

1985

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him<sup>1</sup>. To any other man, this day would be yet another cold day in an endless succession of the same. Winston Smith, however, was not any other man. He ran, once again, through the plan for the day. Dangerous though it was, Winston knew he must have the details of this day straight. There were too many men involved, too many lives at stake, to be uncertain about the plan now. Confident that he was prepared, Winston walked into his office and shut the telescreen off. He thought back, remembering the first time he had seen this done. “You can turn it off!” Winston had exclaimed. Sadly, that first time had turned out to be nothing but a cruel joke. Winston shook his head, ridding his head of the thoughtcrime he had committed. He then laughed, at himself, at the “crime” he committed, at the world around him. He laughed because he had to, because of his loss, and his gain. His laughter gave way to melancholy, his smile replaced by tears. Once again, he fell into a memory.

It had all happened so fast. They left O’Brien’s house, headed back towards their hideaway. Then, a blur. A bomb, a flash, a noise, a cry. The rocket bomb had taken out O’Brien’s house, nearly taking them along with it. Winston remembered so little, yet felt so much. He remembered tasting the blood in his mouth. He remembered looking around and seeing nothing but smoke. He remembered crying out her name, over and over again. He remembered the pain, pain not from the explosion but from the helplessness and the confusion. But most of all, he remembered seeing him. The one person he thought he could trust, standing atop the rubble of his own house with an evil grin on his face. Winston remembered following O’Brien’s glare, and seeing her, lying on the ground, dead. He remembered running, and running. He didn’t stop until he reached the woods where they had first met. The city was once again whipped into a fury. Rations were cut to pay for more war machines, Goldstein’s spies were found around every corner, Big Brother vowed revenge. Winston merely hid, scared of what could happen next.

A knock at the door brought Winston back to the present. He hurriedly turned the telescreen on, and opened the door. It was Syme. Technically, Syme did not exist. He was an

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<sup>1</sup> Orwell, *1984*, Pg. 1

unperson, erased by the government because he was too smart. It was because he was “too smart,” however, that he survived the erase with his honor and dignity intact. Syme was, in Winston’s eyes, the most valuable piece of the plan. Syme spoke: “Good afternoon, comrade. How is your day?” Syme’s eyes showed no emotion, no feeling at all. His expression didn’t change. Winston replied, with the same steely gaze: “Fair. The wind is truly picking up recently, is it not?” Syme’s eyes flickered for a moment, showing at once fear and courage. Then, the moment was gone: “Yes. It is.” Syme calmly exited the room, nothing in his demeanor suggesting the storm he now knew was coming. Reaching for his intercom, Winston began the operation that would mobilize a hundred men: “Wind storm advisory at 1700 hours tonight.” Winston’s voice cracked as he finished the sentence. This was it: the culmination of nine months of silent preparation, training, and networking. Today would be known as the day that thought became free once again.

Winston slowly drifted off to sleep, knowing he would need the energy for later. His dreams brought him once more to the past. He recalled the agony he felt in the forest that fateful day. He had bawled, he had screamed, he had torn his hair and ripped his clothes. The anger and pain that had run through his head had been nearly unbearable. A thousand thoughts ran through his mind, none of them rational. He wanted to kill O’Brien; he wanted to destroy Big Brother. Winston recalled questioning himself, wondering how he could have stopped the event, wondering what he did wrong, wondering why this happened to him. He recalled the trees, blowing around in the strong wind. He recalled believing, at first, that even the trees were mocking him in his pain. He recalled the spark of imagination the trees had then given him. *They bend in the wind*, he remembered thinking, *but do not fall, and so triumph over their perpetual enemy*. It was then that Winston had decided to take down Big Brother. He returned to his job, expecting to be taken to the Ministry of Love at any time. Instead, O’Brien was erased and Winston was untouched.

Winston’s alarm went off. It was 16:55. Winston awoke, and brought himself to the task at hand, which his group had code-named “Operation Tornado.” Syme had remembered a mystical device of the weather, a force of wind so strong that it ripped houses apart, called a tornado. The whole group had agreed that it was the perfect name for the operation. Winston walked out of his office and was soon flanked by two of his comrades, each ready to die to protect Winston. Winston walked towards the Ministry of Love, gaining more followers with

every step. Citizens and members of the group alike joined with Winston and his comrades. To the people of the city, such an outright crime was shocking. Jaws dropped as Winston's ever growing contingent of men walked boldly onward. Winston and his comrades had been silently yet efficiently spreading the word about Operation Tornado through the entire city, but no one expected it to actually happen. Everyone knew that the Thought Police would have destroyed such an outright revolt before it even left the thought process. In fact, many thought that the information they received about Operation Tornado was a test *from* the Thought Police. A rocket bomb screamed its way towards Winston's group, and many of the citizens who had joined the group ran away screaming in fear. Winston and his comrades walked on, seemingly unaffected by the bomb roaring towards them. As the bomb neared them, it was vaporized. Another rocket bomb flew at them. It too was vaporized. A sniper fired at Winston from a far off window. A comrade pulled out a small device and caught the bullet on it. Winston smiled. Syme had thought of everything. The firing slowly ceased and Winston recalled the time he had first met the erased Syme.

