

The Muslin Curtains

(Utopia Out of Dystopia I)

Juhan Puhm

“Not everything that happened was planned. It was all more of a happy accident, if you can call it that.”

“I imagine the question really is, how much of everything that happened, did you actually plan?”

“We were of course always planning things, most definitely we planned things, that was what we did, that was our job. But really, we had no plans as to what happened. We simply piggybacked on the circumstances, and those circumstances were handed to us on a silver platter.

“In the end we didn’t do anything at all. That is the point. That is the irony. It all kind of perfectly happened, all by itself.”

The very old man, sitting in a chair, in a very run down and dilapidated second floor room, paused to catch his breath. His mind clear as a bell, living in a body ravaged by time. The breeze blew the ragged and old muslin curtains, and pulled them out of the open window. The heat was stifling. The wide, rundown thoroughfare, below the old, cracked, open window was deserted. Shop upon shop open, empty, abandoned to the elements.

“Do you have no guilt, no remorse?” the youngish thin man with patchy stubble asked.

“No, I have no guilt, no remorse. I did what needed to be done. I saved the planet, it is that simple. Plainly put,” the old man coughed, “I saved the human race. I saved the human race from itself.”

“You think?”

“Yes I think, I know. There should be a statue of me on every street corner. Children in schools being taught what salvation and sacrifice mean.” The old man with what strength he still had, became mildly aggravated and animated.

“Well, it certainly changed the course of history.”

“Well hopefully it changed the course of humanity. We are still here aren’t we? We aren’t any worse for wear. We don’t have a third arm growing out of our backs or purple eyes. We are almost exactly the same now, as we were back then.”

“Well, accept there are a lot fewer of us now.”

“And that’s a bad thing? Come on man, where are your brains? Have you not thought any of this through?”

“Well, a lot of people died. I guess they will hold that simple fact against you.”

“I didn’t kill a single soul, or maybe almost not a single soul.”

“Well, initially eight million people died, that’s more than a single soul,” the young man countered.

“In the scheme of things that is nothing compared to the tens and hundreds of millions that have died in plagues and epidemics through the ages,” replied the old man. “And why are you blaming me for that? I had little or nothing to do with that at all. Nothing directly anyways.

“Yes, we funded the lab, like we funded hundreds of labs across the world. That one quack doc became infected, deliberately or not, and walked out and infected everybody he came into contact with, how can I even remotely be held responsible for that?”

“But you were involved after that?” asked the young man.

“Of course I was involved after that!” the old man exploded, choking on his saliva. “Please, pass me some water, please,” the old man gasped.

Out of the oxidized metal container the young man poured some water into a cloudy glass and carefully handed it to the old man, making sure he had a grasp on it before letting the glass go. The old man drank messily and noisily, spilling down the front of his worn and tattered bathrobe.

“Goddamn piss water as warm as blazes. Where the hell’s the electricity, where the hell’s the refrigerator, where the hell’s the damn petrol for the generator? What the hell, what’s the point, the generator doesn’t work anymore anyways. Where the hell is everybody?”

“Yes, that is a good question,” the young man answered ironically, “yup where is everybody? Where *has* everybody gone?”

“Aw shutup. What was I saying?” the old man snapped angrily.

“You were going to talk about your involvement as the virus was spreading across the globe.”

“I had nothing to do with that. I had nothing to do with the eight million people who died. Back then, more people than that died every couple of months from natural causes. Eight million, ten million, twenty million, that’s a drop in the bucket.

“Now eight billion, ten billion smelly dirty people, swarming across the face of the earth, eating out of each other’s armpits, now that’s disgusting, that’s a problem, that’s the real virus,” the

old man said, getting more and more agitated, “that is the real plague on this planet, good riddance to it.”

“Well, that’s for sure now,” spoke the young man facetiously, as he chuckled and rapidly exhaled out of his nose.

“You don’t really understand do you?”

“Well, I understand that a virus spread across the world killing a lot of people, but I really don’t understand the exact details of what happened after that.”

“Eight million is not a lot of people,” coughed the old man. “It would have been better if it took out ten or a hundred times, or a thousand times more people.

“Everyone thinks they are so special and unique. Do you ever listen to people talk? They all talk the same. They all say the same things; ‘and I was thinking that we could’ or ‘do you understand what I am saying’ or ‘does that make sense to you?’.

“We aren’t unique, hardly a one of us. We are all programmed minions, eat, sleep, have sex, think we are special and one of a kind. We are no different than ants in a colony.”

