

# The Triumph of the Prague Workers' Councils · *Eugene Stein*

## 1. THIEVES LIKE US

The auction at Sotheby's of European political memorabilia was under way. Jessica Neumann had come to New York from Chicago on the off-chance some Situationist material might turn up. Elaine Friedman had come from Massachusetts for precisely the same reason.

Jessica found herself behind the main auditorium, in front of the long wooden table where the next few lots had been placed before being auctioned. Elaine was already there.

Nothing on the table much interested Jessica—Popular Front claptrap and reactionary fodder—but on a chair nearby she spotted a pile of posters and pamphlets. She sifted quickly through the pages, and halfway through, she found a single, handwritten sheet of paper. She recognized the handwriting at once—it was Guy Debord's; Debord was one of the Situationists' leading ideologues. The document, evidently the rough draft for a communique issued during the occupation of the Sorbonne in May 1968, called upon workers to occupy a Renault plant in Lyons.

Inside a large box filled with political buttons, meanwhile, Elaine Friedman had found, tucked all the way at the bottom, a small jewel box with a rusty clasp. She finally managed to open the box and took out a small handmade silver pendant. She opened the pendant and inside was a tiny painting of Charles Fourier.

Jessica tried to stifle a cry when she saw what Elaine was holding, but a small moan escaped. And then, softly: "Tatiana."

"Yes," Elaine agreed. She turned over the jewel box. A label from a store in Brussels was pasted to the bottom.

"We'll go together," Jessica said.

"Of course."

They recognized each other; they'd both attended a symposium on the Situationists a year before, in Toronto. While the guard was distracted by an old woman who insisted on bringing her Lhasa apso into the auction room—"He has very good taste," the woman maintained—Jessica managed

to sneak the Debord manuscript into her program, and Elaine dropped the pendant into her pocket. She left the jewel box but copied down the Brussels address.

## 2. THE PROLETARIAT AS SUBJECT AND AS REPRESENTATION

In 1968, when Jessica was fourteen, she spent the summer with her Uncle Rene, who lived in Paris. (Her father's family originally came from Alsace, and Jessica had grown up speaking French and German.) A few months earlier, Jessica's cousin Michelle had been one of the students who seized control of the University of Nanterre. The Nanterre occupation had sparked the entire May uprising in France. Michelle gave her younger cousin books to read—Hegel, Marx, Lukacs, Bakunin—and patiently worked through them with her; brought her to cafes, where dialectical materialism was debated; and accompanied her to a birth control clinic. That summer Jessica slept with a boy for the first time, and she became a Situationist, and somehow the joys of revolution and sexual freedom merged in her mind, so that she couldn't tell where one left off and the other began.

Back in Chicago, her teacher asked her to do a book report, and when Jessica got up in front of the class, she announced that was going to consider the entire Paris rebellion as her text. She proceeded to give a Situationist analysis of the May events. She said that late capitalism really represented the dictatorship of the commodity; that *things* ruled and were young; that modern society as a whole constituted a spectacle, and the spectacle marked the triumph of the commodity; that by their very contemplation of the spectacle, human beings were controlled, subjugated, made passive, isolated.

When she finished, most of the class just looked at her, blankly. In the back of the room, the single black student in the class gave her the black power salute. He hadn't really understood her talk, but he had the sense her heart was in the right place. The teacher hadn't understood what she'd said either, and failed her.

A month later she was told she could erase the F if she gave another book report, this time on an actual book. Jessica chose Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*. She said Cather was America's most underrated novelist. She said the characters were beautifully realized. She said the book was a

brilliant dissection of alienated labor and the emptiness of bourgeois life, and then she segued into an analysis of the recent invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Russian, Polish, East German, Hungarian, and Bulgarian armies. She explained that the Bolshevism/“communism” of Eastern Europe was just another form of state capitalism; that modern life was marked by the banality of work and the pauperization of play; that a revolution of *everyday life* was needed. The black student stood up in the back of the room and applauded. This time he got the jist of it. The teacher failed her again.

