

ISSUE 23
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Shatin Pui Ying Post

MATRIX

Inhale
Courage
Exhale
Fear



“Courage is more exhilarating than fear and in the long run it is easier. We do not have to become heroes overnight. Just a step at a time, meeting each thing that comes up, seeing it is not as dreadful as it appeared, discovering we have the strength to stare it down.”

Eleanor Roosevelt, You Learn By Living (1960)

In this issue of *Matrix*, six of our students have submitted their original works on the theme of courage. Their writings showcase to us how courage is embodied in different aspects of life, in reality and in fiction. It is hoped that their works will inspire you to lead a life with fortitude and positive energy.

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Defining COURAGE Julio Tang (5B)

Courage: it allows one to face challenges, difficulties, or even dangers without fear. Courage is an option. A personal choice of stepping out of your comfort zone to face challenges head-on.

Courage is synonymous to bravery or fearlessness. These words are often defined as the willingness to confront agony, danger and uncertainty. We can escape from these negative emotions and dangerous situations if we have the guts. Courage isn't an emotion that stops you from feeling fear, pain or unhappiness. Indeed, courageous people do feel fear like all others do, but compare to those who are less courageous, they are able to manage and overcome their fear.

Once the South African Civil Rights Activist, Nelson Mandela, said, *'Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid but he who conquers that fear.'*



Being courageous does not mean we have to be fearless or act like we are not afraid of anything. No one was born with courage. We gradually acquire it through our encounters with challenges and failures. We learn to adapt and deal with them. After each difficulty is overcome, courage is accumulated.

Courage is about taking the first step to do things you are not bold enough to. Don't be ashamed of feeling anxious as this is completely natural. Yet, we can choose to face it squarely and find within ourselves a motivation to combat adversities. Doing it repeatedly, we will be able to learn, hone our skills and boost our courage. To be courageous or not, it's simply a personal choice.

Then, how do we know if someone is courageous? To me, a person with bravery possesses the following unique qualities.

First of all, self-confidence is the most fundamental element. People who have courage believe firmly in themselves and their abilities. They trust that they are capable enough to accomplish any feat. For example, they are usually more eager to try something new and challenging. They often play an active role in a team or a group. They are confident and have strong faith in what they are doing and always maintain a positive outlook.



Second, courageous people are charismatic. They always motivate people with their personal charms, expertise, integrity and empathy. They don't mind sacrificing for the common good and are always ready to lend a helping hand to others.

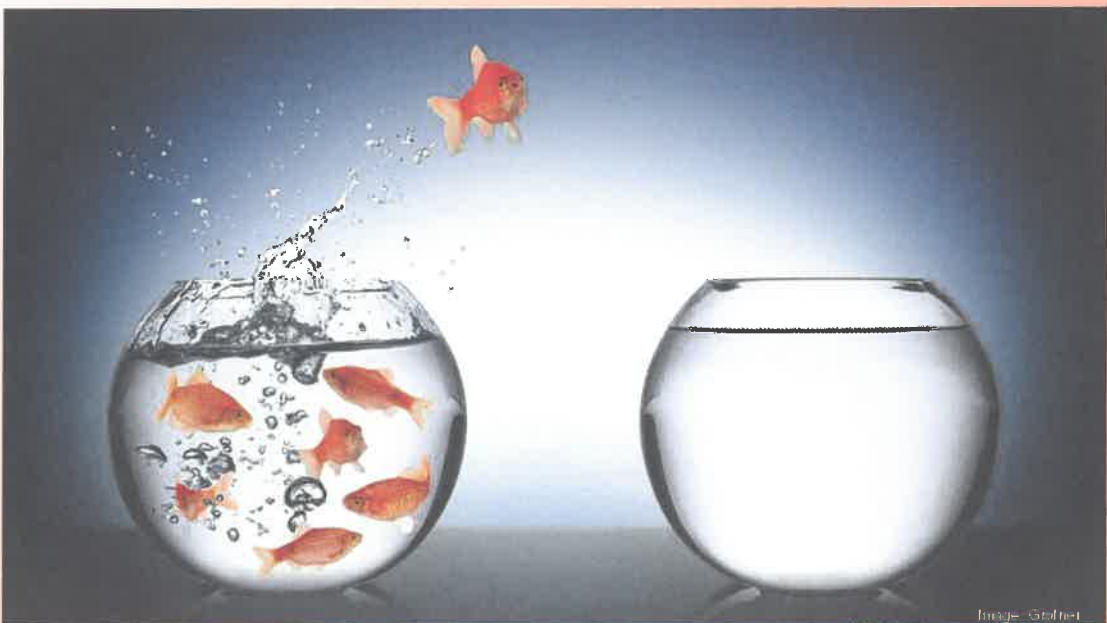
Last but not least, people who are daring embrace problems and are less likely to avoid them. They love hurdles and challenges, which give them a chance to display their strength in problem-solving. They swim against the tide and are not going to compromise.

