

Pan Tadeusz

by

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)

Book Five The Quarrel

Argument:

Telimena's hunting plans.

*The little gardener prepares to enter fashionable society
& listens to her guardian's precepts.*

The return of the hunters.

Tadeusz experiences a great shock.

A second encounter at the Shrine of Musings.

A reconciliation mediated by a swarm of ants.

The case of the hunt is argued at table.

The Chief Steward's tale of Reytan

& the Prince de Nassau interrupted.

A shadowy figure with a key.

The ensuing brawl.

The Count and Gerwazy hold a council of war.

Translated By Christopher A. Zakrzewski

His hunt crowned with success, the Chief Steward was even now returning home from the forest; meanwhile, in the solitude of the house Telimena was only beginning her chase. True, she was sitting motionless with her arms folded over her bosom; but her thoughts ran upon a brace of game of her own. Surely there was a way of bringing to bay and bagging the two at once—Tadeusz and the Count? The Count was young, heir to a noble house, comely of appearance; indeed, he was half-smitten already. But what of it? His feelings might change. And how sincere was his love? Would he consider marriage? With a woman several years his senior? And less wealthy! Would his kinsmen allow it? What would society say?

Absorbed in these thoughts, she rose from the sofa and lifted herself on the tips of her toes. Yes, she stood taller now. Uncovering her bust a little, she bent over sideways and surveyed herself keenly. Once more

she sought out the advice of the mirror. A moment later, she dropped her gaze, sighed, and sat down again.

The Count was a titled gentleman. The well-to-do had fickle tastes. The Count was a blond. Blonds lacked passion. And Tadeusz? A simple heart! An honest lad—hardly more than a child. He was just beginning to discover the joys of love. Suitably watched, he would not readily break off his first romantic attachment. Besides, was he not now bound to her by certain favors? Young men may be given to sudden changes of mind, but unlike their elders they hold fast to their affections, for they have tenderer consciences. Long does the simple virginal soul of a youth savor her first sweet taste of love. Young men take their pleasures as they leave them—with a glad heart, even as friends delight in a frugal repast. Only old drunkards with seared livers recoil from the liquor they drink to excess. All this Telimena understood perfectly well, for she was wise and fully conversant with the ways of the world.

But what would society say? True, they could always drop out of sight by moving to another part of the district and keeping to themselves. Better still, she could leave the district altogether. Why not make a little trip to the city? There she could acquaint the lad with high society, shape his path, aid and advise him, instruct his heart, have him for a companion, a brother; in short, enjoy the world while the years allowed.

Buoyed up by these thoughts, Telimena began to pace jauntily up and down the room; but then again she dropped her gaze to the floor. Still, she thought, the Count did warrant consideration. What if she could procure his interest in Sophie? The girl might not be well to do, but in social standing she was every bit his equal. Her father had been a senator. Was she not a dignitary's daughter? If she could bring their union to effect, she would be assured of a harborage in their home; as Sophie's kinswoman and the couple's marriage-broker she would be like a mother to them both. And so, after this final consultation with herself, Telimena went to the window and called out to her niece who was amusing herself in the garden.

Sophie stood bareheaded in her morning chemise, a sieve clasped in her upraised hand. Birds flew to her feet from every direction: here, round as balls of yarn, ran a flock of ruffled hens; there, wobbling their purple helms, plying their wings like sculls, sharp-spurred roosters came leaping over furrow and shrub. Close upon them, clucking at his giddy helpmate's strident yelps,

strode a puffed-up turkey tom. From the meadow yonder, long-tailed peafowl came gliding up like a fleet of rafts. Hither and yon, silver-plumed doves floated down like snowflakes. All converged on the center of the circular green where Sophie was standing: a raucous, roiling throng of domestic fowl hemmed round by a narrow white band of doves. The inner circle comprised a motley of stars, streaks, and stripes. Amber beaks and coral crests rose up like fish in the sea. A forest of necks swayed gently to and fro like water lily stems. A thousand eyes gazed up at Sophie.

All white in her long chemise she reared above them, whirling round like a fountain in a flowerbed, scooping up the barley pearls in her pearly white hand and casting them generously over the welter of wings and heads. The grain was fit for lordly tables; it was the staple of Lithuania's broths. Sophie pilfered this provender from the housekeeper's cupboard. To feed her birds she inflicted material loss on the farm.

"Sophie!" she heard someone call. That was Auntie's voice! She tossed the rest of the delicacies to the birds; then, twirling and beating the sieve in time, the playful girl began to skip her way like a tambourine dancer through the hens, peacocks, and doves. The startled fowl fluttered up in a throng. Sophie seemed to soar the highest; her feet scarcely touched the ground. Like Aphrodite in her dove-drawn car she flew—a flush of silver pigeons leading the way.

Bursting in through the bedroom window, she gave out a gleeful shout and dropped breathless into her auntie's lap. Telimena kissed her cheeks and stroked her chin. With joy in her heart she studied the pretty child's lively features. (Truly she loved her little ward.) Then resuming her grave expression, she rose to her feet and began to pace the room.

"Really, Sophie dear," she said, holding her finger to her lips, "you are forgetting both your station and age. Why, just today you turned fourteen! It is time you dropped your turkeys and hens. Shame on you! Are they fitting amusements for a dignitary's daughter? As for those grimy peasant urchins, you have cosseted them quite long enough. Ah, Sophie! The very sight of you makes me want to weep. How dreadfully swarthy you are! What a gypsy you have become! You move and gesture like a parish wench. All this I shall have to take in hand; indeed, I will begin this very day. I have decided to bring you out. Yes, you shall accompany me into the drawing room, to meet the guests, of whom we have a great number today. See you do not put me to shame."

