

# The Tragedy of Martin and Bozhka

Translated and adapted by Ing. Slavomír Blažek, PhD, PMP

From the Slovak original "Dobrodruhovia" — hybrid literary translation (excerpt)

A strange tension hung in the air. The land had fallen silent; the wind no longer whispered, and even the leaves seemed to hold their breath. Then the night sky tore open with a flash of lightning, followed by a deep, rolling thunder. The first drops of rain pierced through the crowns of ancient trees and fell upon the head of a man sitting calmly beside a crackling fire.

He had shoulder-length, wavy hair and a rough beard shadowing his face. A hardened leather jerkin shielded him from the chill. His shelter was nothing more than a crude lean-to — a temporary refuge for weary travelers — equipped with a simple firepit and a modest stack of dry wood. It offered just enough comfort to outlast a stormy night like this.

Through the rhythmic patter of rain, he caught a faint rustle. To most, it would have meant nothing — perhaps a frightened animal seeking dry ground. But he was no ordinary man. He knew the forest intimately; he often wandered its hidden paths, listening to the subtle language of its sounds. This was no animal. Someone was coming.

The rustle grew louder until a shape appeared through the gloom — a medium-built figure outlined by firelight. For a moment, he feared an ambush. Yet he heard no other steps, saw no drawn blade, felt no threat — only a drenched woman cloaked against the rain.

Flaming red hair spilled down her back. Beneath the cloak, the hilt of a sword gleamed faintly, and a small shield hung over her shoulder. Her armor was worn and patched. Not a beauty, he thought, and gestured for her to sit. Only then did he release the bow he had been quietly holding behind his back, leaning it against a spear stuck in the ground.

The woman nodded gratefully and crouched close to the fire, stretching out her hands to its warmth.

"My name is Rynn," she said, breaking the silence without looking at him.

"Tar," he replied, drawing a piece of bread from his pack. When he noticed the spark of hunger in her eyes, he offered her some.

"Are you traveling? Where are you headed?" she asked, her mouth still full. Tar found the question bold but harmless.

"I'm going north. To Elshuma — the city of endless opportunity, trade, knowledge... and filth."

Rynn nearly choked. "Filth? You praise it and curse it in the same breath. Make up your mind."

Lightning split the sky again, thunder cracking close behind.

"Where there are many people, there's always filth," Tar said darkly. "Thieves, killers, liars. Everyone chasing their own gain, ready to sell even their mothers for it. Some are driven by greed, others by lust for power. And some," he smirked, "reach their goals through bedsheets and deceit."

Rynn frowned. "You speak as if you've been there."

Tar shrugged. "All cities are the same. The world's a rotten place. Whether it's Elshuma or anywhere else—it doesn't matter. Maybe it's rumor, maybe truth. But one day, we'll all face it."

A sharp crack of breaking wood cut through his words. He froze mid-sentence.

"We're not alone," he whispered. "Someone's watching us."

Rynn turned, scanning the shadows beyond the firelight.

"Show yourself!" Tar called. "If you're a friend, come closer. If you mean harm—run, before an arrow finds your back."

He wasn't bluffing. His bow was already drawn.

A slender man emerged from the thicket, his cloak soaked through. Hands raised high, a staff gripped in one. The wind caught his cloak, revealing a dark red robe trimmed with gold and boots thick with mud. Wet hair clung to his face — young, almost delicate.

"Please, don't shoot!" he said quickly. "I'm no thief. Just a traveler caught in the storm. When I saw your fire, I hoped to wait out the rain. But when I noticed you were armed, I hid. I didn't know if you were bandits."

The firelight revealed his youth — perhaps twenty at most. Rynn eased her grip, and Tar lowered his bow once more.

"Fair enough," Tar said. "Sit, then. So, another traveler heading north? What's your name, friend?"

"Forgive my manners," the young man said, stepping closer. "I'm Yaril, from a small village near Ife. My father's fallen ill, so I'm traveling to Elshuma to find a cure—"

"Hold it, Yaril from the village near Ife," Tar interrupted. "That's too much information for strangers. Father, sickness, cure—keep such things to yourself. You never know who's listening, or what knife they're hiding behind their smile. Let me give you one good piece of advice—"

He didn't finish.

A scream cut through the rain. Not the howl of an animal — but the cry of a man. A man dying.

Neither of them knew it then, but that scream would bind their fates for years to come.