

RALLY



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1: LONER



I've never been one for the in-crowd and the town I grew up in never had an out-crowd. So I've always been different, I thought differently, I acted differently, I existed differently. I've always seemed to exist in a world parallel to the one in the town, a world with windows into theirs so that we could watch each other from a distance.

So this to me is something completely alien. Something I have never witnessed before. Something that feels kind of illogical with a slight hint of danger. This crowd, this gathering of people, it's like something I've never experienced and I wonder how many of them have been living in parallel worlds alongside their hometowns.

I seem to watch from a distance once more, even though I'm right alongside them. The scarf over my face seems to throw up a protective barrier I can hide behind, one I can feel safe behind, so even though it's starting to get hot and moist from my breath I have no intention of taking it off. This is my protection should things go wrong. This is my safety.

As I look around I notice more people with scarves over their faces. Could they have problems similar to mine? Could it be that I'm most certainly not the only one? The thought frightens me, yet is too appealing to dismiss. It would mean that I am not so much a freak of nature as I thought.

And it could theoretically be true. They are talking to me, unprejudiced, non-aggressively. They keep repeating words such as injustice, equality and the cause. Everywhere conversations spark up about these three words and I remember why I am here. Yet the more people talk, the more I am content to listen, I have no interest in mingling in the conversation. I don't feel comfortable becoming a part of this crowd, yet.

Instead I am content with repeating the words over and over in my head, linking images from the news media to the words, in essence making a collage of words and images to reflect my own opinion on the subject. Much to my amazement however this collage doesn't seem to conflict with any of the opinions around me, in fact the others seem fine with slightly deviating views, as long as the overall feeling of justified outrage is consistent with theirs.

Without thinking I move my scarf lower down my face to reveal my nose, but as soon as I realize what I'm doing, I stop. I can't remove the protective barrier completely yet, I still need my safe haven.

Minutes go by as we just seem to wait here and someone speaks for all of us, urging us to start moving towards the headquarters of the perpetrators of injustice. Seemingly as one, the crowd starts moving as commanded and I have no choice but to follow, I don't want another choice either.

The proximity of the others around me alarms me and I slow my pace so as to end up at the back of the group. People bump into me as I move more and more to the back, yet no one seems to have the intention of actually causing me any physical harm or discomfort. Most of them even apologize.

My scarf slips lower and lower, dropping further from my face, but I fail to notice until it dangles around my neck. The protective barrier is no longer needed, I can feel safe here. No one seems to want to do me any harm, no one seems to be out to hurt me. Not here. My confidence grows as we approach the headquarters and I feel like a burden has been lifted from me and my consciousness.

2: CROWD



A tension rises as the headquarters comes into sight. Hands come from pockets as we approach, mine join them. One is raised into the air, followed by another, and another and the number grows exponentially. In what seems like a mere moment all hands are in the air, fists clenched tight, including mine.

Our initial enthusiasm subsides a bit when there's no immediate reaction from the corporate executives. I can't believe I'm speaking in plural now, it's funny, really, how quickly I've been accepted here and how quickly I've felt like this is where I'm supposed to be, what I've been waiting for most of my life.

The initial lack of response lasts for a few minutes and then the sirens approach. We turn as one to the direction of the sound and see the police van creeping closer in an adjacent street. Our outrage grows as the corporate executives seem to have sent their lap dogs to clean up the rabble in the street.

We are justified, we are a peaceful protest. Not a single shop window or car has been damaged in our march, not a single hair has been hurt on any innocent bystander. My outrage grows even further as images from my past rise up again, the constant threat of police intervention for walking on the street, the instant dismissal of the townsfolk upon seeing me. But this time we have them outnumbered.

Tall, muscular men in uniforms come from the back of the van and set up a line between us and the headquarters. I push my way to the front, emboldened by my frustration. I walk up to one of the corporate agents and scream at him, feeling more strength and courage well up from behind me.

"What the fuck are you doing? Are you protecting these bastards? They're responsible for the death of millions. Their products have been thoroughly tested on animals, men, women and children. Purely for the sake of more profit.

"Their employees go home every night to a dilapidated building, a building that's about to collapse from its own weight. Their employees need to live day by day on minimum wage, wondering if they'll have a job the next day or if their boss has had a sudden flight of fancy and fired him for no particular reason.

"How the hell can you justify their actions? How the hell can you stand here and oppose us? While they are in there counting their cash, made off the backs and suffering of decent people? Decent people like your neighbors, your parents, your family."

