

The Scrivener Spring 2015

1 The De Smet Jesuit High School Literary
Magazine

Editor

John Higgins

Moderator

Robert Hutchison

Special Thanks to

Laurie Kohler and Emily Dames

Table of Contents

Cover: Picture by Seth Akakpo-Lado

<i>Question Mark Exclamation Point - short story by Patrick Bowey</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Journey - poetry by Sam Davis</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Sandwiched Between Oreos - short story by Ian Normile</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Whole - poetry by Andrew Kafoury</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>artwork by Alex Trunko</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Ray's Trip to the Pharmacy - short story by Isaac Williams</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Ascent - artwork by Christian Weishaar</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>The Dance - short story by John Higgins</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>artwork by Jacob Stange</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Ode to a Muni Bond - poetry by Mr. Andy Lange</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Work in the Field - artwork by Angelo Marcallini</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>The Water - short story by Suneh Bhakta</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Sad Child artwork by Connor Larson</i>	<i>56</i>

LITTLE GREEN MEN

by Jonathan Strickland

Little Timmy sat alone in his bedroom; a summer breeze flowed through an open window rustling curtains and papers alike. Sitting cross-legged on the oak floor, Timmy admired his most recent creation: two large armies of toy soldiers stood opposite each other on an imaginary battlefield, one army green, and the other grey. Making sure not to knock any of them over, Timmy stood up and, assuming the role of General for the green army, gave a hardy salute. He then knelt down and was about to start what seemed to be the battle of the century in his bedroom when his mother called from the kitchen.

“Timmy! Lunch is ready, come wash up!” Her somber tone went unnoticed by Timmy as he was too perplexed with the plastic spectacle on the floor.

“Just a minute mama!” He shouted, hoping she could understand that he was desperately needed to command his soldiers.

“Not in a minute, now Timothy!” She countered. With a sigh of momentary defeat, Timmy went downstairs to eat

“I made your favorite chicken soup dear,” she was seated at a small table they kept in the

kitchen; the dining room was too big for just the two of them. “When you finish eating and clean up your bowl then you can go back to your toys okay?”

“Okay mama!” Timmy piped as he sat in the chair opposite her.

“So are you excited to start kindergarten honey?” His mother asked.

“Do I *have* to go mama, can’t I just stay home?”

“No sweetie, you and all the other boys and girls have to go.” They both enjoyed a hefty bowl of soup and Timmy did as his mother asked and cleaned up his dishes after they were both finished. Before galloping back up to his room, Timmy waited a moment.

“Mama, when is Papa coming home?” he questioned. His mother stopped washing her bowl and placed it on the counter beside her. She leaned her hands on the sink and took a deep breath.

“It’s bad luck to ask that Timmy. You’re daddy Richard’s doing some real good work for those kind folks across the ocean; they need his help. Now go play, and know that your papa loves you more than anything in the world.” Timmy walked out without a word.

“*Then why isn’t he here*” he thought. Back up in his room, Timmy’s attitude reverted to its cheerful innocent self as he commenced with the grand battle he had orchestrated. Waves of little green men collided against a brick wall of grey soldiers. “We’re losing men!” Timmy said in a deep tone. Followed by various *bangs* and *pew-pew-pews* Timmy said again in the disgruntled voice, “We need to push them back! You, you, and you with me!” He grabbed the soldiers to whom he had called and pushed them forward into enemy lines. One figurine stood out in front of the group; Timmy’s hands whipped around knocking over grey troops in the man’s wake as he cut them down almost single-handedly. His comrades fell all around him as he continued onward.

A young man stood cramped inside a small iron boat, surrounded by younger and older men who all looked just as uneasy as he. The sky was a dusty grey as they sloshed forward towards an equally gloomy beach. Ocean spray regularly covered the huddled men, and off on the distant sands they could hear the crackles of gunfire and thuds of explosions; the closer they crept the louder it all grew.

“Door drops in 30!” a deep voice shouted from a heightened seat at the back of the boat, his hands clamped around a small steering wheel. The young man looked over his gear one last time

out of anxiety. Someone next to him, a kid, no older than 17, pulled out a small silver cross from under his shirt, kissed it like it were the love of his life, and quickly tucked it away. His lips mouthed a short prayer as he stared blankly at his boots. Thinking it might be his last chance to do so, the young man pulled out a small photograph from his pocket; a boy, his son, smiled at him with all the joy and innocence any child should have.

“Hey Richie!” a man behind him shouted over the roaring winds, “Helluva vacation eh?” Richard felt a strong hand pat his soldier. “We’re gonna be okay man, just get up the beach fast as you can, you’ll see your boy again I promise!” Suddenly, an explosion rattled the boat to its core, gears started spinning, and the front wall of the vessel dropped.

“OUT, OUT, OUT!” one of the soldiers cried. Bullets snapped through the floating coffin as both boys and men charged out onto the sloppy red sands of France; the whole place smelled of death and nothing could be heard above the unending drone of gunfire. Richard ducked his head and charged forward, sand spat up at his heels as he dove behind a jack-shaped hunk of metal where a group of still-breathing bodies were huddled. The men he was with only moments ago were gone; they either didn’t make it out of the Higgins at all or were torn apart by heavy German machineguns. The boat itself had been engulfed



artwork by Zachary Katigbak

in a hellish flame.

“Move up the beach! Get to that seawall NOW!” an older man boomed.

“Fuck this I’m staying!” another man shouted back.

“If you stay here you DIE here corporal! Now move!”

“MORTARS!”

Richie heard the blood-curdling cry too late as the world erupted under his feet.

Timmy and his mother sat down for dinner. “I made chicken soup.” His mom said tenderly, “your favorite.” They both sat with full bowls and ate in silence.

Breaking the quiet tension, Timmy spoke up, “the soup is delicious mama.”

“Thank you sweetie, I’m glad you like it.” She smiled wide at him and they continued eating. “Are you excited for your first day of second grade tomorrow?” she asked.

“Oh boy am I, Joe and Dillan are going to be there and we’re going to have lots of fun.” he excitedly responded.

“You’ll have a wonderful time,” his mother affirmed, “I just know it.” After they finished, Timmy was cleaning their bowls and cups while his mother wiped off the table.

“Hey mama,” Timmy said softly.

“Yes dear?”

“When is papa coming home?”

INVEST

by Mr. Andy Lange

Invest when you’re young
Uncle Sam does allow
Tax-free it will grow
If you pay taxes now

No thank you tax man
I’ll keep what is mine
Go get someone else
Keep your 1099

Money markets and CDs
I guess but no thanks
Need no FDIC
Leave those at the banks

At Merrill, Schwab, or Ed Jones
You will find
An account just for you
It’s one-of-a-kind

Stocks and bonds; ETFs
Many investments to try
Tax-sheltered returns
Can grow to the sky

Retirement savers unite
We’re well on our way
The vehicle for us
Is a Roth IRA

SANTA CLAUS ISN'T COMING TO TOWN

by Christopher Noonan

My name is Brian. I was in sixth grade. Christmas was coming around. I was so happy I could barely hold in my excitement. It was very rainy at school one day, so for recess I just hung around and worked on my homework. While doing so, I see my little brother Tommy talking to his best friend Jordan about what they wanted to get for Christmas. I wanted to listen to my brother to make sure I got him the thing he wanted for Christmas.

"I really hope that I get that new RC Airplane for Christmas! Those things look so cool!" Tommy said. His face lit up with excitement. I knew I had bought the right thing then.

Jordan shared Tommy's excitement. "Dude, those things are so awesome! I've been begging my parents to get me one for Christmas. They keep telling me how expensive it is so I don't know if they will get it for me or not."

Tommy had a look of confusion on his face. "Um, why would you ask your parents to get you one for Christmas? Can't you just write a letter to Santa and he will make it for you?"

"Oh, you don't know yet do you?"

"Know what?"

Oh no. It was happening. The bomb

was just about to be dropped on my little brother. The truth about Santa Claus. I wanted to get up and stop Jordan right then and there. But for some reason, I couldn't move. I should've moved. But I didn't. I stayed where I was, and watched Jordan tell Tommy the truth. I felt like a statue about to witness a tragic event, and helpless to do anything about it.

Jordan gave a little chuckle and said "I can't believe this! You are such a child!"

"What? What is it? Just tell me!"

"Dude, Santa Claus isn't real. He's just a made up character made by parents. I still don't know why they would come up with such a fake lie."

Tommy's face lost all its color. "How could you say that? Santa Claus is real! He is!" Tears started coming down his eyes.

"Tommy, get a grip of yourself. Face the facts. Do you really believe that some fat man could travel millions of miles in one day? On a sled with reindeer no less! Oh, and if he's so fat, how does he even get into the chimney's?"

"He uses magic" Tommy said in a soft voice. Jordan started laughing

again. Louder than before.

"Magic?" Jordan said, still laughing. "I can't believe you still believe in this baloney! You are such a child!"

Tommy, with tears in his eyes, pushed Jordan out of the way and started running. I got up from my chair and went up to Jordan. "What the heck man! Why did you do that?"

"What did I do?" said Jordan "He was gonna find out sooner or later anyways."

"Well it should've been later!" I said. I then start running after him. He ran out of the school doors into the storm and started running back home. When I ran out the door, I lost sight of him. He was still young, so I knew the only place he could run to was back home. Luckily, I knew a shortcut back to our house he still didn't know about. It was a path in the woods that only I and a few of my buddies knew about. The rain made it harder to go by this path, but I just had to make it before Tommy. While running back home, my mind started racing. It was my job to bring Tommy to and from school safely. Now he's off all by himself and it's all my fault. Why didn't I stop Jordan when I had the chance? I was so scared. If I didn't get home in time before Tommy... actually, I didn't want to think about that. I started climbing over logs, rocks, mud holes, everything. I tried climbing this small cliff, but the rain made it all slippery. I grabbed onto a branch to pull me up, but the branch broke! I started sliding back down the hill and I landed on my leg. I heard something crack. It was the most

excruciating pain I have ever felt. I had to limp the rest of the way through the woods.

When I got out of the woods, I saw that I beat him back to the house. I limped back to our house and I waited awhile for him to come home and talk to him about this whole Santa Claus business. I must have waited for hours. Where the hell was he? Did he get lost in the storm? I just waited and hoped he was ok. I wanted to go look for him by myself, but then I might get lost myself. I knew I needed to wait for my parents. Oh man my parents. What were they going to do to me? Tommy was my responsibility. Why didn't I stop Jordan?

By the time my mom and dad came home, they asked where Tommy was and why I walked with a limp. I told them what happened and that he hadn't returned home yet. My mother tells me to go to bed and everything will be ok. I could sense a disturbance in her voice. A sense of worrying. I went upstairs in my room and lay in my bed. I just stared at the ceiling thinking. I couldn't believe what was going on. It was all my fault. I couldn't sleep so I started my way back downstairs. I was halfway down when I see my mother and father talking to each other.

"Honey," my father said, in his most soothing voice, "everything is gonna be alright. I just know it is. The police said they will send out a search party and they will find him safe and sound. Don't worry."

"How can I not worry!?" my mother yelled. Tears were coming down her cheeks. "Our son is missing and you're telling me to not worry?! I'm

a mother! It's my job to worry! I just know something bad happened, I just know it! I can feel it."

"Honey, it's gonna be fine. He probably just got lost. The police will find them."

"I can't just sit here and wait while my baby boy is alone. I'm going out to look for him too."

Just then, the door bell rung. My mother quickly ran to the door and opens it. At the front door is a police officer. He took off his police cap and looked at my mother, his eyes filled with regret, like he was about to say something drastic. He told her "I'm sorry ma'am. We found your boy Tommy."

