

Raided

By Zach Chung, 15

The sun fell slowly and the horses energy dwindled, the wind rushing by with the sweet note of a whistle, sending ripples like ocean waves through their capes. A boy of anger and a girl of sadness stood alone on a field, awaiting the calm of night. The boys thoughts whirled inside his head, a storm of conflicts carried like a heavy sack.

*I can fight them, i know i can! All i need is the survivors to join me, and we can ...*

“No. I know what you’re thinking, but I can’t let you do that. I’ve already lost too many, I can’t lose you too.” The girl interrupted his thoughts. She stood up to prepare the horses for the night. But the anger inside the boy was too great to rest. He had to avenge Mother and Father. “But Rowan...” Tried the boy Rowan whipped around, and the boy realised she was crying

“NO. We can’t go back, okay Luke? Our village is lost, and we were lucky to get out alive. I’m taking us to the nearest town, and we can settle down there.”

“This isn’t what Mother & Father would want!”

“And how do you know that?” Rowans gaze turned to Luke, eyes of ice and stone under a sheet of longing. Luke knew he could not go any further, that she could not take anything else. He strode over to his makeshift sleeping sack, his anger lying still for the moment.

*I wonder how the raiders would tell the story.*

The thought floated in his head as he succumbed to the darkness of sleep.

**Chants waking the young and the old. Axes in hand as they came down to greet them. Red serpents engraved on fabric. Screams of familiars echoing through the air. Fire. Fire everywhere. Screams. Very close screams, was it mother? Was it Father? Mother & Father are not here. Did they leave? Tight hand grabbing his wrist, footsteps running, running, running. They were his feet. Where is Father? Where is Mother? Why is the village so quiet? I want to go home.**

Luke sprouted from his sleep like a berry picked too early, sweat running down his body. Was that him in the dream? He didn’t remember much from the raid that ravaged his home town. Rowan turned to him with a look that told Luke she didn’t get any sleep.

“Luke it’s OK. I have decided we can go back to the village to search the remains before we find a new town.” Rowan had awoken with a new tone, one of sympathy, in hand with the stretching sadness. So they mounted their horses and rode back on the too familiar gravel path.

“Who is that” Rowan squinted at the black outline. Luke jolted upwards, knocked out of a daydream he didn’t know he was in. He looked up at the scorched brick walls and the charred planks lying misplaced on the ashen ground. He could’ve sworn he saw the orange-red gaze of fire staring back at him for a

brief moment, only to disappear just as quick. He realised just how much the raid affected him, like a parasite in his head.

Then he saw them.

He wore a black tunic covering most of his body, with a straw hat that would've otherwise classified him as a regular townsfolk searching the ruin, if it wasn't for the blatant red serpent coiled over his heart, embedded into the tunic as well as his soul. He recognised it immediately, and subconsciously jumped off his horse to catch him.

"No Luke, he might be dangerous..." Rowan tried, but the warning was too late. Lukes feet touching the ground pulled the mans head up like strings, and he dropped a few of the small spheric objects he was carrying as he darted in the opposite direction.

*He's running back from where the raiders came! He's one of them!* Luke sparked, the thought giving him the energy he missed from sleep as he dashed towards the man. When Luke didn't stop to inspect the fallen objects, the man put on a burst of speed, fleeing over the hill. Luke heard his sisters footsteps slow as she approached the dropped goods on the ground.

"Luke, he's carrying b..." Rowan concluded, but was cut short by Luke's guttural scream as he realised he could not catch the raider.

"GET THE HORSES!" Luke screamed, already half way to them. Caught up in Luke's contagious rage, Rowan mounted her horse and followed Luke as he chased down the raider. They rode their horses for what seemed like an eternity to Rowan, until a village came into view. At first, Rowan had thought she'd rode in a circle, but noticed that this village was fully intact, and filled with people.

"He went... there?" Luke wondered as he tried to piece together the raiders intentions.

