

Politics between Us

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politics between us

BY TRICIA TUNSTALL

Joan Baez is telling fifty thousand kids in a stadium that they've got themselves a Woodstock. My daughter and I watch on TV. The kids in the stadium cheer wildly and with what seems like relief, as though she has forgiven them something.

"Were you in Woodstock?" my daughter asks me. Maybe she thinks it was a TV show. I wasn't in Woodstock, I tell her, but I was in the Movement. She looks uncertain and a little nervous. My daughter is thirteen. Most of the kids in that stadium can't be too much older. I wonder how I would tell her, or them, about the Movement.

The image that comes to my mind is like something from a children's story. We — the Movement, that is — are huddled together on one end of a great seesaw. There are not enough of us, of course; we cannot make it budge. But this also gives us our one big advantage: ours is the high end. We have the stiff wind and the long view, the dizzy spells and exhilaration of high places. They, down there, are heavy with power. But they are stuck to the ground.

Now that is romantic, but no more so than children's stories ever are, and no more so than we used to feel. I wonder if anyone at that concert, or anyone anywhere, could possibly feel the same way now. Joan Baez is telling the audience that they can change the world; but what a bleak, not to mention perverse, idea it is that the way you change the world is to buy a ticket to a concert with your parents' American Express card.

She leads them in singing "Amazing Grace," prompting them at every line because they don't know the words. "To save a wretch like me. . . ." The TV camera pans across thousands of kids with tans and perfect teeth waving American flags. My daughter studies them, pointing out girls with frizzed hair. She longs to have her hair frizzed but is not permitted to. The camera comes to rest for a moment on a young

couple, maybe nineteen or twenty years old. She has on a halter top; he wears glasses and a shy beard. The boy holds the girl's hand in both of his, the fingers of his right hand braided into her fingers, his left hand cupped over her knuckles. It is a nice gesture, and they do not know the camera has found it. They are gazing, rapt, at Joan Baez. I am touched in spite of myself; and suddenly I remember Saul.

I have not thought of him for a long time. Years ago, when I left the Movement, I panicked at the idea that I had, in my mother's words, "lost the best years of my life"; and I bought three linen skirts and a blow dryer and forgot as much as possible about my lost best years. But now, as I watch that lovestruck, solemn young couple, the memories don't seem to rankle. I realize that what I would really like to tell my daughter is the story of Saul.

I met Saul when I was twenty-two. I was utterly committed to communist revolution, and I loved to drive. In 1971 in the United States of America the work of a revolutionary entailed a great deal of driving — delivering leaflets to campuses, traveling to weekend workshops, carting boxes of oats and radishes and honey home from the Food Co-op—and since I had a car I was very valuable to the revolution. I also had a lot of time. Four months into my first real job, teaching science in a private high school in Boston, I had been fired when the vice-principal walked in on my special lesson about the effect of chemical defoliants upon rice paddies. I was looking for another job, but without haste. I had some money saved.

Saul was standing by the side of a highway near Boston one day in February with his thumb out and a royal blue wool scarf around his neck, and I slowed my car to give him a ride. He had sharp features and a high color in his cheeks, and when he got in there was a faint smell of soap and even aftershave about him. Immediately he began examining the books on the floor beneath his feet.

"Why all the propaganda?" he said.

This was unlooked-for obtuseness in anyone hitchhiking to Boston in 1971. "Marx isn't propaganda," I told him, ready to throw him, aromatic cheeks and all, back onto the Beltway.

"Not that I've read it, but it isn't exactly daytime TV, either," he said.

I thought about the spiritual poverty of the masses under capitalism and I didn't answer. But he kept asking questions about where I was going, what I did, where I lived. He rolled his window down and sat forward on his seat, his dark curls straightened by the wind, braiding the fringe on his scarf. When I told him I lived in a communal house he seemed hardly to understand what I meant. His naiveté puzzled me until I shouted a few questions of my own over the wind, and discovered he was from Nebraska. This was a surprise; his thin, dark, hectic look did not fit my image of the heartland. The aftershave, though, was accounted for.

He told me his name was Saul and reached, rather quaintly I thought, to shake my hand. He said he had been working his way across the country, driving a truck, caddying a golf course, reading gas meters. Boston, for no obvious reason, was his destination. I decided he was not an agent, and told him so.

“Why should I be an agent?” he asked.

I mentioned that undercover FBI agents were everywhere these days, what with the growing power and inevitable triumph of the Movement. This last seemed to be news to him, although he had seen some antiwar demonstrations at the University of Nebraska.

