

**Editor's note:** This is an excerpt from the work of historical fiction "The Black Dog Chronicles," by R. Vladimir Baumgarten, PhD.

### **THE BLACK DOG CHRONICLES, PART I - ANDREJ**

The village of Tlenocany was located in a wooded hollow, which was in turn situated among the green foothills of the eastern Carpathians. Tlenocany was indistinguishable from hundreds of other Slovak hamlets save for one exception: it had no well. This fact accounts for the tragedy that marks the formal beginning of this story, which the author will relate in due course. The average citizens of Tlenocany were poor, downtrodden peasants, humble Slovak subjects of His Apostolic Majesty Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary. Their lives were marked by hard work and drudgery, periodically broken by heavy draughts of what passed for brandy, which occasionally caused brain damage. From the cradle to the grave, one knew where one stood in Tlenocany, and this inspired few illusions.

Tlenocany, incidentally, cannot be found on any recent map. The village was burned by retreating Germans early in 1945. Only charred ruins remain. This last event was one of very few outstanding occurrences in an otherwise uneventful history of close to three centuries. Tlenocany was first founded by Slovak peasants fleeing Turkish inroads from the Hungarian plain in the seventeenth century. Its people endured heavy requisitions from Imperial Austrian forces and Transylvanian rebels at war with each other. Peace—and rule by the nobility—was restored early in the eighteenth century. Many subsequent catastrophes, which struck that part of the world, did not strike the village. In 1831, a cholera epidemic convulsed eastern Slovakia. Many peasants, believing the nobility had poisoned the wells, rose in bloody revolt. Although there were few cases of cholera in Tlenocany, there was no well, and the people remained calm. The absence of the well, however, was a factor in one noteworthy catastrophe in 1876, one which sent a teenage lad down the long road to recognized heroism.

Early one morning, the villagers were alerted to the sound of a woman's hysterical, drawn-out scream. Within seconds, several pairs of bare and ill-shod feet were running in the direction of the sound. The scream came from the nearby stream, which supplied water for all the villagers' needs. Two sights—both of them awe-inspiring—confronted those who converged on the scene. One of these was a large, black dog of wolflike appearance, which, perceiving danger, splashed through the water and made for the forest on the opposite bank. The other was that of a young girl lying among the embankment, with an ever-expanding pool of crimson erupting from her throat.

All the villagers fell silent, except for one prematurely aged woman who pushed through their midst. She began keening wildly, "Ooooooh, my Anicka! Ooooooh, ooooooh, aiiiee!" The mother attempted to raise her daughter's head, while blood in a bucket like quantity splattered the elder woman's skirt. Another woman, likewise distraught but less hysterical, tore away a part of her own skirt and attempted to bandage the wound. The girl stopped screaming: she gasped and gurgled like a river after a severe storm. Within minutes, the sound of an ominous rattle rose from her throat, and then she was pale and silent.

The villagers were likewise silent, hushed by the sudden presence of Death. But after one very long minute, the mother commenced howling like a wounded beast, and the other women, as if on cue, did likewise. The eyes of the men were moist with tears, but they remained silent. They understood the nature of the tragedy well enough, but could not—or refused to—understand the rationale of this or so many other disasters which marked their lives. A benevolent God permitted evil events for reasons inscrutable to all but Him: this they had been taught to accept. Yet, with every tragedy there was always this same unanswered question.

At this moment, a lone figure approached the scene on horseback. He was of medium height, swarthy complexion, and endowed with a handsome mustache; he wore the fur dolman cap common among the Hungarian nobility. The man's name was Count Tibor Paleki, and he was the lord of the manor located several miles away. He had been taking his morning ride when the sound of the commotion attracted him. Paleki halted at the scene of the death and dismounted cautiously. Although serfdom had been abolished in 1848, it was still customary for peasants to doff their hats to a member of the nobility. The menfolk were too preoccupied with the tragedy at hand to observe this piece of decorum. Paleki, generally regarded as a kindly man by the standards of his class, would not have insisted upon this point. Now, himself awed by the presence of Death, Paleki removed his own cap. "How did this happen?" he asked hesitantly.

The women, still bawling with grief, all began talking at once, so that all the count could surmise was that the girl had come to the stream with pails, as she did every other morning. He held up his hand for silence. "You," he addressed the oldest man in the group, "you explain it, please."

The elderly peasant with drooping mustaches snorted like a tired horse, and then stated quite simply, "Carny pes—the Black Dog."

So that was it, then. The feral King of the Forest had struck again, and this time he had claimed a human life. Ten years previous—at a time when Paleki was living in exile in Italy—a neighboring noble had simply abandoned his unwanted puppies in the forest, where they had grown up wild and had multiplied. Wild dogs are much more innately vicious than wolves: the latter only attack men in the desperate hunger of a bitter winter, whereas a wild dog may conceivably strike at any given time. The Black Dog had become something of a legend, even killing other wild dogs and enjoying the uncontested supremacy of the hill-country. He had also killed several deer on the Paleki estate. On one occasion, the Black Dog had mauled and seriously injured a woodcutter;

the man's companion had been quick-witted enough to light a torch and frighten the beast away. For the first time, the King of the Forest had killed a human being.

