

The Whole City Against Me

L.C. Graf

CHARACTERS

Crowd Goer 1

Crowd Goer 2

Crowd Goer 3

PLACE

New York

TIME

February 21, 1965

[It has been a few hours since the Audubon Ballroom has been emptied. Few people mingle around. Blood splatter is inside, police have taped up the premises. Across the street, a small group of people stand, smoking and watching.]

CROWD GOER 1:

“By any means necessary,” don’t think he was talking about going to Jannah when he said that...

CROWD GOER 2:

(Nods sympathetically, takes puff from cigarette and sighs with the smoke.)

I remember, a few years back, felt just like a kid being up here away from my parents. Thought I wouldn’t be able to make it. I’m from the south, so it’s different up here. Much different... And saw on the TV one night, saw on the TV this man talking. And he was sayin, all sorts of things that kinda scared me at first. I’m a religious person, parents are Catholic. Taught me some things about God and Jesus, y’know and here’s this man and he’s sayin... he’s sayin all these white devils are out to get me. That the white devils are here and bringin out the second coming. I can still hear him sayin that you know?

(Group nods collectively, Crowd Goer 2 hums quietly under their breath, the tune of “Amazing Grace”. Third crowd-goer has been praying quietly under their breath)

CROWD GOER 1:

Never was exactly what you'd call religious, you know. Never was part of that whole "Nation of Islam" but... but there were some times where I came damn near close. Just, went to his church up in Harlem, you know back when Elijah Muhammad was speakin and I could see God in that man's eyes. Firmly believe I could see it. And he looked like me. God looked like me.

CROWD GOER 3:

Allahu Akbar, Ashadu anna Muhammadan rasoolullah...

(pause)

It doesn't matter where you find your faith. I was scared at first, when he started to preach of working with all but I understood that he meant that Allah has the same plan for us all to unite, that under his order we will all be together, but to first show this, we need to be working with our brothers and sisters. We are all united...

(crowd goers turn to look at the third member who has been standing quietly watching the entrance of the Ballroom. The first crowd goer leans back against a wall, smoking quietly.)

CROWDGOER 2:

What gets me, what gets me man is exactly what you just said. We've all suffered, they want us to suffer more. This is how our lives have been plagued, with suffering and I always wondered about that. But it made sense after awhile, it made sense after awhile...

The problem is, we don't think about each other. We don't think about the world, just think about the little things.

CROWDGOER 1:

Learn to forget out differences, is what he said. He said we gotta take the ballet, not the bullet. Take the ballet.

(pause for puff of cigarette)

American nightmare...

(drops cigarette on the ground and rubs it out)

CROWDGOER 2:

We ain't American! After this? After this?! We ain't American son, that's right this is the American nightmare. We got stuck here. We could have an entire different life, but we're here. But you know what? I ain't gonna be a victim of this, I ain't gonna do it.

(group nods)

Stand up, gotta wake up... Look what just happened out there, and they think that this is the end all. I can already hear it. All those people that were around here, all of them were thinking it and I could feel it. "Oh it's finally over, no more of *THOSE* people yelling."

Well this ain't the end. Not at all.

CROWDGOER 3:

Allah created us all, there is no race. There is no problem. We are all the same to him, we were all born from the same Adam and the same Eve. I have found the sincerest brotherhood, I have found the purpose and meaning of togetherness.

(Crowdgoers say 'amen', give gracious nods as Crowdgoer 3 speaks)

Allah has given me so much. He has given me all of this purpose where before I found nothing but darkness. And there is darkness still. There is darkness in the men that pain us. But this, this is not the justice Allah wants. We must fight by any means necessary, we must get the justice that is deserved. We treat others with what they treat us.

CROWDGOER 2:

Once... Once I met him, you know? I met him awhile back, he probably wouldn't even remember me. But I told him, "I'm confused. I feel lost and unworthy." I said to him, "I tried to wash off the color of my skin,". Hardest confession I've ever made to anyone, including my parents... He told me, "Son... You are part of the strength of this nation." And I went chasing after him, following everything he said since...

CROWDGOER 1:

He had that about him. I know it. He had it all going for him. I could listen to him for hours and I felt like I was listening to the Lord. Felt like, I was a real person for once. That all that I do was okay. I felt ok.

(another pause)

I'm tired... I'm really... really... tired.

(The group nods and stands back, watching. One of them begins to pray again, the other lights another cigarette. They act as if nothing is happening around them, they are all silent for a minute. But police sirens go off in the background, people are walking nervously down the street, whispering, chattering, stopping to look at the police tape that surrounds the ballroom across the street from the group.)

CROWDGOER 2:

They want to kill us all. That's how the worlds going to end! They're going to kill us all and label us something like communists or traitors, they're going to say what they already say but louder, they're going to put it in their laws. We're some sort of disease to them, we're so dirty to them, but we are the original people! We are all powerful! Look where he came from? Prison! Prison! Yet the man taught himself, and I teach my children everyday.

CROWDGOER 3:

Everything is done according to Allah's plan. Elijah Muhammad has brought this new way of learning and life to us and you are doing exactly what must be done. You must learn, and you must grow. I was once lost, someone in the wild not paying attention of Allah speaking in my ear but I changed. I now listen to him with all my heart and I know that here within the destruction, we will be given a chance to be reborn and to change. The world will change, but must hold faith.

CROWDGOER 1:

He's dead. He ain't comin back. And I think we need to recognize that, take what he told us, help his family, and leave. I think it's going to get worse here. Just far, far worse.

(Across the street people have begun crying, some of them yell about justice. Others just sob.)

CROWDGOER 2:

That's right. You're crazy if you think it's going to get better. The whole country is against us, they're coming to get us. One by one, he knew it you know. He knew he'd be killed one day and I bet you anything they're going to pin it on one of us. They're going to say that one of those crazy black-power-people did it. They're going to show we're all against each other.

CROWDGOER 1:

You're blowing it out of proportion. We're fine. We gotta move forward, like the man said. We just gotta move forward.

CROWDGOER 3:

By any means necessary.