It occurred to me that Saul might be excellent practice. Among my housemates I was continually chastised for timidity: if one was committed to the Movement it followed that one must be a tireless proselytizer, missing no opportunity to change a mind or raise a consciousness. I was devoted to the Movement; but I was terrible at talking it up. Whenever I tried, I tended to choke on the intensity of my convictions. Stammering and hesitating, I was sure I drove potential converts up the wall instead of into the fray. But Saul was clearly interested, and also too ignorant to challenge me.

So I told him about the Movement. I talked about the socialist vision and the feminist critique, about the need for a new theory of class and a new strategy for change — nonviolent, I emphasized, democratic, grass-roots. I talked about the politics of lifestyle and the alienation of everyday life, about organic gardens and paralegal training and the destabilization of the war machine. It came awkwardly at first, but Saul sat and listened as though he were in a concert hall. More and more easily the words began to glide along the tracks of my favorite, familiar truths.

I talked all the way into the city. When I dropped him on a downtown streetcorner — “anyplace you think is particularly ‘Boston,’ ”

he instructed me — I felt dizzy with eloquence. I had never talked politics so long.

In the Movement we called ourselves organizers, although we built no trade unions and no electoral parties. It was our axiom that you could really “organize” only one person at a time. With the gratifying sense that Saul had begun to be organized, I drove home. I was on dinner duty that night in my communal house.

Life in our house was governed by the inexorable rotation of a chore wheel as firmly as the lives of peasants by the circling of the sun. Making dinner and serving it at six-thirty sharp was one of seven specified revolutionary duties, along with taking out the garbage and cleaning the bathrooms.

Happily for the smooth operation of the chore wheel, there were at that time seven people living in the house, one of whom was my boyfriend, Kenneth. Kenneth had gone through Harvard in three years and the Law School in two, faster than any student on record, but had refused to take the bar exam. The recalcitrance of this potentially brilliant alumnus was a matter of concern to university officials, who understood dimly that Kenneth would not take the bar exam until the collapse of imperialist America. Kenneth came from a Philadelphia Main Line family that was one-tenth, he said, Iroquois Indian. No one doubted it.

Kenneth had total recall. At meetings, he was always the one who remembered statistics, logistics, and historical facts. He was a good executive (the chore wheel was his design) and a master administrator at demonstrations. Demonstrations scared me a little; secretly, I would rather have stayed home and read Marx. As a child I had been allowed to stay home from church sometimes and spend Sunday morning reading *Nellie Bly*, *First Woman Reporter* or *Anne of Green Gables*. My current housemates were not so lenient. Theory was no substitute for action, no matter what you read.

Most of them, in fact, had never read Marx, although I think they thought they had. Certainly Louise, who was our one bona fide working-class house member and drove a cab in a baseball cap, had not. Neither did Marxist theory seem to present any particular urgency for Brenda, who was writing a dissertation on sex role stereotypes in Greek mythology, or Honey, a very pretty small blonde hippie who was the linchpin staff-person at the Women’s Center.

The men in the house didn’t read much at all. Mitchell, who was a guitar player, practiced long melancholy riffs for hours, lying on

his back on the dining room table. He experienced periodic bursts of political fervor during which he would stride around Harvard Square giving out leaflets and haranguing the pagans with astonishing cogency. Budge was a sweet, sad, older man — twenty-seven at least — who worked the cash register at the Food Co-op in the day and tallied cash and food stamps at night, and could make a hot-and-sour soup that brought tears to the eyes. Kenneth, of course, had read everything already.

The night after I gave Saul a lift into Boston he appeared at my door on a borrowed motorcycle. He had remembered the name of my street, he said, and knew right away which house was mine when he heard us calling our dogs, whose names were Love and Struggle. I told him we were all about to go out to meetings.

“I’ll come back tomorrow, then,” he said. No one had tried to “date” me like this — he probably still used the word — since my pre-political days. I was flattered and a little irritated.

“Sorry, meetings tomorrow night too,” I told him. He seemed somewhat dashed. I saw he got the picture: meetings every night.

Every night all seven of us piled into cars and went to meetings. Like our fellows in other communal houses, we fanned out across Boston, going from Cambridge to Somerville, Somerville to Dorchester, to union support committees and antiwar coalitions and women’s groups and men’s groups. On any night there were circles of us throughout the city, in living rooms and church basements. The next night, as though a kaleidoscope had turned a notch, we would recombine for new meetings, different circles in different living rooms.

“I’d like to go, too,” said Saul.

This was awkward. I began to fear I had organized a loser, a lonely guy desperate for companionship, who would settle for a meeting if he couldn’t get a date. “It doesn’t work that way,” I said tentatively.

“Well, you tell me what way it does work, why don’t you,” he said. “Do I need to take an intro course? Is there a baby meeting someplace I can go to? Whatever you recommend, I’ll do it.” He looked very severe. “I’m interested, get it?” he said.

