

THE LATE SUMMER SUN SETTLED ALONG THE DINGY HORIZON as Richard Eldrich stepped out of the large white building of the Ministry of Truth. He hardly took any notice of the muggy air or the grungy streets of Washington D.C., his mind far off in the preparations to one of his famous speeches extolling the virtues of this great society and its leader, Big Brother. Loyalty to the regime and death to the enemy were always his subjects, along with the ideas of *doublethink* and his great admiration for Newspeak. Yes, all of his speeches had a substantial part of this language in them. And yet behind the facade of the iron party orator was an intelligence that surpassed that of many of his peers. Maybe that was why he had been narrowly passed over for that promotion.... Rich quickly suppressed the thought. *Crimestop* automatically stopped him from thinking any heretical thoughts against the Party. *The Party knows best*, he said to himself, subconsciously tugging at the breast pocket of his blue overalls. He had to hurry home and then head to the Community Center for the discussion that night. But before that he needed to pick up some shoe laces. Anita would never let him go out looking indecent when he was going to speak. Rich sighed to himself and turned off the street once called Pennsylvania Avenue and into prole territory.

Going into this territory was not forbidden, but it was not recommendable either. Even so, when you need shoelaces and the Party stores don't have any, where else can you go? Rich steeled himself as he entered the first small dingy general store he came to. *Let's get this over with*, he thought to himself. Like many of the other Party people, he didn't like mingling with the proles, but sometimes it was inevitable.

The store was no more than 9 feet by 12 feet in size, but it was cluttered and crammed with a great assortment of things, anything from paper clips to old appliances and from buttons to books. Rich stared around the store for a moment, surprised at all of the things in it.

"May I help you?" came a voice with a distinct southern drawl. Rich looked over to see an elderly woman standing behind the small counter.

"I, ah, need some shoelaces," Rich said.

"Brown or black?" the woman retorted. Rich looked at his shoes for a moment.

"Black, I guess," he said. The woman nodded and bent beneath the counter, bringing up a shoe box filled with laces. "Take yer pick," she drawled, "any pair is 25 cents." Rich nodded and slowly looked through the box. After a few moments he had selected two, not that it mattered since all of the laces were exactly the same. He took his time because he was watching the saleswoman. She was dressed in poor colorful garb, like many proles, and yet it was very neat. Her gray hair was also neatly pinned back and there was an air of friendliness around her. She glanced in his direction and he looked down at the table quickly, not wanting to look into her fiery green eyes. He looked down the counter. A small book was lying just next to his right hand. The cover was a forest green and it had golden letters printed on the cover. He turned it towards himself carefully. The title said: *Gideon New Testament Psalms Proverbs*. He was suddenly intrigued by the title and for a moment he forgot all about *crimestop*, *doublethink*, and everything else he had been indoctrinated with. He picked up the volume and opened the ancient pages. His eyes fell on the table of contents. There were 29 entries listed there. The first four were names he knew. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He knew people by that name, might they have written this book?

"Have you decided what you want?" The voice of the elderly woman made him jump.

"Uh, yes, I'd like this pair and the book," he said shoving the two items toward the little woman. She looked at his selection for a moment.

"The book isn't for sale," she said. "But you can have it for free," she continued before Rich could protest. "That'll be 25 cents," she said and Rich put a quarter on the counter. "Have a nice day now," she said and disappeared into a small door between two of the shelves. Rich looked after her for a moment and then left quickly, slipping the book into a pocket of his overalls. He had been here far too long.

RICH SAT QUIETLY IN HIS KITCHEN, his back discreetly to the humming telescreen. In the two weeks since his purchase of the little booklet he hadn't been able to put it down. Of course it wouldn't do to read it openly, one could never know when the Thought Police would plug into his telescreen and watch him. You had to be careful and above all else, trust *no one*. And yet some of the things he read he couldn't help but share with Anita. She stood next to the ancient gas stove and tried to put together a half-way decent meal out of the daily ration. Rich had often

wondered why he married her. There was no love involved. There *could* be no love involved, otherwise the marriage would have been forbidden. Why then? Maybe because as loyal Party members both had realized that perpetuating the race was very important. He regarded her for a moment. In another time she would have been called beautiful, with shoulder length dark-blond hair, and a well-formed body. Her face was always very expressive and even when angry she looked very nice. But something about her demeanor destroyed all of the physical beauty. It must have been the ideology of the Party that tinted her every movement and thought.

Hold on a minute, Rich suddenly thought, running a hand through his own light-brown hair. *Why am I suddenly thinking like this?* Maybe it was this book. He looked at the place he had left off, suddenly wondering why this book hadn't been destroyed. At every turn it mentioned "God." Of course there was no God, the only reality was the Party. That was what he had been propagating from the day he had joined the Spies. His then innocent mind had been filled with Party doctrine until he thought it would burst. And now at 25 he was one of the best orators the Party had ever seen. Now look at him: he was sitting here and reading a book about "God." He looked over the page he had finished. It was the end of the third chapter in the book, called Luke. Rich carefully turned the ancient page and looked at the first words on the page: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."¹

Hogwash, was Rich's first comment. But then slowly something began to dawn on him: *If this is talking about that man mentioned in the other chapters, Jesus, then maybe it is accurate. Didn't he always talk about God being his father?*

Rich read on: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."² Something about this line intrigued him. He had a lot of questions and he needed answers. He stood and walked towards the door.

