

There was once a traveler called C who arrived in a city where the houses breathed and every wall remembered those who had slept against it. He carried almost nothing except a polished smile and a pocket full of tiny mirrors. Whenever he met someone, he would hold up a mirror that reflected not himself, but the other person exactly as they wished to be seen. People mistook this reflection for friendship. The narrator met him beneath a house where long tables fed strangers, and music echoed through cracked windows. C wore the emblem of an old constellation, and the two spoke until dawn. The traveler seemed harmless then—a curious apprentice wandering through a city built from occupations, abandoned workshops, communal kitchens, broken printing presses and impossible dreams. He drifted from presses and unfinished projects. Eventually he found refuge inside an abandoned workshop where forgotten machines still whispored ink into the darkness. Around it, a collective slowly formed, not through plans but through countless meals, endless meetings, victories that looked like failures and failures that still felt worth celebrating.

C began appearing more and more often. At first he came as a visitor. Then as a helper. Then as if he had always belonged there. He worked tirelessly. He carried wood, washed dishes, attended meetings, laughed louder than anyone else. His effort was genuine enough that people welcomed him. Yet every gesture seemed secretly measured against an invisible staircase no one else could see. Others built rooms. C counted floors. The narrator never understood this staircase. Every time he looked where C was staring he saw only empty air. There were kitchens to clean, banners to paint, rent to resist, police to evade, people to care for. Yet C insisted there were steps ascending through the movement itself, hidden among conversations, friendships and reputations.

Every person became another rung. Every gathering another landing. Every introduction another elevation. He learned quickly that affection could be harvested. Compliments became climbing hooks. Shared secrets became ropes. Familiar names became passwords. Opening doors into circles that had once been closed. When old companions stopped leading upward, they slowly faded behind him like villages disappearing beneath fog. The workshop became a fortress against demolition. Together they organized meals, benefits and nights where music dissolved into debates until sunrise. Chemicals blurred the edges of memory. Ridiculous songs filled the rooms with obscene choruses that everyone mocked because they were too absurd to be taken seriously. Laughter floated through the building like smoke. The narrator believed jokes vanished with dawn. But C collected echoes. Not because they mattered then, because every echo might someday become another step. Years passed. The workshop fell. The collective cracked open under pressure, exhaustion and history. Many searched for new ground. C searched for the next staircase. He crossed mountains into distant lands where old certainties burned away. When he returned, his vocabulary had changed. His clothes had changed. His politics had sharpened. His convictions sounded deeper. But beneath every transformation, the invisible ladder remained exactly where it had always been. Only now the higher floors were occupied by different people. He climbed toward them with the same careful feet. Old comrades became stories. Old shelters became forgotten stations. Old debts dissolved like rainwater. Those who had once offered him a couch became names spoken only when useful. Those who opened doors found themselves standing outside them.

LADDERS



Set inside an anarchist
underworld slowly
infected by invisible
hierarchies, this
nightmare follows a man
who mistakes every
human connection for
another rung.

The higher he climbs, the
less remains of the people
below—until only the
Ladder remembers who
he used to be.

Raised by the wolves 001

Years later, C held the empty shell of an old joke before strangers as though it had always concealed a monster. No one had questioned it when it was spoken. It simply waited until it became useful.

Only then did the Ladder reveal itself. Its rungs were abandoned friendships. Its rails were borrowed trust. Every step demanded another memory be stripped of its context, another face become a foothold. Looking down, C expected to find followers. Instead, thousands of discarded masks stared back with his own eyes. Then the Ladder vanished.

There had never been any Ladder. There had only been the belief that he was climbing. For the first time, C understood that he had spent years suspended above an abyss, mistaking other people's faith for solid ground.

The fall had begun long before he noticed he was falling.