It was Monday night, Antiwar Coalition meeting night for Kenneth and Brenda and me. Saul came to the meeting on his motorcycle, following us in my car. I did not know the protocol for bringing in a convert cold, literally off the street. Should he be introduced? Introductions, like handshakes, were the vaguely remembered, nearly

Chekhovian gestures of a bygone time. People either knew other people already or hung around until they did.

Saul solved my problem by taking a seat apart from the rest of us and looking somewhat surly. He was taken for a veteran, and everyone kept a reverential distance. From eight o'clock to eleven o'clock he listened, and we talked.

It was not, as I recall, a particularly memorable meeting. From time to time our meetings were rousing, even inspiring — when the best speakers, all our local heavies, really got rolling and raised a storm of language around us; when the grand old dialectical hymns rang in our ears; when we would suddenly understand all of human freedom and oppression and feel ourselves the heirs of Emma, the brothers of Ho. Meetings did not, however, reach these heights very often. At Saul's first meeting we made a list.

Plans were underway for a national antiwar demonstration that spring. Kenneth presided over the listing of preparatory tasks and the assigning of those tasks among us. Saul raised his hand, and to my surprise Kenneth nodded and wrote down his name. "Good attitude," said Kenneth to me later. "Seems like he could be a good cadre, if he's not an agent. Why don't you get to know him a little and find out where he's coming from? After all, he's your catch."

"I don't want to get to know him," I said immediately. Saul's intense interest made me nervous. But Saul was, after all, my catch, and now he was on the media committee. I thought that perhaps I should see about his education. So when he called and asked me to lunch the next day I went prepared. I wore my brown leather boots and my army surplus jacket and my grandmother's black jet earrings; and I brought my favorite Marx, the *1844 Manuscripts*.

Most people — and probably Saul — thought of Marx as the great spokesman of the dispossessed. But I read Marx for what he understood about owning things. "Our objects in relation to one another constitute our only intelligible language," wrote Marx, and the words would trigger a hundred memories of my doggedly affluent childhood: the driveways full of station wagons and the houses full of extension phones and Waterpics and blenders, the Christmas trees unapproachable for the presents that spread out beneath them like a spill of gaudy garbage; and above all a certain anxious ache, a sensation of being slightly stunned and terribly alone, which I had often felt as a child as I tagged behind my mother through supermarkets big as stadiums or rode in her car along streets where huge square houses stood Cy-

clops-like with their blank bay windows in front.

I could not connect that ache with any definite cause. But I knew it had something to do with the sheen of things — new, expensive, replaceable things — that seemed to cover the surface of my parents' life.

As far as I could tell, Marx was the first to know that deprivation and surfeit are two sides of the same obsession. It was comforting to me that deep in the nineteenth century this man had had a profoundly accurate premonition of West Orange, New Jersey.

Saul, from his unspecified Midwestern town, might have no idea what Marx and I were talking about. Maybe he knew nothing about the sad opulence of suburbs. Maybe he had been blessed with a childhood innocent of surfeit or deprivation, in the magical land of Dick and Jane and Spot; maybe he had grown up in some simple white frame house on a simple trellised lane, with a family farm in back where he and his brothers scythed hay after school as the whippoorwills sang. Maybe he was feigning interest in politics because he was interested in me.

Well, I might harbor such dark suspicions, but I decided not to assume anything. I would give it a try.

We sat in a pizza parlor in Cambridge and I put on my eyeglasses. "Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is ours only if we have it, if we have eaten, drunk, worn, or lived in it," I read. These lines never failed to stir me like poetry. I was afraid of looking ridiculous, but I continued, "Hence all the physical and spiritual senses have been replaced by the single alienation of them all — the sense of *having*."

I realized that Saul's listening was almost athletic in its intensity. "Let me see that," he said. It was the first time I had seen someone else react so strongly to the words. I read on: "Overcoming private property means the emancipation of all the human senses. The development of all the senses is the work of the whole history of the world."

"That's beautiful," said Saul. "I never heard anything so beautiful." The pizza arrived, and Saul moved over to sit next to me in the booth. He drew a slice very carefully out of the pie and pointed it at me, and I bit off the tip of the wedge. "The coming society," we read together, "will produce the rich, deep and entirely sensitive man. . . ."

Saul went to another meeting that night, and another the night

after that. He spent several days running all the media committee's most thankless errands, which is just what an agent would have done; only Saul did it with unmistakable enthusiasm. He made no tries at an appearance of political sophistication. At those first meetings he simply sat and listened with concentrated pleasure, as he had listened to me read Marx.

"I'm interested," Saul had said to me. It was quickly clear that he was more than interested; he was impelled. He went to every meeting he could, and soon began to speak up from time to time; he joined more committees and distributed leaflets and volunteered at the Food Co-op. He quickly learned everyone's name and came to understand the peculiarities of our vocabulary. In a matter of weeks he was accepted among us.

