

THE FORMER PEOPLE
by
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Edteck Press
New York

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ISBN 1-4116-6331-4

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Book and cover design by Peter Pappas
Edteck Press

In Memory Of

All those brave men and women who resisted domestic tyranny and foreign oppression, and who fought and died for freedom in the Hungarian Rebellion of 1956.

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for Oblivion,
A great-siz'd monster of ingratitude.
These scraps are good deeds past, which are
devour'd
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done. Perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright; to have done is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mock'ry... .

– William Shakespeare

A man sees death in things. That is what it is to be
a man.

– Gilgamesh

I. Washington, D.C., Vienna, Summer, Autumn, 1956

By the time the meeting had gone on for well over two hours, Cleve was fed up. The air was blue with cigarette smoke, the ashtrays filled to overflowing, and between the fading afternoon light and the newly lit overhead lights, the conference room and its occupants seemed painted in smeared butter. Two dozen people were there from the Department, desk chiefs and their deputies from the Russian and East-European sections, with the Assistant Secretary presiding. Faces flushed, eyes bleary, a few men had loosened their ties and collars, and some had even taken off their jackets. Everyone's nerves were frayed except the Assistant Secretary's. A short grey man in a grey suit, his grey hair brushed back over his ears so that not a single hair was awry, he had the reputation for being unflappable. All afternoon he had chaired the session, and now in his careful Cambridge accent, he told them that "rollback" was and remained national policy. There weren't be any leaks to the newspapers, or to anyone else, about dissension in the Department; no one was even to mention any "discussions." The Secretary had enunciated the policy for "liberation." The President had confirmed it; their job was to carry out policy, not to question it.

Cleve saw Jim Hursh's almost imperceptible warning, the merest shake of his dark head, the silent drumming of his fingernails on the mahogany conference table, but Cleve ignored the warning. He knew he was being "too intense," wasn't using the

understated, grey-flannel style. Unlike the others, who had spoken sitting down, he had, almost involuntarily, risen to his feet. Defending an opposing policy in the Department was acceptable, provided you did it with your head alone. If your heart was in it, best to disguise it as thoroughly as you could. Always the illusion of indifference. But Cleve wasn't indifferent to the liberation policy because it was a fraud that America would not and should not back with military force. Whatever the Secretary said for public consumption, the leaders of the government accepted *de facto* Soviet hegemony in East and Central Europe. They denied the Soviets *de jure* recognition, but that was a formality. Now that the Russians had the Bomb, there wasn't a glimmer of America's risking a war for Central Europe. Liberation remained a policy enunciated for domestic partisan political purposes. It made good election speeches. It made Americans feel righteous and freedom-loving, even a little daring. It made their leaders say that they were winning the hearts and minds of men. But only the mad or the self-deluded believed for a moment that the United States would go to war to "liberate the captive nations."

Choosing his words carefully, but saying *we* instead of *you*, Cleve listed the facts that everyone there knew by heart. When he summed up, he deliberately lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper, not only because he was tired and tense, but because he wanted them to strain to hear what he was saying, to pay attention.

"If we don't change our policies and our propaganda, they will lead to futile rebellions and bloodshed. Men, women and children will die uselessly in the streets of Warsaw, Budapest and Prague, shot down by the Russians, just as in 1953, they died uselessly in the streets of East Berlin. And we Americans will be sitting by doing nothing. But we will be responsible for having urged those people into the streets as much as they themselves will be responsible for having misjudged us and the Russians. We all know our country will not go to war to liberate Eastern Europe. The President knows that; the Secretary of State knows that. What's more, the country knows that. The policy is hypocritical and incendiary; therefore, we should publicly renounce it.

"It is also a destructive policy because those who do rebel, who believe our verbal posturing, and are killed in the uprisings, will be the most idealistic, courageous individuals, the future

potential leadership of the region. We shall have served Soviet purposes, not our own, by acting as *agents-provocateurs*, exposing the future opposition leadership so that the Soviets can cut their heads off with a single stroke.

“Now, especially, with Stalin dead, with the Soviet leadership divided and uncertain, with their bureaucracy wavering, with more lenient policies emerging in the Satellites — and even in the U.S.S.R. itself — now is the time for us to be prudent, patient and subtle in encouraging long-term change in the Soviet bloc.”

When he sat down, his knees were shaking, his hands trembling. No one spoke until the Assistant Secretary suavely thanked him for his interesting remarks, and then there was an audible sigh of relief. People got up, stretched, straightened their coats and ties. It was over. No one spoke to him. No one contested what he'd said. On his way out of the conference room, the Assistant Secretary went by him and inclined his head. It was as if he'd never uttered a word. It was as if he'd suddenly become what the Russians called a “non-person,” visible to no one but Jim Hursh. Cleve knew he had lost, and not for the first time he was terribly afraid for those men and women in Eastern Europe he knew were soon going to die.

It was only a little later than the cocktail hour, but the Hay-Adams bar was unusually quiet for that time of evening. They not only got a table, but their drinks were served with a dispatch for which Cleve was grateful. He ordered a double bourbon and drank off half of it while Jim Hursh stirred the sliver of lime in his gimlet. “You said you would — and you did. But it was a mistake, Joseph. You wasted your fire — and yourself.”