Count Tibor Paleki sighed. There was so much evil in the world, and even great strides in progress—such as national independence and an improved standard of living for the peasantry—could not eradicate all of it. He had been an impassioned crusader at one time. It was only after long years and considerable sorrow that he had learned idealism has its limits. He remembered the insane grandeur of 1848-49, when, as a young hussar, he had fought in Hungary's War of Independence against the Austrian Emperor. That had seemed like a simple time of life when he was living it (although, in retrospect, he could see that the issues were indeed complex), a time when thousands of sabers reflected the afternoon sun, when his army was on one side, when the Austrians were on the other, when the Hungarian battle cry "Ellen!" rose in a tumult from thousands of voices, when hoof beats thundered in the cadence of a charge, and when issues were decisively resolved through saber-stroke and pistol-shot. It was a time of glory, honor, and courage.

And, then, something had gone wrong. In the following year, the Star came to the aid of the Emperor, and Hungary was overrun by her enemies. Paleki and thousands of other Hungarians fled into exile, while behind them, hundred of not so fortunate political or military leaders were executed or imprisoned. The following years constituted a different sort of time, in which he learned and mastered the hard art of patience. In the course of that decade, a new breed of Hungarian arose, one which was equally determined and tenacious, but one which was realistic enough to wage a political war within the framework of the Imperial system. Austria, meanwhile, had won a war and lost the peace. Defeated in new wars in 1859 and 1866, the Habsburgs resigned themselves to taking on the Magyar nobility as equal partners. Emperor Franz Joseph was crowned King of Hungary in Budapest, and the Hungarians were free to manage

their own internal affairs. Last but not least, Paleki and others returned home under amnesty.

His aged father had died while he was away, and though the old man had provided for a trusteeship during Paleki's absence, many new problems had arisen. The times were changing, and many other lesser nobles were selling their lands and investing in industry in Budapest. Tibor clung stubbornly to his land, tackled all the new problems, and in large measure succeeded. The only problem, which had remained unsolvable, was the Black Dog. Now he had claimed a life for the first time.

Count Tibor gazed pensively at the peasants before him. Many of them—out of necessity—still labored on his land two or three days a week. He was pragmatic enough to realize that he needed the peasants at least as much as they needed him. One had to turn out a fair amount of produce—especially in these days of growing industrial capitalism—to stay alive, and the small plots of these people were simply not enough. A moderate man in his politics, he regarded his relationship with the peasantry as one of partnership. The wages he paid were average on a national scale, but he went further than many other nobles in providing extra benefits, frequently funding important social events such as weddings and funerals. In truth, he was in many respects a Christian at heart, and now he confronted an issue in which the demands of Courage and the incentive of Compassion were one: he immediately resolved what needed to be done.

“Zuzka,” he gently addressed the grieving mother, “you have my deepest sympathy. I shall speak with Father Mihailik this afternoon and make all the arrangement.” (He wanted to make sure that the poor child was at least buried in a decent coffin.)

“Uncle Tibor,” one of the men spoke up, “shall we form a hunting party for that god-damned beast?”

For the first time, count Tibor's eyes shot with fire and his jaw was clenched. "No," he said abruptly. "I'll call you if I need you, but his ass belongs to me!"

Then he rode away. Humanitarian though he was, Count Tibor took his sense of aristocracy seriously. As lord of the Paleki manor, he regarded the matter as a personal vendetta between himself and the Black Dog. But as he crossed the village it dawned on him that there was one man who knew the dark hollows with which Count Tibor was unfamiliar. He supposed it best to take that individual as his guide. Bearing this thought in mind, Count Tibor considered it wise to make a second stop after his conversation with the priest.

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On that morning at a sturdy white frame house some distance from the village, something unusual was taking place. It seemed that a farmer named Jan Borovak was sitting in his chair rather than working. This was not an activity generally attributed to Jan Borovak, who was energetic even among a people noted for hard work. Borovak was more prosperous than many of his neighbors, partly through his own cleverness, partly through good luck, and partly through his friendship with Count Tibor. The fact that he owned a frame house and did not live in a chimney-less hut—like so many in Tlenocany—was proof of his relative affluence.

No more physical work remained for that morning. The crops would take care of themselves until the summer harvest. His younger son, Andrej, home from school for the summer, had already milked the cows, and his elder brother Štefan had taken both the cows and goats out to pasture. Actually, Jan Borovak was more of a livestock herdsman than a farmer, as most of his land had been converted for grazing. His sitting in the chair was in truth not so much idleness as contemplation: tomorrow, he and Štefan were to take several heads to the marketplace of the nearest real town, a

distance of some ten miles. The Jewish butcher did not like skinny cows, and Jan was estimating how much profit he could expect on some of the fatter heifers.

The tall, stoop-shouldered Slovak peasant managed his worldly affairs well enough. He loved his land in much the same way he loved his wife: not with the fiery passion of youth, but with the serenity which comes from a long, mutually satisfying relationship. He drank, as did the other Slovak peasants, but he never did it with any sense of desperate absorption. His common sense and perseverance accounted for much of his life of modest success. One other factor gazed sternly down from the wall at him.

The only item of pure luxury in Jan Borovak's house was a picture of a man in a hussar's uniform, which hung on the wall above the mantle. His father, Martin Borovak, had been a veteran of Hungary's War of Independence in 1848-49, like many other Slovaks in this district. The Slovak national movement had not been strong in his county, although Martin's brother, Vladislav, had joined the Hurbanovci, for which he was subsequently hanged. Most Slovaks of the Tlenocany area served in the Hungarian cavalry. During the war, Martin Borovak had saved Count Tibor's life on one occasion. Martin himself was killed fighting the Russians at Temesvar during the final days of the war, and young Count Tibor never forgot his benefactor. He vowed that if he ever returned to Hungary he would look after the well being of Martin's son.

