

#5

Reminiscences of a Lord

a tragi-comic political thriller

Slobodan Šembera

duration: ca 55 minutes

Dramatis persona:

Lord Badminton, the sixth baron of Badminton

Set in London, 1991-1992

Secret Introduction:

In the quiet and refined setting of his study in his palatial house in London's Chelsea, surrounded by walls panelled in dark mahogany, protected by the warmth of thick English rugs, heavy curtains and the smouldering fire from the reddish marble fireplace, behind a large Chippendale style desk, sunk in a deep leather armchair, with a low light from the green glass shaded art-deco reading light, in this comfortable refuge that gives more of an impression of the mysteriousness of some KGB official of the thirties than of the jet set manners of the end of the century, the hero of our story sits and does his behind the scenes work: a Lord, a real live lord, the Sixth Baron of Badminton, privy counsellor to Her Majesty, a one-time Sandhurst cadet, member of an army whose unwavering tradition it is above all to be true to their word and to preserve their honour, upon whom the Military Cross has been conferred, a Knight of the Order of St Michael and St George. The undisturbed tranquillity is broken from time to time by the manservant George, walking upon tip-toe; he is a chap in his middle years, of a highly disciplined manner, recruited from the

English educated white minority of the former British colony of Rhodesia, by the odd ring of the ex-directory telephone, and of course by the heavy weight of responsibility of the centuries old inheritance of the aristocracy. Noblesse oblige. This description cannot, alas, be given in contemporary radio treatments, but it does speak of the atmosphere in which the secret journal entries of our hero are made, reminiscences written for history and for some future generations who will not anyway, in the opinion of the writer, be worthy of them. That the chronicler of events has the habit of reading his words aloud tells us simply of the subdued sense of his own never quite properly exercised literary talent, which is not worthy of his ancient lineage and affairs of state, nor suitable for the vulgar to whom they might be exposed were they in the form of printed matter.

Therefore this journal writer is also his own most faithful, and only, reader, who with all appropriate awe and without hiding his adoration reads out what has been written. For him, in addition, announcements about the regularity of his bowel movements are equally as important as data about the number of dead in some far-off war, his distaste for milk is expressed as vehemently as his concern for the slaughter of the innocent, the geography of Africa is as unimportant as of that Europe insofar as it is related to countries beyond the confines of the Island. His half a millennium of aristocratic breeding insists that everything be said evenly, moderately, elevatedly.

Without any outpourings of feeling, or condemnation, without raising the voice. The savagery of some of his reactions, most frequently arising from some sense of personal insult or historical deprivation comes out then mostly in the content of the writing, its style and the choice of lexis. For example, if our hero calls some foreign minister a tulip, he does not say this with any noticeable wrath in his voice, but will substantiate his claim in such a way that a man of far less importance than a minister would feel insulted. His concern, anxiety and fear become apparent only in those moments when he is aware that his world mission will perhaps not be written in golden letters in the course of history, and when he is concerned for his own health. But that comes in only at the end, as everything human in this kind of character comes in only at the end. At any event, that is the way he spoke, and how they who shall speak for him should speak. This may be understood as a direction to the director and actor.

(Long introductory chime from Big Ben)

The dear sound of our dear Big Ben. It chimed for my forebears, and it chimes for me. It reminds me of the inexorable march of time, of history. There, this equally inexorable 1991 has already been breached. Imagine that only two hundred years ago, not far from us, just over the Channel, the French Revolution started to seethe in the France of that time. Fortunately,

we English put a stop to all that as well. And also fortunately, during the course of history all such eruptions of vulgar discontent have moved further and further away from the British Isles, towards the east and south, which does not on the other hand mean that they have not bothered us and got on our nerves. It was not a matter of indifference to the Royal Family, and so of course to everyone in the British Isles, when a common village photographer, in the name of the barbaric Soviet authorities, treacherously did to death his own Russian Emperor, the cousin of our Britannic Majesty, together with the whole of his family. We remember it. No single member of the Royal Family, nor of my own family, the Badminton, has since that time set foot upon the barbaric Soviet earth. In spite of our fruitful collaboration in World War II, when by force of circumstances we had to defeat the Hun together. Even then there was a clear and decent understanding: we give the weaponry, you the men. And *basta*, as the Finns, I think, would put it. Alas, history is repeating itself. I think it is the Portuguese who say *Repetitio est mater omnium studiorum*. But we will sort things out.

