Fateful meeting

Joan of Arc and Jan Žižka

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Dear reader,

Thank you for walking with me on the path of words, emotions, and courage. Without your presence, my endeavors would remain just a silent thought on paper.

You are the one who breathes life into the story. You are the reason why it makes sense to tell it.

With humility and gratitude,

Pavel Hrejsemnou

Prologue

There are encounters that change the course of a battle. There are words that cut a sword. And then there are moments when two destinies, from opposite ends of the world, touch - and the world will never be the same again.

This book is not just about war. It is not about faith that defeats. It is about faith that remains, even when all else falls. It is about a girl who heard God in flames and a man who saw the world with one eye, but the truth with his whole heart.

In the field between France and Bohemia, between a silent chapel and a dagger in his sleeve, between a pilgrim and a soldier, a friendship was born that is not recorded in the chronicles. And yet we carry it within us - those of us who have ever believed that courage is not a cry, but a decision to stay.

This is the story of a fire that the rain did not put out. Of a spark that survived execution. And of those who carried the light on.

Chapter 1 – Shadows of Chillon Castle

It was night. That strange, heavy night when the moon remains hidden behind a veil of clouds and every light from a torch seems desperately weak. The humid air wafted through the corridors like the breath of an old castle, full of centuries-old sighs and the memory of tortured souls.

Silence reigned over the water castle of Chillon, spread out like a stone on the dark waters of Lake Geneva. Only the occasional crackle of a torch or the dripping of a drop echoing from the stone vault reminded us that time was constantly passing – both here and in this dungeon.

Joan of Arc, once a shepherdess from Domrémy, now an "actress of faith" according to her accusers, sat leaning against a stone wall. Her sleeve was torn, her face muddy from the journey, and her gaze no longer belonged to a girl. Her eyes, which had once shone with the certainty of a heavenly mission, were hazy, but not broken. In her hands she held an invisible reliquary – a memory, a faith, perhaps just the remnants of hope.

She was captured. Abandoned. Betrayed. And yet – something still burned within her that no bond or trial could break.

Suddenly, a whisper came from the shadow of the next cell. Not words, but rather a presence. Heavy footsteps,

slow, calm, almost meditative. Johanna looked into the dark corner, where the light of the burning torch did not reach.

And then she saw him.

A man with an ashen beard, with eyes that remembered war and peace, victory and pain. His body was strong, yet wounded. A dark scarf covered his left eye. Yet the other looked intently, wisely and tenderly – as if he knew her. As if he was waiting for her.

“I am Jan Žižka of Trocnov,” he said quietly, but there was thunder in his voice.

Johanna blinked. She knew the name. It had been circulating through Europe, just like her own. The specter of an invincible warlord without an eye who had stood up to the Church itself. Now he stood before her. Or at least his ghost? Her mind wavered.

“That can’t be…,” she whispered.

“It can. We are where time is of no consequence. In captivity. In the silence between worlds.”

His words didn’t fit with anything she knew. And yet a peace came from them. Exactly the kind we feel just before falling asleep—or just before dying.

Žižka sat down on the stone opposite her. He didn’t plead, he didn’t explain. He was just there. And Joanna, who had spoken to angels and kings, felt a strange shiver.

“You wrote a letter to Bohemia,” he said.

She flinched. “How do you know?”

“Words that are written from the heart will reach further than a messenger on horseback.”

They fell silent. The silence was full of the unspoken. And then Joanna spoke, almost in a whisper: “I believe in God’s justice. But sometimes it seems that God’s silence is more threatening than his anger.”

Žižka nodded. “Silence is a test. Not a punishment. There is no comfort in faith, but strength. You learn it.”

And Joanna, for the first time after days of despair, did not cry. She just looked silently at the man who should have been dead – and yet he was closer to her than any of the living.

Chapter 2 – The Voice of Conscience

The stone walls were silent, but their silence revealed a strange dignity – as if they themselves had witnessed something that transcended the course of history. The torch crackled, casting an orange shadow on the faces of two people, each from a different world and yet united by the same pain: the betrayal of their own church.