This was yet another reason for Jan Borovak's relative prosperity. Count Tibor favored him with low-cost grain, and, once perceiving Jan's strong sense of duty, entrusted him with several important items of business, for which he generously compensated the sturdy Slav. Finally, the two men had gone on several hunting expeditions together. Even among stern military units, there is often a strong sense of democracy shared among men encamped in the woods at night. In the case of Jan Borovak and Count Tibor, these excursions evolved into genuine friendship. Share a

bottle of slivovice around a campfire at night had broken down all barriers, and though Tibor was the hunter and Jan was the tracker, not other distinction existed between the Magyar nobleman and the Slovak peasant.

And now, the sound of approaching hoof beats indicated to Jan that his friend and benefactor was coming to call upon him. He rose from his chair and went out onto the porch to face that man who was dismounting. "Good morning, Your Excellency," Jan greeted him readily. Addressing Count Tibor, as an "excellency" was much less subservient than one might first imagine. To the other, more humble Slovak peasants, Paleki was "Uncle Tibor". Borovak's customary address was both a mark of respect and an indication that he was himself a trusted retainer.

"Good morning, Janko," Count Tibor replied. "I am glad to find you at home." He entered the house as naturally as he would have his own manor house.

Jan produced a jug of brandy and two cups. "Just one," Tibor cautioned him, sighing. "I have much to do this day, and Commissioner Horvazy is joining me for dinner this evening."

Borovak nodded equitably, handed his guest a cup, and filled his own. "Pro patrie!" Tibor saluted, an old hussar's toast, and they clanked their cups solemnly together. They downed their brandy in a fiery gulp, breathed a deep sigh, and smiled together at the burst of warmth inside each of them.

"I was just coming from Reverend Mihailik's rectory," Tibor began, "because I had to make some funeral arrangements. There's been a death in the village."

"Bozhe maj!" Jan exclaimed. "Who caught it this time?"

"Do you know the widow Susedka?"

"I do. Poor as a bird, but strong. I'm rather surprised to hear it."

"It wasn't the widow, it was her daughter. Anicka went down to the stream to fetch water, and the Black Dog tore out her throat."

“Damnation!” Borovak spat. “I’ve been expecting something like this for some time now. Someone should have shot that cur years ago. He’s been getting bolder, and I can hear him howling up on the ridge at nights. I set out after him with a rifle on a couple of occasions, but never could get close to him.”

“That is why I came to talk with you,” Tibor replied. “The son of a bitch has stuck to my gullet for too long, and now he’s gone to killing one of our people. I won’t be able to rest until I see him dead, and have decided to track him down. But you are the only man who knows the by ways well enough for me to pinpoint his lair.”

“I shall, of course, be happy to undertake this search within the next few days,” Jan assented.

Count Tibor was silent for a long minute, and then asked, “Why not earlier?”

Borovak sighed. “Štefan and I have to sell some heifer to the Jew tomorrow.”

“Can’t that wait?” queried count Tibor, with a touch of impatience.

“Pardon me, Your Excellency, I shall, of course, go on the hunt earlier if you absolutely demand it. You see harvest is fast approaching, and I must sell some cattle before that time.”

Count Tibor was silent for a long moment. “Normally,” he murmured, “I wouldn’t ask something like this of you on such short notice. But this is one thing which will bother me until it is done. If you could spare me Štefan ...but, no, Štefan is going to market with you.”

“How about my younger son, Andrej?” Borovak suggested. “You could borrow him for a day or so.”

Count Tibor arched his eyebrows. “He’s quite young,” he observed. “Little more than a child, really. You know what a dangerous business this will be. If something goes wrong, he would have to back me up with a rifle. Does he shoot well? Can he shoot at all?”

Jan Borovak smiled. "I just recently started him on target-practice, and well, he's improving. But I did not consider him on account of a gun. He's a better tracker than his older brother, and may even be better than me!"

Count Tibor laughed. "Surely you jest, my friend!"

"I am not jesting, Your Excellency," Jan replied, his tone becoming more serious. "My Andrej...well...he's not like other boys in many ways. Even when he was younger, he was less interested in games with other boys than he was in talking long, solitary walks. At first, this bothered me: people who think too much go crazy, you know. But over the last few years he has explored that area better than I have. He has no fear of those black woods in Devil's Hollow, which all the women are scared of. His mother doesn't know he's been there—she would go mad if she did, so I told him not to say anything. But I think the Black Dog's lair is somewhere in there. And if anyone could help you locate it, it would be my Andrej."

Count Tibor was thoughtful. "I am impressed," he said, finally. "If your lad is so intrepid, it would be well for him to begin following in your footsteps."

"Andrej!" Borovak called out. There was the patter of bare feet racing across the yard outside, and a fourteen-year-old boy suddenly materialized on the porch. He was of sturdy frame and had blond, flaxen hair. His gray eyes lacked the mischievous twinkle of youth, but mirrored a peculiar sense of contemplation.

Count Tibor Paleki perceived—for reasons he himself could not fully explain—that this youth was just what he needed. "Good morning, Your Excellency," Andrej greeted him, not in a boyish, singsong voice, but with a genuine air of dignity.

"Good morning, young falcon," Tibor returned, impressed.

