

TALES OF DREADED TOMORROWS

FIVE CLASSIC STORIES OF
DYSTOPIAN FUTURES

.....

We ↪ Yevgeny Ivanovich Zamyatin

Erewhon ↪ Samuel Butler

The Coming Race ↪ Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The Land Of Darkness ↪ Margaret Oliphant

The Machine Stops ↪ E. M. Forster



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WE

EVGENII
IVANOVICH
ZAMIATIN

RECORD ONE

An Announcement

The Wisest of Lines

A Poem

This is merely a copy, word by word, of what was published this morning in the State newspaper:

“In another hundred and twenty days the building of the *Integral* will be completed. The great historic hour is near, when the first *Integral* will rise into the limitless space of the universe. A thousand years ago your heroic ancestors subjected the whole earth to the power of the United State. A still more glorious task is before you,—the integration of the indefinite equation of the Cosmos by the use of the glass, electric, fire-breathing *Integral*. Your mission is to subjugate to the grateful yoke of reason the unknown beings who live on other planets, and who are perhaps still in the primitive state of freedom. If they will not understand that we are bringing them a mathematically faultless happiness, our duty will be to force them to be happy. But before we take up arms, we shall try the power of words.

“In the name of The Well-Doer, the following is announced herewith to all Numbers of the United State:

“Whoever feels capable must consider it his duty to write treatises, poems, manifestoes, odes and other compositions on the greatness and the beauty of the United State.

“This will be the first load which the *Integral* will carry.

“Long live the United State! Long live the Numbers!! Long live the Well-Doer!!!”

I feel my cheeks are burning as I write this. To integrate the colossal, universal equation! To unbend the wild curve, to straighten it out to a tangent—to a straight line! For the United State is a straight line, a great, divine, precise, wise line, the wisest of lines!

I, D-503, the builder of the *Integral*, I am only one of the many mathematicians of the United State. My pen, which is accustomed to figures,

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is unable to express the march and rhythm of consonance; therefore I shall try to record only the things I see, the things I think, or to be more exact, the things we think. Yes, we; that is exactly what I mean, and “We” shall, therefore, be the title of my records. But this will only be a derivative of our life,—of our mathematical, perfect life in the United State. If this be so, will not this derivative be a poem in itself, despite my limitations? It will. I believe, I know it.

I feel my cheeks are burning as I write this. I feel something similar to what a woman probably feels when for the first time she senses within herself the pulse of a tiny, blind, human being. It is I, and at the same time it is not I. And for many long months it will be necessary to feed it with my life, with my blood, and then with a pain at my heart, to tear it from myself and lay it at the feet of the United State.

Yet I am ready, as everyone, or nearly everyone of us, is. I am ready.

RECORD TWO

Ballet

Square Harmony

X

Spring. From behind the Green Wall from some unknown plains the wind brings to us the yellow honeyed pollen of flowers. One's lips are dry from this sweet dust. Every moment one passes one's tongue over them. Probably, all women whom I meet in the street (and men certainly also), have today sweet lips. This disturbs somewhat my logical thinking. But the sky! The sky is blue. Its limpidness is not marred by a single cloud. (How primitive was the taste of the ancients, since their poets were always inspired by these senseless, formless, stupidly rushing accumulations of steam!) I love, I am sure it will not be an error if I say we love, only such a sky—a sterile, faultless sky. On such days the whole universe seems to be moulded of the same eternal glass, like the Green Wall, and like all our buildings. On such days one sees into the very blue depth of things. One sees their wonderful equations, hitherto unknown. One sees them in everything, even in the most ordinary everyday things.

Here is an example: this morning I was on the dock where the Integral is being built, and I saw the lathes; blindly, with abandon, the balls of the regulators were rotating; the cranks were swinging from side to side with a glimmer; the working-beam proudly swung its shoulder; and the mechanical chisels were dancing to the melody of an unheard Tarantella. I suddenly perceived all the music, all the beauty, of this colossal, of this mechanical ballet, illumined by light blue rays of sunshine. Then the thought came: why beautiful? Why is a dance beautiful? Answer: because it is an unfree movement. Because the deep meaning of the dance is contained in its absolute, ecstatic submission, in the ideal non-freedom. If it is true that our ancestors would abandon themselves in dancing at the most inspired moments of their lives (religious mysteries, military parades) then it means only one thing: the instinct of non-freedom has been characteristic of human

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nature from ancient times, and we in our life of today, we are only consciously—

I was interrupted. The switchboard clicked. I raised my eyes,—O-90, of course! In half a minute she herself will be here to take me for the walk.

Dear O—! She always seems to me to look like her name, O—. She is approximately ten centimeters shorter than the required Maternal Norm. Therefore she appears all round; the rose-colored O of her lips is open to meet every word of mine. She has a round soft dimple on her wrist. Children have such dimples. As she came in, the logical fly-wheel was still buzzing in my head, and following its inertia, I began to tell her about my new formula which embraced the machines and the dancers and all of us.

“Wonderful, isn’t it!” I asked.

“Yes, wonderful ... Spring!” she replied, with a rosy smile.

You see? Spring! She talks about Spring! Females!... I became silent.