Sophie leapt up, clapped her hands, and flung her arms around Telimena.

"Oh, Auntie!" she said, both laughing and crying with joy. "It has been so long since I saw a guest. In all the time I have been here among the turkeys and hens, I have had but one visitor, and that was a wild pigeon. I find it so tedious sitting here in this room. Even the Judge says it is bad for my health."

"The Judge!" snorted her aunt. "He never stops pestering me to bring you out. 'She has come of age,' he keeps mumbling to me under his breath. Of course, never having rubbed elbows with distinguished society, the old man has no idea what he is talking about. I know better how long it takes to train a young lady and how best to stage her *début*. Understand, Sophie, that however lovely or clever a girl may be, if she grows up under society's constant gaze, the effect is lost, for everyone will have grown used to seeing her from an early age. But let a mature and refined demoiselle come bursting forth from no one knows where and the whole world flocks curiously around her. People observe her every gesture and glance. They hang on her every word and repeat her every thought. When once a young lady comes into fashion, then willy-nilly everyone is bound to admire her. But I have no doubt you will give a good account of yourself. You grew up in the capital. Though you have lived here in these parts for two years, you cannot completely have forgotten Petersburg. So, Sophie, attend to your toilet. You will find everything arranged on my dressing table. Come, do get along! The hunt will be back any minute."

She summoned in the chambermaid and serving girl. They emptied a water-ewer into a silver basin. Sophie splashed in the water like a sparrow in the sand. With the maid's help she washed her hands, face, and neck; meanwhile, Telimena broached her Petersburg stores and drew out bottles of perfume and jars of pomade. She sprinkled Sophie with exquisite scents, which filled the room, and applied the gum arabic to her hair. Sophie put on white openwork stockings and a matching pair of satin shoes of Warsaw craftsmanship. After lacing the bodice, the maid spread a dust-wrap over her bosom, then set to removing the crimped curl papers. Since Sophie's hair was rather short, they braided it into two plaits, leaving a smooth fringe over the brow and temples. The maid bound a garland of freshly picked cornflowers and passed it to Telimena, who pinned it deftly to Sophie's head from right to left. The crown set off the pale-gold tresses to advantage—like wildflowers in the corn. Then

off came the wrap, and her toilet was complete. Sophie tossed a white frock over her head and, rolling up a white batiste handkerchief in her hand, presented herself for inspection: the very picture of a white lily.

After a few nice adjustments to her hair and dress, they paraded her up and down the room. Following her niece's movements with a drill instructor's eye, Telimena frowned and grew increasingly cross. At last, brought to despair by Sophie's curtsy, she could contain herself no longer.

"Alas the day, Sophie! This is what happens from consorting with gooseherds and geese! Why, you stride like a boy! Your eye roves from left to right just like a divorc  e's. Now drop me a curtsy. Mercy me! How awkward you are!"

"Oh, Auntie!" pleaded poor Sophia. "It is not my fault. I did not choose to be cooped up here. I have had no one to dance with. I tend the geese and nanny the children out of boredom. But just wait, Auntie, give me time to mingle with people and you will see how I improve."

"Of the two evils, poultry is by far the lesser," replied her aunt. "I would sooner have you consorting with birds than the boorish guests we have known until now. You have only to recall our recent visitors. The parish priest mumbling his orisons or playing at checkers. The barristers smoking their pipes. The very pink of gentility! Fine manners you would learn from them. But at last we have guests worthy of your station. We have respectable people staying at the house. Mark well, my dear, the Count is here. A true gentleman, young and well bred—the Governor's kinsman! So mind your manners with him."

The sound of men and horses fell upon their ears. The hunt already at the gate! Telimena seized Sophie by the hand and hastened with her to the drawing room. None of the hunters had yet put in an appearance. Not wishing to be seen in their shooting coats, they had retired to their rooms to change. Dressed in no time, the youth—including Tadeusz and the Count—were the first to enter. Telimena performed the duties of the host. Greeting and seating the guests as they entered, she diverted them with small talk and presented her niece to all in turn. Tadeusz was first in line. Introduced as his close kinswoman, Sophie curtsied to him politely. He answered with a low bow, was about to speak, when, staring into her eyes, he took such fright that the words refused to pass his lips. His face colored brightly, then grew pale. What lay on

his heart he could not say, but he felt quite wretched, for he had recognized Sophie! There was no mistaking the girl's shining tresses, small stature, and voice. Here was the same little head, the same tiny waist he had seen on the garden fence. Only this morning this lovely voice had roused him for the hunt.

The Chief Steward relieved him of his embarrassment. Seeing the lad turn pale and reel on his feet, he urged him to retire to his room and seek rest. Tadeusz withdrew to the corner and leaned on the mantelpiece. In stony silence he cast wild wide-eyed glances now at the aunt, now at the niece. Telimena could not help noticing the strong impression Sophie's first glance had made on him; but since she was busy diverting the guests, she could not surmise everything. Still, her eyes never left the youth. At last, seizing a favorable moment, she ran up to him. Was he well? Why so glum? she asked importunately. Smiling, she made allusions to Sophie. Tadeusz leaned on his elbow without stirring or saying a word. He knitted his brow and pulled a face, which only further confused and astonished Telimena. Instantly her face and tone of voice hardened. Rising in anger, she began to shower him with harsh words, taunts, and reproaches. Tadeusz, stung to the quick, started up, frowned, and spat on the floor; then kicking aside the chair, he stormed wordlessly out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Fortunately, the scene went unnoticed by the rest of the guests.

