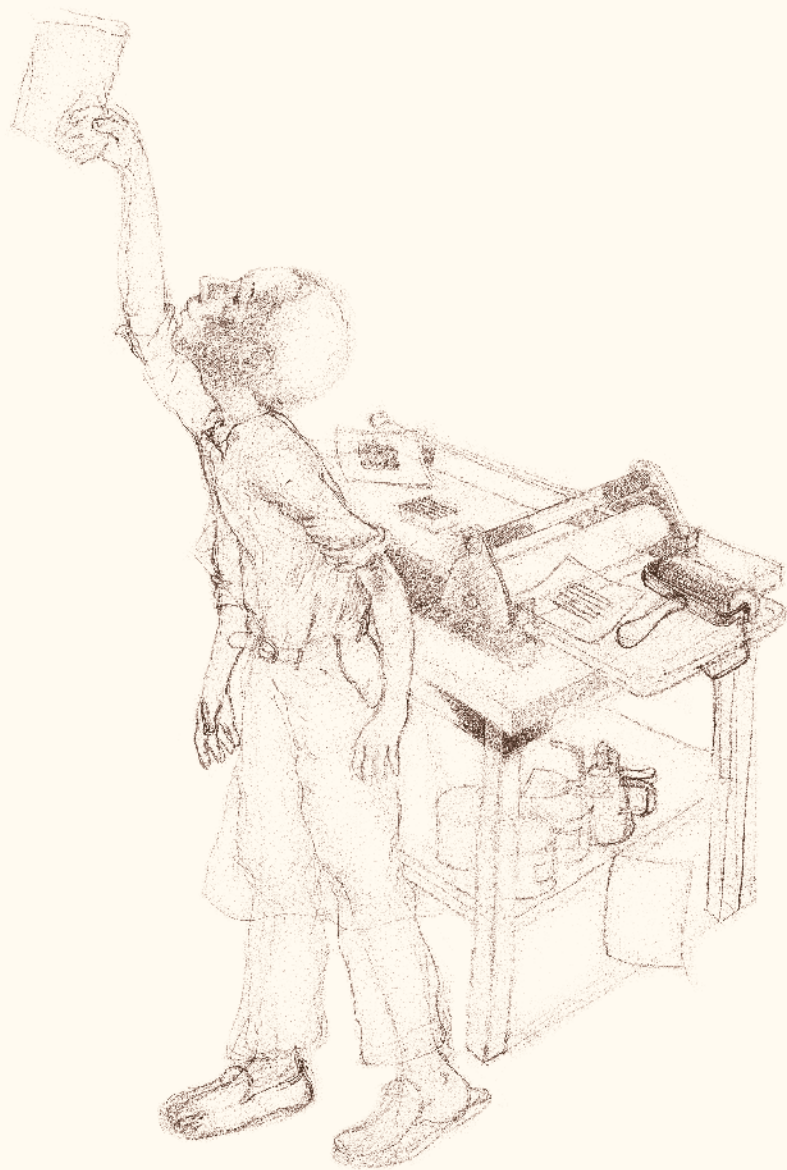


Hassan Zahreddine

NIN NIN

A story from
Lebanon





For my father
For all printers



Zin

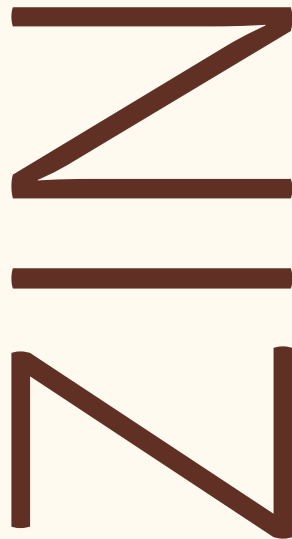
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Hassan Zahreddine
(Text and illustration)

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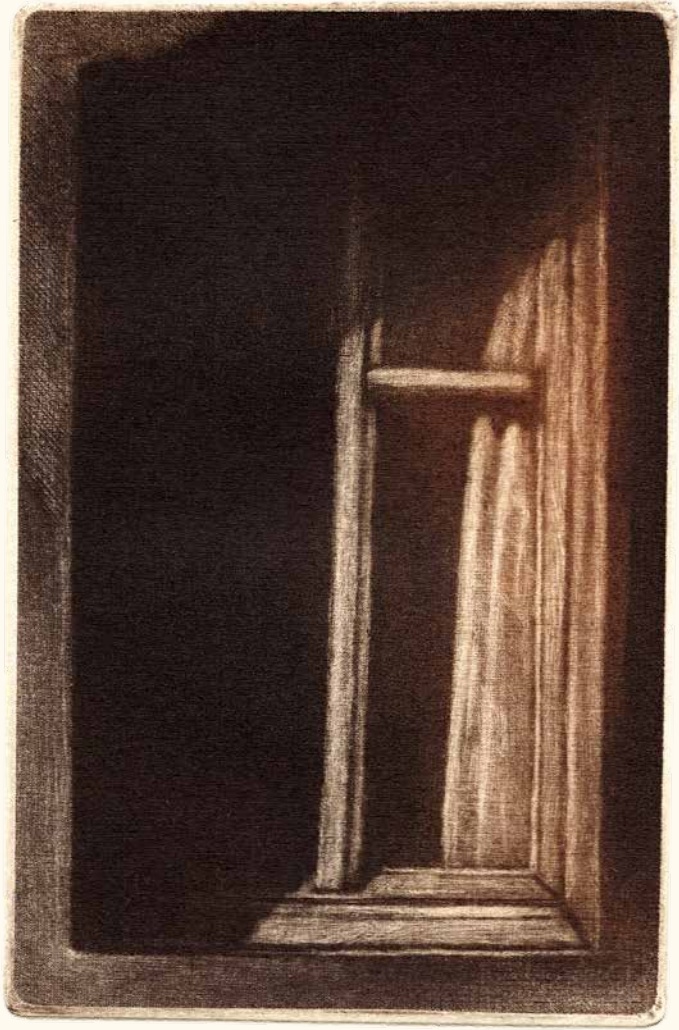
BAOBAB BOOKS