"There is a task which Count Tibor wishes you to perform while Štefan and I are away," Jan informed his son. "You might like it better than milking cows."

Count Tibor smiled, and addressed the boy: "First of all, how would you like to spend a night in my house?"

Andrej Borovak was somewhat taken aback. Even a son of a fairly well to do farmer could hardly ever expect this. His father likewise eyed Count Tibor quizzically. "What I had in mind," Tibor continued, "was for you to come to my house for dinner tomorrow. Then, just rest for awhile. But early, very early the next morning, I would like you to accompany me on a hunt."

Young Andrej's eyes widened. "The Black Dog!" he exclaimed suddenly.

Young man, are you afraid?"

Andrej frowned thoughtfully for a long moment. "Ask me when we're out in the woods," he said finally, "and then I'll let you know when it's too late to turn back."

Both Count Tibor and his father could not avoid bursting into laughter at his line of reasoning.

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That evening at the Paleki estate was characterized by the dinner mentioned at the Borovak house. Count Istvan Horvazy, the county commissioner, and several other members of the local gentry were in attendance. In this particular county, it had become the custom of these gentlemen to dine together once a week. They would eat dinner at each other's estates, and it so happened that on this particular night the Paleki estate had been designated. Count Tibor's guests welcomed this invitation, as he had an especially good chef and several competent assistants. Count Tibor, for his part, accepted this state of affairs as a social obligation, nothing more nor less. It was true that he enjoyed the company of several guests, but Count Horvazy was not necessarily one of them.

It was not simply a case of Count Tibor disliking Horvazy: they had always enjoyed cordial relations. Horvazy, a member of the Diet in Budapest, was a passionate

politician, and his politics differed considerably from Tibor's. Theoretically, the post of county commissioner was elective; in practice, it remained in the hands of the same family from one generation to the next. Istvan Horvazy held the post because his father had held it before him, and Istvan's son (an arrogant, reckless horseman of a youth) would undoubtedly follow. The Horvazy family had developed the science of district gerrymandering into a fine art.

Tibor Paleki and Istvan Horvazy had evolved into two very different personalities over the years. The former had started out as a fiery idealist and later became a moderate, while the latter had once been a lukewarm patriot and later became a rabid nationalist. Horvazy had also participated in the Hungarian War of Independence, but only briefly and reluctantly. In January 1849, when the Austrians first captured Buda and Pest (then still separate cities), Horvazy and a number of other Hungarian nobles left the honveds and offered their submissions to Field Marshal Windischgratz. These men had come to the conclusion they could only rule all of Hungary—including the Slav and Romanian lands—through the scepter of the house of Habsburg. They were undoubtedly correct up to a point: Slovaks, Romanians, Croats, and Serbs were then siding with the Habsburgs as the lesser of two evils. After Austria's victory—owed in part to these peoples—their own aspirations were dismissed in cavalier fashion. Hungary remained a single unit, albeit under Austrian administration. Istvan Horvazy lived quietly on his estate throughout the following decade. Immediately after the Austrian commissioner was recalled in 1860, the Horvazy family's political machine began functioning again. Horvazy regarded the 1867 compromise as a victory for his kind of Magyar. He had become a vociferous defender of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Moreover, in spite of his partially Slovak ancestry—or perhaps because of it—he had become increasingly anti-Slav. His rhetoric became more violent with each passing year. Count Tibor instinctively distrusted this kind of politician: he sought enemies who

were nonexistent, created crises that were unnecessary, and started wars in which other people were killed.

After the meal was concluded, Paleki and his guests adjourned to the study, where they sat back to enjoy cigars, brandy, and conversation, in accordance with established custom. Count Horvazy, as usual, initiated the conversation. "There's a certain item of news which will interest you gentlemen," he began, "but one I felt it politique to hold until after dinner. Serbia and Montenegro have declared war on the Turks."

This might have been mildly disturbing to the Hungarian gentry, but it was hardly surprising. The Balkan provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina—inhabited by many Serbs—had been in a state of revolt against the Turks since the previous year. A trained observer was not the only person who could have predicted that their brother Slavs would join the struggle.

"This hardly concerns Hungary—or even the Monarchy as a whole," spoke Imre Karolyi, a young conservative. "The Grand Turk may not be as strong as he used to be, but he can still hold his own against those swineherdsmen. Turkey will win the war soon enough, and it will have no bearing on Austria-Hungary."

Horvazy waved his hand impatiently. "But what if Turkey cannot crush the Serbs?" he demanded. "And what if Russia steps in? The Monarchy cannot afford to tolerate the presence of a large South Slav state on her southern border. If the Turks cannot hold Bosnia, we may have to consider occupation."

Tibor smiled benignly. "Oh, come now, Istvan," he chided gently. "The last thing that the Monarchy needs now is to get itself entangled in that mess down there. You yourself said that Hungary must have no Slavs."

"That is true!" Horvazy exclaimed. "And I am correct in saying that. But we must be prepared for all possibilities. If it comes down to a choice between Bosnia becoming

a Russian satellite or Bosnia becoming our satellite, the latter is definitely the lesser of two evils.”

“It would require a sizable military force if the Monarchy decided to occupy Bosnia,” Tibor interjected, “and our soldiers might become burdened with fighting guerrillas for years. I might add that such foreign involvement would do nothing to benefit internal security at home.”