He fled out of the gate and made straight for the fields. As when a pike, feeling the prongs of the leister lodged in its breast, thrashes about in the water, then dives deep in the hope of breaking free, yet always drags that iron and cord with it, so Tadeusz carried within him the hurt that refused to let go. Crossing ditches and leaping fences, he wandered without aim or direction. At last, upon entering the woods, he arrived (by chance or design) at the hillock, which only yesterday had been the scene of his joy, the place where he had received the little note in earnest of love, the spot already known to us as the Shrine of Musings.

Whom should he spy there sitting alone and lost in her thoughts but her—Telimena! Nothing about her garb and posture recalled the gaudy creature of the day before. Dressed all in white, she sat motionless on the rock, as if carved out of stone. Her face lay buried in her hands; and though you could not hear the sobs, you could tell she was shedding copious tears.

Tadeusz fought a losing battle with his heart. He felt an anguish of remorse and pity. Long he watched her in silence from his place of concealment behind a tree. At last, heaving a sigh, he began to reproach himself. "What a churl I am!" he thought. "What right had I to lay my mistake to her account?" Cautiously he peered out, but at that very moment Telimena started up from the rock and began to thrash about left and right. Forging the stream at a jump, she threw out her arms and, with her hair streaming wildly behind her, pelted through the forest. She leapt in the air, fell to her knees, then cast herself down on the ground. Unable to rise, she lay writhing on the turf, clearly in the throes of terrible torments. She tore at her breast, her neck, her ankles, and knees. Tadeusz ran to her rescue, convinced that an unclean spirit had taken possession of her; but this was not the cause of her convulsions.

Beside a birch nearby there stood a mighty anthill. On the grass all around it swarmed its frugal denizens. Driven by some need or longing, they felt especially drawn to the Shrine of Musings. From their citadel on the hill they had beaten a path to the edge of the stream and along this path they marched their rank and file. Alas, Telimena blocked the way. Lured by the luster of her white stockings, the insects swarmed under her dress and set busily to work, tickling and biting. Telimena was forced to flee and shake them off. Finally, seating herself on the sward, she began to pick them off one by one.

Tadeusz could scarcely refuse to come to her assistance. Brushing off her frock, he worked his way down to her feet. His lips strayed close to her temples. And so, in this friendly attitude, without uttering a word, they put their morning quarrel behind them. Who knows how long they might have sat there if the tolling of the manor bell had not brought them to their senses. The summons to dinner! Time to go back; the more so as the distant crack of a breaking branch fell upon their ears. Perhaps people were out looking for them. Since it would hardly do to be seen returning from the forest together, they stole off in opposite directions: Telimena to the right, toward the orchard, Tadeusz to the left—toward the high road; but in so retreating, neither was spared cause for alarm. Telimena could have sworn she caught a glimpse of Robak's gaunt hooded face in the bushes; and more than once Tadeusz spied a tall white shadow to his left. Who it was, he could not tell, but he had a strong suspicion it was the Count in his English riding coat.

Dinner was served at the castle. Disregarding the Judge's express prohibition, the obdurate Protazy had once again, in the absence of the company, laid siege to the castle with an *intromissio* (as he called it) of the tableware. The guests filed into the great hall and formed a circle around the table. The Chamberlain took the seat of honor. (It was the privilege of his post and senior years.) He bowed to the ladies, the elders, and youth. The Bernardine monk was not dining tonight. In his stead, at her husband's right elbow, stood the Chamberlain's wife. After seating the guests accordingly, the Judge blessed the table in the Latin tongue. The men took vodka, and all sat down and fell to, dispatching the creamed borsch in silence.

After the soup came crayfish, chicken, and asparagus washed down with Hungarian and Malaga wine. The guests ate and drank in stony silence. Never could these castle walls, which had so lavishly feted so many sons of the nobility and resounded with so many hearty hurrahs—never, since the day they were built, could they recall such a feast of gloom. But for the popping of corks and the rattle of plates you would have sworn the great hall was empty or that some evil spirit had sealed the banqueters' lips.

The reasons for this silence were many. True, the men had returned from the hunt in a boisterous frame of mind. But when their ardor cooled and they began to reflect on the hunt, they realized they had not exactly covered themselves in glory. Had it required a monkish hood popping up like "Philip in the hemp" to show up the shooters of the district? The shame of it! What hay they would make of it in Oszmiana and Lida! Had they not been vying with them for years over who had the better marksmen? Such were the thoughts that ran through their minds.

As to the Notary and the Assessor, in addition to their old animosities, they had the disgrace of their hounds fresh on their minds. That vile hare kept flitting before their eyes. Legs outthrust, it raced before them, taunting them from the edge of the forest with that twitch of its tail. Like a lash it cut across their hearts. Both men stared down at their plates. The Assessor, seeing Telimena seated between his two rivals, had yet another cause for chagrin.