“You can’t really believe that, what about yourself?”

“Look,” said the old man getting more and more excited, “just because I can see out these eyes myself and have my own consciousness, so what? So does everybody.

“We are ruled by the chemicals that flow through our system. We think we have free will, what a joke. We are free to do exactly what our bodies urge us to do, no more. And really, what is it all about?”

“Okay calm down”

“What is it all about, what is it always all about? I’ll tell you. It’s always about sex. It’s all about sex. But, what is *that* really all about? Nothing more than the chemicals in our bodies directing us to reproduce, and reproduce more, and reproduce until the planet is a festering cess pool. And what do we end up with? Ten billion people....”

“Eight billion”

“Ten billion, eight billion, it doesn’t matter, it’s all the same, eating and destroying everything in their path, trees, wildlife, gorillas, you name it. It was all being destroyed before our eyes. And why? Because we couldn’t keep the population even remotely under control.”

The old man paused for a moment. “So maybe I played God a little.”

"A little?" replied the young man, with a slight undertone of incredulity.

"I am glad. What was set out to be done was done, and it didn't harm a single soul."

"What do you mean 'didn't harm a single soul'? What about all the souls that weren't able to be born?"

"What the hell," shot back the old man. "Are you an absolute idiot? Do you think God ordains who and who isn't to be born? In that case God *did* ordain that all those that were not to be born, were not born. And that," laughed the old man, "means I in the end did God's will! I accomplished the will of God!"

The old man stopped for a moment to regain his breath. The muslin curtains barely moved in the still breeze. Below, a pushcart rattled on the broken pavement.

"Who is that?" the old man wheezed.

"I don't know," said the young man looking out the window. "It looks like there is something dead in the cart."

"Ah, fresh dinner, good for him. Where was I? What was I saying?"

"I don't know....God's will."

"God's will. It's all God's will until it isn't God's will, and then watch them hang or be stoned or burnt at the stake. God's will.

"It's God's will when really it should be our will. It should be our will to figure out how to float around on this God forsaken rock, in the middle of space going nowhere, in the solitary confinement of vast endless nothingness.

"That's God's will, that we are even here. God's will that we are left to our own pathetic and violent devices. Yes, it's aaaallllllll..." the old man drawled out the word, "...God's will. I will tell you about Go-od's will.

"I will tell you how it is, was, in those days. It was all just the repetition of the same words, over and over again, until they became true.

"But they never were true. Everybody believing they are true doesn't make them true, no matter how everyone repeats the same things, over and over again, like chimpanzees on a broken telephone.

“‘Weapons of mass destruction, global warming, climate change, ecological collapse’, my ass. Except the last one, which was happening all around us. At least now, we have been diverted from that, for a few millennia, longer, if we have learned anything at all.

“You know back in the day, all the world leaders flew their carbon spewing private jets, flew them to the four corners of the earth, to talk about ‘climate change’, which basically was how to put another yoke onto the masses.

“But that is not what I want to say. So what? Maybe the planet was getting a little bit warmer. Maybe we were helping it along, a tiny miniscule bit. So what? We have been warming up for twelve thousand years since the last ice age.

“When we start cooling off again, heading for the next ice age, we will be freaking out, trying to get all the carbon back out of the oceans, to give ourselves a nice cozy warm carbon dioxide blanket. It’s one freak out to the next. It’s always been that way.”

“Hold on a second,” said the young man, “I have to go for a piss.”

“Have one for me,” said the old man. “Here, help me up, I will go with you. I have to go too.”

Together the two, the younger man helping the older man, stumbled out the old door, by the crumbling wall paper, down the littered hallway, to what used to be a quite nice working bathroom.

“God it reeks in here,” said the old man

“Maybe we will get running water again one day, I doubt it.”

The old man pulled up his fly leaning heavily on the wall. The old man hobbled on his own, back to the only room that had a slight breeze.

“Do you want to go outside and sit in the shade? It will be cooler than sitting in here. I will help you down the stairs,” offered the young man.

Outside the cicadas cried their long cry. The ants marched over the old man’s bare feet and across his knee. “Why am I wearing this? It’s a hundred degrees out,” the old man said as he laboured to take off his torn bathrobe.

“Here, I’ll help you,” said the young man, helping with an arm and a sleeve.

“Look around, look outside,” said the old man. “They are all here, every single one of them. More than there has ever been in living memory.

