

The Fourth Prague Defenestration: 1

by Jerry Ratch

Defenestration - the act of throwing someone out of a window.

1

I went to Prague recently to visit my family's castle, which is called Krivoklat. I'm not even going to attempt to explain to you how to pronounce that. It's outside Prague, about an hour to the west. They say that inside the veins of every Bohemian lies an entire army of dead alcoholics. And I suppose this is true of me too.

I have at times felt them overrunning the topsoil of my own personal demons, even though my father had the iron will to drink only one glass of deep red Mogen David wine with the yellow eye of an egg yolk staring out at him like the evil eye, warning him of what always lay ahead, if he were to cut loose like his father before him. But he never did. He had a Russian's iron will, for it was the Russians who rode into Bohemia on horseback and swooped up his own drunken father into the Czar's wicked army.

Every family castle is a letdown, to tell you the truth. Kind of claustrophobic, the dungeon poorly lit and dank. It kind of makes you go inside and shut down, quit thinking, sort of like meditating. Too much history makes you thirsty for blood, I think, hungry for booze and duck and cabbage, raw whiskey in the throat, and maybe, yes, maybe even pissing in the sink at your castle. Just because you can.

* * * * * * * * *

So, my wife and I stood staring into my family castle's dungeon through the bars. It was kind of dank and dark, reminding me of the typical mind-set of your average Bohemian. By nature we are a darkly lit, moody people. They would not let us go on the standard all-inclusive castle tour in the actual castle above, because we were not ten people. Everybody knows you have to have ten people to be allowed into the upper parts of your family castle, where royalty used to sport and get drunk. So all we could get in to see for free was the dungeon down below. How many of my own family must have ended up in that dungeon? That was all I could think as it stared back blankly at me. Dungeons, as a general rule, do not have emotions. They do not tear up easily. If only they could speak, I thought.

I needed to poop, probably the result of having lunched on the local duck recently fished out of the Vltava River, where you can see flocks of them just floating all over the place, waiting to be someone's dinner on the plaza by the Astronomical Clock. But the tourist bathroom of my castle was locked, until a man who looked somewhat like me, showed up, took one look at me and unlocked the door to the toilet. "The rolls of paper," he explained, "are outside the toilet stalls. Be careful not to fall if the automatic light goes out." I nodded and went on inside the toilet, which was a little like its own kind of dungeon. I shut the toilet door and flipped the latch for privacy, then sat down to unload, when suddenly the lights went out.

"Hello?" I asked the darkness. "Anybody there?" Nothing. I rose from the toilet seat, but realized I needed to wipe myself off, and had neglected to heed the man's advice about where the rolls of toilet paper were. "The toilet guard," we should call him. I'm using the royal "we" more comfortably now. "Hello?" I waved my arms around

to see if the lights would come back on so I could find the rolls of toilet paper outside the stall. Just my Bohemian luck.

When I finally got the lights to turn back on after wandering out of the stall with my pants down around my knees, the toilet paper turned out to be this humungous brown roll of Soviet style toilet paper, narrow, and not at all gentle on your bottom. This stuff must've been manufactured during World War II, and made specifically for use under difficult circumstances on the Russian Front, with the Germans breathing down their necks. Maybe made specifically to survive the extremes of a harsh Russian winter. Or possibly for use by bears and such. It was obviously never meant to pamper your ass, that's for sure.

But there was no other choice, so use it I did. Such is the life of a Bohemian. The toilet guardian was waiting for me as I emerged from the tourist toilet into the bright sunlight. He was wearing a knowing look, and had a slight, very slight smirk about his face. I would not go so far as to call it a smile. No indeed. But he did not know I came from royalty, or at least as near to royalty as a Bohemian can get, without being defenestrated by the commoners during one of their infamous Defenestrations. More on that to follow later. Stay tuned.

"I am relative of owner," he said, sticking out his big Bohemian/Russian mitt. "Name is Vladimir. Vladimir Janovsky."

I was shocked, a little. That was my mother's mother's name. That's who used to run the inn at the castle! Of course, you've got to understand that Bohemians are prone to exaggerating a bit, and outright lying, just to gain some stature. It runs in our blood, so I wasn't too sure about this guy's pedigree, if you must know.

"Zat so?" I said, trying my best to keep my cool. "Same as the street in Prague? That Janovsky?"

"You heard of it?" he asked. I just nodded, and kept eying him. He did look quite a bit like me. But then so did thousands of other Bohemians. That's because our roots pretty much extended back to the Roman Empire around those parts. So, what the heck? It wasn't like in America, where everybody looks like mutts.

"You look vaguely familiar," he said. "Did I see you on the news or something? Are you that mass murderer who escaped? Where you are from? What is name?"

"Chicago," I told him. "Name's Fyodor."

He just kept eying me suspiciously, but then he said, "Go on, Chicago. That's where my uncle Leo escaped to back in 1956. Yeah, Chicago. Are you related to him maybe?"

"That would mean *we'd* be related somehow," I said matter-of-factly.

Now he really took a good look at me. "Turn your face, just a little," he said. He touched my chin gruffly with his big mitt. "No, is not possible. Are you Bohemian?"

I nodded. Then he added, "Bohemians are known liars, you know. What is last name?"

I knew that, for a fact. I myself was a liar. I could be lying right now. I mean, right here and now to you, dear reader. It is possible. Keep that in mind. "What are you, KGB?" I asked, trying to joke.

"Depends on who is asking. The KGB is watching us, still. They are everywhere. Watch everything. Know what I mean?" He looked all around, up and down the steep castle walls. Down the little lane leading up to the castle, where a party of people were walking back along the path down to the little river that ran past it. More of a

creek, really. I gave a shudder. I felt as if I had been here before. I had always felt I'd met my wife there in a previous life. Somewhere out in the fields across and beyond the creek, where the royalty used to go hunting for boar and duck. It all seemed so familiar.

That was when I told him my last name was Janov. And he looked for all the world as if I had just kicked him in the groin.