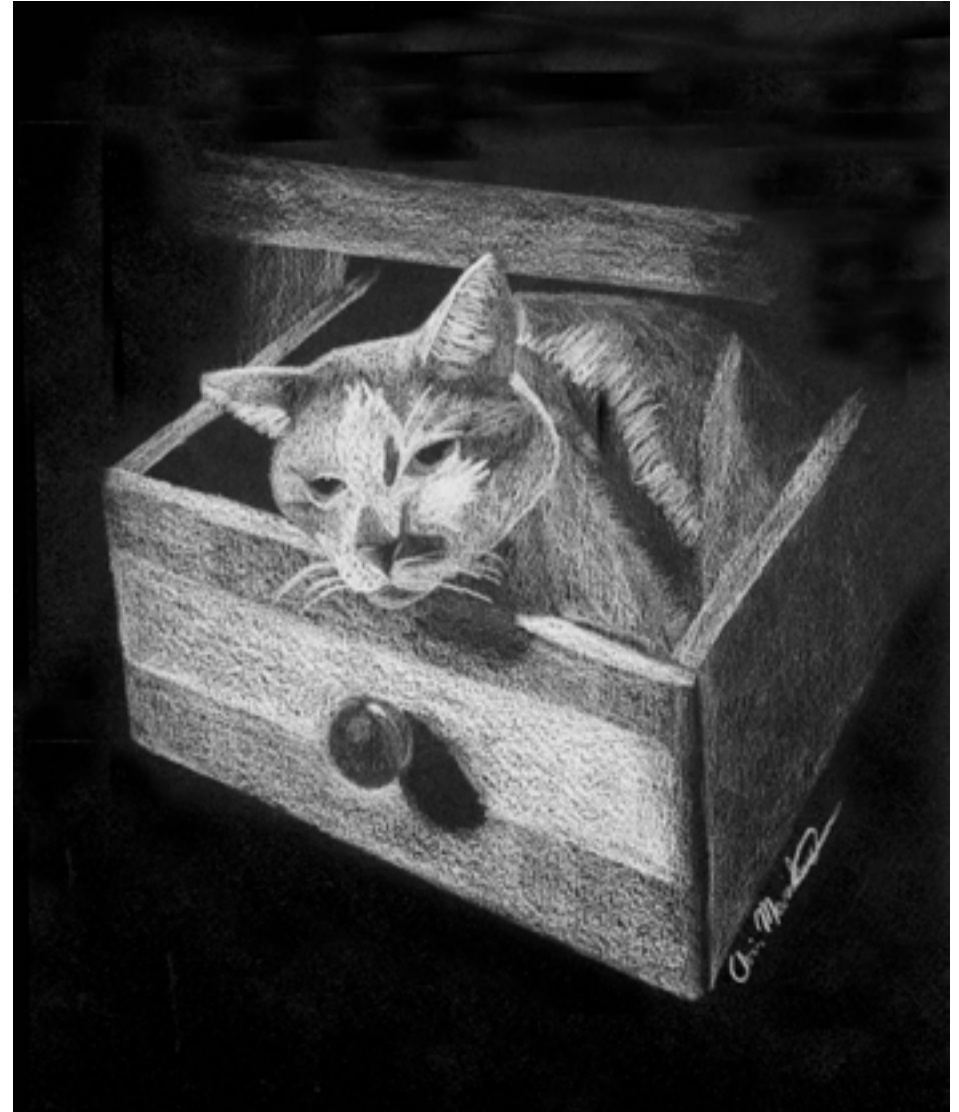
"No...no." My mother started falling down, like her legs just turned to jelly. "NOOOO!" she yelled. She started crying like I've never seen before.

My dad grabbed her and held her tight.

The police officer took a deep breath and said "We found him on the side of the road. Pretty beat up. We believe he was hit by a car. The driver must have gotten scared and dragged the body to the side of the road. I'm so sorry for your loss. I have a little daughter myself. Not much older than your Tommy. If you need anything, don't be afraid to call." And he gave my father his card, and went back to his police car and drove off.

I couldn't believe it. My little brother was dead. He died sad. If people die, they should die happy and with no regrets. My brother died with the loss of his imagination. I was never able to give him that RC Airplane he wanted. It now just sits on his old dresser, still wrapped, with the tag saying:

To: Tommy
From: Santa Claus



artwork by Chris Mausshardt

PARABLE OF PREPARATION

by Matt Meyer

A man just out of college named Henry visited home to get some tips from his dad. At three o'clock the next day, Henry had a very important job interview. Henry didn't think that he could get the job.

Henry asked, "Dad, what should I do to prepare myself for the job interview tomorrow? I am very nervous about it, and I need help."

His dad told him he needed to have faith, do his best, and study hard.

That answer didn't satisfy Eric, and he was still nervous.

His father noticing this asked, "Son, have I ever told you of my old college friend Eric?"

The son answered, "No, I don't think you have."

His dad told the story, "I was just about your age, and it was the week before final exams. My friend and roommate, Eric, took an Organic Chemistry class. The class was so difficult that the class average was around a 50%. To help with this, the teacher curved the class, and he proposed a question to the students. The teacher said, 'Students, I know we have covered a lot in this class, and I

also know that some of you are just about done with it and ready for summer. So, I have come up with a proposition for you all. You can have your grade curved right now and not take the exam, or, for those of you looking to get that last boost in your grade, you can take the exam and have the curve applied after.' The teacher then asked for a show of hands. Roughly 70% of the class chose not to take the exam. The teacher stated, 'Ok, those of you with your hand up, you are done with this class. Congratulations on a hard semester of work. Have fun and be safe. You are now done with my class. You may go.' Now, there were only about fifty kids remaining. The teacher gave warning, 'This is the last chance you have. If you don't leave now, you have to take the exam.' Another twelve kids left. The teacher watched the last few walk out the door, and then he turned to his students. He said, 'For those of you remaining, I wish you luck. Study hard and come prepared. Thanks, class is dismissed.' Now, my old friend Eric was one of those few students remaining. I remember Eric studying for hours on end each and every day that week, and then, exam day came. Eric went to his exam. He read the first question, 'How many Oxygen atoms are in H₂O?' Eric was shocked. The entire exam was filled with about twenty ques-

tions just as easy as the first one. Eric filled out the exam, and he was done within about ten minutes. Eric turned it in and asked the teacher why the test was so easy. The teacher replied, 'You had faith. You believed. You knew all you had to do was try your hardest and prepare yourself, and I wanted to reward those who remained because of their faith in their abilities.' Son, anything can happen

tomorrow at your interview. So just like Eric, you need to prepare yourself the best you can, but most importantly, you need to have faith and believe. You can get the job. I know you can. You just have to know it. It's not about what the other seventy percent of the class does or believes; it's all about what *you* believe and what *you* do." Henry's father got up and left.

PARABLE OF THE TWO HUNTERS

by John Brennan

There once were two deer hunters. One was interested in hunting purely for the fun in obtaining his trophy and showing off his prized mounted deer head. The other hunter enjoyed the hobby for quite a different reason.

The second hunter prepared for the hunt by making food plots, cleaning up trails, making sure stands were safe, and even sighted in his gun. He had a map of the farm and set up game cameras to track the deer in advance of the season. This gave him information on the best place to hunt.

The first hunter didn't really care for all the prep work that should be done before every season.

On the day of the hunt the

first hunter shot carelessly and often with no regard to waste. If the size of the antlers didn't satisfy him, he walked away from the deer letting it lay dead to spoil.

The second hunter was methodical, patient, and clear in his purpose. His goal was to quietly wait for the largest deer, so he could share the meat of the animal with his neighbor who was without work and could not feed his family. He did not care about the trophy; only for the people who couldn't provide food on the table for their family.

The first hunter worried about his own selfish want for the biggest prize he could display. The second hunter, who was caring and giving, was the model for all hunters.

PARABLE OF THE FOURTH-LINE HOCKEY PLAYER

by Will Carter

After practice one day, a hockey coach began a speech about work ethic and growth. Then, one forward on the fourth line asked his coach, “Why do I put forth ten times more effort than the first-liners in practice yet still are not as good as they are? What is the point in trying if I will never be as accomplished as them?”

The coach dwelled on this question for a while, and finally replied, “Once, I coached a team up in Minnesota and I had two polar-opposite players. One was so skilled that he was a legend in Minnesota, and claimed to have the filthiest mitts in high school; I had him on the first line. The second player had played hockey all of his life, but never had the same talent as the first player; therefore, I put him on the fourth line. The first player never tried at practice and did not do any additional training, while the second player was on the ice every single day working on his fundamentals

and skills. When it came time to choose the captain for the team, I chose the fourth-liner.”

The fourth-line player looked at his coach in bewilderment, wondering why he would ever choose a fourth-liner over a star player as captain. The coach told him that a player can be the reincarnation of Mario Lemieux, but if he does not put the blood, sweat, tears, and every piece of his heart into the game, he will never be successful. In life, if you do not give one-hundred percent of your effort into something you strive to become, you will never reach your goal.

The coach then told the player, “I want the team’s captain to be someone who displays remarkable effort and encourages the entire team to equal him in his work ethic, and forming a stronger team as a whole. Fourth-liners are the heart and soul of the team.”

The player never complained about his skills again.

PARABLE OF THE STUDENT DURING FINALS WEEK

by Haydn Boldt

While finals week was approaching fast at DeSmet, every student was frantically trying to maintain their study habits and keep up with all of their subjects. For Johnny, however, it was another case. It had been the first day of finals and he knew he failed the first two exams. He had been desperately trying to stay on task and study as much as possible for every subject, but other events and distractions caught his eye keeping him from the books. Even though he realized he was putting off his work, Johnny complained to all of his friends explaining that it was just procrastination keeping him from studying.

“I really want to study but whenever I think I want to my mind tells me to put it off,” he would always say. “I am such a procrastinator.”

He then one day went to one of his good friends, Matt, and asked, “Why am I such a procrastinator?”

Matt looked at him and laughed, saying, “Procrastination is something that doesn’t exist. It’s made up; you just don’t have your priorities straight.”

Johnny said in reply, “What do you mean? I have my priorities straight, I just can’t study without

putting it off for a while.”

Matt asked him, “What if right now I said I have three million dollars waiting for you in the back of my car? All you have to do is wake up tomorrow morning at 2:00 and run all the way from your house to DeSmet. What would you do?”

Johnny, now laughing, said “I’d be right here waiting for you at 2:00 AM to bring me that two million dollars.”

“Exactly!” said Matt, “So you’re not a procrastinator. You just need to realize that people who achieve good grades on these exams understand how important this is to their life. Successful people know that in order to succeed they have to make it a mentality and set their priorities straight; make studying for the exams the only thing on your mind and when you complete that goal, you’ll feel so much better.”

As the next two days went by, Johnny walked out of DeSmet knowing that this summer was going to feel ten times better with a few more A’s riding on his report card.

PARABLE OF THE EMPEROR'S WISE DECISION

by Michael Tran

A long time ago in Ancient China, there lived an emperor who was wise and well-loved throughout the land. One day, the leader of his army came to him and said, "Your majesty, we have caught the man responsible for burning our crops. What shall we do with him?"

Some people thought that since the man had caused such damage within the community, he should be put to death immediately. The emperor looked at the man as the man looked back with embarrassment and shame. The emperor knew that the man was ashamed for what he had done. However, the emperor also knew that he should carry out some form of justice. He looked into the man's eyes and said, "I exile you from this great land."

The man was taken out into the wild and exiled. Most of the emperor's people thought this was fair, considering that the man only burned down a small portion of a larger crop and that death was too much of a punishment. However, others thought the emperor's decision was unfair, they believed that the emperor should have made an example out of the man and to show others that such an act made the community weaker.

