

A Real Hero

©2017 by *Riot*

Smoke billowed behind us as me and my mother ran along the cracked, dusty sidewalk. I tried not to trip over my tail as I was still getting used to moving swiftly. I guess three-year-old dingo pups weren't meant for this kind of travel.

My mother's terrified eyes darting from side to side heightened my tension. Her ears perked and swiveled, trying to steer us clear of all danger. We were on what used to be one of the busiest streets in town, but it was lifeless now. Various posters, purses, even cell phones were scattered along the empty pavement as we hurried to the edge of the city. Toward safety.

A "Migration" they called it. A great movement of citizens for their well-being. Calling it an evacuation would've been too chaotic and panic inducing. Migrating, evacuating, leaving home, they all mean a change. A change not chosen by an individual. A change brought on by force or intimidation. Most people had already fled across the bridge to the next city over, which was untouched by the current conflict.

A thunderous boom bellowed in my ears as I was thrown to the ground by a shockwave. My mother wrapped an arm around my waist and tucked me under her arm, not wasting any time to help me to my paws. My body secured, I looked behind us to catch a glimpse of what we were running from. I saw nothing but smoke as the dust settle from the last explosion, but then a flash! A bright blue beam of light zipped through the sky. It was our hero! The light disappeared as quickly as it had shown up, followed by another explosion. Whatever was going on there, nothing would be left standing.

I was very young at the time so I don't rightfully remember this hero's name. He faded into nonexistence after the Migration, but I remember how he was chosen...

"Nothing but the best in class!" Our mayor had shouted to a myriad of microphones, trying to reassure his people as much as himself. "Our city will be saved from this menace, but we must leave to let good be done! We must leave this place until conflict has found its resolution!" He gave a determined nod, waved to the crowd, and stepped into his gold trimmed vehicle. I find it odd that I can picture his face and car so well after all these years, but I can't remember a thing about the hero he appointed.

The danger was some villain by the name of Doubt. The name came from some over dramatic backstory about how the world doubted him and he set out to prove his worth through terror. It was kind of cheesy to me, but no one questioned his abilities when he started tearing up our streets. There was a big rush to get out of the city after the mayor's announcement was made, but my mother and I waited to leave until most of the hustle and looting had passed. Being so young at the time, I was vulnerable to getting trampled or lost and we decided not to risk being in a crowd.

So now here I was, tucked under my mother's arm and bouncing up and down as the city's exit finally came into view. I wriggled my legs and tail, wanting to run again as my belly was starting to hurt from being pinned against my mother's side. She let me drop and I took up pace beside her again, my paws clutching her short brown fur as we ran.

When we reached the bridge connecting our two towns, policemen came up to us and escorted us to a nearby stadium where food and water were supplied, and they even handed out toys for us kids. I remember being handed a small blue rabbit, which I promptly clutched to my chest and sobbed into. As the adrenaline was wearing off, the weight of the situation was starting to overwhelm my young brain. My mother sat a few feet away, resting as she was handed a cup of water. I curled up in her lap and fell asleep.

A few weeks passed, and we learned to live in the stadium. It was a bit weird being crammed into such a tight space with so many other species, but mother reminded me that they were all part of the Migration as well. I hated being taken away from home and away from everything I had known, but I did my best to stay strong. Some of the other children had taught me some games, and the sports team that practiced in the stadium let some of us play with them while our parents worked or searched for jobs. It wasn't much, but it was enough to pass the time.

Another few weeks, and we were allowed to return to our city. We weren't allowed to move back in, but we were told to salvage what we could find of our decrepit homes and belongings and take them out before the city was razed. Our apartment was mainly intact with the only real damage being a few broken windows. We were the lucky ones. I saw entire buildings toppled, I heard distressed mewls and howls of loss as everyone furiously dug around in what used to be their homes. Even at age three, I knew this was wrong. The news said the hero had beaten Doubt, and he was praised as "Best in class! This is

what you get when you hire the best in class!". But as I looked around I saw only destruction, loss, and pain.

You want to know my opinion of our hero and the Migration? I hope he never forgets what he did. I hope he never escapes the guilt he feels for the destruction of our lives and prosperity. Because even if he's convinced he earned his title, the rest of us are plagued with doubt.