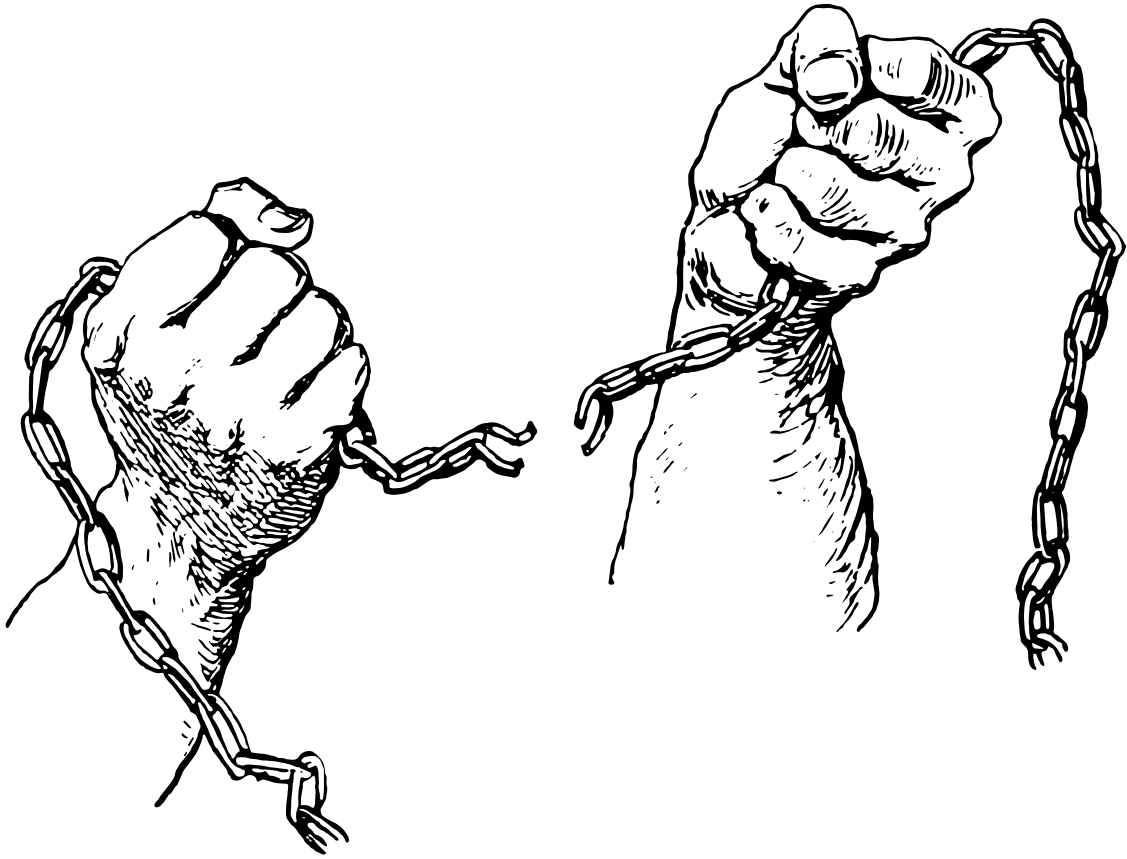


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TWO DAYS TO FREEDOM

Best Works: Summer 2021

JONATHAN MOON

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CHAPTER 1

The shrill blaring horn blasted me out of my sleep. I immediately got up, folded my pyjamas and blanket into a neat pile, and put on my grey shirt and pants, just as I had been taught to. This was part of my everyday morning routine as required by the Government. I trudged to the bathroom and turned on the faucet. The cool water washed the rest of my sleep from my eyes and energized me to go about my day. As I descended into the dining room, the familiar aroma of freeze-dried eggs and instant porridge wafted up to me.

"G'Morning, Mother and Father." My voice was still scratchy from sleep.

"Good morning, Son. Breakfast is almost ready," Mother announced, frantically juggling the eggs and porridge. Father tiredly raised his mug of coffee in greeting, quiet as always. I sat down on the chair and rested my elbows on the cool metal table that had been in our family ever since I could remember. Then breakfast was served, and I dutifully ate the tasteless food that would give me energy enough to last the morning.