This is Zineddine. One of many children in a family where there was little food. Like his siblings Zineddine did not go to school. He didn't have time to play either, because he had to work.

One morning, his father accompanied him into town. They entered a house. Inside there was a deafening noise. "This is a printing house", said the father.







“What’s your name?” the boy was asked.

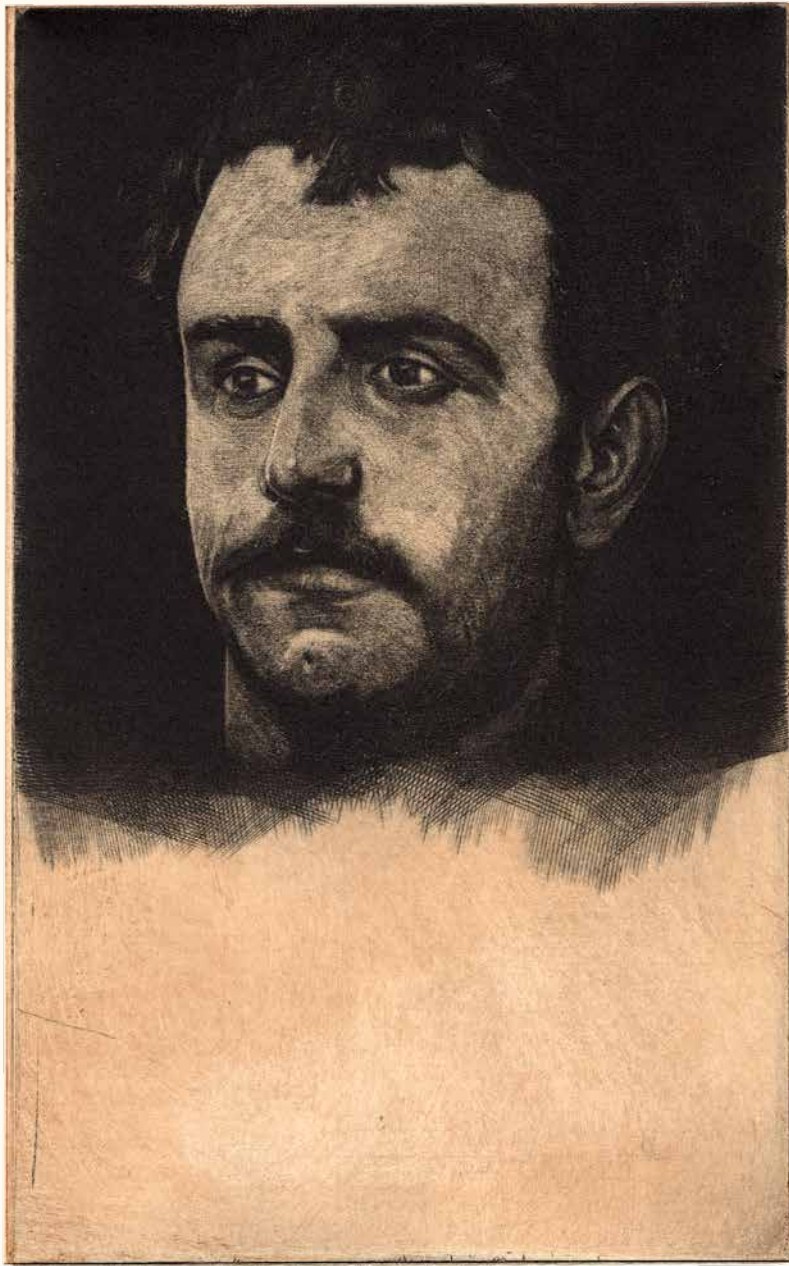
“Zineddine”, he answered.