Cleve felt as if he'd been running for a long distance. “No word of congratulations, of condolence, for speaking the truth?”

“This post-mortem doesn't call for congratulations. You were premature. You should have waited.”

“For what, Jim, another East Berlin?”

“For another year, maybe two or three. The tide will turn. Their minds will change.”

“Not unless someone tells them what tide is running in the first place.” Cleve noticed how dark the hollows were under Jim Hursh's blue eyes. He too looked worn out.

“Not until events change their minds.”

“Was the East German rising a fantasy? Remember those German kids throwing stones at Russian tanks? Remember the calls to RIAS to help them? Where were the American tanks, they wanted to know. Remember their pleas to their ‘fellow socialists’ in the S.P.D.?”

“I don’t need reminding. I remember it as well as you do. But maybe more people have to die before the Department listens.”

“Is that a statement of policy, or a breakdown of intelligence and will?”

“You’ve got to wait it out, wait them out.”

Successively Cleve clapped his palms over his eyes, ears and mouth. “Make like monkeys, Jim? See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil?”

“You can’t beat them.”

“I certainly can’t if I don’t try. There are also people outside of the Department who’ll listen.”

Hursh sneered. “Sure. Two-bit newspapermen who’d sell their souls for a headline, who couldn’t tell you where Budapest or Bucharest are, or tell you the difference. What the hell do they have to do with governing, with making policy? Jackdaws, jackasses, jackals! Pontificating peacocks!” He touched the gimlet to his lips. “Go to the newspapers, Joseph, and you’re a pariah. They’ll drive you out of the Department on a rail, tar and feather you.”

“And the Congress?”

“All pork barrel and elections — and Joe McCarthy. You know what they did to the guys on the China desk, and they’re still going on with it. *We* lost China. *We* lost Korea. Now you want to tell them *we’ve* lost Eastern Europe too?”

“We’ve been in this together for the past year and a half, and now you’re scurrying for cover. What’s going on?”

“I’m scared stiff, Joseph.”

“Of McCarthy?”

“Of him and his minions. And Dora is pregnant.”

“Marvelous! Congratulations! Why didn’t you say anything before?”

“The rabbits only told us yesterday.”

“So you’re afraid of losing your job?”

“God, you make me sound so craven. Sure I’m afraid to get fired. Sure, I’m terrified to get the McCarthy-ites on my back. I wasn’t as lucky as you. I wasn’t born here. And my father was a member of the Austrian Socialist Party. But those are minor things.”

“What’s major then?”

“You can’t win! This is the wrong time.”

“Riots in Plzen. Rebellion in East Berlin. All the Satellites seething. And people there, and here, believing the Dulles nonsense that liberation ‘will mark the end of the negative, futile and immoral policy of containment which abandons countless human beings to despotism and godless terrorism.’ Those people really believe the U.S. Cavalry will rescue them.”

“The more fools they. They’ve just seen too many American Westerns.”

“It’s criminal to mislead them.”

“You’re preaching to the converted.”

“But?”

“We’ve been sending our paper up the pipe for eighteen months, and what’s changed? Nothing. We’ve agreed to let Kim Il Sung have the North, and we won’t help the French with the Vietminh and Uncle Ho, but Foster wanted to drop the Bomb on Dienbienphu, so if they won’t even drop it on Orientals — tried it once, lots of folks didn’t like it — they surely won’t drop it on Europeans. Not even Russian Communists. Did you ever wonder, Joseph, whether they’d have dropped the Bomb on our German cousins, even if we had it at the time? I know we’re not going to war for Czechs and Poles and Hungarians, but...”

“...but if they go out into the streets at our urging, and get themselves shot down, it’s okay? We ought to help them delude themselves?”

Hursh’s voice rose. “They’ve got the same information we have. They can draw the same conclusions.”

They drank in silence, then ordered another round. “Remember when you hired me, Joseph? I was a lousy copy boy at the *Post*, getting nowhere. I don’t want to go back to that.”

“With the experience you have now, and your natural gifts, you’ll do a lot better than that.”

“Have you talked to any of the people the Department let go? They can’t get jobs selling shoes. Some of them have had to find jobs in Peru, in Venezuela, in Morocco. Please, I beg you, lay off! Go to the Assistant Secretary and withdraw that last policy paper recommendation.”

“How will that help anyone?”

“It will help me and Dora, and my unborn son. It will help you.”

“That’s not enough.”

“...the hard way is to have the courage to be patient, tirelessly to seek out every single avenue open to us in the hope...of leading the other side to a little better understanding of the honesty of our intentions.”

“You quoting Ike!”

“If we bide our time, we’ll get the policy changed. If we leave the Department, we’ll have no influence at all. All those assholes will run it unopposed, and we’ll be nothing, nobody. Wait till this McCarthy business burns itself out. Wait...”

“...wait until thirty or forty thousand Poles or Czechs or Magyars are lying dead in the streets so we’ll still have our comfy little jobs, and then we can say I told you so?”

Hursh’s eyes filled with tears. “Sometimes you’re a monster. You don’t give an inch. I don’t want to be a martyr. I don’t want to be ahead of my time. I don’t want to be right — and out of a job, out of power.”

“Out of power? What the hell’s power for, except to put to some good use?”

