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The Curse on the Bones of Quzma, Son of Salimu - Norman A. Rubin

The dying man lay exhausted, but still, on the large master bed in the darkened room. Drawn thick curtains denied rays of daylight from penetrating the gloom. Two thick flickery candles set on ornate large bronze stands stood sentinel at both sides of the four-poster. The bed was now an altar dedicated to an honorable elder in the final ebb of life. Mourning kin, few in numbers, stood in reverence near the foot of the bedstead, silent in their grief.

Count Konzo Salimu's emaciated body lay between the sheets; his uncovered white maned head set on a slightly stained pillow revealed the signs of the end of time. The wan light revealed the pain and anguish; it was marked on the thin features of the wrinkled-lined face of the patrician. One of his eyes was closed in his suffering, but the other was an unblinking opened eye; an orb of inner fire levelled towards a youngish man standing at his bedside.

His sight was riveted to his son Quzma, a disgrace to the name of Salimu, a known drunk and lechor who stood in the stupour of drink at his dying father's bedside. The young man bloated and disheveled from the vapours of liquor, grinned disgracefully from smirking lips at his dying father in return; no reverence was featured on his florid features.

The count was suffering in despairing thought as he remembered the terrible years when he pleaded with son to reform his ways. At first he spoke to his son with compassionate words for him to heed his words, but all his efforts fell on deaf ears. Within time his phrases to his son were spoken in anger and through a vicious tongue.

The all-seeing eye of the elder saw everything in the slovenly drunken appearance of the youngish man. It saw the irreverent features written on his son's face, partially hidden by the flow of tangled black hair.

From the count's spittle flecked lips angry Slavic words were spluttered towards his antagonist; words of despair, which enraged at the degradation and the shame to the house of Salimu brought by his son. Frustration in Count Konzo Salimu's thoughts increased in its misery. It led to further curse words, "May your soul be closed off, be loosen, be melted away, broken, leave and go away from the earth for ever. Yah, yah, Yah."

As the words were spewed out, his son remained silent without any recourse to the damning words. He remained upright, but unsteady on his veined swollen legs. His fefogged drunken mind took the punishing tone without a murmur, except from a rumbling tone that crept from his sickish stomach.

The dying man stared, with a steady evil eye, at this unsteady scapegrace, the creature of his loins, the inheritor of his name Salimu. With panted breath he cursed again with subdued malice at the pathetic figure that loomed within his sight. The lack of an apologetic answers to

his words angered him deeply, and he let out another muted hoarse cry, "Curse the spirit of the bones that walks within the tendons and bones of Quzma." Count Konzo Salimu cursed his son once again with weakening effort of his lashing tongue. He coughed in a spasmodic fit as he spoke, choking on his very breath.

The attending doctor pushed aside the drunken Quzma with seemly ease, and quickly went to the aid of his patient. With healing hands he managed to control the coughing spell; then he lifted the head of the dying man and offered a sip of water. After the physician had straightened the covering blankets and made his patient comfortable, he turned to a small group of anxious kin. The negative shaking of his white bearded head told of the grave news; their funereal dressed forms shook as they wailed quietly at the grave tidings.

The kin knew of Quzma and of his erratic behavior. The squat young man was known to all as a disgrace to the proud name of Salimu. His pockmarked face was known as an easy mark at the gambling table, where the wealth of the family covered the increasing debts. The harlots all about knew of the silver coins that flowed as they allowed his flabby body to cover them. And many a time, the good citizens of the community were awakened in the early morning hours by his bellowing off-key voice as he drunkenly made his way to his hearth.

The assembled grievors showed their shame towards Quzma with the shaking of their frowned heads. Until two of the bereaved search out the disgraceful youth and shuffled him out of the master bedroom by the force of their arms. There was no pity as he was rudely pushed from the open door to one of the plush-setees that lined the lighted corridor, where Quzma wearily dropped into its comfort. The slam of the door didn't disturb his reverie, as his drunken mind was unable to comprehend the act.