"Sorry," the man had said as he bumped past Winston, "I'm in a rush." Winston had thought nothing of it, until he saw two other men rushing after the stranger. It was then Winston had run the voice through his brain. He knew that voice, from somewhere in his past. He had turned around and followed the chasers. He had thought through the voice again, this time matching it to a face. It was Syme! The very fact that he remembered Syme was thoughtcrime, as Syme had technically never existed. Quickly Winston had thought through what had happened, and he had deduced that the chasers must be members of the Thought Police, chasing after a man who wasn't. Winston remembered picking up the pace, from a walk to a jog to a run. He knew he had to find Syme. He had found Syme in an alley, where Syme had been chased by the Thought Police. One of the two policemen had been holding a gun to Syme's head, while the other had been reading from some sheet of paper. Syme - and Winston had always thought this odd - had merely smiled at the words and prepared for certain death. Winston had turned away as the shot fired. The Thought Police had walked off, sure of their kill. Winston had slumped down against the wall, wondering once again what he would do. Suddenly he had heard whistling! Winston had looked around, and seeing no one in the area, had nearly declared himself insane, when Syme had patted Winston on the back: "Smith old buddy!" Syme had said, "It truly is wonderful to see you."

“Winston! Winston!” A voice brought him back to the present. “They’re bringing in tanks.” The phalanx of comrades broke into a jog, knowing that they had to reach the Ministry of Love before the heavy weaponry reached them. Syme could do a great many things, but he could not save them from the tanks. The comrades, now over one hundred strong, reached the gate and quickly overwhelmed the guards. Two of the stronger comrades picked up guns and assumed a position at the front of the group. The snipers began shooting again, and a comrade fell. Winston ordered another comrade to see to him, and then moved forward to oversee the destruction of the front door. The Ministry of Love had no windows, and only one door. The door was two feet thick, four feet wide, and seven feet tall. It was solid metal. This door had been the trickiest part of the entire planning process. The comrades could find no way around it, and no way through it. Eventually it had been Syme, once again, who had figured out a solution to the problem. Using a complex algorithm of resonant frequencies and common decimal numbers, Syme had discovered a way to crack the code of the door’s lock. The only issue was that it took several minutes to open the door once the code had been cracked. “Comrade Smith! The code is cracked and we-” The comrade’s remaining words were lost in a nearby explosion. “The tanks are firing!” Winston turned around, and, for the first time since he re-met Syme, truly worried for the safety of the plan. The door slowly began to open as the tanks fired again. Now the snipers fired even more, and several comrades went down. Oddly, though, the tanks were not very accurate. The shells hit the Ministry, the apartments around the complex, and the road, but missed the comrades. Winston began to suspect something, but the door opened before he could fully formulate his thought. Winston and the remaining comrades slowly filed into the dark building, all unaware of the danger awaiting them.

Syme had explained his escape to Winston, starting from inside the Ministry of Love and ending with the shot in the alley. In truth, Winston had not understood much of it, as Syme was apt to use newspeak language and technical terms in his descriptions. Syme had ended his story with a warning: “Smith, they are watching you carefully. They hope that you will merely roll over and give in to their will. Smith, you must not let that happen. I’ll be in contact soon.” Winston had no chance to reply as Syme ran off. Winston recalled having a thousand questions, and no answers.

Two weeks after the incident, Winston had found himself assigned to the committee in charge of the next Hate Week. He hadwalked into the meeting room at the Ministry of Truth at

15:00, not sure what to expect. Such assignments were fairly common in Winston's line of work, but he had never been given one himself. Winston remembered being shocked when he had seen Syme at the head of the table. Winston knew he would never forget the words Syme spoke next: "Welcome comrade! This is the beginning of a revolt."

Winston continued walking the halls of the Ministry of Love, remembering the long journey it took to get there. The men ahead of him stopped at the end of the hall. "Comrade," one of them said, "We have reached room 101." Winston clenched his jaw and opened the door, not knowing what to expect. The stories Syme had told the comrades about room 101 were horrific, but Syme seemed to believe that room 101 held the key to defeating the Ministry of Love. In the room, there was only silence and one solitary light. Two comrades walked through the door, carrying electric torches. There was nothing in the room. Something about the building was not right. Winston checked the door. It was room 101, and the room had an inherently evil feel to it. "Comrades, we will continue onwards." Winston made an abrupt 180, opened another door, and found a set of stairs. As he moved to take the stairs, a comrade stopped him: "Comrade Smith, I should try this first." Winston stepped aside, and the man began his trek up the stairs. He was immediately shot down by a sniper upstairs, and an audible gasp went through the other comrades. Winston wiped away a tear and walked away, beginning the search for another way up. Winston thought through every option, every scenario. The comrades, now numbering about eighty-five, all huddled together near the entrance of the Ministry. Then, something struck Winston. He told the comrades to be quiet, and listened intently. He heard nothing. Winston smacked himself, finally realizing what was wrong with the situation. If this were a prison, where were the prisoners? If this were a jailbreak, where were the ones waiting to be broken out? Winston put his face in his hands, desperate to uncover this mystery.

