

Book Week Short Story Competition 2021

1st Place- James T (8S)

The Climb

I was playing with Layla, Henry, Jayde and Arthur when they came. They came waving guns. They told us to co-operate; they said it would be easier. Arthur, always the troublemaker, sprinted off – but he barely made it to the low, crumbling fence before they shot him. Killed. My friend. No-one said a word after that. I was torn away from Mum, and bundled into the back of the truck, where we sat for the following long hours. Cramped and sore, sitting there, overseen by a burly man who looked so menacing, all of us were too scared to even whisper. When we arrived, they gave us bread and fruit, with some water. That was something at least. Then, they told us we would be facing a test with other children from the surrounding area. Jayde knew the area best, having sometimes travelled to market with her dad, but one fleeting glimpse of her expression told me that she was as petrified as me. They told us we had to climb a cliff – no rules, just climb. There was money to be won, enough to last a lifetime, they said. It sounded like a sports day race, but I realised it was deadly.

When I saw the cliff, I felt sick. The face was so sheer, with several overhangs, that I was scared to start. As I turned to talk to my friends, I discovered with alarm that Henry was lying dead, some rocks scattered several feet away. I gulped. I also saw that Jayde was nowhere to be seen. I turned to face Layla. "Let's get this over with and both reach the top." She nodded, swallowing as she turned to face the base of the cliff. "After you."

I could feel my fingertips slipping off the slick rock. Every muscle tense in my arms, I desperately tried to pull myself up. But I had no strength left after the two hour climb. 'Hold on! I'm coming!' cried Layla, scrambling across the cliff face. I saw the panic in her eyes. We both knew she was never going to reach me in time. My left hand lost its purchase on the rock and I dangled like a leaf in the wind. Glancing down at blackness beneath me, I wondered if all the sacrifice had been worth it. Henry dead. Jayde missing. Arthur killed. And now it was my turn...

It wasn't a want; it was a need. Right arm. Left arm. Over and over. It felt like years had passed. Right arm. Left arm. I could distantly hear Layla screaming my name. Right arm. Left arm. Finally, I collapsed over the edge, and the whole world spun into blackness.

"Jason! Jason!" Layla cried, "You made it, you beat everyone!"
I winced. And then I smiled. We weren't going to have to work the fields forever. Before I blacked out again, I heard a voice swirling round my head:
"Enough money to last a lifetime..."