"Where are you going?" came a voice behind him. He turned and saw Anita looking at him. Her gray eyes shimmered in the half-light.

"For a walk," was all he answered as he left the apartment.

HIS WALK WAS AIMLESS AND BEFORE LONG HE FOUND HIMSELF walking along a small side street in the center of prole territory, his right hand loosely holding the green booklet. He had been reading as he walked and he had found more interesting things: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet all who received him, to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."³

What does that mean? Rich wondered. *If this "Word" really was God and he came to live among men, that would be something else. Big Brother doesn't mingle with the Party members. But if God did, then that would be really amazing. But what about the rest? Can't someone explain it to me?*

"Excuse me, sir?" Rich turned to see a man dressed in prole garb walking up behind him. Instantly a warning light clicked on in his head, but there was something about the eyes, they weren't the eyes of a prole, and not the eyes of a Party member, empty and hopeless. No, this man's eyes were filled with a fiery light and warmth.

"Sir," the man continued, "you said you wanted help?"

Did I speak out loud? Rich suddenly wondered. "Well, I have some questions."

"We all do, sir," the man answered. "Maybe I can help you with some."

"Well, it's about this book," Rich said holding up the booklet. The man's flaming eyes filled with surprise.

"Where did you get that?" he asked in a half-whisper. Then he looked over his shoulder. "Come with me," he said quickly and pulled Rich into the shadow of a doorway. "It has been years since I saw one of these," the man said earnestly. "Do you know what this is?"

¹John 1:1-2

²John 1:3-5

³John 1:10-14

“It’s a very interesting narrative, especially...”

“Sir, that is the Word of God!”

“This is the Word that came to earth?” Rich asked incredulously.

“John 1, verse 1,” the man said cracking a broad smile. “That is talking about Jesus Christ, God’s son. He is a real part of history, not just a figment of a man’s imagination, like many of the comrades written about in the Post or any other paper for that matter. And God is real, too, not like Big Brother.” Rich was shocked. What this man had said was bordering on blasphemy.

“Now, sir,” the man said. “You have some questions?”

“Yes, this here,” Rich said pointing to the section about “his” being in the world.

“Ah, yes,” the man said, nodding. “This is one of the harder parts to understand. ‘He’ is Jesus. And here is the reason he came: to give ‘light to every man.’”

“What is that?” Rich asked.

“How much have you read?”

“The first three chapters of this book.”

“Good, then you know what Jesus did.”

Rich nodded. “He came and died on a -- a cross.”

“Right,” the man said nodding. “But he didn’t stay dead. He *rose* again from the dead and he is still alive now!”

“Wait a minute,” Rich said, shaking his head. “You say that this, uh, Jesus isn’t dead?”

“Yes,” the man answered, his fiery eyes earnest. “But he went back to heaven to be with his Father. Here,” he said, “let me show you.” Rich gave him the book and the man quickly turned the pages and read: “They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’”⁴

“See,” the man continued. “It says right here that he went to heaven and will return.” Rich was intrigued, but still had some questions, especially about his death.

“Why did this man die, even though he didn’t do anything wrong?” Again his companion flipped the pages and read: “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”⁵

“What does ‘sinned’ mean?” Rich asked.

“‘Sin’ means missing the mark, it means that you did what God has said is wrong and done bad things.”

Rich laughed. “Well, I guess this doesn’t really count for me. I’m a good person.” But inside he knew that these were hollow words, bolstering an ego that was slowly being broken by divine tools.

“Oh no, my friend,” the man said, “didn’t you hear what it said? ‘All have sinned.’ That means that you have sinned and I have sinned and every person in this dying world has sinned.” He paused for a moment letting his words sink into Rich. Slowly the emptiness inside Rich began to become a pain.

“What happens to those that don’t follow Jesus?” he asked his companion. The man looked dead serious as he answered, “They will be separated from God forever and thrown into the lake of fire.”

IN THE SILENCE OF HIS BEDROOM Rich mulled over what he had heard today. His friend had given him more information, and even offered him a chance to accept the forgiveness of Christ, but Rich found it too much to accept at one time.

“I just don’t think I can do it now,” he told the man.

“I will pray for you,” were the other’s words as they parted. “I will be here if you wish to talk more.” Then he had vanished into the crowd. But now as Rich mulled it over he cursed himself for not accepting the gracious offer of his companion. *Come on, Eldrich,* said a small voice inside him. *This is just a bunch of hogwash made up to send you to the Ministry of Love. Then why do I feel so empty?* he asked himself. *Why can’t I get any peace at my present job?* He rose and dressed, stepping out into the night air off of his balcony for a few moments.