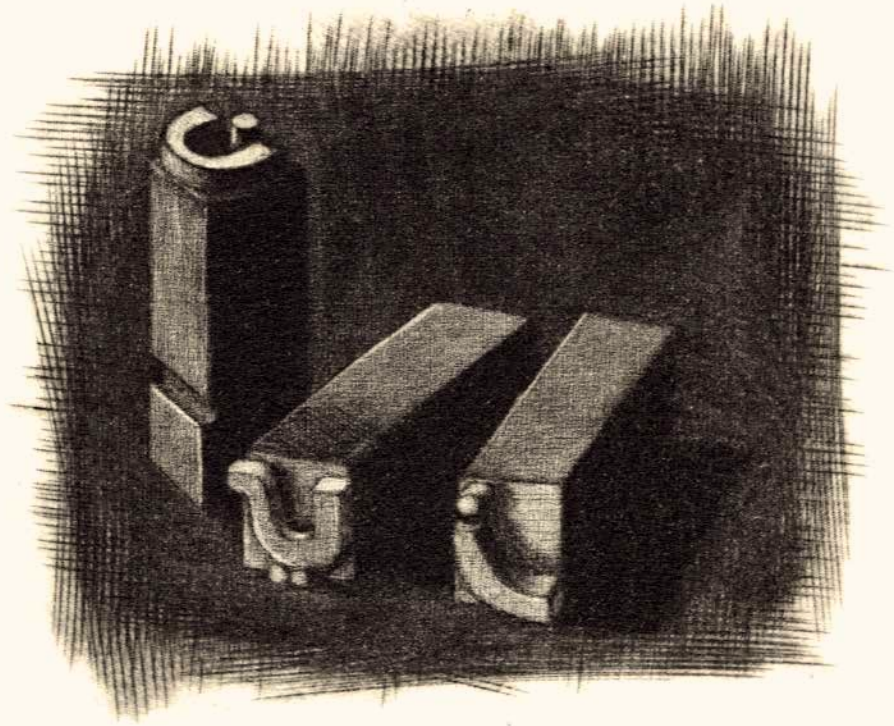
“That’s too many letters. The master printer only has three.”

Some were crossed out, leaving three: *Zin*.

He knew this name. His mother called him Zin when he was busy in front of the house.







The master reached into one of the many drawers and took out three small metal pieces. He lined them up, tied them together with a thread and rolled over this block of letters with a roller until it was completely black.

Now he laid a white sheet of paper onto the block and ran a device over it. It rattled so loudly that Zin became frightened.

The master pulled off the paper and gave it to the boy. With his fingertips, Zin followed the trace of the letters on the paper. He liked the characters. He knew them from the newspapers, which the people at the café looked at with interest for hours. But what did these characters mean?







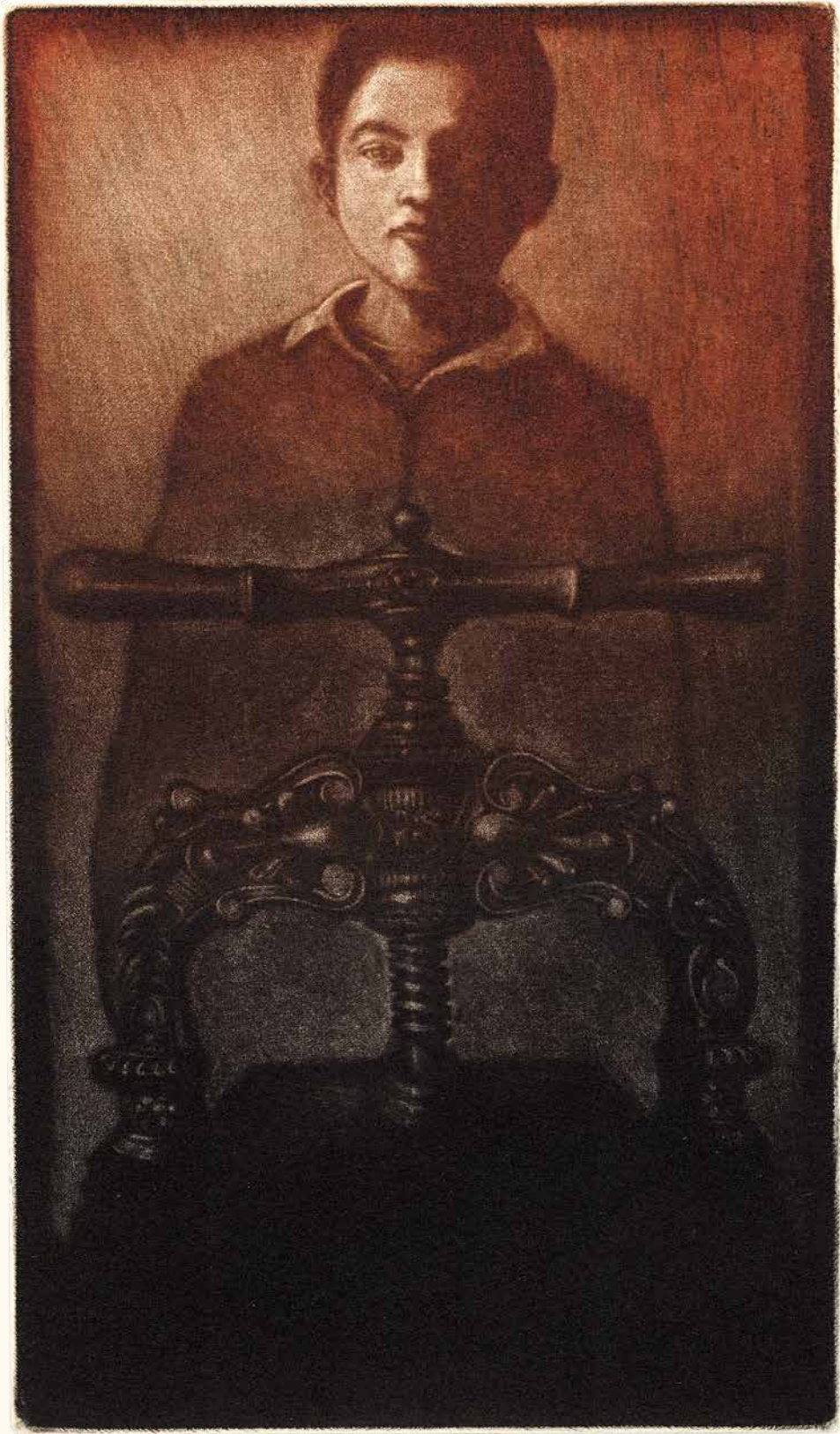
“These are the three letters of your name”, said the master.
“Letters are like building blocks. If you align them words are being created. If you print the words, they are being recorded and people can read them in books and newspapers.”