As I chewed on my food, I could sense something different about my parents' mood. Father was blinking rapidly, tapping his fingers nervously on the table. Mother was outright glaring at the television set that was explaining the benefits that the Government had provided us.

"Is something bothering you guys? What's wrong?" I asked, confused about why my parents were acting so stiff and nervous.

"No, no nothing's wrong. It's just ... You watch out for yourself today, okay? If something out of the ordinary happens, you come straight back home." Mother was obviously lying about nothing being wrong but I shrugged it off thinking it something trivial.

My town was uneventful as always, with scores of people strolling about, going through their morning tasks. Some people were carrying umbrellas as it looked like it would rain later in the afternoon. I mentally kicked myself for forgetting my own umbrella. As I slowly approached my school, I saw the horn that had woken me up and would signal throughout the day, lunch, dinner, and curfew. There seemed nothing out of the ordinary at my school as I entered through its gates: all was as to be expected. Trees, wilted by continued exposure to the cleaning chemicals, stood behind the large metallic gates, the air smelled of the disinfectants used to clean the school overnight, students were getting ready for the first period, quietly getting out books from the lockers and toting them to their respective classes. I could feel the heaviness of my own books in my bag as I went to my first lesson in history.

History was one of the most important classes in school and this lecture was about how our Government had taken control when the earlier regimes had proved ineffective at moderating their citizens after the tragic corona pandemic at the beginning of the century. It had taken our Government seventy years to bring order and make our town peaceful, free from all kinds of conflict and argument. Since then, they had instilled discipline and equality between people to ensure that no more conflict would arise. This rigid sense of peace had lasted for 20 years and hopefully it would continue for many more years.

As the history lecture droned on, I could hear pencils scratching paper, the sound of everyone quietly taking notes. I was bored out of my mind as the professor talked in his monotone voice and I lethargically took notes.

After that first mind numbing lesson, the rest of the day passed by similarly without any incident and before I knew it, it was the end of the day. I tiredly stuffed my books back into the locker and exited the school. The journey home seemed a thousand times longer than the one in the morning. To add to the laborious walk, dark clouds started rolling in and soon it was drizzling. I sighed at forgetting my umbrella, annoyed that I would arrive home soaked by the rain. I quickened my pace as I heard ominous thunder in the distance. As I finally neared home, I felt overjoyed at the prospect of taking a warm shower and collapsing onto my bed afterwards.

CHAPTER 2

But when I entered through the doorway, I was met by a bone-chilling sight. The living room was a mess and the couch upturned, ridden with bullet holes. In the kitchen, the china was all shattered, the cupboards broken. I was filled with dread and my breath came out in fast, short bursts as I approached my parents' bedroom. A horrifying sight greeted me: they were lying in pools of blood. "They're gone ... no, they can't be gone! Please, they can't be gone!" My mouth opened to voice my fears in a scream, but it stuck in my throat and would not come out. Tears blurred my eyes as I staggered toward them, helplessness washing over me. Mother was motionless but Father's sudden movement caught my eye.

"Protect this... find him by midnight, then go to the Rebellion," Father gasped with his last breath as he handed me a vial, at the same time breaking another one on the ground and exposing me to whatever was in it. He also weakly slid a paper slip across the floor that had an address on it.

"Wha ... what do you mean? What happened here? You can't go yet, what's going on?" But no matter how much I begged him to tell me, he had said his last words.

Head reeling from what I had just witnessed, I stumbled out of the house and collapsed on the lawn. I dully stared at the two things Father had given me: the vial and the slip of paper. I didn't know what was in the vial or what its chemical would do to me. But I did know what was written on the paper. It was an address to a place a few hours away, a place that was practically a ruin. Still, it was the only lead I had. The only way I might be able to get answers.

CHAPTER 3

I stood up shakily on my feet. As devastated as I was by my parents' death, I was also determined to find out who had murdered them. I would find justice and get some answers from the mysterious 'him' Father had told me to find.

Wiping away my tears, I checked my phone for directions to the address and started running that way. As I ran through the town, I felt silent eyes on me, observing me. Some townsfolk I had known since I was young were glaring at me with outright hostility. I heard them calling someone and whispering urgently on their phones.

