



MISCONDUCT

I study the terra cotta floor, there's a thin channel, seems picked out, underlined, a black emphasis ... peering nearer, nearer - a line of ants, finding a boulevard: up and down, black ants are good; or better than the red.... I follow them - 'O no! The cat's been shot!': a bolt; her blood straight laid out for pilgrims' progress, a track across the floor...

'The people over there.' I say, 'I'll sort them out, call the police even....'

'Oh no,' Juha says, 'They're bad. Do nothing. Get another cat.'

'I loved that one,' I say, starting to cry.

'Accept - it's where you are,' she says: 'React as if you're here.'

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Dear Alice,

'I loved your riposte, critique. It caused me endless suffering. My categories - led me down a track that maybe ends in prejudices unfelt, unintended. You are right - they'd bring down immense humiliations. I threw my manuscript - not on the fire, there isn't one - into the furnace: my raging, rearranging mind! I admit - the geopolitics is stupid, risky too, believing our species end is man-made - that's a forzataura.

The atlas that I use - is historical, it gives excessive manpower to defunct empires. I'm out of kilter so.

All wrong! And you're right - I can't remember dates. Time baffles!

I'm happy with death, but bringing sexuality in - is slippery. Your arcane quotations - some are too wise, not on the web. In short, I question if I'm ready, shall ever be - to make a lifetime from these little squibs, impromptu stuff. Try something bigger, taking all my years ...'

'Not a category problem' - I write that on the envelope.

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Nor am I ready for Juha. Maybe the bolt was meant for her.

Maybe I should have done her in, stayed peaceful with the cat.

If you're bad, no one calls the cops. You're feared.

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'This place - you must adapt. It's an old old civilisation. Study, ingest, immerse ...' she says.

'I'm here from necessity,' I say: 'I'm in the iron maiden. Guilty; an apostate, a martyr, justified and culpable. Misconduct - that's the worst. You have to flee - you've been courageous; that comes to an end. Prudence tells you you're not safe, you're finished. Will they follow, seek you out - or just know where you are, where they can sequester you, lift from your burrow, your lair - when they want: when they find the last evidence: when they're hungry: when they want to hear the bang? Misconduct - the last blot, the one anyone can do, the banality. Breaking a rule, spraining a footnote. That's misconduct: - the rest is resistance, principle, and conscience. I'm not in a place, this place, now: - it's

the place that you can't leave, ever, can't go back from ...'

'I know,' says Juha: 'You've ended up for nothing, in nowhere. The only thing that's left for you - is being no one. You chose a public place for work back there, so when they throw you out, first they tell the cops... the serious ones, ones who already know.'

'There's still the law back there,' I say: 'It pays them, to keep that on. I could be in jail ... decades. Decays. 'Incitement and conspiracy. A well-known friend of"

'You're not patriotic ... ' Juha says: 'Here, they are. Everywhere is countries still. When there's only one country, it will be far far worse.'

'So, you don't think I'm serious, face a serious penalty?' I ask.

'Your friends are serious,' she says: 'You aren't. You think. That takes you anywhere, but - it isn't interesting, not what you do. Ask yourself 'why?' 'Why am I ignored?'"

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'You seem different, Juha,' I say.

'I changed the colour of my eyes,' she says: 'It should help you too. Fitting in - seeming to. It saves your life.'

'And do things look different?' I ask.

'Of course,' she says: 'Science makes the change, but the gaze, the long gaze - yes, that is different.'

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Maybe it's premature. Running away before you're hit, before you're persecuted - even if by then, it is too late. Don't take your gun up to the hills - you've made yourself a target, don't start armed conflict without arms, lots of

them, and friends who cheat you, who you don't trust

Self-exile. Self-protection. Running scared. You have to write your own descriptions, and hope they're read The manual says at first - 'street battles'. Well, those still proceed - they don't go well, they cost - your side. Then others muscle in

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'Everyone has countries they can't go to,' Juha says: 'Lots they wouldn't want. Some - they've been thrown out, or they escape. It's nothing special, it's chess. Once you're safe - you're quite irrelevant - a poor sod, looking for work, or looking for cash, at least. Believe me, it's no big deal, and if you have some persecuted friends - they're an awful bore, even worse than you. People!

'Going to town, leaving you to marinate here - it's liberation,' she says, and does a twirl, and claps her hands.

'You have a lover there,' I say: 'In town - where it's all different.'

'New life!' she says: 'That's something! In the town, they don't ask me for a document. And someone who loves me? Wouldn't that be great, and yet you would begrudge?'

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'A judgement - you must sign,' says the guy who wears a kind of uniform.

'Expelled,' says Juha: 'That isn't good. They don't say why, but of course you know. You've all the reasons, unreasons too ... It's normal, absolutely so. No drama, please, no melodrama ... It doesn't mention me - it leaves me my free choice. That's pretty good, you know ... '

'I'll take Jewel up to the copse,' I say, putting her in a plastic bag.

'I'll see if Mirko can come, advise you.' Juha says: 'Dig with this knife - be very very careful.'

The ground's like steel. I have to build a bower, a pyre, a pyramid. It's difficult - I lay her in the bag on top. There's nothing new to say: she was wilful, not good at all. The best.

Eagles and millipedes, looking for carrion. Not while I'm here

I take her out the bag.

'Expelled' - an owl's pellet.

We leave our dead out for the birds - they feed the eagles, who'd go extinct in these millennia of dearth and suffering, but for the funerals ... and then perhaps Ahura Mazda comes, a messiah, andfor those around, it will be good, be very very good. It's another trick, of course, we'll be long gone ... or else there is no trick - that's it. The truth.