Zin wanted to learn how to read. But how? Who would teach him?
“You will learn”, said the master. “There are not so many letters. Soon you will soon know them all. Then you will be able to read. And once you know where each letter is in the type case, you can put them together to form words and prepare the printing plate.

From now on Zin set off early for his way to the printing house every morning. Excitedly, he went straight to the type case.

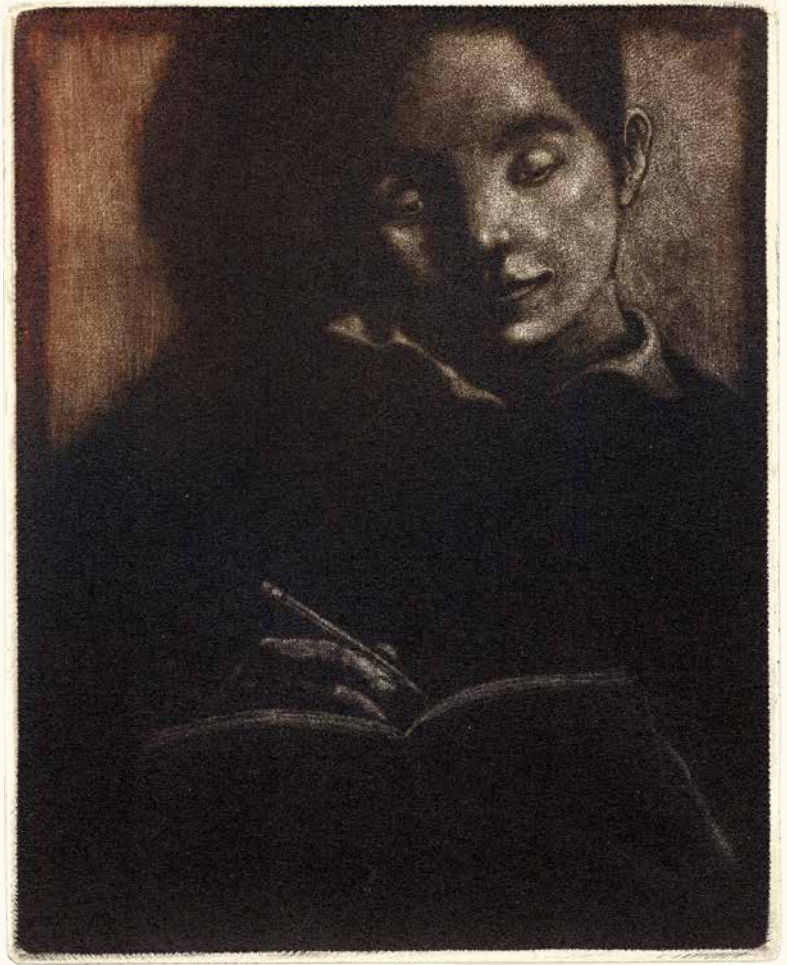
He put letters together to create words he liked. For example, the name of his cat.