We were down in the street. The avenue was crowded. On days when the weather is so beautiful the afternoon personal hour is usually the hour of the supplementary walk. As always the big Musical Tower was playing with all its pipes, the March of the United State. The Numbers, hundreds, thousands of Numbers in light blue unifs (probably a derivative of the ancient uniform) with golden badges on the chest,—the State number of each one, male or female,—the Numbers were walking slowly, four abreast, exaltedly keeping the step. I, we four, were but one of the innumerable waves of a powerful torrent. To my left, O-90 (if one of my long-haired ancestors were writing this a thousand years ago, he would probably call her by that funny word, mine), to my right, two unknown Numbers, a she-Number and a he-Number.

Blue sky, tiny baby suns in each one of our badges; our faces are unclouded by the insanity of thoughts. Rays.... Do you picture it? Everything seems to be made of a kind of smiling, a ray-like matter. And the brass measures: Tra-ta-ta-tam.... Tra-ta-ta-tam ... stamping on the brassy steps which sparkle in the sun; with every step you rise higher and higher into the dizzy blue heights.... Then, as this morning on the dock, again I saw as if for the first time in my life, the impeccably straight streets, the glistening glass of the pavement, the divine parallelopipeds of the transparent dwellings, the square harmony of the grayish-blue rows of Numbers. And it seemed to me that not past generations, but I myself, had won a victory over the old god and the old life, that I myself had created all this. I felt like a tower: I was afraid to move my elbow, lest the walls, the cupola and the machines should fall to pieces.

Then without warning—a jump through centuries: I remembered (apparently through an association by contrast) a picture in the museum, a picture of an avenue of the twentieth century, a thundering many-colored

WE

confusion of men, wheels, animals, bill-boards, trees, colors, and birds.... They say all this once actually existed!

It seemed to me so incredible, so absurd, that I lost control of myself and laughed aloud. A laugh, as if an echo of mine, reached my ear from the right. I turned. I saw white, very white, sharp teeth, and an unfamiliar female face.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but you looked about you like an inspired mythological god on the seventh day of creation. You look as though you are sure that I, too, was created by you, by no one but you. It is very flattering."

All this without a smile, even with a certain degree of respect—(she may know that I am the builder of the Integral). In her eyes nevertheless, in her brows, there was a strange irritating X, and I was unable to grasp it, to find an arithmetical expression for it. Somehow I was confused; with a somewhat hazy mind, I tried logically to motivate my laughter.

"It was absolutely clear that this contrast, this impassable abyss, between the things of today and of years ago—"

"But why impassable?" (What bright, sharp teeth!) "One might throw a bridge over that abyss. Please imagine: a drum battalion, rows,—all this existed before and consequently—"

"Oh, yes, it is clear," I exclaimed.

It was a remarkable intersection of thoughts. She said almost in the same words the things I wrote down before the walk! Do you understand? Even the thoughts! It is because nobody is one, but one of. We are all so much alike—

"Are you sure?" I noticed her brows which rose to the temples in an acute angle,—like the sharp corners of an X. Again I was confused, casting a glance to the right, then to the left. To my right—she, slender, abrupt, resistantly flexible like a whip, I-330 (I saw her number now). To my left, O-, totally different, made all of circles with a child-like dimple on her wrist; and at the very end of our row, an unknown he-Number, double-curved like the letter S. We were all so different from one another....

The one to my right, I-330, apparently caught my confused eye, for she said with a sigh, "Yes, alas!"

I don't deny that this exclamation was quite in place, but again there was something in her face or in her voice....

With an abruptness unusual for me, I said, "Why 'alas'? Science is developing and if not now, then within fifty or one hundred years—"

"Even the noses will—"

"Yes, noses!" This time I almost shouted, "Since there is still a reason, no matter what, for envy.... Since my nose is button-like and someone else's is—"

"Well your nose is rather classic, as they would say in the ancient days, although your hands—No, no, show me your hands!"

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I hate to have anyone look at my hands; they are covered with long hair,—a stupid atavism. I stretched out my hand and said as indifferently as I could, “Ape-like.”

She glanced at my hand, then at my face.

“No, a very curious harmony.”

She weighed me with her eyes as though with scales. The little horns again appeared at the corners of her brows.

“He is registered in my name,” exclaimed O-90 with a rosy smile.

I made a grimace. Strictly speaking, she was out of order. This dear O-, how shall I say it? the speed of her tongue is not correctly calculated; the speed per second of her tongue should be slightly less than the speed per second of her thoughts,—at any rate not the reverse.

At the end of the avenue the big bell of the Accumulating Tower resounded seventeen. The personal hour was at an end. I-330 was leaving us with that S-like he-Number. He has such a respectable, and I noticed then, such a familiar face. I must have met him somewhere, but where I could not remember. Upon leaving me I-330 said with the same X-like smile:

“Drop in day after tomorrow at auditorium 112.”

I shrugged my shoulders: “If I am assigned to the auditorium you just named—”

She, with a peculiar, incomprehensible certainty: “You will.”

The woman had upon me a disagreeable effect, like an irrational component of an equation which you cannot eliminate. I was glad to remain alone with dear O-, at least for a short while. Hand in hand with her, I passed four lines of avenues; at the next corner she went to the right, I to the left. O- timidly raised her round blue crystalline eyes:

“I would like so much to come to you today and pull down the curtains, especially today, right now....”

How funny she is. But what could I say to her? She was with me only yesterday and she knows as well as I that our next sexual day is day-after-tomorrow. It is merely another case in which her thoughts are too far ahead. It sometimes happens that the spark comes too early to the motor.

At parting I kissed her twice—no, I shall be exact, three times, on her wonderful blue eyes, such clear, unclouded eyes.