

Restrained

By Genesis Mota-Silvestre

Do you ever feel like you don't belong in society or just in general? I know I do.

“Jane!” shouts my mother into my bedroom, “Get ready for school!”

“I'm already ready!” I responded.

I've been ready for about an hour already. It doesn't take you long to get ready when you're wearing the same hideous gray jumpsuit and high ponytail. I head towards the bathroom mirror, to take one final look at myself. My forehead looks as if it's been stretched out because of the same freaking ponytail. I'm tired of wearing the same clothing and hairdo every day, despite the fact that women are required to put their hair up in a ponytail. You can't put anything on that isn't issued by the government, and of color. I can't stand it anymore, so I choose to wear half of my hair in a high ponytail and leave the other half out. To top it all off, I put on a bright green headband. It belonged to my great-great grandmother, who wore it before the Equality Movement. As I look into the mirror, I see rebellion staring back at me.

“The bus is here!” shouts my mother from the living room.

I grab my bookbag, and head towards the door, not allowing my mother to get a glimpse of me.

“Love you mom,” I say to her as I shut the door.

The brightness of the sun hits my eyes the moment I step outside. I swear I went completely blind for a split second. The school bus driver opens the doors to allow me to enter.

“Good to see you Mr. Holt,” I say to him as I walk in.

He responds to me with a half-smile that reveals his missing teeth. But his smile fades when he notices my hairstyle and headband. Every student on the bus, including the bus driver, is

dressed in the same gray jumpsuit. Every girl has her hair up in a high ponytail, every boy has a low buzz cut, and, as you might expect, the bus driver has one as well.

“Good morning Jane” they all say to me in unison.

“Good morning,” I responded back.

I proceed to the back of the bus, where I always sit. I look out the window at the neighborhoods we're driving through. Every house is two stories tall, all gray, with a small backyard and a white minivan. This is how every American household looks after the Equality Movement. In 2022, our ancestors were obsessed with fighting for equality for everyone. As a result, the government determined that in order to achieve and maintain equality, everyone must live and dress in the same way. Like that, nobody is superior to or inferior to another. However, no one is allowed to express themselves as a result of this. I'm not allowed to dress or act the way that I want to, the way that I am. My wings are bound to a system that will never set them free. But here I am today, giving them a small taste of freedom.

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“Welcome to History 101!” says Ms. Main to the classroom, “Today’s date is March 4, 2069, which marks the 47th anniversary of the Equality Movement. We now live in a more just and equal society as a result of our passionate and caring forefathers.”

“A society that supports totalitarianism,” mumbles the girl next to me.

When I turn to my right to look at her, I realize that she isn't wearing the jumpsuit. Instead, she's dressed in a bright orange crop top and ripped jeans.

“Can you repeat what you just said Anfelisa, I didn't quite hear you,” Ms. Main says to her.

Anfelisa hesitates to repeat what she just said, but then she sits up straighter and clears her throat.

“I said, you mean a society that supports totalitarianism!” shouts Anfelisa to the whole classroom.

“How can you call this a better society if we can’t even express ourselves, which is one of the most crucial human elements!” says Anfelisa while looking at everyone, “We all look the same, dressed in gray jumpsuits as if we were prisoners. Prisoners to a government that doesn’t care about who we are and who profits from our confinement.”

She sits back on her seat and takes a deep breath, to collect herself again. Silence pours through the classroom, drowning everyone in it. No one ever talks against the system, at least in public. Seeing Anfelisa rebeliate, inspires me to do the same even though it shouldn’t.

Ms. Main reaches behind her desk, and grabs the big green box. She places it on her desk and takes out her phone from her pocket, and texts someone. *Dear God, please don’t let it be who I think it is.* I turn to my right to look at Anfelisa, and her face has gone completely white. She turns her head to look at me, and panic flares in her eyes. The eyes are the windows to the soul, and by looking at Anfelisa, I read and understood her as an open book.

“To celebrate the anniversary, I decided to get us a class pet,” says Ms. Main to the class.

