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**COLOMAN: A PLAY IN FIVE  
ACTS, BY EDWARD PERCY  
AND W. B. NICHOLS**

*pseud*

NEW YORK: LAURENCE J. GOMME  
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U.S.F.R. Feb. 27. 17.

To the Memory of  
LAURENCE IRVING  
At whose instance this Play was begun  
shortly before his tragic death

Κακῶν δ' αὖ σοὶ μοῖραν ἔνειμε θεός

—*Philetas*

# COLOMAN

## CHARACTERS

(LADISLAUS THE FIRST)  
COLOMAN  
ALMOS } *his nephews* } *of the House of Arpad*  
STEPHEN, son to COLOMAN  
BELA, son to ALMOS

NICHOLAS HUNYADY, *the Chancellor*  
GABRIEL EGUON, *an old warrior*  
GUYON RAKOVSCY, *a young warrior*  
MATTHIAS ODEV } *two old counsellors* } *Hungarian noblemen*  
PETER ITTAKAR  
OTTO CSUPOR, *captain of the King's bodyguard*

ROBERT OF UJHELY, *his ancient*  
FEDOR GYURI, *afterwards his ancient*  
THE ARCHBISHOP OF GRAN  
JOHN CSABA, *chaplain to COLOMAN*  
ALADAR MAROTY, *a young priest*  
SIMON SZVELA, *magister acolytorum*  
SIR GODFREY DE BOUILLON, *a Crusader*  
KRISCH, *a gipsy*

BUSELLA, *wife to COLOMAN*  
ILONA, *wife to ALMOS*  
ROSALYS, *one of her ladies*

### A Variety of Persons forming a Crowd

*Of Whom there speak:* FETH, *a bell-ringer*; ANNA, *his wife*; SERGEI-MICHAEL, *their son*; an old woman, *friend to ANNA*; a miller; *his daughter named ELSE*; LUDOVIC, *a huntsman*; a merchant, a magistrate and his wife; a tanner; a wool-dyer; an armourer; an officer; three court ladies; a courtesan; an old shepherd and his son.

*Of Whom there are mute:* Certain courtiers, folk, soldiers, crusaders, attendants, priests, monks, nuns and acolytes.

*The scene is laid in Hungary, in and around the city of Pesth.*

### ACT I

*SCENE I.* A Hall in the King's Palace.

*SCENE II.* In the Bishop's Gardens.

### ACT II

The Cathedral.

### ACT III

*SCENE I.* The Summer Chamber in the King's Palace.

*SCENE II.* The Duke's Tent.

### ACT IV

The Summer Chamber in the King's Palace.

### ACT V

The Ruins of the Monastery of St. Sebastian.

*The action takes place during the close of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth centuries, A. D.*

# COLOMAN

## ACT I            SCENE I

### ACT I

#### SCENE I    The King's Palace at Pesth.

*A vast, barbaric hall, richly yet sombrely mosaiced. To the spectator's left is the main entrance. At the back, above some shallow steps, are huge doors leading to an inner chamber. To the right is a loosely-curtained window. In the centre of the floor is the hearth, round which are grouped benches and chairs covered with skins. The hall is lit by the glow from the hearth and by torches planted in the walls.*

*Round the fire are seated MATTHIAS ODEV, GABRIEL EGUON, OTTO CSUPOR, ROBERT OF UJHELY and PETER ITTAKAR. GUYON RAKOVSCY stands by the window. On a couch in the immediate foreground lies DUKE ALMOS, asleep. A leathern bottle has fallen from his hand.*

MATTHIAS ODEV.    What of the east, boy?

GUYON RAKOVSCY.    Faint green . . yet scarcely dawn.

MATTHIAS ODEV.    'Tis the soul's sabbath.

GABRIEL EGUON.    A fit hour for the passing of a king.

OTTO CSUPOR.    Dark, dark for Hungary!

GUYON RAKOVSCY.    Why cannot the old foresee dawn  
in midnight?

MATTHIAS ODEV.    They have endured too much . .

OTTO CSUPOR.    Headstrong lad! The land's destiny  
is darkened. Her Saint suffers eclipse.

GUYON RAKOVSCY.    Because one king dies, are we

paupers in majesty? Hungary is yet quick and young. Her youth is her majesty — whatever her bent-backs may be!

ALADAR MAROTY *has entered from the King's chamber.*

ALADAR MAROTY. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem..

PETER ITTAKAR. What news, father?

ALADAR MAROTY. The Prince-Bishop is even now administering the Extreme Unction.

*They all kneel. The priest stands above them.*

SIMON SZVELA *enters from the left. Seeing them kneel, he pauses, watching them with a smile.*

SIMON SZVELA. . . Worship — or homage? Who is the King?

ALADAR MAROTY. Pax vobiscum.

*They rise. ALMOS groans and mutters in his sleep. SIMON SZVELA comes forward and mockingly drops on one knee before the sleeping Duke.*

SIMON SZVELA. Does the King speak?

ALADAR MAROTY. Master Simon, King Ladislaus is not yet dead.

SIMON SZVELA. Then Heaven waxes not impatient for its saints . .

ROBERT OF UJHELY. The Duke wakens —

SIMON SZVELA. Duke-King, King-duke . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Duke-swine, swine-King! He will never rule Hungary.

OTTO CSUPOR. Traitorous boy!

PETER ITTAKAR. And if not he — who then?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Coloman!

OTTO CSUPOR. Coloman?

ALADAR MAROTY. The Bishop?

GABRIEL EGUON. The Prince-Bishop?

SIMON SZVELA. Bishop-king, King-bishop . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. He was King Geyza's elder son.

ROBERT OF UJHELY. [*Scornfully.*] By a Greek concubine!

OTTO CSUPOR. Madness! — while Duke Almos was

conceived by a regal mother. The throne is his by birth. Has not our saintly Ladislaus already named him his successor? Truly he loves him as his own son.

GABRIEL EGUON. Ay, for he hates the Bishop.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. He fears him!