“God,” he whispered. “Help me.”

■■■

⁴Acts 1:10-11

⁵Romans 2:22b-23

THE FOLLOWING DAY HE HEADED BACK into the prole section of town, his mind made up. He was surprised to find his companion already waiting for him by the doorway.

"I knew you would come sooner or later," the man told him.

"Have you been praying for me?" Rich asked, afraid that the answer might have been a "no."

"Yes, I have," was the answer.

"Then, my friend," Rich said, "please tell me again: what must I do to be saved?"

"Believe in Jesus Christ and give your heart to him and you will be changed."

"Oh, I will," Rich cried.

"Then kneel and pray with me," the man said and they knelt. "Repeat what I say, Rich," he said with an authoritative voice. And he prayed a simple prayer. Rich repeated it:

"Oh, Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner and I know I need you. Cleanse my heart and come live in me. Thank you that you do. Amen." As he opened his eyes, Rich suddenly felt as if something had been broken away from him. He felt free, as if he wanted to dance and sing. He stood and suddenly his new-found friend embraced him.

"Welcome to the family," he said to Rich. Tears of joy were pouring down Rich's cheek as he stepped back.

"Thank you, my friend," he said to the man. "You have helped me greatly."

"Then let me help you again," the man said, pulling a thick brown book from his jacket. "I want to exchange your New Testament for this."

"What is it?" Rich asked taking the book.

"It is the whole Bible. It has the things you have already read in it and more. Take care, for persecution will come, Rich. It will."

"Thank you again, my friend," Rich said. "And will I see you again?"

"Oh, most definitely, though maybe not in this life," his friend said turning to leave. "See you."

"Bye," Rich said, watching the man go.



THE DAYS HAD PASSED AND RICH JUST COULDN'T GET ENOUGH of the book that the man had given him. He spent the whole night reading it, often falling asleep over it. He was learning so much. He had found a note in the front, recommending that he memorize the passages and he did, any passage that he found really useful. And he prayed. He prayed for his colleagues, his country, his world -- and Anita.

Anita was beginning to notice the changes in her husband. Usually lethargic in the morning he was usually awake and reading that book. She began to notice a fire in his deep hazel eyes, a burning that she couldn't explain. He had a vigor that she didn't think he could have, but what frightened her most of all was his talk. He talked of nothing but this book and the man called Jesus. She became afraid that he had abandoned the Party's way and had found something more evil. Even though she didn't love him, she didn't want to lose him, either. There was more food to eat, more recognition, and maybe somebody to fight with when the need arose. But she had finally had enough. Rich was sitting with his back to the telescreen again reading that book.

"Rich," she said in a serious tone. He quickly closed the book and put it on the floor.

"Yes?" he asked.

"You *have* to stop reading that book," she said, impatiently tapping her foot. "You just aren't spending enough time with the Party. It's bad for your image and then *they* might take you!" Rich smiled at her anger, and suddenly became aware of a new feeling towards her that he didn't think he'd ever had before: affection.

"Well, Anita," he said. "If I would do that I would really lose my life." She shuddered as she saw a warmth mingling with the fire in his eyes.

"If you don't stop, you'll really be killed," she said, biting her lip.

"Why do you worry about me, Anita?" he asked.

"Well -- I" She didn't know the answer to that one.

"Come take a walk with me," he said.

"But it's almost 21:00."

"That doesn't matter," he answered, picking up his book. "Come." For some reason she couldn't resist his invitation and followed him out of the apartment.



RICH SLOWLY DIRECTED THEIR STEPS toward the scrubby park. There were no electric lights, only the light of the moon falling among the trees and onto a small pond a short way away.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” Rich asked almost breathlessly, looking about the soft dark grove of trees. “Do you know how all this came into being?”

“Of course,” Anita replied monotonously. “It all evolved over millions of years....”

“No, I mean really. How did it happen that this lifeless clump of rock could become such a place, blooming with life even in this oppression?” Anita just looked at him, watching him to see what would happen next. He took several steps toward the pond and then turned and looked at his young wife, eyes full of fire. “It was created, by God. The only God.” He came back his face intense, full of meaning. “And so were you, and I. But do you know why this world is the way that it is?” Anita was silent. “It is because man sinned. He did what God told him *not* to do. But not only man sinned, woman did too. What happened when those two sinned? Death came to the world and we couldn’t be friends with God. But God wanted to be in the world with us. And for that reason he sent his Son and his Son died for us. I have learned that and accepted that and that’s why I’m different, Anita, that’s why I don’t believe in the Party and in Ingsoc anymore. Oceania is dead to me, because I have found life. Life forever.”

“You mean, you aren’t going to die?” Anita asked incredulously.

