

Glory Keeps Fucking with My Throat

I sit in the Old Government Building, debating. Someone told me the orders for Parihaka were signed down the corridor. I'm distracted; the old kauri window frames the marble and granite cenotaph. It's a man on a rearing horse. Its top coated with a green stain. I always find myself craning my neck up at it, my throat stretched, as I walk by.

Back to debating, my mate says he's sick of saying the same thing. I laugh, but it's easier to fit into old arguments, old lines, and old mechs. We lose, but I don't care. I tell myself I'm not there to win anymore; I lost hope for that. I lost hope for the NZ team too. He didn't; he's going to Panama in July, but I think I'm finding a place for myself, slowly. Wanting to win, but happy to lose. Walking out, he does a pull-up on a beam. I watch him.

I pass by the cenotaph on the way to yours. It's a war memorial. Sometimes, I daydream about war. I'm stuck. Holed down somewhere as the Chinese attack. I die often, but somehow my POV continues. Did I rise, soaked in glory, to heaven like the shirtless man on that tower? His muscles ripple like mine do in my head. You'd have given me one of your off-kilter smiles if I said that.

Once, me and a mate went to see the treaty protests. We travelled back streets around police cordons and arrived on Whitmore Street. I saw the cenotaph there, blending in with the mass of flags and mass of people. Steam and smoke from flares filled the air. It reminded me of *Kingdom of Heaven*, when the crusaders see Saladin's army crest over a hill. Before the battle, Baldwin meets with Saladin. Man to man. He's glory-soaked, and then they fight, curved swords against straight ones. It's badass. I didn't say anything, though. Bad connotations, I guess.

Like when we watched a video of the Capitol Riots in history, and it looked kinda fun: the way their necks strained as they entered the rotunda. It was 'their house', they said. The crowd seemed to move as one. They couldn't be contained. Hundreds screaming, roaring for redemption. Hundreds taking turns to beat a flagpole into the cop's head. I kept the thought

and the sick-sweet taste of its blood in my throat. The class sat in silence.

Mob mentality is always spat out of teachers' mouths. When someone asked me, 'What's the coolest thing you've ever seen?' I said, 'When that guy won the 400m.' He kept running. Past the finish line and into us, and we swelled around. Our hands reached forward, trying to touch him. Trying to touch the three-peat. Trying to touch another notch in a 150-year history of fucking up Town, Stream, and Rongotai.

Another time, we won a traditional, and we rushed the field. We yelled, 'Fuck the dooleys.' at the Pat's boys and chanted in a circle. There was a crush, and there were five people on top of me. I was choking, my neck squished tighter and tighter. Someone was laughing at me and my wetted eyes. I screamed at him. When I was pulled out, I told all my mates, though. 'There was a crush. I got out.' I felt glory-soaked.

Later, a video goes around of a fight. Some random beats up an autistic kid. Apparently, he was talking to little girls. Which seems unlikely, but likely enough for someone to justify it. Likely enough to start courteous – some lazy jabs, bouncing toes lined up Stephen 'Wonderboy' Thompson-style – before he beats his head into the wall and walks off. I look away. And I watch it again. Who did he think he was protecting?

Did the men, the first time they arrived – red crosses stitched onto their tunics, a warrant, begging to be dyed more and more with Saracen blood – know any of the pilgrims chased from their holy sites? Every time they slit someone's throat, did they notice theirs closing?

I climb halfway up the hill to your house, and you smile when you see me. We talk for a while. I try to cheat in a card game. Then, you jab your fingers into my ribs and tickle me. Later, you rest your head on my chest, my head bent crescent to look at your face. I swallow, smiling.

I walk back, daydreaming. I wonder what the man on the rearing horse thinks as he cranes his neck up to heaven. He probably sees less sun now, seventy years later. Climate change and all that. When I walk by, he looks like he's gasping for air. Glory-choked.