Joanna moved closer. “You say you know about my letter… Do you know who I wrote it to?”

Žižka nodded. “To the Hussites. To people who no longer believe that God is represented by cardinals and golden crutches. To people who, like you, see that truth does not shine from relics, but from a soul that is not afraid to speak.”

Joanna was silent for a moment. The memory of that letter came back to her in her dreams. She had written it bent over at night, on the edge of an old parchment, in despair and hope. “I prayed that my words would find hearts that would understand. But sometimes I doubt if they were even heard.”

“They were,” Žižka replied firmly. “And not only heard. They were received as a sign.”

The fire from the torch reflected on his face, illuminating it like a statue carved in granite. “Do you know what led me to fight?” he asked quietly.

Joanna shook her head.

“The voice of conscience. Not revenge, not the desire for power. Just that inner call that Master Jan Hus called the voice of truth. He said: Love the truth, defend the truth, hold on to the truth, learn the truth, and defend the truth to the death. And I believed him. Not because he had a title, but because he was burning.”

There was silence. Joanna knelt closer to him, as if she wanted to touch the flame.

“Did you believe that it was possible to purify the church?”

“No,” he answered calmly. “I believed that faith needed to be cleansed from the church.”

Joanna was shocked. All her life she had been taught that the church was the body of Christ. But now… now here sat a man who had rejected the church—and yet spoke like a prophet.

“Where is God then?” she asked.

Žižka smiled. “You don’t enter the temple. You don’t enter dogmas. God is in the silence of conscience. In the strength when you say no to wrongdoing. In action when you help the weak. In every heart that longs for light.”

“And what about the pope? And kings?”

“Kings come and go. Popes too. But truth… endures. That’s why Hus burned and yet triumphed. That’s why you’re here too.”

Joanna shivered—not from the cold, but from the power of the words that vibrated her insides.

“Do you think I too will have to die?”

“Perhaps,” he replied without pathos. “But you know what’s worse than death? To be silent when you should speak. To betray when you should stand.”

There was a silence, deeper than ever. And in that silence, between two flames—one burning in the torch and the other burning in their eyes—Johanna understood.

She was not alone. And she was not lost.

Chapter 3 – Words Written in Fire

Joan sat in silence, her gaze fixed on the flickering light of the torch, but her eyes no longer followed the stone or the shadow. She was turning back.

She closed her eyelids – and suddenly she found herself in a memory.

It was late evening in the camp near Compiègne, in a small field shrine made of canvas and a wooden cross. Outside, the rain was falling and patting the tarpaulins, but inside, a candle burned – the only witness to her decision.

A piece of parchment lay on her knees in front of her. Her fingers were stiff with cold, but her grip on the quill was firm. She had three sheets of paper beside her – two she had already written to kings and knights. The third was different. It was intended for those who had never seen her but felt the same fire.

The Bohemians.

The Hussites.

She had heard about them from the mouths of pilgrims and soldiers. They spoke of them in whispers, as if they were afraid to speak their names. People from Bohemia who had defied the Pope. Who believed that Christ was the head of the church, not Rome.

“They are heretics,” the bishop she served had repeatedly said. “They are brothers,” her heart said.

She took the quill, dipped it in ink, and slowly began to write.

“You who carry the banner of truth and freedom in the land of Bohemia, hear the voice of a sister from afar. I, Joan, who was called by the voice of God to lead France to liberation, know that you too have been given holy power. Do not cease. Even if the world hates you, Christ will not deny you.”

Writing burned in her chest like a confession. She had no idea if the letter would ever reach a Czech hand. But she had to write it. It was more than an act—it was a testimony.

The next lines flowed with increasing fervor.

“Do not be seduced by the power of those who talk about God but sell the sacrament. Follow the voice of conscience and hold fast to the purity of Scripture. Your fight is not only for swords, but for the soul of Europe. If I fall, I will fall knowing that I fought by your side in spirit and in truth.”