“Oh,” Rich said, smiling to himself. “I didn’t mean *that*. Of course this body will die, but after death I will go to be with God.” He gripped her arms. “And I want you to be able to do that, too, Anita.” He dropped his hands and turned away, suddenly realizing what he had said. “I’m changing,” he finally said after a moment. “Changing but from the inside out. With this change come new feelings I didn’t know before: compassion, friendship, hope, peace, love.” Rich paused for a moment and turned back, looking into her gray eyes, eyes full of fear. She shuddered as she saw the warmth and gentleness in his. There was a look there she had never seen before. “I have learned what love is,” he said. “It is something that the Party can *never* quench. And I have learned to love you, too.” She went rigid the instant the words left his mouth. “Don’t worry, girl, it’s not what happens in a bed, it’s what happens here,” he said, pointing to his chest, “in your heart of hearts. That is where you must learn what love is. And only God can teach you that.” He paused. “It’s getting late,” he finally said. “Let’s go home.”

ANITA SUDDENLY CAME AWAKE, COVERED IN SWEAT. Those dreams had been back again, horrible dreams of being chased by an unseen light and always being cornered, and then as it came nearer, that voice, rumbling, coming from the depth of the earth. She had never told Rich and didn’t think she ever would. She suddenly slipped out of bed and pulled her overalls on. She stood and left her room. There was Rich with his head resting on the kitchen table, the book just a bit away from his arm. She bent over the thick book and looked at the opened page. Something on it caught her eye: “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

“The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh; / she shall be called “woman,” / for she was taken out of man.’”⁶ What did that mean. She turned and looked self-consciously at the humming telescreen and wondered if *they* were watching her. Her eyes slipped a bit higher up the page and she read: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”⁷ *A helper? Is that what a woman is?* she suddenly wondered. *If that is so then why don’t we help men?*

A HAND SHOOK RICH’S SHOULDER, WAKING HIM FROM HIS SLEEP. He wiped his eyes and focused on the shadowed face of his wife. He searched the usually passionless face for any difference. She stepped into the soft light, clearing away many of the shadows in her face. He read the questions written there and beckoned for her to come. They crossed the room and entered their bedroom. Anita sat on the edge of the bed.

“Tell me,” she whispered when he sat down next to her, “what are men and women like in that book of yours?”

“They are friends, enemies, lovers, and followers of God,” he answered in a hushed voice. “But most of all they are partners. That’s what a husband and wife are: partners for life, each one building the other up through their mutual love, and serving God together.”

⁶Genesis 2:22-23

⁷Genesis 2:18

“That sounds a bit like the Party philosophy,” she said after a moment. “Man and woman toiling side-by-side to build a better world.”

“Yes,” Rich agreed, “but God’s way works better, because you can really change the world. Man’s ways are empty, but God’s ways are full of life and light. If a man and woman are partners in Him, then they are complete, because God fills in the gaps left by man’s sin.” Anita thought about this for a moment.

“I like your God, Rich,” she said finally. “Can I know him, too?”

“Anyone can know him, Anita. You just have to tell him that and believe in his Son, Jesus.”

“Tell me about him, Rich,” she almost pleaded and he did. It ended almost an hour later with both on their knees, praying. When they finished Anita looked at Rich.

“I feel free,” she said, tears streaming down her face, “free!”

“And you are now,” Rich said, beaming. “Free from the bonds of sin and the Party.”



A strange change came over the Eldrich household during the next few weeks. Whenever the Thought Police plugged in they didn’t hear any conversation, neither did they see anything out of the ordinary, except that the house had suddenly become neater and more like a home. Anita and Rich’s co-workers also began to notice a change around the two. During the Two-Minute Hate neither seemed to be really caught up in the frenzy. Rich became a more thoughtful person, trying to help those he saw, whereas before he minded his own business to the point of ignoring even his wife’s problems. Anita’s once harsh attitude had softened and if you spoke with either for even a short period of time you could see a fire in their eyes and sense a gentle power about all their actions. But aside from this their discussion topics worried the other Party members. They didn’t talk about the Party’s greatness anymore, just about the beauty of life and most of all about “God.” They never discussed it overtly, no, they were too cautious for that, and yet it was something about the way they mentioned “Him” that instantly made their comrades suspicious of their motives and mental stability.

Every night they would pray together and study before going to bed, and during this time they were often reminded that persecution was soon to come. Rich prayed for strength to stand against any tortures devised by their LORD’S enemies. Also as time passed Rich and Anita slowly became aware of a growing love for the other. It grew daily as did their devotion to their new God and it also marked their actions and words. There still were fights now and then, but the split never lasted long, it always healed quickly as the one at fault made amends.

“ELDRICH!” RICH LEANED BACK IN HIS SEAT to see a tall, thin man dressed in black overalls coming towards him.

“Ah, Kirkland,” Rich said with a warm smile. “How are you doing?” The man in black just grimaced at him and motioned Rich to follow him. Rich quickly rose and followed Kirkland out of his department of the Ministry of Truth. A few minutes and several flights of stairs later he was standing in Kirkland’s office. The Inner Party man sat down behind his expansive desk and looked at Rick for a long moment and then began to speak in an icy tone of voice.

