

Fight for Freedom

By Katy Chantharasy, Pymble Ladies College

You lift your head. Your vision is blurry from when your nose slammed to the ground. You haul yourself up to sitting. It feels important not to stay down. That would be giving in. You can hear their footsteps growing distant beyond the closed door. They've taken the handcuffs off and you rub your wrists, feeling the red rawness through your shock.

The room is large, longer than the cricket pitch, with a high dark ceiling. A single naked bulb struggles to push back the gloom. There's only one door. You hear them lock it on the way out. You see a wooden ladder built into the wall, leading up to a narrow wooden walkway. The light comes through its slats, making bars against the wall. That's when you notice him.

His hands are chained above his head and he swings forward on them. His feet are chained together too. The cold, grey metal looks odd against his boyish pyjamas; purple satin with a turtle print. He's too old for them, you think. Seventeen perhaps. Your age. He's grinning at you. So what? Some sort of lunatic? 'You're a very good actor,' he says. His voice is high and eager.

You stand up and brush yourself off. You know why you are here. Of course, you know about the Tough Test. Your parents have warned you of the harsh ways of today's world. Before you turn eighteen; an adult, you must pass the test that shows that you are strong and tough enough of a human being to survive in the world today. The rules are simple, you must prove that you are worthy; if you are successful in doing so, you may live and continue your life as usual. But if you fail, you must be killed.

You study the boy; you are still speechless and you take a while to process his words. He looks rosy and cheerful, but you notice that his silky pyjamas are dusty and worn, they are ripped at the legs, and bloodstains have dried in little patches. The flecks of blood are small, but they

scare you, enough to back into the corner, though all the while, not taking your eyes of this strange character. Has he already been tested? Surely they would not use the same person twice?

He tilts his head to one side, like a confused puppy, his gaze is fixed directly on you. Immediately you realize that your silent study of him must have looked strange. You feel a flush rise in your cheeks as you stammer, "huh? I have absolutely no idea what you are on about". You start to worry; you are here for the test, aren't you? You must be.

"I think you do" the boy insists. "Seriously, it's not like you were going to show your weaknesses to *them* were you?" he shudders and his chains rattle, the noise echoing about the stony room. "You would never pass the test would you? But I suppose you won't anyway. They have already told me all about you, you're the weakling- your whole family is!" he laughs, almost cruelly; as if he is sharing an inside joke with a large group of friends. You can feel your cheeks burning as if bursting with the humiliation. "*Who are you?*" you shriek, the anger finally escaping. "***Are you insane?***"

"Why, of course he is" says a voice, startling you. You look up, towards the direction that the voice has come from. You see a darkened silhouette of a man looking more sinister than anything you have ever seen. Your heart freezes over. The silhouette stays as a shadow as the man speaks again. "Young Billy here is suffering from a mental illness, he sees things, hears things, and is constantly being taken over by his... weak mind. He has been hypnotized to prevent him from showing us most of his weak side. It has sickened us for long enough." He pauses as you stare at Billy in disbelief. "For your official Tough Test" he announces, "you must kill Billy Thompson."

The man steps forward on the narrow suspended walkway, the single bulb illuminates him, he lifts a blade and slashes at the wire that the bulb swings so precariously on. You see the bulb drop, and as it hits the ground, it smashes and the room goes black.

“Five minutes” shouts the man, “that is your time limit” You start to panic; you cannot kill Billy; that would be wrong. He is suffering in his delusion, how could he help it? Billy may have been rude to you but it was no fault of his. He did not deserve to die.

Neither do you, you think, as you contemplate the consequences of the test. You know how your family would suffer without you; you know how they would feel. They have suffered enough after your brother failed the test. This time, you will not let them down. You climb the ladder to the platform in silence. You creep up behind the man and shove him off the walkway. He slams to the ground in the pile of glass, left behind by the light bulb. The man is unconscious and you grab his blade to slash at Billy’s chains, he drops to the ground, but the man breaks Billy’s fall. “Hey! What are you doing?” he shouts. “sshhh!” You exclaim, “I’m trying to get us out of here, my family has suffered long enough because of this test. It ends here.”

Your own words inspire you as you take the man’s keys from his pocket and unlock the door. Expecting to find corridors, you see barren desert. You smile, freedom. It feels good. You leave the remote warehouse. It is sunrise as you run; back home, across the desert, away from the injustice. The new day symbolizes your newfound courage to strive to save other kids from the peril of the Test. And to share your freedom with them too.