

**Pariah Dog, Krishna Balasubramanian '26**  
**Silver Key, Flash Fiction**

“Ding ding ding,” the dog woke up from its sleep only to be reminded of the suffocating humid blanket that she had to live in. Still coming to her senses, the dog saw an old man pushing the pedal of an old rusted bike tugging an ice cream cart with a faded sign reading “Kwality Walls.” The old man yelled, “Ice Cream for seventy rupees, two ice creams for 130 rupees. Come get your ice creams!” She was a rather smart dog and after getting a whiff of the contents in the cart her stomach rumbled at the thought of such a delight. She got up and trotted down the road following the man. Her paws were burning from the heat the black pavement absorbed from the orange sun. But regardless she had to keep up the chase.

The dog weaved through the traffic ignoring the toxic smoke emitted by the stalling vehicles. Finally, the old man parked in front of a two-story building. At the sight of this, the dog decided to quench her thirst before approaching the cart. She trotted to the other side of the road where there was an open sewer drain. The water was odorous and to the dog’s dismay she couldn’t even spot the water; it was a river of trash with flies and grime dwelling there. She poked her nose through the trash layer to reach the liquid. After drinking her fill, the dog returned to her spot near the old man. She sat with swollen nipples and a bulging belly under a tree in the shade. It worried her sometimes she felt kicks in her belly but she had no clue what it was.

A bell rang making her ears perk. She saw a stampede of kids in uniforms run out and line up in front of the cart. The dog watched silently from afar at the kids exchanging money for vanilla ice cream on a waffle cone. At the sight of the delicacy, she tried to get closer to the cart, totally disregarding the line. At first, the children started to pinch her. But as she got closer to the cart they kicked her. She ignored the torment until she got close enough to the cart that she could see the old man’s pupils. Suddenly she felt a piercing pain, as if multiple hornets were stinging her. She glanced back and saw the kids picking stones and hurling them at her. Howling in pain, she ran away from the building as far as she could. Finally, she stopped and glanced back to see none of the children behind her. Her fur, a beige, rough, and cut trim piece of coating was now covered in red patches, gushing and tainting what used to be a perfect coat.

After a few weeks, she gave birth to a set of eight yipping and playful pups, all young and innocent. The old man passed the dog again, this time noticing the newborn pups. He picked the pups up and pulled them close to his chest. The dog who seemed to be enjoying and basking in the attention wagged her tail at the sight of the man holding her pups. The old man opened his ice cream cart and placed the pups inside. The dog was elated; she couldn’t believe she was going to have an owner, one who would provide sustenance for her and her darlings. The man smiled at the pups and started biking. She knew that he wanted her to follow him. So she wove through the traffic following the “Kwality Walls” sign, quickening her pace to keep up with the old man. Suddenly she lost sight of the sign and she howled for the old man to slow down. She whimpered and sat in the middle of the road as the traffic went on, reassuring

herself that the old man would come back. Hours went by, fewer and fewer cars passed her, the sun had retreated into the horizon, the street lamps turned on, and mosquitoes had woken up, forming a swarm around her. Yet, she sat there unfazed but optimistic. She knew the old man would notice she was missing. She knew that the old man would feel regret for abandoning her. She knew that the old man had some humanity in him. But little did she know that the old man was not coming back because she was an old dog who had gone past the expiration date, she was an outcast. She was a pariah dog.