Unnerved by their cold looks, I picked up my pace. Strangely, I didn't feel tired at all after running a few miles. I was in fact energized and not even close to slowing down. When I heard the police siren, something in me urged me to slow down, talk to the police. But I ignored my intuition and ran on, running with my head, not my feet. The buildings passed by in a blur and I was shocked by my own speed. I thought it impossible to run this fast before. What had happened? Was this linked to whatever serum was in the vial Father had exposed me to?

CHAPTER 4

Suddenly, a black blur at the edge of my vision interrupted my speculation. Someone was moving toward me in a shocking display of speed. Before I knew it, that someone was right beside me, had grabbed me, and thrown me onto the lawn of the nearest house.

Grass and dirt clung to my hair from my tumble and I dizzily looked up to glare at my assailant. He was seemingly a little older than me, blocky with a muscular build, eyes angry like a bear and a snarling mouth. Then my eyes saw the dreaded Enforcer badge on his chest.

Enforcers were how the peace was maintained. They were the elite forces of the Government, ruthless foot soldiers who silenced anyone that disturbed the peace. Some people believed them to be a myth as they were rarely seen in public. But now, one of them was standing right in front of me.

"Jeremy Smith, you are sentenced to death for conspiracy against the Government, aiding and abetting the Rebellion, and breaking the peace." His voice was dark and raspy like metal scratching on a surface.

He was suddenly right up in my face and a truck-like force rammed into my gut. The force of the punch launched me backwards and through the house wall.

Coughing from the impact and with nausea taking over, I painstakingly stood up and started bolting the other way. I ran frantically, ran faster than ever before, afraid for my life. This man was not someone I could fight, even with my seemingly enhanced abilities.

I risked a glance backwards and saw him pursuing me: he was like the grim reaper given life, relentlessly chasing me. Mind reeling with desperation, I looked around for anything, anything at all that might be my salvation. I could not die here. I had to get the serum in the vial to the Rebellion and find justice for my parents' deaths.

Up ahead, I saw hope in the form of an abandoned factory. Maybe I could lose him there. I would stand a better chance inside than in the wide open.

I heaved the rusty metal factory doors open with a resounding clang, and dashed inside erratically, hoping to lose my pursuer in the winding labyrinth of corridors. Despite that, I could feel him only a few meters behind me, his feet clanging on the metal floor like an ominous bell. Another turn in the maze led me to a door at the end of the hallway. Praying with all my heart that it would lead outside, I almost flew through it and slammed the bolt shut, locking it. To my immense relief, there was another door leading outside, and I could hear the furious Enforcer roaring at his failure to catch me.

CHAPTER 5

Gasping for breath and feeling lucky at my narrow escape, I checked my phone map and found that the address Father gave me was now only a couple of minutes away. This part of the town was rundown and the last I heard, the Officials were planning on redevelopment. I saw overgrown lawns, dusty windows, and broken streetlamps.

I reached my destination and stared sceptically at the hovel: shattered windows, weed-filled garden, and rotting planks spoke of years of neglect. I couldn't believe someone was living here, much less someone my parents knew.

I clenched my fist and hesitantly knocked on the mouldy door. To my surprise, the eyehole opened, and an annoyed, bloodshot eye glared out at me.

"What do you want?" the man's voice behind the eye growled at me.

"Umm ... my parents sent me. Do you know James Smith or Mary Smith?" The man's unpleasant demeanour put me off and made me doubt myself.

"What do those two want with me? Whatever, I guess that gets you through the door." The hideous eye disappeared, a series of locks unlocked, and the door opened to reveal a person.

He was wearing a coat that looked it had been unwashed since he bought it and pants with an unreasonable number of pockets filled with who knows what. A pronounced limp, and those bloodshot eyes glaring down at me.

I slowly stepped into the house, looking at him for a reaction as I might look at an agitated bear. He slammed the door behind me, ominously locking all the locks again. This man and this hovel did not seem like things that my parents, model citizens that they were, would associate with. He represented everything my parents disliked: he was messy, he was dirty, he was crude.

"So, what do your parents want this time, kid?" he snapped.

