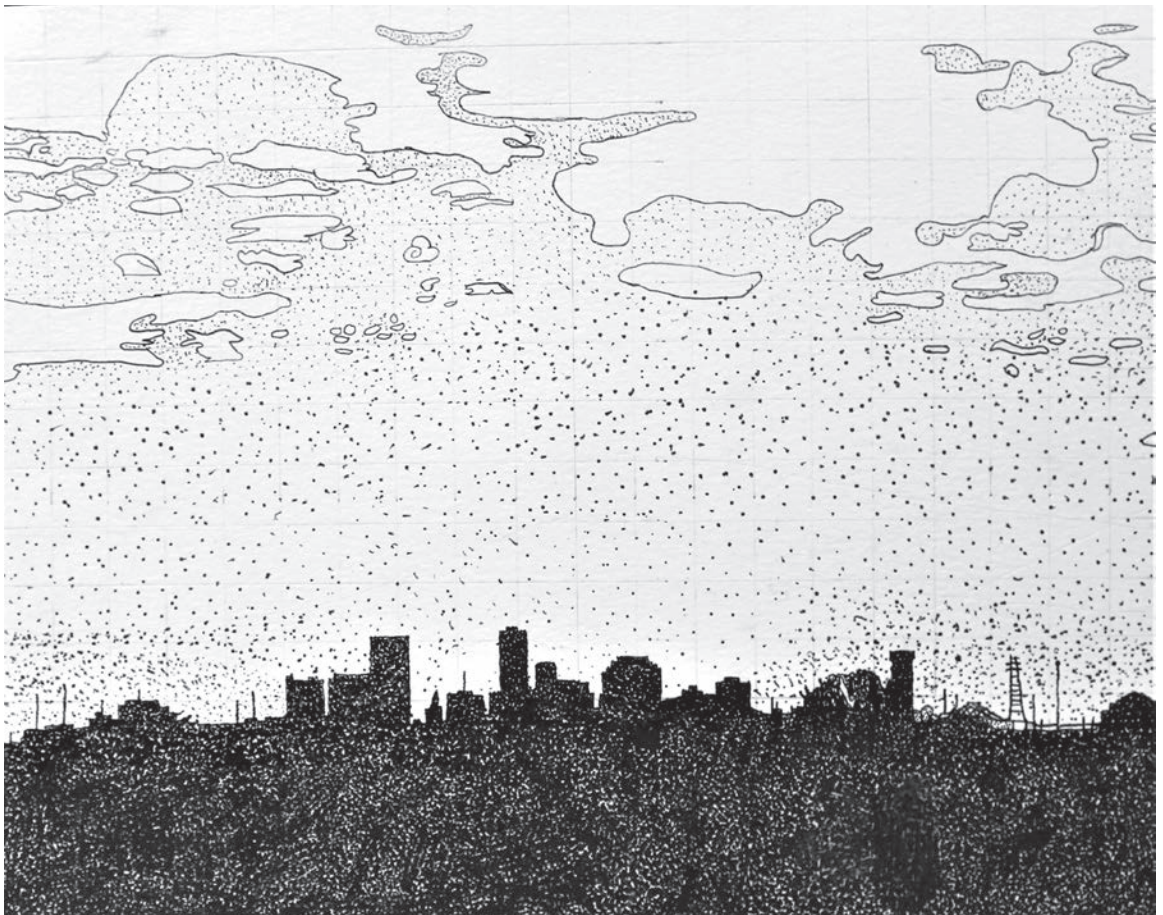
demanded.

The bartender came back with the drink and placed it on the counter. "Enjoy," he muttered.

As Will stared at the scene in the bar, he noticed people talking, laughing, and having a grand time. He glared at the young men flirting with girls, and groups of friends laughing over a series of jokes. He remembered in his youth of times where things were that simple, but not anymore. He never wanted to kill a human being, or watch

someone he cherished die before his eyes by gunfire. He blamed the incidents on himself. He looked into the mirror behind the bar. His face looked old and tired.

As Frank Sinatra's "That's Life" played in the background, and as the booze filled into his system, numbing his skin with each drink he ordered, he could feel sadness welling up from inside, and the warm tears felt like blood on his face. Another holiday, and another long night, but the bleeding never stopped.



Tale of Two

Justus Voltolina '20

War never changes no matter where it takes place. The war itself wasn't the issue, though. It was what came after: the foreign occupation, the poverty, the destruction, the lack of basic needs being met. Everything was in shambles compared to what once was. The city that once was a thriving hub of culture was now a shadow of its former self, filled with scavengers searching through the ruins hopefully just to survive until the next day. Some survivors were lucky and had made it out but those who stayed played a far more dangerous game. With the foreign occupation of the Russian army it was like a game of cat and mouse. Always moving and always hiding.