She opens the box, and inside it is a cage with a Scarlet Macaw inside of it. The bird’s feathers are the colors of the rainbow, bringing the gray dull room to life alongside Anfelisa. It flies inside of the cage anxious to get out, but the cage is locked. Ms. Main places the cage next to the window, almost as if taunting it.

“Please welcome Eagle, to the class everyone,” says Ms. Main joyfully to the classroom.

Everyone is looking at Eagle, some with jealousy in their eyes but mines with resemblance. Out of nowhere, an Equality officer walks into the classroom and grabs Anfelisa by her neck. Anfelisa tries to fight off the officer, but he places a pair of electric handcuffs on her that immediately shocks her into submission. *This seriously can not be happening right now.* Without realizing, I’m standing up in defense of Anfelisa. The officer looks at me and realizes that my hairstyle is different and that I’m wearing a green headband. *Damn it, I chose the wrong day to retaliate.* He walks over to me, and stares me up and down before placing a pair of handcuffs on me as well.

“Why the hell did you put this on me fo-,” are the last words I’m able to say before everything goes completely black.

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My whole body is tingling and my head is all over the place. I hear shouting all around me, from what seems to be from a crowd. When my eyes adjust to the light, a sudden coldness hits my core. I’m sitting on my school’s stage in front of everyone with my hands tied behind my back, with Anfelisa next to me. Four equality officers are on stage, and principal Melo is giving a speech.

“And because of that, they must be punished to set an example for those who are thinking of doing the same!” shouts principal Melo into the microphone.

Everyone is clapping and shouting in agreement, not because they want to but because they have to. One of the Equality officers, grabs Anfelisa and forces her to get on her knees in front of everyone.

She turns her head to look at me, “Jane, don’t regret the decisions that you made today. Everything happens for a reason and sometimes good comes from it, even though right now it might not seem like it. Never regret putting up a fight for what you believe,” whispers Anfelisa to me.

Tears are flowing out of my eyes, uncontrollably with minds of their own. Anfelisa on the other hand, isn’t crying instead she puts on a brave face despite knowing what’s to come. Anfelisa is right, but it’s hard to think positively despite everything. The officer rips her bright orange shirt from the back, and throws it on the floor. From his pocket he takes out a box of matches, and sets the shirt on fire.

"Who does Anfelisa think she is, acting as if she is superior to all of us!" Mr. Melo exclaims into the microphone, "To believe that equality isn't necessary, to believe that we should live in injustice like our forefathers!"

The officer is given a gun and points it to Anfelisa's head. I'm still suffering from the effects of the electric shock, which prevents me from speaking. My body is trembling from my inner screams, desperate for an escape. I can't let this happen, but I'm powerless to stop it. The officer inhales and quickly closes his eyes before pulling the trigger, not wanting to see the execution. The gunfire seemed muted to me, as if it had been delivered to my ears by water.

Before falling to the ground, Anfelisa stares down at the red blossoming on her chest. Everyone, especially the students in the first row, started yelling. Anfelisa's blood spilled on their gray jumpsuit, staining some of it red. Someone immediately grabs all of my hair in a bundle, and I get the sense of having a lighter head. *Please don't be what I think it is.* I can see hair falling from where it once was all around me. My hair, like glitter, adorns the stage's floor. My green headband is snapped in half and tossed into the trash. I'm dragged further forward so that everyone can see what's coming. *Is this all really happening?* I see Ms. Main holding the cage out of the corner of my eye. She stares at me with regretful eyes, mouthing apologies to me. Because of the chaos, Eagle has gone entirely feral within the cage. Ms. Main unlocks the cage, freeing the bird within the auditorium. Suddenly, the gun was pressed on my head, and time seemed to slow down. I regret not holding my mother this morning, and I regret defying the system today. I recall Anfelisa's final words to me and realize she may be correct. If this was meant to happen, perhaps because of our deaths, people will be able to live in a society where their freedom and self-expression is not a sin, but a right. A shock wave ripples across my body, and I know that my time has arrived. As everything becomes black and numb, I see Eagle's colorful form flying free through an open window to a place where its wings will not be controlled by anyone. To a place where Eagle can fly whenever and wherever it desires, forever.