SIMON SZVELA. So greatly that he cut his claws.

PETER ITTAKAR. How so?

SIMON SZVELA. He made a priest of him.

OTTO CSUPOR. And this suckling would have us warriors ruled by a Churchman!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Rather than by a sot!

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Laying his hand on his sword.*] Blood of the Virgin!

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Restraining him.*] And yet, look you, is it not the truth?

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Regarding the Duke.*] The crown will cool his head.

GABRIEL EGUON. Weak, weak . . .

PETER ITTAKAR. A weak king serves a strong court.

OTTO CSUPOR. And is he not beloved of the people? He is their idol—boon with them all: their natural lord and leader. But what following has your bookish Coloman in the land?

ALADAR MAROTY. Holy Church would be with her son, Otto Csupor.

MATTHIAS ODEV. O waste of honest argument! Coloman is no self-seeker. He cares not for pomp nor for power. He is a scholar, a dreamer of dreams. I have known him from a boy.

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Turning to Rakovscy.*] There is an end then of your King Coloman!

SIMON SZVELA. Are you God?

*A procession of acolytes enters from the King's chamber, chanting a Latin psalm. They cross the hall and out to the left. The two last boys swing censers before JOHN CSABA, who carries the Host. At its appearance all kneel reverently. On the threshold of the ante-chamber, CSABA*

*delivers the Host to ALADAR MAROTY, who bears it out, following the acolytes.*

JOHN CSABA. The King asks for the Duke. Rouse him.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Is the end come?

JOHN CSABA. He is almost past breathing. Hasten.

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Waking the Duke.*] My lord — my lord.

ALMOS. What now?

OTTO CSUPOR. Your royal uncle asks for you. Quick, my lord!

ALMOS. What — not dead yet? Steady me, man, steady me. Where's my half-brother?

SIMON SZVELA. Before you — with the King.

*CSUPOR helps ALMOS up to the chamber, preceded by CSABA. GABRIEL EGUON follows and stands looking in after them through the half-open door. GUYON and ROBERT OF UJHELY wait silently at the foot of the steps.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. Why do you out-stay your acolytes, Master Szvela?

SIMON SZVELA. That I may not out-stay my fortune, good my lord.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Do you wait to kiss a saint's shroud or a king's mantle?

SIMON SZVELA. My sins be forgiven me!

MATTHIAS ODEV. Come, my shrewd courtier, what is it you desire of the new King?

SIMON SZVELA. Lace for my acolytes . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Short words — long thoughts.

PETER ITTAKAR. [*Who is now seated on the Duke's Couch.*] What does this fellow with thinking?

SIMON SZVELA. To add a cubit to his stature.

PETER ITTAKAR. You are apt, fool! Ah,— [*his foot strikes the overturned bottle*]. Sirrah, remove this.

SIMON SZVELA. I am unworthy, my lord —

PETER ITTAKAR. Unworthy?

SIMON SZVELA. — to bear so much of the King's majesty.

*He takes the bottle, concealing it beneath some skins at the back: then crosses to GUYON RAKOVSCY and ROBERT OF UJHELY with whom he stands conversing. PETER ITTAKAR turns to ODEV, who moves over to him.*

PETER ITTAKAR. What an impudent rogue is this! Why do you suffer him?

MATTHIAS ODEV. He saves a motley. It is good sometimes to hear a man of the people.

PETER ITTAKAR. Since when has Simon Szvela voiced the people?

MATTHIAS ODEV. He is too astute to voice the people, but what he thinks today the people may think tomorrow. Therein lies his interest, Count Ittakar.

PETER ITTAKAR. He spoke contemptuously of the Duke. Think you, Matthias Odev, that the people —

MATTHIAS ODEV. They do not know their idol as you and I. His countess debaucheries —

PETER ITTAKAR. Yet the people ever love princely failings.

MATTHIAS ODEV. In a prince, ay — but not in a king.

PETER ITTAKAR. [*Whispering.*] Matthias Odev, is there any warrant for this talk of Coloman?

MATTHIAS ODEV. A boy's enthusiasm — thistledown!

PETER ITTAKAR. There is no enmity between these half-brothers . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. I know of none.

PETER ITTAKAR. Yet some hold that the Bishop has cause for jealousy.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Jealousy of the Duke? Cause, perhaps, but no inclination. Coloman has never viewed himself as aught beyond a king's bastard. He was a philosopher before he became a priest. If he harbours enmity towards any man, it must be towards his uncle.

PETER ITTAKAR. Towards the dying Saint Ladislaus? The Virgin forbid!

MATTHIAS ODEV. Well! Did he not tear him from

wife and son when he forced him into the Church? Is that nothing? Did he not humiliate him before the Court? And leave his wife no wife, and his son no son? Nothing? He was afraid of him . .

PETER ITTAKAR. Afraid?

MATTHIAS ODEV. For his favourite Almos and for himself. The saint ever fears the scholar.

PETER ITTAKAR. Nevertheless he gave him a bishopric.

MATTHIAS ODEV. To deprive him of a kingdom. Yet there was no need. From the time that I dandled him on my knee have I been Coloman's familiar: there is no purple ambition in him.

PETER ITTAKAR. You comfort me. When the land is in faction, it is the rich who suffer . .

BUSELLA *enters leading STEPHEN, her little son, by the hand.*

BUSELLA. My lords, I —

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*Hastening to her.*] Fair madam!

BUSELLA. Fair as fair befall, boy. I am come — pah! Shut out the grey smell of death. Is my husband within?

ROBERT OF UJHELY. He who was your husband —

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Hound!

GABRIEL EGUON. [*From the door.*] Hush . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Peace!

BUSELLA. My lords, I forget . . [*To ROBERT.*] Sir, I thank you for your memory. The father of my son — the lord Bishop — is he within?

MATTHIAS ODEV. Yes, madam, with the others.

BUSELLA. What others?

