

HYMN FOR THE LOCKDOWN

SAKIB AL MAHMUD

As they were running through the debris, Maria could see the boy tripping over and getting trampled on, but there was no time to go over and save him. They all knew he couldn't be saved. He had lost the race; the race to survival. Maria remembered him from the day before. He and his younger brother had joined the group coming from the south. She couldn't remember their names. Nevertheless she didn't have time to think about his loss. She needed to find a safe place immediately. The enemy was gaining on them. She found a large boulder ahead and shouted for the group to follow her. There was a cavern behind the rock. They managed to get in before the first hound came in sight.

By the time the dust settled over, everyone had found a place to sit or lie down behind the boulder. If one tried hard enough, they could hear the loud heartbeats that were resonating inside the cavern. One could very well compare those resonating heartbeats with a hymn, Maria thought. They were safe for the moment. But for

how long? She didn't like their odds. They wouldn't be able to go out before the hounds were done scanning the field. They were stuck inside this dark cavern. She was becoming restless. She thought she was going to lose it if they had to spend another night in one of these dark caves.

Jeremy was the first to talk, "I think we should wait till the evening. Then we move west. There used to be an airfield. We will find shelter there." He was their leader. Well, sort of. He was always there to direct them to the next destination, to tell them what to do and how to do it. She found it quite extraordinary for one person to know so much about everything. But she never put her thoughts to words. One could never be too careful in situations such as this.

"We might find some food there as well," remarked Omar.

Maria was walking about. She retorted, "No, we will not find any food there."

"We need shelter for the night," said Jeremy.

"What about the morning after? What do we do then?"

"We move somewhere else, searching

for food."

She snapped, "I am tired of being on the run, looking for caves and tunnels, living like... Like a damn rodent."

"Ever since Joshua was killed we have been following Jeremy. He saved our lives so many times," Mina cautioned her. She was consoling the little boy whose brother had just died out in the field. Mina had been the motherly figure of the group for as long as anyone could remember. They say she used to be a nurse. The night Maria joined the group, it was Mina who bandaged her broken arm and sat beside her through the feverish night.

"Don't you get it?" Maria couldn't hold it any longer. She was screaming at that moment, "He has been the guide all along because he was written like this. He's purpose is to guide us, to show us the path. Not only Jeremy but each one of us... We are...", she started to say something more but then stopped herself. She realised they already had a lot on their plate to deal with, and giving in to her frustrations wasn't going to help.

"What do you suggest?"

"I say we stand our ground here. We fight those beasts, or animals, or whatever the hell they are," she didn't know what to call them.

"We won't survive against them."

"Some of us will die," Maria admitted. She walked over to Mina and took her hands, "But we have been losing a few every week. We can at least take the zone back if we fight together."

"You're saying we have a chance?" asked Omar.

"We might," Maria tried to see hope even though there wasn't much left of it. She saw the faces filled with anguish and despair. But they had to fight back. It could not go on. "I say we take the fight to them even if that means only one of us makes it through. We shall remain and survive as one."

They saw the fear in each other's eyes, but also knew they had to do what needed to be done.

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