

X-Novo

By Ken Hagdal
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Text of the Tables of the Gender Laws borrowed from Deborah Tannen's "Genderlect Styles"

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“La det bli kjent at vårt
Lys og mørke er byttet
For tragediens jakt
Som i mann så i ulv
Som jeggeren og byttet”
Helheim – Dualitet Og Ulver

“Behold the new messiah, arising from the wound.
In rags of execution, freedom is consumed”
Virgin Steele – Life Among the Ruins

“Until the dawn lifts
Only stare into the darkness
The days will blur
The darkest days,
days will seem so clear”
Paradise Lost – To the Darkness

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To Whomever is Reading This,

For some reason, Goddess, in her mysterious ways, has enabled you to unearth my journal from the soil of this sun-battered desert. Hopefully, it will allow you, or one of your thinkers, to draw a moral from the events it recounts. There has to be one. There always is when one flips through the darkest pages of Humankind's history. I would just be at a loss to tell you what ours was. Too involved, and still too fresh, I guess.

The seminal idea for these pages came to me when working on the speech for our Revolution's first anniversary. Back then, some of our sisters were going down the slippery slope and I thought it would help re-ground them if I addressed you, one of our remote descendants; an audience who may have forgotten the reason for our struggle or wasn't feeling directly concerned by it. An audience who, until recently, was assumed to be female. If this isn't the case, I can understand that you may find my standpoint occasionally disturbing, but should you take it in stride, I also want to believe you could benefit from some of my insights into your gender's quirks here and there.

The other possible ground for reproach is having chosen the form of a personal journal, to have aggregated to objective, historical, facts all my thoughts and comments, as well as personal events, and so, in the most ingenuous manner. In response to these misgivings, I would like to ask: what priceless data would we have gained from a probe inside Hitler's mind as he was waiting on a reply from the Vienna Arts Academy, or Napoleon's as he was sitting beneath a chestnut tree on his twentieth birthday, watching French troops crush his people's will into submission? Wouldn't we now have an inkling of what laid the groundwork for mass bloodshed?

Of course, our endgame caused far fewer casualties as you must know. What I'm alluding to is this failure to break the cycle of the rise and fall of civilizations. The eeriest part is some of history's pundits had brought us an acute knowledge of the symptoms, especially the likes of Machiavelli and Gibbons.

Maybe that was it... We might have been distracted by the glare on the surface and missed some dark ooze festering deep within; the roots of it all. Something we might even have nurtured through our good intentions... Someone should dig that out.

Lisa Fenrich,
Secretary of Information of the USA (07/20!9-08/15/20*0)

Disclaimer: Years, decades, or centuries after the events, you might have heard about me in official history in a non-flattering manner. In my defense, I want to bring to your attention that the purpose of mass media in my time, which I suppose to be your historians' main source, wasn't exactly to offer the most accurate information. I know; I had been in charge of them long enough. But then again, there might be certain patterns I might not want to see, unconsciously. I will leave you free to form your own opinion. My only request is that you do so after acquainting yourself with my own version to its full extent. As to the truthfulness of my account, all I can point out is it was written for neither a prince nor an honorary title. For all I know, it may never be more than a speech to maggots...

Day One

The Politics of Ecstasy

Mina skimmed the printout.

"You did a really good job, Lisa," she finally remarked.

I couldn't help peeking at the twirling pages from my side of her desk. Pink highlight was for a nod. Blue, for a frown... So far, so pink.

"That was a very sound approach; creative, too," she continued. "It reminds us of all the fundamentals without coming off preachy."

There was a slight mismatch in her tone. Something that pervaded her gestures. An air of mechanism, of detachment. And from yet deeper, its root strained the lines the years had etched around her eyes. Glossless, they remained riveted on the speech, as if loaded with a weight too heavy to bear.

Behind her, hanging on the wall with majestic dignity, Big Sister was looking after us. The artist rendition of her at any rate, since unfortunately we had found no photograph that depicted her in a fashion worthy of her sanctity. In this picture, duplicated in every office of the Complex, she was clad in typical nun habit, with that skin-tight white coif which imprisoned her neck and all of her head except the face under a black, hood-like, veil. She had always refused to give it up; as a reminder of the old system's

yoke.

Her head tilted gently to one side, one end of the dog leash in a tender embrace around her neck and the other tied around her wardrobe's rail. Just how her body was found. The Sacred Scrolls she had discovered were firmly gripped in her left hand while the right one dangled, palm wide open, like an invitation to commune. Her face looked so young and peaceful despite her sixty-two springs, as though her newborn faith had rejuvenated her.

It was tough looking straight at her in these moments. I knew the rough edges of the speech would be smoothed out, it's why I was here, but part of me still felt nervous for not getting it *right* on first draft. Because we knew I did.

Pages stopped flipping. Mina's eyes descended on a paragraph circled with a pink stroke.

"Just out of curiosity, when you said,..."

She leaned on her elbows and read in a steady monotone: "Back in men's day, you would open a newspaper and had to go through pages and pages on finance, the economy, sports results, weather forecast, and celebrity gossip before you could at last spot the thumbnail about one of them arrested for raping and murdering one of our sisters. The most popular means of disposing of her were: strangling, throat cutting, skull smashing with a stone, or mere fist for the self-indulgent, before burying her in a trash bag or charred with gasoline... Two pages before that, you could read a journalist bawling his heart out across four columns over one of their champions spraining his ankle."

She looked up.

"It was idiomatic or an actual case?"

"Yes, it was. I mean, it did happen."

She stared at me, or to me, a moment and nodded.

"Another thing,..."

She turned two pages. There was the blue stain.

"Why did you feel the need for..."

She read: "Not all men were like that, though. Some of them respected us. There were even a few you could have an intellec-

tually-stimulating conversation with every now and then."

She looked up, waited.

"Well, I've noticed that coming across as objective can have a jolting effect on the person you're trying to convince."

She hummed lengthily, glanced at her speech.

"Lisa, under different circumstances, I would have commended your commitment to the truth... but at the present time, I'm extremely concerned about any level of granularity below self-imposing trends."

"Alright. Delete it."

"But, you understand, right? There's nothing wrong with it as it is. I just wouldn't like for our stray sisters to grasp at anything that might further confuse them... The rest was honestly a joy to read."

"I'm fine."

She offered a conventional smile, reached for her companion whiteout bottle and unscrewed its cap with carefree abandon. The squeak of the dried fluid sent a shiver up and down my spine.

I looked away.

"I'm going to get going if I'm no longer needed."

"Hold on," she curtly ordered as the tip of the brush finished its job.

The cap put away, she picked up her phone, dialed an unfamiliar tune.

"Can we drop in now?" she asked.

Thanking whoever was on the other end, she hung up and rose from her chair.

"Come along," she said.