This conversation proceeded to turn into a forum, as the gentry debated the pros and cons of an Austrian occupation of the Turkish-owned province. “Ah, hell,” Horvazy sighed, “we’re arguing about something that hasn’t even happened yet. And it is true that we have our work cut out for us at home. I believe that the greatest issue facing Hungary today is the Magyarization of our subject peoples. We have already begun the first steps, but there is still much, much to be done! Thank God we shut down that viper’s nest in Marton last year.”

The “viper’s nest in Marton” was a reference to Slovenska Matica, the Slovak cultural institution. It had been established in Turciansky Svaty Martin (“Marton” was its Magyar name) in the last decade, in part through a donation by the King-Emperor Franz Joseph himself. Matica was one of the few tangible concessions which the Slovak people had gained from the Monarchy. Although its work was purely cultural, Matica was labeled by Magyar chauvinists as a “hotbed of Pan-Slavism.” In the past year it had been shut down by Prime Minister Tisza, who claimed that the foundation had violated its bylaws, which stated that the institution was the property of the Slovak nation. After all, Tisza had reasoned there really was no Slovak nation. The museum, library, and money were all confiscated by the Hungarian government. Count Tibor secretly considered this an injustice, but knowing the feelings of his countrymen, had never spoken openly of the matter.

“I have proposed a new piece of legislation that we are about to introduce,” Horvazy continued. “My friends in the Diet and I want a bill passed which will officially give all towns and rivers in Hungary Magyar names.”

“How much good will that do?” one of the others questioned. “What we call Kassa, the Germans will continue to call Kaschau and the Slovaks will call Kosice.”

“It is a beginning,” Horvazy argued, “although much more will need to be accomplished if we want a Hungary of not only one state, but one people as well. I believe the Uplands here are particularly important in this struggle. We’re going to have a lot of trouble elsewhere. The Serbs, the Romanians—bah! They are a mule-headed collection, and what can we expect of them? And as for the Rusyns, I don’t even know if we can begin. But it is different with the Slovaks. There are some rabble-rousers among them, who must be suppressed. The Slovak people served Hungary heroically for centuries, and given the proper guidance, can still become good Hungarians.”

Tibor spoke up. “They already are good Hungarians. Even the nationalists among them have no objection to Hungarian citizenship. But unlike we Magyars, they differentiate between citizenship and nationality. Believe me, gentlemen, I want nothing more than to see our non-Magyars in Hungary become good citizens, even good Magyars. But the course we are following may well serve to alienate them further, rather than bringing them around. Let us avoid the mistakes of the past. If we allow them to maintain their own culture, they will be satisfied with that, and we will be so much the better for it.”

“I would be inclined to agree with you, Tibor,” Imre Karolyi interjected, “if what we were dealing with was just a national entity within Hungary. But it so happens that they are Slavs, and Russia must be taken into account as well. Under Tsar Alexander, the Russian Pan-Slavs have been let off their leashes. The ambitions of Russian

imperialism know no bounds! If we are to avert the threat of Russian expansion across the Carpathians, then there must be one—and only one—nationality in Hungary.”

“But our new policy is in many ways helping the Russians,” Tibor objected. “Many Slovaks who would have been content with simple cultural freedom are now looking toward Russia for deliverance.”

“You are forgetting one thing, Tibor,” Count Horvazy interjected. “Every citizen in Hungary has the right to his own culture. But these people are demanding political concessions. Hungary is one nation, and the language of that nation is and shall remain Magyar.”

Tibor Paleki fell silent. Why is it, he wondered sadly, that we Hungarians can do all things well except learn from our mistakes? This same debate had been going on among Hungarians for some forty years now. It was the same issue that the two great leaders of the Hungarian national revival—Szechenyi and Kossuth—had found so divisive. Paleki’s sympathies were with Szechenyi, who not only helped modernize Hungary, but who spoke of dealing with Hungary’s minorities in a spirit of Christian brotherhood. Kossuth—once admired by Count Tibor—saw the future of Hungary in a much different light. Kossuth proposed more radical land reforms, but also demanded a uni-national state. Kossuth was partially of Slovak origin, and these renegade sons frequently outdid many born Magyars in Hungarian chauvinism. Szechenyi, a genuine Magyar, had warned his rival that forced Magyarization would have disastrous repercussions for Hungary.

And Szechenyi had been right. At a time when Hungary was fighting for liberty against Austrian armies, she was also plagued with uprisings in the surrounding mountains. This might have been avoided: even the Slovak leader Stur at first sought an alliance with Kossuth. But Kossuth’s mind was already set, and so Hungary lost a war, and its independence as well. And today, Hungary was governed by men who

were not one wit less compromising than Kossuth on this issue, and they did not possess even half of his vision in matters such as farm reform. Tibor shuddered for his country's future whenever he considered this state of affairs.

"We are living in eventful times," Karolyi remarked. "This is a great era of nation-building. We Magyars not only have pretty much what we want, but we can even make Vienna bend towards us whenever the occasion demands. And as for the other nations—Italy is unified, Germany is now an empire, and Russia keeps growing in size. Ambitions have overlapped and clashed, we would do well to look further down the road. France wants revenge against the Germans, and Russia is angry with Austria for not supporting her in the Crimean conflict. I myself hope that peace can be maintained, but there is always a possibility that the Powers could become embroiled in a major war. Hungary would have a great deal at stake in such a war, and we must be internally strong if war should begin."