“Joseph, I’m begging you.”

“It is neither safe nor prudent to do aught against conscience. Here I stand — I cannot do otherwise. God help me.”

“God help you all right. If you do as much damage as that pig-head Kraut did, you’ll need God’s help!” Hursh threw a bill on the table and stalked out.

Cleve stared at his bourbon until the waiter, hovering, made him uneasily aware that people were waiting for tables. He left, walking blindly into the now darkened Washington streets, wanting to cry because the man he considered his best friend had sold him out, because Jim Hursh made him feel like a self-righteous prig. And, besides, of all the historical figures he’d read and studied

about, there were few Cleve hated with more vehemence than Martin Luther.

The Department didn't send him to Vienna until the fighting was almost finished. From the first news of the Revolt, Cleve stayed in his office, sleeping a few hours a night on the couch, wrapped in an old khaki G.I. blanket, sometimes sitting at his desk in that blanket because he couldn't seem to get warm. He read every transcript of the radio monitoring of the various broadcast services as they came in from all over Hungary, from Győr and Miskolc, Dunapentele and Szombatheley, but most important from Budapest. Each day as he went wearily down the hall to the men's room, he passed the Assistant Secretary arriving, but their eyes never met, nor did they exchange a word. For eight days and nights, Cleve didn't leave the building. He read every word that came to him about Hungary, from the very first reports on October 23 that "counterrevolutionary gangs" had attacked public buildings in Budapest and killed members of the political police, through the two Soviet interventions and the desperate appeals to President Eisenhower, Prime Minister Eden, the UN Secretariat, for armed intervention and aid, until the November days when, like stopped mouths, the last free radios were shut down all over the country.

Two broadcasts particularly stuck in his memory, their chanting repetitions a choral background for the nightmares he had about the street fighting at the Kilián Barracks and the Korvin Theater that jolted him awake, scenes of kids jamming plumber's pipe under Russian T-34 tank treads, of women queuing for bread being shot down, of the "Red workers" of Csepel fighting to the hopeless end against the Soviet Red Army divisions. One was a Radio Csokonai broadcast, which came up out of a welter of S.O.S. signals made unintelligible by Russian jamming and atmospheric conditions, a voice in clear English suddenly speaking out of the void the opening words of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, a voice drowned out after "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," then reemerging with, "The brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract," before becoming inaudible.

The second broadcast shook him to his very marrow, an appeal so desperate it seemed to leap off the teletype sheets:

“In the name of all honest Hungarians we appeal to all honest men in the world. Must we appeal again? Do you love freedom? So do we. Do you have wives and children? So do we. We have wounded who have given their blood for the sacred cause of freedom, but we have no bandages, no medicine. And what shall we give to our children who are crying for bread? The last piece of bread has been eaten.

“In the name of all that is dear to you, we ask you to help. Those who have died for freedom accuse you who are able to help and who have not helped.”

Nathan was only a few months old then and with part-time and unreliable help, Sylvia was having great difficulties in nursing and attending to him, and managing to teach her courses at the University. At first, she made no objection to his remaining at the office, but when for more than a week, Cleve didn't come home, she turned angry. Several times a day they talked on the phone, and each day her reaction was sharper, until she said, “You can't do anything for the Hungarians, but you can do something for me, for us, here at home.” It was as much as she was willing to say, but the fury in her voice spoke louder than her words.

History was breaking around his head. He was helpless and he hated it. The English, French and Israelis invaded Egypt, and if the Hungarian Revolt were not doomed before that, it surely was after that. Cleve understood their motives for invasion, although he thought it would prove futile even before the Americans and the Soviets jointly nullified their victory and drove them out. And then Eisenhower's victory, his reelection, made a mockery of the men who died in Budapest and Port Said. Each day, preparing briefing and position papers for the Assistant Secretary, Cleve wondered why he went on with it, for if his work had any effect, he couldn't see it.

On the eighth day, the Assistant Secretary sent him to Vienna on temporary duty attached to the Embassy to help interrogate the refugees who were beginning to flood across the Hungarian border into Austria. He wanted Cleve to depart for Vienna as soon as possible. Just as Cleve was about to leave his office, the Assistant Secretary said, “Would you really have gone to

war with the Russians over Hungary?” Behind the horn-rimmed eyeglasses his grey eyes were pained, and Cleve understood the question was not rhetorical: the Assistant Secretary really wanted to know.

“I don’t believe the Russians would have gone to war over Hungary or Suez, Mr. Secretary.”

“But suppose you believed wrong. If you had the responsibility for the decision, would you have run the risk?”

Cleve shook his head. What he had tried to tell the Assistant Secretary, had been telling him and anyone in the Department who would listen ever since 1953, when Imré Nagy initiated his New Course in Hungary, was the same. Belaboring it seemed pointless. The damage was done. The Revolt was crushed. The only thing to do was to bind up the wounds as best they could. In going to Vienna, perhaps he could see to helping some of the refugees. In that at least he might be effective. And maybe, just maybe, the refugee interrogations might teach the policymakers something. East Germany, first; Poland next; and now Hungary. Who would it be next time? And would the Department and the United States be better prepared, have any wiser policy?

“Do you have to go?” Sylvia asked.

“You know I do.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“Six weeks.”

