The Rhyme of The Ancient Hungarian

BY KARL E. BLATT

(INSPIRED BY A POEM WITH A VAGUELY SIMILAR TITLE BY SAMUEL COLERIDGE)



Then rose the ancient Hungarian,
downing the last of his Burgundy,
"By my long grey beard and hoary mane,"
he hailed, "let's turn the talk to me!"

The room grew still as word was passed,
"It's useless to protest;
this raconteur is beyond compare
and knows not how to rest."

Eyes ablaze, he began his tale :
"Four score onboard the ship of Life,"
he said, turning a wine cork in his hand,
"have taught me much of joy and strife …

A father lost at the age of nine.
A mother who had to make ends meet.
She sorted books around the clock
yet her love knew no retreat.

Never more was a son cared for;
still inside a restless spirit grew.
Anger fanned by a world at war;
pain beyond what a boy could construe.

I fought and fumed and lost my way,
running amuck I must confess;
until on a dark winter night in 48
I was led from the wilderness …

"Recall your father, fine man he was,"
said my mother lighting the way.
He'd be not proud of what you've become.
Let his character in you hold sway."

Her words rang true as Matthias Bell.
In a dream I saw his smiling face.
"Heed your good mother," I heard him say,
"Avert the Blatt name from disgrace."

"Aye, sir," I said, so full of awe
that I shook myself awake.
A fifteen year old became a man that day
with a purpose he could not forsake.

No choir boy I, but the tide had changed
about this I made no bones;
sports and studies and girls (of course)
became the focus of my hormones.

Still, clouds of tyranny swirled above
as Stalin took Hitler's place.
A Magyar legacy of a thousand years
in a decade was laid to waste.

The progeny of St. Stephan though,
Are not like sheep so readily tame,
And in the shadow of *Jozsef*'s statue,
In **56** their anger burst into flame.

20,000 stormed the Parliament,
chanting "no longer will we be slaves."
Their song was heard around the world.
While the red guard cowered like knaves.

Came next the farce of Soviet surrender,
followed then by their tanks in force.
As they rolled over both young and old,
my mother pleaded a last recourse :

"My die is cast, but you are young—
you cannot remain here still.
A better world for you awaits;
You have a future yet to fill."

With a breaking heart I bid her adieu,
swearing in time we'd be as one again.
While a map set down before us all
traced a route to the River Seine.

Sworn brother, George, was by my side;
we skirted miles of guarded track.
Once through the tunnel to Austria,
we wept for those still under attack.

Life anew began for us then;
freedom to choose and find our way,
A winding path led me to Montreal;
George in Paris chose to stay.

A gifted mind I knew I had—
vision beyond what most others see.
I cast my net to schools far and wide,
landing the most venerable, M.I.T.

In Cambridge I found a second home.
Music and students were everywhere.
I tirelessly worked, as mother advised,
but found time still for the ladies fair.

At a school dance atop Beacon Hill
across the hall I espied a coy smile.
Irish-Italian made for a fiery mix
and her beauty did at once beguile.

Chapel bells rang out half year hence.
To fair Donna Marie I said "I do."
Not only did I take her hand that day,
but to her boy became a father true.

A good lad named Karl was he;
his laugh did cause my heart to swell.
In time we added another son, Greg,
and in Weston we settled to dwell.

My two boys both were feisty chaps,
brazenly wild and smart as could be,
Seeing them through the good and the bad,
I knew they most took after was me.

Aye, stormy was marriage to Donna Marie,
but to our boys we always did right.
Though dinner time proved a raucous affair,
lofty views therein took flight.

We held fast to our vows until in 87
the endless tempest tore us asunder.
A grey drizzling rain settled on Newton Street,
but gone was the lightning and thunder.

In time our lives apart took shape;
The sun saw its way through the clouds,
With both my boys well on their way,
I turned to the ladies forming in crowds.

A revolving door saw them come and go,
until one of family Waldron tried to exit.
I got in her way, saying "I'd prefer if you stay."
And keen young Annika could tell I meant it.

A fire within was rekindled that day—
a joy and passion and hunger for life.
We traveled the world, and atop it I said :
"Ann, now and forever please be my wife."

Happy endings are a trifling thing,
for in all must joy and sorrow abide.
But since that day the passing years
have been richer than can I describe.

So proud of my sons, now fully grown,
to them both have I remained close.
In place of dinnertime now our views
take flight in the emails we regularly post.

Love can fall prey to distance and time,
staying close is never easy to do.
But no matter the cost, in the end,
Most important is the love we accrue.

Family, friends and loved ones,
even a daughter long lost in the fray,
All now bring profound joy to my life,
And will until death in kind has its way.

But that final specter I fear not now,
remaining sound of body and mind.
And when at last he comes, a joke I'll tell,
so hilarious he can't but return in kind.

So, a toast to all those assembled …
Hurry before my throat goes dry !
To the top, yes ; now a truth I'll impart
no man of wisdom could ever belie :

"He liveth best, who loveth family best,
however vast their sprawl.
No matter your circumstance or whimsy,
always cherish and support them all."

Then the Hungarian, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar.
Sat down to thunderous applause,
As the guests cried out for MORE!