Therefore, how can we become more courageous? Here are some tips for you. First, don't be afraid of seeking help from others. People may think it is shameful to ask for help. Some are anxious about revealing their weaknesses or they worry about being teased. Yet, it is actually normal and reasonable. Through the process, your self-confidence will be boosted when you take the first step to reach out for help and interact with others.

Besides, committing yourself to the tasks you are to undertake can easily help you build up courage. People tend to procrastinate, especially when they encounter difficulties. As a matter of fact, procrastinating can be an excuse for your lack of courage. Be determined and try committing yourself to the tasks that you are to complete. Never wait for another year or the 'right moment' to do it. Act promptly and feel the difference. This is where your courage is developed.

There are always times when we have to do things that we don't like. It is rather pointless to avoid them because it will eventually get back to you and you have no choice but to face it. Don't be deterred by failures as they are not fatal and your value is not measured by them. Failing could be depressing but it also proves that you have taken a bold step forward. If you don't have the guts to act, how will we know if we fail or succeed?

Courage isn't the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. Take risks, believe in yourself and be humble.





An innocent little girl...

Sammie Wong (4D)



an innocent little girl, has never seen the world. Lied to by her stepmother, there are monsters and ghosts everywhere. She felt so free as she walked with glasses.

Finally, she stopped to catch her breath. With her eyes wide open, she ran as fast as a hare chased by a tiger. She tried to find a way out.

One day, she found a book hidden in a box. Pictures of trees and animals made her feel safe. She took a look. Pictures of trees and animals made her feel safe.

Following her. Afraid that her stepmother would find her. Fear is like a shadow that follows you. She went down the stairs. Fear is like a shadow that follows you.

She was determined. She escaped. She took a look. Pictures of trees and animals made her feel safe. She was determined. She escaped. She took a look. Pictures of trees and animals made her feel safe.





An innocent girl,
has never seen the world.
Lied to by her stepmom,
there are monsters and ghosts outside,
all these creatures gave her shivers.
She found a book hidden in a box.
She took a look.
Pictures of trees and animals made her gasp,
she was finally awoken.
She was determined,
she escaped.
Shut shut her eyes,
took a deep breath.
Clutching the rope tightly, woosh!
Down she went.
Fear is like a shadow following her.
Afraid that her stepmom would find out,
she ran as fast as a hare chased by a tiger.
Finally, she stopped to catch her breath.
With her heart filled with glee,
she feels so free.



Admitting to our Mistakes Evelyn Fong (5C)

About courage, what does it conjure up? The courage of trying new things? The courage of facing uncertainties and difficulties? Courage is the ability to do something difficult, dangerous or even frightening. There are many ways to manifest courage, but to me, it is the courage to admit your mistakes and accept the consequences boldly.

As a current S5 student, I have had many unforgettable memories, having studied in this school for five years. Here is an incident that I will always remember.

Every year, the school organizes a taster programme for S3 students to allow them to learn more about subjects offered in senior secondary,

such as Economics. During the programme, some students sitting at the back, including me, were using their phones as we weren't interested in the lessons. However, some students reported us to the discipline teacher and as a result, we



were given a lecture by the discipline teacher harshly. She said that we didn't exercise self-control and lacked the ability to judge what was proper behaviour.

After that, she gave a piece of paper to each one of us and told us to write down our names and then hand it to her if we had used our phones in the lessons. I struggled whether I should write down my name as I was anxious about being punished. Finally, I made up my mind and wrote down my name resolutely because I didn't want to make one more mistake and honesty is priceless. When I handed in

my slip to her, I felt very guilty as I had disappointed her.

The next day, my class teachers asked me why I had done such inappropriate and stupid thing angrily. I didn't know how to answer them as I felt extremely ashamed. Then, we were told to see the discipline teacher. Obviously, she would scold us. I didn't remember what she said exactly but I understood that she detested to see that we didn't think before we acted. She then told us to inform our parents frankly that night.

I couldn't stop thinking about that incident after school. I was guilty more than worried as I had been so wrong and I had let my teachers and parents down. A warning was issued to remind me not to make the same silly mistake again.

