

STALIN IN ARUBA

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Stalin in Aruba

Stalin invented the art of cropping:
chopping Trotsky out of every archived
rally, removing the heads

of his friends from family albums,
splicing his own head into a childhood
of wheat fields, farm animals, fruit trees.

Every time we eliminate red-eye, ten pounds
or ten years, that troublesome ex from our photos,
we do the same or a very different thing,

depending, most would say, on our intent—
trying to obscure? or clarify?
Some might ask if we mean to deceive.

But simplicity and clarity always obfuscate:
actions become ideas we only squint at,
too small or dazzling to see properly.

Stalin's favorite trick: cropping out
his own head, enlarging it,
then pasting it above dozens of girl-heads

bound in white and red kerchiefs.
He knew a good photo is more
than propaganda. The good papa,

he was reflecting back only
what we wanted, needed, to see.
Just like I might superimpose Stalin

onto someone's vacation photos. Stalin in Aruba!
decked out in a tank suit with red racing
stripes down each side, open-mouthed, amazed—

not by the chrome and glass of the capitalists,
or their neon string bikinis, pierced navels
and nipples, frothy daiquiris in eighteen flavors,

but by the dozen disposable cameras flashing white,
poolside, one after another!
Blinking, Stalin rubs his stunned eyes—what

will we later make of all these snapshots?
And why so many? They will be archived
in shoeboxes in the shadows under our beds,

not among the copper pipes and dark
metal guts of a Kremlin utility room,
but kept nonetheless—to what end?

I'll leave Stalin in Aruba, amazed
but peering past the camera's flash,
and smudge out all the rest, until

the bleached teeth and winking diamond rings
blur together—simply dazzling!

The Führer's Girls

Mitzi, 1927, Rope

In our dress shop across from the Deutsche Haus
we didn't sell it, only cord, piping, braid—

the gilt cord I used to trim his Christmas gift,
cushions with swastikas embroidered in silk,

the yellow piping on his tweed armchair
where he refused, the second time, to marry me,

the gold braid on his cuffs my first Party meeting,
where he fed me lemon cake with his fingers.

My woodland sprite, he named me once,
with necklaces, but no rings.

Around my neck, this last—running knot,
scaffold knot, strung loose enough he has time to find me

as he found me first,
among the Berchtesgaden firs.

Geli, 1931, Revolver

He's tiresome, he twitches, he
breaks things— my bisque piano baby
figurines, for example.

Carpet Biter, Emil calls him, when he falls
frothing on the floor—
no voice lessons in Vienna,
no cinema with my school chums,
no calling him Uncle Alf when we're undressed.

Scrubbing his back, I count
his moles (seven), squatting over him, I count
the two years, the days left
(six-hundred and ninety-four) until he says
Emil and I can marry, once he's sure I've matured.

While he takes Eva, that bitch,
riding in the Mercedes, I stay home.
Who will interrupt with brown-shirts
posted at the door?

Uncle Alf's Walther eight-caliber
against my chest,
Emil, Emil, I whisper,
until my nipples clot up, hard.

Eva, 1935, Sleeping Pills

Frau Schaub came as ambassador,
with flowers and telegrams,
so my whole office is a flower shop,
smells like a cemetery chapel,

same as my suite at Berghof,
where I wait out the dinner parties,
away from the diplomats.

Wolf keeps his Lugers locked up, after
last time, but keeps me stocked up—
Veronal, Luminel, Phanodorm.

Thirty-five this time, and I'll lay
my Rolleiflex next to me
so I might emerge from the developer bath,
fixed as they will find me—
barefaced blond,
chrysanthemum blossoms,
black sheets.

Renate, 1937, Out the Window

Our first date, he started with the details,
Gestapo techniques. After this warm-up,
he undressed, expected, yes,
but then begged me to kick him, yes,
better than he deserved, yes,
he was not worthy, yes, kissed
the palms of my feet.

The morphine muddles, I know,
but the sound my skirt makes, full of air,
same as the whip's bite,
the pavement quickening the same gray
as the wool uniforms
of the four SS rushing up—
why wait? to wake to light
refracting off anything but insignia.

Eva, 1945, Cyanide

Married in my black silk,
champagne in the sitting room,
and after, a glass ampule,
jerky wedding dance,
bitter almond air.