

The Crown and Column  
by Sacha Cvetanovic

*Inspired by the Devonport Column*

The midnight sky stretches for as far as my vision will take me.  
The wind rips across my skin reminding me that I am alive.  
The city lays dormant at this hour, asleep with one eye open.  
A terrifying dread hangs in the air, an overbearing fog that clouds my every waking hour.  
I breathe.  
In.  
And then out.

An eerie silence sweeps out from Ker Street to Kernow.  
A layer of smoke clings to the air from Duke Street to Dartmoor.  
The embers of yesterday's fires litter this once majestic panorama.

Rrrrrrrrr.  
A faint rattle comes into earshot.  
I spin around and look out to the Sound.  
RRRRRRRRR.  
The rattle grows until it becomes my every thought.  
RRRRRRRRRRRRRRR.  
Death arrives at our door and it makes no subtle entrance.  
I look down over the balcony.  
McNelson stares up at me from down below.  
We both know tonight will be no different from the last.

Daggers drop from the sky piercing what remains of our city.  
Boom, Boom, BOOOM, boom BOOOOOOOM.  
Hellfire is scattered everywhere.  
Screams from those who have survived consume me.  
And so my shift begins.

Flames reach towards the sky,  
There is no saving everyone.  
Focus.  
The adrenaline takes over.  
Brickfields, Mount Wise, Stonehouse.  
They are all ablaze.  
I must choose. Quickly.

I grab the pen and paper and scribble down  
'Mount Wise School'

I go inside and attach the paper to the pulley system.  
With all my might, I pull the rope.  
Sending the paper hurtling towards the ground.  
I feel a tug from the other end.  
McNelson has it now.  
From the balcony's edge I see my partner sprint to the fire truck awaiting our directions.  
The engine starts up and the blood red light comes on, a small blip that is barely noticeable in  
this sea of fire.  
And they take off into the night.

I reset the pulley system, ready for our next set of directions.  
Now I must choose, again.  
As I stare out, my thoughts begin to run wild,  
How many lives have been lost because of my decisions?  
How many orphans have been made thanks to me?  
No.  
This is no time for doubt.  
That is tomorrow's burden to bear.

Dawn begins to break,  
The sun peeks over the hills in the east,  
Bringing with it a copper tint to the sky,  
And a clear view of the city.  
Until tonight's shift...