She was given one last chance to give a book report. Jessica chose *Huckleberry Finn*, and said simply that Huck and Jim showed how much pleasure awaited us if we could rupture the spectacle of racism and the racism of spectacle.

The teacher was now frightened by Jessica and even more frightened by the black student in the back of the room, who she believed might riot at any moment; this time she gave Jessica an A.

### 3. THE BIG SLEEP

The plane touched down in Brussels during a light drizzle. It was late, so the two women took a cab to a small hotel Jessica knew, ate a light supper of bread and cheese, and then sat in front of the brick fireplace in the common room, nursing their wine. They compared notes: their lives, their lovers, their sense of the mysterious past forever receding . . . And they talked about Tatiana, about her art and her loneliness, and especially about her masterpiece, “Triumph of the Prague Workers’ Councils, 1956/1968.”

Elaine told Jessica that her boyfriend had recently left her for a Trotskyist nymphomaniac, and Jessica shared her pain.

The next day they rose early, ate breakfast, and then went out into the Brussels morning. The sky was as gray as the alley cat who lived behind the hotel and fed on scraps of garbage. Elaine and Jessica walked along the rue du Chêne, past the Manneken-Pis (a fountain of a small boy urinating, and one of Brussels’ most important sights). The store, which sold rare books, antiquities, and memorabilia, had just opened when they arrived. The tiny, ancient Flemish owner was still hanging up his coat.

He turned around and looked at them. He spoke in English, lightly accented. “Can I mebbe perhaps to help you?”

“We’re interested in the work of Tatiana—” Elaine never even got to finish the sentence.

“Everybody want piece of Tatiana,” the man told them. “Last week, another wooman, rich wooman come. I have nothink.”

“There was another woman here?” Jessica asked.

“Yes, a third wooman. There was a third wooman.”

“What did you tell her?” Jessica pressed him.

“I got neckless from old man. Eisenberg. He die. He love Tatiana.”

The man went on to say that he had sold the necklace to a European collector who made frequent trips to the U.S., that Eisenberg had a son, and yes, he had an address . . . now where had he put it . . . Eventually he found the slip of paper.

Elaine and Jessica rushed to the address. The son was sitting down to a late breakfast but consented to talk to them. Yes, his father had fallen in love with Tatiana in the sixties. He was an accountant who had done her taxes the year she lived in Paris. No, the pendant was the only gift he’d ever received from her. Yes, he’d heard of the collages. No, he’d never seen them. Yes, a third woman had asked him these same questions. She was actually an old client of his father’s. The son gave him the address of the woman, who lived in Paris and who had left her card. And they might want to look up another friend of Tatiana’s, the son said, a Monsieur Roche, who also lived in Paris, near the Luxembourg Gardens.

They took the bullet train to Paris and were there by lunch time.

“Tatiana was everything to everybody,” said Roche, when they tracked him down. He would have looked dapper in his dapper new gray suit, if not for the beads of sweat that had formed above his upper lip. He spoke excellent English. A ceiling fan overhead chopped the air and made vaguely threatening noises, but did little to cool the overheated apartment. The light streaming into Roche’s living room filtered through a lattice-work he’d just had built for his orchids and left shadows the shape of a cobweb on the walls of his flat. The orchids were large and almost obscenely suggestive with their gaping mouths. There were packages and shopping bags all over the room; Roche had done quite a bit of shopping lately. “She could be whatever she wanted or needed to be,” he continued. “Her paintings are the same way.”

“About her collages,” Elaine prompted gently . . .

“You’re after the ‘Prague,’ aren’t you?” Roche asked.

They were noncommittal.

“Maybe it’s better that it’s never found,” he said. “This way it exists for all of us. And no one can take it away.”

“Have you ever seen it?” Jessica wondered.

“Never.”

“He’s lying,” Jessica said later.

“Hmm,” Elaine temporized.

A heavysset man seemed to be following them when they left Roche’s apartment, but he disappeared after a few blocks.

