

‘Without Freedom of Thought, there can be no such Thing as Wisdom; and no such Thing as publick Liberty, without Freedom of Speech.’

Silence Dogood, No.8, The New-England Courant (1722)

the Girl is running. her Ministry-regulation shoes make almost no noise against the smooth path. after all, everything in Empire is streamlined for efficiency, from the cut of their hair to the curve of their boots. in her hand is a single leaf of paper. *paper*. until six months ago, the Girl had never seen paper — no one in Empire had. it was an archaic artifact of the Before, from the time before Empire burnt the Old World to the ground and eradicated all disorder and chaos. *ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN. ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN.* the televised recording rings across the city block, giant screens on every corner with Empire’s beaming face illuminated in dazzling blue light.

ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN. as if the Girl could ever forget. they are born with Empire’s words in their head, in their mouths, each and every citizen engendered from his likeness, his genes. ‘i have eradicated all dissent, all difference’. a pause, then their cue: *ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN.* the Girl’s voice is rough with disuse, she never speaks much, no one would dare, nothing but this phrase every hour — because creation is chaos, because thought is chaos, and there is nothing Empire hates more.

feeling the ghost of eyes on her, the Girl shivers in her coat, the paper a too-loud noise crackling under her palm. runs a little faster. a gaze heavy on the back of her neck, sweat trickling down her temple. if the Girl gets caught — no, she can’t. don’t think, run. because six months ago, the Girl became a messenger-runner for the Movement. they needed people, desperately, the turnaround for new recruits too quick. too quick, because people are Disappeared all the time.

wheels thud behind her. a whistle. the Girl sucks in a breath, surreptitiously wipes her mouth, then slows to a stop. slips into Ministry-regulation posture, her boots equidistant, hands behind her back. the paper no longer in her hand, but disintegrating in her mouth as she chews. it’s dry, tastes like their regulation gruel. the Girl tries not to shake in fear.

the sentry stops before her. the Girl greets it with what is customary: *ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN*, she says. its eyes scan her with a blinding blue light, GIRL 19802001 IDENTIFIED. PROCEED TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY 101. she exhales in relief, then runs towards the SchoolBlock.

the Movement says every sentry used to be a Citizen, until they got too curious for Empire, too chaotic. the Girl feels the sentry’s eyes following her, even as she gets farther away.

that’s alright, she thinks. the Girl can become shadow, become sound.

underneath the SchoolBlock is a cellar, from Before. it's damp and musty and made of old stone. during their Broadcasts, the sound reverberates all around her. an echo. a shroud. the Girl loves it.

the SchoolBlock's concrete walls muffle all sound, and the Girl can pass her messages to the Movement when she comes to class. today, the cellar hums with irrepressible energy. the Girl finds her way through the tunnels in the dark, fumbling for the Broadcast room.

'GIRL 19802001 reporting to the Movement.' her voice is faint, but it carries to the center. someone sighs, not unkindly. 'we don't have to go by those numbers here. have you picked a name yet?' the Girl hesitates. *a name?*

she can feel the other person's responding frown, even in the dimness of the cellar. GIRL 19801965, or Tessa, as she likes to be called, is head of Broadcast, second-in-command only to The Voice herself. she can't see Tessa, but the Girl knows they look exactly alike. same uniform, same haircut, same slate grey eyes, same height. the Girl imagines The Voice must look exactly like her too, and isn't that a lovely thought, that The Voice's bravery might also run in her veins?

'is there news?' the Girl whispers. Tessa hesitates.

'what is it?'

'the Ministry has been looking for The Voice, you know this. but they searched most of the SchoolBlock today.'

The Voice, head of the Movement, has been Broadcasting for years. Empire's Ministry might control all televised recordings, all their educational tablets and curriculum, but the Movement has oldtech that hasn't been seen in years — transistor radios, paper, the telegraph.

the Girl gasps. 'no! that's impossible! they don't know how we sound! we never... we never even get to—'

Tessa sighs, sounding so tired. 'they made us Speak in class today. they— some of us, some of us haven't Spoken in years.' the Girl's heart is in her throat. 'and The Voice? did they find—'

'no, thank the Movement. no. but she's gone into hiding. there will be no Broadcast tonight.' the Girl frowns. 'but.. the Movement? the papers, Tessa, surely—'

‘the Movement’s plans must wait.’ Tessa’s voice breaks from holding back tears. ‘we can’t Broadcast... not without The Voice, no one else will agree to Speak. even that’s too much for us. for me.’

‘...i’ll do it.’

the Girl’s voice is tenuous, but does not break. ‘i’ll be The Voice tonight. we can’t stop the plan, not now. everything’s already in motion, everyone in their places. if we don’t tonight, the whole Movement could collapse. let me, Tessa, let me Speak.’

Tessa falls silent in thought. ‘if you get caught, the Movement will not come for you, you know this. we can’t protect you.’

the Girl nods, ‘i do. let me. please.’

in the dark, there’s a rustle of wires, Tessa’s footsteps. the Girl imagines all the oldtech twisting in a tangle on the floor. Tessa passes her a cylinder of cold metal, ‘Speak into this. you know what to say.’

the Girl takes a deep breath. for the first time in her life, she Speaks. and she knows someone will listen.

the Girl is running. her Ministry-regulation shoes making almost no noise against the smooth path. in her hand, a single leaf of paper. *paper*. it crinkles. the Girl runs faster. she can still hear the Broadcast in her ears. THIS IS THE VOICE. THIS IS THE MOVEMENT. her voice. the *Girl’s* voice. she’s giddy, she wants to laugh, and wouldn’t that be such a wonderful sound?

ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN. ALL FOR THE GOOD OF MAN. the televised recording rings across the city block, giant screens on every corner, but Empire’s once smiling face shakes with repressed anger, the fluorescent lighting making his face look skull-like and gaunt.

the Movement did that. *she* did that. the Girl became the Voice, became sound.

she runs. dares to turn her face to the sky. wheels thud behind her. the sentry. the same shrill whistle. but she doesn’t stop. the Girl runs, and runs, paper clutched in her hand.

STOP! GIRL 19802001 YOU ARE ORDERED TO STOP!

the Girl laughs for the first time, joy ringing in the air. she only needs to buy the Movement a few more minutes.

she feels a sharp pain, cries out. falls to the ground face-first. her mouth is a mess of blood and spit. the Girl crawls to her knees. she laughs more loudly. she's never seen blood before. it's so... red.

the sentry behind her— EMPIRE HAS RECOGNISED YOUR VOICE ON THE BROADCAST.
GIRL 19802001—

she laughs, looking into the human eyes of the sentry, slate grey like hers. its body is half human, half metal. it looks like her classmates. she wonders if the sentry was part of the Movement once too, if it was just a girl like her. she laughs. 'don't call me that. my name is—'

a shot. a life undone. the paper in her hand unfurls, but it's... blank? the sentry recoils — is it shock? an old, awakened human emotion?

and then—

a shroud of sound. The Voice's ringing tone a countercurrent to Empire's.

THE PEOPLE WILL NO LONGER COWER IN FEAR.

flyers rain from the sky, paper everywhere. and people Speak their names, and laugh and come alive. and Words — so many Words.

Let there be Liberty. Freedom. Speech.

By Gabby Fadullon