

*Sir Isaac Newton Saves Mrs.
Bonaventure,
and
Rivulus Dominarum Welcomes the
Month of May*





As Mr. Lionel Richard Coeur de Lion van Tcheluk had so rightly remarked, it was the month of May. At least, it was the month of May in Rivulus Dominarum. Mind you, he did not deny—in fact, he had a faint suspicion—that it might be May in various other places, such as the Principality of Lichtenstein or the Republic of San Marino, or even in France or Portugal. But he, at the present time, had no evidence of that, for he performed his trout fishing in Garlic Creek, and Garlic Creek was on Garlic Creek Street, and that street is located in our town, and not in some distant, Godforsaken foreign land. In short, Mr. Lionel van Tcheluk was wise enough (being the older of the two twin brothers van Tcheluk) to know that one can never be sure of things one does not see with one's own eyes, hear with one's own ears, or smell with one's own nose, and that mental attitude he believed to be not only tenable, but also commendable in the highest degree.

With regard to identifying the current month, our concitizens unanimously agreed with him, and they did so based on indubitable facts. In truth, it had been Monsignor Johannes Marignolli who first brought the news, for, as he had been riding his bike past St. Joseph's one day, he had noticed that Father Philippe's ancestors, perched on the branches of the Padre's tree of consanguinity, were no longer singing fourteenth-century motets, opting instead for *Sumer is incumen in/Lhude sing cuccu*. And although the song was visibly referring to a summer month, everybody knew that cuckoos regularly returned to our part of the world in May, in spite of May being known as one of the spring months. Initially baffled by such inadvertency, some folks had once approached Mrs. Bonaventure, the Vice President of the Association for the Preservation (or Protection, as some would have it) of the Middle Ages Among Us, demanding an explanation. A town meeting had been held at which Mrs. Bonaventure had pointed out that those cuckoos who came back to us had no idea of our own classification of the months of the year, therefore they felt free to come and go as they pleased. Besides, she said, it may be that in certain parts of medieval England (for the song's lyrics were clearly in some form of middle English) the birds only arrived in summer—but Albion was a perfidious realm, you could never trust her or her poets to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And that was that.

A day or two after Monsignor Marignolli's report, Sisters Chiara and Imelda noticed that the mini-dragons densely populating the trees of love and spiritual virtues in the apothecary herb garden were picking up that song, although it had nothing to do with the customary Gregorian chants in Mode 1 (Dorian) and Mode 2 (Hypodorian) which they were in the habit of singing. Furthermore, Mesdames Bonaventure, Bacon, and Grosseteste, while taking a leisurely walk in the Municipal Park (this happened shortly before Mrs. Grosseteste's banquet-related misadventures) remarked that young and fresh *minimae*, *brevae*, *longae*, *duplex longae*, and *maximae* had appeared in the trees of note shapes lining the main alley—and this, based on centuries' experience, was a sure sign that the month of May had arrived.



As an avid observer of nature and a member of the local Association of Biology Enthusiasts, Mr. Simon T. Unstede, the blacksmith, maintained that he, too, was positive that May was here, as he'd noticed large flocks of barnacle geese flying eastward—which is what they did at this time of the year. In addition, he was in the position to ascertain that it must be the same month in the Netherlands as well, for that is the month when the aforesaid geese leave behind the moors of Assen and start their journey to Siberia to lay their eggs. As for whatever month was

now being enjoyed by folks in the Principality of Lichtenstein or the Republic of San Marino, he could not, in good conscience, guarantee that it was May, as he had no evidence other than last year's calendar (printed simultaneously, in a deluxe edition, in Vaduz and the City of San Marino) which had been gifted to him on the occasion of an international biological conference. He doubted that, being one year old, the calendar was accurate as far as this year's succession of months goes. Mr. Unstede also reported that one of the geese in one particular flock was continuously calling 'mayday, mayday, mayday' whilst flying over the Carthusian friars' vegetable garden (adjacent to his own yard) and dropping what turned out to be the stolen Dacian helmet. In conclusion, he was confident that our town was experiencing the month of May at its fullest, and that every day of the month was a May Day, as confirmed by the goose in question.