One day, the emperor and his

son were walking in the market place when a monk came to the emperor to commend him for such a wise decision and gave him a blessing. The farmer that had lost his crops due to the man came up to the emperor. Filled with rage, he lunged at the emperor with a knife. The emperor's guards quickly threw him to the ground and threw him into prison. The emperor's son, traumatized from such an event asked his father, "Father, why can all the people not see that you made a wise decision, but must go and commit such cruel acts towards you?"

The emperor looked at his son and asked, "Son, when it rains how do the farmers feel?"

His son replied, "The farmers rejoice for they know their crops will flourish."

The emperor was pleased with his son's response and continued to ask, "Son, when it rains, how do the merchants selling their goods here in the marketplace feel?"

The son replied, "They would be disappointed, for one would be a fool to shop in the rain."

The emperor was pleased with his son's response and asked, "Son, when the moon is bright at night

and shines upon this land like the sun, how do the poets feel?"

The son replied, "The poets are well for they have such a beautiful event to write about."

The emperor smiled and continued, "And the robbers, how do they feel?"

The son replied, "They are angry for the light from the moon will give them away."

The emperor continued, "Son, in life, like the rain and the moon there will be people who look up upon it and look down upon it. The same goes for you and me in life, there will be people who look up upon us and look down upon us.

"What should we do with those that look down upon us?" the son asked.

The emperor replied simply, "Look up."



artwork by Zachary Katigbak

THE LONERS

by Ben Uxa

Will was having a great dream, like any other teenage boy would, when all the sudden the noise in which he hated the most went off, "Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep!" He woke up looking at a ceiling wall, and realized that he was awake and out of his dream. He rolled over and looked at his clock, and said "Ugh, I just want this week to be over." It was Monday morning and Will was dreading high school. He rolled himself down the stairs to the kitchen where his mom was making him breakfast and his dad was rushing around getting ready to go off to work.

"Mom, can I please not go to high school? Everyone is mean to me and I hate going to a place that I don't feel welcomed."

"But honey, you've only been there for about a week. Trust me; I know that you will be able to make friends. Just wait a little bit more; I know you will be able to settle in sometime."

"But Mom! Everyone does cruel things to me. I have had students yell at me, call me names, spit at me, laugh at me, and other cruel things."

"Well, have you told any of the teachers or principal? I'm sure

they could do something about it. How about your counselor?"

"I have, but they all just think I'm lying and tell me 'I have better things to do and worry about than a kid who is struggling in his first week of school.' Can you please do something?"

"Tell you what- if you are still upset by the end of this week, I will take you out of the school and place you at the other high school in town."

Will agreed and then eats his breakfast and got ready to go. Before he walked out the door, his mom says "Will, don't you ever forget that I love you." His father, still rushing around, did not say anything to his son, until his wife signaled for him to say goodbye.

He then shouted to Will "Have a good day and I love you too!"

During school, Will was still having a hard time fitting in with the people and lifestyle. He was tripped in the hallway by a student who looked like he could play in the NFL. Instead of saying sorry, he said "Watch where you're walking nerd!" Now Will couldn't fight back or say anything because the guy was ten times the size of

him and could probably kill him. But then Will thought maybe if he talked back and was beaten up he would be able to leave this school or get attention. So instead of saying anything, he just gave the mediocre kid the finger. When the kid saw him he gave him the devil's look and said, "You're dead." Will quickly ran away and headed for somewhere where he could hide- the bathroom. He hid in the stall, fearing that the monster would follow him. He then heard the door open and his heart started to beat as fast as a phone book in a dryer. He looked through the crack of the stall door, but could see no one. He then quickly texted his parents saying, "Help, I need to get out of this place ASAP. PLEASE!!!" When he looked up from texting, he saw the huge kid staring at him and said "Gotcha." The kid ripped open the door, and grabbed him and said "You're going to pay." Will tried pleading his case, but the kid just laughed in a creepy kind of way.

The giant was about to dunk Will's head in the toilet, when someone shouted "STOP!!! What the fuck do you think you're doing Chad? Are you seriously going to beat this kid up? You could ruin the team's playoff chances this season." It was Mitch McCoy, the quarterback of the varsity football squad, who came in to help save Will.

"Just because you're the team captain hot shit," exclaimed Chad Cunningham, the team's offensive

tight end.

"I know you have hated me ever since your high school crush fell for me instead of you, but if you have a problem, you come talk to me. I really do not want to have to tell anyone about this, especially Coach."

There was a complete silence in the bathroom until Chad shouted "FUCK YOU!" and walked out.

"Hey man, sorry you had to deal with that guy, he just is a big fat jerk, but I would never say that to him. My name's Mitch, what's yours?"

Having a look of confusion on his face, Will said "My name is Will Walton, nice to meet you."

M&M and invited Will to come watch their game on Friday night. After finding out that Will was good with numbers, he asked him if he would like to become their manager and statistician. Will gladly accepted, and they then gave each other a high five and said to each other "See you around."

When Will came home, he had a smile on his face. As he walked in the door, his mother rushed to him and said, "Are you okay? Oh my gosh, I saw your text and was nervous sick the whole day. What happened? I will take you out of there right away."

Will responded, "I'm fine mom, I actually have some good news,

but I will wait to tell you when dad gets home.”

At dinner his mother was anxious to hear what he was going to say, finally saying “Well, tell us what happened, c’mon I’m dying to hear the big news!”

“Okay!!! Are you ready...? I love this high school!!! I made some new friends today, and then I was asked to be their manager for the football team.” He then explained all that had happened that lead up to that point of the day. After it all, his parents were ecstatic and thrilled to hear that he made friends and loved going there. Both his parents had something to look forward that Friday night, which would be watching the football team play and most important seeing their son be happy. When Will went to bed that night, he was so excited to go back to private high school that he now loved. He was thinking about all the people that he would become friends with at his high school. He slept good that night, real good.

The football game that Will had been waiting for the whole week had finally come. During their time in the locker room, he noticed that neither Mitch nor Chad said anything to each other or went over the plays or did a pre-game ritual. They even didn’t look at each other. Chad was Mitch’s tight end, so Mitch depended greatly on him for protection and being a receiver. When Coach

told Mitch to lead his team away, Mitch had a grin on his face and stood up and yelled, “Everybody up! Now we got six minutes to play our hearts out, let’s take it to the field and show them what we are made of!!!” Will noticed that all the players yelled and were motivated by his words, except for Chad. He just calmly walked out of the locker room and onto the field. Throughout the game, the teams were neck and neck. Will could tell that there were several points where the team was not in sink throughout the game- While on offense, Mitch never passed it to his tight end Chad, even if he was wide open. He would frustrate the team because he decided to run the ball himself a lot of the times and he would always bitch to them and tell them what to do, even if they were doing this right. At one play in the game, Chad was tired of Mitch’s bitching, and instead of blocking the other team’s lineman, he let him run right at Mitch and hit him so hard that it looked like a bus had hit him at 100 mph. Coach called a timeout right away, and called the players over to the sidelines.

“What the hell is going on out there?!?! You two need to get your shit that together and stop acting like a bunch of bitchy teenage girls and start play the damn game like the superstars that you are!!! You guys got ten second left to give our team a victory, so go out there and win it for your team.”

Back at the huddle, Mitch

gave the play, and then when team went to the line of scrimmage, he went up to Chad and put his shirt and said “Hey, for one play let’s put everything aside and stop acting like me hate each other.”

When he was done saying that, all Chad had to say was “Whatever man.”

Mitch came to the line and got set, then yelled “HIKE!” He dropped back in the pocket, then saw Chad open and threw a deep bullet to him, which made the whole crowd go on their feet. Chad caught it, then soared into the end zone and scored the game winning touchdown. The whole team went nuts, and even Will ran onto the field to celebrate. Mitch ran up to Chad hoping for a chest bump, but instead found himself chest bumping the air.

In the locker room Mitch was given the game ball. This easily pissed off Chad- “What the hell! C’mon Coach you know if it wasn’t for me we would not be celebrating right now. I hate how you always do everything for Mitch; he’s such a suck up! That’s it, I’m out!” Chad stormed out of the locker room.

After all the players left the locker room after the game, Mitch realized that he forgot his phone in his locker. As he reached his locker, he heard footsteps walking through the locker room. It was Mitch’s top wide receivers, Cordarelle Revis and Scott McCanty.

“Man, why in da hell did Coach give Mitch da game ball. Dude can’t even carry this team. I hate how we do all the work and we bust our ass and he gets all the credit.”

Scott was nodding his head as Cordarelle said this. “Yeah, and I hate how he feels like he needs to control this team both on and off the field. He ain’t Coach, so why try acting like one.”

“Scott, you know he is Coach’s favorite? It’s because he acts like a fucking little suck up and most especially because his dad is loaded with money and if Coach don’t let Mitch do what he wants then his dad will stop being a booster. I hate how some people act like fucking know-it-all and get everything they want cause their parents are loaded.”

Mitch could not take hearing their conversation about him anymore, so he quickly grabbed his phone and quietly left the locker room.

“Cordarelle, you know we haven’t even gotten to the worst and most awkward part yet- Mitch is going to want to have an after party tomorrow at his house like he always does after every win. I don’t get why he feels like he wants to do this- whether it be to make friends or show off his home.”

“Yeah, he acts like a fucking dictator, and after we win, he feels like he needs to show his gratitude

towards us on da win.”

“Well Cordarelle, let’s just go but not talk to him and just stay on Chad’s side. I’ll even get every-one to do it so it could hopefully make a statement.

When Mitch walked out of the locker room, he saw Chad leaning on the fence by the football field and walked up to Chad and said “Hey man look, you’re a great athlete but the obvious choice for the game ball was me because I am the leader of this team and I’m the one who threw the ball. I know you understand this.”

“Are you fucking serious right now? You’re such a little bitchy dictator on our team, you feel you need to control every player’s life and tell what to do and what not to! You got to stop being so self-centered and listen to guys around besides your parents and Coach.”

Chad then walked away without saying anymore. Just as he was walking away, he heard a familiar voice and stopped to this.

“Mitch baby, you played great out there, you looked so sexy out there. I don’t care what anyone has to say badly about you, just know this- you were the best one out there and you carried the team on your back the whole entire time of the game.” It was Mitch’s girlfriend and Chad’s old crush, Lyla. She had smooth brunette hair, an amazing body, the face of an angel, and smelt like roses all the time.

After Chad heard her say that, he quickly turned around and rushed back to Mitch and Lyla. “Why are you into this control freak? He’s just going to control your life, and make you do things for his benefit and not give a shit about what you want to do. You should have someone who will love you with respect and give you excitement. That someone could be me.”

“Lyla honey, what is he talking about?”

Lyla was quiet and just tried to pretend like she didn’t hear anything. Chad looked very intrigued by this conflict. “Oh, you didn’t tell him?”

Chad looked very confused. “Tell me what?”

“Well Mr. Perfect, your so called girlfriend has had sex with me several times during your relationship and enjoys it, which is why we have done it several times.”

After hearing Chad say this, Lyla quickly tried to defend herself. “Baby I can explain! You see, I always have wanted to make love with you, but you seem to never be in the mood because you’re so focused on football. You never show how much you care for me, unlike Chad who has respected me and has shown love for me.

“You had sex with this prick! I can’t believe you would do something like this. You know how

much this is going to hurt my reputation and future? I could get in so much trouble. UGH! You’re crazy to think that I don’t care about you- I love you so much. For you to do something like this must mean that you don’t care about me. I need to leave and let this all sink in.” After this dispute, all three went their separate ways to think things over.

