

Story for performance #758  
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Tags: [storytelling](#), [security](#), [surveillance](#), [violence](#)

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I was reading a book I'd found or borrowed. I must have been bored, because it was nonsense. A fairy story. Everyone was 'beseech thee' this and 'grant ye' that. What I can remember is that it was a story about a venerable and majestic King who was also old and sick. And he'd been confined to his room with nothing to do but worry about whether people would remember him well or not. So he commissioned a great book that would list all of his deeds, and also would include all the wisdom of the great thinkers and poets of the age. This book would be really lavishly produced, with gold lettering and full-colour throughout, and printed on really good quality paper. The idea was that the book could then be read aloud to him whenever he was feeling a bit depressed—which was most of the time. He wanted to drown in a sea of thought and culture and poetry. Basically, I think he just needed something to cheer himself up. But then there was some complication or a story-within-a-story—some kind of parable about vanity and losing touch with what's important in life—and I can't remember much about that, but it involved—I don't know—thoroughbred horses, costly robes and Viziers, those kind of things. Lamentations. Gifts. Threats of suicide.

I'm sorry, I've started forgetting my own language. That was a difficult question. I don't know if I can tell you much you don't already know.

If I have trouble speaking can you ask me the question again?

I never did get to finish the story. There was a rebellion. Not in the book, in real life. I'd just been transferred from the 10th Sabotage Detachment to the Gendarmerie. A lot of us were. There had been a lot of new laws—mainly to do with public order issues at that 'time of crisis'. Of course there was a big demonstration against all of this, and people gathered in the park. It's the same everywhere I think. You have your Hyde Park and your Bois de Boulogne. Every city has these great open spaces where armies can be mobilised to defend them. Normally these are just places of leisure—any military presence would just be decorative. You'd go there to pick up a girl or to promenade. And High Society would go there, to see and be seen. It's the same everywhere, I think.

It's all in the news reports, anybody could look this up. By 3 o'clock that afternoon there were thousands of people gathered there. Tens of thousands. And this was not a surprise. There had been posters and flyers appearing everywhere for several days. It was Colonel Salapura who

instructed us to go and provide reinforcements. The police who'd been there from the beginning were losing control of the situation. I don't know where the order came from beyond that. But you can ask yourself: who paid our wages?

It was too late for us to be of much use. If you think of how big that park is, and knowing that you need one man for every yard of perimeter you want to secure. There were not enough of us to be effective.

There was some rumour that the President himself would come to address the crowd. That he would make some announcement about reviewing the laws in question. That was another fairy story—this wasn't at all likely to happen, given how volatile the situation was. But I think that's where the idea came from. Someone decided to spread it about that the President was here already, but in disguise. I don't know who it was. No-one owned up to it. But whoever it was started a whisper that he was disguised as a protestor. Something about wanting to get closer to his people and hear their grievances for himself. This was clever, obviously. To turn the crowd against itself. To break it up in that way so they forget who the enemy is and make life easier for us.

It wasn't us. We didn't start the rumour and nor did we act upon it. Even if certain revisionists have started suggesting that we have blood on our hands. We were spectators at best. And none of this was anywhere near where I was standing, so I didn't really see it with my own eyes while it was happening, I just heard about it. And then later I had to help clear up the mess. But listen, when you have that atmosphere of suspicion the most ridiculous thing can seem believable, and people started turning to their neighbour and looking at them with a new eye—everyone thinking they'd found the President. And by that time people were angry, and frustrated. Then...Well, you know what happened.

We didn't see the real President much after that. Not in the way that we used to before. They say it shook him up really badly, and I can believe it. He was only human.

I think that's why my memory of the day is so vivid, though. You know, to go from that to this. From a story about the vanity of some make-believe King to the fate of a dozen make-believe Presidents. There's no logic to it. No moral. Just for some reason it sticks in my mind.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tony White.*