

The Artistic Observer

He was on his third pencil of the day. The swiping of the freshly sharpened writing utensil was his background music for today's lecture on the Civil War. Riley sat in his assigned seat in the back of the class as he sketched out the scene in front of him: the teacher standing at the SmartBoard, the back of heads, the windows, documenting every object on every desk and in every crevice. No one questioned him, and the teacher didn't tell him to pay attention or put his hood down; he was taking notes, using a method that worked for him. The pencil glided across the paper, and when he filled in the smartboard he had drawn, he drew an action scene of the notes on the board.

The sketches belonged in the Louvre. No other sixteen year old could draw as well as he. Yet no one asked to see his masterpieces. His classmates and teachers knew that Riley would never show them, or even reply to their request. The only person who was ever allowed to see his drawings was his mother, occasionally.

After history class, he walked out with a couple of new sketches in hand. Riley wandered down the halls silently. No one stopped and asked him how his day was and no one waved at him. They knew he wouldn't reply anyway. As Riley walked, he took note of everything he saw: the colors, the lines, the shapes. He also noticed everyone that was around him, who they were and how close they stood. Following his daily walking plan, he exited the school; steps in sync with the days before that.

When he reached his school bus, he took his seat in the middle of the bus and opened his backpack filled with art supplies, grabbed his pencil, and started drawing again. People began to file into the seats around him. They were packed in like sardines with at least two to a seat, including his. He was squished against the window as far away from others as possible. When his seatmate squeezed in next to him, Riley began to focus on his breathing. Four

seconds in, hold it for four seconds, and then exhale for four seconds. He repeated this throughout the bus ride, attempting to calm himself down and stop his shaking. The bumps in the road and his quivering caused little curves in his drawings, that added a uniqueness to every stroke of the pencil.

“Hey Riley, how was your day at school?” His mom was on a ladder, tapping away at some nails with a hammer, fixing their house that was practically held together by duct tape. She was adding another board to the gaps between the ceiling and the walls.

He looked at her, not meeting her eyes, and gave her a thumbs up.

“No one gave you any trouble, right?”

He shook his head no and then dashed down the hall to his bedroom.

Tossing his backpack on the rotting floor, he plopped on his mattress and paged through his sketchbook. Reviewing his day was one of his favorite activities, giving him a chance to critique his art and remember his surroundings. He sat in the glow from his window and basked in the sunlight. The busy sounds of the city were right outside the wall. He was constantly watching life go by and drawing it, from his bed or backyard. As soon as the satisfying “thwips” of the paper reached a blank page, he grabbed his pencil again. He popped out the frame of his window and crawled out onto the ground, making himself comfortable in his space with his tattered window sitting next to him.

The drawing commenced. Outlines of cars, city buses, and skyscrapers in the near distance set the scene. As people passed by, Riley remembered every one of them and added them into his display. He paid attention to every detail of the world--the sound, smell, shape--missing nothing. Different drawings were made for passing periods of time, every picture varied but showing the same feel of the hustle and bustle of the city. He'd occasionally add color if it

seemed to fit, but only when he wanted to. He didn't have to please anyone but himself with his art.

He was finishing up a drawing of a blue pickup truck when someone got into the truck and started it. A commotion arose as two women ran out of the house that the truck was parked in front of. Tears were running down one woman's face, while the other's expression was livid. The distinct lines in her face were more angry than anyone else Riley had ever drawn. He continued to sketch the scene.

"You can't just leave and you can't take our savings with you!" the furious woman was yelling, "I will report you! I will tell them everything you did!" Their voices sliced through the air. The man in the truck had locked the doors as both women banged on the windows and tugged at the door handles.

As night began to descend on the city, the man began to rev the engine, louder and louder. The street was empty except for the altercation. Both exasperated women were screaming and yelling: "You aren't leaving!" The sobbing woman moved in front of the truck as the driver pulled out of the parallel parking spot. Fists kept colliding with the hood of the intimidating vehicle.

Riley sketched every movement and moment of the scene, making a virtual flipbook. His head pounded and sweat streamed down his forehead. He kept drawing through his hyperventilating, fighting through the numbness spreading through his body. Opportunities to draw an action scene like this didn't come along often.

The fuming woman was still banging on the driver's door. The man in the car was screaming and yelling, too, running his hands through his hair and laying on the horn as he tried to leave. His voice bellowed through the shell of the vehicle: "You better let me leave or you're going to get it, don't keep testing me!" They persisted.

“We had a deal!” The woman at his door was banging harder and harder.

“Move it, Jenny!” The driver was smacking his side of the window and kept his other hand on the horn.

“You’ll have to kill me before I let you get away with this!” He whipped the driver’s door open into the woman, knocking her to the ground. He watched her head collide with the pavement as he slammed and locked his door shut. He kicked the gas, ignoring the other person still in front of his car. With no hesitation he plowed right through her and sped away.

The truck barreled down the empty road, leaving a scene of nightmares behind.

Riley was still leaning against his house, in shock. His sketches depicted the scene of pain in front of him. The last drawing was colored in strokes of red.

Light behind him shone through the hole in the wall he had created. “Riley, I asked you to stop taking your window out, you know it’s broken. I don’t want bugs or animals in your--” His mother’s voice jolted. Riley looked up at his mom and stood up as she climbed through the broken window frame, taking in the situation.

He shakily stood up and showed her his sketches, flipping page after page depicting what had happened. His uncontrollable trembling caused the tearing of a few pages. His mom was already pulling her phone out and dialing 911. “Hello? Yes I am calling from 1413 Rabbit Lane. We believe we just witnessed a hit- and- run incident. Please hurry, it’s bad.”

She sunk down next to where Riley was sitting. He pointed out at the street, where the body laid, with an inquisitive look on his face. “There’s nothing we can do except wait for the paramedics.” He shrunk back into himself. She sighed and turned to Riley. “You realize you’re going to have to show the police your drawings and tell them what you saw.”

His sketchbook was immediately slammed shut as Riley shook his head. He tried to climb back inside, but was stopped when his mom pulled him back down next to her.

They heard police sirens shriek down their streets as red and blue flashed and lit up the neighborhood. Doors swung open and cops exited. One of them walked over to Riley and his mother. "Ma'am, are you the one that reported this?"

"Yes, sir." She was standing with her arm around Riley, guarding him. He was shaking again. She could count along with his breathing exercise as his chest rose every four seconds.

"Could you tell me what happened?"

Riley's mom comfortingly squeezed him into her and then replied, "Actually, we can show you." She reached out for Riley's sketchbook that he was hugging into his chest with a tighter grasp than a WWE wrestler. "Riley, could you show him your drawings?"

He continued his deep breathing. Looking hesitant, Riley reluctantly opened the sketchbook to where his drawings of the conflict began and handed it over to the policeman.

Riley, with enormous effort, managed to force out words to respond to a stranger.

"I drew it all."

Word Count: 1551