Jessica and Elaine went back to their hotel on the rue des Ecoles. That night, they stayed up late, drinking brandy, talking. Jessica said she no longer considered herself a Situationist. In the last few years she had begun reading the works of some 20th century Italian ultra-anarchists—anarchists so opposed to authority that they viewed *any* organization as inherently fascistic. Consequently, these anarchists never formed political groups, but recommended instead that individuals attack the state privately and anonymously. It was a lonely sort of life, Jessica conceded, and she felt a certain kinship with Tatiana. Jessica had never settled down anywhere for long and in fact made her living as a court stenographer.

Elaine Friedman was an assistant professor of art history at Smith. She had done her dissertation on Situationist art, and the art still spoke to her powerfully. She said she felt it was her duty to keep the collages out of museums at all cost, because a museum represented a hierarchical, managerial, bureaucratic approach to art—the antithesis of Tatiana’s message.

Jessica went to sleep, but Elaine stayed up a little longer, reading a book on non-Euclidean geometry she’d found in the night table in her hotel room. At last she went to the bathroom down the hall to brush her teeth before going to bed. She left her room unlocked since she’d only be gone for a minute or two. She returned to her room and noticed that the door was open a bit more than she’d left it. Probably the wind, she surmised. She went into her room and turned to lock the door. Suddenly she felt a sharp, intense pain in her left temple, as someone smashed something on her head. She dropped to her knees and saw a pair of beautiful blue women’s shoes before she sank into unconsciousness.

#### 4. WATCH OUT FOR MANIPULATORS! WATCH OUT FOR BUREAUCRATS!

Elaine Friedman considered Tatiana one of the most important artists of the century, and certainly one of the most essential. Tatiana was not the first to insist that true art and true revolution could only be realized when art and revolution merged; but she was the first to show *how to make it happen*.

Tatiana Basho Malevich was the single member of the Situationist International who lived behind the Iron Curtain. She was born in Leningrad during the Nine Hundred Days siege to an artistic and bohemian family; her father was a great admirer of Japanese haiku, as her middle name attests. She settled in Moscow as a young woman, and lived there until 1969, when she was placed, against her will, in a psychiatric hospital sixty kilometers outside of Vladivostok. A cousin of Casimir Malevich, the Russian Suprematist painter, she linked up with the French Situationists when she accompanied an exhibition of Malevich's work that toured Europe. She absorbed much from her cousin's book *World Without Objects*, but grounded his rather ethereal aesthetic philosophy in a rigorous anarcho-Marxist skepticism.

Her fame as an artist rests largely on the half dozen collages she made in Moscow in 1968 during a single one-month burst of creativity, and which she managed to smuggle out of the country. Distraught over the collapse of the May rebellion in Paris and the brutal repression of the Czechs that August, Tatiana (she preferred to be called by her first name) decided she would rewrite history. She would imagine a world where workers rose up against their overlords, and where revolution was never hijacked by bureaucrats, juntas, Leninists, or spectacle. The six collages in the "Triumph" series were the happy result of Tatiana's reverie.

"Triumph of the Paris Communards, 1871," was a take-off on Goya's "The Burial of the Sardine." But where Goya saw madness in carnival revelers, Tatiana saw freedom. The Situationists had long maintained that true revolution could be seen as festivity, as passionate, spontaneous play. The collage depicts a Commune that has defeated the Prussians. Drunk with joy and liberty, Paris throws itself the biggest party in history. Reds predominate in the collage—the red of blood, the red of wine, the red of revolution. Tatiana gave the work to her father, who lived in Finland, and whom she apparently adored.

The first collage she actually completed was “Triumph of Brook Farm/Fourier Phalanx, 1843,” which showed an imagined tableau of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, and Albert Brisbane cavorting naked. It is presently in the collection of a Japanese industrialist.

