

Melvin the Protester



a short satire

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On Tuesday afternoon at 4:37 p.m. Mountain Standard Time, Melvin's life finally began. Exiting his place of work, he stepped out onto the sidewalk and that's when he saw her—*her*, the woman his life had been waiting for. And now his life could begin because there she was—average frame, medium-length black hair, attractive face—holding a fist in the air as she marched down the middle of the street in the front of a large, loud crowd. Where had she been all his life?

Melvin dropped his computer case to the pavement and rushed into the street to be near her. The crowd was chanting. They were yelling. They were speaking some sort of truth to some sort of power, and now Melvin was part of it! And she was in the front of it all, only feet away, her straight, fine hair spilling over the black-and-white keffiyeh wrapped around her delicate neck. And there Melvin was, he the avatar of all passive men desperate for the kind of meaning that can only be provided by one such as she, she the embodiment of a million strong, independent female protagonists compressed into one perfect diamond amidst a crowd of rough, smelly, generally hostile faces. He knew more than he had ever known anything before: he had found his soul mate.

Yes! This is life! he thought, his heart rising at the sight of her and at the yelling and the chanting. This was what he had been missing! He had never felt so involved. He couldn't hold it in anymore. He had to express himself.

"I'm very troubled!" he shouted. It was liberating to care about such an important cause. He imagined his fellow marchers nodding approvingly as they continued their own yelling. Some in the front were waving signs as well. He couldn't read them from behind, but he was sure they were brilliant. How great it was to be a part of this, whatever it was!

The protesters continued down the street, making their way to an intersection where they stopped, blocking traffic in all directions. Melvin shook his fist at the vague faces behind the windshields of waiting cars. Your daily commutes, your grocery trips, they aren't as important as our very, very important cause! He felt himself pulled higher in the euphoria of being within something greater than himself.

Loosening his tie, he yelled, "I'm so, so, somewhat angry about all this!" It felt right. He lost himself in the moment and let it all go.

"I hate whatever everyone else here hates!" he screamed, waving his arms in the air. And she was there in the front, her fist still held high,

defying the laws of gravity and the weariness of the flesh. Every inch of her screamed perfection, at least the inches he could see, and he was sure the other inches were great as well. How could it be otherwise? And in the beauty of her eyes and the rhythm of her chants, any desire for gainful employment or semblance of productivity fell away like skin flaking off a sunburn.

Then they were marching again, weaving their way through the traffic down one street, banging on the cars as they went, yelling and chanting and singing about their glorious struggle. Melvin patted the hood of a BMW, careful not to leave a smudge. He waved at the old woman inside, who looked frightened of the crowd. She shouldn't be frightened, he thought. She should be in awe of their grand purpose! They were marching for justice, adjective justice. Melvin didn't know what the adjective was, but he was sure it was something impressive!

And so he marched in lockstep with the rest of the protesters. He was one of them now. Already, he had made out an Amazon shopping cart in his mind. First, he would click to buy a Guy Fawkes mask. Then his mouse would say "Yes, Amazon, I would like a Che Guevara shirt. Large size, please!" He'd skip the keffiyeh because scarves look better on the ladies, but he'd definitely add an iPhone to his shopping cart, an iPhone to take pictures of his brave stand against whatever it was they were standing against. And with a click of his phone's touch screen, those pictures would be proudly shared online for all the world to see: on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram, maybe even on Google+—that's how important his pictures would be!

The crowd had worked its way through the waiting cars and were walking along the open street again, bystanders pointing at them from the sidewalks and doorways. Melvin smiled a euphoric smile, reveling in his presence among the protesters. It felt good to be standing for something. It felt good to be seen standing for something—something important, something essential, something a tad unclear yet surely monumental. People were watching. Cameras were rolling. He might be on the news tomorrow! "Previously Obscure Local Man Joins Grand Protest!" That's what the headlines would say. And the pictures would show him—and her too, a wide enough shot to include them both, maybe some of the more amiable-looking protesters as well. There were a few, here and there.

A quarter of the group split off and charged into a liquor store. Melvin

wished they had visited the bookstore next door instead. He had no need for alcohol; he was drunk on true love! And now with his dream in sight, he could really use a self-help book about first dates. But sadly, none of his fellow protesters seemed interested in expressing their frustration amongst the book aisles. Oh, well, he'd add a dating book to his Amazon shopping cart along with his protest gear; and, thanks to his annual Prime membership, it'd be delivered in time for a weekend date!

