

THE SPADE

February 14th on the Long Island Railroad platform and the asterisks cascading out of the steel sky, disappearing into my wounded palms. I am the only human being alive here tonight, pacing my footprints from one end of the platform to another, fumbling in my coat for a cigarette, a match. I think of my wife's twisted leg shambling a swath through the elements, the trail of ellipses left by her cane. My wounds ache in these palms and I strike fire, rubies burning in my coat pocket.

I buried diamonds in the old countries for Dragovich before his revolution failed, and now I track stolen jewels in America for strangers who line my pockets with currency. I remember Dragovich stroking a black rabbit in his lap, the sunlight reflecting off his almond eyes. He said, *Better to go into the night with a weapon than a walking stick.*

When I think of all of us who did not make it out

alive, I feel lucky to witness my breath spiraling up, out, away into what are no longer night raid clouds or burning sails.

Doctor Segovovich died with a stethoscope in his fist and night planes in his ears. His wife—Lady Segovovich—sailed later for America, where she abandoned her mourning veil for a newfound revenge. Brought over by her daughter, a poet, and son-in-law who worked in umbrella repair. Lady Segovovich. Her veil could not disguise those long, famous lashes that had once been batted at us from movie screens of our youth. But here in America she was processed by an immigration official just like everyone else. Immigration official? A clerk I call him. Because even though I have seen where and how he lives, I know he is only a handsomely paid thief. This official, Von Schleissenz (the clerk!) asked after Lady Segovovich's possessions. She had an engraved cigarette case and a framed wedding photograph. From a white velvet pouch onto the cold dark wood of the desk her rubies spilled out last. A necklace that had been with her people forever. Just imagine Von Schleissenz blinded by the glare of such jewels. Now watch him slide the rubies into his hand, his pocket. He took a gold-papered cigarette from Lady Segovovich's engraved case and lit it with a small flourish of a match, dismissing her with a hiss of smoke.

I wait on the platform for the bright light in the distance. Valentine's Day is also my wife's birthday. She waits for me with our friends tonight. They are gathered around a table in Brooklyn eating lamb as accordion music plays. I see Maurice lifting a wine bottle, Iphegnia's dance with a

wooden spoon, Zara's hazel eyes full of candlelight, tapping her wrist to the accordion's waltz.

Dragovich used to say, *Call a spade a spade*, digging the rusted spear of his bayonet into the dirt. He died in a torn shirt, his hands ruined, singing.

Lady Segovovich went to New York's Lower East Side, where many knew her face. They threw flowers at her on the streets, but she could not think of bouquets, of silver screens, of this horrible new country. Only the villain with her now. Her family's necklace stolen away—who would believe her? The poet daughter and umbrella repairman tracked me to Brooklyn, where some know me as a thief. But you cannot thieve what has already been stolen.

When I arrived at the umbrella repair shop, Lady Segovovich was in a state of high drama. She swung at the tea service and tore off her mourning veil, cursing, *The thief!* as she ran into my arms. From the ceiling hung metal spiders—inverted, stripped of their rain cloths. The mourning veil caught on a spire to sway above our heads. Whispering in her ear, I told Lady Segovovich what I tell them all: *I too know what it is to have lost*. The bills she pressed into my then-clean hands! I tracked the jewels to a Long Island lawn while the roses were still in bloom.

Zara—wounded while gliding through the air on her trapeze during our season of the night raids. I was there at the circus grounds that night. With a sledgehammer I gaveled a plate, lifting the stone to a bell in the sky. It rang out as the night planes dove, bombing the fields. I saw Dragovich the first

time then, running for the fallen trapeze tent with a black rabbit tucked beneath his arm. I dropped the hammer and followed him.