Next she constructed “Triumph of the Peasants/Eternal Council of Mühlhausen, 1525.” The collage posited that the uprising of South German peasants led by Thomas Münzer was actually successful. Luther, who had opposed the rebellion and supported the princes, was shown in a stockade. The collage found its way to East Germany, which, from time to time, embraced the Peasant Uprising as an important forerunner to the Communist state. Consequently, the collage was shown occasionally at the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, until an anarchist snuck in and wrote the name “Erich Honeker” on Luther’s dunce cap. Twelve weeks went by before any of the curators noticed. Tatiana was delighted, purportedly, when word reached her in Siberia, but the collage was subsequently put back into storage. After the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, the collage was shipped to the Städtisches Kunstmuseum in Bonn, where a curator declared it “not worthy of exhibition.”

Tatiana would probably consider that a compliment, Elaine reasoned.

“Triumph of the Barcelona Anarchists, 1937,” showed POUM revelers joyfully hanging Franco, Mussolini, and Stalin by the heels. It was sent to Franco as a birthday present—Tatiana had a wonderful sense of humor—and is presumed to have been destroyed.

Next Tatiana made her most dangerous collage, the one that probably got her sent to Siberia. “Triumph of the Kronstadt Sailors, 1921” showed the seamen tossing Lenin and Trotsky into the Baltic Sea. “All power to the soviets” was stencilled, in Russian, underneath the collage; on top Tatiana wrote (with her blood, some say) “Workers of all Nations, Unite!” Criticizing the Communist Party by invoking Marx—criticizing the Party for not being communist enough—well, it was simply too much of an affront. A day after the collage was first exhibited in Norway, Tatiana was hospitalized. It is undeniable that Tatiana was emotionally disturbed, plagued by visions, occasional hallucinations, and (justifiable?) paranoia; moreover, the events of 1968 had plunged her into a nearly psychotic depression. Still, Brezhnev called her “the most dangerous woman in Moscow,” (see Andropov’s *Memoirs*) and the political reasons for her

hospitalization seem clear. Tatiana's own mental illness simply made it easier for the Kremlin.

The last collage she made, "The Triumph of the Prague Workers' Councils, 1956/1968" was actually the most important of all. The "Prague" and "Kronstadt" collages were both thought to be lost when Situationist headquarters in Oslo were set on fire by either Stalinists, neo-Nazis, or careless children. But the "Kronstadt" collage had recently turned up in a stall on Portobello Road, in London, and Elaine and Jessica believed the "Prague" was extant as well.

#### 5. NOT ANOTHER MOVIE ABOUT TWO WOMEN ON THE ROAD

Madame LaGrange, the woman who'd given her card to Eisenberg's son, had recently come back from New York, her concierge assured them, but was indisposed and wasn't seeing visitors. Jessica and Elaine needed to kill some time. Jessica wanted to see the new Godard film, so she could revile it, and Elaine wanted to go to the Beaubourg museum, which she abhorred. The discussion grew rather heated. Elaine was angry anyway, because Jessica refused to believe someone had attacked her the night before, even though the pendant was now missing. In fact, Jessica started laughing when Elaine mentioned the beautiful pair of shoes.

So Elaine called Jessica a fascist, and Jessica called Elaine a Shelepinite with Nashist tendencies, and they both started crying, and wiped the corners of their eyes with tissues, and started laughing through their tears, and hugged each other very tight. And after that, everything was all right.

"Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable, / Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat," Jessica recited.

"My father used to say that," Elaine remembered.

#### 6. ALPHAVILLE, A FILM BY JEAN-LUC GODARD

They saw the special compu-gendarmes everywhere they went in Paris. A small boy used a slingshot against one of the CD-ROM-aided policemen, then made his escape, swinging from one building to another, using the clotheslines that connected each building to its neighbor and that reminded Jessica of cables linking PCs into a computer network.

"Tarzan versus IBM," Jessica noted.

The sky was as gray as in Brussels, and as the afternoon wore on, the light shortened, until it seemed to Elaine as though the city were being filmed in black-and-white. Or perhaps, when the light slanted just so and left a pool of shadow lapping up against their feet, it reminded her of one of Goya's dark etchings. Paris, City of Pain.

