

If "1984" Had A More Upbeat Ending.....

by Jennifer Donnell

Winston slumped into his seat at The Chestnut Tree and felt the Victory Gin turn in his stomach. Something resembling panic -or was it pleasure- began to take residence in his gut, at the announcement from the telescreen.

"Eurasia," the generally monotonous voice squeaked, in a far less strident or polished tone than usual, "... Eurasia, Er, Eastasia, has taken Africa! Furthermore, troops have been spotted within distance of Oceania. Seizure of our continent is anticipated!"

The waiter stopped refilling Winston's glass and was soon shaking with rage. He migrated next to a man Winston recognized as a comrade who was particularly venomous during Hate Week festivities.

"Big Brother will show them!" they commiserated in violent support.

It was then Winston realized their rage wasn't from fear of losing, it was still -even in the face of imminent defeat- pure anger toward the enemy and trust in the Party, that mutable constant.

Momentarily Winston's thoughts muddled again. He felt his fingers twitch, a physical sensation which seemed to accompany any recollection from the past. Most of his memories were moments he'd reiterated so many times during his stay in the Ministry of Love that it was impossible to feel genuine intimacy with them. Moreover, even the slightest recollection gave him lucid flashbacks of the building's binding restraints. As the memory crept into full

awareness, his thoughts -in equal measure- combatted his nostalgia with thoughts of the dial, the presence of inescapable physical pain. The only constant coherent thought he ever seemed able to reach, these days, was a scent which lingered in the back of his nostrils, a hairy soured smell of rats.

Still, the announcement seemed to have unlocked something. He stopped observing the waiter and turned away from Proles nervously congregating in small circles outside the window. *Yes, that was it.* He was certain, now, that his remembrance was one of Julia.

It had been March, the same month it was now, but years prior. They had met in the rented room above the shop. Julia, naked, had promised that should Big Brother ever fall... to the Brotherhood or, for that matter, any army, they would meet at the shop, immediately. Even in the stupor of weeks, make it months, of him inhaling gin, he realized that he didn't have much to lose. He need no longer fear the Patrols, if the end was near. Granted, it was hard to tell if Julia's words were another false memory, the kind O'Brien had warned him about. A mixture of respect and fear still mated with his feelings for O'Brien. Perhaps the Party needed a new slogan,

AN ENEMY IS YOUR GREATEST FRIEND

Downing the last saccharine clove taste of his Victory Gin. Winston tried to focus enough to decide. He was used to being a dead man, but if there was a reality in which Big Brother wasn't a concern, then perhaps he'd be able to live again- just a little at first and then, more, in spurts. He felt for the balding patch of hair on his head. Sure, that was never going to be the same, but maybe there was a part of him that was constant. He used to believe the laws of nature were, before it became true that $2 + 2 = 5$. The possibility of humanness filled a part which he assumed had been destroyed with the rest, with joy. His leg twitched, even as he stood up. Joy was dangerous, O'Brien had nailed that particular point into his skull like

a bullet. Perhaps joy was what had led him led him to embezzle and murder, if all that the Party had told him he'd done was true.

Yet, that part of him, the human part he'd long since forgotten, returned to the idea of Julia and the room. It was real, surely not a hallucination. The concept of meeting her laid itself round his head like a crown of thorns. What if Julia was there right now, walking up the stairs, greeting Mr. Charrington and asking if the room was still available. She would hand Mr. Charrington a few dollars and step inside, shed her coveralls and try on one of the second hand dresses the Proles wore. She'd apply the found lipstick she'd stored in the nightstand and transform from Comrade to female. She'd find the real chocolate she'd brought before the Patrols seized them. It would be white with age, but they'd both remember the taste. That and the taste of their lips mingling. His main fear was that she'd only remember the betrayal, how he'd shouted for O'Brien to give her to the rats instead. Hadn't he begged O'Brien to tear off her face, strip her to the bone- anything, *anyone instead of him*. She'd know this without him speaking of it, because she had done the same- it was unavoidable. As much as they'd thought the truths of their nature would stay safe, but pain can erase the softest sensations of care.

As if driven by the magnetic pull of the Eurasian or Eastasian (he still wasn't sure which) army circling in on Oceania like a shark narrowing in on a swimmer, he pulled on his brown jacket and threw some money on the table, knocking over his chess pieces. The others in the cafe ignored his exit, still animated with detestation, ranting about how the Party would squish their repulsive enemy- not knowing that this time it wouldn't be so.

The door to the shop was open. He meant to call out for Mr. Charrington, or Julia, but couldn't bring himself to speak. The creak of his boots wore into the dimmed mahogany staircase, unwittingly announcing his arrival. With each step he reminded himself that she wasn't likely to be there, she couldn't be... could she? Why would

she want his bloated, aging, worn body, his reduced mental ability. He opened the door to the room. Her eyes were what he noticed first, they shone with something undeniable. They weren't saying sorry or needing an apology, but were lit with quiet understanding. Before his eyes, she had transformed into a woman who didn't revisit the past. The knowledge that genuine freedom was close seemed to redden her cheeks with excitement, so he hardly noticed the jagged scar running from her forehead to temple. He moved closer and held her until she motioned for the bed. He untied her dress and their breath released, as if shedding the indoctrination of the party from their minds. She rested her head soft in his arm. He kissed her with the laws of physics, of nature, remembering a reality that even the Party couldn't negate, which even the Ministry of Love hadn't been able to undo.

He embraced her goodbye when she left, headed for a boat to take her somewhere new. He didn't ask where 'new' was, nor did she tell him. They'd find one another again, if they wanted to, and wouldn't, if not. Downstairs Mr. Charrington greeted him with a calm air of reverence, for coming back from the dead.

Winston walked home the long way but never went inside. He walked until the sun rose and made his own cheeks red with wonder.