Telimena sat looking away from Tadeusz. In her confusion she hardly dared glance at him; instead, she sought to divert the gloomy Count—to draw him into a conversation and restore his humor, for he had returned from his walk (or ambush, as Tadeusz suspected) in a strangely sour frame of mind. The Count listened to

Telimena with a supercilious air. He frowned and stared at her in a manner just short of scorn; then, leaning away from her as far as he could, he turned his attention to Sophie. He refilled her wine goblet, helped her to the viands, and plied her with a thousand gallantries, all the while bowing and smiling. From time to time, he rolled his eyes and sighed deeply. Despite the clever deception, you could tell his flirtations had no other object than to spite Telimena. Now and then, he would turn to her with an air of feigned nonchalance and fix her with an ominous stare.

Telimena could make no sense of it. She shrugged her shoulders and put it down to his eccentric ways; finally, not entirely displeased with the Count's advances toward her niece, she turned to her other partner at table. Tadeusz sat equally sullen. Neither eating nor drinking, he seemed to be listening to the talk around him, eyes fixed on his plate. Telimena refilled his glass. Her intrusion upon the privacy of his thoughts annoyed him. Asked about his health, he merely yawned. He no longer took kindly to her premature advances (so much had he changed over the course of one evening). The low cut of her dress scandalized him. How indecent! But what was his surprise when he raised his eyes! The shock almost put him in a panic. His eyesight had grown suddenly sharper. No sooner did he glance at Telimena's glowing cheeks than he discovered a terrible secret. Great heavens, she was rouged!

Perhaps the powder was of inferior quality; or perhaps she had inadvertently rubbed it off. In any case, it lay unevenly spread, exposing patches of skin of a coarse complexion. Perhaps Tadeusz was the cause of it, having drawn too close to her at the Shrine of Musings and brushed off the carmine, which overlay the whiting like the fine dust of a butterfly's wing. After her hasty return from the forest, Telimena had not had time to touch up her face; and now there were freckles showing through, especially around the mouth. Suddenly, like a pair of crafty spies exposing one species of treachery, Tadeusz's eyes began to examine the rest of her charms and unmask a host of additional little perfidies: two missing teeth, crow's feet around the eyes and temples, creases along the brow, and a thousand wrinkles concealed under the chin!

A gainless thing to stare too closely at an object of beauty! A contemptible thing to spy on one's beloved! A scurvy thing to change one's tastes and fancies! But who can curb the heart? Appealing to his conscience, Tadeusz tried to stir up the embers of his love; to warm his heart anew with the rays of her eyes; but their light was like the moon's—bright, yet throwing no heat. Her

gaze merely glanced off his heart, for it had grown chill to the core. And so, berating and reproaching himself, he bent sullenly over his plate and bit his lip.

Meanwhile, an evil spirit prompted him with a new temptation: to eavesdrop on Sophie and the Count. Charmed by the latter's gallantries, the girl had blushed at first and dropped her gaze; but soon the two were laughing together. Their talk turned to a certain surprise encounter in the garden, to a certain sally into the burdock and flowerbeds. Straining his utmost to listen, Tadeusz swallowed the bitter words and digested them in his heart. A terrible feast! As the fork-tongued adder sucks on a poisonous herb, then coils up on the garden path, imperiling the unwary foot, so Tadeusz, drunk on jealousy's venom, feigned indifference, while bursting with malice.

Let but a few sit sullen at the merriest of gatherings and their gloom quickly spreads to the rest of the company. The hunters had long since fallen silent; and now, infected with Tadeusz's spleen, the other side of the table fell silent too. Even the Chamberlain seemed out of sorts. Seeing his comely, well-dowered daughters in the prime of life (the finest matches in the district in everyone's estimation) sitting mute and ignored by the silent youth, he too showed little zest for talk. The hospitable Judge was also upset. The Steward, noticing the general silence, called it a feast of wolves—unfit for Polish folk.

Now the Chief Steward's ears were peculiarly sensitive to silence. Talkative by nature, he was inordinately fond of chatterers. Small wonder! He had spent his entire life in the company of the nobility, attending dinner banquets, hunts, assemblies, and the regional diets. He had grown used to having noise around him, even when he himself was silent, or prowling the rooms with his fly-flapper, or merely dozing in his chair with his eyes shut. By day he constantly sought out conversation. At night he insisted on having a body close by to say the beads with him or spin him a yarn. For this reason he considered the tobacco pipe his mortal foe, dreamed up by the German to depolonize the Pole. "A Germanized Pole is a Pole bereft of speech," he used to say. Having prattled through the day, the old man thrived on prattle for his sleep. Silence awoke him from his slumber. Even so the din of the wheels lulls the miller to sleep: the wheels have only to grind to a halt and he starts to his feet, crying, "*And the Word was made flesh...*"

The Chief Steward bowed to the Chamberlain and by a light touch of his hand to his mouth made known to the Judge his wish to address the guests. Both

men replied to his mute gesture with a nod of the head, as if to say, "By all means!" The Steward struck up.