They walked along the Seine, and it looked like every body of water Jessica had ever seen, dirty, as dirty as Lake Michigan or the Hudson, the Hamburg Hafen or the Mediterranean. "It's always the same water," Jessica told Elaine.

The compu-gendarmes patrolled every street corner, serving their master, Big Memory, as the total computer vector that dominated France had come to be called. The cops arrested anyone who refused to conform; they patrolled against *difference*, which Prime Minister LePen had outlawed.

"Maybe it's best that Tatiana didn't live to see this," Elaine mused.

"What are you talking about? She's still alive," Jessica reminded her.

Elaine was embarrassed. "I forgot." But it was easy to forget . . . Tatiana had been released only recently from the mental institution that had been her home for more than two decades, and now she lived quietly in Moscow, refusing to see any visitors.

That night Jessica, who was pursuing a master's degree in library science in her spare time, broke into Big Memory's cavernous files with a password she'd bought on the black market in Montparnasse. She managed to find the subfile on Situationist subversives, and by carefully tracking down every mention of the "Prague," she soon established that the collage still existed.

"I knew it," Elaine said. "I knew it."

In fact, all the evidence indicated the "Prague" was right there in Paris. If only they knew where to look . . .

A warning light started blinking on the computer Jessica had rented. The compu-gendarmes, probably alerted by an internal security mechanism, were trying to track her down. Jessica turned off the machine before they could trace her.

## 7. UNTITLED

"The Triumph of the Prague Workers' Councils" was Tatiana's most important work, for it described and invoked—possibly, some mystic anarchist-pagans claimed, it even summoned into being—Situationist uto-

pia: workers/consumers would establish local councils in factories and communes around the world; the non-bureaucratic, participatory councils would confiscate the productive forces of society, and thereby the proletariat as a revolutionary class *would seize history*.

Authority and hierarchy would simply vanish. Poof . . .

Only a handful of people had ever seen the “Prague” before its disappearance. All vouched for its almost mesmeric appeal; but it was a kind of upside-down mesmerism that challenged passivity, that smashed and ruptured the spectacle.

Elaine dreamt of the “Prague,” often. But once it was found, how could she keep it from becoming just another spectacle? “The long lost ‘Prague’”—just one more commodity—grist for the capitalist mill. Like the “Kronstadt” collage, set in a little alcove in the National Gallery, garnering quaint praise from *The Tatler* and *Time* . . .

The two women decided to go out on the town. Jessica dressed up in a short denim skirt and blue high heels.

Elaine was horrified. “Your shoes—!”

Jessica looked down at her feet and then back up at Elaine. “You don’t really think . . . ”

“I don’t know what to think. Do you swear? Do you swear you didn’t do it?”

“Tell me, Elaine,” said Jessica, very gently, “what can women such as we find to swear *on*? On the graves of our mothers, who loved us, but mistreated us, because they mistreated themselves? On the graves of our fathers, who worked too hard for too little money, and whom we can never respect, even though we’re moved profoundly by their sacrifice? On the Bible, on the Torah, which we don’t believe in? On Marx, who grew old and orthodox and, ultimately, bourgeois with his mathematics? On what, Elaine? On what?”

And Elaine loved Jessica then, loved her because they were very much a pair, because Jessica was the only one who understood what Elaine’s life had been all about.

“Swear on the life—not the grave—of Emma Goldman,” Elaine told her finally. “And Bessie Smith. Swear on cold ripe peaches on hot August days. Swear on *My Antonia*.”

“I swear,” Jessica said.

“I believe you,” Elaine said.

## 8. THE PLOT THICKENS

Jessica stood there, in the middle of the room, with her gun.

Madame LaGrange sat on her couch, calmly smoking a cigarette, and wearing a beautiful blue kimono. Monsieur Roche, next to her, fidgeted nervously. Madame LaGrange's obese chauffeur, Jacques, sat quietly on an easy chair off to the side.