“I have been hearing some rather disturbing things about you, Eldrich,” he said. “I wanted to check into them and put a stop to them before anything else happened.” He studied Rich for a long moment. “I hear you haven’t been really contributing to the general good of the Party. I even have observed you during the Two-Minute Hate. You don’t act on it, you just act as if it is good exercise and at the end you just sit calmly. How can you do that? It is impossible to break the hold of the Party over the individual!”

“Is that so?” Rich said with a half-smile. “I believe that many people have broken that hold at one time or another, some just from their own strength and others through a Power greater than their own. The power of hate, however is another matter,” Rich continued. “Man can’t break that through his own power, because of his faulty nature that often feeds on hate to keep going.”

“Shaddap!” Kirkland suddenly yelled. “You don’t understand why you’re here. You aren’t here so we can psychoanalyze your ability to withstand hate. You are here so I can help you get back on track.” Kirkland calmed a bit. “Eldrich you have gotten into something that is destroying your career and effectiveness with the Party. We are worried about you and want to help you come back to where you really belong.”

Yeah, right! Rich suddenly found himself thinking. *It was him that got that promotion I deserved!* He almost answered harshly to this man's accusation, but something inside him whispered, *What would Jesus do in this situation?*

"My dear friend," Rich said with a warm smile, "I already have found the place where I belong and I am in it. Now, with your permission, I would like to return to my work." Kirkland's pale face reddened for a moment but the dark man calmed himself.

"All right, Eldrich," he said carefully, "you can return to your job, but let me warn you, Big Brother is watching you!" Rich just smiled and left the office.

"I THINK WE'RE ABOUT TO GET IT, ANITA," Rich said that evening as they were preparing for bed.

"What makes you say that?" she asked.

"Kirkland called me into his office and warned me to return to the 'right' way."

Anita laughed, her once plain face sparkling with joy and warmth. "But you have found the right way, luv, why go back?"

"There you have a point," he said, putting his arms around her. "After I have found God would I ever *not* want to know him?" She just smiled and kissed him.

Crash! The door suddenly folded in on itself to reveal one of the black Party guards, his foot raised in a kick. "Get back and put your hands on your head!" he yelled. The couple complied instantly. Black-clad soldiers poured into the room, surrounding the two. The one that had kicked in the door raised his rifle butt and swung it towards Anita.

"No!" Rich threw himself in front of his wife, catching the vicious blow on his shoulder. Pain shot through it, making him stagger, but he stood tall in front of her.

"Get out of the way, you %\$@#!" the soldier screamed. Rich just shook his head and remained in place, tears running down his cheeks from the pain in his shoulder. The rifle butt swung again, hitting him in the stomach. He doubled over for just a short moment, and straightened again in the same protective stance in front of her. The soldier raised his rifle butt again, this time to strike him in the face.

"Stop!" came a voice from the doorway. A man dressed in plain blue overalls stepped through the door. Rich knew him. He worked in the cubicle next to Rich's and was plainly in charge of the operation. "Get them out of here," he said jerking his head toward the door. A soldier grabbed each of Rich's arms and almost carried him out of the room. Rich planted his feet down and turned his head toward Anita.

"Be strong in the Faith and in the power of His might!" he called. She just nodded, tears rolling down her cheeks as they dragged him from the apartment.

RICH GROANED QUIETLY AS THEY KICKED HIM INTO THE ROOM. He had been beaten severely and now they had tossed him into this room. Rich carefully pushed himself up with his good right arm and after a few minutes he was able to crawl to the small benches that lined the walls of the room. He pulled himself up on it and sat still. After a few minutes his blurry vision began to clear and he noticed that there was a large telescreen set in every wall, staring at him. After staring back at the one across from him for several minutes he looked down at himself. His overalls were torn and bloodied and his right leg hung limply to the floor. He was quite sure that several of his ribs and his shoulder were broken and he wondered if he would ever be able to get better again. But then he began thinking about Anita. He was worried about what had happened to her.

"Oh, God," he said quietly, "protect her and strengthen her to stand against the torture she will endure."

"Silence!" the telescreen bawled at him, but Rich didn't obey. He prayed on for her, for his fellow inmates, for his captors, the Party, Washington D.C., and the rest of the world. As he prayed his pain slowly seemed to lessen, and by the time the door of the room opened again, his leg and arm were completely healed. Only his side seemed a bit tender. The soldiers tossed another figure into the room and slammed the door shut. Rich instantly bolted from his seat and knelt beside the wounded individual. He knew it was a woman from the long hair and the high-pitched moans she gave. He carefully turned her over and looked at her battered face. She seemed almost dead, but of course the guards wouldn't kill her until after she confessed complete fealty to the system. He carefully wiped the blood from her mouth with his already bloodied handkerchief and waited for her to come around. He stood and sat against the wall again, head bowed and arms crossed, praying silently.

