

Dubcek



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INTRODUCTION
 In the summer of 1968 I was lucky enough to make my first visit to
 Czechoslovakia. This trip changed my life. I was twenty-twoi¼Œ had just
 left Oxfordi¼Œ was uncertain what work to doi¼Œ and travelled with my
 sisteri¼Œ Joannai¼Œ on a student train to Prague. Like anyone who has ever
 been therei¼Œ we were overwhelmed by the faded but then blooming
 summer beauty of the city - the dark narrow streets of the Old Town
 and the Jewish quarter where Katka livedi¼Œ the graceful statues on the
 Charles Bridgei¼Œ the tiny lanes winding up the hill to Prague Castle and
 the cathedral.
 From Prague we took long rides on rattling buses and on ironclad
 i¼Œ steam trdinsi¼Œ marvellous behemoths i¼Œ through southern Bohemia and
 ~mto~orai¼Œ viai¼Œ riding from one village to another. We sat on the open
 car~e stepsi¼Œ legs danglingi¼Œ as we rumbled through long fields of corn
 .read}to:be~ harv~tedi¼Œ in and out of dark pine forests where cart tracks
 .meandered across the railsi¼Œ and into neat little stations bedecked with
 i¼Œ tlowersi¼Œ where~people put out their hands to have the monsters halt.
 Moist of all I remember the extraordinary joie de vivre of almost
 ~eve~one we met. The joy of talkingi¼Œ and of being allowed to remember
 - and to hope! Life had the effervescence of champagne; I had never
 seen such a bubbling of hope and

excitement. I remember one country-
iwoman looking with astonishment at
photographs of the Masaryks
/had brought from Prague. Six months ago we were
not allowed to
know that these men existed. That the Communist Party of all
institu-
tions was offering such freedoms! It was too good to believe! Yes.
In
the U Fleku beer house in Prague everything was exuberance
and
contempt
for the Russians
over long jugs of black beer. In little

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目录:

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