"That is the point I have been trying to make!" Horvazy exclaimed triumphantly. "If there ever is a major war, it will be characterized by a struggle between Magyarism and Slavdom. The very existence of either will be determined by the outcome!"

Tibor had nothing further to contribute to this conversation. When a sufficient number of people all want the same thing badly enough, they normally acquire it: this is how wars start. And he reflected sadly that in this singular instance Istvan Horvazy might be right.

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The following afternoon marked an unprecedented event in the life of fourteen-year-old Andrej Borovak. On that day, he presented himself at the Paleki manor to aid the Count in tracking the Black Dog. It must be understood that when Tibor invited him for dinner it did not mean the Slovak peasant youth dined at the same table the nobility

had dined at the previous night. He ate his meal in the servants' quarters, but even so, the goulash was of a more sumptuous character than he would have eaten at home.

The size of the manor house awed him: he had see the place from a distance before, but this was his first visit inside. So this is how rich folks live, he mused. He did not then realize that there were many aristocrats who were considerably wealthier than Count Tibor, just as his own family was better off than other Slovak peasant farmers in the area. This first exposure to the life of "the better half" raised new questions in his young mind.

He was greatly looking forward to the hunt. Marija, his mother, had shrieked like a screech-owl when his father had informed her of what Andrej would be doing. Nevertheless, Jan had remained adamant, and Marija's remonstrances had proved useless. A practical woman, she had made sure he wore shoes when going to the Paleki estate (normally, he only wore shoes on Sundays).

Count Tibor mildly feared that anticipation of the hunt would make the boy too excitable to sleep. "Sleeping tonight is important," he told his young friend. "We have a good bit of hiking ahead of us tomorrow, and tomorrow night we must take turns keeping vigil by the campfire." Tibor's fears proved groundless: Andrej had had such an appetite that he ate three portions of the spicy stew, and that –together with a small glass of tokaj—made him drowsy early. He was escorted to a servant's cottage, where he flopped upon a large bed and fell asleep almost immediately.

Shortly before daybreak, one of the servants went into the cottage to waken the fledgling tracker. Andrej revived almost instantly, with all the resilience of youth. He slipped on his trousers, slid his feet into his shoes, and minutes later ejected himself into the cool night air. Count Tibor was already awaiting him.

"Are you ready?" he asked the boy pleasantly.

Andrej nodded. "At once, Your Excellency!"

“Put these on your back, then—,” the count handed him a pack and a rifle, “and fasten the canteen to your belt.”

As the first rays of light dawned, the count and the boy approached a forest at the edge of the estate. The morning mist drifted between the trees. Count Tibor led the way onto a path winding its way through columns of ancient oaks, which took them deep into the mist-shrouded woods. To young Andrej, it was as if this mysterious piece of land was a passageway between the world he had known and some mystical fairy-land. The two travelers did not speak to each other for a long time, but speech was not necessary: they were already united in the communion of a singular purpose. At length, the sun rose higher and the mist lifted. In the distance, they could now hear the gurgling of a stream.

“I know where we are now,” Andrej spoke suddenly. “This stream runs down past Tlenocany. But there is another stream that breaks off from it a mile from here—I think that stream travels near where the Black Dog has his lair.”

Tibor nodded. “That is the one we shall take, then.”

The two followed the stream to the spot where its sister branched off. They followed the second stream some distance, and then Tibor called a rest-halt. They paused awhile to lunch on hard bread and goat’s cheese, and for Tibor to smoke a pipe. Again, they hardly exchanged a word. At length, they came to an area where an abandoned farm was lodged between two hills. Behind the farm loomed ominous dark woods.

“That’s the Devil’s Hollow, isn’t it?” Tibor inquired.

Andrej nodded silently.

“Well, then, shall we proceed?”

“No!” the youth said suddenly, with an air of quiet authority. “It would be better to flank the hollow from where the hills rise further downstream.”

Tibor arched an eyebrow. "Those hills are covered with forest. Can you be absolutely certain?"

"Trust me, Your Excellency, my instincts seldom fail."

It was as if this peasant youth had suddenly assumed command of the entire hunt. In any similar instance, Count Tibor would have flatly rejected such an unheard-of notion. But remembering the words of Andrej's father, the noble reserved judgment: the boy seemed to know what he was doing. They continued the march, following the stream.

About a mile further, Andrej suddenly halted. "This is where we take the hill," he stated unequivocally. And without further ado, he commenced climbing. Tibor swore with astonishment, but there was no alternative to following Andrej up the embankment. Thick woods extended up the sides of the steep slope. The middle-aged count found himself becoming rather winded. The young Slovak continued to ascend higher with all the agility of a mountain goat. Tibor concluded that Andrej's father had been correct: this boy was as much a part of the forest as any creature who dwelled there. After a climb of almost three hundred feet, he emerged on a dirt trail skirting the ridge.

"This path," Andrej explained, "leads into Devil's Hollow from the back. I think the Black Dog roams here at night."

"I have never heard of this path before," Tibor remarked.

"Nobody has. I discovered it myself."

The trail wound all the way around the crest of the hillside. It was really a remarkable path, and had probably only been used by outlaws in bygone ages. One could see a large part of the valley from the wooded heights; the trail was completely invisible to anyone or anything below.

Suddenly Andrej pointed to some paw prints in the mud alongside some wet ground. "He has been here!"

Tibor nodded. Judging from the size of those prints, it could be none but the Black Dog. He followed the tracks back to a crevice in the face of the cliff rising above the ridge on the other side of the path. “No,” he murmured, “this is too small a cave to serve as his lair. He has obviously been checking on it.”