Since Chad lived close by his school, he walked home. We he opened the door, he shouted “Pops, I’m home. You here?” After saying this, complete silence had just flowed through the whole house. Chad did not like the thought of this, because he knew that his dad was probably out drinking, which he usually did almost every night. Chad did not have really anymore family besides his dad, his mother had left them around the time when he was in elementary school and he did not have any siblings. As far as living went, he lived in a very small house, and had numerous jobs to help pay for their necessities and to make ends meet, especially since his father was in no state to be able to have a stable job. Instead of Chad’s dad taking care of him, Chad had to take care of both himself and his father. Not only was Chad’s dad an alcoholic, but he also was an abusive parent. Whenever Chad did not meet his father’s needs, his father felt like he needed to give him a beating to teach him a lesson. All that Chad dealt with in life made him become more and more anger with the world. Chad sometimes wished

that his dad was not around, but then he would remember that he is the only person who has been in his life for so long.

While watching T.V., Chad heard stumbling footsteps coming up to his front door- he knew who it was and became fearful. His dad busted the door open, and stumbled through the house. When he stumbled upon the television room where Chad was, he just stared at him for a while.

“So, how’d my boy do out there?”

“It was great! We won and I got the game-winning touchdown catch! Although, I was not given the game ball. Instead it had been given to Mitch, which pisses me off, but it is what it is.” Chad said this while trying to block out the stench of alcohol.

His father looked at him in dismay. “Boy, what have I told you over and over? I want a winner in this household, someone who is always given the game ball! God dammit!!! If you can’t do that then I’m gonna have to give you a lesson!”

After hearing this, Chad knew that this was going to be one hell of a night for him. Before this happened, he popped open a fresh beer to take away his angers and sadness.

The next day, the whole team, including Will, went to a party at Mitch’s house. At the

party, Will noticed that most of the people were centered on hanging with Chad and leaving Mitch out in the cold for being a suck up. Mitch tried talking with anyone, but every person just turned their shoulder to him. Will also saw how Mitch was the only one not drinking at a party hosted by him. Will decided to join in a conversation with Mitch and not drink as well.

“So Mitch, how come you don’t drink?”

“Well, I just don’t want it to hurt my football career. Plus I don’t feel like I want to embarrass myself in front of anyone if I were to get drunk. The only reason I offered to have a party here was because I knew that I would not have been welcomed at anyone else’s house.”

As the two were talking, Chad stumbled upon them looking wasted.

“Hey everybody, look at these two losers here. You know that no one likes you guys. I can keep taunting you and you want do nothing about it.” Mitch just was silent and stared at him. Chad kept taunting them- “C’mon why you not want to fight?”

“Because I’m more civilized and know that my ass would be handed to me by Coach and my parents.”

“You’re such a goodie-goodie, you pussy.”

Mitch just stood there having a number of things going through his head. He really wanted to give Chad a lesson, but knew that there would be consequences. If he beat him up, Coach could get furious with him and bench him. Not only would his parents be upset him throwing a party, but they would especially hate for him to get in a fist fight. He himself would be put in danger because he knew that Chad would fight back. But if he didn’t fight back, the team and everyone at the party would see him as a weak person instead of the leader that he should be seen as. There was also a slight possible chance that someone at the party would feel the urge to call the police. This moment would affect the person that he is supposed to be and hurt everything that he has worked for up to this point. Mitch closed his eyes and took a deep breath. It felt like this decision took hours, but in real time it took about fifteen seconds. Finally, he walked up to Chad and without any hesitation, socked him right in the mouth and said “You get the hell out of my house, you drunk bastard!” But Chad would not go down without a fight, and tried fighting back but was easily beaten the crap out of since he was drunk. When Chad fell to the ground, Mitch still kept punching him. Each time he brought his fist back to wind up for another punch there would be more blood that was dripping from it. Will tried ever so hard to pull him back, but finally the rest of the team saw that Will needed

help and pulled Mitch back and told him to calm down. When Chad got up slowly, he went up to Mitch.

He did not say a single word but just stared at Mitch. Without saying anything, he just walked out of Mitch’s house and on his way home.

It was that time again, practice after the first day of the school week. After the fight occurred at Mitch’s house Saturday night, tensions seemed to be pretty high- neither Mitch nor Chad talked to each other, they didn’t even look at each other in the eyes, and there was just complete silence. The whole team tried throwing the whole event under the bus, but knew that the topic would somehow come up at some point.

“Dude, dude, dude, guess what?” Cordarelle Revis was rushing towards Chad.

“What?”

“You’re not going to believe this!”

“What? Dude tell me!” Chad was so anxious to hear what Cordarelle had to tell him.

“I was walking by Coach’s office, and I overheard him talking on the phone to what seemed to be a scout from Oregon about our great offensive player who made a tremendous touchdown for the

game winner!”

“Great for him. You think I give a shit about it?”

“Dude, Coach was talking about you; you’re the one who made the ‘tremendous touchdown’ last Friday.”

“That is probably the biggest load of crap that someone could give to me just to try and make me feel better. You know Coach is talking about Mitch.”

“No he’s not! You have always wanted to go to Oregon and play D1 ball and have the chance to go to the pros.”

“Yeah, but I’m still not believing you, because Coach doesn’t give a shit about where I go, all he cares about is Mitch and to make sure he goes to a great college. If I tried to impress scouts or try and get full rides to colleges to play ball, I would have to do it myself.”

“Dude, you need to start believing in yourself! Fuck Mitch! His pussy ass wouldn’t do shit at Oregon and we all know it, even Coach.”

“Dude, I’m still not believing what you say. Hell, Coach could be talking about our Tre Dawson.” (Tre had an impressive game-winning TD run about a month ago). “I’m not buying that he’s talking about me, I’m just not.”

When the players walked out onto the field, Mitch walked

past Chad. Before Chad could say anything, Mitch quickly told Chad “Please don’t tell Coach what had happened over the weekend, it would be beneficial for both of us.”

“It would benefit us both? Or would it just benefit you, ’cause we all know that even if I told Coach what happened, he wouldn’t do nothing and just let you be, but he would punish the hell out of me.”

As the team lined up for stretching, Coach walked by Chad and saw that he had a black eye, bruised chin and cheeks, and a busted lip.

“I see the father has not been so nice to you lately. You okay?”

“My father ain’t done squat to me lately.”

“Well, if it wasn’t your father, than who was it?”

“Coach, I’d rather not say.”

“C’mon Chad, I care about every player on my team and I want to know who did this to you. You are one of my most important assets to this team. I need you.”

Chad knew Coach was just blowing smoke up his ass, so he just replied, “Alright, fine. It was Mitch. But I know you’re not going to believe me because you feel he is a perfect person.”

Coach just stared at Chad. Finally he looked away towards the other players on the field.

“MITCH! Get your ass over here!”

Mitch walked over slowly and looked like he was going to shit bricks. “Yeah Coach?”

“So what’s this fight I heard about between you and Chad?”

“Well, you see- I was- he was- Alright, I only beat him up cause he was drunk at my house and calling me a pussy in front of everyone. I had to defend myself, you understand that Coach. Don’t you?”

At that moment, Chad had the look of the devil and seems liked he wanted to kill Mitch, and he knew that Coach was going to punish him hard.

“What the fuck is wrong with you! Chad you need to get your fucking heading out of your ass and start to use a word I like to call control. You’re done! You’re not playing this Friday, even if we really needed you.”

“Are you serious Coach? I can’t believe I’m the one at fault, when Mitch is the one who had people over at his house and supplied the alcohol!”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass about what Mitch did! You’re the one who is at fault. Now get the hell off my field!”

Chad just stared at both Coach and Mitch and finally turned around and stormed off the field. While rushing of the field, he took



artwork by Zachary Katigbak

off his helmet and threw it across the field. Will noticed this and quickly went to pick up his helmet and brought it back into the locker room. Coach just looked back at all the players warming up, and seeing that they all had stopped he looked dazed and confused. "Wanna run a play?"

As Will walked into the locker room and set Chad's helmet next to where he was sitting. Without saying anything, Chad took his helmet and banged into against the lockers. "FUCK COACH! FUCK MITCH!"

"Chad, what the hell is wrong with you?" Will knew that he shouldn't have said this.

Chad turned around and stared at Will, giving him the sense that he was going to beat the shit out of him. "What's wrong with me? What the hell is wrong with Coach and Mitch? That's the question that you should ask."

"Listen, I see that both of them are asses, but you need to calm down and try to block out all of the negativity that is in your life. It seems to me that you're not alone- you have the whole team on your side, I know they are."

"Why should I listen to you? Hell, you could just be doing this cause Mitch or Coach told you."

"I'm only helping you because no one else seems like they will. Tell you what, how about this Sunday night you come to the

youth group at my church. I think it would really be beneficial for you and help guide you on a path to greatness."

"No way! Ain't no way am I going to some place that tries to lift people up by telling them a bunch of BS." Chad quickly got up to walk out of the locker room.

"Fine, I guess I will just have to tell the principal that you're the one who pulled the fire alarm this morning."

"How in the world did you find out about that?"

"Let's just say I know people. So, you want to reconsider it?"

"Hrrgh. Fine, I guess I'll go to this worthless meeting with people who have no life."

"And Mitch McCoy has carried his team to the state championship game. Even with the absence of their star tight end Chad Cunningham, Mitch seemed to have carried his team through. Mitch is by far the best one-"

Will shut off his car as he pulled into his driveway. As he came inside to his home, his dad quickly rushed to him.

"What a game! They were unbelievable! That Mitch guy looks like a great guy, one who can become a great leader."

"Sure he is." Will just turned

away and rolled his eyes knowing that his dad was wrong and if he had known the type of person Mitch was he would take back what he said. "Were you even watching the game, we barely one. I bet if we had played Chad, we would have won by a lot more."

"Will, now you know how I feel about you taking sides with a criminal. He is no good at all and he is the type of person who is going to waste their life by doing stupid things."

"No, see that's where you're wrong. I know that Chad is just like you and me and that he has a heart and conscience, but he just does not know it yet."

"Will, stop fighting with me. Just believe what I am saying is true and he is bad news."

"YOU'RE WRONG!!!! You don't know him as much as I do. He could have a thousand problems going on in his life but just does not have the decency to speak out and ask others for help."

"Will, why are you being so stubborn with me? I am your father. You know what.... Go to your room!"

"Thank God, I was waiting for you to tell me that! I'd rather be up there then be in a room with someone as annoying as you!" Will stormed up towards his room, went in and slammed the door shut. "I hate how my dad never is proud of when I help people in

need, especially misfits like Chad. I just hope to God Chad finally finds a stronghold tomorrow."

Will waited outside the church doors for Chad to show up for a while now. Finally he saw Chad coming towards the church.

"Don't you just love being here? I mean, to know that Jesus is in the presence and that he is always there for you. Everything about this place makes it so peaceful and happy."

"Calm down dude. Stop making this place seem like this is the best place in the world. I mean, I would rather be at home right now watching Sunday Night Football than come here. I'm only doing this because I don't want you to let out the secret about me pulling the fire alarm. Now, how long do I have to stay?"

"You can leave when I say you can."

As they walked into church, they saw that a man was standing in the front pews with a group of other teens sitting around him. As Will and Chad walked up, the man said "Will, so glad you could join us this afternoon. I see you have brought another disciple."

"Hey Reverend Tim! I am so happy to introduce to you Chad Cunningham, a classmate of mine and an elite tight end for our football team. He wants to become

closer to God and become more open just like all of us. Isn't that right Chad?"

"Sure, whatever." Chad looked down after mumbling that.

Reverend Tim Tom looked very intrigued by Chad's character and personality. "You know Chad, can I bring you back to my office and have a talk with you and get to know you better?"

"Ahhhh, sure I guess."

"Great. Now for the rest of you I want you to work on the normal activities."