And Fra Dolcino was rumored to have lost interest in declaiming inflammatory speeches to the assembly of wine bottles in his Old Town shop—rather, some people said, he had been seen and heard practicing the tenor part of a certain *Fa-la-la* song which was later identified as Thomas Morley's *Now is the Month of Maying*. In doing so, the same people said, Fra Dolcino



was making an unpardonable mistake: as a member of the Association for the Protection of the Middle Ages Among Us, he should have stuck with some medieval form of welcoming the month in question instead of paying tribute to a Renaissance composer. Consequently, he was reported as a traitor to the cause to Mrs. Bonaventure, who penned a heavy reprimand which was sent to Fra Dolcino via air mail; this ensured he'd get the letter promptly, in about three weeks, rather than the two days it would have taken, had it been sent as a piece of snail mail.

Finally, folks noticed that lately a bull (*Taurus*)—which they initially mistook for Mrs. Bacon's chimaera—was roaming through the cobblestone streets of Old Town at all sorts of times, but mostly at ungodly hours. The animal was reported taking occasional baths in the Fountain of Youth, or giving dirty looks to the wigs displayed in the window of William of

Ockham's barber shop across the square. Some of these wigs were not only outrageously long and curly, but also bright red in color, for that was Mr. Ockham's favorite hue. However, it did not appear to be the beast's preferred hue. In truth, it seemed to irritate the animal, which was seen on numerous occasions attempting to attack the display window, and one early morning Mr. Ockham woke up to find the window broken, the red wigs torn to pieces, and two bottles of his finest wine, a vintage Burgundy, empty and swimming in the crystal-clear waters of the Fountain of Youth. The arrival and settling in of the bull, as well as its unhinged behavior compounded by heavy alcohol consumption were taken to indicate that for all practical purposes the month of May was in town, and that it meant to stay here for a while.

A week now had passed since Mr. Unstede had advanced the hypothesis of the authentic Dacian helmet having been hidden in the Assen marshes by the folks who'd stolen it; a week, too, had passed (it was the same week as the one referred to at the beginning of this paragraph) since he had also proposed that what Friar Ambrose was wearing on his head was not a shiny bucket, nor was it a masterfully crafted replica of the authentic helmet, but the original object itself, picked up by a barnacle goose in the Netherlands and carried all the way to Northern Transylvania, where the bird in question managed to drop it in the Carthusian brothers'



vegetable garden. The day when Mr. Unstede voiced that idea was also the day he and Father Philippe were hit on the head by the Dacian bracelets, similarly stolen from the Assen Museum, so Mr. Unstede had no choice but to affirm that these objects, too, had been picked up by diverse geese and flown West-to-East across Europe all the way to our town, where they (the bracelets, that is, not the geese) by accident or design fell on top of the two men's heads—without, however, causing too much damage, for they both were people endowed with resilient skulls and proud of it.

As a result of all this activity consisting in the dropping of golden objects on territory belonging to our municipality, the Padre and Mr. Unstede decided to take said objects to the local History Museum, where the helmet and the bracelets were left in the Artist of the Sun Dial's custody, who solemnly swore to examine them with the greatest attention, compare them to existing archival photographs and videos, make hand drawings of them from all angles, and, finally, offer an expert opinion on origin, provenance, and authenticity. Obviously, all this had to be done before Father Philippe, Mr. Unstede, and Friar Ambrose could make their discovery public—for none of them was prepared to disclose anything without rigorous scientific backing.

It's got to be said that The Artist of the Sun Dial's real name was not The Artist of the Sun Dial. Rather, he had earned that endearing nickname on account of a feat of unexpected, yet extraordinary impact, artistically speaking, for which he had been solely responsible—namely, the hand-drawing of a sun dial on the floor of his parents' house porch as he, a boy of ten or eleven, was waiting for his father to come home from work. Thereafter his fame spread like wildfire among his classmates and, later, among our more adult concitizens, and prompted him to consider a career as a visual artist. At any rate, at present he was associated with the History Museum and had built an impeccable reputation as their prime hand-drawer of reproductions of restored archeological artifacts, namely pots, pans, cups, urns, bracelets, rings, knives, swords, helmets, knights' armors, and suchlike. He was a writer, too, in his spare time, and had penned several works of which perhaps the most notable was *The Seini Holler*, a made-up chronicle of his years as a student at the Seini High School of Agriculture. There were people, though, who believed his one major achievement to be the creation of a set of playing cards, one of which included the portrait of the Mayor before his arrest and detention on charges of bribe-taking. This set was in continual use at *Friar John's* beer garden, and had insured that the Artist's fame spread even wider, at the time of this writing encompassing large masses of the town's youngsters skipping school, and attracting an appreciable number of the town's beer lovers spending impressive amounts of time at *Friar John's*, sipping mouthfuls of the liquid in question and playing numerous rounds of cards.