ROBERT OF UJHELY. The Duke, his wife and child —

SIMON SZVELA. The whole royal house, gracious lady.

BUSELLA. Are we of no account? Sirs, I am come to ask the King's blessing upon my son. Is it not possible to admit us?

MATTHIAS ODEV. Surely you must see that it is not?

BUSELLA. Not? He is of equal kin with the Duke's son — the babe Bela.

ROBERT OF UJHELY. Bela is a prince of the line —

PETER ITTAKAR. The King is beyond speech.

BUSELLA. Yet if he could but see him . . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. What purpose would it serve?

BUSELLA. To regain my honour and my son's just titles. This saintly King stripped us of them — he alone can revoke his own injustice. My son's father is with him and my son's place is with his father. At least, let in the child.

*Suddenly a wail of women issues from the King's chamber. They all pause for a moment.*

*Then EGUON shuts out the noise and comes down.*

BUSELLA. That was . . . ?

GABRIEL EGUON. Death.

SIMON SZVELA. The Saint is gathered to the saints.

*The boy begins to cry. BUSELLA holds him to her.*

BUSELLA. Hush, do not be frightened. You are a prince.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*In a low voice.*] Perhaps one day you will be my king.

STEPHEN. Shall I really? "King Stephen?" I shall cut off your head!

*GUYON laughs and catches him up in his arms.*

GABRIEL EGUON. A great knight has doffed his harness.

ROBERT OF UJHELY. Long live the King!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. God for Hungary!

PETER ITTAKAR. Bear yourselves seemly against their coming forth.

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Who has crossed to the window, flinging aside the curtains and gazing out.*] A fair star in a fair sky . . .

BUSELLA. Dawn has so many favoured children.

SIMON SZVELA. Yet I see a cloud coming up. Fear not, lady, 'tis no bigger than a mitre.

*Two nuns open the doors of the King's chamber.*

ALMOS, ILONA bearing BELA in her arms, COLOMAN in his robes, NICHOLAS HUNYADY with the seal, OTTO CSUPOR, and JOHN CSABA carrying COLOMAN'S crozier enter.

ALMOS. [*Plucking at COLOMAN'S sleeve.*] What's next to be done, brother Bishop?

COLOMAN. Bid the dead king's esquires keep dutiful guard over his body till the burial.

*At a sign from CSUPOR, ROBERT OF UJHELY makes obeisance and departs.*

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. Gracious my lord, suffer me to be the first to salute my sovereigns.

ILONA. Worthy Hunyady!

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Proffering the seal.*] I give back to the King what a king entrusted to me.

ALMOS. God's body, keep it, man! And you, brother, see to these obsequies.

COLOMAN. In all duty, brother and liege.

ALMOS. Spare no ritual. Yon's the choirmaster. Bid him tune his boy's throats. By Saint Cecilia, they need it! [*To SIMON SZVELA.*] Look you, master, if they sing no better than at last Mass, we'll slit your tongue for your vile teaching. Come, good Csupor, to bed . . . to bed . . .

*OTTO CSUPOR leads him from the room.*

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. Shall I escort you to your ladies, sweet madam?

ILONA. We thank you, my lord. [*He waits at the entrance. She turns to COLOMAN, half-timidly.*] Will you not kiss the child?

*COLOMAN makes the sign of the cross above the infant, then bends down and gently kisses him.*

COLOMAN. Little blossom . . . My brother is blessed.

*Here STEPHEN slips from his mother's hand and runs as if to touch the babe. ILONA, seeing BUSELLA, shrinks back from contact with the boy. COLOMAN seizes his hand and holds him beside him. ILONA moves slowly to the door, singing a lullaby to soothe the wakened child.*

ILONA. *Now 'tis the folding-time  
Of the weary moon . .*

*She passes out, followed by HUNYDAY.*

GABRIEL EGUON. I am afraid for Hungary . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Are we not all?

COLOMAN. See to it that you love the King. [*To them all.*] Good friends, who honoured my uncle and gave him tried service, go in unto him once more in last homage.

PETER ITTAKAR. Thanks, my lord.

GABRIEL EGUON. We are fain to take our leave of him.

COLOMAN. [*Taking his crozier from CSABA.*] Father, show them his face. And, above all, love the King.

*RAKOVSCY, ITTAKAR and EGUON enter the death-chamber preceded by CSABA. COLOMAN turns to MATTHIAS ODEV. He places his hand on his shoulder.*

COLOMAN. You, iron-mind, gold-heart, pass in also . . true friend.

MATTHIAS ODEV. They have spoken of you tonight —

COLOMAN. How?

MATTHIAS ODEV. Tread your ways warily. If a strong king so feared your brain — how much more will a weak one?

*He bows to BUSELLA as he follows the others.*

BUSELLA. Have you no blessing for your own son? No word of greeting for me?

*COLOMAN stoops and kisses STEPHEN on the brow. Then he rises and faces her with dignity. The boy, released, runs to SZVELA who engages him in play. They are unnoticed by BUSELLA and COLOMAN during the ensuing scene.*

COLOMAN. Do you think I have no heart?

BUSELLA. You keep it well hidden, my lord Bishop!

COLOMAN. A thing well hidden lies deep. What have I done to stir such bitterness in you? Your grievance should have died with the King.

BUSELLA. One can have no grievance against the

dead. I speak to the living. And I look for redress to the living. Have I not had to endure the foulest wrong that woman can suffer? For ten years have I been mocked of my inferiors, have I seen my son gibed at by the very pages! Your son . . . Coloman, Coloman! In those first, soft nights of wooing, little did we dream that a Saint's breath would estrange our lips.

COLOMAN. The King feared me, hated me — removed me. There was no choice. It meant the priesthood or the assassin. Our lives — and that life within you — hung upon our obedience.

BUSELLA. Better have died! This infinite exile from your arms . . . I have no nun's blood in me. Had you cared less for wisdom and more for love we should not have come to this. 'Twas your head that King Ladislaus feared, not your heart!

