The Nerd's Tale & Punishment

by alphanocten

Summary

This is the Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao/Handmaid's Tale/Crime & Punishment fanfiction you never knew you wanted. Told from the perspective of Yunior, Oscar Wao takes one of his nighttime drives and encounters an escaping Offred and literally runs into Raskolnikov. They discuss the concept of escape.

Notes

This was originally written March 9th, 2012, for an AP Literature and Composition assignment (my senior year of high school).

I forgot to mention this one part of Oscar Wao’s life, after the Fall but before the End. He described it to me and it didn’t make any sense—and it still doesn’t, but apparently he learned some pretty deep stuff there. So, my boy, my ghetto nerd, had gotten into the habit of squeezing his Death Star-sized girth into his tiny little car and driving far, far away to just feel alive.

One night, as the sun dipped down beneath the Jersey smokestacks, leaving the sky as a big red stain, he didn’t think of turning back. A little past Cambridge, Mass., he sees this chick dart to the side of the road and into the trees. She was impossible to miss because she was dressed in red, really obvious stop sign red. Oscar, the curious nerd, stops his car right where he sees the chick, oozes out of the car like Jabba the Hutt, fixes his glasses, and inspects the woods.
“Do you need a ride? Do you need help?” says Oscar, always trying to be the hero. The chick appears out of the woods like Gandalf the White in the Forest of Fangorn with her hat nearly glowing. It wasn’t really a hat. It was one of those white pilgrim headdress things, only with wings. Some dress too. She could have been one of Emperor Palpatine’s guards (dressed to kill Oscar?). Oscar, totally ignoring any and all warning signs, waits for an answer. She doesn’t make eye contact. All Oscar can see is her hat.

“Yes, I would like to leave,” she says, in a voice like the dying Abin Sur. “Mayday.”

“Mayday? Is this like war or something? Just get in. You’re safe,” says Oscar. Despite the nerdy exterior, Oscar’s not the brightest when dealing with damsels in distress. Oscar wonders if she’s LARPing, which would explain the costume, but doesn’t ask.

They roll out and Oscar wants to get a good look at her face, but she’s looking at her own feet and the wings are hiding her face. “Where would you like to go…milady?”

“North.” (Monosyllabic, huh?)

“I see.” The awkwardness appears like a force field. Oscar, seemingly wanting to get himself killed (this wasn’t the first time), leans back on the headrest with his afro scraping the ceiling, and promptly nods off. WHAM! A body hits the windshield and a shriek sounds. Oscar’s eyes open and his foot stomps the brake. They both jerk forward in their seats and watch in horror as the body rolls down the hood of the car leaving streaks of red in its wake.

Oscar hurtles out of the car, gets down, and starts shaking the body by the shoulders. The girl follows him out noiselessly. Luckily, the guy on the ground isn’t dead as indicated by the slight wheeze. I guess he looked like hell before, since all his clothes look and smell like the Shredder’s dirty laundry, but now there’s a pretty sizable trail of blood running out of his mouth. At this point, Oscar’s palms are too sweaty to get a grip on the guy, and the blood is getting on his own clothes. None of this is helping the hyperventilation. At least Oscar’s wide awake.

“OhGodIalmostkilledaguy.”

The almost-dead guy coughs out, “Raskolnikov”. A Russian? How the hell did a Commie get here? And why was he crossing a road at night?

Oscar is very, very tempted to drop Raskol now. This guy was sketchy. He is already on a mission to deliver the red girl to the generic north, and with the accident, the cops should be after him. But Oscar, who simply cannot leave a fellow in need stands, and tugs Raskolnikov’s ragged body to the back seat, heaving and sweating the whole way.

“I..I know you need to get somewhere, but I need to take this guy to the hospital,” Oscar says, “I can’t just let this guy die here.”

“Maybe he wanted to die,” the girl (woman, actually, she’s a lot older than Oscar first thought) says.

That carbonite feeling goes through Oscar and reminds him of his Fall. “Please, get back in the car. I just want both of you to be safe.” Oscar blows out his cheeks. “Just tell me where to go.”