As soon as he had been informed that the bucket he'd found on Carthusian premises and wore on his head was, in fact, either a replica, or the original Dacian helmet itself, Friar Ambrose, who, contrary to Carthusian rules, disliked to keep perpetual silence, had gone straight to the Poor Claire's apothecary and had spoken about it in strictest confidence to Sister Imelda. She, in turn, mentioned the facts, still in strictest confidence, to Sister Chiara, who subsequently told the story to Mrs. Bonaventure, who was visiting the establishment to acquire a fresh batch of anti-moustache tincture.

Consequently, at the very moment the Artist of the Sundial began devoting his time and attention to a thorough analysis of the objects, Mrs. Bonaventure was at Mrs. Rogeria Bacon's front gate, pushing it forcefully and listening to the dolorous screech which was the gate's usual



response to being pushed around—for Mrs. Bacon’s gate was of the sensitive kind, and, as a rule, it was against being maneuvered with such lack of delicacy.

A cursory examination of the front yard revealed that Ludovica, Mrs. Bacon’s chimaera was nowhere in sight—which prompted Mrs. Bonaventure to give a sigh of relief. Lancelot (previously known as Hardy Laurel), Mrs. Bacon’s laurel tree was, however, present and seemed to be in a good mood, as it was singing to itself the tenor part of *Nabucodonosor/Hugo, Hugo princeps invidiae*, a fourteenth-century motet it had allegedly learned through root osmosis from Father Philippe’s tree of consanguinity.

Mrs. Bonaventure climbed the five steps leading to Mrs. Bacon’s front door, knocked on it, and, upon hearing Mrs. Bacon saying “Enter,” immediately did as told. (In doing so she had two compelling reasons: first, she knew from experience that it was inadvisable to contradict her friend, consequently she avoided like the plague, for example, to exit when asked to come in; second, she had a personal, strong, and justifiable desire to enter, for it was clear to her that only by physically inserting herself into Mrs. Bacon’s antechamber could she, Mrs. Bonaventure, successfully approach the other lady with her legitimate concerns—unless Mrs. Bacon would have come out herself, which, however, was not a probability at the present time, as Mrs. Bacon could be seen through the open door to her boudoir to be applying makeup to the upper area of her face as well as to her lips). Mrs. Bonaventure, therefore, entered successively the lobby and the boudoir, and after being successful in doing so, she formulated the following question:

“My dear Rogeria, have you heard the news about the Dacian helmet and bracelets?”

“Oh, its’ simply shocking, isn’t it?”

“Indeed.”

“All’s Well That Ends Well ...”

On a normal day, Mrs. Bonaventure would have had an adverse reaction to Mrs. Bacon’s Shakespearian reference, for both ladies were members of the Association for the Protection of the Middle Ages Among Us, and not on the best terms with the Association for the Protection of the Renaissance Among Us, its statutes, its members, and its declared purpose, but in the present circumstances she let it pass.

“I was relieved to read ...” Mrs. Bacon went on, adjusting the intensity of the blue eye shadow she was wearing today, and applying additional blush to her cheeks.

“To read? Where did you read about it? I thought it was only known to a very few people.”

“Why, it is certainly known to those of us who read *The Rivulus Dominarum Clarion*.”

“The local newspaper?! Have they already published the story? Was it Friar Ambrose who talked to them?”

“Oh, no, my dear. I don’t see what Friar Ambrose would have to do with it.”

“Then, maybe, Father Philippe? Or Mr. Unstede? Sister Chiara?”

“Nonsense. *The Clarion* people say that, according to the *Associated Press*, the helmet and two bracelets have been returned to the Assen Museum ...”

“You’re kidding me. It doesn’t make any sense. They could not have been returned, since Assen is in the Netherlands, and our town, including the History Museum, is—well, not in the Netherlands. Surely the *Associated Press* are misinformed.”

“I don’t see what Rivulus Dominarum and our own Museum have to do with the return of the Dacian treasure ...”

“Well, it must be then that we’re talking about two different things. Look, Sister Chiara just told me that Sister Imelda had told her that Friar Ambrose had disclosed that what he was wearing on his head the other day, when he came in with the milk and cheese, was, in fact, either the Dacian helmet or else a shockingly well-crafted copy which was dropped, according to Mr. Unstede’s testimony, in the Carthusians’ vegetable garden ...”