COLOMAN. Untamed, unreconciled, unhappy! When will you learn submission to circumstances? I have passed these years in a cloister. I have found peace there — even a measure of happiness. [*Gently.*] There is always happiness to be won from the resolve to be happy.

BUSELLA. I wedded a prince. What am I now? The others will tell you. We might have shared a throne, you and I — have fashioned a brood of kings. I was ambitious for you, my husband. Today, our future seems as dead as our past . . .

COLOMAN. These are old complainings. If your mood keeps the same tenour, spare me the rest.

BUSELLA. Hear me out. I seek redress — from the living. Our sainted enemy is translated to Heaven. For too long he overshadowed our lives. Now that we are free, it lies with you to cancel his fiat.

COLOMAN. How do you mean?

BUSELLA. If one king could make you a priest, another can unmake you. This coxcomb — your brother — my lord Almos — is pliant and easily swayed. Induce him to obtain the Pope's annulment of your

vows. And further . . . He is ready to impose trust in you. Now is your opportunity to make yourself the strong man in the land and me an honourable woman. Love the King — wedge yourself into his heart's counsels.

COLOMAN. Do not trouble my peace. I have left the Court. I would rather watch men than rule them . . . and the Church has need of me.

BUSELLA. You are no Churchman!

COLOMAN. Who made you the keeper of my conscience?

BUSELLA. Ah, do not be cruel to me. I touch your hands now so seldom. Your hands that were so strong — so strong! Let us knit up the old life. Be once again my husband. I am still ambitious for you. Mark me, the King's death will divide the Court: a good time to thrust in. We should very soon regain our old power — the power that made us so feared. Perhaps we might rise even higher . . .

COLOMAN. Woman, woman, what thoughts are these? Would you have me plot against my brother — traitor to my King as well as to my Church?

BUSELLA. Deeds are so swiftly done . . . in a night . . .

COLOMAN. Hush. Even Heaven has ears.

BUSELLA. Is your blood so cold? Do you feel no thrill at the thought of —

COLOMAN. Peace! I have out-lived ambition.

BUSELLA. And your honour.

COLOMAN. A man's honour is his loyalty to his wisdom. Set not your imagination upon ambition. It is an alchemist of dust: it has a Midas-touch. Let a man but once be seized by ambition and he has lost his soul.

*SZVELA claps his hands and laughs shrilly. COLOMAN and BUSELLA turn to him startled. It seems to be part of the game.*

SIMON SZVELA. A fair child, a sweet child, a wise child!

*He advances with the boy. BUSELLA beckons STEPHEN to her.*

BUSELLA. Come hither. You have wearied Master Szvela.

SIMON SZVELA. Nay, madam, seldom was I more profitably employed . .

STEPHEN. Mother, he has taught me a fine game: it is called "Kings and Queens"!

BUSELLA. Come, coz. [*She takes him by the hand. SIMON SZVELA stands at the entrance. As she walks away she says bitterly over her shoulder to COLOMAN.*] It is vain to speak with a dead man!

COLOMAN. Fare you well.

*She goes out with the boy, SZVELA following. COLOMAN stands in deep thought. Then the doors of the King's chamber open, and ODEV, EGUON, ITTAKAR and RAKOVSCY appear, talking in subdued tones. CSABA closes the door behind them. At the same time ROBERT OF UJHELY enters swiftly with four soldiers. They proceed to mount guard on the steps. There is a sense of bustle and movement, but it does not rouse the BISHOP.*

C O L O M A N

ACT I      SCENE II

SCENE II      In the Bishop's Gardens.

*A little paved close surrounded by heavy foliage and approached on the one side by an avenue leading from the Cathedral cloisters, on the other by a flight of flagged steps to the higher reaches of the gardens. In the centre is a stone fish-pond with a fountain.*

ILONA and four of her ladies enter from the avenue.

THE FIRST LADY. My lord Bishop has a pleasant garden . .

ILONA. A peaceful garden . .

THE SECOND LADY. Your Highness is tired. The Burial was sombre and wearisome.

ILONA. [*Sitting at the fountain's edge.*] We will rest awhile. His Grace will not grudge us this cosy hospitality. Come, sit round me. [*To one who kneels at her feet, with a lapful of lilies.*] My pretty sweeting, shall you confess your dainty robbery to the Bishop?

THE THIRD LADY. [*Archly.*] He does not confess me . .

THE FOURTH LADY. You think him too old for you, my red Rosalys!

ILONA. We are surfeited of confessions and masses today. I wonder if my babe be asleep! Sweet friends, when you are mothers . . Come, rede me this riddle. How is a woman best delivered of good tidings?

THE FIRST LADY. When her unwelcome lord rides to the wars . . ?

THE FOURTH LADY. And her true-lover holds her skein?

ILONA. Prithee, be less subtle and more homely in your reasoning. If you are as unskilled in the answer as you are in the answering, it must often go hard with you! Draw your bows once again. 'Tis in the nature of a maxim.

THE SECOND LADY. One that a woman would put to practise?

ILONA. God help her, poor soul, if not! It is her only salvation i' this world . .

THE FIRST LADY. "How is a woman best delivered of good tidings" . . ?

THE THIRD LADY. By a long tongue?

ILONA. By keeping her secrets . .

*Here ALMOS enters from the avenue, accompanied by NICHOLAS HUNYADY, PETER ITTAKAR and OTTO CSUPOR.*

ALMOS. Who talks of secrets in His Sanctity's garden?

CSUPOR *laughs.*

ILONA. I was asking a riddle, my lord.

ALMOS. Oho! What riddle?

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. Propound it again, sweet madam.

ILONA. [*To her ladies.*] Now we'll badger our men. My lords, how is a woman best delivered of good tidings?

ALMOS. Come, to it, fellows. Wits, wits, wits! Depend on't, "secret" tilts in the answer . .

ILONA. Wits, wits, wits! Are you as witty as we?

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. "How is a woman best delivered of good tidings" . . ?