This grove - is not the place I'd choose - packets and pieces, scattered round, not enchanted, no place to leave a person in the middle of twelve thousand years of strife and emptiness.

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Mirko says, 'Expelled. That's good. You must resist, ignore. Are you a liberal? Here to find the celebrated decency they'd proscribed back there? Now you know ... Knowing - is always better, so they say. It trumps experience - experience is just fodder, knowing is live oysters.

'Or are you a true revolutionary? Ready to resist? You know you'll have to execute the traitors - they're buried underneath the airport tarmac, so every time you fly off, to festivities and flattery, you feel the bump - that's you, that's your memorial.'

'I'm all those things,' I say: 'Solitary, cruel, just, and sentimental. Frightened too. If I'm the traitor, I accept ... It always happens, I'll be just a bump ...'

'Don't slide away,' says Mirko, grabbing me: 'Don't run off to history - that's bracken, a thicket of deep scratches.'

'You must have a show. Be a celebrity, stand for something, at least for yourself. Make an appearance, be a vindictive ghost, an ever-present presence. Win sympathy and cause embarrassment. Justice and freedom - don't forget! Live with a collective of fierce friends. You're nothing; you're an idiot, like Juha says, if you're anonymous. Write your script and play your part!'

'Yes, Mirko, I know all that - but concretely' I say.

'Oh, the concrete!' he says: 'It's vital. For the runway too. In your place - I would disappear.'

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'The food is good,' says Mirko, eating slow - 'Only.... They don't gnaw the roots, like you - they're pounded and then seethed. It makes them edible.'

'Fuck you!' Juha says, laughing: 'The time to tell was before we got it wrong.'

'Remember,' Mirko says to me, 'A gang can rule if one in three consents. It has the money from the other two: - that one in three does very well You might go back, and risk The one in three who lives so well - they'd teeter if it seemed life for the rest was harsh and undeserved ...and if their cash was teetering as well...'

'I don't believe it, Mirko - they can't calculate,' I say: 'Besides, people aren't tender, not with anyone. They don't

observe what happens or what may ... I write about quite something else, the justice, feeling free, all that.....'

'It's just a test, I'm sure,' says Juha, tired of both of us: 'He won't go back, won't take the risk. Count on him, Mirko, on his loyalty, if that is what it is'

'He should decide,' says Mirko, leaving, gesturing up, towards the window of the neighbours with the bow 'Is it justice, or freedom, that he's interested in ... or in their contradictions? We're warriors, no doubt we need his guidance - if he's a warrior too'

'Where's the contradiction? What is contradiction? That's what we write about, Mirko, when I'm not polishing my greaves,' I say: 'It's quite complicated, and I don't really have the tools - I get the criticisms, my life's work is dealing with them'

'That's been no use,' says Juha, when he's gone: 'He wants you to take responsibility, that's all.'

'I'm not in a position to do that,' I say, 'Not for anything...'

'When there's fascism all over - where do you go? What do you do? What are you?' she asks.

'Probably this,' I say: 'What you said. No one, nowhere. A warrior in waiting. Being on a world - it doesn't matter. Really - you're in a forest, edible. There's others smaller and more edible you eat, and larger, who eat you. That's all - fascism's just a little extra deal. Quicker, bigger, longer. It all depends on categories - which am I in? What old stomping boots will they use this time? The iron heel, with rubber insets?'

'The guys supposed to be for me, and on my side - I didn't trust them. I was right - they weren't my friends, and

theirs was not my side. The compromises: - don't make them, they don't work.'

'You're an idiot,' Juha says: 'You don't watch your enemies - they're grotesque, so you think precaution is a waste of time. You'll end like Jewel - maybe it's what you want.'

'I left,' I say: 'You, Juha - you didn't want.'

'I'd stick it out,' she says: 'No one wants to massacre somebody like me... or likes living in a suitcase where there's only you, Matti.'

'There's always people who chose to leave,' I say, 'They're known forever as the conscience - in exile. And when the regime falls - they go back, and they're the restoration - the bourgeois order, meek, mild, prolific'

'I don't want that - absolutely not. There'll be massacres, some invisible - I know, I'm telling you, Juha ...'

'I bought a rabbit,' Juha says, 'The market's full of them.'

'I'm all for rabbits,' I say, 'They know what it's about, and don't hesitate and fiddle like a cat. But - how do we stop it burrowing, running off?'

'It won't,' she says: 'It's dead - they killed it for me. That's a favour - usually it's up to you. We can't digest the local food - it's acid.'

'I'm something new,' I say, 'A new species. I don't eat. My manifesto's new as well.'

'Good,' she says, 'You work on evolution - and I'll give the neighbours what I can't pig down: - they'll think we roast the cat. My species - is tough, unapologetic. I'm legion. But they'll only find one specimen of you.'

'I don't fit with you, Juha,' I say: 'You'll say it's patriarchy ...'

'O yes,' she says: 'Your thinking's patriarchal - you are not. But you'll turn

into something else incongruous ...
Matriarchal ...'

'It's the faces,' I say, 'The cruelty.
The rabbit-sellers. They're wealthy here,
the peasants live a hundred years - at
harvest time they take a cruise, bring in
a gang of slaves, a coffie, *kafilah* - to do
the work. They're not like us, Juha, they
have books at home, listen to Baltic
singing eat healthy, exercise
...Petition, vote, save money ...'

'Yes,' she says, 'The rabbit was real
tasty - I'm sure it ate well, exercised.
They rear them with a song - *Non
m'affligge il tormento di morte.*'

'Pigs satisfied who quote Socrates,' I
say.

We understand each other; she laughs
and I despair.

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