

2004

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of misinformation dulled and confused his memory; and of course doublethink interfaced — a large portion of his mind was trained to believe everything issued by the Ministry of Truth no matter how mutable or how personally the distortions were his own conception. Every revision of circumstance was accompanied by instant and automatic faith in its immutability.

Winston's instructions were faxed from higher echelons within the Ministry of Truth. He was never candidly ordered to alter historical record, which at any rate was little more than fiction. Each revision of scripture was justified by other alliterations to scripture. Winston might question the veracity of his assignments but he also relished the challenge they gave his imagination to concoct the necessary sacred lies.

Someone else, if they had momentarily put aside fear of thinking improper thoughts, might have become cynical or obsessively dispirited. Winston's seemingly instinctual recognition of hypocrisy (probably a result of his amendability) prodded him to intellectual revulsion of militant theocracy. He thought he was alone in his lack of faith. He could not trust anyone, which he realized as the most powerful and compelling psychology of control. But what to do about it he had not a clue.

Winston could not clearly remember if the past resembled the present. Some subliminal memory told him it had not, that life had been much more open and pleasant. That daily life had been lived without fear. He couldn't be sure. His memory was indistinct, scrubbed so often he was not sure he remembered anything.

But startling thoughts popped into his mind as if from nowhere. One such moment occurred during a vehement noon-time exhortation by a visiting high-level cleric against sexual intercourse, first among cardinal sins, demanding everyone, men and women, resist all temptation, unnecessarily warning that death was the punishment for anyone caught in an inappropriate and uncompromising sexual act (though the leniency of castration was often granted men unless they were homosexuals). Winston's mind was not upon the fulsome priest. A bit of oldtime wisdom jacked through his synapses: Everybody constantly thought about sex but believed prayer would take its place in the afterlife. The reality in his lifetime was that prayer was substituted for sex.

Vows of chastity were required of everyone. Only heterosexual couples selected for their spiritual purity and married by the Order were allowed intercourse. The risk was that those who applied for marriage and were rejected after examination faced torture and death. Marital sex was restricted to what was called the 'missionary' position, the woman on her back, the man on top, which would be an adequate metaphor for any definitive sculpture of Evangelica.

Winston was hungry for knowledge of the real past. He treasured small proofs. Once he saw three pariahs at a café who were later arrested and executed. Their names and photographs disappeared from all records. But he remembered seeing briefly a newspaper article about their trial, which was shown on the only television network ('The Holy Joy Channel'). Gospel and fervent worship programming was mixed with inquisitorial trials of heretics, homosexuals, witches, traitors, enemy prisoners and Jews. Executions were generally the most watched programs, although the names of the condemned vanished and records altered to indicate they never existed. This was a contradiction to Winston and led to his initial questioning of the ruling dogma. To him it was the most compelling question: What happened to the souls of the disappeared? Did they vanish also? Of course he knew better than to voice his question or reveal any suspicion he gave it a thought. He was as always carefully reverent in his demeanor.

Once he saw a very old man and risked almost certain vanishment asking questions in a seedy unsanctioned drinking place about the past. The old man had been struck by Al's Hammer (perhaps aggravated by continual and contradictory brainwashing; Winston's work) and could only recollect personal anecdotes and old abuses whose meaning Winston dismissed without fathoming.

One day he left the Ministry of Truth early. Sundry dervish holograms assailed him as he walked toward his shabby apartment building. "GOD IS WATCHING!" the sepulchral voice warned. He entered his dreary room and sat at a table in an alcove the peeping TV screen was unable to penetrate. He opened a blank diary he had purchased in a small antique store and hoarded like contraband. He looked at the first page, hesitated a moment, then wrote passionately, nearly out of control:

DOWN WITH GOD
DOWN WITH GOD
DOWN WITH GOD

He stopped, frightened of his own damned heresy.

From that moment he knew he was as good as dead.

GOD IS DEAD! He wrote defensively.

At his lowest depths of depression and futility he met Julia. He was terrified of her at first. He thought she was a wanton temptress in pay of zealous sex vigilantes who trapped unwary respondents and executed them on the spot. He wanted to crush her skull when he saw her staring at him in the Ministry of Truth, convinced she was procured by the Inquisition to entrap him to breach his obligatory commitment to chastity. Always the testing of spiritual surrender. That in itself seemed reason to cudgel her. But he was afraid to strike.