Elaine watched it all, and it seemed to her that she'd watched it all before.

"I suppose you're wondering why I've called you all here," Jessica said.

They were.

"Madame LaGrange went to Belgium as soon as she heard about the pendant," Jessica began. "But the pendant had already been sold. When Madame heard it would be auctioned at Sotheby's, she flew to New York to bid on it. She arranged with a corrupt Sotheby's employee to stash the pendant in a box of worthless buttons, where Elaine chanced upon it."

Madame LaGrange blew a perfect smoke ring into the air, then smiled enigmatically.

"Meanwhile, Madame LaGrange had encouraged the relationship between her chauffeur and Monsieur Roche," Jessica went on.

Monsieur Roche began chewing on his nails.

"Relationship?" Elaine asked.

"Of course. They were lovers," Jessica explained. "But Jacques had a secret. Madame LaGrange had slowly and quite deliberately addicted him to heroin. Once he was addicted, he was bound to her forever. In fact, he was her slave. She knew that Monsieur Roche knew more about the collages than he let on, and she knew Jacques would come in handy one day."

Jacques sat very still on the easy chair, impassive and thoughtful. A single tear fell from his left eye and splashed on his cheek. His chauffeur's hat was perched at a rakish angle.

"Madame LaGrange was certain Roche held the key to the 'Prague.' Now was the time to act. Using Jacques as her intermediary, she offered money to Monsieur Roche, a great deal of money, and Monsieur Roche, who had guarded the 'Prague' honorably and courageously for many years, finally broke down. He needed the money for his sister's kidney transplant and to pay for Jacques's stay at a drug rehabilitation clinic. With the money in hand, Roche also treated himself to a new suit and the various parcels we saw in his apartment."

“Don’t forget the trellis for my orchids,” Monsieur Roche reminded them. “That was very important too.”

“Right. And one more thing. Madame LaGrange knew whoever had the pendant would eventually come to Roche. All she had to do was wait. When we left Monsieur Roche’s apartment, Jacques tailed us. He was the heavyset man we saw behind us.”

“I knew he looked familiar,” Elaine said.

“Madame LaGrange was the woman in the blue shoes who knocked you out, Elaine. At first I didn’t believe you,” Jessica admitted. “I thought you’d concocted the story so you wouldn’t have to share the necklace with me. But when I saw that Madame LaGrange, my evil double, my twin, only wore blue, I realized she was the culprit.”

“But why?” Elaine asked, turning from Jessica to Madame LaGrange. “Why?”

“I have my reasons,” said Madame LaGrange, quietly but with steely determination.

“She was jealous of Tatiana,” Jessica proposed. “At first I thought she wanted the collage for political reasons. Or because she respected Tatiana’s artistic vision. Or even as an investment opportunity to hedge against inflation. But now I know it was simply jealousy. Remember Eisenberg?”

“Yes. The old man who died. Tatiana’s accountant.”

“Accountant?” Madame LaGrange spit out the word. “Perhaps you mean the greatest fiduciary mind of the century.”

“Yes, Eisenberg was a genius,” Jessica acknowledged. “A master of oil depletion allowances, tax-shelters, and depreciation. He raised inventive bookkeeping to an art, and in fact lectured occasionally at the Sorbonne before he retired to Brussels. Madame LaGrange loved him. But he loved *Tatiana*. Madame never forgave Tatiana. She swore revenge. And what was her revenge? She would deprive the world of Tatiana’s work. She wanted the collage, *so she could annihilate it*. And she visited Eisenberg’s son, simply to find out if there was anything else of Tatiana’s she could destroy.”

“That’s why you wanted the collage?” Monsieur Roche accused Madame LaGrange, his voice breaking with sorrow, his eyes brimming over with tears. “To ruin something so beautiful? God forgive me.”

“It’s not too late,” Jessica said. “The collage still exists. Madame LaGrange couldn’t bring herself to destroy it.”