Finally he heard a moan and looked to see that the girl had come around. And a girl she was. He didn't figure her to be older than 20. He quickly came and knelt beside her.

"37412, Eldrich, R. Get back in your seat!" the telescreen screamed, but Rich didn't hear. His heart was too full of compassion for the young woman to obey the cruel command. He carefully helped her to her feet and sat her down on the bench. No sooner had he done that than the door crashed open and the soldiers burst in with their short cudgels. They began beating Rich mercilessly, but he didn't make a noise, he simply endured, praying silently for those who beat him. Finally one of them decided that it was enough and they left the room. Rich pushed himself up off the floor and stood uncertainly, collapsing on the bench right next to the girl, who was staring at him incredulously.

"Who are you," she finally asked after a while.

"My name's Rich," he said with a smile. She noticed his eyes were clouded with pain, and yet he didn't make a sound.

"What are you in for," she inquired farther.

"For believing in God." The answer was simple, but it shocked her.

"For believing in God?"

"That's right," Rich said, nodding.

"But that's silly, there is no God," she said after a moment.

"My wife told me that, too, but she changed her mind." He paused for a moment, searching her brown eyes. "And you, what are *you* in for?"

"Well, I'd rather not talk about that," she said uncomfortably.

"Okay," he said and bowed his head again.

"What are you doing?" she whispered.

"I'm praying," he said seriously. The girl seemed to think for a moment.

"Well, would you put in a word for me, too?"

"Of course," Rich answered with a smile. The telescreen then came on yelling at them to shut up. They obliged, and Rich sat quietly for a long time, lips sometimes moving in silent prayer, sometimes still. Then suddenly he quoted a verse he had memorized:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."⁸

"What does that mean?" the girl suddenly asked.

"It means that God will be with you no matter where you are and what trouble you are in, if you choose to believe in him," Rich answered. The telescreen screamed for silence, but Rich ignored it. "You see, God created this whole world. He created me and you, and those people sitting behind these screens. When He created the first man and woman He made them perfect, but they disobeyed God and so we became what we are: twisted and evil individuals."

"But the Party is trying to make amends, make us perfect," the girl countered.

"Actually, my dear friend, the Party just wants more power to feed on. It cares nothing for the perfection of it's people. All it wants is power and more power. Only God can make you perfect, through the gift of His Son."

"God had a son? How'd He do that?" she asked.

"Oh, it's not like you would have a son," Rich said with a warm smile. "It's more like, oh, a spiritual kinship. Jesus was God's Son, and he came to earth to die for our sin."

"What is sin?" the girl wanted to know.

"Sin is not doing what God want's you to," Rich said, his hazel eyes full of sadness. "It hurts God to see us do such things and because of that we can't go to be with Him when we die."

"But isn't death the end of all things?"

"No, death is not the end," Rich said shaking his head. "Either you accept God and receive true Life and go to live with Him in Heaven, or you stay in Death and are thrown into a Lake of Fire. It is very painful there, you are constantly burning, and there is no way that you can leave. But most of all it is lonely." He fell silent and the girl fidgeted uncomfortably.

⁸Psalms 23:4a

“I will tell you why I’m in here,” she said after a long pause. “It is because I fell in love and followed my heart.” She looked at the floor. “I now am here because of *crimethink* and there is no way that I can get out except for giving up and becoming a complete Party member. But I don’t want to,” she said, tears sliding down her white cheeks, “I want to be free.”

“With Jesus you can,” Rich said, putting his arm around her.

“Really?” she asked, a small amount of hope creeping into her eyes. Rich nodded and asked if she would pray with him. She nodded and the two knelt under the angry eyes of the telescreen. There in the depths of the Ministry of Love another soul was won back from the darkened path. As they finished praying the door burst open and the guards exploded in, bludgeoning the two prisoners. Rich was then yanked to his feet and dragged from the room, praising God that this girl’s soul had been saved and praying that she would remain strong in her new Faith.

HE LAY ON A STRANGE TABLE on his back with his wrist, ankles, neck, and waist strapped tightly to it. He couldn’t do anything but look at the ceiling, and only from the corners of his eyes could he see two phantoms hovering around the table. One was slightly stooped and dressed in a white lab coat. The other one was tall and thin, dressed in the black of the Inner Party. The man in black stepped up to the table and spoke to Rich.

“Well, Eldrich,” he said, “I warned you to watch yourself and now look at what has happened. You are trussed up here and have to go through this painful ordeal.”

Rich smiled. “Kirkland, you really don’t care what happens to me as long as you can have more power. That’s what this is all about. I have found a power so much greater that it threatens the stranglehold of the Party and it’s doctrine over this world.” The Inner Party member’s face contorted with rage and he suddenly yanked a lever beside the table. Pain shot through Rich. It felt as if someone was ripping out his spine and twisting his arms off. It was so great he couldn’t make a sound. Then it stopped.