“Which means at least two months, maybe more?”

“Maybe.”

Sylvia waited until he was ready to leave the house before saying, “I haven’t asked for much, Joseph, but now I need you here. I’m still nursing Nathan, and I’m exhausted all the time.” They had hired a series of black girls from Virginia and Maryland to help with the chores, but the girls turned out to be more trouble than help.

“Couldn’t you get one of your sisters down, or your parents? It’s only for a short time.”

“Shirley and Geraldine have their own families, their own responsibilities. And if my parents came, I’d have to look after them too. We’re *your* responsibility, Joseph, Nathan and I.”

Cleve heard her words against the clanging in his mind of, *Do you have wives and children? So do we...in the name of all that*

is dear to you, we ask you to help. Those who have died for freedom accuse you who are able to help and have not helped. “I must go, Sylvia,” was all he said.

“Go for a week, for ten days, then come home.”

“I won’t be able to come home until I’ve done what has to be done.”

“And what no one else can do?”

Cleve hesitated. “There are others, a few, but right now I’m the best choice. And it’s my job.”

“You’ll regret this, Joseph.”

“I regret it already, Sylvia, all of it, the whole bloody mess we made in Hungary and Eastern Europe.”

“And it’s your job to put it all right?”

“No, just to do what I can.”

What Sylvia was asking him was reasonable, but Cleve needed to leave for Vienna without feeling guiltier than he already did, yet he couldn’t ask for her blessing; it had to come from her spontaneously. And it wouldn’t.

Beneath the red, yellow and blue birds of the mobile the Hurshes had sent, Nathan slept peacefully in his crib. As Cleve bent to kiss him goodbye, Sylvia whispered, “Please, don’t wake him.” Cleve brushed the cheek with his lips, saw his son stir, the tiny, perfect fingers ball into fists, then open again. He breathed in the sweet smells of soap and bath powder. At the door, when Sylvia kissed him, it was with such sorrow that Cleve thought he might never see her again.

In Vienna, Cleve met Bruce McKelvey for the first time. McKelvey was, of course, at the Ambassador, sitting at breakfast in his shirtsleeves having the Viennese Gabelfrüstück in his suite, neatly cutting the Beuschel and Krenfleisch into bite-sized pieces with his knife and fork, fastidiously used in European style. McKelvey was over six feet tall, with the chest and shoulders of an athlete not yet gone to seed. His big, handsome Scottish features, sandy and freckled, seemed almost bland, the blue eyes whimsical contrast to the thick dark hair, precisely cut mustache, not quite a Guardsman’s but close. The face had been schooled to be misleading, arranged to direct the viewer to the amused disdain and

sybaritic lechery of the red lips and away from the underlying Scots seriousness and intensity. Its cold caution and reserve belonged to a professional diplomat or an Intelligence agent: Bruce McKelvey was both.

The breakfast table was set for three, but the dregs of coffee in one cup, traces of egg and ham on a plate, showed that someone had already eaten. The lipstick on the rim of the coffee cup was clearly visible. McKelvey finished chewing and swallowing before motioning Cleve to the table, poured some steaming coffee from the heavy silver urn into the third, clean cup and handed it across the table. "Had breakfast?"

Cleve had gone from Schwechat Airport to his hotel, then directly to the Ambassador. The long, sleepless flight had made him irascible, but he curbed his tongue.

"Where are you staying?"

Cleve told him. It was a small hotel off the Kärtnerstrasse near the Cathedral, in distance not far from the Ambassador but otherwise a world away.

"The food is rotten there, so is the service, and the whole place is so depressing. Why did you go there? You could have stayed here, or at the Bristol."

"I thought the Bristol and this place would be too expensive for a long stay."

McKelvey cut a small piece of one meatball, then a fragment of pork, covered both with horseradish sauce, confidently placed all of it on his fork and conveyed it unerringly to his mouth. He chewed and swallowed carefully before he said, "Don't be impatient to suffer unnecessarily, Dr. Cleve — it is Doctor, isn't it? — life will permit you, provide you, with sufficient and necessary opportunities."

Cleve recognized the touché and didn't contest it. Instead, he asked what had happened during the time he'd been in transit.

"The Russians are mopping up. Nagy is in the Jug Embassy, Mindszenty in ours. And the workers of Csepel, those splendid fools, are still fighting and dying."

"Goddamn it, I told them it would come to this!"

"A number of us have been trying to tell that to the Department for more than a year."

“I’ve been at it for three years, and no one even mentioned anyone else who agreed with me.”

McKelvey laid down his knife and fork, carefully wiped the ruby lips with his heavy linen napkin. “You thought you were the only one? Galileo and the Inquisition? *E pur si muove?*” The tolerant amusement of his words didn’t match the scorn in his eyes.

For almost three years Cleve had requested the secret Intelligence estimates of the Hungarian, Czech and Polish situations, but he hadn’t seen a single sheet of paper the Agency sent that agreed with his assessments. Had the Assistant Secretary seen them? Had he taken care to see that Cleve and Jim Hirsch didn’t see them?

“Have a drink. You look like you could use one.” McKelvey lifted a bottle of Stolichnaya from the ice bucket at his feet, and only then did Cleve recognize that between bites, Bruce McKelvey had been sipping not water but straight vodka.