Through this incident, I understood that everyone makes mistakes. *"What's done can't be undone, but at least you can keep it from happening again."* Rather than trying to cover it up, we should admit our fault courageously and learn from it. Indeed, admitting your mistakes can be difficult as you will risk being punished or losing integrity and friendships. However, it is an invaluable experience that will benefit you forever. So, don't be afraid of admitting our faults. What's significant is we learn to repent and try turning a new leaf.



Speaking Up Yan Ling (4D)

I remembered when I was in kindergarten; we took turns to be the class monitors. One day, I noticed the "monitor tag" on my desk but it wasn't my duty day. I hesitated and showed the monitor tag in the classroom and asked, "Who is the monitor of today?"

"Hey! That's my monitor tag!" Mary yelled loudly.

I almost forgot her name, but I clearly remembered that she was the most popular student in the class. She frowned fiercely and I knew I was caught in a tremendous trouble.

"Now I know why we couldn't find it the whole morning. YOU TOOK IT!" one of Mary's friends accused.

"Give it back!" another boy shouted.



"Thief! Thief!" the gang of hers was shouting at me rudely.

Our class teacher was sitting next to me with folded arms and said nothing. I bet she thought I stole the tag and was expecting me to fix the problem on my own. I didn't know what to do at that moment. Then, I burst into tears and screamed bitter-

ly, "It wasn't me!"

"It wasn't her fault. The tag was already on her desk when she came in," my friend, Ella tried to intervene and help me.

However, that did not resolve the situation at all. All classmates had already believed that I was a dishonest thief.

Ella tried again resolutely, "I sit next to her and I saw it with my own

eyes. She definitely is not a thief!" Her eyes turned watery.

Ella was also a friend of Mary. Then Mary said, "We will no longer be friends if you speak up for her."

It takes courage to overcome our fear and anxiety. It takes courage to climb up a tall tree and save a kitten. It also requires courage to confront gangsters to save the innocents. They are the kinds of physical risks we take for what is right. Yet, there is another kind of courage. We have to speak up for what is true even when we are going against the tide.

The consequences may be being isolated, repelled or even bullied. Ella's little heart understood all these very well, but she was determined to step up for the truth. This is undoubtedly something remarkable for a kindergarten girl.

We all know it is paramount to be rational and clear-minded in times of crisis. Nevertheless, if I were Ella, I would keep quiet and joined the bullies passively as it would make my social life easier. I feel terribly guilty to have this cowardly thought but deep down I really appreciate Ella's bravery and integrity.



Cry of Wolf (Part 2) Henry Chu (6C)

It was eight years later. May has grown up into an 18-year-old young woman, who long had her innocence left in her dark past. She is no longer the playful and fragile girl that the neighbourhood used to know. Now with her fearsome pistol that could conjure even burning bullets, she is known as one of the most proficient hunters in the Magic Forest. But there is one thing that remained unchanged throughout the years: her eye-catching red cape that she modified over and over to fit her growing body. This not only allows her to retain the name of the 'Red Riding Hood', but also keeps her inseparable bond with her late parents.

One day May was preparing for another day's hunt. But as soon as she had loaded the bullets into her prized pistol, she sensed something lurking behind her. She swiftly took a glance behind her, and there stood a grey creature with a long snout and messy strands of hair. Then May spotted something that ultimately caught her attention - a limping forelimb on the left.

Without hesitating, May pointed her powerful pistol at the old beast, for this wolf was the crafty thief who took away her love and left her to survive alone once again. May is not afraid of anything at this point, but the beast will not cower easily. She and the old wolf are at a dangerous standoff, but who will strike first?

As May firmly aimed at the wolf with her lethal pistol, she suddenly discovered in its eyes, a lurking sense of melancholy, or perhaps, a pang of bitterness filled with pleas and cries of injustice. For a split second, May wondered how it was able to channel all those complex emotions through a simple gaze. What exactly is in this wolf's head? However, these doubts in her head were simultaneously silenced by the grave words: 'Wolves are the most dangerous creatures of all.' At the same time, scenes of a blood-stained room endlessly flickered in her mind.

With her heart vigorously ablaze, May pressed her finger hesitantly against the trigger.

'Stop! Freeze!'

A sudden noise from nowhere startled May and the wolf as men in military uniforms marched in. 'Finally, you beastly criminal! Be ready to face the trial!' The two officers shouted as they threw a net and caught the poor beast in it. It tried to struggle, but was too old and weak to fight back while the men carried it away.