As the two walked into Reverend Tim's office, Chad had this look of frustration on his face. Reverend Tim Tom could obviously tell that Chad had some lifestyle issues. "So Chad, I can obviously tell that you have some personal issues in your life. Could you please tell me about them?"

"Why the heck would I want to tell you? You're not going to be able to fix them. I mean, that is if I had any."

"Chad, why do you keep blocking people out of your life who try to help you?"

"Excuse me? I get along with everyone in my life just fine. I don't need help for a guy named Reverend Tank Top to become happier in my life and with the people in it. If I ever had a problem I would take care of it myself."

"And so that would be beating someone or something up?"

"SHUT UP! You don't know me, so why do you feel that you need to help me?"

"Oh, but I do know you. Will and some of the others have told me about your problems and wanted to help you out but did not know how. So that is why they came to me for advice."

"I can't believe you guys." Chad just sat there in silence for a while.

Reverend Tim finally spoke out. "Chad, I'm only going to ask a simple question, and I ask that you give me an answer, and it can be simple as one word- What is the one thing you want most in life?"

"Respect." Chad still did not look at Reverend Tim.

The two sat in silence for a while again. Finally, Reverend Tim spoke out. "You know Chad. Jesus once said 'Do to others as you would like to be treated.' I think if you lived by this you could clearly see how to be a changed man in the world."

Chad let this phrase sit in his head for a while. After thinking about it, Chad spoke out. "It all started when my mom left." Reverend Tim Tom looked at him with a little smile.

After talking with Reverend Tim Tom for about an hour

and a half, the two walked out of the church together. "Chad, I want you to follow the ways that we talked about, and accept those who play an important part in your life. Remember- hold your friends close, and your enemies closer. I'll see you tomorrow evening." Chad turned and walked down the church steps, while having a little smile appear on his face.

As usual, there was tension in the locker room, but for once Chad had not started it. In fact, it was Mitch who had started it.

"So Chad, did you hear about the game on Friday? Looks like you have no value to this team anymore."

Chad quickly turned around and started walking towards Mitch. When Will had heard Mitch say that and saw Chad walking his way, he quickly rushed to hold back Chad and whispered to him to get him out of the trouble that he would be in.

"Don't do it man. It's not worth it, you are better than that. Just think of what Reverend told you last night. Just ignore him."

"How the hell am I supposed to ignore him when he does not know when to shout his fucking mouth?"

"Hey Hey Hey!!! What the hell is going on in there?" Coach rushed into the locker room after

hearing yelling from his office.

Will just responded by saying "Oh, nothing Coach. You know, it's just teammates being teammates. We like to tease with each other."

"Then, let's hit the practice fields."

As they were walking out into the practice fields, Mitch walked up to Will. "Hey man what hell! Why did you stick up for Chad back then? I was trying to get him to get angry so he would get benched for the championship game this Saturday. You saw how the team was out there without him last week. We were unstoppable."

"Are you kidding me? We barely won. You know what, Chad and the others are right. You are so self-centered and thick headed that you don't know how others feel. You know, Chad could be going through a lot of shit right now, and all he needs is a friend to help him along the way. You need to stop thinking about yourself and your role as a leader, and start helping those that lag behind."

Before Mitch could respond, Will quickly rushed up towards the front of the line.

While the team was practicing, a man in a dress shirt and tie with dress pants started walking onto the field. He walked towards Coach and started talking to him. Coach then looked towards Chad.

“Chad, come over here son.” Chad looked very confused, but quickly rushed over.

“What’s up?”

The man took off his sunglasses and looked at Chad very sickly. “Son, my name is Detective Harrison; I am with the detective unit for the Dallas Police Department. Son... well... oh how do I say this? Well, we found your dad dead behind a bar this morning. He died from alcoholism. After looking through every piece of evidence and connecting the dots, we suspect that it was not suicidal and that he just over dosed. I am really sorry to tell you this, if there is anything that you need please tell me.”

Chad just stared at the ground in deep silence. Finally he looked up at Coach. “Coach, may I please be excused from practice?”

“Oh course. If you need anything at all please let me know too.”

“I’ll be fine.”

After Chad left the locker room, he quickly rushed home. When he got home, he started yelling and screaming, and even started throwing objects about his house. He finally decided to call Reverend Tim’s cell number.

“Come on...Come on...Come on..... Hello Reverend Tim. Can I please spea k with you as soon as possible? I am in a huge emer-

gency. Please!”

About an hour later, Reverend Tim arrived at Chad’s house. “What’s up Chad?”

Chad stared at him for a while, and then just burst into tears saying “My dad’s dead!”

“Oh my gosh! I am so sorry to hear that. How can I be of any assistance?” Chad then had a long conversation with him about how his whole day went. After having a conversation, the Reverend left his house, but before leaving he gave him some advice.

“Chad, let Mitch be willing to come into your life. He will once he realizes his faults. And if he does not, well you still will have others including Will and I. Now are you sure you will be okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

The next day, Chad sat in silence everywhere he went. He talked to no one, and just sat as if he were waiting for something. In the locker room, Mitch walked up to Chad and sat next to him. “Hey man, I heard about the bad news yesterday, and I just wanted to say that I am sorry about what had happened to him. It is always hard to lose someone as close as a parent.”

Chad kept staring at the ground and mumbled “Go away.” It surprised Mitch that he would say this, mainly because he felt that Chad was going to say more

vulgar words or phrases. It made Mitch start to realize that maybe Will was right, and that he needed to start changing his ways in life.

As the team was sitting in the locker room, Coach walked in and said “Chad, I need to see you in my office for a minute.” Chad walked into his room still looking very depressed.

“Look son, I know I have been a hard ass on you this whole year, but the reason why I do it is because I care about you and I feel you are the one with the most potential out of all my players to make it to the pros. This is coming from the bottom of my heart, and I mean every word that I say. I am hard on you because I want to teach you lessons that can allow you to be the one from the team who succeeds the most. I also wanted to let you know that I talked to one of the coach’s from Oregon last week and he said that they really want a player like you, one who is unstoppable. They offered you a scholarship! They want you man!”

Chad just kept staring away into the distance. He finally looked at Coach and said “Is that all Coach?”

“Chad, what can I do to bring back the energy in you?”

“My father.”

“Come on Chad, I am for real. What do you want that will make you livelier, besides your dad?”

Chad finally looked up at Coach, took a deep breath and just said “An understanding on life.” After he said this, he got up and walked towards the door to leave Coach’s room.

“Hey, Chad.”

Chad turned around slowly. “Yeah Coach.”

“I just wanted to tell you that I am proud of you, and no matter what I still believe in you, and I know that you are the best on this team. So it’s time you started acting like a leader and show your teammates what you are made of. Take care now and get ready for the big game tomorrow.” After Chad had heard this, he turned and kept walking. As he walked away he had a little smirk on his face and felt a bit better. That quickly went away after he saw Mitch walking his way. As the two passed each other, neither said a word but just kept staring at one another. Each had been waiting for the other to apologize first and understand their fault.

“Well folks, today is the big day here in Dallas. Two of the city’s best high school football teams will be going head to head in the state championship game. Of course, there has been a lot of emotion within Mitch’s team, especially with the death of Chad’s father. I just hope that kid finds a way to block out his emotions and play the game of his life. And let’s hope to

see a great team effort, especially between the unstoppable Mitch and the horrific Chad. Now moving onto the coaches-” Coach turned off the radio as he pulled up to AT&T Stadium. As the team got ready in the locker room, there was a great sense of quietness in which no one spoke to each other and just went off into their own world and prepared themselves in their own way for the game that was ahead for them. Finally, Coach walked out of the coach’s office, looked around and said “You boys look ready.” He then turned towards Will and gave him a big smile.

“Will, why don’t you lead us in prayer on this beautiful day!”

“Yes sir, Coach!”

All the players gathered around in a circle and bowed their heads. When Chad saw that he had to hold Mitch’s hand, he refused.

“Ahh hell no! Ain’t no way am I going to hold hands with this guy!”

“Just shut the hell up and for once just act for 20 seconds that you like each other!” After Coach had yelled at him, Chad rolled his eyes and reluctantly grasped Mitch’s hand.

“Dear God, we thank you for this opportunity that you have given us, and we ask that you give us the strength and courage to go out there and play with all our hearts and minds. We ask that you

give us the ability to strengthen as a brotherhood and become one in order to reach the goal that we strive to accomplish. May we ask you that you block out all the hatred that we have against teammates and ask that you give those the strength to find peace and joy.” After Will had said that part, Mitch squeezed the hand of Chad and gave him a tiny smile. “And finally Lord, we ask that you allow us to come out with the win today and bring a state championship to this school. In Jesus name Amen.”

After Will said this, Cordarelle rushed to the center, which then made the whole team enclose in a circle and come closer to him. With their fists in the air, Cordarelle shouted “For sixty minutes, let’s play the game of our lives! We won’t stop ‘til the finally whistle blows! CLEAR EYES! FULL HEARTS!” In which the team responded “CAN’T LOSE!” The whole team then rushed out of the locker room and through the tunnel which led onto the field. Before Chad could get too far, Mitch pulled him aside.

“Now what do you want?”

“Look man, I know you want to win this just as much as I do. This is our final senior game, we both need each other. We need this State Championship title. I know that I have been a whole jerk to you and the team this whole time, but it’s just because I am competitive and I want to succeed. I just wanted to say I’m sorry for doing

that. I realize now that not only do I want myself to succeed, but I also want my... our team to achieve greatness. Now you can hate me after all is said and done after this game, but for our last game as teammates let’s go out there and win this for our team and town, as well as for one another.”

After Mitch said this, Chad pulled him close in and stared at him for a few seconds, and then he finally smiled and answered “Let’s do this brother.” After that the two rushed down the tunnel with all their adrenalin rushing through them and felt like they were on the top of the world as the stadium lights hit them.

THE NEW AGE

by John Higgins

I woke up the next day and immediately thanked God I was still alive and had a family. I could still see smoke from Lower Manhattan out my window, and I would eventually get used to seeing wisps of smoke instead of the Towers I knew and loved. The first day was definitely the hardest of them all.

Well, that’s not necessarily true. Day Zero, as I liked to call it, was the worst day.

The New Age, Day 0

1 hour before attack

The Parker Residence

I woke up at 7:45 that morning to get ready for school. I had to report to homeroom by 8:30, and classes started at 8:45. Mom made me some waffles, and soon we were ready to catch the train. I had to get off two stops before she did, so it just became part of

the routine to take the subway together.

We didn’t really do much talking on the train, but there was one thing she said that has haunted me to the present day.

“Jerry,” she said, “I have a really bad feeling about today. I don’t know why, but my motherly senses are telling me some crazy stuff is gonna happen today. Just... be careful, ok?”

“Ok, Mom,” I said, slightly puzzled at the thought. I got off the train at my stop about ten blocks north of the place where both of my parents worked, the place where they met, and the place I liked to call my second home: the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

Mom was an accountant for some bank on the 53rd floor of the North Tower, and Dad was a lawyer for a firm on the South Tower’s

29th floor. They met by chance when on a coffee break outside the Towers. Dad was talking to a coworker and wasn't paying attention, almost ran over Mom, and the rest, as they say, was history.

I walked two blocks west to my generically-named high school that nobody beyond our little section of the district really cared or knew about. We liked to call ourselves "Twin Towers" High School, since we were the closest school to the Towers. I walked in, stopped by my locker, and went to say a quick hello to my beautiful girlfriend Sarah. She had auburn hair and striking blue eyes, with an amazing personality to boot. She gave me a quick kiss, and fixed my dirty blond hair, which was spiked up from leftover bedhead.

She looked me in the eyes and said, "I'm getting a weird vibe today, and I don't know why... What about you?"