"I don't know. My father told me to find you," I said shakily. "He also gave me this thing." I showed him the vial of chemicals.

The man's eyes went wide at the sight of the vial.

"Oh no, I think not! I will not get mixed up with all of that again."

"So you do know what this is!" I exclaimed. "Please, you have to help me. I have to get this to the Rebellion."

"Why are you asking me to do it? Go tell your parents that if they want something done, they do it themselves. I'm not going to risk my life for them again. They must have a death wish if they're still with the Rebellion." Those words stung deep into me like salt on a wound. Turning stiffly away from him, I clenched my teeth.

"The Government got to my parents. They're already gone ..."

"What? What do you mean they're gone? Where did they go?" he interrupted.

"They're dead alright! The Government got to them! They told me to find you, that you would help me. I guess they were wrong then."

With that, I stormed outside determined to find the Rebellion and deliver the chemical. With or without his help.

Fuming that the one person my Father had depended on wouldn't help me, I climbed to the top of a nearby hill to clear my mind. It overlooked my hometown but, as I looked down into where I had grown up, I noticed some differences. While the people had always followed the rules, there was a renewed sense of control in the air. People were talking in hushed murmurs, there were not many people outside, more Enforcers were out and about, and I could smell the chemical scent of cleaning tools wafting all the way up the hill.

What had they done to my town? Never had the town felt this stale. I needed to find the Rebellion quickly. While debating over what my next steps should be, I heard someone yell at me.

CHAPTER 6

"Hey kid! Hey, I thought things over, and I'll take you to the Rebellion!" I could see him limping up the hill, favouring his right leg.

"What? But I thought you didn't want to get mixed up in this again." I ran down to meet him, my mind wary with confusion.

"Yeah, I didn't. But if James and Mary are really gone, it's now my responsibility to see that their son gets to the Rebels safely." My mouth turned into a massive grin. I was overjoyed. My father had chosen the right person to help me, to show me what to do in this new world of quiet chaos.

"Okay, so where do we go? Where's the Rebellion base?" I couldn't wait to make my way toward the people who would have answers about my parents and the vial of chemicals they left me holding.

"The Rebels set up base out toward the east. It should only be a couple of hours' walking but with my bad leg we could reach it tomorrow if we keep a decent pace."

Suddenly, my joy turned into doubt. The way he had changed his mind so fast was suspicious.

"How do I know I can trust you? How can I know that you aren't an agent for the Government, trying to lead me into a trap?" I could still remember my frightening encounter with the Enforcer and was worried that this man who I believed to be my parents' friend was just another one of those Government Enforcers.

"Look, I know I can't make you trust me one hundred percent. But I did work with your parents. They were the most brilliant scientists in the Rebellion. They worked tirelessly day and night to make the vial of chemicals you're holding right now. They were heroes, extraordinary people who fought for people's freedom. While I'm not them, I'll try my hardest to preserve the chemical they made to free everyone." At his words, I was slack jawed. My parents, scientists for the Rebellion? They were rule followers; they never broke a single Government law in their life! But I could sense the truth in his words.

He explained more how they had created this liquid that could free people's minds from the Government's control. As I struggled to wrap my head around the truth, he chuckled.

"I assume you didn't know all that, is that right? Don't worry about my trustworthiness. I would do anything for a chance to free everyone from the clutches of this Government. Now, if we're done guessing whether I'm an Enforcer or not, let's get a move on to the Rebellion base, shall we?"

"Yeah, but you lead the way. I'll bring up the rear." He did seem like an honest person, but just in case, I thought it would be wise to walk behind.

As the sun set in an orange ball of flame behind me, we went back to his hovel to collect food and water for the journey and set out east. He kept a fast pace despite his limp, eager to make it to the base. We occasionally would take breaks for food or water, but the walking was mostly in silence, broken only by the occasional crackling of twigs or the hooting of night owls.

A few hours into our journey, he set his bag down.

"Let's have a quick sleep to get back our energy. I'll take the first watch so you can get some shut-eye." While I was reluctant to allow myself to be vulnerable in the dark, it was true that I needed rest to continue on, so I slowly laid down on the ground, determined to sleep light just in case.