“Those bastards knew, and they went right on with it.”

“They didn’t know anything, Dr. Cleve. If they did, you could be angry with them, or even forgive them, *hein?* Instead of their informing him, they wait for the Secretary to tell them the way the world turns because he’s top dog. And once he tells them, having consulted his proper Presbyterian God, they don’t know anything else. The Sermon has come down from the Mount, or at least from the Seventh Floor.”

The vodka slid down Cleve’s throat, icy, then landed burning in his stomach. Cleve buttered a brioche and bit into it, grateful for the hot coffee. After they were done eating, McKelvey stood up, put his coat jacket on and shot his gold-linked cuffs. In his dark blue, pin-striped suit and severe burgundy tie, flattened against his shirt with a pearl stickpin, McKelvey looked as expensive and dangerous as a powerful banker or corporation lawyer. He moved as if he had planned to proclaim himself a cautious, controlled and reliable man. All of it — clothing, posture, facial expression, right down to the semi-Guardsman’s mustache — seemed intended to disguise a passionate, unconventional intelligence, and perhaps some unrequited romantic intention. Then he sat back on the couch, lit a cigarette in his meerschaum holder with a gold Dunhill lighter before he looked up. “Géza thinks quite a lot of you.”

“If you have a Hungarian for a friend...” Cleve let the sentence trail off into the foolish grin and shrug that the U.S. Army and Department of State had forced him to perfect as a feigned self-deprecation. A disguise, he supposed, not much different from McKelvey’s.

But McKelvey was not put off. “Géza says you understood what was happening in Hungary even before the Magyar émigrés did. That’s something émigrés hate to admit more than anything else, except maybe the foolishnesses that made them émigrés in the first place.”

“Géza was one of the émigrés who helped me to recognize what was happening.”

“Ever been inside Hungary?”

“Never.”

“Ever been inside Eastern Europe? Another world, *hein?* The dark side of the moon.”

“You have been, I suppose?”

“Géza hasn’t mentioned me, I take it?”

In the Talmud Torahs of his childhood, Cleve had learned early the virtues of answering one question with another. He admired McKelvey’s skill with the technique, but he told him only that it was the Department which had vouched for McKelvey as an East-European and Soviet expert with whom Cleve would be working on this “Hungarian thing.”

McKelvey’s nostrils flared to allow streams of smoke to flow into the blue, mid-morning air on which his mocking laughter floated. “They told you I was to work for you, didn’t they? The Department, not the Company, speaks for the United States of America, even when it stutters or talks nonsense. God, did you hear them in the UN leaning on the Brits and the French and the Israelis, but not saying a word about...”

Cathedral bells began to toll, their foghorn boom drowning out the rest of McKelvey’s words. He sat wreathed in cigarette smoke and silence, the fury in his face, draining away, until, when the clangor was over, his features had once again taken on their sybaritic, devil-may-care mask. With the echo of the bells still in the room, there came a clap on the door, and McKelvey called, “Come!” and Géza András walked in, as timely, melodramatic and

on cue as in an opera. “Joseph,” he exclaimed, “a long time since I didn’t see you!”

Actually, they had seen each other only a week earlier. From the very first day of the Revolution, they talked daily on the phone, yet it did seem as if months had elapsed. One of the few times Cleve had left his office was to meet Géza in the Department cafeteria to dissuade him from returning to Hungary. In the first flush of the Revolution, certain that the new Nagy coalition would make his return possible, Géza had already booked a ticket for Vienna. He and Cleve had quarreled bitterly about it.

“The Russians aren’t going to let Nagy take Hungary out of the bloc,” Cleve had insisted.

“Always you are pessimist, Joseph. Why? Look at Austria. They let Austria go.”

They had argued back and forth until Cleve, pleading, asked Géza to wait until the fighting was over at least, until events in Budapest and in Moscow were clearer, but Géza had already packed his bags. “What about Eva and the children?” Cleve asked.

“I send for them from Budapest when they make me minister. I can go home now. Eight years I am waiting, in Zurich, in Paris, in London. Now I go home. Come on, Joseph, be happy for me. Drink a *barack* with me to celebrate. I tell you jokes, make you laugh. You hear the new one? ‘In this revolution, the Hungarians they are behaving like Poles, the Poles they are behaving like Czechs and the Czechs they are behaving like pigs!’”

The joke had been circulating for some days, but it was too true for Cleve to find funny. And now Géza was here, merry as usual, his eyes shining, his thick grey hair awry from the Vienna wind, his buck teeth protruding from his mouth like the cowcatcher of an old-fashioned locomotive. “Bruce is fellow who saves my skin in Budapest, my life. Remember I tell you about him? He smuggles me across the border in his car when the AVO comes to get me.” He saw the Stolichnaya bottle and yelled, “You are bastard, Bruce, drinking Russki vodka while the Russkies, they are riding over my people with their T-34 tanks. You should at least drink Polish Wyborowa.”

McKelvey grinned, poured a vodka for Géza and another for Cleve. He raised his glass to Géza. “From the class of ‘48 to the class of ‘56!”

“*Minden jót kívánok!* I drink to that.” After they set their glasses down, Géza told them that the car was downstairs, gassed and ready to go.

