

**2021**  
**With apologies to George Orwell**

In between the sleep deprivation, the waterboarding, and the shock therapy, all of which are intended to cleanse my mind of alternative facts, I occasionally remember a time that invades my consciousness unbidden, a time that occurred on an arctic January day. I am unaware of the significance of that day, yet it recurs with an insistent, pervasive thrum like a heartbeat that refuses to cease, uselessly pumping after hope for recovery has long been abandoned.

The glimpses I have of my days that are not marked by torture come during moments when I am obliged to hear the lectures delivered by The Minister of Information, a slender, blond woman whose feral eyes reflect back an absolute darkness and a display of total devotion to the postulates of the Two Kaisers.

“We must always remember that the Kaisers love you, and have instituted programs to protect and cherish each of you. Remember too, that the Democratic Republic of Amerirussian States cannot long survive the carnage visited upon us by our enemies if we do not open our hearts to patriotism, knowing that if we do, there can be no room left for prejudice.”

I admit that when I hear these words, I cry the great, great tears that are cried by many, many patriots. The threats against the Democratic Republic of Amerirussian States are real, as we are reminded every day. We have been threatened by the imperialist Far Eastern countries, as well as the evil block of New European States and the Republics of Sudamerica that conspire to undo our way of life through their veiled attempts at coercing us to accept their trade treaties, their humanitarian impulses, and their unclean immigrants who attempt to swarm upon our shores like an infestation of rats, ready to infect us. Thankfully, the Western Kaiser, bless him and his orange hair, has erected walls along our borders and has swept away the treaties and the

naïve promises of freedom told by those nations claiming to be true republics, and that have sought to obliterate our way of life.

Sometimes, as I sit in my cell and await the torture that will inevitably come, the pain washing over me like the incessant cacophony of voices from the overhead speakers until my ears bleed from the stridulations they produce, I wonder why we all look alike. I seem to remember, although I may be delusional, that people once looked different: some brown, some black, some yellow, some red. They have all been made to disappear; and now we are clean and white, uncorrupted by the vile influences that their kind introduce into the purity of our race. The Eastern Kaiser, whom we refer to simply as P., has made manifest to us that only those who believe in Mother Amerirussia, are worthy of being citizens in this brave new world.

We are led to believe that the Kaisers will rule indefinitely, leading us into a time of prosperity and peace. This time will come, according to the Minister of Information, when our enemies stop the wars and the mindless aggression with which they seek to end our way of life. But more importantly, the citizens of Amerirussia must stop clinging to outdated beliefs and above all, to things which she calls facts. The words she spews ejaculate from her mouth, spittle flying like a punch to be delivered to an opponent, as she ecstatically proclaims that facts no longer exist and that these so-called facts are attempts by our enemies to discredit our way of life; to somehow insinuate that our form of government is illegitimate.

I seem to recall, when an interstitial bout of clarity interrupts my fevered mind, that the Two Kaisers were elected unanimously by the people, and that there could be no disputing the outcome of the elections, because fraud and corruption had been eliminated, and voting counts could finally be believed. I desperately try to recall having voted, but am unsuccessful; I haven't seen a place where you can cast a vote, in years. I am afraid to ask anyone else if they remember

such things because there is a place, it is rumored, that is worse than the one to which I have been remanded. I fear that if I ask too many questions I will be sent to this other place which is spoken of only in whispers; it is named the “gulag” in our hybrid language of Anglorussian. Here, in this place where I am, I undergo treatment to remove the pernicious alternative facts that come unbidden to my consciousness. I am told that when I am cleansed, I will once again be loved by the Kaisers; this is a comforting thought, I am led to believe.

The Kaisers have told us, as their voices blare down from screens located in all public places, the orange-tinted hair of the one, eyes bulging from his sockets, mouth pursed as if to deliver a kiss (an involuntary thought comes flashing through my consciousness “who was Judas?”) and the impassive, smug face of the other with his blue penetrating eyes, and his leering form shirt-less on the screen, that the armies will leave our cities and towns once all thoughts of prior times have been eradicated from our collective memories.

The pronouncements of the Kaisers are always filmed to preserve their thoughts for posterity. Today, another filming has begun, another New Testament to be delivered to the adoring crowds. As the camera pulls back to impress upon the onlookers the magnificence of the event, a magnificence like some gleaming glass and marble tower rising majestically into the sky, the Minister of Information kneels before the orange-haired one and grovels at his feet chanting “we always intend to tell the truth, as it is believed and oracularly proclaimed by our great Kaisers.”

Resistance is futile; their thought police are everywhere. Their spies are everywhere. They are embedded in every device, every piece of fine-tuned machinery, tiny cameras in the strangest places and if they catch you, you will be placed on the large screens that line every

public place and be exposed for the corrupt, pitiful, contaminated thing that you are. And the crowds will laugh at you for being so weak, so very weak.

How do they know what we think? How can they tell when we disobey? It makes no difference, I have abandoned all hope since I entered here, in this place where I am kept. It is warm here, and there is barbed-wire that surrounds this stockade. The rats, which my jailers say are symbols of the pestilence that the unrepentant visit on society, scamper along the ground and infiltrate every corner of my cell. I used to fear the rats; now, when no jailers are present, I kill and eat them to supplement the rancid bits of food that are thrown at me by the strong, protective, armed guards. Perhaps they are right: I am unclean and the rats that I ingest inject their poison into me, causing my mind to become contaminated, filthy, like some power-mad person attempting to cleanse himself with fetid showers.

In the distance, there is a sign that looms overhead, its red-painted words, like the blood of forgotten patriots in the undiscovered country of my hallucinatory dreams, says "The Kaisers' Love Will Set You Free." There is another sign, a relic of some pre-historic time, that says in fading letters "Guantanamo." When I gaze at the signs, I sometimes think of that night when the dream came; the dream that resulted in my incarceration. I can't recall all the details of that lurid dream, but I remember walking into a wood, feeling like I was lost, and gazing into a Stygian blackness where no hope remained. I recall that I woke up screaming: "We hold these truths to be self-evident;" as tears streamed down my face. I no longer know what the words mean.

I long for death, but it will not come. I long for release, but it will not come. I long for whatever existed before that fateful January day; but as I am reminded by the Kaisers and the Minister of Information, there was nothing before the Kaisers assumed office. For all of us here

in this place, and in Amerirussia at large, we have been indoctrinated to the reality that the world started on that January day, and history began at that time.

I lean back in my cell, waiting for the guards to come and take me to my well-deserved rounds of waterboarding and shock therapy. Another involuntary phrase enters my consciousness “O brave new world that has such people in it.” I am not sure whether I should be happy or sad. I sit, I wait: as blackness engulfs my cell and I hear the footsteps of my torturers, I know I deserve the punishments that I am about to receive, that my trespasses against the state will never be forgiven, so help me Kaisers, amen.

Peter J Ponzio