“You see, Eldrich, I told you you would go through a lot of pain,” Kirkland said with a cruel smile. “Now let’s start with the basics.” He began pacing back and forth in the room. “First of all you must understand that there is no ‘God.’ It was just a myth thought up by the people previous generations before we enlightened them. This ‘God’ of yours was just as much a fairy tale as Jupiter, Mars, or Venus of the Romans. None of these exist and neither does your ‘God.’” A moan came from Rich’s lips.

“What did you say?” Kirkland demanded.

“I cannot -- I -- will -- not -- recant!” Rich panted. Kirkland spun the dial and yanked the lever again. A second time Rich experienced the pain this time greater.

“I will *not* recant!” he screamed through the haze of pain. Kirkland shut off the device and signaled his white-coated assistant. The man brought a helmet-like device over and placed it on Rich’s head.

“Close your mouth,” Kirkland ordered calmly. Rich felt a pop in his head as suddenly a big hole opened in his mental fabric. *What is going on? God, help me!* He tried to remember some of the scripture he had memorized as Kirkland began his monologue about God being a myth again. Just one fragment came to Rich’s mind: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ...”⁹ Rich’s lips began to move, repeating the fragment. Slowly the rest of it came back: “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”¹⁰ As he prayed this prayer the mental gap closed and not one word Kirkland said had effect on him.

“So,” Kirkland finally asked, “is there a God?”

“Yes, there is, friend,” Rich said, hazel eyes sparkling. “And he loves you deeply.” Kirkland’s mouth dropped open. “Get him out of here,” he screamed. The bonds loosened and several black guards entered the room, quickly dragging Rich out of the interrogation room.

IV

Rich lay in a pool of blood in the center of the detention cell. He had been beaten mercilessly, and even so he had not cried out. This only seemed to anger the guards more so they continued to hit him. They had finally

⁹Matthew 5:9b

¹⁰Matthew 5:10-13

left him, almost dead, suffering for his Faith. Gentle hands reached down and turned him over, carefully pulling him to the side and then washing his face. He opened his hazy eyes to see the girl he had witnessed to. How come they had put him back in with her? Was this some kind of a joke? He gasped as she moved his arm, obviously broken. And she was singing softly. He couldn't understand the words, but they washed over him like a balm and he drifted off into a deep sleep.

HE SUDDENLY FELT LIKE HE WAS FLOATING and looked down to see a dark-haired figure bent over an inert, battered body. Then there was a loud rush and he found himself standing on a vast open plain. He could see black sentries standing before him with bloody swords and the visors of their armor down. A great host of shining warriors swept down from the starless sky above him and engaged the dark legion in battle. The battle seemed to last for years, though it might have been only moments. The shining warriors had been vanquished by their evil enemy. He cried out in sadness and pain when he saw that the shining ones had lost. Then a great Voice echoed over the plains.

“Why do you cry, son of man?” it asked.

He looked up and answered, “I cry that the heavenly host has been defeated.” Again the great Voice rumbled from the heavens,

“Who will stand against the forces of evil in this world?” He felt something begin to burn inside him.

“Here am I, Lord, send me!” he said.

“Then go,” echoed the Voice. He walked towards the legions, unarmed, when suddenly another Great Warrior appeared beside him.

“Here, friend,” the Warrior said, “is your armor.” Shining ones surrounded him attaching the blazing armor to his body while the great Warrior watched. Then the shining ones melted away and another warrior appeared in their stead. Long hair flowed from beneath the warrior's helmet and the build of the armor revealed that this was no man, but a woman. She turned her face towards him, he recognized her and spoke her name. She smiled and drew her sword in a salute. He drew his also and the two marched into battle side by side. The black sentries saw them coming and readied themselves. The sound of the clash of blades echoed across the heavens. He could feel the heat and the danger of the situation. But he fought on and the black sentries fell before his blade. The woman was also fighting, but there were too many.

“Help us, Lord,” he cried. And beside them appeared the Great Warrior. His armor was battered and his sword's surface was uneven from the many battles he'd fought. The Warrior waded into the fray and the singing blades cut through the dark warriors as around them more and more soldiers of Light appeared. He recognized some of them, but could not speak to them. Then suddenly the legions of deepest darkness fled. He felt tired and happy as he turned to the Great Warrior.

“Kneel, my friend,” the Warrior commanded and he complied. The Warrior's great sword touched his shoulders lightly. He then stood and looked his commander in the face.

“You have fought and won this battle, friend,” the Warrior said, “but you have another one you must fight. On this battle will depend your life and that of your wife and the lives of many people. Call on me when you need help and I will be there for you.” The Warrior pointed toward a doorway filled with light. “Go now, my friend.” He tuned and stepped through the door.

RICH OPENED HIS EYES, HIS MIND STILL FULL OF THE MEMORIES FROM THIS WONDROUS DREAM. He looked up and saw the girl that had been thrust into the cell with him. She looked at him as if she had never seen him before.