"I make bold to prevail on our youth to make merry at the banquet board as we used to do in olden times, and not to munch *in silentio*. Are we Capuchin fathers? The nobleman who fails to exercise his tongue is like a hunter who allows the shot to rust in his gun. That is why I praise the loquacity of our sires. After a hunt, they gathered round the table not only to partake of the victuals, but also to share their thoughts. Whatever lay on their hearts, be it reproach or praise for the hunter or beater, the hounds or the shots—everything was brought out into the open; and all this produced a noise as sweet to the sportsman's ear as a second hunt. I know; I know what ails you. This cloud of somber cares wafts from Robak's hood! You feel ashamed your shots went wild. But do not burn with shame. I knew hunters who were better marksmen than you, and yet missed. To hit, to miss, and to learn from one's mistakes—that is the life of a sportsman. I too have shot wide of the mark at times, though I have hunted with a gun ever since I was a boy. "The great hunter Tułoszczyk was known to miss. Even Reytan, God rest his soul, did not always hit the mark. More on him anon. As for letting the bear escape the ring and our two young gentlemen shying away, though they had a spear in hand—well, no one will praise or condemn it. To beat a retreat with a loaded gun has always been seen as the height of cowardice. And shooting blindly (as many do), not closing with the quarry or taking proper aim—that is a shameful thing. But whoever aims well, allows the prey to come close, and misses, may fall back without disgrace. Then again, he may choose to resort to the spear, but only as he sees fit, for he is under no obligation. The hunting spear is there strictly for self-defense; that is the way it has always been. So take my words to heart, dear Tadeusz and my lord Count. Do not let your retreat upset you unduly. Henceforth, whenever you recall today's incident, remember this word of caution from the old Steward. Never stand in another's way; and never should a pair of hunters shoot at the same time at the same game."

No sooner did the Steward utter the word "game" than the Assessor fired back with a half-audible "dame." "Bravo!" cried the youth. Murmurs and laughter began to ripple through the hall as the Steward's word of caution made the round of the guests, some insisting on the word "game," others laughingly repeating, "dame." "Coquette!" said Bolesta under his breath; to which, fixing a stiletto eye on Telimena, the Assessor riposted, "Grisette!"

The Steward had not meant to poke fun at anyone; nor was he aware of what was being whispered around him. Delighted to have brought mirth to the ladies and youth, he now sought to cheer up the hunters. And so, filling his goblet, he struck up again.

"I look in vain for our Bernardine priest, for I should like to relate to him a certain curious incident not unlike the one that occurred this morning. The Warden said he knew of but one man who could shoot as straight as Robak. I knew another. He saved two men with a similar shot. It happened in Naliboki Forest, when the Deputy Reytan and the Prince de Nassau came up to hunt. They did not begrudge that nobleman his glory; indeed, they were the first to drink his health. Past telling the gifts they heaped on him; and they threw in the slain boar's pelt as well. I shall now recount the tale of that boar and shot, for I witnessed it myself. The incident was very much like the one that took place this morning; and it happened to the finest marksmen of my day, the Deputy Reytan and the Prince de Nassau—"

But here, having refilled his cup, the Judge broke in. "I drink to Robak's health! Steward, raise your beaker! If we cannot enrich our almsman with gifts, then we shall endeavor to repay him for the spent powder. The bear slain in the forest today is hereby pledged to him. There should be more than enough flesh on its bones to last his refectory for two years. As to the hide—that I intend to keep. If need be, I will take it by force, or perhaps the monk will offer it up as an exercise in humility; then again, I may purchase it from him, even if it costs me a dozen sable furs; at any rate, we shall dispose of it as we see fit. The first crown and highest honor have already gone to God's servant. Our good Chamberlain will now have the honor of awarding the second prize. Let him decide who merits the hide."

The Chamberlain rubbed his brow and pondered his verdict; meanwhile, the hunters began to murmur among themselves. Each laid his own claim to the prize, one for rousing the bear, another for wounding it, another for setting on the hounds, still another for luring the beast back into the forest. The Notary and the Assessor renewed their quarrel, the former extolling the virtues of his Sanguszko fowling piece, the latter, his Sagalas.

"My dear Judge and neighbor," the Chamberlain replied at last, "The first prize rightfully belongs to God's servant. But as to the winner of the second prize, that is not easy to determine. Every hunter seems to me to have acquitted himself with equal distinction. All showed equal

dexterity, skill, and courage. But fate placed two among us in special peril. Two came closest to the bear's claws: Tadeusz and the Count. Both men have a right to the hide; but Tadeusz, being the younger and our host's kinsman, will gladly (I am sure of it) forgo the prize. Therefore, my lord Count, the *spolia opima* fall to you. May this hide garnish your trophy room. May it remind you of today's sport and serve you as a talisman of hunting success and a goad to future glory."

He fell silent, blithely thinking he had cheered the Count. He could not have known how painful a thrust he had dealt him. At the mention of "trophy room," the Count instinctively looked up at the stags' frontlets and spreading antlers that hung from the walls like a forest of bays sown by the fathers to garnish the brows of their sons. He looked at the family portraits adorning the pillars and the ancient Half-Goat emblazoning the vault. All these relics harkened to him with voices from the past. The Count roused himself, recalling where and whose guest he was: a descendant of the Horeszkos, a guest under his own roof, feasting with the Soplicas, his ancestral foes! And now his newly aroused jealousy of Tadeusz only further provoked him against the Soplica clan.

"My house is too small," he replied with a bitter smile. "It has no room worthy of so superb a trophy. Better the bear should wait here among these antlered heads until the Judge decides to restore him to me along with the castle."

Catching his meaning, the Chamberlain rapped on his gold snuffbox and begged to be heard. "My dear Count and neighbor," he said. "You are to be commended for minding your interests even at the dinner table, unlike so many fashionable young gentlemen of your age who pay scant attention to their accounts. That my court will bring about an agreeable settlement is my earnest hope and wish. One obstacle remains: the question of the manorial farm. What I propose is an exchange, an award of land in return for the farm on the following terms. . ." And he launched (as always) into an orderly exposition of his plan. He was halfway through his speech when an unexpected commotion arose at the far end of the table. Some of the guests were pointing at something that had caught their attention, others were looking in the direction indicated. At last, like ears of grain bowed by a contrary gust of wind, all heads turned away from the speaker to face the corner of the hall.