A clerk is a clerk is a clerk is a clerk is a clerk. Von Schleissensz—thief!—had I not waited for you? Did you ever see me out among your rose bushes dancing alone, my arms full of branches, petals kissing my cheeks, fingers careful to only brush the thorns? Of course you didn't. For five months I watched from your Long Island garden. Lady Segovovich grew impatient. I received weekly visits from the umbrella repair man. *I get one chance, only one!* I yelled at the son-in-law. *First the roses, then the asterisks.* Five months, Von Schleissensz! You with your tumbler full of rye and Madame Von Schleissensz nibbling slivered almonds. The two of you did not dance even once in the window or gaze out to catch the shadow in the roses. I tossed you several obscene gestures, spat in your flowerbeds, cursed your name in three languages (the last created by Dragovich, to be used if we were ever taken away). Saturday nights for five months your windows stayed dark with parted curtains. Gone to the city from seven till midnight, where undoubtedly you dined beneath glimmering chandeliers and undertipped your elegant waiter before the vestibule spat you back into the night.

Your cat gave me my entrance. I watched her slip through a whisper in the window frame. I, who traveled with Dragovich, who threw weapons into the Black Sea, who buried diamonds among the unmarked graves, I who know that with a flick of the wrist a whisper becomes a great yawn in the darkness. I was inside your house, rushing past the

china, the library, up the curved staircase and its polished balustrade, into your bedroom.

Dragovich told us, *They will never understand that a weapon fires no music, that a jewel is just a pretty stone to hold and admire.* I dug up those diamonds. Later. For Zara. To escape our fates. We traded jewels for passage on trains that took us to ships leaving for America. New York. Brooklyn. A Polish neighborhood. With its bakeries and flower shops, nobody minded the smell from the glue factory so much at all, and the streets leading to the East River were lined with trees. Zara and I with our black hair and black eyes among so many gold heads and green arms.

What are you? The women asked my wife.

We were with Dragovich.

I say a clerk is a clerk because only an imbecile would hide the rubies he stole in a shoebox: the obvious target in a walk-in closet the size of the apartment poor Maurice spent his childhood suffocating in. What do you know of rooms, Von Schleissensz? What do you know of Lady Segovovich's lashes? What do you know of my wife's trapeze career, crippled by occupation? I stomped your worthless shoebox, peeling off my gloves. It was people like you who stole the music from our lives.

Our last night together, Dragovich set fire to the pier. I carried Zara away in my arms, her cane beating a tattoo into the air, *No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No!*

In the closet I heard voices closing in. I dropped my gloves and went running.

My grandfather was a highdive champion, as was my father, and therefore, I. When I joined Dragovich, my father disowned his only son. He told me, *Men in this family have flown through the air, and you, you have chosen to dig yourself into the earth with a maniac.* I chose Dragovich. I fell in love with Zara. Sprinting through Von Schleissensz's bedroom, I had forgotten the charge of great heights. Yet our instincts remember what we have forgotten. Pigeons still return to sites of scorched awnings. Sailors will always wake, looking for stars in their prison ceilings. I dove, bursting through glass—fists full of my blood and the Segovovich's rubies. I was ready to plummet while churning through the night air, but landed on the floor covered in shards. Still the voices, rising now. And music. An oboe, a bassoon. I got to my knees, dropping the wet jewels into a coat pocket, and looked back over my shoulder. It was not a window I dove through, but a free-standing mirror that had caught the moon. The room went silent. And I laughed. I laughed in the shattered mirror. I laughed until I couldn't feel my hands, then went rushing through the doors, down the lawn, past the garden, to the streets. By the time I reached the railroad platform, the asterisks were falling.

Dragovich applauded like a madman when he was caught on the blazing pier and not one of us went to him. We were already hurrying away. Even his black rabbit sped back into the forest. Dragovich crooned out a war cry before his hands got taken and broken then broken again.

The train will come to deliver me back to my wife and friends tonight. I stand at the platform's edge with arms

in the air, asterisks in my eyes. Von Schleissensz, on the floor of your enormous closet you will find my gloves fallen in an obscene gesture: my gift to you. I am keeping Lady Segovovich's rubies. Tonight I remembered Dragovich. But the stones are not for him. Nor for me. Not even for St. Valentine, thief among thieves. When I arrive in Brooklyn, I will lift the bottle from Maurice's grip, bow before Iphegnia's applause, and kiss my wife, spilling wine into her glass and blood into her palms, singing, *Zara, darling, jewel of my heart...*