To May, this all seemed too sudden. Of course, she knew that the wolf deserved punishment, but it was supposed to be HER job. She had to revenge with her own hands! Without hesitation, she rushed back to her house, packed enough food and water, and then hastily trod along the soldiers' path. She realised that she had already lost track of them, but there was no time to lose anymore. She desperately needed to catch up with them.

'Where, where am I heading to...?'

*** **

'Young lady! Young lady! Are you OK?'

May opened her eyes slowly, only to see the clear blue sky up above.

What...what have just happened...?'

'Your head is bruised. You might have tripped and hit a rock.'



She got up in agony, and saw a smartly-dressed gentleman sitting beside her. Right by him stood a black horse, which was as dark as the night sky.

'Hang on. This horse seems familiar to me... have I met you before?'

At this very moment, several flashbacks came to her mind. 'Christmas night... matches... secret gentleman...'

'Wait, aren't you the girl who almost froze to death 8 years ago?'

Now, everything came back to May. This good man beside her was her saviour who sent her to a new life in the Magic Forest! This

miraculous reunion seemed too good to be true, but it is him – without a doubt – standing right beside her!

'...May I ask who you are, good sir?' May asked while trying to stay composed.

'I am, in fact, Prince Edward of the Kingdom of Oz (which the Magic Forest is a part of), but many people like to call me the Happy Prince.'

'Oh, really! Then are you really a happy prince?'

'Hmm, I don't know; maybe it's because wherever I go, people always seem to carry joy on their faces, and I feel proud of that.'

'Then you must be a well-respected prince!'

'If I may be so bold to ask,' May continued, 'why did you come to the Magic Forest?'

'Father received reports from some officials that there is a curious phenomenon going on in the Magic Forest, and so he asked me to come here and search for clues.'

'I see, but I'm leaving the Magic Forest.' She said solemnly, with her short-lived enthusiasm.

'Why?'

The Red Riding Hood told the prince her tragedy and her determination for a revenge.

'What? Wolves? Eating humans?'

'Yes, indeed! I will never forgive him for what he had taken away from me...' Before May could finish her sentence, several masked men with daggers leapt out from nowhere!

'Hey! Who are they?' The uninvited visitors drew their razor-sharp blades, and went straight for the prince!

Sensing that her saviour was in grave danger, she swiftly took her bronze pistol and coldly aimed it at the assassins. However, as she glanced around the deep dark woods, there were more



fearsome men standing nearby with lethal rifles. The Prince, their prey, is now being hemmed in, without a slight chance of breaking through. Now trapped between the Devil and the deep blue sea, it seems that attempts to fight back will certainly be futile, and certainly he will meet his end.

At this critical moment, everyone felt a light breeze as the bushes rustled. But something - a voice - was heard before anyone could possibly react.

'If you want to slay the Happy Prince, then you have to do it over my dead body!'



All of a sudden, another man in a ghost-white cloak wielding an amethyst scimitar emerged from the dust like a spectre. Yet, heeding no warning, the men in black continued their mission to kill.

But the hermit in white is not good-tempered either. Soon enough, his whole body spun, as if he was dancing with his scimitar. Then with a sudden acceleration, he left five or six men's clothes stained in scarlet. Impressed, the Happy Prince and Red Riding Hood seemed to have regained hope from this secret swordsman. They once again held their weapons in their hands firmly, and fought back for their pending doom without hesitation.

Finally, the assassins all laid lifelessly on the ground.

'Thank you, good sir,' Prince Edward showed his gratitude towards the man in the white cloak.

'Sir, may I learn your name?' May asked in curiosity.

The man silently took off his hood, revealing a bearded face with a significant desert-brown complexion. With his long, shaggy hair dangling down his face, he could easily resemble a broken wanderer.

This man thus spoke, 'My name is Aladdin.'

May was shocked, 'Aladdin? Prince, have you heard of him before?'

'Who hasn't? Aladdin, the most famous fortune teller and wish granter on this land? Everyone knows him!'

'Aye prince, yet thou shalt be warned,' Aladdin said solemnly.

'Every wish I grant comes with a price. You tried your very best to act according to the people, but you see what happened just now? The dark politics and the vicious villains have just aimed their deadly darts at you, Prince!'

The Happy Prince seemed so taken aback by Aladdin's warnings that he literally backed a step or two. 'So, you mean... I have offended someone, so he is trying to kill me?'