We accepted him, above all, because he believed in us so passionately. He embraced our causes as though he had invented them. There was a deep, idealistic anger in him about countless things — about the rigidities of college curricula, the fortunes of oil companies, the poverty of Eastern cities and the dumping of Western crops; about Vietnam, where he would not be sent, on account of severe hay fever. All the standard, timeworn targets of radical censure were new and appalling discoveries for him, occasions for astonished outrage.

He rescued our convictions from the drift toward habit. He saw us as heroic, and we welcomed him to heroism.

About his past he was consistently vague — although not secretive; I guessed that he simply found it boring. There were no clues from him as to the personal trigger of this or that one of his indignations. I never did know whether he grew up privileged or poor. His anger was a form of animation, almost of exuberance. It was fluent, and without bitterness, and absolutely authentic.

It was this anger, it seemed, that had brought him to Boston. Without knowing about organized radical movements, he had somehow known that Boston was the place to come in those years if you were young and full of stamina and continually furious.

It happened that Saul and I began to find ourselves more and more on the same committees. We would go out together to put up posters or leaflet college dorms, and then we would retreat to the warmth of some coffee shop to read and talk. Saul was a voracious reader, with a taste for florid fiction: he loved *Wuthering Heights* and *Lolita* and anything by F. Scott Fitzgerald. I lent him every book of Marxist philosophy I owned, and he read them all. They seemed to have for

him, as for me, the force of revelation, of a crucial dream suddenly remembered. He read late at night, he told me, camped out under a pile of blankets on the couch in an acquaintance's apartment.

I did not want to see the apartment or meet the acquaintance. For that matter, I did not particularly want to invite him for dinner at my communal house. So we met in town and talked about dialectical materialism as ardently as if we were telling secrets. Afterwards, in the dark, wet afternoons, he would take me home on his motorcycle. I would sit behind him and put my hands in the pockets of his jacket, and his blue scarf would snake back and cling to my neck. He would yell cries of revolutionary fervor at the passersby: "Rejoice!" he would admonish them. "The revolution comes!" The roar of the motorcycle and the streaming wind would drown the words before anyone else could hear them; people saw only a flushed boy, his mouth wide open, and a pale girl wrapped in a bright blue flag.

I had come to find him very exciting, which was what made it difficult to have him in my house, where the relative stability of my relationship with Kenneth had made us a sort of den mother and father to the others. Kenneth was an irreproachable lover, docile and deliberate. Before lovemaking he was apt to inquire what I needed — as though he were about to run out to the grocery store, I thought sometimes, and then felt guilty for the thought; his solicitude was after all an admirable thing. Honey and Brenda, both of whom tended to take up with one after another charismatic cad, were constantly telling me how lucky I was to have found a truly feminist male. (Louise had given up men when she put on her baseball cap, and was sought after, so far without success, by a number of gay women in town.)

But I learned to tolerate Saul's visits, because his friendship with Kenneth was developing almost as fast as our own. "I think he's terrific," Saul told me. "He's so organized. He operates a Rolodex file like some IBM executive. That's what the Movement needs — more people that organized." Saul himself could not manage a date book. He had bought one at the Harvard Coop but as far as I knew had opened it only once, to copy into it, on the pages of March 27th to July 3rd, a speech he liked by Rosa Luxemburg.

His relationship with Kenneth seemed to thrive on their differences. The two of them would sit at the dining room table and plan media strategies, Saul composing incendiary slogans or fantasizing a takeover of some working-class radio station, and watching admiringly as Kenneth put three-by-five cards in alphabetical order. "You

don't know the first thing about working-class consciousness," Kenneth would tell Saul, as he had often told me. "You should try to keep up, understand where people's heads are. Watch a little TV, for Christ's sake. Read a tabloid." I, in fact, did try to follow this advice. I made sure I knew who had been raped and who had won the lottery in any given week. But Saul would nod amiable agreement with Kenneth and then go right on ignoring whatever expressions of mass consciousness struck him as violating the English language, which was all of them.

Kenneth accepted Saul as potentially useful, although he did not seem to enjoy him much. But then Kenneth did not tend to derive enjoyment from people. He enjoyed his chore wheel and his meeting schedule and his Rolodex file. He enjoyed his wall full of cross-indexed books and his window full of very healthy plants. Every Saturday night he made a batch of caramel fudge, sat in front of the TV with his arm around me and got quickly, efficiently stoned. The next morning he would be up leafleting black ladies at the local Baptist church. He had studiously collectivist principles and a rock-solid sense of himself as the one who ran the Movement.