The two grievors rejoined their mourning family members at the altar of dying. All remained still in their vigilance as they waited the fall of the sands of time. They listened to the whispered prayers of salvation and redemption in the Greek tongue recited by the ministring archimandrite. Tears ran copiously as the vigilant counted the laboured breath of the dying man. They watched the movements of the soberly featured doctor as he tended to the comfort of the Count in the final moments, and saw to the needs of the dying man till the darkness of death was experienced.

The soft ticking of a large mantle, clock set on a distant cornice, told of the passing time. Suddenly the dying man sounded out, followed by a thick gurgling rumbling of Slavic words. Then silence reigned. The King of Death changed the mode of living from the body of the earth and the soul with the spirit. The cry of wailing and keening could be heard after the doctor closed the all-seeing eye, and laid the hands of the deceased cross-like on his covered chest.

The archimandrite in the somber vestments of his holy Orthodox order and adorned with a pectoral gold cross of St. Michael came to the bed of the deceased. He placed two gold coins over the sealed eyes of the once living form. The sign of the cross was symbolized on the forehead; holy water was sprinkled over the still body and the last rites were recited. After the

office was read, the saintly father removed his stole, closed his breviary and silently left the room.

The abbot walked quietly on sandaled feet as he neared the slumbering form of Quzma lying in the softness of the plush settee. The saintly father in all his mercy, paused for a moment at the inert youth; then he lightly shook the sleeping creature awake. Quzma, in the bluriness of sleep, heard faint words informing him of death. The abbot quietly left after passing the message.

As Quzma shook his befogged head from the haziness of his drunk-like sleep, the sound of thunder rumbled through the air, gaining momentum with the beat of time. A rainstorm had risen in all fury. Suddenly a flash of lightning lit the entire corridor. Within the streak of lightning Quzma saw the damning evil eye of Count Salimu. More thunderbolts flashed throughout the long corridor and the orb appeared in multiple forms damning the youngish man its sight.

The roar of the thunder was heard as the hoarse voice of Count Konzo Salimu as it cursed with each peel of a thunderous clap. Jumbled words damned Quzma with threat of broken bones, melting flesh, the closing of the soul, and of the departure of the body from the earth. At each clapping roar of the thunder, the cursed words repeated their terrible phrases.

Quzma, at first, cowered in terror at the staring evil eye and of the thunderous curses. As the evil eye appeared in multiple shapes in the lightning flashes and the threatening words of doom repeated in the pealing of the thunder, he jumped to feet and ran in terror. He screamed in fright as he made his way through long wide corridor to the entrance portal. With effort flowing from his frightened soul, he managed to the open the thick oaken doors, fleeing to the imagined safety under the open rain filled clouds.

But on the outside, Quzma was opened to the shower of bolts of lightning and thunderous claps. The sight of the punishing orb and the pealing of the cursed threat once again damned his belaboured body. He ran further and further from the manor house trying to escape a fateful punishment. No matter where he ran the threatening evil sight and the damning words hovered over him.

Quzma skittered haphazardly on the slimy mud as he attempted to climb the path that led to the nearby hills. He imagined it would be a safe haven from the sight and words hanging over his threatened tortured mind and body. As he ran his unsteady feet skidded in the thickening ooze causing him to fall in a small ravine flowing with churning water. Quzma clawed at the slippery side of the ravine in a desperate bid to escape the flowing water. Slowly, with torn and bloody fingers grasping the rocky banks, he made his way to the top. As he lay panting from his efforts, a lightning bolt, directed by a flash of an eye, struck him which sent his body tumbling to the depths of the waters of the ravine.

Quzma's body was burnt and melted by the stroke of the bolt, His limbs were loosened and broken, and his body was washed away by the downward flow of foaming water that rushed fiercely down the ravine. Mud and silt covered his body at the end of the tumultuous journey and buried never to be seen on the surface of the earth's soil.