ALMOS. [*Laughing.*] When her delivery is secret!

ILONA. Sir, you are pleased to be merry—and wrong!

PETER ITTAKAR. I have it! Nay, there's no "secret" in that . .

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. By a secret confession?

OTTO CSUPOR. A priest's answer, Count Hunyady! Now hear a soldier's — by keeping her secrets, madam?

ILONA. You are right, captain. But I think your ears were sharper than your wits.

ALMOS. "By keeping her secrets?" A pretty counsel to hear from your pretty lips! Secrets — you? Have you secrets, my pretty plover?

ILONA. [*Rising.*] I keep but one from you — the secret which every wife should keep from her husband. [*To her ladies.*] Hear me, O ye, my maids! You are sitting at the feet of Gamaliel . .

ALMOS. Well! What is this marvellous secret which every wife should keep from her husband?

ILONA. [*Chucking him beneath the chin.*] How much exactly she loves him. We do not like you too conceited — or too jealous. Come, my dears, you have learnt the wisdom of a wife: now learn that of a mother. I want to hug baby Bela!

*Wake, baby, tho' your head*

*Is wreathed in dreams . .*

*She ascends the steps with her ladies, halts at the topmost to laugh back at ALMOS, and is gone.*

OTTO CSUPOR. Your Queen is shrewd, my lord.

ALMOS. So she be not a shrew, I care not!

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. A witty woman often sees further than she talks. Well, this little "court of love" has lightened the gloom of King Ladislaus' burial . .

OTTO CSUPOR. And the haughty dominance of these priests — saving your brother, Sire.

ALMOS. [*Moodily.*] He, too, is haughty.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. These great thinkers are always haughty.

ALMOS. What has my brother done with all his great thinking? Pestilent swelled-brain! He slights me: I feel it.

PETER ITTAKAR. The Virgin forbid!

ALMOS. I have walked with him in this very garden . . . and he has been King, not I!

OTTO CSUPOR. Then you have remarked his ambition?

ALMOS. Ha, and certain of my courtiers foster it by their obsequence.

OTTO CSUPOR. By more than their obsequence. I have told you what passed on the night of the King's death. [*To ITTAKAR.*] You were present . . .

PETER ITTAKAR. I heard nothing, but 'twas in the air.

ALMOS. Who were for him?

OTTO CSUPOR. Young Rakovscy and my old lord Eguon. They are the most formidable.

PETER ITTAKAR. And they wield much money.

ALMOS. Well, 'tis no matter. I have scotched it. I am cleverer than my brother credits.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. What measure, Sire, have you taken?

ALMOS. I have a plan to humble this great thinker, this schemer, before all Hungary. When he has done my bidding there will be an end to his kingly pretences!

OTTO CSUPOR. What bidding?

ALMOS. Tush . . . Trust in the Lord's Anointed. It is a politic jest. I have contrived it with the Archbishop of Gran.

PETER ITTAKAR. Here he comes from the Cathedral and Bishop Coloman with him.

ALMOS. God's body, then let us go! Faugh — I can scent them from here. Let us leave them to their episcopalities! Come, sup with me.

*They go up the steps. There is a moment's silence; then voices are heard approaching and COLOMAN, followed by the ARCHBISHOP OF GRAN leaning on JOHN CSABA, emerges from the avenue. ALADAR MAROTY follows respectfully. He carries certain of the ARCHBISHOP'S appurtenances.*

COLOMAN. I love my garden. It is terraced to the sun . . . Yonder lies the Palace; there I have lodged you.

THE ARCHBISHOP. As you love me, a moment. I hate your burial services, and a Saint's is worse than a Christian's. They pray twice as long for 'em. [*He seats himself on the rim of the fountain.*] Mother o' God, my knees . . . There was a clamminess i' the church has seized my limbs. [*Turning a roguish eye on CSABA.*] Saw you the wench who knelt under the organ-loft?

JOHN CSABA. No, my lord.

THE ARCHBISHOP. A gipsy, by Jesu! A brown wench with a white bosom . . . [*To ALADAR MAROTY.*] Saw you not her?

ALADAR MAROTY. Nor I, my lord.

THE ARCHBISHOP. Ah, you are little more than a novice. When I was a young priest . . .

COLOMAN. [*Smiling.*] It is said that you became licentiate at an earlier age, than most, my lord.

THE ARCHBISHOP. [*Eyeing him sharply.*] Eh? Oh, ay. [*Crossing himself and mumbling rapidly.*] Ad te levavi oculos meos: qui habitas in coelis . . . There is scholarship in all things.

JOHN CSABA. Concerning this matter, my lords — [*To ALADAR.*] Walk apart.

THE ARCHBISHOP. This business of the King's crowning — yes, yes! Is the day bespoken?

COLOMAN. This day se'nnight.

THE ARCHBISHOP. And the ritual — will it be according to the Roll of Saint Ladislaus' crowning? We must have a rehearsal. I am shaky in my Latin. But let it not be Thursday. She is too . . . I am in the confessional o' Thursday.

COLOMAN. It shall be appointed in closet with the Chancellor, my honoured lord. [*Wearily.*] How close the dusk seems! [*He lays his hand on the masonry.*] The stone burns . . .

THE ARCHBISHOP. Now, my children, touching the new reign, will King Almos prove a dutiful son to the Holy Church? She has a body terrestrial as well as a body celestial.

COLOMAN. [*Dipping his hand in the pond.*] Strange, that restless water should be so restful!

THE ARCHBISHOP. [*To CSABA.*] He hears me not . .

COLOMAN. There were once carp in this fountain, my lord — something killed them. Their bodies littered the basin as with silver. Have no doubts of my brother. Crown him in all confidence. The gardener told me 'twas a water-snake, hidden . . hidden deep. Crown Almos in all confidence, good my lord. Mark me, I bade you do it!

THE ARCHBISHOP. The King spoke as 'twere his wish that you, his brother, should crown him.

COLOMAN. I? The crown of Hungary!