She stopped. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Not because of fear. Because of the power of the words that were not hers – they were given to her. They were written by the invisible hand of faith.

She signed herself simply:

Johanna, servant of God.

Then she folded the parchment and handed it to the commander who was about to leave for the north. “Give this to someone who is going to Bohemia. It is important,” she said quietly.

The crackle of burning wood tore her out of her thoughts. She opened her eyes. She was in the cell again, with her face facing her. Žižka was silent, but his gaze said it all.

“That letter,” she whispered, “wasn’t my words. It was God speaking through me.”

“And that’s why it touched us too,” Jan nodded.

Chapter 4 – What is truth?

The torch was slowly burning down. Its flame trembled, as if it felt the weight of the questions that were soon to be uttered. The dungeon was silent, except for the rustle of a drop that fell in a regular rhythm from the cracked vault onto the stone pavement. There was something compassionate in that rhythm. As if time itself was listening.

Joanna was silent. A question was forming on her lips that she had carried since childhood, but she had never dared to actually utter it. But now she sat face to face with a man who had survived battles, church curses, and the pain of losing his own eye – and yet he radiated peace.

Finally she made up her mind.

“What is truth?” Her voice was almost inaudible. And yet the whole world trembled in that whisper.

Žižka did not move. He just closed his good eye, as if he were listening not to Joanna, but to time itself. And then he answered quietly:

“Truth is a fire that everyone fears because it burns.”

He paused. His words were not just an answer – they were a judgment. And he continued.

“Truth is not what kings say. Nor what popes proclaim. Truth does not wait for the approval of a council. It

simply is. And most of the time it stands alone – on the scaffold."

Joanna nodded. She felt each of his words sink into her heart like heavy but liberating stones.

"Master Jan Hus," said Žižka, "said: Truth triumphs, even if it is defeated for a moment. And I believed him. Not because of his learning – but because of the way he remained silent when they put handcuffs on him. The way he sang when they led him to his death. In his silence, the truth was louder than the sermons of the bishops."

Joanna shuddered. Suddenly it dawned on her that truth was not just an answer to a question. It was a way of life. A path that hurts.

"But how do you know what truth is? So many voices claim to own it."

Žižka smiled. "Whoever says they own the truth has usually lost it long ago. Truth is not a thing. It is light. And everyone who walks towards it walks in the shadows. They are unsure, they doubt, they grope – but they walk. The one who claims to hold the truth in their hands usually holds only a scepter over others."

The torch sputtered and went out. Their faces were lost in the darkness, but their eyes still shone.

"So truth... is it silence? Doubt?" asked Joanna.

"Truth," Žižka answered quietly, "is the voice of your conscience. And conscience is a temple that no pope can close."

At that moment, Joanna felt something inside her break – and at the same time be born. For her, truth was no longer just a word on parchment or a cry on the battlefield. It was a flame that must be carried – even though it burns. Perhaps that was why she had been chosen.

Chapter 5 – The Ashes That Burned On

Žižka sat with his head bowed. Johanna was silent, feeling that now silence belonged to him. Not because he demanded it – but because there was something sacred in his silence.

“I saw him,” he said after a moment.

“Who?” Johanna whispered.

“A goose.”

Silence again. Heavy. Saturated with an image that never faded.

“I was young,” he continued. “Not a military leader. Not yet. Just a pilgrim. A merchant. A wanderer. I did not seek the truth. I sought bread. But in Constance I found it. The truth. She stood at the stake, bound, and sang a psalm.”

The fire in his voice grew stronger. Not with anger, but with the heat of memory.

“I stood in the crowd. We pressed against each other. Some laughed. Others spat. But I… I couldn't breathe. When they lit the wood under his feet, the wind carried the smoke to us. And in that smoke I heard his voice. Not a scream. Not a wail. A voice, solid as a rock.”

Joanna touched her fingers—as if to wipe the ashes from her hands.

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