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Signs of the Times

Liudmyla Tymoshenko

Translated by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

On 1 February 2022, my friend Katya Penkova's kitty-cat Margosha was stolen. We once had a neighbor, Granny Maria, who lived in apartment No. 3, had eight cats, and smelled terribly of cat urine. Maria's cats were an unsightly bunch, but Maria loved them. Often, sitting on a bench near the house, she would scratch their fur, and crush fleas with her finger nails before wiping her hands on her apron. Their names were quite simple - Meow, Whitey, Blackey, Scratchy, One-Eye, No Tail, Little Meow, and so forth. Their quantity never changed, although there was a strict rotation. The ones with tails died in battles, fell under the wheels of cars, were ripped apart by stray dogs, and were bitten by rats. But Meow-Whitey-Scratchy gave birth to kittens a couple of times a year, so there were no negative statistical trends. Every time one of these residents of apartment No. 3 disappeared, Maria wailed for the whole street to hear: "My One-Eye (No Tail, Blackey) is gone! Some bastard stole her, she was so beautiful." We comforted her. "Yes," we said, "She was beautiful." And we would laugh to ourselves, because who the fuck needed her One-Eye? Who, in our day and age, needs to steal cats on the street?

Katya Penkova's Margosha was 14 years old. She needed constant care and regular visits to the vet. Her eyes were bad, she had kidney problems, she was old and gray. If Margosha had just disappeared, Katya would have thought her kitty had gone on to seek a better place to climb a rainbow on her way to the best of all cat worlds.

But no. Surveillance cameras inside the house and yard showed that citizens Aleksandr Kasianenko and his cohabitant Anastasiia, at 6 a.m. on 1 February 2022, took Margosha and, getting into a blue Mercedes with license plates AR 969511, disappeared in an unknown direction. They rented an apartment in this building, so the landlords had copies of their passports. Katya published the data of these two on Facebook, as well as video recordings from cameras, and their profiles in social networks. Their profiles soon disappeared, along with their phone numbers on all messengers - Messenger, WhatsUp, Viber, and Telegram too. No car with such license plates could be found. No one saw Aleksandr Kasianenko or his cohabitant Anastasiia again. To say nothing of kitty-cat Margosha.

I watch the video of a thirty-year-old woman walking down the stairs, passing by the elevator, an old cat resting on her bosom. I watch the video of the same woman leaving the entrance, and heading toward a Mercedes with license plates AR 969511. A man of thirty or thirty-five is waiting for her there. He opens the trunk, and shifts something around. The woman with a cat on her bosom gets into a car. The man then sits behind the wheel. The car drives off.

In February 2022 the laws of logic ceased to function. It finally became clear that the notion of the “eyewitness,” as in proof of facts, died irreversibly. It disappeared into space and time, ceased its existence, disappeared into thin air. From now on, anyone can do anything in full sight of everyone and will never have to answer for it. You can shoot down a Boeing 777, burn down a house filled with people, or rape an eight month-old child with a spoon. The absurdity of abducting old Margosha, who was needed by no one but Katya Penkova, loved by none but Katya Penkova, is just one of those signs of the time that lead us into a maelstrom with its bottom blown out.