A shadowy figure had emerged from a tiny doorway concealed among the pillars where a portrait of the last of the Horeszko Pantlers hung. It was Gerwazy,

instantly recognizable by his tall stature, demeanor, and the silver half-goats embroidered on his faded coat. Straight as a ramrod, mute and grim, he entered, without doffing his cap or bobbing his head. A dagger-like key gleamed in his hand. Opening a cabinet door, he proceeded to perform a number of manual rotations.

By a pillar at each of two corners of the hall there stood a grandfather's clock. Quaint old fellows—long at odds with the sun's diurnal course. Often they struck the noon hour at sundown. Gerwazy never undertook to repair the works, but he would not dream of allowing the timepieces to go unwound. Every night he tormented them punctually with his key; and now was the hour for winding the clocks.

As the Chamberlain held the attention of those who cared to listen, the Warden pulled on the weights. The rusty works began to grate and grind. The Chamberlain shuddered and stopped in mid-phrase.

"I say, good fellow," he said, "attend to that urgent task of yours some other time!"

And he resumed his exposition of his plan. But the roguish Warden yanked the other plummet with even greater force, whereupon the artificial bullfinch, which sat perched atop the clock, flapped its wings and burst into song. The bird was well crafted. Pity it was out of repair. It squawked and it quavered, and the longer it screeched, the worse it got. The guests gave out a roar of laughter. Once more the Chamberlain was forced to interrupt his speech.

"Warden," he cried, "or should I say, screech owl! If you value your beak, you will put a stop to that racket!" Undaunted, Gerwazy leaned his right arm gravely against the clock, placed his left hand on his hip and, thus buttressed, rejoined:

"My dear little Chamberlain! A great lord is free to jest. A sparrow is smaller than an owl; and yet, domiciled in his own nest of shavings, he is braver than the owl who squats under another's roof. A warden's no screech owl. Who steals into somebody's garret by night—he is the owl; and I intend to flush him out!"

"Show him the door!" roared the Chamberlain.

"My lord!" cried out the Warden to the Count. "Do you not see what goes on? Is your honor not sullied enough that you should eat and drink with these Soplicas? Must I, Gerwazy *Rębajło*, Keeper of the Horeszko keys, be reviled under the roof of my lords? And you take this sitting down?"

At this Protazy called out "Come to order!" three times. "Clear these premises, I say! I, Protazy Balthasar Brzechalski, bearer of two titles, erstwhile Sergeant-at-Arms of the Royal Assizes, *vulgo* Court Bailiff, render both my *obductio* and formal *visio*. I call as witness every born gentleman here and charge the Assessor in attendance to launch an inquiry on behalf of his worship, Judge Soplica, concerning this *incursio* upon the castle premises, which the Judge holds by right of law; to which I adduce the plain fact that he is dining here tonight."

"You squawking magpie!" bellowed Gerwazy. "I'll show you!"

And yanking his iron keys from under his belt, he whirled them over his head and let fly with all his might. Like a stone from a sling hurtled that mass of iron. It would have smashed Protazy's skull to bits had he not ducked in the nick of time; even so did the Sergeant-at-Arms escape certain death.

Everyone started from his seat. For a moment there was a dead silence. Then the Judge cried out:

"Confine that mischief-maker in the stocks! Ho there, boys!"

The servants ran briskly through the narrow space between the wall and bench, but the Count barred their way with a chair.

"Stand back!" he cried, placing his foot on the frail barricade. "Judge! No one lays a hand on my servant in my house. If anyone here has a complaint against the old man, let him lodge it with me."

The Chamberlain looked at the Count out of the corner of his eye. "Sir," he said, "I need no help from you to chastise this insolent squirekin. Besides, you anticipate the court's decision. You are not the lord here; nor, sir, are you the host. Sit you still as before, and if you honor not my silver hair, then defer at least to the district's highest office."

"What is that to me?" retorted the Count. "Enough of your prattle! Weary others with your office and favors. I have been fool enough to join you in revelries, which end in boorish behavior. You shall answer for this slight to my honor. Until we meet again—sober of mind. Gerwazy, pray follow me!"

Not in his wildest imaginings did the Chamberlain expect such a reply. He had just been pouring himself another bumper when the Count's insolent outburst hit him like a thunderbolt. Holding the bottle motionless to the glass, he tilted his head, pricked up his ears and, staring wide-eyed, parted his lips. No sound came out, but he squeezed the glass so

hard that it burst with a ping and sent the wine spraying into his eyes. You would have sworn fire poured over his soul along with that wine, so flushed was his face, so inflamed was his eye. He started to speak, but found it hard to articulate the first word, for he seemed to be mashing it in his teeth.

"M-m-milksop!" he finally brought out. "You, you—countling! I'll—. Thomas, my saber! I will teach you some *mores*, you—milksop! Damn him! So, my 'office' and 'favors' weary that delicate little ear, eh? Why, I will slice your lobes off, earrings and all! Outside with you and draw your sword! Thomas, my saber!"