Big Ben sounds

I am writing my diary again today. The fact that I have written nothing in it for two months does not mean that I have become idle. Quite the contrary. Apart from my quotidian social duties, especially that of taking afternoon tea in the Lords' Club, with exhausting discussion about the still unfathomable reasons for the collapse of the British Empire, about the climatic pitfalls still set for us everyday, as for centuries, by the unpredictable British weather, and about the superlative quality of the British press, I have in this period with my own hands hammered in the nail on which the coat of arms of my illustrious family hangs, the material proof of our six generation long line of lords, which our maid with pure vulgar maladroitness was likely to have deprived me of. During her dusting she knocked

it to the floor. I reminded her that while dusting, the coat of arms is to be avoided. And I also sprinkled a sulphur powder against pests on the roses in the hothouse. Actually, there are no pests in the greenhouse. But you never know. As we diplomats are wont to say, cure is better than prevention. Or vice versa, quite often. Also had an unavoidable conversation with the new gardener and explained that the roses are my own exclusive preserve. Explained that roses are more sensitive and older than the human race, that they constitute a symbol of duality: flowers and thorns, like beauty and the beast, love and hate, life and death, and that you have to know roses. I added that roses are not grass, and let him stick to that. It seems that he comprehended. And I didn't write anything in my diary because there was nothing to write. From Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to here nothing has gone on. Big Jim fixed Kuwait, and there is peace in Rhodesia. Because I settled Rhodesia, without Big Jim. In fact, it was quite tedious. Today they called me from the Foreign Office. They tell me that the Europeans want some job doing, that things have boiled over in Europe. Naturally. As soon as something boils over in Europe, we are called upon to do the job. And if the cooking goes as planned, we Britons are not on the guest list for lunch. On the contrary, they would even like us to pay for it. That is how it is, when we're generous. We looked after the Lithuanians' gold for fifty years. And now, when we have won their freedom for them, we have had to give it back. No one asked how much it cost us to look after it in the Second World War alone. But forgiveness is a virtue, wins you friends. Apparently things are boiling over in Croatia. Looked at the map. That's in Yugoslavia. In the Balkans. I'll have to go overseas again. What will happen to the roses?
A satisfactory movement today.

Big Ben strikes

This is really dreadful! They are actually fighting! Of course, they have al-

ways fought in Europe. That's why we English are fortunate we are not in it. It's quite enough that we have to be in the European Community. And it's a question how long that will last. If we have to pay something for the European cuisine again, we certainly won't be giving our spices. Let them cook it and eat it themselves. But these Croats are fighting for freedom. In their own land. What business have we got there? The trouble is that they do not recognize their own land as their own. So much I have understood. They don't admit that their country is Yugoslavia. But they do admit that it is Croatia. So they don't admit that Croatia is Yugoslavia. And vice versa. They are against Yugoslavia then! Appalling. And how much blood, sweat and tears we have shed for the freedom of Yugoslavia. And for Marshal Tito as well. My Marshal Tito rose has a place on honour in the greenhouse, the colour of alabaster, specially cultivated for him in the Netherlands. Handed to him personally while he was visiting Queen Juliana. Lord, what a sight that was. How imposing he was in his dark blue uniform of a marshal, with a sash, then the dignity of Her Majesty. I've also got the dusky gold President Herbert Hoover in my greenhouse, and the somewhat lighter Countess Vandal, and the completely light coloured, yellow and white Empress Augusta, but none of them cost me as much as Marshal Tito. What am I going to do with it now? Probably have to send it back to The Hague. Perhaps I shall still manage to sell it to someone there.

Movement satisfactory.

Big Ben strikes

Still this exasperatingly tedious ninety first year of the twentieth century. I have had an hour's lesson, at her Majesty's expense, learning to pronounce the names of the cities, villages and persons in the original Yugoslav language. They warned me that I have to say "in the languages of the Yugoslav peoples and nationalities" or better still to say only "original names". What