THE ARCHBISHOP. As is most natural and politic.

COLOMAN. [*Walking up and down.*] No, no, no, no . . The crown in *my* hands?

THE ARCHBISHOP. Yet consider, Prince Coloman, it would serve to proclaim your love for the King.

COLOMAN. Did I not bid them love the King?

THE ARCHBISHOP. That was well done. Let your brotherly love continue.

COLOMAN. It is not my province, my lord Archbishop —

THE ARCHBISHOP. Well, for my part, I would fain be rid of it. I grow infirm . .

COLOMAN. Nor is it my humour. Tell the King I shrink from this.

JOHN CSABA. Is that wise, my lord?

COLOMAN. No more. Tell the King, I say. I will not do it. Do not misunderstand me. I am my brother's loyal servant, but this moves me too far.

THE ARCHBISHOP. So slender a whim . .

COLOMAN. Sirs, I am determined. Do not press me further.

ALADAR MAROTY. [*Coming forward.*] My lords, a message from the King.

COLOMAN. Who bears the message?

ALADAR MAROTY. One presently from the Court — Master Simon Szvela.

SZVELA *appears at the head of the steps and comes down. He kneels before the ARCHBISHOP, who raises his hand in blessing.*

THE ARCHBISHOP. [*To CSABA.*] A face like Judas! [*Aloud.*] Our Lady smile upon you, fair son. What is it?

SIMON SZVELA. [*Rising.*] Most Holy Father, I am bidden entreat you to the King. He would consult you anent the investiture before you sup.

THE ARCHBISHOP. Pox upon it! Authority is so new a toy to a young monarch—he gives no peace to his nurses! [*To CSABA.*] Your arm, father. [*To ALADAR MAROTY.*] Help me up, son. I wane too swiftly for these crownings . . . We will lose no time in waiting upon the King's sweet pleasure. My nose has prophesied me broiled trout for supper. [*To COLOMAN.*] Send me your tidings anon.

COLOMAN. Kiss the King's hands for me, my lord. I bear him all fealty.

THE ARCHBISHOP. Hm . . . Christ be with you.

*CSABA and ALADAR MAROTY help the old man up the steps and they disappear. COLOMAN remains by the fountain, idly toying with the water.*

COLOMAN. She called me dead. Then the dead dream . . .

SIMON SZVELA. [*Suddenly.*] What if they should be raised from the dead?

COLOMAN. Who is that?

SIMON SZVELA. Another dead man.

COLOMAN. [*Half angry, half amused.*] What has wrought your death, Master Szvela?

SIMON SZVELA. That which wrought yours, my lord. The being robbed by the King. He has filched my livelihood. I met him by the gates. I am no longer choirmaster.

COLOMAN. I am sorry at it. Unfeignedly, for we have of late been a little thrown together, and have conversed upon occasion. [*Smiling.*] Is it the sing-

ing? My brother has a delicate ear — and a rough hand . . .

SIMON SZVELA. Yet he has a wonderful clemency. I am not to be whipped in that I cannot smithy the boys' throats to his liking, or turn a potter of nightingales! [*Breaking into a merry catch.*] *But if bread is black, the girls are white . . .*

COLOMAN. Does this mean so little to you?

SIMON SZVELA. As little, my lord, as a flood to a waterfowl. I bear myself after the manner of my betters.

COLOMAN. Since when were your betters waterfowl?

SIMON SZVELA. Since the eagle grew afraid o' the sun . . .

COLOMAN. [*His face darkening.*] Lie fallow . . .

SIMON SZVELA. I am a fool, Prince. Humility only becomes the wise.

COLOMAN. A fool to his folly!

SIMON SZVELA. And a wise man to his fool . . .

COLOMAN. You stumble on strange meanings.

SIMON SZVELA. My lord, I am fain to perform a miracle.

COLOMAN. You — a miracle?

SIMON SZVELA. The raising of a man from the dead.

COLOMAN. [*After a moment's pause.*] If you have said all, you have said too much, if you have said but half you have said too little. Sit you down — there.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Perching himself on the fountain's rim and leaning across to COLOMAN, speaking with extraordinary intensity.*] Who made you your brother's servant?

COLOMAN. My mother.

SIMON SZVELA. The Arpads count their race from their sires! Was not William of England a bastard?

COLOMAN. O Wormwood Star! Would you have me become King?

SIMON SZVELA. [*Seizing his hand and kissing it.*] My lord, I love you . . .

COLOMAN. [*Good-humouredly pinching SZVELA'S ear.*]

I think not. No man loves me. Were you a woman . . . She loved me.

SIMON SZVELA. She, too, would have you King.

COLOMAN. She . . . ?

SIMON SZVELA. She is mindful of her indignity. How these ladies exalt their proprieties! Is it a light task for a woman of her pride to forego a husband and a crown?

COLOMAN. [*Scarcely audibly.*] Ah, Busella! [*With a hard laugh.*] She recks more of the crown than the husband.

SIMON SZVELA. Or mayhap it is the mother in her. Holy Father, what of your son?

COLOMAN. He will thank me for having spared him the haunting imminence of kingship. Our desolate vigils are a disease: they palsy us. This will not lure me. Such bait is grown stale on the hook. You must catch me while you have me beguiled . . . for I sway with the stream.

SIMON SZVELA. Then I must thread on a live worm. How does Hungary sit solitary, waiting for her lord! She is clay for a great fashioner. There is room for a Caesar in her annals. Caesar — Coloman . . .

COLOMAN. Conquest — destiny!

SIMON SZVELA. Now wakes the man of action. Will you ever comfortably sing Mass again? Behold Hungary! What she is, what she will be, what she might be. She is . . . weakening in the midst of nations gathering strength. She will be . . . their soft plunder beneath your drunken brother. She might be . . . what you alone can make her. My lord Bishop, I, too, have my text and my sermon.

COLOMAN. Retro me, Satanas. What have you been paid for this?