"Luke, you have to know. He was gathering br..." Rowan pushed, but Luke didn't care.

"Those are the people who did this to us Rowan! This is our chance!" He said, not waiting for a response as he sprinted on foot to the village

"But Luke, he was carrying bread..." whispered Rowan, waves of regret crashing in her mind. Luke was too far to hear, she knew, and it was too late to stop him. I shouldn't have gone back! Luke is going to get hurt, or he is going to hurt someone! I can't let this happen. Mom, Dad, what do i do? Rowan cried for a long time, before making her decision.

Luke had to study the enemy first, that's what his dad had taught him.

*If only Dad were here, he could do this easily.*

It wasn't long until he spotted the man they were chasing, zigzagging through paths and people, until he reached a small house with weathered walls. Luke saw another shape moving within, so he scurried to the back and pressed his ear to the wall to listen.

"Daddy!" A high pitched voice yelled in glee, surprising Luke. For a moment, his anger died down, but was instantly lit when he remembered why his parents weren't with them.

“Hello Aria! Look what I brought you.” The man said, with a softer voice than he expected. Luke’s nose was met with the sweet scent of... bread?

Luke found a small crack in the wood and peered inside. He saw the man sitting on a wooden chair, his eyes shrouded as he watched his daughter eat.

*Was that what he was carrying? Was he getting food for his daughter?* Luke thought, but reminded himself once again why he was there. But his thoughts were stopped short when a conversation abruptly began.

“Why do you never take off the red badge, Daddy?”

“Because I have to. I’m a soldier.”

“What’s a soldier?”

“I...work for the town leader.”

“What do you do for the leader? Please tell me!”

“I...” and then the man burst out crying. For the first time since the raid, Luke felt sorry for someone.

*How can i feel sorry for them?! Look at what they did to me!*

“You there!” Said a booming voice from beside him. Luke turned to be met with many sets of eyes, some with fear and one with power.

*They’re scared of me? They better be!* Luke thought.

“What is your business in my town?” Said the voice again, as Luke realised who he was talking to.

The town leader! Luke's thoughts exploded in anger and fear. The town leader turned around to send an intimidating gaze at the townsfolk watching the encounter. As the people ran in silenced fear, Luke felt a small shiver scurry down his spine.

*They’re not afraid of me, they’re afraid of him!* Luke realised, and it all came crashing in like a tidal wave of mixed emotions battling against each other.

*These people were commanded by their ruler to attack our village. It wasn’t their fault. Wait! Mother and Father would want me to avenge them! Or would they?* Luke felt like the walls of his skull were closing in on his thoughts, hoping to be pulled out.

“I...I’m just passing by sir” Luke stutted

“Leave” The town leader growled.

Luke turned and walked nowhere for a while, and it wasn’t until he was out of sight of the village that he turned to run back to Rowan. As the sun set, his thoughts set on one conclusion. Forgiveness. Yes, a small piece of him still wanted to return, and return what they had done to him, but those people were under a bad leadership. He was foolish to assume that was what his parents would have wanted. These thoughts rested on his shoulders all the walk back.

Rowan rode as fast as she could, hoping she could make it before Luke made a mistake. She almost rode right past the walking figure, but she would recognize her brother anywhere. As she came to her senses after her ride, she assumed her greatest fear were realised.

I'm too late.... "Luke, what did you do?" She asked, thinking she knew the answer, but to her surprise, she did not.

"Don't worry Sis, I changed my mind"

"What?"

"I saw their life, and I knew I couldn't hurt anyone, even if they hurt the ones I loved." Luke explained. Rowan smiled, and hugged her brother with all her heart.

The sun fell slowly and the horses energy dwindled after a long day, the wind rushing by with the sweet note of a whistle, sending ripples like ocean waves through their capes. A boy and girl of calm stood together on a field, awaiting the calm of night, the boys thoughts finally still, like a pond after a rainstorm. Finally, at peace.

The End