“Help me up,” he said. After a moment's hesitation she did. He stood uncertainly at first, but then felt his strength returning. He then began pacing through the room and with every step he took he felt stronger. Then the door opened and Kirkland stepped in. He stared at Rich incredulously for a long moment, but then recovered himself.

“Room 101,” was all he said. Rich felt a pang of fear pass through him, but remembered the words of his great Lord, straightened his shoulders and followed Kirkland through the door.



The darkened room was situated deep in the bowels of the Ministry of Love. Here Rich was again strapped to a chair, so tightly that he could not move. Kirkland slowly came across the room with a black cage. There was something in it, writhing and squirming. As he came closer Rich could see the blunt head and hear the rattle of a rattlesnake. Kirkland slowly began a narrative, “The North American rattlesnake has one of the most lethal poisons of all snakes. There is no way that a person can live after the bite of such a snake....” He continued a monologue about the snake. Rich slowly began to tense as the cage with the snake slowly came closer, but something inside him kept fear from coming. The words from one of the Psalms came to mind: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...”¹¹ As he began to pray through that Psalm he began to relax. All that mattered now was seeing his King. Soon it would be over. He closed his eyes as the rattling came closer.

Then suddenly it seemed that Time itself had stood still. Rich opened his eyes to see Kirkland frozen in place in front of him, his mouth frozen open in the middle of a word. His bonds suddenly had loosened and Rich stood up. “Go quickly,” came a small quiet voice from inside him. He ran through the door and ascended the long stairways. At every turn he expected to be challenged, but no sound came. He continued to run up the stairs. As he passed an open hall he suddenly heard someone call his name. He turned to see Anita running towards him. Her face looked puffy from the beatings she had taken, but an inner light radiated from her, giving her a beauty he had never noticed before. A moment later she was in his arms, kissing him.

“I missed you so much,” she said.

“Me, too,” he said, smiling. “But I had this dream and I saw you in it.”

“You did, too?” she asked incredulously. “Was it about a battle and a Great Warrior?” Rich just nodded. “I was there, too, Rich,” she said, putting her head on his shoulder.

“I know,” he said. They held each other for a moment longer. “We’ve got to get out of here,” he then said, and hand-in-hand they ran from the darkened halls of the building out into the sunlit world.

AS THEY WALKED THE STREETS OF WASHINGTON, they could see that the people were in the middle of Hate Week. Rich felt something growing inside him, an urge to speak to these people. Some of them recognized him and began chanting his name. More joined in until the whole crowd was calling his name. A large swath opened, letting Rich and Anita walk to the podium. The speaker there stepped aside and let Rich take his place. Anita stood next to Rich, holding his hand. Rich looked over the crowd, as the words began to come to him.

“You are probably expecting me to give you a rousing speech on behalf of the Party,” he began. “Well, I can’t do that anymore. I have found something greater in my life that demands more attention than the Party. Many of you would condemn me for what I am going to tell you, but I must say it anyway. I have come to believe that God is real.” A murmur went through the crowd. “I also know that we are in the middle of Hate Week. I want to tell you about something that will make this a week of love. This God I will tell you about is greater than any Party could ever be. And, unlike Big Brother, He is real. If you don’t believe me, just look at me. I have just come from the Ministry of Love. I had been interned there for believing in God and He rescued me from the hands of the people there.” He paused, another thought coming to his mind.

“You know something, the Ministry of Love should really be called the Pit of Hatred. So also the other ministries must be renamed. The Ministry of Peace should be the Ministry of Death, the Ministry of Plenty should be called the Ministry of Poverty, and the Ministry of Truth is really the Ministry of Lies. The Party claims it controls the past and deifies Big Brother, but I know that it doesn’t. I came to believe in God because of a simple book that I acquired in a small store in the prole district. This book led me and my wife to the Truth and we have learned what it is to really be in Christ. Let me tell you of what this book says.” He continued to tell the remarkable story of how God became man and died for mankind. The speech finally ended in a call to accept this new Lord as a personal savior. Many thousands knelt at that call as a new revival spread across the city and from that city to the nation and into the world. And through the willingness of one man to follow his true King the stranglehold of the Party was broken and the true Light came to shine on mankind

¹¹Psalm 23:1

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS STORY IS BASED ON GEORGE ORWELL'S EPIC NOVEL *1984*. There was one thing about it that really bothered me and that was the sheer hopelessness of the story. I understand that that is what Orwell intended, but what about Jesus Christ? He has held out hope and love and most importantly salvation for almost 2000 years. If Oceania had really come to pass, there would have been no way that the Party could snuff out the burning flame, and because they couldn't do that, the regime that thrived towards power would fall apart. This would be my vision for this world of hopelessness: One man would come to know the Truth, be set free by it, and through the martyrdom of one man the nation would be saved. That is what *1989* is about, the story of the one man, Rich Eldrich, who gave up his life to follow his new Lord. Through his faith his wife is saved and through both of their faiths the nation was saved.

JOSH MALCOLM

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