“To where?” Cleve inquired, his exhaustion burned away by the vodka and the excitement.

“To meet the class of ‘56,” McKelvey replied.

As they went down in the elevator, McKelvey told them that more than 30,000 Hungarians already had crossed from Hungary into Austria. “Where else to go?” Géza said. “Who wants to go to Beograd?”

The car was a powerful, dark maroon Mercedes with matching leather upholstery, and McKelvey walked twice around it, admiring it, before he installed himself in the driver’s seat. Géza sat up front with him, and Cleve made himself comfortable among the assorted boxes in the back seat. They drove to his hotel so he could pick up his luggage, which he hadn’t yet unpacked, but he took the opportunity to check in with the Embassy by phone. When he went back to the desk to sign out, the concierge protested in English, “But, Dr. Cleve, you have only just arrived!” Cleve said he’d be back, and after he had paid the bill and left a large tip, the concierge seemed mollified. As he went out the front door, Cleve heard him say to the switchboard girl, in German, “Crazy Americans!” Even here, in the country from which his mother’s people had fled, he was still a *meshugener*.

Géza opened the Mercedes’ trunk to put his flight bag in for him, and Cleve thought he saw a sub-machine gun and clips there, but it could as easily have been a kind of European tire jack with which he wasn’t familiar. They drove out of the city the way he’d come in from Schwechat, but once past the airport, McKelvey turned southeast and shot the Mercedes ahead at more than 150 kilometers an hour. Géza kept the radio on, but all they heard were Strauss waltzes, Magyar czárdás and the other Strauss’ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. There were no news broadcasts. Up front, McKelvey and Géza talked in such low voices that the music drowned out what they were saying.

Cleve had seen that Burgenland countryside before, but never in grey, leafless autumn desolation. Long before, on a sunny, spring morning, he’d driven from Vienna to Eisenstadt to see where Haydn lived and worked for the Eszterházys. The white marble

tomb in the church crypt was impressive, the tribute Haydn's princely Hungarian patrons paid to their court musician. But Cleve was horrified to learn that Haydn's body lay there headless. When he was informed that the head — or at least the skull — was now ensconced in the Musikverein Museum in *Alte Wien*, he turned the car around and raced back that same afternoon to see it sitting like Yorick's skull on the grand piano in its glass case. Alas, poor Haydn, Cleve thought gratefully, a fellow of infinite gifts. Haydn, too, had borne him on his back a thousand times, yet where were his songs now? his flashes of merriment? all that music?

German music, especially Haydn's and Mozart's, Bach's and Beethoven's, had been among the most profound solaces of his life, yet how could the music he loved, as he loved Russian literature, come from societies he so detested, from people for whom he had profound and abiding suspicion — and often enough sheer, unadulterated hatred? It was a contradiction he'd dismissed when he heard Americans say that they loved Paris, if only they could get rid of the Parisians. But it was the Parisians who made Paris what it was, Frenchmen who made France what it was, yet Cleve couldn't bring the same insight to bear on the Germans or the Russians...not only had Haydn's music impressed and moved him, but the long, unbelievably productive life astonished him, the 100 symphonies, the 80 some odd string quartets, the trios, sonatas, concerti, oratorios, operas, songs, masses: The plenitude. Or was he, like all Americans, stirred simply by sheer quantity?

Then, too, there was the friendship with Mozart. Whatever other crafts he practiced, Cleve thought of himself first and foremost as a writer, and the problem of friendship between artists remained a sore point for him. He was always being disappointed in such friendships — Jim Hursh being only one case in point — always Melville being rejected by Hawthorne, or at least being kept at stiff arm's length. What was it Haydn and Mozart must have felt for each other? What pain must have moved Haydn when that young friend and genius died at thirty-five while he lived on to blessed seventy-seven, to be interred — if headless — in the grandeurs of Eszterházy marble?

Cleve awoke stiff and cold. They were driving slowly, through flatland and marsh, the skies lowering, leaden. Without

turning, Géza told him that they were not far from Neusiedl, then handed back a thermos. Shuddering, Cleve drank the hot black coffee laced with brandy and felt warmer. “When I was boy,” Géza was telling McKelvey, “my father takes me to the Fertő — you know, the Neusiedler See — not here, but on the Magyar side. A small part only is Hungarian, near the southern tip. My father, he is a man who watches birds. How do you call that?”

“Ornithologist,” McKelvey supplied.

“Early morning, we come there even before the sun. My father, he rents a skiff, and we go out on the water. The reeds are high and make the shadows on the lake, like a prison.”

“Bars?” Cleve asked.

“No, no, smaller.”

“Grating?”

“Yes, like grating. The reeds are high, but we go until we can see. My father, he has his glasses, real Zeiss, from the old war when he is in the Austrian Army. We are all day on the Fertő. He is looking for birds, and he writes in a school notebook when he sees what his birds look like, where they are, what they do. Only time it is I see him ever happy.”

“Did you like your father?” McKelvey asked.

“I hate him. He is to himself all the time. Never he talks to me. Never do I hear him laugh. A man disappointed in the whole life. He sells cottons in small store we have in Pest. He hates such work, does not like to sell to women, so he goes into the back of the store, and he leaves my mother to work, later me and my brother. His father is doctor, and he wants also to be doctor. But under Horthy, because he is Jew, they do not let him to the university.”

