

eritis sicut deus

by strannikov

When Lenin's cat Geneve went missing in late October 1917, suspicion fell immediately upon the pair of wolfhounds that one of Alexandra Kollontai's lackeys had been seen walking on chain leashes on the grounds of the Smolny Institute. Had the lackey known that the cat mangled by the wolfhounds behind one of the impromptu guardhouses had belonged to Lenin (in a lumpen-proletarian manner of speaking), he might have steered the dogs in another direction to let the hounds lift their legs in the vicinity of some knot of Menshevik delegates: but in those days it was not always easy to distinguish Bolsheviki from Mensheviki.

At any rate, once Lenin's suspicions were confirmed by Dzerzhinsky with the forensic evidence of poor Geneve's mangled, bloody, and frozen carcass, the wolfhounds mysteriously vanished: some said they were tossed into the treacherous Neva before or after being shot, others claimed that the lackey performed his own calculations and dined on wolfhound into the early days of November. The lackey, for whatever reason, was never again spotted on the grounds of the Smolny Institute, with or without Kollontai's wolfhounds.

In June 1918, as the Murmansk Crisis was stewing, Lenin's replacement cat Vaska (named by Bonch-Bruevich long before he wrote the children's tale) was almost killed by the large poodle that a visiting French delegate had given to Nadezhda Krupskaya. Enough! Once Lenin had dispatched Krupskaya back to Petrograd from Moscow for a month to supervise reorganization of the university library, he had the poodle bayoneted as "another enemy of the proletariat", momentarily confusing the dog with that scoundrel Yuryev of the Murmansk Soviet. (Unfortunately, a band of opportunistic Left SRs absconded with the poodle carcass before any Bolshevik culinary artist could lay hands on it.)

Trying times and difficult days for Lenin's cats! Poor Vaska died as a consequence of his frightful close call by the end of 1918,

though Lenin had not himself succumbed subsequent to his frightful interview with Fanya Kaplan in late August. As Lenin convalesced in the summer of 1919, Stalin uncharacteristically thought it considerate to cheer him up and sent a large lean black cat that someone had named Griboyedov but which Bonch-Bruevich renamed Voron (Raven).

Voron thereafter lived in Lenin's Kremlin office, except at night when he patrolled the Kremlin dark as the accomplished and ruthless mouser that he was. In daylight hours, when not purring on Lenin's lap (or eating or relieving himself in Bonch-Bruevich's office corner), Voron slept on Lenin's desk, respectful of proletarian considerations enough never to disturb the vast correspondence and the numerous drafts of numerous speeches. The cat most often napped and sprawled around the base of the bronze copy of "Affe mit Schädel" Lenin kept on his desk.

—but neither Lenin's serenity nor Voron's could last for long!

The interruption came in mid-July 1920, when Inessa Armand paid a call on Lenin in his office. Bonch-Bruevich was busy in his own office recording minutes from the Second Comintern Congress, probably another interminable contribution from that lunatic American Reed, else he'd've stopped Armand cold outside Lenin's office door: she entered a bit awkwardly without closing the door behind her, holding only with difficulty a frisky Pomeranian that came from the litter that Kollontai had left for no known reason at the editorial offices of the new journal Kommunistka.

Seeing Voron napping on the desk, the yappy little dog leapt from Armand's grasp, bounced off a chair cushion, and landed on the floor. Instantly alert, back arched and hairs standing, Voron eyed the yappy little mutt that Armand could not retrieve, for almost two minutes it darted back and forth barking under the black cat's gaze. Voron never hissed once. Then, quite unexpectedly, Voron leapt upon the Pomeranian and savagely clawed and scratched and tumbled with the overmatched dog until it fled from the office and raced past a bewildered guard striding up to investigate the

commotion. The Pomeranian disappeared into the Kremlin's depths, its yapping never heard again, but Voron leapt back onto Lenin's desk, eyed Armand with complete disdain, then returned to his interrupted nap around the base of the bronze.

Already a sack of nerves and exhaustion since the launch of the journal, Armand was aghast at the cat's sudden attack and casual mayhem. Lenin did his best to soothe his former mistress, but she couldn't relax in the office with that cat there, even if it was asleep already. "A vacation to some spa in the Caucasus!" Lenin exclaimed. "Take a train to Pyatigorsk or Nalchik, take a rest, you've earned it!"

Voron shifted on Lenin's desk so that he could stare down Armand on her way out: one eye read "implacable hatred", the other said something much worse. She carried with her on the train the shiver and the shudder that the cat's glare inspired, all the way past Pyatigorsk to Nalchik. The dread memory of the black cat's parting glare subsided only as Armand succumbed to the cholera she contracted after meeting with the Nalchik Executive Committee.

When time came for Armand's entombment in the Kremlin Necropolis, the skeleton of a rat-shredded Pomeranian was found in a nearby niche, identifiable by a small tangle of reddish dog fur and some few hairs that seemed to've come from a black cat.

END