tongue twisters they are, these original names. In Rhodesia the original names are much easier to say. Because they have adopted English. But at tea in the Lords' Club, no one was able to repeat after me the name of even one of these original names, which caused me no little satisfaction. Perhaps they are actually fighting over there because they can't manage to agree in their original languages. Perhaps they should have English brought in for them. But I can't suggest that, the French would be saying we want to impose our will on Europe again. Well, then, let them just go on fighting. I also had an hour, billed to the same party, of learning basic geographical concepts and spatial familiarization. Discovered a few more peoples. So, apart from having various original languages at their beck and call, they also have various original nations. Apart from these original ones, however, they also have some unoriginal nations that some original nations there call nationalities, and some of them minorities. Complicates matters. But put more simply, this is what it boils down to, according to the crossword puzzle I made up after swatting it up during two hours in the sauna. The original nations, in alphabetical order, are Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians and, remarkable but true, the Muslims. And the unoriginal nations, again in alphabetical order, are Albanians, Czechs, Hungarians, Turks, Slovaks, Ruthenians, and as Her Majesty's Government ought not to lose sight of, several English ladies happily married in the Croatian coastal area, who always bother me with their letters. For they, it seems, have become more original in their Croatianness than the original ladies, and yet still Crown subjects. They all live in six republics and two autonomous provinces, which in practice are no longer autonomous, though constitutionally they are autonomous, while we recognize only the constitution. And vice versa. In the Republic of Croatia alongside the original Croatian people lives a smaller part of the original Serbian people, just as in the Republic of Serbia lives a still smaller part

of the original Croatian people. But while the original Croats in original Serbia recognize Serbia as being their original republic, the original Serbs in original Croatia do not wish to recognize Croatia as their original republic. They want the original Republic of Serbia to come over to the original Republic of Croatia and stay there. And it just won't work out, because Newton has incontrovertibly proved that two republics cannot occupy the same spot. And vice versa. But it does work out if they are helped by the army, and since the army is actually Serb, though Yugoslavian as well, that is what it is doing. And contrarily, it doesn't work out, if the army gets what for. That's what happened, the what for getting, in the original Republic of Slovenia, and so the original Republic of Slovenia did not become the original Republic of Serbia, though of course there are not really any Serbs there anyway, nevertheless, they are doubtless always available. The problem is that some of the original nations do not recognize some of the other original nations. The original Serbs claim that the original Croats are really Catholic Serbs, the original Muslims really Muslim Serbs, the original Montenegrins just Serbs, and the others are nothing at all. According to this viewpoint, the Slovenes could be Alpine Serbs. Because before, the Serbs called them Alpine Croats, and since the Croats are now only Catholic Serbs, the Slovenes might then be just Alpine Serbs. If it weren't for the matter of getting what for. After this matter, the Slovenes were allowed to stay Slovenes, and apart from being threatened with having their nuclear power station blown up they are largely left alone. The problem comes in with the minorities, like, for example, the Albanians, who according to the Serbs are not original. So they recognize them. But they think that they ought to live in their original Albania, and not in original Serbia. The Albanians don't accept this because they want to be original at their own point of origin, and so lots of them are fighting together with the original Croats. The

problem is now that the whole of this very embroiled situation which I, in the words of Lord Ashley in the Lords' Club, have masterfully entangled with this puzzle, resulted in there being some dreadfully unpleasant and bloody pictures on British television. Because of the excessively emphatic truthfulness of what they show, like, for example, corpses without hands and feet in Croatian villages, with their throats cut and eyes cut out, they have had to be actually excised from the visual part of the transmission. And why do they have to use knives when they have all that wonderful weaponry that we sold them?

Lord Ashley says that it could be because of their being originally stock-raisers and consequently good butchers. I tried some kind of little skinless sausages of theirs once. Never again, not after that kind of image. Or any other Balkan food.

Satisfactory movement.

Big Ben strikes

I have made myself quite clear: without a stoppage of the fighting, there can be no peace conference.

Big Ben strikes

They are still fighting. And so I have summoned a conference.

Big Ben strikes

Thursday today. Was in The Hague at the Conference. What a wash out. But no one, no one whatsoever, wanted to buy my Marshal Tito during the adjournment. Even that Dutch tulip of a minister of theirs who will never understand the rules of diplomacy, not even in the world to come, said with a laugh that is how it is in life when it is scattered with roses. The petals fade, and only the thorns are left. I don't know how it is possible that in a constitutional monarchy like Holland this kind of vulgarian can be at the head of the diplomatic service. Now I know why they lost Indonesia. And then, that milk of theirs wherever you turn.