As spring approached, the task of running the Movement became ever more considerable. We were all, in our various ways, moving toward the big demonstration in Washington. Brenda and her fellow graduate students drew time lines of Southeast Asian history; Honey had special Women's Center tee-shirts printed for the demonstration; Mitchell took his guitar to a bench in the Boston Common and conducted impromptu teach-ins over a G-minor vamp.

Saul and I worked together constantly now. In early March, over beers, we were moved by some dense passage in *Das Kapital* to write a sort of inspirational leaflet about war and spring, the gist being that they were at odds. It gained us a modest reputation for prose style, and after that we were in demand as a team to write publicity materials.

About this time the assistant dean of some local college had been persuaded to donate a room in his Student Union building to the city-wide mobilization effort. It was here that Saul and I wrote. He would stand behind me as I sat at a typewriter and we'd toss phrases back and forth, turning tropes on one another's polemical ardor, my fingers whacking at the keys, his resting lightly on my shoulders.

And it was here, of course, that we first made love. Late one night, as we drafted a condemnation of strafe bombing, Saul began to give me a back rub. We were at the part about the number of day-

care centers and public gardens that could have been funded by the money going to the war machine; and we felt thrilled with our words, with our new melody for the time-honored chant of bread and roses. Saul's hands were warm on my back and my imagination was full of babies and duckponds, and then he was tilting my chin up and we were kissing. He turned off the light and made a pillow of our blue jeans, and we made love in an ecstatic scramble, keeping our sweaters on in the chill darkness. Afterwards, he found a candle in a desk drawer. We put it next to the typewriter, and Saul knelt behind my chair and put his arms around me and we finished the leaflet.

Kenneth was asleep when I got home. I crawled into bed and nestled against him and stared all night at the orbiting shafts of light on the ceiling from the headlights of passing cars. I was torn between longing for Saul and remorse toward Kenneth, and I was incidentally surprised to discover how glamorous a thing it was to go from one lover to the bed of another. I decided I did not need to tell Kenneth about my transgression.

But Saul and I worked late and made love the next night, and the next, and when I slipped back into bed with Kenneth I no longer felt glamorous; I felt like a cheat. So I moved my three pairs of blue jeans and five shelves of books down the hall to a tiny spare bedroom, and I told Kenneth about Saul.

Kenneth looked shocked. "How long have you been—" he said, and stopped, as if unsure what he wanted to know.

"Not long," I told him quickly, and he put his hands in his pockets and went out to take the dogs for a walk.

"We were getting awfully monogamous, anyway," he said briefly upon his return, and offered to continue sleeping with me now and then. My tendency, however, was to be awfully monogamous; and I was awfully, totally in love with Saul.

I have never been happier than I was that spring. The sunlight thickened every day and the late snow lay steaming on the sidewalks, and Saul hung up his blue scarf and bought a pair of sandals, as though it were spring in Georgia. I spent most nights with him on his sofa, which he surrounded with a folding screen for privacy—although his acquaintance, a mute Nebraskan medical student, came home only to sleep or to drink whole gallons of milk without pausing to breathe. Saul hung the screen with posters of Marx and Engels and Joan Baez, and we read and talked and ate bread and cheese by candlelight, and then curled up in blankets full of crumbs and slept like children.

Our days were spent in demonstration organizing at the Student Union. The place was full of people at work and a feeling of busy, ambitious solidarity. More vividly than the demonstration itself (although that, when it finally came, was memorable enough in its own way) I remember the work of preparation — the smells of coffee and glazed doughnuts and mimeograph ink, the windows wide open to the April air full of rain and raw light, the dog-eared lists taped to card tables and the slogans taped to walls. I remember Saul and me carting a record player into the Student Union room and playing Bob Dylan and Pink Floyd over and over; I remember driving slowly through downtown Boston while he leaned out the window with a megaphone and invited everybody to Washington in May at the top of his lungs. I remember running with him across a park in a downpour, my stack of colored leaflets bleeding onto my fingers; at the sight of his ankles above his sandal straps red with chill and flecked with blades of wet grass I felt such desire that we cut short our leafleting and went home to his sofa.

We arrived at our nightly meetings flushed with the leafleting and lovemaking of the day. With Saul I was getting used to the sound of my own voice, and I began to find in meetings that I had things to say, and even to say them. I was no longer among the lightweights.

Saul, to whom talking came easily, was becoming a heavy now that he knew the words. To his own surprise, he had a flair for old-fashioned oratory. His brief, saturation-style political education, equal parts Marx and meetings, gave him a peculiar but effective vocabulary: he could put gay pride and relations of production in the same sentence with no trouble at all.

