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Spring 2021

### For [REDACTED]

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**For [REDACTED]  
By Lalini Shanella Ranaraja**

**I**

You said, "I'm risking my life to do this,"  
and then you asked me to name your activist Instagram page.  
[REDACTED] kilometres away your people were being massacred  
and who was I to say no?  
Somewhere in [REDACTED] a soldier wiped down his bayonet;  
his friends holstered their smartphones.

**II**

Sometimes I try to rewrite the world over WhatsApp.  
"Just keep your head down!"  
"This is what I *can* do! This is *all* I can do!"  
If this were a landline there would be a mighty crash.  
Instead, a green screen and the contact list  
that only yesterday looked too long,  
the steady blue blink of the Mediacom router squatting in the corner.  
The traitor in me that wants to be perfect protests -  
*what if the opposition falls tomorrow what they cut off the internet again*  
*what if these were the last words you said -*

**III**

I spent two hours one morning in June  
trying to post a black square on social media. Took it down.  
Put it back up. Took it down again. Every other day  
a hashtag explodes, celebrities toppling faster  
than governments. My friend [REDACTED]  
sends me links to petitions. My other friend [REDACTED]  
begs me to like, share, repost. I sprawl on my bed that I paid for in dollars,  
wonder if I should turn the AC up a little,  
gaze through the window glaze at the calm Midwestern summer  
and wish everyone would just shut up for one second and let me enjoy it.

**IV**

When I told you what happened in [REDACTED]  
you were quiet until I finished and then you asked  
why I would wear [REDACTED]  
if that was what it got me.  
I told you that just being alive wasn't enough.

Yesterday you said, "Jail? Lol. At least in jail  
I'd still be alive." The abyss in your face struck me cold  
even though we were sitting in the first spring sunlight,  
sorority sisters marching past in matching shorts.

## V

Sometimes I'll hear myself talking and realize  
I sound like the sensitivity seminars they make us take  
before we can register for classes. I'm sick of my own voice  
saying *consent* and *equity* and *development*, long before the party guests  
start scrolling through Netflix, wondering  
if they can stay logged into my account after I leave.

My [REDACTED] keeps telling me I expect too much of people.

## VI

Everyone's got a body count memorized.  
Mine is [REDACTED].  
Yours has not yet stopped rising,  
has not yet been verified.  
Sometimes we watch each other watching  
our friends vying for the highest Call of Duty kill count  
and when you leave and pretend to do the dishes  
I follow you.

## VII

We don't tweet about it  
but somehow I know  
you might never get to go home.  
We don't tweet about it  
but sometimes I think  
I might never choose to go home.

END