Makes me unable to look at my secretary's correcting fluid. But I found a solution! In the plane. Amazing how clear your thinking becomes when you take off. Above all these mighty earthly questions that cause us so much trouble and botheration every day. Like yesterday, for example, when the maid was looking for a pay rise. I explained to her that I am no longer in active service, that I do not work any longer for Her Majesty's Government, that I am only Her Majesty's Privy Counsellor. An honorary function only, that does not attract a salary. I am just an ordinary pensioner, I said, and added, that anyway the era of communism has gone without return. Seems to have understood. Anyway, that was evident at the Conference. All these people from the Yugoslav republics are very likable, very approachable. Very decent chaps. Even those who were reds the day before yesterday are pretending that they weren't. The gentleman from Serbia speaks first rate English. With, albeit, a Pakkie accent. But in Britain we have lots of original and unoriginal Pakistanis, and so we got on together like a house on fire. The gentleman from Croatia impressed me with his perfectly pressed suit. We English, of course, first of all wear our suits in a bit in secret, or let our valets do it for us, so that they should get that certain patina that is necessary for our English understanding of refinement. But, so many nations, so many ways of doing things. We learned that from Mr Gandhi, who we had to leave the whole of India to, and we never even once caught him wearing a suit. And the others round the table also seemed very impressive. Particularly as compared with where they come from! The gentleman from Montenegro was something of an exception here. I was expecting the type of Montenegrin that I know from the time of their heroic King, Nicholas, and this gentleman, even ignoring the monarchy, would hardly get by as a republic. In any event, it is clear that when the monarchy goes, it's all over with physical fitness. We had a very fine time, I had the feeling that I was at the opening of

an exhibition in some branch section of our National Gallery. Then I raised my airplane solution. First: the original Serbs and the original Republic of Serbia had to recognize all the other original nations, including their own, and the original republics. Second: vice versa too. Third: the protection of all minorities, no matter how original or not, and an unconditional cease-fire. Things got a bit sticky here. All of them, it is true, accepted everything, but the gentleman from Serbia who also accepted everything, would not go for any formulation with the word "all" in it. He objected to having to recognize all the others. No trouble, said I, we are not going to wage a Balkan War because of just one word. If that is the condition of peace, then the word "all" is out. The chap with the brilliant Pakkie accent at once agreed with me, but remarked that the word "some" would be better than nothing, since we had already chucked out "all". Well, I said, you should have told me at once you like some better than all, we wouldn't have had to argey-bargey for so long. And so, or so I think, it was recorded that the chappie from Serbia had to recognize some other nations and republics. But I am not absolutely sure, because I was beginning to get very hungry and my stomach was rumbling, my wrist was aching from constantly looking at my watch. I stuck it out, and got a second wind when the same chappie with the pronounced Pakistani accent comforted me with, and I quote, the Republic of Serbia is not at war. He repeated this again and again. Not at war. And vice versa. Who then is at war, I asked. The army, the Yugoslav army, he said. But you told me before that the army was just a buffer, I replied according to my infallible memory. Yes, he said, a buffer that is fighting, he said. No problem, I replied, the next time I shall invite one of your generals to the Conference. Which one, he asked. Any one, I replied. They're all precisely the same, I thought to myself. The rest of the tribal leaders agreed with me that we had signed some kind of cease-fire. I am not sure whom it is between.

Then, thank the Lord, we went down to dinner. That Dutch milk again. In spite of all, a satisfactory movement.

Big Ben strikes

Incredible but true. They have broken the cease-fire agreement again. When I got the telegram from Her Majesty's Foreign Office telling me that the cease-fire had been broken, I said: I knew it! You don't negotiate a cease-fire with the Balkans over a glass of Dutch milk. Nor with the British. But when we do sign, even if it is only over a glass of tap-water, we British stand by our signature. Not the Balkans. They did not understand. Did not understand who they were dealing with. Did not understand that I am Lord Badminton, the sixth baron of his house, the Privy Counsellor of Her Majesty, a diplomat from Sandhurst, awarded the Military Cross, Knight of the Order of St Michael and St George, member of an army whose sacred principle it is to preserve their honour and keep their word. They didn't understand that they are not going to soil this thousand year principle with their tribal squabbles. Or vice versa perhaps. Lord Ashley told me in the sauna that I had not understood them. That they are all Byzantine. That this kind of behaviour is the legacy of the Byzantine empire, when successful frauds and backstabblings were valued more than looking you in the eye and challenging you to a duel. I don't know what this Byzantine empire of theirs is, but I do know what the British is. And they have appealed to a British lord for help, not a Byzantine. And that's the way they have to behave. But that is not how they are behaving. And then these catchpenny journalists ask me who is behaving the worst. I told them that the Serbs in Croatia put tree trunks across the road, stopped the traffic, threw stones at innocent Italian tourists who anyway do nothing but sing, and yelled at them that they were fascists and various other words that are not worthy of going down in history, and that they were being protected by the Yugoslav army, which is