“I wanted to,” Madame LaGrange told them, and for the first time a hint of sadness crept into her voice. “I wanted to so badly. But it’s very powerful. More powerful than I . . .”

“Thank God,” Monsieur Roche muttered.

“God—or revolutionary Marxism,” said Jessica. “You be the judge.”

“I have to see it, Jessica, I have to,” Elaine begged. “Where is it?”

“Well, I can’t be sure—but I suspect it’s behind those curtains.” Jessica pointed to the blue damask satin that draped the windows behind Elaine.

## 9. MARTIAN TIME SLIP

They were alone in the Bois de Boulogne, where the red and yellow irises bloomed, and where the yellow and purple lilies were just beginning to bud.

They were alone with the collage, which was covered with heavy brown paper.

Together they unwrapped it. Together they propped the collage against a tree. Together they stepped back. Together they looked.

The collage conflated the Budapest Workers’ Councils of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968; together, Czechoslovakia and Hungary pushed back the Soviet army. The councils were triumphant. The last capitalist was hung with the guts of the last bureaucrat. True socialism reigned.

Jessica took another step back. “My God, it’s beautiful. The colors . . .”

“They’re *playing*,” Elaine said reverently.

In a startling reversal, Tatiana depicted the common people, leisured and happy, gamboling like a court of aristocrats. There were masquerade balls, coquettes, archery contests, jazz ensembles, and in one corner, a Los Angeles beach party and volleyball game.

But the most interesting effect was in the middle of the collage, where a kind of vacancy or telescoping occurred. Tatiana had cut a hole in the canvas, and covered it with clear cellophane; and somehow, miraculously, Tatiana had succeeded in bending the space-time continuum, so that through the center, the viewer could peer into another universe. Not metaphorically—*actually*. The other universe was actually visible.

“They talk about rupturing the spectacle,” Elaine reflected, “but I never knew they meant it literally.”

“I read something somewhere—that anarchism is a kind of miracle,” Jessica told her. “The intrusion of another world into this one.”

They looked through the cellophane and they saw the other universe. And what they saw was unspeakably beautiful. Unspeakable, because there were no words to describe it. Only mathematics could describe it: anarchism, socialism, freedom, fraternity raised to the infinite power.

But they could not pass through.

## 10. LIEBESTOD

A wind crept up and swept over them and over the flowers, and then Jessica took out her gun and pointed it at Elaine.

Nervously: “Jessica, what are you doing?”

“I love you, but I can’t trust you.”

Elaine was trembling. “Of course you can.”

“How can an anarchist trust anyone but herself?” Jessica asked sadly.

“I’d never do anything to hurt the collage,” Elaine said. “I’d protect it. I would.” She was desperate.

“Anyone can be corrupted. I have to guard the ‘Prague.’ For future generations. They’ll know what to do with it.”

“But all we’ve been through—”

“Exactly. All we’ve been through. Which means you’ll understand what I have to do. You’re the only one who *can* understand . . .”

“Yes, I see,” said Elaine, after thinking for a moment.

Jessica fired twice. One bullet went into Elaine’s abdomen, the other hit her chest.

Elaine fell to the ground. Jessica knelt by her side. And then Elaine took out a revolver. And aimed—

Not at Jessica—

At the collage. She fired six times, and when she stopped firing, there was nothing left.

“I had to, Jessica. I couldn’t trust you, either. I couldn’t let it be put on display somewhere. It’s safer this way.”

“Yes,” Jessica said. “Of course.” What courage, she marvelled. What commitment.

“The expropriators are expropriated,” Elaine said, with a little laugh, but the laughter turned into coughing, and the cough turned into choking.

Jessica took Elaine's hand and kissed it. "I've never loved anyone as much as I love you."

"Swear?" Elaine said, the blood in her throat making her gurgle.

"I swear on the life—not the grave—of Emma Goldman. And Bessie Smith." Jessica kissed Elaine's red lips. "I swear on cold ripe peaches on hot August days. I swear on *My Antonia*."

"We saw something," said Elaine, content, and then she died.

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