

The Fourth Prague Defenestration: 12

by Jerry Ratch

Ellen and I stepped out into the hall to discuss the situation. Maybe we should make some sort of offer to purchase these paintings, because if it did turn out that they were for real, well, the value could be endless. Think of it. Vladimir Lenin, the painter. I mean, think of the irony. Behind the Iron Curtain yet!

Oh, the irony, the irony!

Well, everybody, I guess, needs a hobby, so... I mean, look at me. I'm a poet! A Bohemian who's a poet! Who would've thought, right? Watch out for those wild, wandering packs of poets out in the surrounding woods around Prague, is all I'm saying. To hell with the pigs.

We went back inside, where the men were waiting. They looked at us expectantly.

"These paintings are for sale?" I asked.

"No, they certainly are not," Einstein said. He laughed, and then Vladimir laughed, then Boris.

"Then why are we here?"

"How much are they worth?" Einstein asked.

"Are they real?"

Einstein gestured with his hand. "Go show them my gravestone at the old Jewish Cemetery. Get them out of here. My time is shorter already."

Vladimir pulled me out into the hallway. "Ees die soon. Paintings are real. You want to purchase, no?"

"Well, how much?"

"How much? Ees priceless, priceless."

"How much does he want?"

"Make offer he cannot refuse. Ees dying soon."

I pulled out my wallet and took a peek inside. Boris appeared in the hallway now.

"Ees no joking," Boris said. "What is wrong with heem?"

Vladimir shrugged.

"Okay, my checkbook is back at the hotel."

"Ees bankwire, or nothing. Bankwire. That ees all."

"How much."

"Make best offer."

"One thousand."

"Why are we talking with this man?" asked Boris. "We go have more beers now? More duck? Peeg?"

“Wissout peeg ist gut, no?” Vladimir said. Both men broke out laughing.

Suddenly Einstein was shouting from inside, where he and Ellen of Troy were discussing the paintings of Lenin.

“Boris, Vladimir, get me my pills, quick!” We went inside the apartment, where Einstein was grabbing his chest.

“Nitro pills. In kitchen. Schnell, schnell!”

Einstein was turning blue in the face. He was sitting on the Persian carpet. But the two men glanced at each other. They seemed not be in a hurry.

Ellen kept searching through the drawers in the kitchen. “Where, where?” she said.

Einstein fell over with a gasp. We heard his breath escape his mouth. Maybe his last breath.

Ellen ran to his side and bent over him. “Last time. How much for Lenin's paintings?”

He gestured for her to come near, and whispered something.

“Okay,” said Ellen of Troy.

That was when Einstein laughed, and got up off the Persian rug. He stuck out his hand. “Ees a deal.” He was smiling. “Gentlemen, get out the brandy, and the schnapps.”

We'd been played. That was all I could think. Played.

“How much?” I asked.

Einstein said, "Deal ees deal." He was limping all around his apartment. He pulled out a bottle of schnapps and poured himself a shot. Then another.

"How much, Ellen? How much?"

"Fyodor..."

"Just tell me how much, damn it!"

"Ten."

"Ten what?"

"Ten thousand."

"Ten thousand dollars?"

"No, don't be silly. Where would we get \$10,000 U.S? Ten thousand Korunas."

"Really? That's ... that's not so bad," I said, breathing a sigh of relief.

"Right? That's four hundred bucks. Can you believe it? For Lenin's paintings. Vladimir f..ing Lenin!"

"Yeah, but what if they're not really his? I mean, how can you prove it?"

Camille von Footitch, or Ellen of Troy, thought about it for a moment. "Huh," was all she said.

"Give me a shot of schnapps," she told Einstein. "Make that two."

“Ees Lenin's paintings, do not worry so much. Come, have shot of schnapps. Ees good for celebrate, no? Make your feet feel great. Good for you. Good for you.”