It was the first time Cleve heard Géza admit publicly to being Jewish. What Géza called his “Jewish origins,” he usually kept a deep, dark secret. In America, he and his wife took their children to a Calvinist Reformed church.

“My mother, she gives us food, cucumbers and hardboiled eggs, sausage and salami, slices of *dobostorta* or leftover *csöröge*. My father, he always brings a big jug like this,” he reached back for his thermos, “filled with coffee and *barack*, and gives me little to drink some time.”

“You ever get interested in birds?” McKelvey wanted to know.

“Never. When I am small boy, I try to shot them. Like our cat, I leave them where my father he finds them, by back door, in the garden, so he will be angry. For a long time, he doesn’t know who makes it, so I tell him.”

“And?”

“He hits me with razor strop.”

“Did that please you, Géza?”

“I feel better because he pays me attention.”

They were entering Neusiedl when McKelvey asked Géza if the “old lady” was still threatening to go back to Hungary. “Tomorrow, if your people they let her. We must say thanks to Russian guard who does not let her cross the border, or she will be in prison, or dead, like the others.”

“You explained to her how much more important it is for her to speak to the General Assembly?”

“You know her, Bruce. She doesn’t give a damn about UNO. There is talk, only talk. She wants to be home, in Budapest, with the others.”

“Even in Recsk?”

“She says she is in prison before, maybe she is in prison again. She doesn’t care. She says me that sometimes is a crime to be outside prison.”

“Crazy.”

“You know all us Magyars are nuts.”

“She’s one of yours. A socialist. Couldn’t you persuade her?”

“All socialists is crazy too.”

“Géza, she’s Minister of State, the only Cabinet member outside of Hungary. She could legitimately organize a government-in-exile.”

Only then did Cleve realize that they were talking about Anna Kéthly.

“She says government must come from inside our country, not from outside.”

“And that’s why she wants to go back?”

“We all want to go back,” Géza said, then corrected himself. “We all *wanted* to go back, but now....”

“A remarkable woman.” McKelvey’s urbane voice was suddenly charged with feeling. “I never met anyone quite like her.”

“Come on, Bruce, you know all Magyar woman like that,” Géza said, and the two of them burst into laughter.

Though Neusiedl was crowded with new people, Austrian and foreign, come down to see or work with the new refugees, McKelvey had managed to wangle three reservations at a hotel, two individual rooms for Géza and Cleve, a suite for himself. “We’ll use the suite for interrogations,” McKelvey explained, without apology.

“How you did this?” Géza asked.

McKelvey winked. “Old connections in the Vienna police. They owed me. I collected.”

After stowing their gear, they reassembled in McKelvey’s suite, a large, old-fashioned sitting room, bedroom and bath full of 19th-century fittings and furnishings. “If you want to get some sleep first, Dr. Cleve,” McKelvey said, “we’ll go down to the border later.”

“If we’re going to work together, we better skip the honorifics.”

“Like the Austrians, the Magyars will love that Herr Professor Doktor.”

“And since you seem to have more experience here, I think you better run the show —” Cleve grinned “— as you’re already doing, but first let me inform you about what the Department wants us — me — to do.” Cleve unlocked his dispatch case, passed the questionnaires around and waited. McKelvey asked who had formulated the questions and showed his distaste when Cleve told him the Department had worked with outside people in public opinion polling and some academics. But when he was finished reading, McKelvey conceded that the questions weren’t all that bad. Géza, who took longer to read, wanted to know if it was forbidden to ask other questions, questions not on the form sheets. Cleve explained that the Department wanted to find out not only what happened but what makes for a revolutionary situation, so that next time, maybe, they might be better prepared for it.

“Like the generals,” McKelvey declared, “the diplomats will always be preparing for the last revolution. And revolutions, like wars, never happen twice the same way. History doesn’t repeat itself. Only man’s stupidity does.”

“Even that’s a form of history, isn’t it?” Cleve reminded him.

McKelvey suggested they work as a team, each of them taking a different tack because they wanted different sorts of information, but they’d see to it that all the questions on the questionnaire were answered — and more. Interviews would be tape-recorded, so that others could subsequently review their work and see, if from ignorance or bias or fatigue, they had missed anything. They could also play the tapes back each day to remind themselves of the facts and see which lines of interrogation worked best. McKelvey would see to it that copies of the tapes were made to be sent back to Washington through the diplomatic pouch in *Alte Wien*. McKelvey emphasized that each of them had to feel free to ask whatever questions he thought useful, and to let new questions arise as the interviews developed and they learned from them.

The people they were going to interview would be selected in the refugee camps, and there would be other interrogation teams — in Nickelsdorf, Frauenkirchen and Andau — with specialized areas of concern. One, for example, would interview children only. All the units would get a fair sampling and in some cases might even repeat interviews with the same refugees for different purposes. “Géza’s going to have lots of questions that aren’t on the sheets, and he’ll be most valuable of all of us.”

“Eight years it is since I am away from home, Bruce. It is a long time. I think Joseph he knows now a lot more than me.”

“You won’t miss much, Géza.” McKelvey turned to Cleve. “Because he’s a Magyar, Géza knows these people better than we ever could. They’re his people. He’ll think of questions we couldn’t even imagine. And the language is his *Muttersprache*. Do you have any Magyar, Joseph?”