"The Ministry of Love is actually a prison." Syme had said. By this time, roughly eight months before the operation, the committee had grown from fifteen to fifty people. Winston recalled thinking it odd that the Thought Police had not stopped the committee. "The prisoners there are tortured to no end. They are beaten, both mentally and physically. There is no rest, little food, dirty water, rats everywhere, five prisoners in every cell, and, worst of all, room 101." No one spoke. "Room 101 holds your worst nightmare, brought to life. I don't know how they do it. No one does. I believe it holds the key to defeating the Ministry."

A comrade had spoken up: "How many prisoners are there in the building?"

“Thousands.” Syme had replied, his face grim.

Winston recalled speaking: “Then we must rescue them.” That was the beginning of Operation Tornado. The comrades’ goal had been to rip the Ministry of Love up from the inside, using the prisoners against the guards. Over time, the plan had morphed to a complete revolution, starting in the Ministry of Love but ending with Big Brother himself, assuming he physically existed. Somewhere in the planning, the prisoners had dropped out of the conversation. Looking back, this bothered Winston, but he had not noticed it at the meetings.

The front door of the Ministry swung open, interrupting Winston’s thoughts. “Run!” A comrade yelled as the bullets started flying. Winston jumped up and started running, scared for his life. The soldiers stormed in, mowing down the comrades. Winston started crying uncontrollably, seeing his friends and fellow revolutionaries brutally murdered. Winston ran through a doorway and slammed the door shut, out of breath and out of tears. Then he turned around and jumped, seeing the dead body of a comrade on the steps in front of him. This was the same staircase as before. Winston cautiously grabbed his magnetic bullet blocker out of his pocket. He slowly moved forward, holding the blocker above him to catch the sniper’s bullet. The silence of the situation was deafening. As he slowly moved forward, the door behind him shook. The soldiers were breaking down the door. Winston began to run up the stairs, racking his memory for some indication of what he should do next.

Winston remembered talking with Syme after a meeting, hardly one week before the operation was to begin: “Syme, why can we talk so freely in the meeting room? There is no telescreen, we never seem worried about betrayal, we are never inspected or questioned. Our group grows constantly, and yet no one has been taken by the Thought Police and no one has betrayed us. You aren’t even supposed to be here! You don’t exist! Syme, this has been bugging me for months. You must answer me.”

Syme had smiled, with that same odd smile he had given the Thought Police the day Winston re-met him. Winston had stood still, perplexed. Syme had pointed to a telescreen on the wall, made some reference to the weather and nonchalantly waltzed off, leaving Winston behind with his thoughts and a small piece of paper. Winston had later checked the paper. On it was a number: 606.

Winston had never understood the meaning of the number. He had figured that Syme would explain himself when they were in safety later. Winston now kicked himself for not seeing

the truth earlier: Syme had never truly been on their side. Now Winston knew the significance of Syme's number. It couldn't be a coincidence that the Ministry of Love had six floors. There had been far too many coincidences the day of the operation. Winston continued up the stairs, ready for whatever laid ahead.

Winston reached room 606, took a deep breath, and opened the door. The room was pitch black. A light flickered on near the center of the room. Two chairs sat there, one occupied, one empty. "Please, Smith. Come sit." Winston recognized the voice, but could not place it. "You don't want to miss your own re-birthday." Winston walked in and sat down. The other man turned to face him, but the light was too dim to see his face. The man snapped, and the room lit up. The door slammed shut, and the man turned to face Winston. It was Syme. "I see you figured out my little reference to 606. Good boy." Winston was silent. "Not feeling talkative today, are we? To be honest with you, Smith, you were a tough nut to crack. You scared us, so we devised a plan. Me." Winston still sat silently. "Now, now, Smith. You didn't *really* believe you could beat us, did you? We *used* you. You drew a hundred men to your cause, a hundred men who were dangerous to us. For that, we thank you."

Syme sat silently for a minute, then continued: "I'm sure you believe everything I told you was a lie. You are mostly correct. I told you the truth about this place though, at least, mostly the truth. This is a place of torture, and of prisoners. Now, however, its sole prisoner is you. You trusted the wrong man, fought the wrong person. Now, you will pay. We don't even need to torture you! You can do that on your own. Eventually we might retrieve you from this place. Until then, enjoy." Syme concluded his speech and walked towards the door, throwing out one final comment: "Big Brother never loses. Goodbye Smith."