

OCTOBER 22nd

by Laura C. Alonso

A young officer approached the lawn where Shane was picketing with friends. All from middle-class neighborhoods, none considered "troubled," they were beginning to learn that obeying the law wasn't always enough, particularly as they grew into the young black males this protest addressed.

"Okay folks, keep it orderly, keep it orderly . . . " Shane smiled politely as the officer passed, repeating these words through the crowd. " . . . let's keep it peaceful, people."

"Fuck the po-lice; Fuck the po-lice!" The crowd began chanting in unison.

Hiding his rookie status, Shane joined the protestors' chants. Recently aware of his own vulnerability, he was proud to join the activism. Waving his homemade sign, Shane closed his eyes to the autumn air, breathing in every molecule of this important moment in history: he was becoming a man.

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Knocked to his knees before opening his eyes, Shane looked up to find another officer confronting some rowdy protestors who now surrounded the "peacekeeper." Some of the boys in Shane's group began throwing rocks at the offending cop while Shane remained on the ground, stunned at the sights before him.

In the moment he'd closed his eyes, everything had changed. People ran, screamed, pushed. When more officers approached in riot gear, Shane jumped to his feet, sprinting through the first open space in the crowd.

Forced to abandon illusions, Shane's boyhood fell at his feet. His heart thumped with each pound against the pavement. Once he'd gained several blocks, he looked back over his shoulder.

Not a single person followed.

Sure, I can protest police brutality, Shane lectured himself as he ran, *but I can't stand up in the presence of it*. Breathless, he burned with shame, still running, still afraid, when a shot rang out in the distance.

Those goddamn police . . . fucking bigot cops. His fists tightened, knuckles white, pumping at his sides, but he never looked back again.

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Without removing his jacket, Shane rushed in and turned on the television; an anchorwoman reported the news.

" . . . what began a peaceful protest against police brutality turned violent an hour ago as shots rang through the uncontrollable crowd. Chris Roberts is live at the scene with Officer Kent of the Eighth District."

The officer was sullen; somber -- but Roberts' microphone beckoned.

"We were here for simple crowd control. We know their rights as protestors. But there's always these few takin' things too far and it all turns hypocritical. They don't want police profilin' folks because they're minorities, but they're profilin' us just the same. Not all cops are racists, damn it . . . and who won here today?" The officer pushed his palm toward the camera, head bowed, and walked away.

The camera faded from the scene and photographs emerged on the screen. Two males: one black, one white.

The anchorwoman continued, two smiling faces still posted below. "Twenty-six-year-old George Marshall and twenty-three-year-old

Philip Wright were pronounced dead less than an hour ago, shortly after the gunfire . . . "

Shane clicked off the television before learning whether the dead men were protestors or cops. He pulled his knees to his chest, burying his face in the darkness.

He lingered in this absence of color . . . seeking hope in his own neutral space.