“Look, squirrels and birds and bees and chipmunks and bugs and flies and mushrooms. That’s what you get when there aren’t that many humans. You get nature and jungles and trees and animals. You get beauty and clean air, and just the sound of birds and bees and the wind.

“Listen!? Do you hear that?”

“Hear what?” said the young man.

“Listen, do you hear that?”

“What?” the young man tried to listen.

“Just that! Nothing! No machinery, no cars, no trains, no planes. Everything just rusting into the ground. It is glorious. Glorious nothing. No din of highways always in the distance. Just beautiful nothing.

“I am old as the hills, but the clean air, I swear has given me ten more years. Plus, I have to work a little harder finding food, keeping warm, and keeping body and soul together. But what does that do?! It keeps me healthy, and keeps this old body going, that’s for sure!

“Breathe that, breathe that! You can thank me for that.

“Okay, I’m not the only one to thank, but it was such a long time ago. Now, most likely, I am the only one left, to even tell this story,” said the old man introspectively.

“Damn!” exclaimed the young man, fiddling with an antiquated electronic device. “No, it’s okay. I thought it wasn’t recording for a second, its too old. I got it all, your rant about the birds and the bees and the quiet breeze,” half smiled the young man. “Okay, keep going slowly, I am trying to record everything.”

“Okay,” the old man said calmly.

“Climate change, climate change, climate change. No matter what the pol-ass-ticians and sci-antists said, sticking their heads up each other’s asses, over and over and over, we heard those same two words. It made me sick to my stomach. Say boo against ‘climate change’ and you get your ass crucified to the wall,” said the old man becoming more and more agitated.

“The problem wasn’t climate change. Things are always changing, getting warmer, getting colder. We fool ourselves, thinking we have any control over mother nature. We just polluted things and poisoned ourselves.

“You know what the real problem is? Huh, that’s funny...‘is’. You know what the real problem was? The real problem simply, was too many people on the planet. Too, too many goddamn people.

“Did anybody ever fly to a summit to talk about ‘too many people’? No, not once. China banned couples to a single child and the world screamed ‘human rights abuse’.

“And do you want to know why it was never discussed ever, while the world was bursting at the seams with rotting flesh? I’ll tell you why. I’ll tell you exactly why. It’s because of religion. Religion plain and simple.

“God forbid you tell anybody in any religion they can’t multiply, any religion anywhere in the world.

“You aren’t even a man, living in a tent in some dessert or mountain somewhere, until your wife has borne you ten children. ‘Go forth and multiply’ as that is God’s will.

“It’s always God’s will, isn’t it? Doesn’t matter where, poor country, rich country, Hindu, Catholic, Muslim. It’s our God given right to fill the world with our offspring, until we are suffocating each other to death.

“No, I changed that, changed that all.”

The old man stopped for a while and closed his eyes, as the sun dappled through the leaves onto his chest and undershirt and boxers. The young man stared at the ground. Minutes went by. Squirrels rustled and foraged in the wild plants and hedges. An old swing creaked in the quiet breeze and stopped.

“So, you want to know how it all happened? How everything happened?” said the old man.

Everything grew quiet and still.

“I’ll tell you then.

“You already know all about the virus and how, who knows, one person possibly infected the whole goddamn world.

“Even so it doesn’t matter. A virus is a virus is a virus, no matter where it comes from, it is all part of the plan.

“Viruses are a necessary part of our existence. People think viruses are bad things that just go around causing death. They actually strengthen us. They realign our DNA.

“It is how evolution through the eons takes place. Viruses are little microscopic engineers, tweaking our code, and moving us towards the next evolutionary stage. Humans are so insular and narrow minded.

“Yes, people die. Viruses are like an upgrade to the human operating system. Those that are not upgradable die. It’s like uploading a new OS to a computer. If the computer is not capable of being upgraded, it becomes obsolete, and eventually we throw it away.

“Same way viruses work with people, or any animal or plant really.

“I never have understood why humans, think themselves in control of anything. Everything of importance that happens, happens to them, not because of them, and most of the time in spite of themselves.

“Yes, viruses kill people, they die and those, the vast majority that don’t die, are all the better, stronger, and moving up to the next rung of the evolutionary ladder. That is how it is, how it works, simple.

“So, the population is out of control, causing immense suffering right across the globe. We are all just waiting for the next plague to ease the pressure, but it never comes. Even this world-wide virus really is not even causing a dent in the bucket.

“If it was up to me, I would have engineered a really virulent and deadly strain, and walked out of that lab.