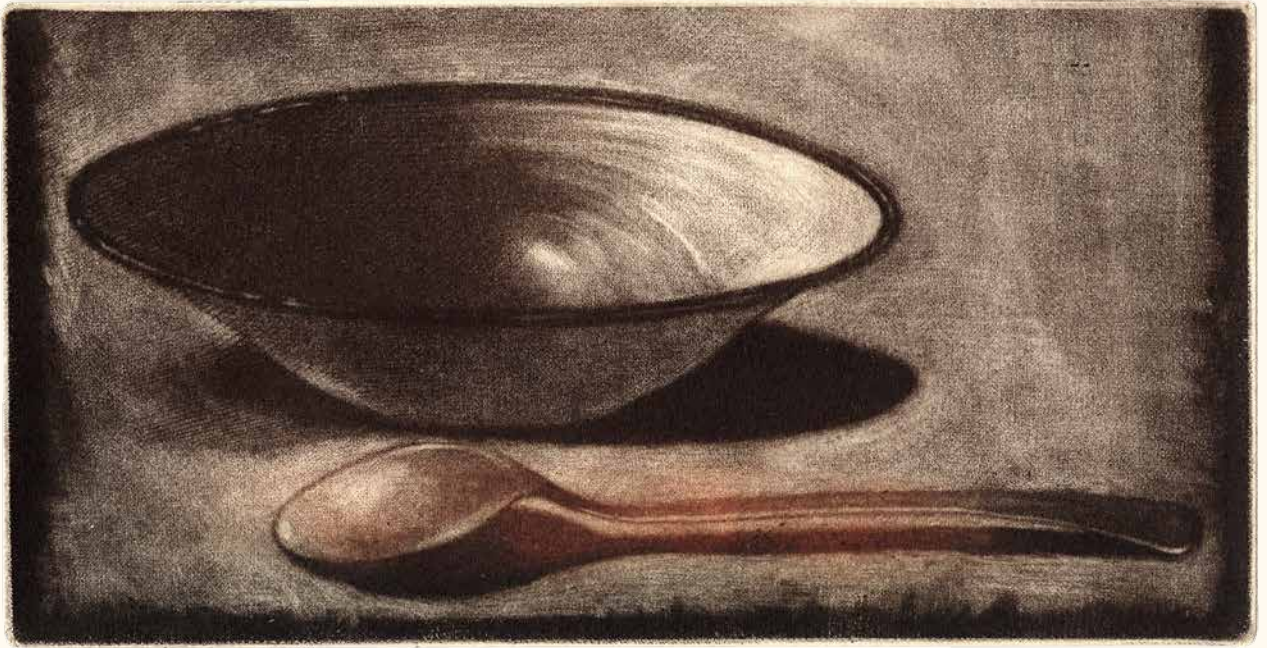




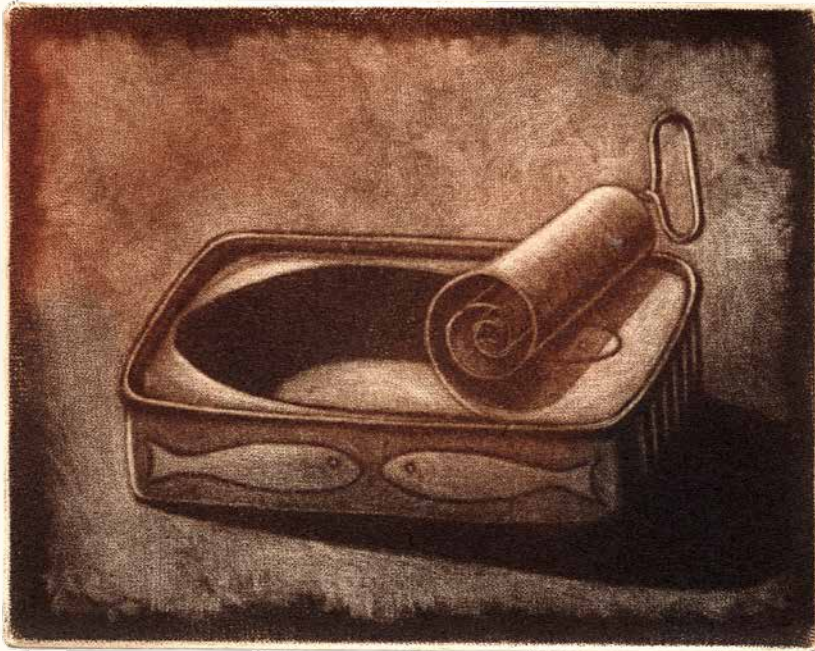
As he made his way through town, Zin spelled out what was written above the shops: *Tailor, Hairdresser, Bakery*. He was happy to be able to read the signs. He especially enjoyed stopping at a shopkeeper who had newspapers, books and stamps spread out on the pavement. Zin looked at the big letters on the magazines. When he had read and understood something, he was proud. In a small notebook he wrote down words he didn't understand and asked the master about them later.