She stumbled into him one day in a corridor and pressed something into his hand. Shaken and unexpectedly excited, Winston unfolded the paper circumspectly in his palm, out of sight of security screens, and at his computer added it to a stack of scriptural revision orders. He took her message off the pile after processing a few fine-tuning adjustments to past and present. "I love you," the note read. His heart surged, and he never again thought of her as an agent of the priests. Instead his new fear was that he was too old, too shabby, too haggard for his years. She was young, impressively vital. She would not want him. He told her this the first time they met in secret. She shook her head and kissed him. "You're like me," she said. "You hate the priests. I knew it the first time I saw you."

They made love the first few times in places she selected and carefully committed to both their memories the details of their separate approaches and departures. He became obsessed



DRAWINGS BY ROGER HAYES

with her. He wanted her to be soiled, impure. She laughed and said she was just the woman. Once he asked her if she enjoyed sex for itself. Oh yes, she said. He rented a room finally in the attic of a bedraggled antiques store cluttered with cheap memorabilia of an earlier age, to him precious icons of a far better past.

Julia was much more aware of the past than Winston. She revealed herself as a Jewess, so far undetected as a result of her public fervor for the ruling theology. She inherited the continuing scholasticism of her religion and its intense oral tradition that survived the incessant rewriting of scripture. The Old Testament belonged to her people; they lived it and wrote it, and most envious to Winston, bound Julia inextricably to a community of time from which he was isolated. Although he yearned for a known ancestry he was a creature of discontinuity. He was without a coherent past, barely even a present, and when he was eventually found out as a heretic and made to vanish, no trace of his life would subsequently exist.

Both knew they were doomed. They knew it when they rented the attic room from the sympathetic elderly owner of the antique store, who seemed to cherish the historic curios in his shop and seldom sold any. Renting the room hastened the certainty of their discovery, but they were tired of planning elaborately detailed trysts in the countryside or in abandoned tenements. They wanted a place they could call their home, however briefly before the Inquisition captured them.

It was inevitable they would take the greater risk yet logical next step of seeking out the opposition underground so fanatically denounced and hunted. Winston was certain one of the high priests at the Ministry of Truth was simpatico. He had, indeed, based his entire personal revolt on his faith in the priest as his mentor. Once he had exchanged a quick glance with the priest and read into it intellectual recoil at the hypocrisy and plain stupefied malevolence that represented itself as godly omnipotence. A second occasion he was approached by the priest and engaged in a brief conversation that firmly indicated intimacy with the forces of reform and change.

It seemed only natural that Winston and Julia accept a veiled invitation to the priest's personal quarters, though a mistake of timing put them together at the outside door. They were let in quickly by a servant. As they followed him down a long hall, Winston and Julia marveled at its opulence. Winston found it difficult to compare the richness of art and furnishings

with his own mean room. He felt elevated at the thought of such a high level priest risking everything for intellectual freedom. Julia, from a long tradition of religious intolerance and betrayal, was more restrained in her enthusiasm as Winston introduced her.

Julia left first. Just as Winston was about to scurry out the door, the priest gave him a book disguised as a Bible and said it would explain everything. A flurry of work prevented him from reading the book for several days. During a weeklong observance of intolerance against the Great Satans the war changed and the predominant enemy became the Asian Pagans. The Ministry of Truth was compelled to immediately revise all records and media to affirm that the Pagans were the enemy all along, which was difficult due to the immense official effort to enflame public hatred of the Great Satans, who, of course, remained an implacable enemy despite the transfer of pious pique.

One evening Winston took the book to the attic room above the antique store a couple of hours before Julia was to arrive. He read about the political subversion that underlay perpetual spiritual war, the manipulation of religious fervor to attain material goals. Actually a single goal. Power. Pure and Supreme. Absolute. The power of God. Not a benevolent God. History proved the weakness of benevolence. Raw power, violent and cruel was the creed. The power of the Big Bang the instant God created the Universe with a mighty clap of hands. That was the power the Holy Order intended to wield over the world, the most elemental power possible. Sanctioned by the mandate of celestial supremacy, the priests set about spiritually sanitizing their increasing flocks, virtually perpetual wirebrush cleansing of the faithful while always watchful for contagiously faithless heretics. The Order was in conflict with any person, creed or idea that did not recognize its supremacy, and opponents were not forgiven or reformed. They were mercilessly hunted down and exterminated without any record remaining of their brief existence.