not Serbian but actually is, and that, when you add it all up, the Serbs are behaving very badly indeed. And I added that the Croats were also behaving very badly, because they were making some very improper complaints about people who were already complaining. What is all this complaining about, I asked the reporters, who do not understand anything anyway. And added, the problem is devilishly complex, don't you know. Some pretty stormy reactions. One of these hopeful quacks quipped that it was about time I went back to looking after the auctions at Christies, which I have been doing for decades out of pure love of art. But my statement drew the applause of little James, who has been dealing for quite some time with the marital dissensions of the heir to the throne. And when they asked me what steps I was going to take against those who were the worst, I said: they'll get a rap over the knuckles. And so, I put off my planned trip to Belgrade. Note: capital of Serbia, also of Yugoslavia. Something like Salisbury in Rhodesia.

Big Ben strikes

Was in Belgrade. Same old boring reporters at their airport again. Asked me why I came when I had said that I would not. I told them I had not said so. I said that I had said I had cancelled it. I cancelled it, then scheduled it again. Because my main concern is to keep the Serbs at the Hague Conference. What sort of opera would it be without a prima donna? The chap from Serbia gave me a hearty welcome. Said he liked the tortoiseshell rims to my glasses. I said I like the flower arrangement on his table. Roses were conspicuously absent. I was very sharp with him. Please be so good, I said, as to tell me why you have broken the cease-fire? First, he told me, it is not us who is doing it, it's the army and the Croats. Secondly, he said, you live in a land of law and order and you know that the world has to look after legally recognized states. And thirdly, he said, presumably we Serbs have as much right to live together in a single

state as the Germans. I was quick to answer, what do you mean army, what do you mean Croats, when our reports say that you are calling up soldiers here and sending them off to fight there. Secondly, the world order protects states against attack from outside, not from inner collapse. And third, in London there is a fairly big Serbian population, does it mean that they will mount an attack on London? He says: we aren't calling anyone up, these are just volunteers who are helping their fellow countrymen when they are in a fix. Secondly, who is it that is lying through his teeth in saying that Yugoslavia is breaking up? Thirdly, about London, we'll come to that later. This last he said of course jokingly, and I said jokingly that I hoped the London question would be settled without killing civilians or resorting to ethnic cleansing. What would we do with all those Londoners if only Serbs were left in London? When we had agreed that we could agree about nothing, we went down to lunch. I asked for vegetarian food only. Got something green. Maybe that is why there was a green light shining in my head all lunchtime. I remembered Churchill's words: if you can't solve some problem, then set up a commission. Fine, I said, if we cannot agree, then we'll set up a commission of top European experts, six presidents of six constitutional courts from six European countries, and they will decide what it is that is rotten in the state of Yugoslavia. But, I added, then everyone will have to abide by what they say, and not deal with what they don't like in the solution by fighting. The Serbian chappie agreed with me, saying that they themselves had suggested a commission of arbitration. Fine, said I, and flew off by the evening plane for London, where my man George had a nice hot spotted dick waiting for me. In the plane I was thinking a little wistfully about what a pity it was the peace conference was not to be held in London. The climate in London would be a boon to the conference. It's well-known, it's mild, and as for the fog it was just an invention of the French under Napoleon and the

Germans in World War I. I am personally of the opinion that a bit of fog would not hurt the conference. All the participants are a bit foggy, and the London variety would just help them not to look each other in the eye. Come what may, the romantic Thames would certainly contribute more to a constructive atmosphere than those endless Dutch dykes. Which they use to rip off the English sea. Situation on the battle field worse and worse. Movement satisfactory.