'I'm afraid so.' Aladdin solemnly replied.

'Oh no! Oh no!' May thought to herself, her heart pounding wildly. 'Then, do you know who is behind all this?'

'I do know, but as I said, your wish to know the villain's plan shall not be granted without a cost.'

'Then what shall the cost be?' The Prince demanded urgently. He did not expect at all that his mission to investigate the Magic Forest had just triggered a crisis in the court – and possibly the whole Kingdom of Oz, too!

'My demand is simple,' Aladdin spoke calmly, 'just chase down a wolf and hunt it. Then you shall uncover the culprit.'

May, at first, was listening to their conversations half-heartedly, as she had waited too long to continue her majestic journey to revenge; but as Aladdin mentioned the conditions for



granting the Prince's wish, her eyes swiftly regained its beam and delightfully interrupted, 'A wolf? No problem! I'm going after a wolf too!'

'Then where shall you find this wolf?'

'In the Capital! Go quick, or we'll lose track of it!' Before she even finished her sentence, she was already leaping into action.

'Well,' Aladdin turned and smirked, 'I wish you the best of luck.' Then, he and the Prince followed the girl's footsteps.

'What! The assassination failed!'

'Yes indeed, Prince.'

'Great! Now Edward knows everything about what's happening in the Forest!'

'Relax, Prince - we still have time. Also, with that old wolf with us, we just need to wait for the trial and the sentence, then success shall come along.'

'You're right. In that case, continue the operation in the Magic Forest!'

'Certainly, Prince.'

End

A Sip of the Past Joyce Wong (4D)

Café. Window. Sunlight.

And a heart weighed down by pounds of stones.

He concentrated deeply on his breathing. It had taken him lots of effort to keep his mind blank. It was just too easy, too dangerous to let his brain wander.



Fountain pen. Ink. Parchment.

Drops of black ink dripped onto the parchment steadily. He hastily wiped it away with his hand, but only succeeding in smearing it all over the blank page.

He promised himself he would put it down, he would close the door to that fateful memory. But his subconscious didn't seem to agree. Nights and nights have passed, and the dark shadow of the past keeps haunting him. Every night in the past 7 months has left him drenched in his own sweat, tangled in his sheet. Medicine had been proved futile. Sleepless nights follow him still.

He could never forget the lifeless eyes that left him shivering under the warm sun, the unmoving body that made thousands of knives twist in his heart.

No. That was too dangerous.

A figure was approaching his table. He glanced up. To his relief, the waitress had brought his order along. Coffee and pastries were the best distractions. It could keep him company for hours. Past. Black. A cold brew.

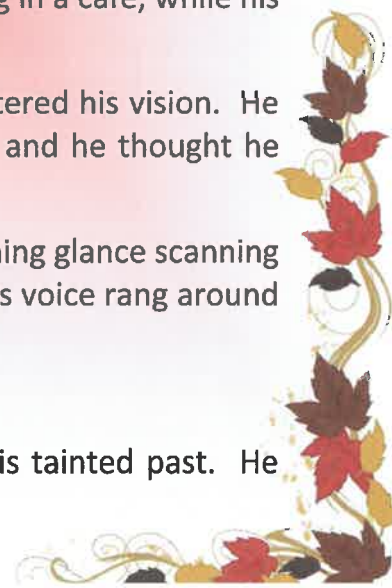
He watched himself clear away the mess on the desk. His limbs felt detached from his body. It was as if his body was still on Earth, sitting in a café, while his head was somewhere else, floating in nothingness.

A plate of pastry, followed by a cup of black cold brew entered his vision. He heard himself mutter a small 'thank you' to the waitress, and he thought he received a reply - a 'you're welcome' or something.

But that was clearly not the case. He felt the girl's questioning glance scanning him even if he was still staring at his blank composition. His voice rang around his head as he asked her to repeat her question.

"Milk, syrup, or both?"

He normally had his cold brew black, for mourning, for his tainted past. He



would ask for milk and sugar every time, but they would remain untouched.

He had tried to make his coffee lighter and sweeter; nevertheless, he failed to do so. He just couldn't bear to take his cold brew with a splash of milk or a drop of syrup when his life was just as dark as black coffee.

Memory. Coffee. Bitterness.

"I'll have both, thank you," he answered, just like any other day.

With his coffee and rolls on the table, there wasn't enough space to accommodate both. The man hurriedly shoved his ink-soaked paper to the side, only to collide with the waitress' hand.

