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So—this is how it ends. Not as I'd imagined, not at all. No slipping softly into oblivion, no graceful bowing out, no dignified exit. Rather, this obscene spectacle of violent mayhem and senseless brawling. I should have known—it's been heading this way for years. The spiralling madness, the barefaced dishonesty, the charade of integrity.

What bothers me most is my own complicity. All of us, we've all done our bit to maintain that charade. We've all downed our glasses of fine pinot noir as we openly admired each other's interior décor and secretly envied the success of each other's children.

None of that matters anymore. They're down there in the streets—our children with the rest of them—screaming and shouting and dancing. I can't even tell if they're celebrating or protesting anymore. Worse—I don't care. It doesn't matter, it's all the same. We win, we lose, we're in it together now, all or nothing.

From the sanctuary of our balcony, the noise of the mob is like the sound of the ocean in a shell, its source massive but invisible. Your parrot on his perch demands food so I feed it a prawn cracker with a little pesto on it, because I know he likes this. He takes it in his gnarled claw, thanks me, and pecks at it. Our empty teacups sit on the table and I wonder how long they will sit there, now that there is no-one to clear them away. Days? Weeks? I can't think into the future.

Even last night we still maintained the charade, entertaining the UN representative in the formal dining room with an impressive menu—I can't imagine how you conjured that up. His wife was nervous, dropping her fork and spilling her wine, but we graciously ignored it, just as we politely avoided difficult conversation topics: the crash of the carbon market, famine in Australia, the dictator's execution. Instead we swapped gossip from the international school, and I was expounding on the virtues of Sibelius when you deftly interrupted with your miraculous tale of the mangoes you found in the market. Mangoes, imagine that! Extravagantly, you bought one, which you would soon serve on a silver dish, cut in generous proportions. Our guests could hardly believe their eyes. The UN representative asked me later, when we were alone, if it was a black market mango. I replied honestly that I did not know. I told him you were capable of magic, and we laughed.

If only that were true. We desperately need magic now, for what but magic could turn the tide, stop the clocks, let us all be winners instead of all losers?

I throw open the shutters at the front of the apartment. The roar and stench of the crowd hits me like a punch in the face. Below, the narrow streets are flooded with a sea of humanity, surging one way then back again, snarling like some primal beast. The heat rising up from these

pressed bodies is more intense than the beating sun. Everything seems slightly out of focus, from the dust thrown up by thousands of pounding feet. No words are understandable, no faces or bodies distinguishable within the seething mass.

And then I see you. You throw your head back to look up at the apartment, mouth wide and scarf slipping, arms raised above the bodies squashed against you. Our eyes meet and instinctively, I scream your name. I don't know if you reply—I can't hear anything, I can't tell if your mouth is moving or locked in an open scream. I'm frozen, torn between leaping madly out of the window or running down the stairs, and knowing both are futile. Because already you are gone—reabsorbed into the crowd, washed away to somewhere I can't reach.

I crumple on the floor and sob loudly and uncontrollably for some time. Hours, perhaps. When my body is exhausted and stiff from lack of movement, I crawl away from the window. The noise follows me but I don't look or close the shutters. I want to let it into the apartment but I'm not ready to confront it, not yet. On the balcony I give the parrot another cracker, and he thanks me. He is unruffled by the dramatic events and eats his cracker with surprising delicacy. I've never paid him much attention before—he was just your indulged pet, your childhood companion. I don't know how old he is, what he has seen with those beady little eyes. He watches me and I'm suddenly sure he knows what I'm thinking. I'm sure he understands much better than I what's going on out there in the city.

When he's finished the cracker he shuffles on his perch, aware that he has my attention, and taps deliberately on the silver ring around his leg—the ring attached to the steel chain that makes the perch his prison. His black eye fixes mine with a meaningful gaze.

I find pliers in the kitchen; the silver ring is easy to sever, and I carefully open it and release the bird's leg from its grasp. He inspects his leg, moving it tentatively, then thanks me. He hops confidently onto the balcony railing, where he preens himself, gently and meticulously separating his colourful glossy feathers with his beak and knobbly tongue.

That evening the parrot and I dine together on the balcony, the muffled noise of the crowd like discreet restaurant muzak. There is no mango, but I discover that you have carefully wrapped up the leftovers from our lavish dinner and placed them in the coolest cupboard. They might last me a few days. The parrot has another prawn cracker with pesto. That night I lie alone in our bed, awake, eyes closed, listening to the ceaseless throng.

In the morning, the parrot is gone.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Helen Varley Jamieson.*