SIMON SZVELA. Nothing — yet. I shall ask my monies of King Coloman — when I am his Chancellor. Now am I but a dispossessed lackey, a dull reed . . . yet one that pipes for half the Court. Whither turns grey Eguon's mind, whither Odev's and Rakovscy's?

To you — Bookish Coloman! To whom does John Csaba pray o' nights? Not to God — but to his ecclesiastical superior. Have you not marked these men wince when Almos has girded at you? Apple of ashes! With such buttresses to your prop will you let this braggart-bibber ride roughshod over you? I have spun a plan . .

COLOMAN. [*Stopping him with a gesture.*] Master Szvela, I had a horse caught in a quicksand. I watched him struggling — as you are watching me. But he freed himself. Get you gone.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Abruptly, with a fantastic bow.*] I am snuffed out. [*He makes as if to withdraw, then stops with a sidelong glance at the BISHOP.*] What of your mistress?

COLOMAN. [*Slowly.*] You omnipotent devil . . [*A pause, then eagerly.*] What of her?

SIMON SZVELA. She would have her love set high. Love is always for the height . .

COLOMAN. How much do you know of — us?

SIMON SZVELA. Enough to be your pander.

COLOMAN. How came you by your knowledge?

SIMON SZVELA. I threw a casual javelin into the dark . .

COLOMAN. You parry me! Have you guessed this?

SIMON SZVELA. I have flown my falcons . . my eyes.

COLOMAN. You have seen — what? Does love so change a man that others . .

SIMON SZVELA. May plumb his passion? O Sir, the hue o' the lips, the hand plucking at the vest, the secret fond smile at matins . .

COLOMAN. Have you watched me so narrowly?

SIMON SZVELA. Yea and again yea. And she . .

COLOMAN. O Heaven and Earth! How near have you been to her?

SIMON SZVELA. I am her ambassador. She bids you aspire.

COLOMAN. Comes this lately from her?

SIMON SZVELA. Ay, my lord. Since you saw her.

COLOMAN. Where have you seen her? When and how? Oh, that I had . . .

SIMON SZVELA. Then you have not seen her so lately?

COLOMAN. I have not seen her . . . my heart does not know how long — how long! [*Turning on him sharply.*] You know so much — yet know not that?

SIMON SZVELA. I do know it.

COLOMAN. You have had speech with her?

SIMON SZVELA. I am her ambassador . . .

COLOMAN. You privileged mountebank . . . Divulge her to me.

SIMON SZVELA. She will divulge herself to the King — not to the Bishop.

COLOMAN. [*Keenly.*] That was her message?

SIMON SZVELA. Such is my deliverance.

COLOMAN. O Madonna! You have seen her face unveiled? You have heard her voice?

SIMON SZVELA. My lord . . .

COLOMAN. That you have heard her voice and I have only known her whisper! That you have seen her face, and I — never! O subtle harlot! Tell me, how looks she in the sun? Is her hair full and braided? What do men call her? Come, answer me, good fellow, what is her name?

SIMON SZVELA. She will not divulge it — to the Bishop.

COLOMAN. And yet — if I make myself King she will come to me again! Openly, openly — not as then, by furtive chance . . . I met her first in the dark lanes beyond the city when I was returning lonely and from a lonely shrine. There was no moon and she was hooded. We never came together but in darkness. How her hands allured! And her breath — God, God, God! I knew not who she was: she would only tell me what she was. But she knew me, for she cried on me by name in her kisses. O hot whisperings! O dear whisperings! We came together — how seldom! And then she slipt away from me . . . I have stolen

out, night upon night, to the familiar spot — but she has not come. She never came . . . And now a year is gone and I am no whit nearer her — unless I pinnacle myself. How may I find her? Come, sirrah, answer me — or I will have you racked. I will draw her name from every sinew of you.

SIMON SZVELA. I am not a coward. You will get nothing that way.

COLOMAN. You shame me. I did forget my philosophy. Sweet knave, tell me how I may find her?

SIMON SZVELA. Bishop Coloman, become King.

COLOMAN. [*Quietly, almost menacingly — his face close to SZVELA'S.*] Your fang is in my heel, O serpent: beware lest I bruise your head. [*Turning away, absorbed.*] I am as a swimmer nearing that great ninth wave which breaks, but cannot be broken. [*Rousing himself with a shudder.*] It is grown dark and cold . . .

SIMON SZVELA. It is nightfall.

*The tension is broken by STEPHEN, who enters carrying a book. He is crying quietly.*

COLOMAN. A little boy . . .

SIMON SZVELA. Your son.

COLOMAN. Why, villain, what make you here? You should be abed. What, tears?

*He takes him between his knees, fondling him.*

STEPHEN. They stole my hobby-horse and, when I asked for it, they told me to tell my father and laughed — it seemed at you.

COLOMAN. Who stole your toy?

STEPHEN. Uncle Almos' pages.

COLOMAN. This — by a King's cullions to a King's grandson! Oh, this is vile!

SIMON SZVELA. King's men and King — thieves all!

STEPHEN. They are always stealing my playthings and cuffing me, and they call me No-Man's son. Who is No-Man?

SIMON SZVELA. A man who is not a King.

STEPHEN. Then everybody is No-Man but Uncle Almos.

COLOMAN. Hm . . . What book have you got there?

STEPHEN. My Virgil.

COLOMAN. Have you not yet conned your lesson for Father Csaba?

STEPHEN. This is not my lesson. I want to take the lots before I go to bed. Mother has told me all about the Virgil lots. You open at chance and whatever you touch first with your finger will tell you what you most want to know.

COLOMAN. What do you most want to know?

STEPHEN. About No-Man. See, if I put my finger in now you can read it for me. I am not clever yet.

SIMON SZVELA. [*In a low tone to COLOMAN.*] O No-Man, heed the No-Man's lot . . .

COLOMAN. So be it!

STEPHEN. Here, father—I have it! “O nate, ingentem luctum ne quaere tuorum.” “O nate”—“O son . . .” Finish it for me.