Milk splattered on the table and his parchment, covering everything with a thin layer of white. In a distance, he could hear the girl apologizing frantically. She produced a towel and wiped the spilled milk away, only to create a larger puddle of mess.

"I'm sorry, Sir," she cried.

He sighed. After all, there is no use crying over spilled milk. What has been done cannot be undone, and what hasn't been done remained the same. There's nothing you can do to change it.

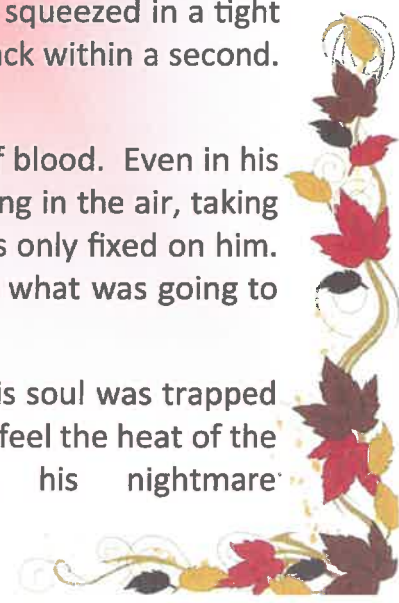
The words echoed in his consciousness like an annoying fly buzzing in the air. Or was it? The knives embedded in his chest were twisting, his breath being knocked out of his lungs. Was there really nothing he could do to change it? What if his desk hadn't been so messy? What if he hadn't pushed his paper to the side carelessly? What if he hadn't asked for milk? What if...?

What if he had tried?

There was no going back. The memory that had been edging around rushed back into his mind. His breath sped up and his heart was squeezed in a tight knot. What he had tried to hold back for months came back within a second. There was nothing he could do to stop it.

The smell of gunpowder, the whiff of sweat, the stench of blood. Even in his memory, they were familiar. He could hear the bullet flying in the air, taking away the too-short life of his comrades. But his eyes was only fixed on him. His brother in anything but blood. Even if he had known what was going to happen, he couldn't have moved his body.

He wanted to scream, to cry, to warn him about it, but his soul was trapped in his paralyzed body. "Anthony!" he croaked. He could feel the heat of the bullet nearing by seconds. He watched as his nightmare



happened once again before his eyes. His mind was screaming, a high-pitched scream.



Anthony turned his head, looking straight at him, confusion written all over his dirt-covered face. He shouted at him, telling him to look in front of him, but no sounds came out of his mouth. He could only watch as the silver bullet shot straight to him, passing through his chest and coming

back out from his upper spine.

Blood spewed out of his mouth at the same moment as he dropped dead. His face still carried the expression he had seconds ago. His eyes opened, as widely as a dead fish. From that angle, he knew that his brother's lungs had been punctured by the bullet. He knew he would have admired the perfect angle of the bullet if it hadn't been his brother who was lying on the ground.

"No, don't you dare, Anthony Creasington... Don't die... Please..." The broken sentence echoed in his mind. His arms moved to embrace the now lifeless body. Needles were poking his eyes. He wasn't even surprised to find that his face had been painted by trails of colourless tears. He selfishly hoped that the one that had been taken down wasn't his beloved brother.

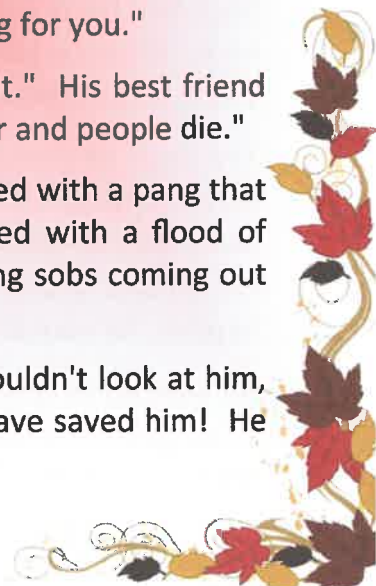
His brother in everything but blood. They were best friends and parabatai.

"I know you will watch my back, right?" His brother asked the same question every single time before the battle as if it was their last. He always replied, "You know I will do anything for you, even if it means dying for you."

"If I die, Alexander Christopher, it will never be your fault." His best friend promised every time after he picked up his gun. "It's a war and people die."

It had never come to a time like that until then. He realized with a pang that it was the last time he heard it. His hands were stained with a flood of scarlet red, and he couldn't seem to control the despairing sobs coming out of his mouth.