The level of comradely interest in Saul and Kenneth and me was quite high these days, which delighted me; I had never been gossiped about before. People tended to leave clear sight lines between the three of us at meetings, as though they did not want to breach the charged energy flowing between us. And the interest grew as Saul and Kenneth emerged as the joint leaders of the coalition we were forming “to bring the socialist-feminist perspective” from Boston to the demonstration in May.

They became very tight. They conferred in corners before and after meetings; they spent hours together over the street maps of Washington that hung on the dining room wall. Sometimes, late at night, a telephone ring would interrupt Saul and me on our sofa, and I would be left to drift into sleep while Saul stood nude at the telephone and

talked in a low voice to Kenneth. “He’s incredible,” Saul said to me. “He doesn’t bear me a grudge about you at all.”

“He’s like that,” I said. “He’s rational. If a grudge might delay the revolution, he doesn’t bear a grudge.”

Saul’s admiration was sincere. He was grateful that he could have me and keep Kenneth too. I made him feel like a firebrand; but with Kenneth he could feel like an organizer.

Although I no longer slept there I was still an official member of the communal house; I could not bring myself to desert, leaving the others stuck with my share of the rent, wreaking havoc with the chore wheel. So I would come every day to fulfill whatever obligation the wheel demanded of me and then drive off to Saul’s place, with meatballs or stir-fried shrimp left over from dinner in a bag for Saul, feeling a little like the maid.

Sometimes Kenneth would say to me before I defected, “Hey, can I borrow you for a minute?” He would lead me to the dining room wall and ask my advice about marching routes, pointing at the map with his little finger and leaning away from me. Uncomfortable but flattered, I would contemplate Washington with him, wondering whether Honey or Brenda — or both, in the interests of stamping out awful monogamy — had yet inherited the truly feminist male.

The bus to Washington left at midnight the night before the demonstration, and there were songs and chanting all the way down. The last time I had sung on a bus had been on a summer camp field trip to see the Old Man in the Mountain, when I was thirteen years old. On that occasion I had been depressed by the racket and had refused to cooperate past the ninety-eighth bottle of beer on the wall; but now, reclining in a seat with Saul, I was comforted by the quiet, solemn singing fringed with the sound of a strummed guitar. In spite of the words they sang they did not reach me as a single, collective voice; what I heard were the individual voices of my friends, strong or quivering or flat, each earnest in its own way. I could hear Louise, half-speaking the words to herself; and Brenda, sitting next to Mitchell and singing husky harmony lines. Saul’s cheek was against my head and he was humming. He did not know the words to these songs. The hired bus driver, who had started the trip surly, seemed to relax as he guided his capsule of gentle melody down the dark highway.

As we came closer to Washington we passed more and more buses heading our way, and suddenly the thing began to be real. It occurred to me, and probably to most of us, only then that our enthusiastic

promotional publicity was true. We were, in fact, hundreds of thousands strong; we were a gigantic tide of discontent. It was a miracle. We were taking over the capital just as we had said we would.

Dawn came, and the buses streamed into the city and parked in a ring around some great grassy circle. The morning was hot and humid and there were people in blue jeans everywhere, drinking coffee from thermos bottles and squinting at maps and making suggestions. The crowd spread out over Washington like floodwaters across an alluvial plain, as fluid and undirected and relentless as the tide.

Our coalition had made a plan to convene in the late morning in Farragut Square for a brief warm-up, a sort of home-team pep rally. After a few speeches to set the mood, we would march to the main demonstration platform on the Mall and hear from some fraction of the Chicago Seven and Doctor Benjamin Spock.

That was the plan, and Saul and Kenneth had given much joint attention to planning their speeches and the route of our march. But when we came to the square we were surprised to find it cordoned off. A squadron of riot police stood in front of a barricade, lined up in a row and slouching a little, as if they were waiting to see a movie.

We came to a confused stop and peered at them from across the street. We were supposed to remember that they were not the enemy, but this was difficult: they were booted and helmeted and armed as though we were coming at them in tanks, instead of in sandals and on empty stomachs.

As I stared at them I seemed to catch the eye of one whose face was young and freckled and whose helmet did not conceal a few stray locks of hair on his forehead. He looked right at me, and I tried to imagine the doubt or shame he must be feeling. Then he pursed his lips and a shiny pink bubble emerged, growing slowly larger till it hid his face; he popped it and sucked it neatly into his mouth and kept staring at me.

I felt suddenly on fire with rage. I wanted to smash the man's helmeted head and see it wither like the popped bubble. There he stood — there they stood — in their medieval armor and medieval ignorance, ready to mow us down without any idea what we were about. They stood there because they had agreed to expect the worst instead of the best of people. They were eager to believe that all human beings had venal ends and sordid means. They were petty and stupid and sadistic, and they hoped we were too.

