

Lenin's Paintings

by Jerry Ratch

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1

I was going through Lenin's jewelry and his paintings with a team of experts. I got the idea that I was hired to verify his paintings, although I didn't know he painted.

When I went home people were staying with us who were actors and actresses, and they filled all our drawers with cats. I reached down to pet what I thought was Ajax, and it turned out to be this ugly fat cat with a snub nose. It loved being petted, and it kept coming toward me and another one came out of another drawer, and Ajax was sitting under the bureau looking confused. You had to bludgeon them to get them off me because they kept clawing me and begging me to pet them. And when I asked you if they were dead, you said they weren't dead but they were vegetables because all the blood vessels in their heads were broken.

Then we opened the door and they were sitting on the doorstep where you had thrown them, and you explained to them very politely that they shouldn't have done that to me and also told them you were very sorry you had to bludgeon them, and they said they were sorry they had frightened me, but their eyes just stared ahead because they couldn't see.

2

The woman who owned the cats came back and led them away into the street which was filled with mud. I followed her and tried to pick up some postcards I saw without anyone noticing, but people saw me and told me that I'd better get back to Lenin's jewelry or I'd be gotten rid of.

3

The next day they sent a hired assassin and he asked me who it was I wanted dead. I told him Lenin was already dead, and he said: "Then what's the use? Is there anyone else?" And I told him I didn't think so, no, not right now.

When I went back to the room with Lenin's jewelry and his paintings, the assassin was already there. He began showing me through the paintings and seemed to be very proud of them. "The jewelry is fake," he said, "but these are real." However, as he was saying this I did notice the part of a necklace he'd been unable to get into his pocket, and when I motioned toward the part that was hanging out, he assured me it was fake and had little value but the paintings were real, and added that I should really be paying more attention to them.

4

Three Inspectors of Antiquities began to question me as to which of the paintings were real and which fake, all the while stuffing huge piles of jewelry into their pockets. I told them I wasn't sure about the paintings, I hadn't known Lenin painted, but that I thought most of the jewelry was real. And they said they weren't concerned about that, but they were sure the paintings were real and shouldn't I be paying more attention to them, and I said yes, since the assassin was now among them helping himself generously to the jewels.

5

The assassin went ahead and killed again. Then he came to me and asked if he had done well enough and were there any others I could think of that needed to be dead. I said I thought perhaps he'd misunderstood me and that I wasn't concerned with killing people, although I could come up with a few names if he were really in need. "Trotsky," I said, "whatever happened to Trotsky?"

"Oh, him, he met with an accident," and after a pause he added: *"You don't know your history."*

6

We were in bed asleep when strange, enormous cats began crowding around our windows and meowing. They made awful scratching and scraping noises at the windows, trying to come in. But I couldn't wake you up. Every time I'd shake you, I would realize it was I who had been asleep and that the cat was at the door.

7

The officer remembered his heart and sat down. He took off his cap and placed it before him on the table. He shook a little with the effort of living. And his face wavered as he sat there questioning: "Which of you is the expert? What are your credentials? Did you know Lenin painted?"

I felt he would die soon and there was no need to answer very quickly, although he was being very patient and seemed not to want to hear the answers to these questions.

8

I was on a catapult but when the spring let loose, I didn't go flying. I stayed with the lever, or else I was the lever, and this method was being employed to force my opinions from me or make me beg for mercy. But as the catapulting continued I realized that they wouldn't stop until they had my opinion.

9

It was after a revolution, or a war or some disaster, and the streets were filled with mud. There were ruins everywhere. Barry was there selling wineglasses that were huge and would hold a whole bottle of wine. He kept assuring the crowds of people that they were real glass and not plastic. But you could see they were really just wine bottles turned upside down and that he had merely cut the bottoms of the bottles off.

10

Everybody was dressed in paper. By the end of the day there was a long line of people waiting for new clothing, since what they had on was torn to shreds during the day. Their uniforms hanging from their bodies. They all looked unwrapped. Paper smocks, paper dresses, paper hats.

I had walked by something that snagged my dress and it had literally been torn off me. I had to swathe it back around my body and hold a corner of it tucked under my arm while we went on through the rest of the tour.

And it was in this manner that we passed by Lenin's body lying in state. They had never put him in the ground. He was in perfect shape as if he were still breathing and in good health. He was simply asleep.