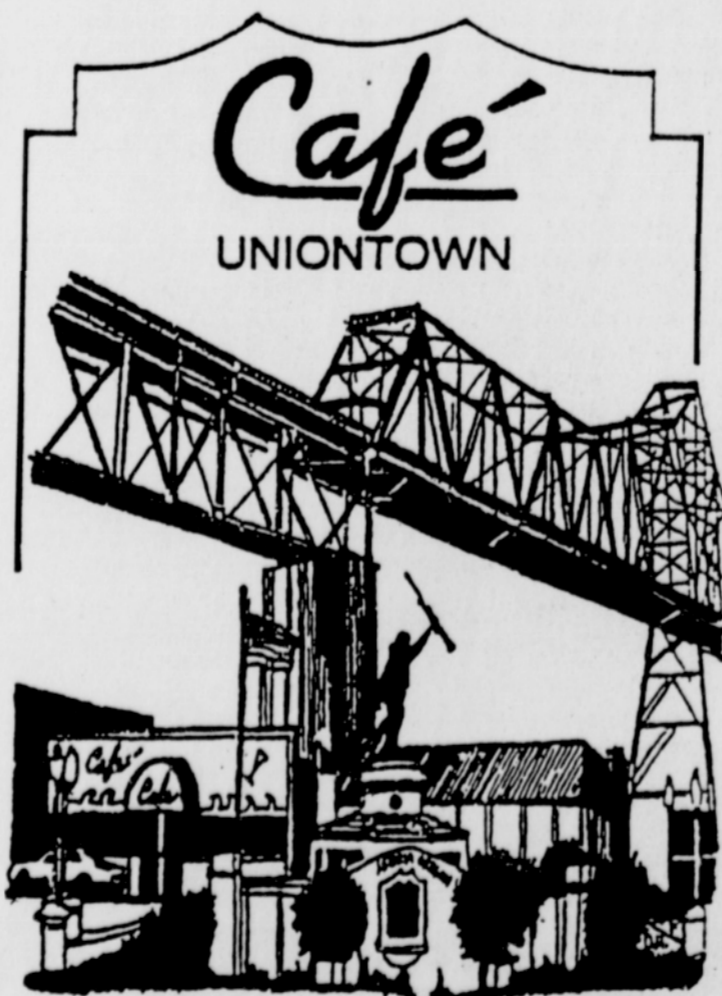
The establishment of a militant theocracy had been absurdly easy. The Christian evangelical movement rose rapidly from spurned obscurity to political dominance, using a combination of dynamic evangelism, television, money and high-tech methods of advertising and propaganda (as well as sanctified corruption) to win local and national elections and mandate laws that discriminated against homosexuals, assertive women, non-Christians and other pariahs.

The longheld fear that communism or socialism would ultimately triumph was startlingly reversed when the major communist empires and socialist states collapsed; more startling was the rapid rise in the vacuum of conservative religious orders all over the world that not only quickly dominated their parent religions but wrested political control of nearly half the planet with blinding swiftness.

American evangelists had endured a half century quietly organizing, clinging to harsh doctrines that tolerated no deviation from ancient scripture and waiting for the internal collapse of Great Sodom (the United States), which they were certain would occur at the Millennium. Liberal democracy was especially demonic to the protectors of oldtime religion. Women debased in the marketplace, not as chattel but as aspiring corporate CEOs, flaunting unspeakable feminism at the devout faithful. Deviant homosexuals boldly challenging traditional values. Heretical sects such as Buddhists, Muslims and abominable Catholics practicing their heresies openly. And the Jewish problem awaited solution.

Great Sodom was perfidiously sabotaged from within by the evangelical agenda which practiced political subversion and theft of elections. Freedom of religion disappeared when the evangelists triumphed at the polls. The first act of the Sacred Ecumenical Council, as Congress was renamed, was to abolish all other religions in favor of a state religion established by the Holy Order, which had usurped the Presidency. The next act was to purge heretics. Massive roundups and executions in the early years set a pattern still followed of sanctioned inquisition. Arrests and executions were a daily routine. Public trials and executions entertained and terrified the faithful. The fear of God inspired love of God as terror inspired faith.

Winston's own memory was confused. He thought he once knew about the spread of evangelical fervor that reformed the western hemisphere. TV preachers infected an ever increasing public with negative platitudes that encouraged isolation and persecution of heretics, homosexuals, free-thinking women,



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