

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Morning Raid

by Nick Parnell

As was their custom they came for me at 3am. The point of deepest sleep, of least resistance. I was ripped from my forgotten dreams by the splintering implosion of the front door and the stamping of many feet on the hollow wooden stairs.

Four soldiers surrounded my bed. Emboldened by their black and red uniforms and heavy guns they were, nevertheless, young and nervous, looking to each other, breathing hard and not only from the exertion.

A moment of silence.

I looked at each one in turn and saw my fear reflected in the deep sorrows of their eyes. Then the leader strolled in, as if on a Sunday walk along the canal path beyond the woods. At his approach the uniforms stiffened, increasing the grip on their weapons. He was not in uniform but wore instead a pinstripe suit complete with waistcoat.

He stood casually, hands in pockets, and looked down at me as I sat on the edge of the bed. Despite my terror I looked directly into his eyes. I don't know what I was expecting to find or what I hoped to achieve. A connection perhaps or just to show my defiance, that I would not be cowed. But there was nothing there.

Sure he had eyes, they were green with upper lids that sagged and surmounted by dense, well defined black eyebrows. They were handsome eyes but they did not shine, there were no creases in the skin at their edges and there was no reflection of any kind. I might as well have been looking into the dark orbits of a skull.

Without any sign of his intention he quickly and gracefully extended his left arm out towards my head and in the same fluid movement grasped a handful of my hair and then whipped his arm back propelling me onto the floor at his feet. Despite the result the action itself was strangely without violence or anger. He took my place on the bed and looked down at me once again as I lay crumpled on the floor.

“Mr Smith, you know why we have come, do you not?” His tone was as hollow as a grey Monday morning.

“Is it about the TV licence?” I ventured a joke, unconsciously trying to evoke some emotion. One of the soldiers spluttered a laugh. The suit turned to its source.

“That is not necessary. Go and wait in the van with Gregor.”

The soldier started to shake and had to be pushed by a comrade towards the door.

“No Mr Smith, it is not about the TV licence. It is more serious than that. There will be no fine. Defying the Party carries the penalty of death.”

My mind cleared. I looked to each soldier, pleading into their eyes. The one behind the bed understood and instantly threw his gun to me.

No emotion was betrayed in the face of the green eyes as I aimed and pulled the trigger.

His body folded at the waist and, almost in slow motion, pitched forward to thump formlessly onto the dark wooden floor. I had solved one problem but it was replaced by another in the space of a dying breath. The gunshot would be heard by Gregor and others in the van and I figured I had about three minutes before they realised I may not be its victim. And the three remaining goons, who were now complicit in my crime, had their own dilemma. Getting rid of me looked like their best way out.

Maybe, I told myself, things are never as bad as they seem. But that was bullshit. Things are often as bad as they seem and sometimes they are worse. But I got lucky. The two young soldiers still pointing their guns at my head hesitated. They did not want to be there and didn't know what to do now that green eyes was no more. I aimed at the uniform who had thrown me his gun.

"OK, nobody shoot. Let's work this out. Nice and calmly. I reckon you've got some options." They listened.

"One, you shoot me now. Maybe one of you gets shot too. But you'll have some explaining to do, what with boss man here having got himself killed. You could turn me in, but that might also risk at least one of you getting dead. Or you could let me escape – but I guess you might find that difficult to explain to the Party." I could hear them thinking, like the ticking of a clock in an empty, silent house.

"There is one other possibility," I said slowly. They listened some more and decided to go for this last gambit.

*

I was led down the stairs, one in front and two behind me, out onto the dark, still street, dawn still over an hour away. The early March air was as cool as a marble floor and I found myself hoping for a clear warm spring. A large green van, an old Ford Transit, sat innocently twenty yards to the right.

They had told me that besides Gregor there was another interrogator in the van, a woman they referred to as The Bee. There would also be their errant colleague, no doubt sitting anxiously in the back, ruminating on his fate. Three interrogators would not have been sent just for me but my new friends could not tell me how many other Anti suspects were on the morning's list or who they might be. I needed to find out.