"Tariq? Tariq wake up we have to go," said a boy to his brother.

"What, why?"

"They're coming and it's past the curfew."

"Alright. Grab your things, then Pias, and we'll head out through the back," said the older of the two boys.

Tariq grabbed his pre-packed bag and checked over it once more before starting quietly towards the back of the collapsed building. It was dangerous for the two of them to be out past curfew, but they didn't have much of a choice considering the circumstances. Tariq and Pias while both old enough to survive but shouldn't have had to do so alone. The life they lived was a cruel one.

Tariq met with his brother out behind the broken building watching the glaring lights shine from those who wished them harm. Curfew ended with sunrise, so they were almost safe from the would be pursuers. Once daybreak came they had a slight bit

more freedom to roam the streets under the watchful eye of those who ruled their land now. Tariq led his brother quietly through the remaining hours of the night only stopping to quietly rest in another of the once great buildings that marred the skyline.

As dawn broke and the sunlight started to shine on the ruined city, the two boys started to stir. Aside from the rubble-filled streets lined with collapsed buildings, the city contained remnants of a war-torn past, everything from old, broken tanks to abandoned roadblocks that still stand. One such tank sat on the side of a busy street filled with commuters on bicycles. As long as daylight lasted they still had to work to provide and this was the most efficient form of transportation. The boys had stopped to rest against the tank as they watched the bikes pass. Tariq heard the faint rumble of his brother's belly and it spoke volumes to the state the two boys were in. Malnourishment was an understatement but it wasn't like they could just go buy food at the market. They're just two orphans with no money, job, or help. Pias had the bright idea to sit next to the cannon, the warm metal heated by the sun felt good in the otherwise harshness of winter. Tariq caught on to his brother's bright idea and climbed atop the rusted war machine. They simply sat there with their feet dangling like children on a ledge as some bike traffic rode past quietly on the dusty road. Enjoying the comfort that the warm tank brought in an otherwise cold and ruthless city unearthed memories of a time before this that Tariq could barely grasp at. It was a comfort not afforded

to most that still lived within the city limits but at least they got to experience it in that one fateful moment of love with one another. The moment was short lived however as the local occupation didn't like such a display. The foreigners deemed it an act of defiance to think about what their once great city looked like and how they fought to try and protect it in what proved to be a fruitless effort.

The boys had to get moving or they'd be arrested and who knows what would happen to them. They're just two kids with no parents after all so who would notice if they just vanished one day. They had to be cautious and careful but this was the time for neither as Tariq could hear the faint sound of what he'd come to know as Dustrunners or more simply put, an army patrol.

"We've gotta get moving bud. You know how they feel about 'vagabonds' now," He said sadly as he started to climb off the once great machine of war much to the dismay of his younger brother.

"I wish we could just go back to before all this started Tariq. I'm sick of living in fear." He

spat the last few words with a venomous tone.

"I am too."

The dynamic duo had to find someplace to stay for the night, and if they didn't start looking now, then who knows where they would end up at the end of the night. The journey through a city so familiar but still so foreign to them was always interesting, especially for Tariq who remembered what once was and what was now. The dilapidated buildings that marred the now dead landscape seemed so empty and depressing compared to the fond memories of a lush green land with marvels everywhere the eye could see. The rubble that lay there now was merely a ghost of the once innovative and breathtaking city. They searched for a place safe enough to rest their heads and intact enough to keep them warm in the cold nights. It was an endless balancing act, teetering on the edge of life and death each day in which one wrong move by either of the two boys could lead to the end of them both in this war torn world.





Passenger on the U.S.S. Corona

Bryan Lagarde '20

The calendar tracks the days
one passing into the next
and measures the flow of time
in equal sized squares
hanging on my wall.
A day is another day.
They are all the same,
today, tomorrow, and yesterday
blending together in my memory,
separate only on the grid.
I continue in the same direction
sitting alone at home,
yet also riding the steady and inevitable
current of time. On the horizon,
I see a faint marker and past it, haze.
The calendar is an empty ocean,
stretching through March, April
and beyond, filled with the nothingness
of my quarantine days.
Were I the captain of this ship
I could turn around and sail back
to more pleasant times of youth
away from the ominous marker
that looms closer
and stands like a mighty gate
to the future. Nearly upon it now,
I see the keyhole shaped like a diploma.
Soon I'll pass through and beyond,
leave the familiar waters of
Brother Martin to discover new shores.



BROTHER  MARTIN