What if... What if he hadn't shouted at him? Then he wouldn't look at him, and he would have noticed the bullet, right? He could have saved him! He could have saved his brother.



Deep down in his heart, he knew that Anthony would die nevertheless. His reflections were never the fastest comparing to his. He could never duck fast enough to escape the shot. The silver bullet would pass through his torso even if he was. It would be a messy death, not a clean one like this.

His memory rewound to the moment before he shouted his brother's name. This time, he stopped. The bullet whizzed through the air, and he was horrified to find that what he had been expecting was playing out before his eyes again. Anthony's eyes were opened in shock, he gurgled up mouthful of blood as he struggled to remain conscious. He tried to apply pressure on his brother's wounds, but it was too late. His eyes closed slowly as he took his last breath.

He knew it was his subconscious telling him that it could never work. That he could never change what had happened. But he just needed someone to blame, even if that 'someone' was himself.

What if... What if he had shot another bullet to strike off the bullet from the enemy? It wasn't easy, very difficult in fact, but he should have tried, right?

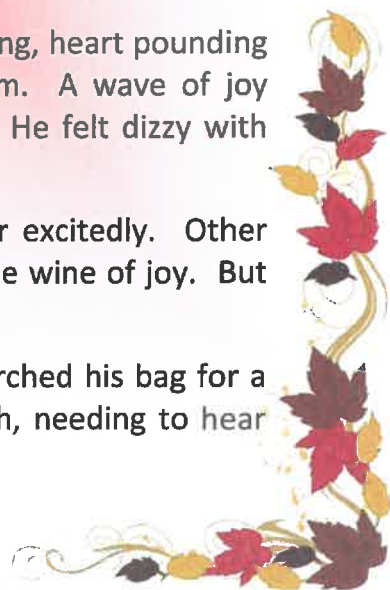
If years and years of military training has taught him anything, then it is the fact that you can only duck to avoid a bullet. A bullet travels up to 1700mph, and the human eyes can only see objects moving up to 550mph. It never works.

But one could try, right? He cursed himself for rejecting the idea. It would have worked if he had tried. It would have worked and his brother wouldn't have died. After all, believing is the key to success. As if he was walking on clouds, he watched as the scene re-played. His vision was swirling and his hands could barely hold the gun steadily. He pulled the trigger blindly, hoping for the best. Time stopped, and it hit the bullet that would eventually kill Anthony. He succeeded and his brother was saved.

He let out a breath that he didn't even know he was holding, heart pounding like a running hart. He had done it. He had saved him. A wave of joy overcame him and his heart was as light as a butterfly. He felt dizzy with happiness filling every part of his body.

"I have done it!" He shouted, jumping up from his chair excitedly. Other customers looked at him oddly as he broke down from the wine of joy. But he couldn't care less. He wanted to shout, to jump, to fly.

He had saved him. He had done the impossible. He searched his bag for a few coins and blindly ran to the nearest telephone booth, needing to hear Anthony's voice to ensure that he was indeed alive.



Happiness took his vision and he couldn't even see the number keys on the telephone straight. With great difficulty, the phone finally rang as it reached the recipient at the other end. He was so thrilled to finally hear his brother's voice. He could hardly stand straight, his legs felt wobbly.

As the phone was on its 13th ring, he was becoming worried that Anthony wouldn't pick up the phone. But to his relief, the ringing stopped when he counted to 17.

"Anthony...?" He asked meekly, his calm tone completely contrary to his intense emotion. He was afraid that his voice would betray him.

There was silence on the other side of the telephone but he knew that someone was on it as he heard the soft sound of breathing. Did Anthony not want to talk to him? Was he angry with him? Was it because he couldn't save him the first time? But he did. He did save him this time. Anthony was alive this time.

"Alexander...," a shaky female voice was heard. He was astounded that it wasn't Anthony. It was his phone number after all.

"I'd like to speak to Anthony Creasington, please," he said politely, hoping that she would hand Anthony the phone. He was never a patient person, and the need to hear his voice again was urgent. He had to ensure that his brother was alive, safe and sound. He had to relieve the guilt that had been gnawing on him ever since that day.