Big Ben strikes

Some paper in Croatia announces that I probably have a mistress in Serbia. Good Lord. Good job that George does not understand Croatian, he would not take at all kindly to that kind of blasphemy. I simply told the Croats to keep that independence of theirs on hold, until things are seen in their proper light. This does not mean I have a Serbian mistress, when I didn't have one even in Rhodesia where my mission was, I must say, a deal more successful. In spite of this kind of calumny, I had to go to The Hague again. The commission led by his honour M. Badinter, a close associate of the French president, which does not in itself actually mean anything, but does bear witness to the importance attributed to the commission, found it irrefutable that Yugoslavia had collapsed. That it had collapsed like a house of cards, with not a single card having the right to represent the whole deck. Apart from the gentlemen from Yugoslavia who came each of them with his own map up his sleeve, the chappie from Serbia brought the general we had wanted with him. In the middle of the conversation, one of the lenses fell out of his spectacles. Good lord, what kind of frames can they have? And how can one expect him not to shoot at civilians when he can see with only one eye? The chappie from Serbia was insultingly upset. How there are just dilettantes in the commission, how the borders among the republics are only administrative and not state frontiers, how it is about secession and

not annexation, how the opinion of the commission is political and not expert, and so on. The chappies from Croatia talked about the occupation of Croatian regions that had never been in any kind of Serbian state, about cities being shelled, about the genocide we call ethnic cleansing. The Slovenes explained that all the debts and all the property ought to be shared out, but the rest stayed more or less mum. Gentlemen, said I, you have got what you were asking for. And now you have to stick to it. And in myself I thought, surely you are not going to do me out of my Nobel peace prize that Stockholm is already talking about. Nevertheless, they agreed on some kind of cease-fire.

Movement satisfactory.

Big Ben strikes

Broke off the cease-fire, agreed on a new one.

Big Ben strikes

Broke off the new cease-fire, agreed on a still newer one.

Big Ben strikes

Broke off the latest cease-fire. I had George count up the cease-fires and how many times they were broken off. George declined initially, saying he was not into Advanced Maths. Had to give him a ticking off. George, I said, where is your English education, that we taught you in Rhodesia. And what would have become of you if I had not brought you here from Rhodesia? After the peace I organized there, in some black fellow's cooking pot, I'll be bound. Boiled. He started counting. They are firing at Dubrovnik.

Big Ben strikes

George counted twelve breaches of the cease-fire. Warned of Vukovar. This is in the extreme north east of Croatia, being besieged by the Army. Hitting it with everything they have. Making another Dresden out of Vukovar. I feel

my optimism draining away. It seems that they do not show enough will to peace.

Big Ben strikes

The Army has entered Vukovar. Took people from the hospital away in an unknown direction. Unofficial reports of massive slaughter. So far, over 400,000 refugees. Terrible pictures on British television. The Prince of Wales called me. Asked if I knew it was one of the best examples of European architectural Baroque. I tell him I do, what else could I say, but that those who were knocking down the Baroque were not doing it because it was Baroque. It is true I heard unconfirmed reports that some general of theirs ordered them to spare the buildings and shoot at live targets, but they didn't listen to him. The Prince just sighed. Houses, churches, museums, all in flames. Your Highness, I tried to change the subject, it will all be restored one day. Just as we did a great job of restoring the docks in Wapping. Perhaps those two buildings alongside the river ought to be moved a couple of yards back, so that the children don't drop off the balcony into the Thames. Perhaps Your Highness is aware, I said, that last week one English little girl fell into the Thames and when they pulled her out it was as if she had been bathed in hydrochloric acid. Very dangerous. But His Highness wouldn't give up. He says, his gracious mother Her Majesty had to take some tranquilizers after these pictures from Vukovar, and that something had to be done. Done? I asked appalled. Your Highness, has anyone in the whole of history managed to set up thirteen cease-fires so fast? The latest one was even done by phone. Nobody, nobody. The people are ungrateful. Now this Vukovar of theirs has fallen, and what a to-do they are making, as if the whole world were collapsing. Some anti-social elements in Paris have renamed one of the metro stations Vukovar with spray paint. And it takes tax-payers' money to clean it up. Of course, the French find this easier to tolerate, in the spirit of their

Jacobinical principles. And every tragedy is a tragedy if you take it too tragically. In every war some cities fall and others are erected. Otherwise we would still be living in the Roman empire. But I have set up thirteen cease-fires, and I'll set up another thirteen if necessary, and no one will blame me for these refugees. In Rhodesia there were refugees too. They still meet me in London, and ask me, Your Excellency, when will we go back? And I say, never, gentlemen, never. But then, we do have peace. It seems that His Highness accepted my explanations and went back to settling his marital problems. But still, there is a certain uneasiness in my intestines.