The Chamberlain's friends sprang to his aid. "Stay, my lord!" cried the Judge, seizing him by the arm. "This is not your fight. It was me he challenged first. Protazy, my sword! I will make him dance to my stick like a bear."

But Tadeusz held him back. "Uncle! Chamberlain! Stoop not to take on this dandy. Are there no young men about? Leave him to me. I will see he gets his desserts. And you, hotspur, who call out our elders, we shall see what a grim knight you are. Tomorrow we parley and decide on the place and arms. Now go, while you have breath to draw."

It was timely advice, for Gerwazy and the Count were in serious straits. While the upper end of the table did nothing but cry foul, the lower end was pelting the Count with bottles. The terrified women pleaded and wept. "Alas the day!" Telimena wailed; then raising her eyeballs, she stood up and went off in a dead faint. She slumped over on the Count, draping her neck over his shoulder, pressing her swan-like bosom against his chest. Despite his fury, the Count checked his advance and began to revive her, fretting her cheeks with his hands.

Meanwhile, Gerwazy, finding himself bearing the full brunt of the flying bottles and stools, was lurching on his feet. Even now a throng of bare-knuckled servants bore down on him from every side. But lucky for him, Sophie, seeing the charge, leapt up and, moved to pity, spread wide her arms and threw herself between the old man and the throng. The servants stopped in their tracks. Gerwazy slunk back and vanished from sight. They were still hunting for him under the table when, springing out from the other side, he hoisted a bench in his powerful arms, swung it round like a windmill, and cleared half the hall. He seized the Count by the arm; and so, with the bench serving as a shield, the two men inched their way back to the little doorway. On reaching the doorsill, Gerwazy stopped. Once more he eyed his foe, hesitating, unable to decide if he should beat an orderly retreat or

avail himself of his new weapon in a fresh bid for glory. He decided on the latter action. Picking up the bench to use as a battering ram, he swung it back, dropped his head, thrust out his chest and, raising his foot, was about to charge—when, looking up, he suddenly blanched.

All this time the Chief Steward had been sitting quietly with half-shut eyes, as if lost in thought. It was only when the Count began to quarrel with the Chamberlain and threaten the Judge that he began to pay attention. Twice he took a pinch of snuff and wiped his eyes. He was only distantly related to the Judge, but having long enjoyed the hospitality of the latter's house, he had grown very attentive to his companion's welfare; and so with growing interest he watched the unfolding brawl. Setting his fingers lightly on the table, he cupped a knife in the hollow of his hand with the handle running the length of his index finger and the blade pointing toward his elbow. Then raising his arm and drawing it back, he whirled the knife about in his fist, as if toying with it, but all the while keeping his eye fixed on the Count.

Now the art of knife throwing, so terrible a part of hand-to-hand combat, had long since fallen into disuse in Lithuania. Only a few old timers were acquainted with it. Gerwazy would sometimes resort to it during a brawl in the tavern; but the Steward was an old hand at it. You could tell by the backward stroke of his arm that the blow would be hard; and the direction of his glance left no doubt as to his intended target: the Count, last male representative of the Horeszko clan (albeit on the female side). The less observant youth failed to comprehend the old man's gesture, but Gerwazy paled at the sight. He swung the bench in front of the Count and drew back to the doorway.

“Catch 'em!” roared the throng.

A wolf caught unawares over his kill will turn blindly on a pack of hounds disturbing his feast. He lunges forward; ready to tear them to pieces. But then, suddenly, amid the clamor of the dogs, he hears the faint click of a rifle hammer. He knows the sound. He turns and looks. There, behind the pack, stooped over on one knee, a hunter stares down his barrel at him. The hunter steadies the barrel with his hand, finger on the trigger. The wolf flattens his ears and makes off, tail cleaving to his belly. The hounds, howling in triumph, go clamoring after him, tearing at his shaggy hide. Now and then the wolf turns and confronts them, snapping his jaws; the merest flash of his white fangs strikes terror into the yelping hounds. Even so grim-faced Gerwazy drew back, checking his assailants with his eye and the bench, until

at last he and the Count vanished deep inside the shadowy niche.

“Catch 'em!” roared the throng again.

Their triumph was short-lived. Without warning, the Warden reappeared by the old organ in the gallery. With an appalling crash he set to ripping out the tin-lead pipes. Great might have been the havoc he wrought from above, but by now the guests were legging it helter-skelter out of the hall. The terrified servants, not daring to hold the field, seized armfuls of Saxon china and decamped on the heels of their lords, abandoning the table linen and a good portion of the silverware to the victors.

And who, braving threats and blows, was the last to quit the battlefield? Protazy Brzechalski! From his position behind the Judge's chair, he continued with unruffled poise to proclaim his official *obductio*. Only when he had discharged his duty did he retire from the field—a field bestrewn with the dead, the maimed, and the detritus of battle. There were no human casualties, but every bench had its legs wrenched off. The table, too, lay crippled and divested of its linen. Amid the wine-bespattered plates it lay, like a dead knight sprawled over bloodied bucklers; and strewn all around it lay corpses of capons and turkeys without number, each breast freshly impaled with a dinner fork.

Within minutes, total calm was restored to the solitary Horeszko castle. The night grew dark. The remains of that splendid lordly banquet lay spread on the floor like the nocturnal feasts of Forefathers' Eve at which the enchanted spirits of the dead are said to preside. Three times from the gables the owls screeched like warlocks. They seemed to greet the rising moon. Her pale image danced tremulously on the table like a purgatorial soul. Rats sprang up from the cellars like spirits from hell. They began to gnaw and sup; here and there, a forlorn champagne bottle popped a toast to the presiding spirits.