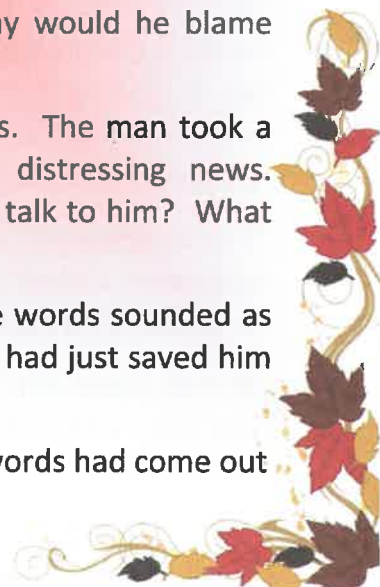
"Alexander... It was never your fault...," the same voice again, bringing a hint of sadness across the phone. The man suddenly realized that the woman was Anthony's mother. He was getting impatient. What he had asked for was Anthony, not his mother. "Please don't blame yourself... Alexander..."

"What... What do you mean?" he stuttered, with caution creeping into his heart. What did Anthony's mother mean by that? Why would he blame himself? "I don't understand..."

He heard a deep sigh and knew that it must be sad news. The man took a deep breath and mentally prepared himself for the distressing news. Maybe... Anthony was angry with him, and didn't want to talk to him? What could be worse than that?

"My son, Anthony... He is dead...," she whispered, but the words sounded as loud as thunder to him. His brother couldn't be dead. He had just saved him from the bullet! No, she must be lying.

"What do you mean by that? I have just saved him!" The words had come out



harsher than he expected, but he could no longer control the anger in his voice. Anthony. Was. Not. Dead.

"A bullet killed him. How could you have saved him?"

He shook his head vigorously. No. He just saved him from that lethal bullet. He had shot the bullet from the enemy. He had done it. He had done the impossible. It wasn't true and she must be lying. She just didn't want him to see Anthony again. "No! I have just saved him! I shot the bullet! He isn't dead!"



There was a long sigh. It was as if the woman was bracing herself to break some important news to him. "Alexander... There is nothing you can do to change what had happened."

"You've been imagining things again, Alex..."

"No... What do you mean...?" his voice hitched, shivering in fear. He hadn't been imagining that right? He couldn't have imagined saving his brother... right...? The man punched himself hesitantly. "But I did it! I shot the bullet that would have killed Anthony! I saved him!" he cried in despair.

"No... Alex... He was killed in the battle. You didn't save him. There was nothing you could do now, please don't blame yourself. It's a war and people die." He could hear that Anthony's mother weeping. "Anthony wouldn't have wanted that. He was an optimistic person. He wouldn't have wanted you to think of him with sadness and guilt."

He was...

It was really the end.

Anthony was dead, and there was nothing he could do to save him, not even imagining to save him. Without even realizing it himself, his unsteady hand dropped the receiver as he stumbled back to his chair. His vision blinded by tears.

"It was a bullet. How could you have saved him?"

"It's a war and people die."

He could see the pair of empty eyes staring at him again. He could no longer deny the fact that he couldn't turn back the clock. It was just like the glass of milk. A ruined life cannot be revived. What he could do was to wipe the milk away and move on, and let time stitch up the wound.



What was left in his heart was an empty hole reminding him of the tragedy of wars. He felt empty with sadness screaming inside his head. It brought away the grief and guilt.

He realized painfully that life wouldn't wait for anyone. It wouldn't wait for him even if he was grieving. The only thing he could do was to hold onto his courage and kept walking.

It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live.

The spilled milk was cleaned up, and a new milk jug was placed neatly on his table. He glanced at his black French Roast, and suddenly, he felt like adding a little milk and sugar syrup. Lighter, and sweeter.

Life is just like the coffee in front of him. It will only be sweeter if you allow it to be. You may drink it as bitter as you want, to torture your taste buds, your heart. But you may also add a little sugar and milk to make it much more bearable.

He might be brave fighting in the battlefield, but it was nothing comparing to the courage needed for him to make his cold brew sweeter. He chuckled at his thought. It was such a joke that a soldier like him would be afraid of adding sugar and milk into his coffee.

The man mustered his courage as he took up the sugar with his left hand, the milk jug with the other. He willed his trembling hands to be still, and slowly, he added both into his cold brew.



As the milk and syrup fused with his black coffee, he could feel the guilt eating him up lessened. It was no longer consuming him. Anthony would be happy. His brother would be happy that he was no longer consumed by his guilt.

The man took a deep breath, bracing himself for the new life and dived in. The taste of his bitter coffee was still familiar, but sweeter, creamier.

Alexander Christopher took another sip as the corner of his lips lifted for the first time ever. He could finally gather his courage to stop looking behind, and kept his eyes on his future. He looked outside. The sky was painted with layers and layers of crimson and gold.

When the sun goes down, it will be another day.