After what seemed like only a blink of an eye, he was shaking me awake. I could see the yellowish haze of the sun about to rise.

"I thought we were going to take turns sleeping." While I was relieved nothing had happened, I didn't like that he had had no sleep.

"It's fine, kid. I can still go on without sleep."

With that, we resumed our trek toward the rising sun. After a few more hours of walking, a vast mountain range began to appear in the distance. Intimidating spires of rocks rose out into the sky and seemed to touch the clouds.

"The Rebellion's base is at the foot of that mountain. We should be able to make it by while it is still day time." Hearing his words, I felt relieved that our destination was in sight and marched on with renewed vigour.

As we slowly got closer to the mountains, I began to appreciate the sheer size of those massive lumps of rocks. When we were seemingly just below the spires, I heard a resounding crack as the tree beside me was blown open by a bullet.

"Hands where I can see them and no sudden movements! You have about twenty guns aimed at your heads and my men won't hesitate to shoot, you got that?" Suddenly, dozens of men were swarming around us and their leader was yelling at us to stay where we were.

All at once, my parents' friend started laughing in amusement.

"Come on guys, do you really not recognize me? It's me, Limping Lenny and that," he proudly announced pointing at me, "is Mary and James Smith's son."

Frowning, the leader of the group stared down at Limping Lenny till his face broke into a grin.

"My goodness it is you. I thought you quit after your injury. And I also thought the Smiths had given up working on that antidote for the Government's mind control?" While he seemed happy about seeing Lenny, he also seemed confused about why we were here.

"My parents were murdered by the government. They gave me this vial of chemicals and told me to give it to the Rebellion." I spoke up, holding the so-called 'antidote' in the air. The leader gasped in surprise seeing the chemicals and at a hand signal from him, the soldiers started ushering me through a camouflaged door into the mountain.

"You have nothing to worry about now, okay? We'll take care of everything. Your parents finally gave us a fighting chance against the Government and their sacrifice will not go to waste. You just sit tight and we will free and save everyone," the leader proclaimed, gripping my shoulder in happiness.

The Rebellion had carved out the inside of the mountain as their base. They led Limping Larry and me in through the camouflaged door and a couple of soldiers took me to my temporary quarters for me to rest. I was finally able to collapse on a fluffy bed, exhausted after the events of the past two days. I told myself it was fine to sleep comfortably, without being worried about an Enforcer popping out to arrest me.

I was relieved beyond description: the Rebellion was real and they were going to make use of the chemical my parents had made. All that was left for me to do was get settled into the base and wait for the day our dystopian Government was finally put to the ground.

CHAPTER 7

A loud cheer from outside roused me from my sleep, and I stumbled over to the common area to see what the commotion was about. The leader of the Rebellion, crying tears of joy, grabbed me by the shoulders.

"It's finally done. Thank you, thank you so much. The Government has finally been overthrown. Everyone is free now. This is all thanks to you and your parents." He was grinning from ear to ear, overjoyed that the people would now be allowed to make their own choices.

I was at a loss for words. All the struggle over the last few days, the fight with the Enforcer, finding Limping Lenny, the journey to the Rebellion: it had not gone to waste. Justice had been served, the leaders of the old regime would now be incarcerated, and my parents' life work would not have been for sham.

I saw Lenny ambling towards me with his now familiar limp.

"Hey kid, now that the Government is gone, we're free to make our own choices. The Rebellion would be happy to take you in, you are a hero in our eyes. How does it sound?"

"Yeah, yeah, I would love that. I want to learn everything there is to learn, everything the Government took away from us." My future now had endless possibilities. I could be whatever I wanted, without any constraints.

I felt taller than the mountains around me as I looked toward my undetermined future.

- End -

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ABOUT WRITING WORKSHOP



Johnathan Moon (Age 14)

2021 Summer Writing Workshop Participant

The Writing Workshop is a program designed to help students become a more creative and powerful writer. Our experienced tutors use a step-by-step approach to help students reach their full potential. They will work together on every step of the way including brainstorming, drafting, and editing. Students will learn how to communicate, structure their ideas and thoughts, and be exposed to a wider knowledge of rich vocabulary, writing styles, and grammatical rules.

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