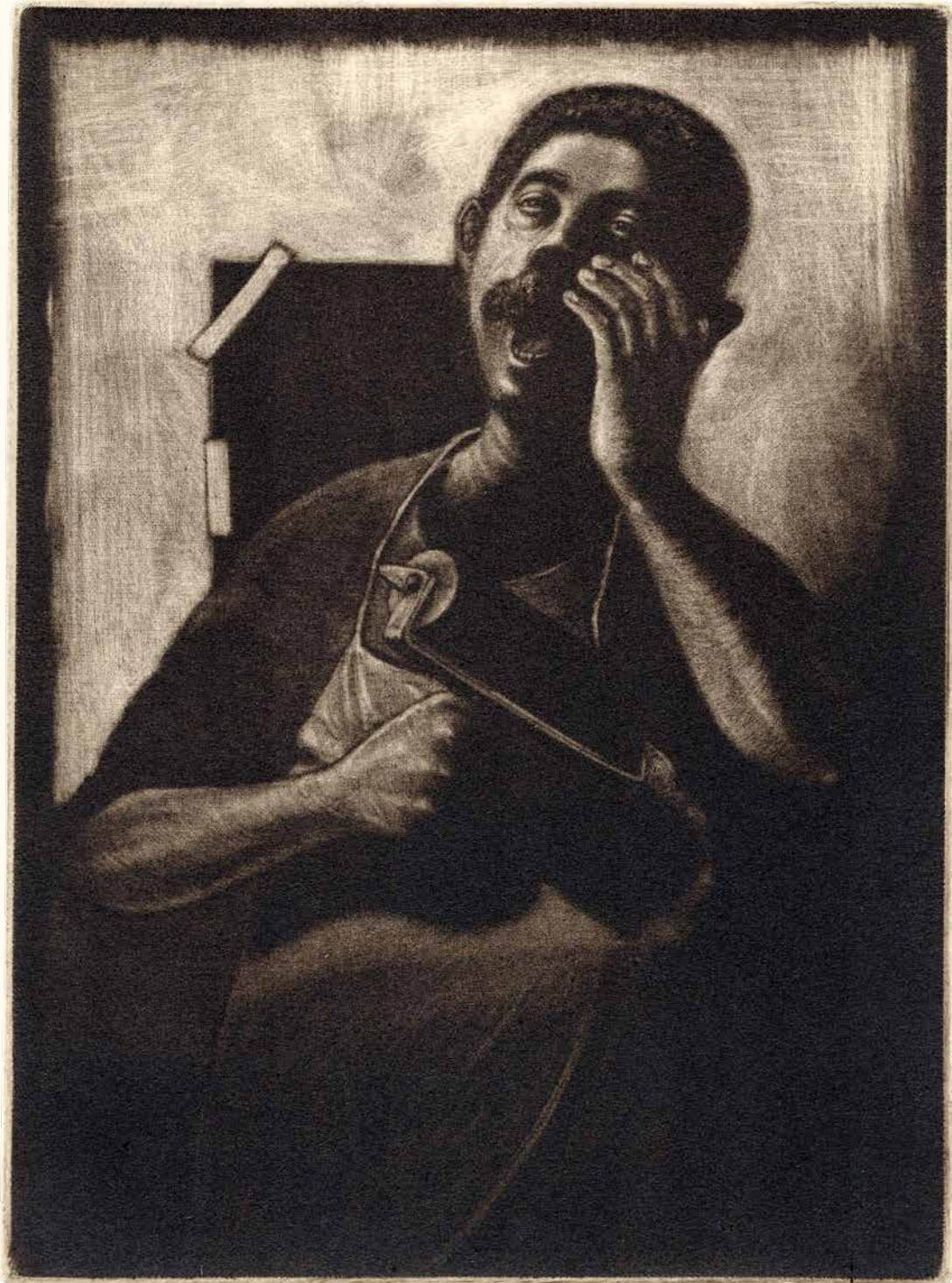






Zin especially loved the lunch break. Everyone sat around a big table and shared their food. Some had cheese, sardines and bread. Others brought hot food in tin cans stacked on top of each other. And to drink they had sweet tea prepared in a large pot.





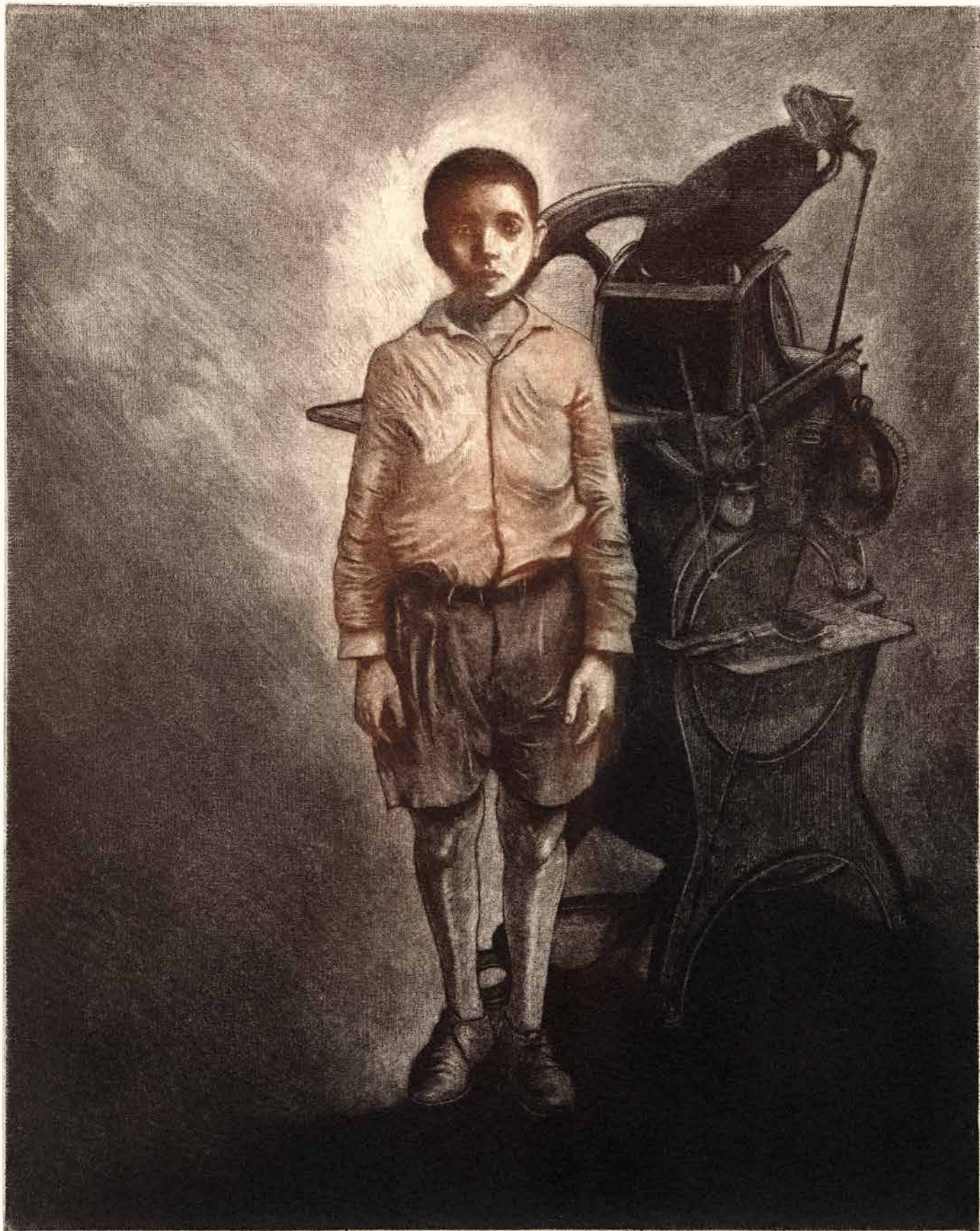
While drinking tea, conversations arose, and everyone joked and laughed together.