I forgot that I disliked demonstrations and feared crowds, and I

began to shout. As loud as I could, glaring across the street at that smug bastard with the gum wad in his cheek, I shouted the first thing that came into my mind.

“Nothing to lose but your chains!” I yelled. “Nothing to lose but your chains!” It was not exactly a standard of the demonstration repertoire, but a few people around me picked it up, and then more and more, and then someone had the happy notion of clapping twice fast after “chains,” which gave the phrase a vaguely cha-cha feel.

The crowd was with me now, and the police, I thought, looked slightly disconcerted. I turned to Saul. “Nothing to lose but your chains,” we cried to one another, jubilant. His cheeks were deeply flushed, glowing through his day’s growth of beard. A blue vein I had never seen before pulsed and flickered in his throat. I loved the way his dark hair curled around his ears; I loved the fervor in his voice; and I loved the thought of mankind, with vast, simple relief, slipping free of its chains.

I looked around at my chanting comrades. There was Brenda with Mitchell, their shoulders pressed together as they called and clapped. There was Honey, gazing fondly at Kenneth’s stern profile and caroling, “Nothing to lose . . . ! Nothing to lose . . . !”

The chant grew faster. The sunshine, so strong after our spare New England spring, warmed our hair and set the cops’ belt buckles twinkling. We swayed in rhythm and felt our hearts pounding and smiled into one another’s eyes, for all the world as though we were at a ball. And then suddenly Saul broke off and said to me, “We should take that square.”

“Take it?” I asked, my fear returning.

“That’s where we planned our rally, and that’s where we’re going to hold it, by God,” he said. “Kenneth! Let’s go over there and give those goons a surprise.” He raised his voice. “Take the square!”

It was a thrilling idea. The chant fell apart and people began scrambling into the street. “Take the square!” we called out.

“No,” said a voice. We turned to see Kenneth behind us, stone-faced and unmoving. “No one goes over there,” he said.

“We have to, Kenneth,” said Saul. “They’re trying to bully us. We can’t let them get away with it.”

“It would be pointless confrontation,” said Kenneth.

“Confrontation,” said Saul, “is what this thing today is all about, isn’t it?” His face was burning red. “Isn’t it?”

Kenneth walked over to him. “Just where do *you* get off,” he

said calmly, “telling *me* what to do? When you actually know something about politics instead of faking it, then talk to me. Meanwhile, we’re going to turn around and march straight to the Mall.”

“No way,” said Saul. His voice shook a little with surprise and fury. “I didn’t come here to kowtow to the cops. Or to anyone they’ve got running scared. We’re taking that square.”

They were close to blows. I knew that the fight was about me, and that it was also about what they said it was about. I was afraid for Saul and afraid for Kenneth, and very excited.

“If we want it,” said Saul, “we should just take it. Simple.”

“Yeah, that seems to be the way you operate,” said Kenneth almost casually. Saul stared at him, wordless, then turned away and headed across the street, calling for us to follow. Kenneth lifted a bullhorn and intoned, “Proceed to the Mall. Proceed to the Mall.”

I crossed after Saul. He walked toward the police line and they looked at him with faint curiosity, as though he were a lone pigeon coming up the sidewalk. He passed between two of them and they let him go. When he got to the statue of Admiral Farragut in the middle of the square, he climbed up on the pedestal and began to deliver his speech.

A few others had crossed after me. We approached the police line and the cops closed ranks; we stopped, deeply frightened in spite of ourselves. Behind us I could hear Kenneth with his bullhorn, delivering instructions to move on. His voice was placid and authoritative.

Saul, wavering on the edge of Admiral Farragut’s pedestal, was speaking rapidly and with furious gestures. I could barely tell what he was saying, although I had helped him write his speech. Across the street Kenneth’s retreat began. One by one, the bulk of the Boston contingent edged away up the street, and the sound of the bullhorn gradually disappeared.

Saul faltered and fell silent a moment, and I saw him take a deep breath. Abandoning his text, he began to improvise for the small band of his faithful a rhapsodic celebration of public space and spontaneous action. He invoked Marx and Marcuse and even, I seem to recall, *Wuthering Heights*, and he described a time when all the bronze admirals and generals and brigadiers would be gently dismantled and replaced with symbols of peace and life. We listened to him as devotedly as he had once listened to us at meetings, in the dead of the Boston winter. Mitchell, next to me, fingered rapid, soundless chord changes on the neck of his guitar, while Louise cocked back her cap

and stared at Saul with a look that appeared to bode ill for her hopeful lesbian suitors. His footing on the pedestal seemed to become more secure as he spoke, and I think we would not have disputed the suggestion that Farragut had moved back a little.