"Yeah, I am too, but only because my mom said she was too." It was then that the bell rang, and I kissed Sarah goodbye and ran up to my third-floor homeroom with a view of the Towers. I got in just as the "Oh-Crud-You're-Late Bell" rang. For the last fifteen minutes before the world as we knew it ended, I talked sports with my friend Zack. The Yankees were on track to make a hell of a run that year, and we were definitely pumped. We were making a bad joke about the Red Sox when we heard a jet flying low overhead.

Instinctively, I looked out the window, just in time to see what looked like a commercial airliner plunging into the side of the North Tower at about the 100th floor. I knew Mom was okay, but that didn't mean that some of my friends hadn't just watched their parents die. I instantly knew that the thing was going to collapse, and I also knew in my heart of hearts that Mom would get out in time.

Within two minutes, the principal came on over the PA and said to us, "Attention, students. In light of recent events, school is cancelled for the day. Go home, and get in touch with your families. Stay safe." We didn't need to be told twice. Nobody in New York knew it yet, but the world had just experienced the most dramatic change in recent history.

The New Age, Day 0

Ten minutes after attack

"Twin Towers" High School

I quickly found Sarah. The first thing out of my mouth was, "I guess you were right."

She responded with a tearful, "Is your mom okay?" and a strong embrace.

"Yes, she's fine," I managed to gasp out. Sarah let go of me and I added, "She's down on the 53rd floor. She'll have plenty of time to get out before the building collapses."

"How do you know it's gonna collapse?" she asked me, puzzled.

"You know how you had that really bad feeling earlier? I just have a feeling in my gut that that thing will have collapsed by the end of the day. Let's head back to my place and wait for Mom; you can call your parents from there since you live so far away. It'll be dangerous to take the train under the Towers."

"Sounds good to me," she said as she took my hand in her own. As we walked out of the school together, we both looked south, toward the Towers, then north, toward my house.

For reasons that to this day neither of us know, we turned and started walking the ten blocks south.

The New Age, Day 0

Thirteen minutes after attack

North Tower Lobby

Sarah never dropped my hand even as we sat in the lobby of the North Tower waiting for my mother to come downstairs. The firemen and police officers who were staffing the makeshift operations center in the lobby told us the plane blew out the elevators, so everyone who was getting out had to take the stairs. I was extremely surprised when I saw Dad walking toward us while we waited.

"What on Earth are you two

doing here?" he shouted at us.

"Don't you know this thing's on fire?"

"We're aware, Dad," I said, "I saw the plane go in with my own two eyes. School sent us home."

"May I ask what *you're* doing here?" asked Sarah.

"I guess I'm here for the same reason you two are," he smiled.

"The officers were telling me I should go back up to my office, but—"

"You had a bad feeling about going back up. Yeah, I know," I interrupted. "All day people have been telling me they've got a bad feeling about something or another."

"Let's go outside and get some fresh air," said Sarah, "The stupid AC isn't working in here."

The New Age, Day 0

Fifteen minutes after attack

In front of the North Tower

"Have I ever told you how Jerry's mother and I met, Sarah?" asked my dad.

Even though she'd heard the story literally a thousand times, Sarah politely said, "No, I haven't. Would you mind telling me?"

"No," said Dad, "but I can show you. You see, we were walk-

ing right about here, and I was busy talking to one of my coworkers on a coffee break and not paying attention. Mrs. Parker and I ran into each other and spilled coffee all over each other.”

“And the rest, as they say, is history,” I added as we all stared up at the Towers along with everyone else in the world.

It was then that we heard the second plane.

The New Age, Day 0

Twenty minutes after attack

Base of the South Tower

The papers started coming down soon after the plane hit.

Papers from the North Tower already covered the ground around its base. Now, the South Tower had unleashed a kind of surreal snow of paper. Nobody said it out loud, but we all knew it was a terrorist attack now. There was no way two planes would crash into both of the Towers in one day by accident. I hoped and prayed that the South Tower would hold long enough to get a decent amount of people out.

“The South Tower’s gonna be the first one to come down,” I said, breaking the eerie silence that had fallen over the city that never sleeps.

“Why would you say that?” asked Dad. “Well, it looks like they

hit it lower than the North Tower, so the weight of the floors above the ones that were damaged would be greater.”

“Makes sense to me,” said Sarah as the papers coated the ground around us. We decided to just stay out there until Mom got down. We decided that if she wasn’t with us in an hour we’d head into the North Tower to find her ourselves.

The New Age, Day 0

Forty-five minutes after attack

Base of the North Tower

About forty-five minutes after the first plane hit, I noticed people start to jump from areas around the impact sites. I tried not to look up after the first one. Some people were becoming hysterical over it, and for some reason they kept looking up. Suddenly, someone’s cell phone rang. He picked it up, and we noticed his jaw drop in shock. After a few minutes he hung up and announced, “They hit the Pentagon.” People started speculating as to what would be next. Would it be the Capitol? The Sears Tower? The Empire State Building? The Hancock Center? The White House? More hits to finish off the Pentagon or the Towers?

We were worried.

“Still no sign of Mrs. Parker,” sighed Sarah. “We’ll go in at about ten minutes to ten,” said Dad.

The New Age, Day 0

One hour, ten minutes after attack

Outside the North Tower

“Okay,” said Dad, “I think it’s time to get her.”

“Let’s go, then!” I said, “We’re on borrowed time already.”

We took one last look up, and, to our horror, saw the South Tower start to give way and collapse. With a mighty roar one of the tallest buildings in America came crashing down in a cloud of smoke and dust. We sprinted into the North Tower and up its stairs to escape the debris cloud. We were safely on the second floor when the roar died and an even more eerie quiet fell upon Lower Manhattan. We exited the stairwell onto the balcony on the second floor. The inside of the lobby looked normal, but through the windows all we saw was gray and dust. All three of us were standing there in shocked silence when we heard a voice say, “What on Earth are you doing here?” We turned around to see a very disgruntled Mom standing in the doorway of the stairwell with her coworkers, all of whom were exhausted from a very long climb. Dad, Sarah, and I all ran to Mom to give her a hug, and we all just stood there in a personal moment of silence for all who, as of that day, were unable to share a moment like that ever again.

About ten minutes later the

dust had cleared to a point where it was reasonably safe to venture out of the still burning North Tower. Mom said goodbye to her stairwell companions and Mom, Dad, Sarah, and I all made our way north to the house.

The New Age, Day 0

102 minutes after attacks

The Parker Residence

We got home and immediately turned on the TV to see the news. We already knew what would be all over the screen, but we wanted to hear the thoughts of others. Sarah and I asked if we could have a few minutes alone. We walked with heavy feet into my room and shut the door behind us. We walked over to my bed and sat down on the side that had a view of the North Tower out my window. I put my arm around Sarah as she quietly wept into my shoulder.

“What’re we gonna do when this is over?” she said through the tears.

“The way I see it,” I said to her, “the instant the first plane hit, the world as we knew it came to an abrupt end, but it was one of those headless chicken types of ends. We didn’t know that a new age had begun until the second plane hit. Then the chicken that was the old world finally realized it was dead and laid down in submission. Now, a new chick has hatched from its egg, and the next

few years will determine how the new age will play out. We'll just have to play it by ear, just like we've had to do before, and we'll have to do again."

Upon finishing, Sarah looked into my eyes with a tearful smile that somehow broke me. I started crying too, and we both continued looking out the window, comforting each other. Then we heard that now-familiar roar that heralded the collapse of the North Tower and the deaths of hundreds of people still trapped in the doomed skyscraper.

On the news that night, we saw more in-depth footage of the attack on the Pentagon, and heard stories of American heroes who, quite possibly, prevented the destruction of the Capitol by bringing down United Airlines Flight 93 in a field in Pennsylvania, killing all on board. The fact that that happened gave us all a little boost of hope that helped us get through that night.

The New Age, Day 1

The Parker Residence

Sarah stayed with us that night in our guest bedroom, seeing as it would have been absolute chaos trying to get her home in the mess. She managed to get in touch with her parents around dinner time to tell them she was okay. They agreed it would be better for her to stay with us until things cleared up a little bit.

After a somber dinner and some exchanging of stories of the day, we all went into the living room to watch funny movies in an attempt to cheer ourselves up.

Needless to say, it didn't really work.

A similar event occurred at breakfast, only this time comparing how much sleep we got after all we'd seen. Sarah and I then sluggishly packed up for school.

The New Age, Day 1

"Twin Towers" High School

Somehow we managed to get to school on time. The halls were strangely silent. Nobody wanted to talk to anybody about anything. Some of the more inconsiderate and immature class clowns made jokes, but were quickly silenced by nerds and jocks alike. September 12, 2001, was not a day for laughter or happiness. The most interesting class that day was history.

The teacher threw out his lesson plan for the day so we could discuss the events of the previous day. We unanimously decided it was terrorists, and then proceeded to compare it to previous historical events. The most terrible thing we could think of prior to September 11, 2001, was December 7, 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was attacked.

The New Age, Year 9

May 1, 2011

Eventually, things in Manhattan returned to relative normalcy. Sarah and I grew up, finished high school, and went to college together at Syracuse. At the end of senior year, at the end of graduation, I proposed to her. She said yes. We were married on September 11, 2009.

A few months before the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, President Barack Obama came on the air on all the news stations to tell us that Osama bin Laden, who planned the attacks, had been killed in a raid by the Navy S.E.A.L.s in Pakistan. The country celebrated almost as much as it had when we won World War II.

It was sickening.

Sarah and I did not celebrate. We didn't think a person's death, no matter how evil, was a thing to celebrate. So we just sat on our couch and cried.

The New Age, Year 10

September 11, 2011

National September 11 Memorial

Ten years had passed since the day the new age began. It seemed as if it had gone by in the blink of an eye. The new memorial was open to the public for just the one day. Many New Yorkers found time to stop by and reflect for a while as they looked down into the empty footprints where the Towers once stood. By then they were de-

cently far along in the construction of four new towers to replace the old ones that fell. This September 11, in particular, was one of great national pride. We had brought justice to Osama bin Laden. It may have taken almost ten years, but we finally did what needed to be done.

Over time, as a country, we had started to heal. The end of Osama bin Laden made that process easier on many people.

The New Age, Year 100

September 11, 2101

World Trade Center

It's been one hundred years since the world changed forever.

I may be 115 years old, but I still feel great. People today are living to be at least 120 on average. We've found cures to almost every disease out there minus, of course, the common cold. In the years that have passed, the United States and the world eradicated another disease from our planet: terrorism. It took about thirteen years from the beginning of the War on Terror to get the Arab nations to work with us. It took a group as radical as the infamous Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, who also called themselves the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, to get them to realize that they needed to do something about it along with the Western world.

The fight was bloody, but

after ISIS was destroyed, terrorist organizations never again took a foothold in a Middle Eastern nation. Wars have been fought since then, but in a more conventional nation-versus-nation sense. The last war fought ended ten years ago. Since then none have been fought anywhere.

Now, looking back a hundred years, I can see how the attacks of September 11, 2001, ended up changing the world for the better. If not for the events of that day, the War on Terror would never have been fought, and we would

be dealing with radically different Middle East today. In essence, by attacking the United States, al-Qaeda condemned themselves and all other terrorist organizations to their destruction.

As I look up and see the “new” World Trade Center above me and the voids left by the fallen Towers below me, I can definitively say that the world has changed for the better.

Welcome to the new age, my friends.