When the voices mixed with the pounding of the printing presses, it sounded as if they were arguing. But the break always ended the same way it had begun: with singing and laughter.



More and more often Zin helped the master at the printing press. It was his job to pull out the printed sheets and lay them on a large table.

One day he was even allowed to set the machine into motion himself. Zin watched, fascinated, as the white sheets filled with letters.

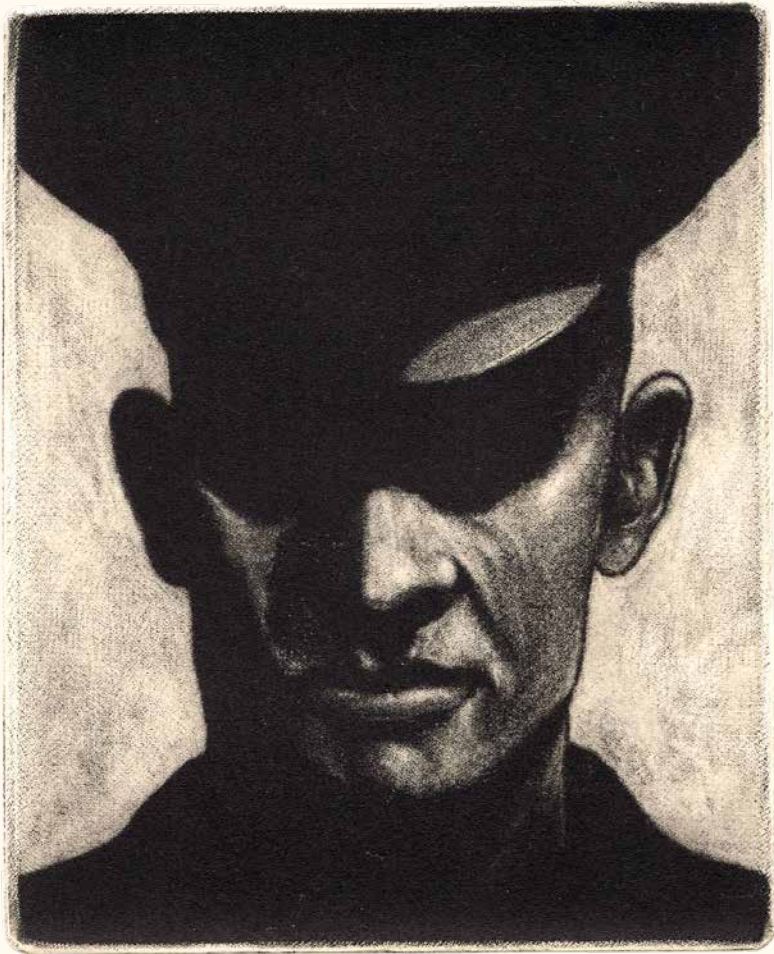




After work, Zin walked home along busy streets. People around him laughed and talked loudly, and their empty tin cans rattled.

One evening, however, there were only a few people on the road and everyone seemed to be walking alone. That day the way home seemed unusually long to Zin.

Then suddenly he was stopped by policemen: "Where are you going?" they asked him. Zin only stuttered. So they let him go, as he was still a child.



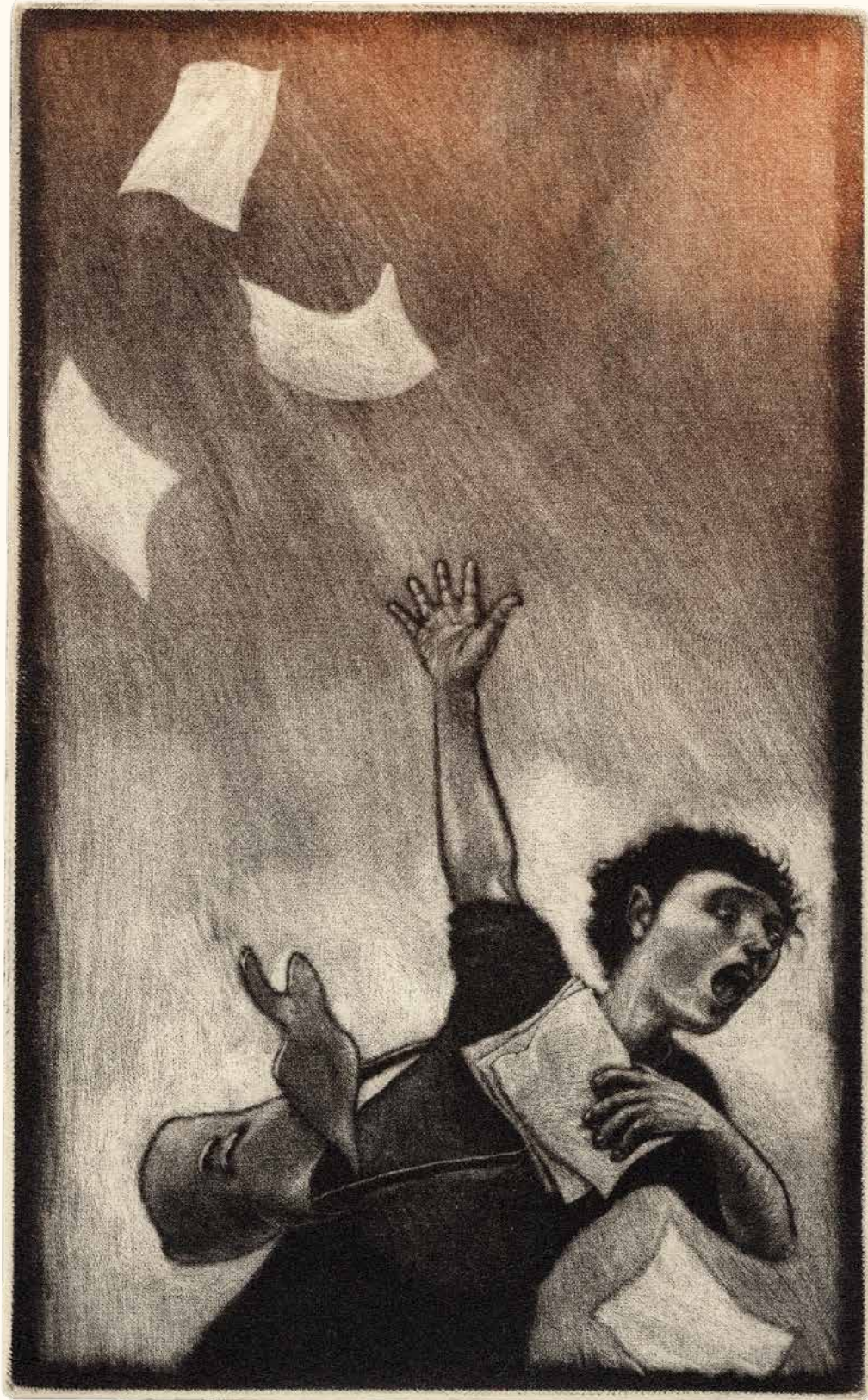
To avoid being stopped by the police again, Zin turned into an unknown alley. There were more people again and he felt safe.