“Dropped by whom?”

“By a barnacle goose.”

Even months afterwards Mrs. Bonaventure was able to recall with painful clarity as well as a considerable amount of outrage Mrs. Bacon’s incontrollable laughter, and the fact that a few buttons from the abdominal region of her blouse fell off and rolled on the floor while she was



literally wiping the tears that kept flowing down her cheeks like unstoppable rivulets. Mrs. Bonaventure also recalled that at the time she did not find that laughter pleasant or even tolerable, and that she had been visited by a strong desire to pull Mrs. Bacon’s hair with the same force she had earlier employed to push her garden gate.

It was Sir Isaac Newton who saved Mrs. Bonaventure from making a fatal mistake that would have ended on the spot an intimate friendship. Well, not really Sir Isaac himself, who was not present on account of having been in his grave for a considerable number of centuries, but his universal law of gravitation. In fact, what Mrs. Bonaventure did was to notice that Mrs. Bacon’s tears were flowing DOWN her cheeks and so carrying a large quantity of her blue eye shadow and cyclamen-colored lipstick all the way to her chin, due to the pull of gravity. She further speculated that had Mrs. Bacon been standing on her head surely the tears, still due to the pull of gravity, would be flowing UP her cheeks all the way to her forehead, which then by necessity would acquire a color most unnatural for that



part of the human body. Mrs. Bonaventure took a brief but delightful moment to imagine her friend in that position, and, being satisfied that she was thus avenged, refrained from performing the specific hair styling procedure she initially had in mind, saying instead:

“Rogeria! Pull yourself together! This is no laughing matter. You mean to say that the Assen Museum say they really have the helmet and the bracelets?”

“I’m not saying it: it’s the Associated Press people. There are photographs proving that, and I’ve seen them with my own eyes. It was on the radio; it was on TV; everybody talks about it, and it’s real and confirmed.”

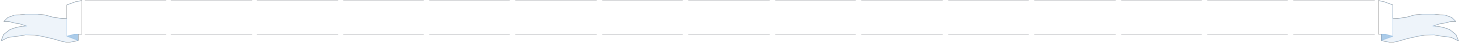
“Then do you think the objects that fell from the sky and were taken to our Museum by Father Philippe are fake?”



“No, they’re not!” Father Philippe was at the door which had been left ajar. In his right hand he was holding a rolled parchment, which he proceeded to unroll. It displayed the town’s coat of arms and a letterhead reading *Per aspera ad astra*, which meant ‘Through hardships to the stars’ and was our town’s motto. Everybody agreed that it was a very appropriate motto, of which the first half was representative of our citizens’ unbearably hard lives (for example, according to the latest census, there were a handful of families that did not own multi-level houses; there

were at least ten families in which not every member owned a twenty-thousand-Euro car; there were even those families who did not own a second house in the country). The second half of the motto was a clear reference to our collective moral strength: the fact that, in face of such adverse circumstances, we were never going to lose hope in a stellar future—on which grounds the Mayor’s Office (even in the Mayor’s absence, as he was in jail) had already approved plans for the building of twenty kilometers worth of bike lanes. This was a truly significant achievement, in that, with the exception of Monsignor Marignolli, the Bishop, there were no people interested in biking other than the occasional bicycle thief, as exemplified in Mr. van Tcheluck’s temporary appropriation of the former’s bike.

“This,” Father Philipe continued, pointing to the parchment “is proof that we have the authentic helmet and bracelet. I just got it from the Artist of the Sun Dial; it was given to him by the President of the committee in charge with the investigation. I have to return it without delay.”



Illustrations

Page 75: Konrad von Megenberg, *Buch der Natur*, fol. 264 r. Heidelberg, University Library. Public domain

Page 76: Calendar: May. The Hague, National Library of the Netherlands, MS KB 133 D11, fol. 6r. Public domain

Page 77: Dragon. The Hague, National Library of the Netherlands, MS KB 72A 23, fol. 47v. Public domain

Page 81: R. Page, after Sir G. Kneller, *Portrait of Sir Isaac Newton*, London, Wellcome Collection. Public domain

Page 82: Aflaatbrief vor een St. Johannes de Doper kapel, manuscript on parchment, 1329, Castle Huis Bergh, The Netherlands. Public domain