“But in the end, we ended up with something even better. So, so, so much better, and it didn’t cause a single soul an ounce of pain, except your ‘silent unborn’. Seriously, you can’t be serious about that?”

“Okay, I know,” said the young man sheepishly, “blame it on religion.”

“When you are a young career man, already at a high level in the national health service, you have a lot of power, right across the world.

“Power to decide who gets research monies, what drugs the pharmaceuticals need manufacture, and in times of a pandemic, what drugs they must produce. It’s power man, pure power. It’s secret power, behind doors power. Power you don’t need to explain to anyone at all, ever.”

A few birds merrily chirped and twittered.

“How in the world was such a massive program possible without anyone knowing anything about it? I’ll tell you.”

A bee buzzed and collected pollen from a nearby flower.

In an unspoken way the few in the know, they are all gone now, so many years have passed by that I've lost count, the few of us in the know, we just all seemed to be silently on the same page together. It was kind of a miracle. Nobody spoke a single word.

"Once we read it and understood its implications, we just let it happen. It was completely ridiculous. We took a lighter to one lab test paper. I don't think that even happened. It got crumpled up, thrown in the wastepaper basket, and the janitor shredded it."

Two squirrels scampered noisily down the eaves chasing one another.

"So, I guess we are finally at the heart of it. The answer to all your questions.

"Everybody knows what happened, that is completely obvious. Look around. There are a lot less people on the planet!

"How it happened, well that is so simple.

The green leaves of the shade tree gently rustled in the quiet passing breeze.

"And what was in that lab test result? Okay...

"The government demanded a vaccine as quickly as possible. It bypassed practically every safety test and trial necessary to bring on any new drug or vaccine. If it had any small effect combating the virus, that was good enough.

"Big pharma began to roll, and made billions in the process, and governments across the whole entire world, in the biggest suspension of human rights ever known to us humans, enforced mandatory vaccination across the whole population of the planet.

"Can you imagine that?

"The whole population mandated to take a vaccine, that had practically no testing to understand its long-term effects. Complete irresponsibility, and a basic forced violation of everyone's body on the planet.

"And talk about mob rule, those against the vaccine, like those who said boo against climate change, basically were screwed to the wall, hunted out and persecuted. Well at least they weren't burnt at the stake for the most part.

"And those against the vaccine, who in the end developed a natural, strong resistance to the virus, way stronger than any half-baked lab vaccine, after the virus had upgraded their operating system, well, those people and their offspring, look around, they are the ones that have inherited the earth. And everyone else just died out.

“Let us hope that we have finally learned something from the past, and not repeat again the same stupid population mistake. And maybe finally, we can be good stewards of this planet, and of ourselves.”

“Like my parents,” spoke the young man.

“Yes, like your parents obviously, otherwise you wouldn’t be here,” replied the old man.

“And the meek shall inherit the earth. In this case the meek are also genetically stronger.

“Think about it. If everything on the planet stopped reproducing, or humans at least, how long would it be before there was hardly any living thing on the planet? A hundred years maybe?

“Well, everything is still here, all the animals and the plants, even more than ever before, it is so very beautiful.

“There is so much growth now, rainforests and fish in the ocean. We couldn’t use it all up if we tried. Trees growing a million times faster than we could ever use them. Animals roaming the savannahs and prairies, more than we could ever harvest.

“A glorious rebirth of the planet, a miraculous save, divine intervention, God’s will, whatever you want to call it. It is amazing beyond belief.

The old man paused for a moment and looked to the sky.

“So no, I didn’t kill a single soul. Everybody who was alive way back then, were able to live their entire lives out as they chose, for better or worse. And only the few who initially defied the powers that be, well I already said it, the unvaccinated and their offspring, they...” the old man laughed a loud and hardy laugh, until he began to cough and sputter. “They...they...”, he tried to get his words out between laughing and coughing and sputtering. “And they shall inherit the earth.

“It is fitting, so fitting. Those that chose not to follow the stench, they and their children follow the new paths laid out for new humankind.”

“And so, what was in that destroyed lab report?” asked the young man.

“Ah” said the old man. “God’s will,” smiled the old man, “God’s will.”

In the empty upstairs room the muslin curtains swayed gently in the breeze.

“The lab report simply said, that the vaccine had the potential, in the long run,” the old man happily sighed, “to produce...complete sterility.

“It was literally that simple, to save the whole goddamn glorious planet, that simple.
Go figure.”

And the muslin curtains pulled gently in and out of the old, cracked, open window.

Juhan Puhm
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