The woman glows & says, “All right then,” while using her red sleeve to wipe the blood off the car. The nerves hit Oscar again and he can barely start the car in fear of conking out at the wheel again and crashing.

“Forward,” she says, now in control. Well excuse me, Princess!
Accompanied by Raskolnikov’s wheeze, Oscar says, “What you said about him wanting to die…I sort of understand. But I couldn’t just leave him there. A little while earlier, I jumped off a bridge, but, this is crazy, a glowing mongoose saved me, and I didn’t die. Now, I’m not even sure why I jumped, or why I’m telling you this.” Oscar’s just been gutted here and all of his innards are spilling out.

“I think he wanted to escape, like me. You may not be from the Mayday Resistance, but I think I can trust you.” She gives a long pause, filling up the distance between the people in the car. “My name is Offred, and I am escaping from Gilead. The woman who had my name before me hanged herself.” There’s a painful sigh here.

“Oh. Should I help you escape faster?” says Oscar as he passes the speed limit. “I think I was trying to escape when I Fell. But it didn’t work. I realized later in the hospital that if I died for good, I would be hurting my family, and I wouldn’t achieve any of my goals…I wouldn’t have found love. It wouldn’t have made things better.”

“I think the old Offred escaped through death. I don’t know,” she says, letting her had droop. “Death is a lot better than doing nothing. She said, ‘Don’t let the bastards grind you down.’ She didn’t, to the last minute. I think she escaped by choosing her future instead of the Republic choosing it for her. The bastards didn’t get her.”

“So, why aren’t you dead?” Oscar blurts. He grips the steering wheel realizing that this is a very bad question to ask.

“I couldn’t kill myself,” Offred says, folding her hands in her lap, “Old Offred died, Moira fought, but I wasn’t bold or brave enough to escape on my own.”

“But you’re here.”

“I was lucky. Escape came to me. In a way, I chose not to die and instead believe in help. I think everyone has or needs a form of escape and this was mine.”

Raskolnikov shifts in the backseat and revives like Bane. The stains aren’t pretty. “Is this America?” he asks.

“Um, yeah,” Oscar says, “Do you need to go anywhere? I’m sorry I didn’t see you crossing the road.” Oscar thinks about his conversation with Offred. “Were you escaping?”

Raskolnikov shudders and looks feverish, his face seems so white, it’s practically alien. “No,” he says in broken English. “I was not trying to walk in front of you. You hit me.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” says Oscar.

Offred adds, “It looked like a suicide.”

“Suicide disgusts me.” Raskolnikov turns to look out the window.

“So, what were you doing?”

“Travelling,” he says.

“In the middle of the night, in the middle of the woods?” says Oscar.

Raskolnikov grunts in reply to this.
“So, why does suicide disgust you? It seems like a perfectly good way to end things, if you want them to end, that is. It’s just one decision out of many.” says Offred.

Raskolnikov doesn’t look pleased with Offred. “An extraordinary man may make any decision he wishes to as he is beyond the scrutiny of morals. But, death caused by one’s own hand surpasses even the power of the extraordinary man. It is atrocious, and through its pointlessness, it cannot be a form of escape. I would agree with you, boy. Oscar.” He emphasizes the “Oscar” with his accent.

“No ordinary man can really escape. There may be physical escape from prison or from poverty, but true escape from the past, from faults and memories, is impossible. A man can only live and find contentment.” This is pretty deep stuff from a nearly-dead man. “I have found this contentment through love.”

Oscar perks up. “Yeah, I feel the same way too.”

“Love is the only way to escape current suffering. A woman named Sonia told me this, and at first, I resisted, but now I see that she knew the truth all along. Escaping through death, it is not possible.”

Both Offred and Oscar shut up at this point. There’s nothing more to be said.

Oscar drops them off in Maine, heads back to Jersey, and the story ends. Or maybe I forgot what happened next. Oscar still wonders if they are all right.


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