My spit drips off his faceplate and I feel as if I'm a giant demon formed out of the shared consciousness of the entire crowd, frothing at the mouth with outrage and frustration. My target remains silent and calmly wipes his faceplate clean.

"Step back" is his only response once his vision is cleared again.

"Like hell I will."

"I said step back" he says as he grabs the rim of my coat and pushes me back. I start falling backwards, but I'm stopped by the others, who catch me before I hit the ground and put me back on my feet. I take another step closer to him, my face almost against his faceplate.

3: POLICE BRUTALITY



"I told you to get back" the corporate agent shouts at me, pressing his faceplate against my face and pushing me back once again.

"And I told you I wouldn't" I reply as the others catch me once again. They are now my safe haven, they are now my protective barrier. I see others stepping forward as well, raging at the other officers. None of them are engaging in any kind of violence or threatening, I notice with a degree of respect and self-confidence.

Then as I turn back to face my own corporate agent I see something black flash into my field of vision and I feel the deafening thud of something massive against my skull. The instant headache is bad, but I've had worse. The others react in amazement as blood starts trickling down my face and take a collective step back. I rise inelegantly to my feet once again, my head throbbing, my face bloodied.

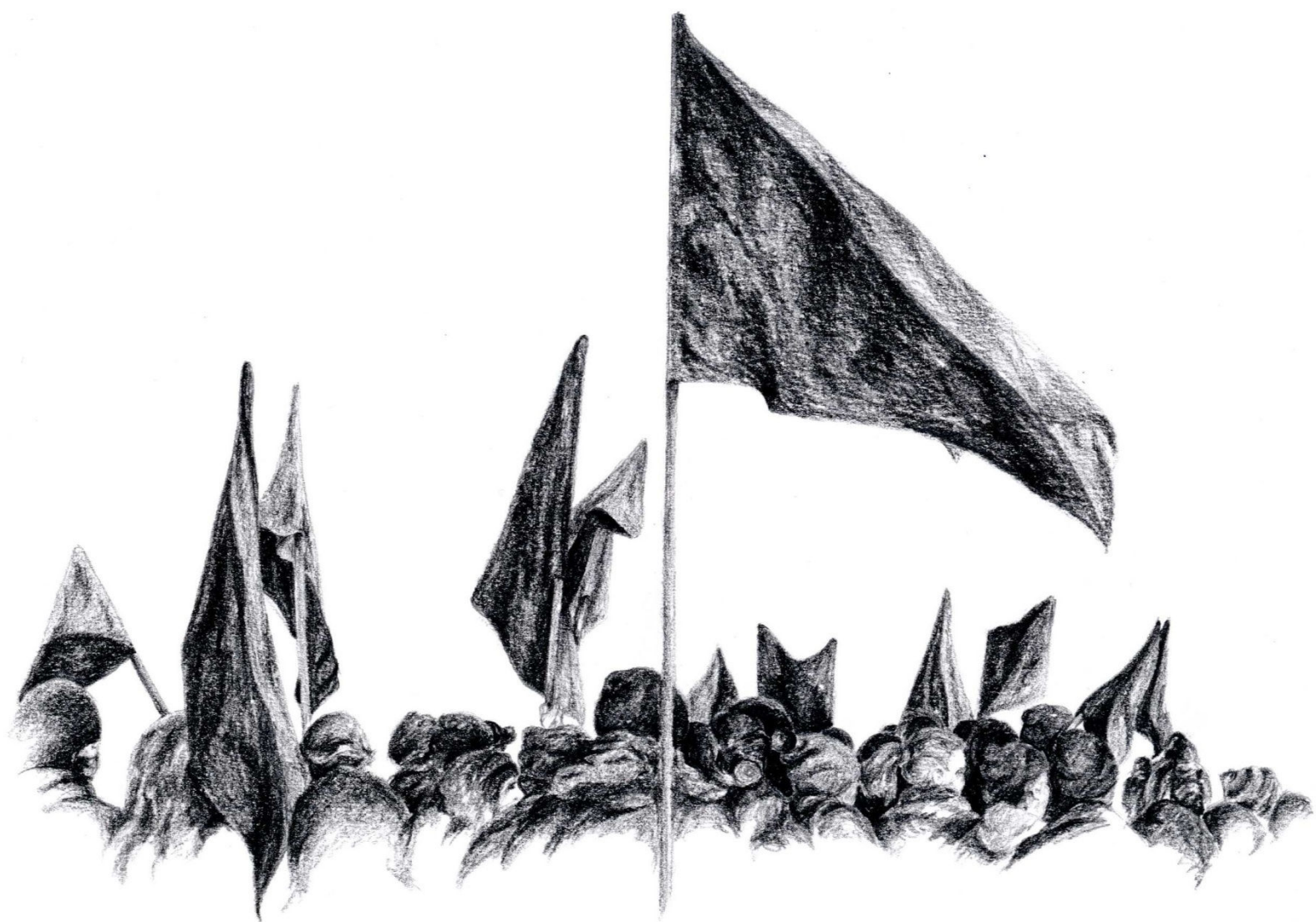
"Is that your answer then? Is that the way you react to someone questioning your authority and motivation? Is that the way you treat a peaceful protest?"

