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LOOK AWAY

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Showcasing Raw Artistic Talent



We were two Standard Eight boys in Pretoria – a capital city loathed the world over as the administrative seat of Apartheid – and Alex wanted me to go with him to an AWB rally at Church Square. He wanted to take me to go to a gathering of a fascist faction – whose symbol was a three-quarter Nazi swastika – during the second State of Emergency of the year. After thinking the situation through sensibly, I decided to go along with him, provided that we could find some hippy clothes to wear.

So we rifled through a bag of old clothes Tracy's parents had left over from the seventies. Alex found a bedraggled black wig, and I wore a dirty blonde. He put on a huge Hawaiian shirt with cut-seized lapels and was soon clattering with cowry shell necklaces in turn, squeezed into an asphyxiating red number and a pair of large bronze bell-bottoms. And so we set off on my golden ten-speeder for the city-centre on that Saturday afternoon in 1987.

Alex didn't have a bike, so he had to sit across my handlebars, effectively impairing my vision almost completely. Our progress from his flat in Arcadia was hampered every odd fifty metres when we'd have to stop so that I could unjam my bell-bottoms which kept flapping into the bicycle chain. We also stopped en route to make protest banners from an old cardboard box we found in Queen Street. So, by the time we got there, the rally was already over. We were too late.

But the noisy aftermath of the event had yet to be cleared up, and we saw a few very scared white kids with End Conscription Campaign T-shirts being bullied into police vans. A number of ANC supporters had also showed up, and these were being duly rounded up by baton bashing policemen who surrounded the perimeter of the square. The air was filled with shouts and screams, and the squeal of sirens.

With deliberate resolve, Alex tightened a red bandana around his black wig and loosened the last of the buttons on his sunflower shirt. Without another word, we hauled out the makeshift posters we'd made. On mine, I'd written: "Is There Intelligent Life on Earth?" and Alex had come up with the rather more obscure: "The Plight of the Pimpled Peruvians".

In the atmosphere of mayhem which now prevailed around the dour statue of the last president of the Boer Republic, we moved towards the Square, holding our appeals aloft. But as we tried to cross the street which circles the square, a policeman wearing a bullet-proof jacket and armed with an R4 motioned for us to go away.

"Val daar fiets hier weg en gaan huis toe", was what he said to us. Alex and I looked at each other blankly. I tried to raise one eyebrow in mock consternation, which was a trick I'd been practising in front of the mirror for just such an occasion.

"Ek's ernstig!" The policeman was becoming agitated. "Fokof!"

We didn't really know what to do, so we just sort of stood there aimlessly in the middle of the street, our placards limp in our hands. We watched the police vans go by, as they dispersed the small unruly mob which had converged on the square.

And then, suddenly, we were surrounded by uniforms as we were swept up in a bustle of burly blue. A few moments of complete confusion followed – as if we were being caught up in a wave and tumbled blindly in painful white foam – as they pummelled us into a yellow van.

"Wat af dan fokken prukke Julie moeffie!" one of the police insisted, as others stripped us of wigs and wallets the white. "Wat die fok dienk Julie manak Julie?" said another, as he locked the door.

"Julie verstaan niks nie," he said. "Julie weet nie wat hier aangaan nie." The man then lead us to his car. He was still convinced that we must be in cahoots with the forces of resistance, and he wanted to see where we lived. He'd also discovered a video in Alex's kitbag, which he cared to view. So we left my golden ten-speaster locked up near the square and drove with the man to Alex's flat.

As we were driving down Church Street, the man explained to us that nobody wanted to hurt the black man. With an expansive gesture, he included all the African workers on the streets who were painting buildings, sweeping drive-ways and washing cars.

"Ons wil net vriende met almal wees" he said.

Alex's parents were living in Paraguay at the time, and he stayed in a flat his father owned in Arcadia. It was straight opposite the vast gardens of the Union Buildings, where Nelson Mandela was to be inaugurated in seven years time. But before Alex would let the man into his flat he insisted on seeing his ID. Alex's stance – palms firmly planted on the hips and with a well-rehearsed Sid Vicious sneer – looked more comical than threatening, and the man smiled indulgently as he produced his card. He let us know that he was part of BOSS, and he covered half of his card in order to protect his personal details. (We didn't know if we should tell him that he was wearing a bronze name-badge, which announced that his name was Mannie Meintjes.)

"Julie kan my maar dan Spies noem," Mannie said. Mannie was very disappointed to find that Alex's video was only of a Pink Floyd concert. "As dit blou was sou ek dit vir myself gehou het", he explained, although he did make use of the opportunity to remark that he now understood how we might have been lead astray. "Ja", he said, "nu verstaan ek hoekom julie so skeef is – as Julie vir hierdie rubbish nou sit en luster."

"Maar nou IV dan nie van musiek nie," Mannie? asked Alex.

Mannie Meintjes' eyes widened when Alex called him by his real name. He seemed suddenly very disconcerted, and asked for a glass of water. When Alex brought it to him, Mannie regarded it suspiciously. He sniffed at the glass warily as if the water might be poisoned, which confirmed

## CHURCH SQUARE

1987

By Anton Krueger  
Pencil Drawing by Markham Hefer

that he was probably paranoid enough to actually be working for the secret services after all.

After having searched the room for drugs or incriminating literature, Mannie was soon satisfied that we weren't an imminent danger to the Republic. Nevertheless, I think he suspected that we might have been harbouring slightly leftist tendencies.

So Mannie sat back and began to talk. He told us that he could have left us with the police – they could have locked us up for a few weeks just to give us a fright; but he'd taken pity on us because we were young, because we were white, and because he felt that there might be hope for us yet. Mannie wanted us to "see the light", and so he set about methodically explaining to us that we were superior to all the other races on God's green earth. He said that this was purely a matter of Genetics, and that we were, in fact, a completely different species to any other race. Mannie told us that the African was destined to always be a follower, and never a leader.

"But what about Jesse Jackson?" Alex asked. (Jackson had run for U.S. president on the Democratic ticket in 1984, and he would run again in 1988.)

Mannie Mentjies thought hard about Alex's question, as he made ready to leave. We could see the cogs turning over in his mind as he mused on this – was Jackson a leader or not? Finally, he paused, and turning at the door he fired off his final retort, saying: "Ja... you boys listen probably also to his music as well... But ag, he's not so bad."

Mannie closed the door behind him and we both clapped our hands to our mouths as we collapsed with laughter.

We then went over the episode again and again, savouring every detail of the escapade. Alex told me that he'd panicked when Mannie had suspected there might have been something in the water. As it turned out, my friend had, in fact, carefully spat in the glass and mixed in the spittoon with his finger, before serving it up to Mannie Mentjies from the Bureau of State Security.

END