Taking one more long breath, Saul delivered a final sally at the cops' backs. "And you bastards," he advised them, "someday you'll get sick and tired of standing in your chain mail holding a square of grass hostage, and you'll open your ears and your eyes and join us! You've got nothing to lose but" — and he caught my eye then and finished softly, almost sadly — "your chains."

When he climbed down from the pedestal he came straight to us. The color in his face had contracted to a short streak of red in each cheek. We punched his arm and ruffled his hair like a baseball team greeting the batter who won the game, and then the others drifted discreetly away. Saul and I walked across the street and leaned against the marble wall of some government building, and Saul began to tear a fringe in the edge of his map of Washington.

"I'll kill him," he said. "I'll break his goddamn American Indian nose. I'll expose him as a chicken-hearted bureaucrat —"

"Forget it," I told him. "It's not worth your energy."

"A bullhorn," he said, unbelieving. "He drowned me out with a bullhorn."

I felt tender and also annoyed. Saul should have known better: he was no match for Kenneth on this level.

"I really thought he liked me," he said. "I really did. After all, he let me have you." It was as though taking me away from Kenneth had been an act of intimacy between them. Somehow, it had made him trust Kenneth more.

"He couldn't have stopped me," I said. Saul looked at me, and then spread the tattered street map on the marble stoop and we sat down on it. "It was a great speech, Saul," I added; and we kissed for a long time beneath the leering gaze of the riot police and the blank stare of the admiral. Then we went together to the Mall to watch the speakers on the distant platform raise their arms to the crowd, and to join in the great roars that followed, like thunder, every flash of the peace sign. And later, in the evening, Saul and Kenneth both won noisy applause by delivering their prepared speeches in the bus as we headed homeward, after which everyone, Saul and Kenneth included, went deeply to sleep.

The story I would tell my daughter ends there; Saul and I were never quite so close again. We stayed together awhile after the demonstration, but he soon grew tired of meetings and demonstrations and even Marx. It wasn't that he was no longer angry about things but that his anger didn't seem to interest him much any more. He decided to go live in New Hampshire and spend his time catching brook trout and throwing them back. He asked me to join him. I said I would think about it; he said he would write when he got settled.

We never heard from one another after that. I spent some years continuing to go through Movement motions even after there wasn't much of a Movement any more, like those cartoon characters who keep running in midair for awhile after they have gone past the edge of the cliff. I thought now and then about going to New Hampshire. But I was intimidated by the idea of all that passionate energy with no focus but one another. We had dared to fall in love so hard, after all, because we had politics between us.

Joan Baez is no longer on the television screen. She has been hugged off the stage by Jack Nicholson, and now Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, looking old and bored, are singing a song I remember liking. My daughter has turned the sound way up and is dancing by herself. The kids in the audience look at the stage some of the time, but most of the time they watch several giant overhead screens showing live aerial views of themselves watching the screens. They look, on the screens, like they're having a great time. Somebody on stage, Crosby maybe, yells "Save the children!" The band all raise cups of Pepsi high over their heads in salute. The crowd cheers obediently. It seems the general idea is that by being there, watching middle-aged hippies drink Pepsi, showing up having a great time on the giant screens, they are saving the children.

I think to myself that it would be very tough for these kids to make up their own Movement. The entertainment salesmen are one step ahead now. They invent an image of a Movement and package it and sell tickets to it. All you have to do—maybe all you can do—is buy it, and then watch yourself having a good time at it.

Some singer I never heard of is on the stage now. He is taking off his clothes and throwing them into the stands. The audience roars. They wave their flags and dance a little. They are saving Ethiopia. They are catching a rock star's socks. When they are through saving

Ethiopia their parents will pick them up and drive them home. I am disgusted, and I start to turn off the TV.

“What are you doing?” my daughter asks indignantly. “This is a historical event.” She points to the logo that appears before commercial breaks, of the African continent striped in rainbow colors. “See?” she says.

“Historical, nothing,” I tell her. “This is a bad rock concert.”

“I wish I was there,” she says. “Freddy Matthews is there. He wanted me to go with him. He said it was a historical event, and he should know. He reads about Ethiopia all the time. He really *believes* in it.”

I try to imagine my daughter in that stadium, holding hands, believing in Ethiopia. Freddy Matthews is news to me. I am used to my daughter as a rather quiet little girl who likes to spend her time climbing out of sight into trees and reading. Last year I gave her *Exodus* and she stayed in a maple tree for five hours. Now she wants to spend seventeen hours at a mass concert with a boy.

Well, there are probably lots of young couples in love in that crowd. Maybe some of them are in love about Ethiopia and history. Maybe their idealism is real, and fierce; maybe it can't be corrupted even by the packaging of a famine as a media event. Who is to say whose passion is authentic, and whose politics?

My daughter is dancing again, looking very serious. I turn the sound down a little. But I leave the TV on.