WHY I DRAW

by Jonathan Strickland

Recently,
People have asked me why I draw.
I used to say just because I could.
Because it was fun.
Because I wasn't half bad at it.
But now,
I know it's so much more than that.
I draw to live.
I draw to love.
I draw to hate.
I draw to hide,
To run away from it all,
If only for an hour or so.
I draw for moments when I can't speak,
For when no words come,
But an image does.
I draw for her,
For him,
For them.
For dark days,
With nowhere to go,
No one to talk to.
I draw.



artwork by Jonathan Strickland

WHAT THE FUNERAL IS FOR

by Connor LoPiccolo

"We have some people who wish to say a few words about the departed before we end here today," said the tired priest. Father Hansen hadn't lost a young parishioner in a few years and regardless of his smartass attitude we could all tell it had hit him hard. I looked around and saw Michelle and Tommy stand up a few pews ahead of me. It was time.

As the piercing sunlight beat down on the back of my already scarlet neck and flecks of grass whipped into my face from the orange and black weed-eater in my hands, I looked over at Andrew. Despite being hunched over and having a few strands of brown hair soaked with sweat hanging down just over his eyes, I could see that trademark smile. Whenever we worked, Andrew always smiled. Come to think of it, Andrew always smiled whenever we did anything. He always had this air about him that everything was going to be ok. Of our group of friends, Andrew had the most brains; he had his entire life planned.

I stood up. Alex swung his feet out of the pew onto the white rustic tiles that all led to the altar. As I passed him and buttoned my coat,

he looked at me with a tight smile and gave me a slight nod.

Click-Clack

My black shoes hit the tile with a sound that reverberated through the church. I turned and faced the altar, not knowing what to do with my hands. I saw Michelle and Tommy making their way up to the altar and started to hurry to catch up with them then slowed when I remembered where we were.

Family friends and teachers always asked the same stupid questions then; nobody but Andrew really knew: "So where you going to college? What you gonna study there?"

Most of us bullshitted our way through situations like that. "Well I'm looking to go to so and so university if I can get the money and I'd like to study so and so field then I can go and be a so and so doing so and so things," we'd say. All of it bullshit, changing at the drop of a hat. But not him.

I walked up to the green carpeted chancel and bowed in unison with Michelle and Tommy toward the tabernacle. It had a red and orange mosaic of the burn-

ing bush on it I just then noticed. I started to wring my hands. We all stood up straight and slowly turned and walked up the deep steps towards the pulpit. Michelle and Tommy had told me what they were going to say, but I didn't pay much attention. Something nice, something proper, something that would make people cry. I had three pages front and back of scribbling on loose-leaf that was folded into thirds weighing down the breast pocket of my coat.

One time we were at some school event hosted in the cafeteria where we had to impress alumni and be on our best behavior and fake our way through the night. We were standing in a circle with Tommy Anderson, Alex Kellner, and a junior we didn't really know all that well. With us were two alumni, one sort of fat with a comb over to cover an obvious bald spot and the other tall and lanky but with an air of being very proper and important. The tall one asked us those questions and we all gave the same answers until it came to Andrew.

Michelle was the first to go. I can't really remember what she said. It's weird when you're in front of that many people and they're all looking at something near you. It's hard to tell whether you should look out into the crowd, or at what they're looking at. She began. "The first time I met him..."

"You know, I just want to be happy," he said with that smile on his mouth and brightness in his dark green eyes.

"And how are you planning on doing that?" the tall one said with a chuckle.

Andrew looked around at the walls of our rather unimpressive cafeteria, just soaking in the memories and the potential he always felt the place had. "I want to be a teacher here," he said looking back at the tall one. "I've never seen happier people than my teachers here. They're excited and interested and really WANT to be here. I don't want to get old and one day realize tha-"

Just then Tommy kicked Andrew and gave him a look that said "Hey, idiot, this is one of the sellouts who DOESN'T like hearing that the kids he's giving money to plan on having a less than six-figure salary."

Recognizing his near gaff, Andrew did his best to recover. "Realize that I never gave back to this place that I love so much," he said.

"Well, there's more ways to 'give back,' as you call it, than just being a teacher," said the tall one with the same chuckle, which was followed by an obligatory agreement from the fat alum and students.

"Oh well you'll figure it out, you seem like a bright kid. Say how'dya do in school anyhow?" said the fat one after another sip out of his scotch.

"I do pretty well sir; just trying to get by," said Andrew.

“Oh shut up! Andrew here got a 35 on his ACT and has a 4.2 GPA. He’s one of our brightest,” said the junior who was just trying to help.

“Holy shit kid and you want to TEACH?” said the fat one, who had been overserved. “Damn if my kids had those numbers I’d ship ‘em off to Harvard!”

“I’m just very lucky to have the gifts I do,” said Andrew, obviously embarrassed. “If you’ll excuse me, I need to go say hi to a few family friends. I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening gentlemen,” he said, going for a handshake.

“Go ahead son, and good luck to ya!” the fat one said as they shook hands.

“Yes you have a good evening too young man,” the tall one said.

Michelle had just gotten through some anecdote. She had choked up a bit, but so far she hadn’t broken down. “That’s how I’ll always remember him; as he was.” What a bunch of bull. Don’t get me wrong, Michelle loved him and even had a thing for him last year that never really panned out, but I don’t think very many will remember him for who he really was.

That was who Andrew was; never one to like another ridiculing him, but never rash enough to assert the dominance he could have if he wanted to. He was our friendly giant, being an extremely lanky 6’3”. Andrew was our hero. He was my hero. Not because

he had everything going for him (which he did), but because despite that he never looked down on those who didn’t. He was kind. He was accepting. He was chivalrous. He loved everyone.

Andrew only ever had problems with one guy, Marty Matthews. We always made the joke that you could never trust a person with two first names; in Marty’s case the idea held true. On paper, most people would think that the two would have been great friends. Marty and Andrew had a lot in common and the two together probably could have done so much if they had ever just wised up a bit. But this wasn’t on paper; it was life. Marty was one of those guys that just really wanted to be liked and went through his high school career just trying to get a leg up, especially on Andrew. Everything that Andrew believed in or tried to do Marty actively worked against. If Andrew brought up an idea during a meeting, Marty shot it down. If Andrew got a question wrong in class or on a test, Marty berated him saying he was stupid. If Andrew stuttered or yawned or did anything less than perfectly Marty pounced at the opportunity to make fun. We all knew that Marty was a dick, but no one ever really confronted him about it. Andrew was fine with it. He always made excuses for Marty whenever we would get frustrated. “Oh he’ll come around, don’t worry about it,” or “you know what, maybe he’s just going through some stuff right now,” he’d say. In a weird way that I never understood, I think Andrew

always cared for Marty. Maybe. I can’t really be sure anymore.

Michelle stepped back from the white marble pulpit, clutching her scattered papers with hands that were shaky and fingers that were rigid. Tommy wrapped his arms around her and whispered something into her ear. She whispered something back. As she walked towards me, Tommy stepped up to the pulpit and pulled his crumpled up papers out of his right pocket. I gave her a hug. “You did great kiddo,” I said. With that, she started bawling. She wasn’t going to make it so she elected to just go and sit back down.

On that day we had already been to eight houses and it was about two in the afternoon. The sun was still high enough to send its searing heat down on us but not so high that the end of the day was out of sight. We always worked at these huge houses with more yard than anyone ever needed, but I guess you can do that when you make that much money.

The house we were working on belonged to some big shot CEO or CFO or something of the area’s leading BioMed company. He was 32 years old. Sometimes I would laugh about the fact that a guy only 15 years older than me had that much money.

“Wouldn’t you love to live in a big house like this one day?” I said to Andrew as we pulled up in my beat up rust red Honda Civic one day.

He laughed lightly. “I don’t think I could ever stand to live in a place like *this*” he said.

“Why’s that? What makes this so bad?” I said.

“I mean nothing is wrong with a big house or anything. Some of my best friends have big houses, I swear!” we both smirked. “I just think that I’ll be happiest as a teacher and honestly a teacher won’t be able to live in a house like that,” he said casually nodding his head towards the house. “I’ll probably just end up living in a dishwasher box on the side of the road.”

“Not a fridge box?”

“Well, I don’t want to be greedy,” he said

“Well what about your family? They gonna live in your box with you?” I said.

Just then I saw something I had never seen in Andrew: uncertainty. It was only for a second, and I’m not sure if he knew I saw it, but it was there.

“Well,” he said, opening the door, “let’s get to it. I’m savin up for that nice Whirlpool box for me and the kids one day.”

I tell myself that I didn’t want to push him, and that’s why I let it go. The truth is that I didn’t want to ruin my image of a man I looked up to. I didn’t hold myself to the same standard that I held Andrew. And how could I have? He was everything good I saw in the

world. And I was me.

Being twice Michelle's size, Tommy had to position the microphone further up. This action was accompanied with a loud EEEEEEECCCKKKK from the metal mic holder that resounded in the silent room of a thousand people. "Um, I'm not a very good speaker and this is the first time I've done something like this, so you guys will have to bear with me if you don't mind," Tommy said, looking down at his wrinkled papers.

So we got to work. I started trimming along the sidewalk that ran up a hill from the driveway to the front door of the house. Andrew trimmed around the free-standing trees and where the yard met the road.

Andrew, his back to me, was walking down the line of bricks that stood vertically between the grass yard and black asphalt, hitting the left over grass missed by his Uncle Jack on the big mower. Those weed eaters sent little green specks flying, cutting from the bottom and shooting them out at random. It was like if someone knocked out the bottom layer of the pyramids or the Eiffel Tower and they just forgot about gravity for a second, at least until they crashed. It's like if the Statue of Liberty got cracked at the knees and then flew off somewhere, only to fall into the ocean a short while later. A feeling of weightlessness followed by a reminder of reality.

With ear buds in, camo and

orange hat turned backwards, wearing a neon green shirt two sizes too big and old blue jeans with frayed bottoms held up by the only belt he owned and green from the knees down on account of all the grass that had been thrown at them, Andrew slowed as he came to where the bricks met an island of ivy with a Paper Birch standing in the middle. I always hated those trees. If the wind got blowin' hard enough we had to pick up all the little bits of bark that flew off at nothing. The whir of the Stihl trimmer came down to a lazy growl and he straightened his back, looking up at an unassuming sign sticking out of the ground.

"So, I don't really know what I'm doin here, so I just... wrote a letter... here goes hope you like it—well not—yeah you know what I mean," Tommy said, clearing his throat. He was terrified. He could shoot shit on us like it was nothing but put him in front of this many people with a microphone AND tell him not to cuss? The guy had no clue what to do.

It was one of those tacky "Welcome to our family!" signs private schools put in new students' yards. We all got one when we were accepted to Campion Prep put in ours. The year's senior class would all write a nice note on the back of one and deliver them to the houses, usually putting them in the front lawn. It was a nice sentiment and, from the perspective of a young man entering into a world he expected to chew him up and spit him out, it served as a reassuring reminder of being

welcomed; mine is in the landfill off highway 130.

Andrew stood there for a second. And then another. And then 10 more. Emotionless. Expressionless. Catatonic almost. For a second, I thought that I saw a tear begin to well up in his eye. Just as quickly as he had stopped, Andrew resumed his work. He pulled the sign out of the ground, trimmed the area it inhabited, and replaced it where it belonged. He gave me a sideways glance, and I could see a tinge of embarrassment come over his face. I realized that I too had stopped working and was standing straight up and staring at him.

"Hey, get back to work you lazy piece of shit!" he said with a smile.

"I just didn't want you to look bad!" I said.

"I don't really know why any of this—stuff—happened," Tommy said. He'd been goin for a while and was on his last page. "Ya know man I just miss you," he said looking down at the closed black casket centered in front of the altar. "And this sucks. And I'm sorry. I should've—" Tommy extended his arms resting on the pulpit fully, pushing himself back a bit so he could have a second. He needed it. Taking a deep breath, he began again. "I shoulda told you that I loved you man. I shoulda told you every chance I got." Which 'him' did Tommy love though?