But suddenly Zin heard excited voices behind him. He turned around and saw a man running through the street throwing leaflets up in the air.

People were hastily grabbing them, and one fell right at Zin's feet. When he picked it up, he could not believe his eyes: He recognized it immediately. He had printed it with the Master the same day, the ink still sticking to his fingers.

What did the words mean? Why did people find it so interesting? And why did the police run after the man with the leaflets? Zin folded up the paper, put it in his jacket pocket and hurried home.





He ate what the others had left for him. Then he took the paper out of his pocket and sat down next to the candle. He deciphered the first word: *Strike*.

With each subsequent word, his heart beat louder. He read line after line, sentence after sentence. He read it all again and again until the candle went out.

The echo of the words reverberated within him until he fell asleep and dreamt of the next day ...







Epilogue

My father told me little about his childhood. But what I do know is that he was unable to attend school because he went to work from the age of nine to earn some money for the family. The family had moved from the countryside to the capital Beirut in the 1940s, hoping to leave poverty behind and build a better life.

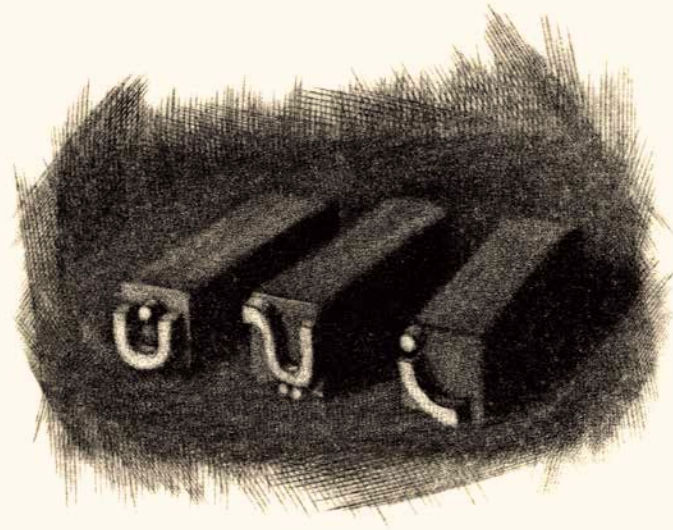
Like Zin in this book, his father – my grandfather, took him to a printing shop one day. There he saw letters and words that he could not decipher. He then taught himself the alphabet while working at the typesetting case. At the same time, he was fascinated by the printing technology. At that time, people still worked with lead typesetting. The letters cast in lead had to be put together by hand in the right order until the whole page was filled. The printing plate was then placed in the machine.

My father learned this trade as a child and later became a typesetter by profession. That the printed word can change people's lives and the fate of people was a formative experience for him. He understood early on that by printing words he could inform people about important events, such as the leaflet in this story that called on people to stand together for their rights. As a printer, my father advocated for justice in his own way and enabled people in Lebanon to have their voices heard and to get informed.

I inherited my love for printing from my father. I did not become a typesetter like him, but a print artist instead. With this book I want to tell his life story. For this purpose, I have dug up the hidden story from his childhood and scraped it onto copper plates. The technique is called mezzotint. First the smooth printing plate is roughened with a steel, then a so-called scraping iron is used to draw on it.

You can show the finest details with this printing technique, but it takes a lot of time. Perhaps that is why there are only a few works of art nowadays that are created in this way. For this book with my father's story, however, it seemed to be the best choice.

Hassan Zahreddine
February 2022



The boy's name is Zineddine. But the name with the many letters soon becomes Zin.

Zin can't read yet when he starts working at a printing house. While he learns about the process at the printing press, he teaches himself the alphabet with the help of the type case.

With every word he deciphers, his world expands. And when he succeeds in combining the words into sentences, he realizes what a printed text can do ...

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