Big Ben strikes

Now the Germans have started to exert pressure! The Huns! As if so far they haven't wanted to interfere, but they're under pressure from public opinion, they want me to make a statement about who is the attacker, who the victim, who's to blame. The fighting to be stopped, the guilty to be punished. As if I were Pontius Pilate. Gentlemen, I have to make peace, not look for the guilty! And how can I make a peace if those who started the fighting and are still fighting are not a part of it? There will be one side missing for the peace. The Huns just don't hear. They say they will recognize Croatia and Slovenia, that this is the only way of stopping the war, stopping the Croats being driven out, stopping the camps. This really made me mad. The Huns are the ones to talk about camps. As if they hadn't dreamed up Auschwitz and Treblinka! And now some Hun hack from Hamburg is blaming me because they put a knife up some prisoner's arse to make him bite off his brother's balls! What these Hun journalists think they can do these days. Describing scenes of this kind of brutality, that is really unethical. And I, who have ruined my health arranging these thirteen cease-fires, really do not have the time to deal with their intertestinal problems as well. That's what the Red Cross is for. And then

the D.P.s, and how many they have taken in, and we in England nothing, and such like Hunnish balderdash. Our Lady Crashford has not only received, but even adopted, a little Croatian chap from the camps, and he's now actually called Archibald. And anyway, where was there ever a war without ruins, without refugees and camps? Have they ever waged such a war? And now they want me to proclaim the Serbs the guilty party, and it's all up with the peace and my Nobel prize. And I was so adamant in my defence of them to the Serbs who claimed that the whole war was the work of Germany, the "Fourth Reich" and so on. Because the Serbs thinks that the Huns have been secretly egged on by the Austrians and the Vatican to set up a new Habsburg Empire! So I am now calming down the Serbs and telling them it is all beside the point, and they are telling me that they will acknowledge Croatia and Slovenia! And that is all the thanks I get! Good Lord, if they recognize them, what is going to happen to my mission?

Big Ben strikes

What is all this about? Now the Americans are getting involved! The Balkans are in Europe, gentlemen, and don't you poke your noses in! Oh no! It is not enough for Big Jim to have a dis-

aster in Somalia, he wants a European Somalia as well. If the Covent Garden opera had that kind of fiasco, the building would not be standing by now. And they say that they will draw in the UN, that they are going to make Butros Butros my co-president. Me. Him. Co-president. To split the Nobel, like Arafat! No you won't! You won't! Look. Look. I've detailed three more truces! Now we have had sixteen of them. Isn't that enough for you? A terrible fit of the gripes.

Big Ben strikes

Still they are not satisfied. They are all conspiring against me. The sixteenth cease-fire has shattered too. What can I do? I flew to Brussels, the fortress of Europe. In the fortress, they think that if they leave the Balkans up to Butros, then I'll be the only one for the chop. You are for it too, my dear sirs, you too! Everyone will see that you are incompetent! And they are. And they mix very bad cocktails. I took cocktails with all of them, was all puffed up like a pumpkin in the evening. Bowels bad. Nevertheless, I managed to put through the seventeenth cease-fire.

Big Ben strikes

Thank the Lord, 1992. Perhaps it will be better. Oh, no it won't! The seven-

teenth cease-fire shattered. I persuaded Lady Crashford to adopt another child. Told George to disconnect the phone. Whenever it phones, they are either telling me that the Huns want to recognize new states, or that the Serbs have broken the cease-fire. But yet perhaps, perhaps...

Big Ben strikes

The phone is disconnected, but George still brings me the news on a silver salver. They have broken the eighteenth cease-fire! Lord! I connected the phone. It went at once. I picked up the receiver with my own hand. No. No. No. They have recognized them! It is over. It is all over. They have smashed the system we rely upon. Smashed our trust! Smashed Europe! I am finished. Butros has got the lot, I have got diarrhoea. Diarrhoea, dear sirs. Diarrhoea! (*Hoarse, threatening*) But you are going to get it too, dear sirs. In Bosnia it's just about to start. You'll finish off the Bosnian pot by yourselves. Without any help from me. I only cooked it. For you.

Big Ben strikes, mingled with the cries and screams of a future, still fiercer war.

Zagreb, December 1996

Translated by Graham McMaster