

Last night, I dreamed a dream.

I was walking down a street I didn't recognize, and there were no signs for me to read. I didn't know where I was going, only that I knew I needed to go down that particular street. It was a simple street, two lane street flanked by red brick buildings, which lacked windows or doors. There were many people around me, of all shapes, sizes, colors, clothes, and attitudes. I didn't know any of them. Soon I saw a splotch of color on one of the red brick buildings, while the rest were plain. When I walked down to the splotch, I saw it was a large mural.

I had never seen a mural like this one before, but I guess that's partially why I liked it so much. It was around fifteen feet wide and ten tall, which wasn't as big as the building it was painted on. The mural had many different elements, in many bright colors. There were a line of people, each unique, each beautiful in their own way. The first was a lady, who was very chubby and proudly wore a bikini; the second was a lanky man, who was black and had thick braids that went down to his waist; the third was a younger lady with a lavender hijab wrapped around her head; the fourth was a man who was mexican and had long black hair that had ribbons braided into it; the fifth and six were ladies holding hands and wearing rainbow bracelets. They were all smiling brightly, eyes looking at one another with a certain kindness... those were the most beautiful parts.

The line of people only took up a little less than half of the picture, and there was plenty more art painted on the wall. There were also two stick figures holding a banner at the top, one stick figure was white and the other black. The banner read, "HOPE IS NOT LOST" in large, red letters. There was a stick figure in a dress, and a regular stick figure, and there was an mathematic equal sign between them, making it obvious neither was greater than the other. There was one last piece to the mural, and it lay in the bottom right corner.

It was a tombstone, laden with flowers and roman candles and plush animals. My heart sunk when I looked closer at the words. The tombstone read, "R.I.P." on the uppermost line of text, the next ones going down went, "Those who have unjustly fallen from us." And below that the tombstone was blank, only gray paint. But it had been written on with permanent marker, in many different handwritings. Names had been scrawled on the wall, names I had heard in the news and on social media. Those names were ones I had seen become hashtags, they were names of people killed, slaughtered without proper reason. What really hit me hard was the sheer number of names squeezed onto the tombstone. It sickened me, it made me start crying where I stood on the sidewalk. All those souls... all those memories that would never be made and opportunities never to be taken, children never born and soulmates who had lost their partner in life

I stopped crying, though, when I saw what other people were doing at the mural. I saw a lady who was clearly overweight standing on the sidewalk, staring blissfully at the lady in the bikini. I figured she didn't see ladies like her drawn to be beautiful a lot, and she looked very happy. Shortly before she left, a young man and even younger girl stood in front of the mural, admiring it. They were both black, the girl's hair was long and braided like the man's in the picture; she seemed to love that. I watched as the young man lifted the girl on his shoulders so that she could put her small hand on the painted man's hair, and the girl giggled with glee. I stepped to the side as two young boys walked by me on the sidewalk; they were holding hands and laughing with one another. They didn't stop, but they did pause and point out the two ladies holding hands on the mural.

I had to move aside again as an elderly lady stopped right behind me, in front of the tombstone. She placed a roman candle on the sidewalk, among the others whose flames had long since died out, and lit the wick. The lady then took a permanent marker and began writing another name on the tombstone, squished into the bottom corner between two or three others.

The whole street seemed to darken as she wrote, lit only by the dim light of the candle. Another soul had been taken from the world, memories not yet made were stolen, and more tears were being shed. I began to silently cry again as the light went out.

That was when I woke up from my dream, which had been so wonderful until the last few moments. I sat upright, rubbing my face to wake up, when I came to a sobering realization. There was no mural. There was no painted memorial tombstone with names without the mural. There were no smiles or happy onlookers without the mural. My stomach had dropped, but lifted itself again when I spotted the paintbrush that sat on my desk. I picked it up, holding all kinds of opportunity in my palm and wondering about all the things I could do with the brush.

I understood one thing in that moment: my dream would stay only a dream unless someone didn't do something about it. I couldn't just lie back down and sleep, hoping someone would paint that mural. That someone, had to be me. I got dressed and grabbed a bucket of paint from my closet, as well as more brushes.

I had a mural to paint.