“None.”

“I understand most of it, but I miss the nuances, and my speech is lousy, my accent off. So we’ll have to rely on Géza and the interpreters. We’ll prime him and them as we go along. I’ve also asked them to send the Jews to you.” None of the other interviewers were Jewish, McKelvey explained, so just as the Magyars I were Géza’s, so, too, were the Jews “his.” But were they? Cleve wondered. He was theirs, for sure, but because he knew what the Germans had done to the Hungarian Jews; aided and

abetted, and sometimes outdone by the Hungarian Arrow Crossists, Cleve was sure there wouldn't be too many Jews among the refugees. Two-thirds of the Jews in Hungary, more than 400,000 of them, had been murdered in the German death camps or by Magyar Fascist *pogromniks*.

It was twilight before they reached the border. Under the fading light and cloud cover, the leafless trees were stark, funereal. All around them, earth and sky were seamed into an immense shroud from which there seemed no escape. The grass, as if seared by wind and cold, looked like pale straw, and in that expanse of plain, now and again broken by clumps of almost spectral white birch, Cleve felt trifling, inconsequential. The others must have felt something similar, because they lowered their voices, as if some power brooding over that lowland might hear and punish them for intruding their petty concerns into its desolation.

McKelvey parked the car off the road. Géza opened the trunk and took out a submachine gun and two automatics. Cleve didn't recognize the type of submachine gun but the automatics were old-style Colt .45's he remembered all too well. Géza gave each of them a Colt and shoulder-holster harness, then put the submachine gun into an old canvas case he slung, muzzle down, over his shoulder. McKelvey stripped off the beautifully tailored British warmer he wore, its RAF blue the color of his eyes, then his banker's pinstripe, and deftly buckled the .45 into place. I would prefer not to, not ever again, Cleve thought, but preferring not to had never been enough, not for him, not for Melville and Bartleby, nor for anyone else. "We're not going to need these weapons, are we?" he asked.

"Don't you know how to use that?" McKelvey asked.

"If border guards come there, Joseph," Géza interjected, "you cannot tell what they do. Better we have these with us."

The old aversion to weapons rose like nausea in his throat, dinned into his head by his parents, by his rabbis, by all Jewish tradition: *Swords into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks*. By his own four years in the United States Army. Yet always, in one place or another, in one way or another, he was forced to pick up a gun. Slowly, his fingers remembering the thinner leather of his phylacteries, Cleve buckled the holster straps into place, checked

the .45's firing mechanism, its blue coldness like death to his touch yet reassuring in his fist. As Géza passed them each a batch of clips, Cleve noticed McKelvey's satisfaction that he seemed to be familiar with the Colt's mechanism.

The moon was not up, and when they came out of the swamp and mist, making their way up through the reeds and the bracken in the dusk, Cleve felt like they were hunted animals. Around them the marshes were frozen, the hoarfrost thick on cattails and ferns, and as they broke their way through the coarse underbrush, their heads turned back as if, at any moment, they expected the noise of their passage, as they moved down into the canal, then up on to the high ground beyond, would bring pursuers up behind them. At first, when Cleve followed their glances, he saw nothing. But when he looked through the binoculars, the skeleton framework of a guard tower loomed up about half a mile away. As far as he could see, there were no guards in it. "No one is up there," he muttered, and McKelvey, beside him, said softly, "That won't last too long. Believe me. God help them to get through while it does."

Although he had long since stopped believing it, Cleve said, "It is written that God is always on the side of the persecuted."

"Then he must have been looking the other way when your people were being persecuted," McKelvey retorted.

They were both whispering, as if still fearful that someone, something, might overhear them.

The first group came like refugees the world over, huddled together, bent against the wind, carrying babies and baggage and bundles in their arms and on their backs, leading children by the hand, the men at the front and in the rear, the women and children in the center, as if with age-old tribal recollection, they had disposed themselves for defense against attack. Heavily-clad, they moved slowly, ponderous, but the scarves of the men and the head kerchiefs of the women flew like banners in the bitter wind. When the refugees saw them, some began to wave, then they started to sing, their voices, thin over the forlorn marches, swept away by the gusts.

"It's the Magyar national anthem," McKelvey growled. His voice hoarse, he began to translate:

God bless the Hungarians,

Give them joy and plenty,
Protect their arms
When they fight the enemy,
Lift their sorrows and their tears...
Hungary has already paid penance
For its past and future sins.

The refugees walked on toward them, singing, hurrying, almost marching in step now. They no longer seemed tired or dispirited, but proud, even triumphant. They began to chant, “Szabad-SÁG!” Then in German, “Frei-HÉIT!” and finally in heavily accented English, “Free-DÓM!”

Géza ran to them, his binoculars bobbing on his chest, the submachine gun case bouncing clumsily on his shoulder, and Cleve and McKelvey ran after him. As they reached the column, the refugees rushed to embrace them, danced around them, gesticulating, shouting, singing. Bottles appeared and were passed, and Cleve tasted the apricot rasp of *barack* on his tongue, yet only when he saw that Géza and McKelvey and the others were weeping did he realize that his own tears were freezing on his cheeks.

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