On the second storey, in the mirrorless room formerly known as the hall of mirrors, the Count stood cooling himself in the air by the door to the gallery overlooking the gate. He wore his frock coat with one arm through the sleeve and the tails and other sleeve wrapped around his throat so that the garment draped his chest like a cloak. Gerwazy paced the hall to and fro with giant strides. Both men were deep in thought and muttering to themselves:

“Pistols!” said the Count. “Then again, broadswords, if they so wish.”

“The castle and village,” said the Warden, “both ours!”

“Uncle, nephew. . . I’ll call out the whole tribe!” exclaimed the Count.

“I say seize the castle, the village, and the land, old boy!” cried the Warden. Then turning to the Count, he resumed: “If it is peace you want, seize it all. Why bother with lawsuits, old boy? The thing is as clear as day. For four centuries Horeszkos have been owners of this castle. After Targowica, as you know, they sequestered part of the land and awarded it to Soplica. Do not settle for a part; you deserve it all as compensation for your legal fees and the pillaging of the castle. Have I not always urged you to forgo the courts? Have I not always urged you to mount an armed foray? Aye, that is the way we used to do it. Who seizes the land is the rightful heir. Who wins on the field wins in court. As for settling our older scores with the Soplicas, we have my Pocketknife here, wieldier than any court of law. And should Matthias join us with his Switch, the pair of us will cut the Soplicas to ribbons.”

“Bravo!” replied the Count. “Your plan smacks of the Sarmatian and Gothic. Your idea is more to my liking than all this legal wrangling. Do you know what? We shall mount an expedition such as Lithuania has not seen for years, and a high time we shall have of it! What kind of action have I seen in the two years I have lived here? Nothing but boundary scuffles with the local rustics! But on our expedition we shall have bloodshed. I took part in such an armed foray once, during my travels abroad. While I was staying with a prince in Sicily, a band of robbers abducted his son-in-law and, fleeing into the mountains, brazenly demanded a ransom from his kin. In no time, we mustered our men and vassals and mounted an attack. Two of the brigands I ran through myself. I was the first to storm the camp and free the captive. Ah, dear Gerwazy! What a triumphal progress we made upon our return! You would have sworn we were feudal knights. The townsfolk greeted us with flowers. The prince’s daughter, grateful to her preserver, fell on my neck and wept. When I returned to Palermo, it was all in the papers. The womenfolk pointed me out. The incident even became the theme of a romance, entitled, *The Count; or the Mystery of Rocca Birbante Castle*—and it mentioned me by name. Tell me, are there any dungeons in this castle?”

“We have ample cellars,” replied the Warden, “but they are empty now. The Soplicas drained them dry.”

“My jockeys!” added the Count. “We must arm my jockeys, and muster our vassals in the hamlets!”

“*Lackeys?* God forbid, sir” broke in Gerwazy. “An armed foray is not for the riffraff. Whoever heard of mounting a foray with lackeys! I see you know nothing about forays, my boy. But *rascals*, that is something else.

Aye, they will come in handy, but it is not in the villages that we shall find them, but rather in the gentry hamlets: Dobrzyn, Rzekików, Ciętycze, and Rąbanki! Noblemen all, since time out of mind! The blood of knights runs in their veins. And all of them Horeszko allies and sworn foes of Soplica! There we shall muster three hundred of your rascals. But that task is for me to discharge. Meanwhile, you, sir, return to your hall and sleep the sleep of the just. A heavy task awaits us on the morrow. You are fond of sleep, old boy, and the hour is late. Hark! The cock crows again. I shall remain here and guard the castle until it grows light. By daybreak I shall be darkening the doorways of Dobrzyn.”

The Count left the gallery, but before taking leave of the castle, he took a peep through one of the embrasures. He saw the manor house ablaze with lights.

“Blaze away!” he exclaimed. “By this time tomorrow we shall have lights in the castle, while you languish in darkness!”

Gerwazy sat down on the floor, leaned his back against the wall, and lowered his head pensively on his chest. The moon shone down on the dome of his skull. In its light he could be seen tracing designs on his polished pate with his finger; clearly he was plotting strategies for his future raids. His eyelids grew heavier, his head nodded involuntarily. Feeling the onset of sleep, he said his customary prayers. Somewhere between the *Pater noster* and the *Ave Maria*, a host of strange shadows began to flit before his eyes. The Warden saw his former lords, the Horeszkos. Some carried sabers, others maces. Every one of them flashed a fell eye and curled his moustache. One reached for his saber, another brandished his mace. Behind them glided a somber phantom with a splash of blood on his breast. Gerwazy shuddered. He recognized the Pantler. He blessed himself in every direction and, the better to drive away these horrid apparitions, recited the litany of the poor souls.

Once more his eyelids began to shut tight. A noise rang in his ears. He saw a mounted troop of the nobility with glinting sabers. An armed foray! The raid of Korelicze with Rymsza at the head! He saw himself, astride his grey, in full career, his terrible sword upraised, his unbuttoned tunic flapping in the wind, his confederates’ cap sliding over his left ear. On he galloped, striking down both rider and stander; now he was setting a burning brand to Soplica’s barn.

And weighed down by these dreams, his head dropped to his chest. So nodded off the last of the Horeszko Wardens.

(to be continued in the next issue)