And with that, everything went back to normal. I even forgot

about it for a while. That was our last summer as high schoolers, or at least that's how we saw it at the time. We knew that we'd spend the next few months worrying about scores and scholarships and "leaving our mark" or whatever. So we spent that summer like it would never end. By this time in my high school career, I had found a pretty solid group of friends. When we drank, it was only socially and we were usually safe. The only one of us that didn't was Andrew, but he was cool about it. We all actually cared about each other, not just how the others could help us but how their week was or what was going on in life.

We were all pretty smart kids back then, sometimes too smart for our own good. We would drive around talking about our place in the world and what it even meant to be a joyful person. Looking back on it, Andrew usually initiated these conversations.

"What do you guys think the greatest good is?" he said one night when we were hanging out on top of a parking structure not far from Campion that overlooked an ever-scenic apartment complex on the left and an outlet mall on the right. There were three reasons people came to the parking structure: to throw things off, to hook up, and to talk. Very rarely were the three mutually exclusive.

"Your friend, Tommy," Tommy said. Without turning around, Tommy took a step back from the pulpit and walked down to take his seat by Michelle. He didn't bow or

anything. I'm pretty sure he and God weren't exactly on speaking terms at that point. I was alone. This wasn't the plan. They were supposed to be up here for me. With me. Now I was alone. I wanted to take a step towards the pulpit. To just come out and say what was on those pages. But my body wouldn't let me move. Those papers were too heavy. But I had to. So I stepped forward.

“What do you mean ‘greatest good?’” said Michelle, one of our friends from Loretto, an all-girls Catholic high school.

“Like, the thing that is of the most value in this world I guess or maybe that which we as free agents ought to strive for,” said Andrew.

“Well I guess the obvious answer would be God,” said Tommy.

“If there is one you mean. If its existence can't be proven then we can't for sure call it the greatest good. Aquinas claims that the epitome and source of all favorable virtues is God, so I guess my question now would be which of those virtues is most important?” said Andrew.

“I think it'd have to be justice,” said Michelle.

“No, mercy outweighs justice,” said Tommy.

“It's not like God isn't just or something. There's heaven and hell,” said Michelle.

“Oh come on! You can't really

believe in a God that sends someone to eternal damnation because they happen to be guilty when they die! That's not justice, even by our standards.”

“God doesn't send people to hell; they choose to end up there. And I think there IS a place for all the ones who want to make it to heaven but can't because they aren't in a state of grace.”

Sometimes these conversations got so filled with rhetoric and semantics that eventually one of us would change the subject back to the original topic.

“I think the greatest good is Truth. Like ‘big-T Truth,’” I said.

It was my turn. Shit. What was I supposed to say? His mother was in the first fucking row and she had welcomed me into her home countless times. Was I supposed to tell the truth? Fuck the truth. The truth was devastating. The truth was horrible. The truth was too painful to bear. I took a deep breath and stepped forward to the pulpit. Oh shit fuck damn. This was it. This was the last word. I might've been the only one who really knew him. And now I'm pretty sure I had to lie about him.

Andrew stuck out his bottom lip a little and gave a slight nod towards me. “Why?” he said.

“Well we're all sitting here talking about ‘what if’ and ‘maybe’ situations, but I think that it'd be most valuable if we knew whether there even IS a God or even if there is a solid Truth,” I



artwork by Matt Quinley

said.

Andrew turned around and looked down to the little lake (or big pond, depending on preference) that the apartments surrounded, and squinted his eyes like he was looking for something.

We spent the next hour talking, star-gazing, and sitting in silence. People came and went until, around midnight, only Andrew and I remained. We were sitting down against the two-foot thick concrete wall that overlooked an alley between the parking structure and one side of the outlet mall.

I realized I'd been standing there in silence just a bit too long. I reached into my breast pocket and pulled out my sheets of paper. The crinkling sound of the pages unfolding filled the church and echoed off the walls. I pressed my hands down on the middle of the page and spread them out, trying to flatten them. Really I was just buying time. I'm supposed to say these words. I'm supposed to feel this way. I'm supposed to lie.

One of the things that I always liked about the friends I had then was our ability to be in a comfortable silence. We didn't need to worry or feel awkward in those moments. But this was not that. This silence was unbearable for me and for some reason I just had to know.

"What's your 'greatest good' Andrew?"

Silence.

He sat with his back to the wall and his elbows rested on his knees. I could tell by his face that he wasn't thinking; he already knew the answer. He was choosing. Choosing, I think, whether to tell me the truth or not. Sometimes I wish he hadn't.

"I don't know anymore," he said in soft voice.

I was dumbfounded. Andrew was at a loss for words. This didn't happen often. Actually, it didn't happen ever.

"You who know me know that I get a little flustered and go on tangents a lot, so I ask that you bear with me here," I said, looking down at the sloppily handwritten mess in front of me. I started to read. "I never wanted to go to Campion. I never wanted to break my hand, an injury that would cut short my baseball career. But most of all, I never wanted to have to say goodbye." It was the start of the biggest lie of my life. And it was one that needed to be told.

"Well," I said, "what'd it used to be?"

Andrew let out a short, sharp, laugh. "When people ask me what I want to be, I say happy. That was my greatest good. My happiness. Me."

"What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong with that? What's wrong with that?!" Andrew stood up. "What's wrong with that is that I really don't care about anything but that! I'm not sure

that I ever have!"

He was pacing now and throwing his hands about wildly. I'd never seen Andrew act this way.

"Are you ok bud?" I said.

He turned his head to me and there was something in his eyes I'd never seen before in anyone. It was loneliness.

"I don't think I've ever really been ok. I've always done well getting by. I'm smart and funny and people like me but damn it I don't like me. Happiness? There are so many better things!"

I sat there not knowing what to say.

"I've walked through this life like I have everything figured out and it got to the point where I even started to believe my own lie. I wanted all of it to be true. I still want it all to be true," he said.

"What made you start thinking like this?" I said.

"You asked about my family."

"Who, Marge and Phil?" I said.

"No, at work one day. You asked about whether my family would live in a box with me or not."

"Shit man, you know I was just kidding. I didn't mean anything by that." I hoped that that would bring him down.

"It doesn't matter what you

meant by it. It made me think. Like really contemplate what this life is even supposed to be about. And then I saw that stupid welcome sign in that fucking yard."

"You don't need to worry about a family you don't even have yet Andrew. Go and be happy. Be a teacher and have a family in live a happy life," I said.

He stopped pacing, put his fingertips together and closed his eyes in frustration. "I don't think you get it. I CAN'T be happy. The way I see it I have two roads ahead of me. I can do the get rich thing. I don't like saying it like that but you know what I mean. I could do whatever I wanted! But for some reason the things I want to do won't secure the kind of family life I want. I could make all the money in the world, but I'd never be happy."

"Then go be happy!" I said.

"There's the shitty part! If I do what will make me happy, I won't make money and my family would suffer because of it."

"Andrew teachers aren't all poor if that's what you're thinking. They can support their families."

He started pacing again. I don't think he had really heard me. "Because, and I'm not trying to be sexist, I just want my wife to have the choice to be a stay at home mom. And I want my kids to be able to go to any school they want and not worry about loans like us. And I want to give back to my community in some way. And I

want to have it figured out; I want to know the answer NOW dammit not later. I just want to—I don't know." He stopped pacing. I could see the weight of whatever was going on in his head give way as he slowly fell to his knees with this look of utter despair on his face. "I'm just so fucking lost," he said.

I was about halfway through. There was the part of me that was reading, eulogizing, and the other part of me was thinking about the ramifications of this lie. On the one hand, I thought, his family and everyone who claimed to know him are gratified in that. Isn't that good? But I'm lying. Well not lying. He really was like this to these people, so it wasn't a lie. They saw him this way, and who was I to ruin that image for them? It would be wrong to do so, right? Fuck, I don't know anymore. I wanted to scream. I wanted to tell them what I knew. I wanted to share the truth. I wanted to stop the lie. But they needed it, so I kept on reading.

That was the moment. That was when Andrew became human in my eyes. It was unfair to see him as more than that before, I admit, but I couldn't help it. The Andrew I thought I knew was compassionate, noble, funny, heroic even. But this? This hunched over, nearly sobbing kid was so far from that. He was broken.

I stood up and walked over to him. He knelt with his knees spread and ankles touching, sitting back on his feet. His arms hung limp, fingertips hanging down to the concrete. Not knowing

what to do, I rested my left hand on his left shoulder and looked out over the parking structure. "You'll be ok, bud. I know this is freaking you out now, but in a couple months we'll look back on this and realize that there was nothing to worry about. Plans change. It happens. You're human and that's ok." Even as I said it, I felt a weird anger well up inside of me. I felt lied to, betrayed. What was stranger was that Andrew and I went our separate ways that night and I really don't know if what I said made any difference at all.

The summer went on. There were parties and weekends spent at Tommy's lake house if only just to stave off remembering that school was about to buckle down on us and with it our descent into the hellish college application process piled on top of our already strenuous schedules. Andrew and I grew apart. Or rather, I realized that we had always been apart. He acted like nothing had ever happened. There was a silent understanding between the two of us that it hadn't. It was easier that way. A couple weeks later, on the last night of the summer, I asked Andrew if everything was alright.

"I'm honestly doing great," he said with one of those big grins. But I couldn't really be sure that he wasn't just saying that to make me feel better or like I helped or something. I could never know when he was telling the truth anymore.

I like to think that he really was doing great. I like to think

that what I said had some impact on him. I like to think that what I saw was just an outburst, a venting session. I like to think a lot of things. I like to think that Andrew died somewhat in a good place in life. Nobody really knows what happened, but the road was slick and his tires were bald. He probably came around the turn too fast and flew right off the side. The medical examiner had to use dental records to identify the crushed up and charred remains. The official report said that Andrew had crashed a little after midnight and wasn't found until about two. He died around 1:30.

I was just finishing up. They'd liked what I had said so far. It did their image of him justice. That's what the funeral is for, isn't it? To comfort the people that knew the departed? To reassure them that they did in fact know them? None of them did. None of them will. That's my burden. "Things don't always go our way. We lost Andrew. And we miss him. I miss him. But it would be unfair for me to stop living my life because of that pain. Worse it would be unfair for him. I won't speak for anyone else, but, as for me, I'm not half-living anymore. Tommy talked about how we don't say that we love each other enough and he's right. So I'm going to start. Not for me. For Andrew. For MY Andrew." There. I did it. And in that moment he was back. I was him and he was me. But it wasn't the him they knew, it was the one I did.

Andrew's body was buried on a bright mid-August morning. Only

family and close friends attended. The rest of the funeral goers were back at the church for the reception. It was one of those days that you want to call beautiful but the circumstance wouldn't allow for it. After sitting through the service given by our parish priest and school president, the closed casket was lowered into the grave. It was probably only a few feet but seeing that darkness envelop the wooden box made me feel like the drop was hundreds. As this was happening I looked around. Michelle was crying hysterically with her head buried in Tommy's shoulder. His eyes were red and puffy from crying, but now he was just watching the casket silently. I think he'll always blame himself a bit since we were out at his lake house. Alex stood on Tommy's left, his lip curled up in anger as tears flowed from his eyes. I felt like I should've been like that. Crying or tearing up. But I couldn't feel it.

In some sick and twisted way, the Andrew I knew died on that parking structure. What was left was a lie. The person they buried that day wasn't my friend; he was the shell of a man that I choose to remember as great. I like to think that in those last moments MY Andrew came back. I like to think that he regained control and for those last moments lived again. I like to think that our friendship wasn't a fabrication to make the sorry sap they were burying feel important. I like to think that I could know whether he was ever real. I like to think that, but I don't really want to know the truth.