He imagined himself waiting on his front porch for the delivery. His tools of resistance and love would arrive efficiently boxed, but somehow the UPS delivery man would know what was inside, and he'd give Melvin a knowing look, as if to say, "Wow." Melvin, for his part, would just look back at the delivery man, not saying anything, but by not saying anything he'd actually be saying, "That's right—Wow. I'm part of an important movement. Maybe, if you play your cards right, you'll be part of an important movement someday as well."

Back in reality, Melvin removed his tie and let it fall to the ground as he continued his march down the street. The crowd grew smaller and smaller as more of its members broke off to visit the various retail establishments on each side. But not the bookstore? Doesn't anyone care about bookstores? Oh, well, let the looters loot, Melvin thought. We are the ones with our hearts set for the cause, whatever that cause might be! And she was still there of course, his beautiful angel of destruction, her fist still raised in the air as if to say, "Yes, Melvin, I've been waiting for you, too."

Everything was so clear to Melvin now. He knew he'd never be happy today until today's outrage was defeated, and he'd never be happy tomorrow until tomorrow's outrage was defeated, and the next day, and the next, and he got a little bit weary just thinking about the unending monotony, yet he felt energized as well because she would be there beside him, or at least a little bit in front of him, and they'd be fighting against whatever the day's outrage might be, refusing to be happy until . . . until . . . never mind until—she'd be there, and he'd be there with her, or at least somewhat close to her!

The crowd stopped for a moment to turn and yell at a building that was guilty of something truly awful. Then they resumed their marching, each of the protesters reaching down and picking up a rock as they went. Melvin picked up a rock as well, a rock of justice, justice for whatever it was they were marching for. He felt more alive than he had previously

thought possible, as if his id were there in his hand and he was holding it and about to do something with it, something important—he could feel it!

They turned the corner and saw a large group of police officers blocking the road. Holy crap, the police are wearing riot gear! Holy crap, we're throwing rocks at them! That seemed a little too aggressive for Melvin so, while he did raise his rock in solidarity with his brothers and sisters in arms, he let the rock fall discretely to the ground as he swung his arm and pretended to throw. Did she see me? No, he told himself, relieved. She was too busy yelling at the police officers, who were advancing on the group.

Melvin yelled along with her. He had run out of ideas for sentences, so he just made up words and yelled them at the top of his voice. No one could hear him anyway. An officer was saying something on a bullhorn. The protesters shouted in response. More rocks were thrown.

Then a tear gas canister hit the ground next to Melvin and he immediately started to choke, his eyes burning. Clutching his face, he looked to his lover, fearful she might be in pain as well. He was grateful to see her hurriedly donning a gas mask. Did anyone bring an extra one? No? One more item for my Amazon shopping cart then, Melvin thought as he squeezed his eyes shut to keep out the pain, but before he had closed them, she had looked in his direction. Was that a wink? Was that a smile?

And he was down on the pavement, coughing, crying tears of pain mixed with tears of joy. Hands grabbed his arms, twisting them behind his back. He looked up, hoping to see her beautiful face, but he saw the face of a police officer wearing a gas mask instead.

“It's smoke, not tear gas,” the officer said, but Melvin's eyes disagreed. If it was smoke, then it was extra tearful smoke, he was sure! Something plastic was drawn tight across his wrists, and he was hauled to his feet. He couldn't see her, but she was out there somewhere, somewhere in the mists of justice and love, fighting for whatever it was they were fighting for.

Maybe she'd be arrested too. Maybe she'd be put in the same police van. They'd smile at each other on the way to the station. They wouldn't speak—such passionate love needs no words. But immediately after posting bail they'd find each other and from then on till forever they'd

always be together. He could see it now. Picnics in the park. Her black-and-white keffiyeh spread out on the ground under them like a blanket, the two of them sitting side by side, discussing deep meaningful things about how the world needs to change in deep meaningful ways.

Yes, the two of them would always be together, and life would be perfect, just perfect—but not too perfect; otherwise they wouldn't have something to protest against.

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