Once more the baton comes down towards me and I can barely raise my arm in time. I catch the baton on my wrist and I feel my hand move in a way it wasn't designed to do, as the pain creeps up my arm in what seems to be slow-motion. I cry out in anger, frustration and pain, some of the others step forward to shield me from the officer and others to look at my wounds, but I won't admit defeat just yet, not now, I can't do that. Finally I have found something worth fighting for, something I've been waiting for.

I push the others aside, clench my teeth and face the officer once again and sense a small fraction of fear in his eyes. A sense of realization of what he's done, beating down an innocent man. I'm not planning to become a martyr, if anything I'll be the knight who valiantly strides onto the battlefield and fights to the brink of death and beyond. A knight who proudly defends what he treasures, who proudly protects who he cares for.

But the fancy is short-lived as the baton comes down once again in an act of desperation. I feel my skull cave in near the temple and my eyes go black for a second. I fall down, no longer capable of defiantly standing up, then everything blurs as the others stand over me. I retreat back into my own world, drawing the blinds to the one that harmed me, but I feel no shame, no remorse, only pain.

4: FLARING EMOTIONS



This isn't supposed to happen, this is a peaceful protest. There shouldn't be any violence, not from us, not from them, not from anyone. As we watch him being carried away by paramedics on a stretcher, it dawns on us that this is not a safe place to be. That this is the last the place in the world where we'd want to be.

The slowly backing away from the officers turns into turning around and moving as fast as possible, yet the aggressors stand still, silently, defiantly. We run, some of us stand in amazement or short-lived defiance, but in the end we all run. We run, we hide. We hide behind cars, behind mailboxes, in alleys, we hide anywhere where there is room to shield us from the aggressors.

Then one of us stands up, rises against the authoritarian oppressors of a peaceful protest. She simply stares at the blood stains on the ground and seems to be unable to fathom what actually happened. Another joins her in the middle of the street. Doing nothing but staring, the two of them seem to try and piece together what happened before, they must've been at the back and didn't see a thing.

Hell, most of us at the front saw it and we don't even really know what happened. It all went so fast. He went down, got back up, went down again, now with a bloodied face, got back up and finally went down a third time and didn't get up.

The two in the street discuss what happens and we hear them speaking of possible scenarios. Then someone joins them and explains what he saw. Another joins them and adds more detail to the account. Slowly, but surely, the street fills again.

We stare at the bloodstains, the officers, the seemingly insurmountable distance in between us and them. Dropped flags are slowly, but confidently picked up again. Picked up flags are slowly, but confidently raised again. Raised flags are slowly, but confidently waved again in defiance.

The officers still stand silently, defiantly and indifferently as they watch the proceedings as we come back together. The distance seems to shrink between us and them as some of us confidently step towards them.

5: RALLY



The person in the front is handed a flag by one of the others and she turns around to speak to us. "Today has been a dark day for peaceful protest. Today it has been made clear that not even peaceful protests will be tolerated. Today is the day that we must make a clear and definite stand. Today is the day we must make a stand against authoritarian oppression. Today... we fight back."

And that's about the moment the shit hit the fan, as they say. That is the moment that the first rock was thrown. That is the moment that the first projectile missed its authoritarian mark and smashed the front window of the corporate headquarters.

That is also the moment that this peaceful protest we had envisioned ceased to be. That is the moment that the authorities forced our hand, but we would not go down without a fight. Full of self-righteous fury we marched towards the cops, who nervously called for backup.

We marched as one, for one, for the cause. We marched as their precious army, we marched against them. We felt invincible and for a time we were, we have been 'till this day. This invincibility has yet to be damaged, this fury has yet to be diminished, this passion has yet to be quenched.

We didn't beat them that day, but we made a lasting impression as we threw our rocks and ideology at them. We made it clear that we would not turn the other cheek after being slapped in the face. We made it clear that we would not take all of this lying down.

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