Now confident that they were approaching the Black Dog’s home territory, Tibor increased his pace. The King of the Forest’s paw prints were scattered all along the ridge. They followed trails leading to all caves and crevices, none of which apparently served as a lair.

Now they approached the Devil’s Hollow. Winding their way around the ridge, they came up above the dark forest behind the small farm they had passed earlier. These woods had a particular blackness about them, as if a dark shadow had been cast across the valley. It was already midday. Tibor knew that very little sunlight reached the depths of this forest, which lay between hills not separated by any great distance. It would be dark in the hollow almost a full hour before sunset. Little wonder that so many people dreaded this place. It was rumored to be inhabited by demons. The gnarled trunks of the trees below reminded one of the setting of a Walpurgisnacht. The owner of that small farm had left years ago, probably frightened away by stories he had begun to believe. The fact that he had vanished so suddenly and mysteriously gave rise to the widely accepted belief that he had been devoured by the Devil: he had been, after all, a miserly skinflint. Count Tibor did not believe these superstition, yet there was something about the place that suggested some deep evil. He actually felt fear—in the form of pressure in his intestines. He grinned sheepishly at Andrej. “I imagine that it would be best for me to shit now before we go down there!”

Andrej respectfully stood a discrete distance away while Count Tibor relieved himself, but remained alert and vigilant. Then they cautiously descended to the floor of the hollow. The forest was no less forbidding. They gradually moved ahead with a

greater sense of resolution. For better or worse, they were in it now, and it was best to get on with the job at hand. Eventually, they emerged from behind the woods to a range of bare cliffs that jutted brazenly skyward. In the face of one of them yawned a black gaping hole. Count Tibor unslung his rifle and moved cautiously ahead. He peered inside. "Empty!" he said at last. He beckoned Andrej to come forward. "This may be the lair, and he might simply be out hunting. Let's have a closer look." He took out his hunting knife and scratched the ground inside the cave at different spots. "My God, this is it!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "This damned thing is full of bones of all kinds."

"Then we will wait for him," Andrej stated coolly.

Tibor nodded. "We will do that –yes. But there is one other thing we should do first."

"And what is that, Your Excellency?"

Tibor did not reply directly. "Unslung your rifle and mount guard," he said. "Wait for me. This should not take long." Andrej waited patiently for fifteen minutes after the count withdrew into the woods. Then he heard the sound of a rifle shot. Now his heart started beating wildly for the first time. Shortly thereafter, Tibor returned, bringing with a dead, bleeding rabbit. "Take your knife," he instructed curtly, "and cut open its belly, but don't gut it." Seeing the questioning expression on the boy's face, Tibor now explained his motives. "I want to leave some bait for him. We're going to camp downwind from his cave, so he doesn't scent us. Between us and the cave I want to hang up this rabbit— just close enough to our site to be within range of rifle shot."

The boy carried out the task of slitting open the rabbit's belly and Count Tibor carried the carcass back to the edge of the woods, where he hung it with some cord from a tree branch. "We'll camp back in the woods some distance," he stated. "Now, let us start collecting firewood. As you know, it will be dark here before the sun actually sets."

Both of them gathered wood for the next two hours. Count Tibor designated a small clearing barely within eye range of the rabbit, and started a small fire with kindling. They gradually added more wood, until they were able to enjoy the benefits of a full-fledged campfire. By now, the sun had passed over the western ridge of hills, and darkness spread across the floor of the hollow in a silent wave. Tibor reached into his pack and drew out a frying pan, some smoked sausage, and several potatoes. "Can you cook?" he asked Andrej, smiling.

Andrej nodded, and prepared an ample meal for both of them. As they ate, Tibor eyed his young friend quizzically. "What do you plan on doing with your life?" he asked suddenly.

For the first time, Andrej seemed not quite so sure of himself. "I ... don't know, Your Excellency. I haven't had much time to think about this. I'll keep working with my father and brother on the farm, I suppose."

"Nowadays," Count Tibor remarked, "there is no law which says that a person born of a farm family has to remain as such."

"I ... haven't really thought about these things," Andrej murmured.

"You have acted like a man who is born and bred for the woods. There is no reason for a lad who is as intrepid as yourself to stay with this. Given some education, you could go far. How have you been doing in school?"

"I did well," Andrej replied, using the past tense. "But the parish school goes no further than eight grades. I have just finished the eighth, so I suppose school is finished for me."

Tibor was silent for a long minute. Finally, he said, "If we succeed in what we came here for, I can promise you a better life. I'll see to it that you are enrolled in a school in some fair-sized town."

Andrej frowned thoughtfully, but did not answer. "Well," Tibor sighed, "you had best try to get some sleep. You'll have to relieve me for night watch in three hours."

Andrej spread out a blanket from his pack, wrapped it around himself, and soon drifted off to sleep. Tibor envied him his capacity for easy slumber. He woke the boy several hours later, and himself tried to sleep, but could not succeed. Indeed, he had not slept much on the previous night either, since he had learned of the Black Dog's deed. Killing the beast had become an idea of obsessive proportions for him: an end to the last and greatest crisis which had haunted the Paleki estate since his return from Italy. He did not expect the King of the Forest to return to his lair that night, and indeed, the fire was likely to keep him away. The Black Dog would return sometime, of that Tibor had no doubt. If necessary, he and Andrej would wait on this spot all the next day. Something resembling instinct strongly suggested to Tibor that the Black dog would return to the area at daybreak, when the campfire was dying down and when dawn opened its counteroffensive against the darkness of the hollow.

The count had just begun drifting off to unconsciousness when Andrej woke him: it was again his turn to keep vigil by the fire. As the last three hours of his night watch passed, Tibor found reason to become increasingly alert: he could hear the sound of a dog baying in the distance. Was it the King of the forest? Or was it simply some other feral creature on its nightly prow? Oh, God! the count prayed silently. As Christ is Lord and as I am a former hussar, let it be him and bring him here ...

At last, daylight, in the form of a cold gray finger, extended itself into the depths of Devil's Hollow. Tibor did not add any more wood: it was time to let the fire die down. As the fire extinguished itself and the valley floor gained more light, he heard the approaching patter of animal feet. Silently, he trained his rifle in the direction of the rabbit hanging from the tree.

A formidable black mass seemed to grow out of the dark trees in the background. It had a head of wolflike appearance and proportion, eyes that glowed like hot coals, and huge, fanglike teeth, from which beerlike froth drooled appreciably. It advanced furtively to the tree branch from which the rabbit hung suspended.

Tibor now aimed directly for the Black Dog's massive breast. He should have fired instantly, but he could not resist the temptation of so many hunters to gaze upon a long-sought, elusive prey before pulling the trigger. The beast jerked his head, catching sight of the hunter. Apparently the sight of a rifle was not unfamiliar to him—unless he instinctively perceived the presence of imminent death—and he bolted into the woods just as Tibor fired. The count heard an agonized yelp: apparently the bullet had struck the wild dog in the flank as he took flight.

Andrej bolted upward from sleep as if someone had just drenched him with icy water. "Was it--?" he gasped in awe, and Tibor nodded. "It was him. I hit him, but I was too slow to do a good job. He may not get far, and we have a trail of blood to work with. Let's go!"

The quick-witted Andrej tossed a bucket of water on the smoldering campfire and began clutching at his rifle. Leaving their camping gear where it lay, both hunters moved swiftly ahead to stalk their prey. There were indeed drops of blood dotting the ground in the forest, and these gradually assumed the dimension of a geometric trail. The two hunters followed the purple pathway up onto the ridge of a wooded plateau flanking the hollow. Soon, however, Tibor perceived a dilemma: the bloody track seemed to halt at the edge of a thick, pathless forest, covered with underbrush and weeds. "He's obviously chosen to bury himself in these woods," he remarked to Andrej. "We must proceed more slowly—and very carefully!"

With as little noise as possible, the count and the boy inched their way cautiously ahead. Tibor's nerves were now so frayed that he could hear a shrill whistling between

his ears. He did not bother to tell Andrej what he hoped was obvious knowledge: the Black Dog would be infinitely more dangerous now. He had always been a menace, he had claimed his first human life only two days previous, and now he was wounded and being inexorably hunted down. He would not run the next time they encountered each other.

As they advanced into the heart of the woods, they heard a rustling from a patch of waist-high grass. As they turned, that massive head materialized once again, the red eyes shot fire, and a low, rumbling growl increased in intensity. It was clearly the Moment of Decision.

Tibor took aim, but the beast came crashing from the grass in a great flying leap. The massive paws struck the nobleman's ribs with such force that he was knocked to the ground, as the deadly jaws plunged for his neck. With speed born of desperation, Tibor swung his rifle-butt, so that it crashed directly into the Black Dog's ear, as he rolled in the other direction. The beast yelped in pain, and backed off, momentarily stunned. He was in fact a blood-spattered mess, but his adrenaline was flowing at lightning speed. He arched his back and prepared to spring again...

At that instant, another rifle shot punctured the air, and as Tibor gazed dumbly, a fountain of blood gushed forth from the small area directly between the eyes of the feral beast. The eyes grew round in seeming wonderment as the Black Dog contracted like a crumbled piece of paper. He shuddered momentarily, and then lay still. Barely two yards away, Andrej Borovak held a smoking rifle, and his eyes glowed with fanaticism.

Slowly, painfully, Count Tibor raised himself to his feet. With awed eyes, he beheld the young victor before him. Andrej appeared somewhat stunned, still not able to grasp the full magnitude of his action. He had but little experience with rifles, and he had acted as if on instinct, hardly thinking. He had taken aim coolly, and shot the cur squarely between the eyes.

Gradually, the boy's eyes screwed back into normal focus, losing some of their druglike fervor. "I am claiming hunter's privilege," he stated slowly but authoritatively. "When we get this carcass back to the campsite, the head is mine."

"Granted!" Tibor replied, in a tone which reflected a combination of awe and respect. He collected his bearings in due course, and began pondering the future of the resolute young champion. Never had any family served Count Tibor with such exemplary loyalty. The boy's grandfather had saved the nobleman's life during the fateful War of Independence, his father had faithfully followed his lead for years, and now, young Andrej had both saved him from certain death and rid the valley of a formidable menace. He deserved—and was equipped for—higher things in life than to be the hewer of wood and the drawer of water for those of more exalted status. Count Tibor's sense of noblesse oblige could now settle for no less than seeing this boy become a gentleman himself. He would prove that there were better ways of molding Hungarian patriots than those which Count Horvazy advocated.

Count Tibor already knew what should be done. He resolved to speak with Jan Borovak that afternoon.