COLOMAN. “Seek not the great sorrow of thy race.”

*There is a long pause. The faces of the two men mirror their thoughts. The boy looks up wonderingly at his father.*

STEPHEN. What is the matter, father? Your face is so cruel . . .

*In the silence the clank of armed men is heard approaching. Then ALMOS enters, coming quickly down the steps, accompanied by OTTO CSUPOR and ROBERT OF UJHELY with six of the King's bodyguard, four of whom bear lighted torches.*

ALMOS. You tarry late in your garden tonight, brother.

COLOMAN. One forgets time in a garden, my lord.

ALMOS. What is this the Archbishop tells me? That you will not pleasure my wish and crown me King?

COLOMAN. Sir, I beseech you, release me from this service.

ALMOS. By God, Bishop, but I will not!

COLOMAN. Almos!

ALMOS. Coloman! This is a matter of grave policy. And it shall be to my device, thus. Men have spoken too much of you as my rival — false speaking, brother, which I myself will not believe. Still, they speak: and their tongues must be stopped. This is the pith of the business. If, with your own hands, you crown me, you yourself silence this treason against us. The Archbishop importuned you as my emissary. He smelt disaffection in your answer. Do you set pride above peace?

COLOMAN. I bade the Archbishop kiss your hands.

ALMOS. Privy loyalty — when I would have your public homage! Where learned you this intimate regard which does not venture out o' doors?

COLOMAN. When we were playfellows, and I bore you on my back . . .

ALMOS. A King can have no elder brother. And he who is not a King is a subject. Take that to your bosom, bookish coz. Come what may, I will be crowned at your hands. I am fixed on't. Bear me this once more and then, if you will, dwindle to winter among your herbs and parchments.

COLOMAN. It is not my bookishness that denies you.

ALMOS. God's body, then, what is it?

COLOMAN. I will not do it.

ALMOS. Not? —

COLOMAN. Not though an emissary from God were to bid me!

ALMOS. [*Furiously.*] Bastard bishop — !

*He half draws his sword. STEPHEN runs to him and clings to his knees.*

STEPHEN. O uncle, be not angered —

ALMOS. [*Striking him.*] Bishop's bastard! [*The men laugh.*] This is a council of disaffection. We have surprised them in the nick. Look you, Sirs, where struts your would-be King — son of a lewd slave — and his son, who is likewise no son, with their High Chancellor — a starveling vagabond! How? Leer you and bow you at me, rascal? God's body, this

must be crushed ere it spread. I'll have this beggars' senate know that I am master of life and death in Hungary. The worms i' the earth will turn rebels, else, and topple our palaces! Csupor —

COLOMAN. No, my lord. This is the way to breed conspiracy, not to quell it. I am an honest man: and he is disordered who believes me otherwise. [*Falling on one knee in an attitude of reverence.*] See, I kiss your hand in all homage. I had not enough considered of this matter. I will do your bidding. I will crown you . . . so you give me leave.

ALMOS. [*Pausing, taken aback, then brusquely.*] Then see to it! [*To CSUPOR.*] How quickly I bent him!

*He goes out, through the avenue, with his followers. The men smile contemptuously at the kneeling BISHOP. There is a long pause.*

COLOMAN. Have you seen this, O God of the Stars? *He rises to his feet. His face is set and stern, but a curious smile plays about the lips.*

SIMON SZVELA. The King's torches have out-fired the stars . . .

*COLOMAN bends over STEPHEN, who leans by the fountain-rim weeping bitterly.*

COLOMAN. Do not cry. I will get back your toy. [*Then he turns abruptly to SZVELA, gripping him firmly by the wrists as he looks intensely into his face.*] You have a plan. What is it?

*So they stand; behind them the starlight flashes in the fountain.*

# COLOMAN

## ACT II

*SCENE:* The Cathedral at Pesth.

*A lofty and immense interior. At the far east end is the high altar, at which several priests — among them ALADAR MAROTY — are busied. Looking towards this, the principal entrance is on the left. Below it is a small door leading, by turret stairs, to the belfry. On the right are three doors giving, in turn, access to the cloisters, the chapter-house, and the Bishop's palace. The lowest is the cloister-door. On either side of the nave is a row of huge round stone pillars. A serial of steps leads to the chancel: beyond, another, to the altar. The chancel is splendid with emblazonry. The floor and walls of the Cathedral are chequered with diapered light shed from many ogives. The altar is hung with cloth of gold. The deep throb of bells can be heard, dominating the confused murmur of a crowd without.*

*JOHN CSABA and OTTO CSUPOR emerge from the chapter-house in deep conversation. The former is in full vestments, the latter in mail with a scarlet cloak.*

*JOHN CSABA. . . so much upon the order of precedence. [They pause.] This aisle is for the Court: that for the people.*

OTTO CSUPOR. And the apse?

JOHN CSABA. That also for the people.

OTTO CSUPOR. By God, a fair favour to the dogs!

JOHN CSABA. The Prince-Bishop commands that his flock shall have full liberty of entrance.

OTTO CSUPOR. And the magistrates and burgesses . . ? Does the Bishop separate the sheep from the goats?

JOHN CSABA. We are all equal before God, my son.

OTTO CSUPOR. Yet the Court . .

JOHN CSABA. [*With a smile.*] Birds of golden spurs flock together. Is there more?

OTTO CSUPOR. Nothing. I'll deliver these dispositions to my ancient.

JOHN CSABA. Bid him keep the doors of the church fast till I send word.

OTTO CSUPOR. It shall be so . .

*He goes out through the main door. The people without acclaim him. Then a man-at-arms closes the door. CSABA turns to ALADAR MAROTY who, during the foregoing conversation, has come down the nave bearing a silver ewer of holy water from which he is filling a small basin hewn out of one of the foremost pillars. About this time the bell ceases.*

JOHN CSABA. Is all ready?

ALADAR MAROTY. All, father, save the Blessed Oil.

JOHN CSABA. The Archbishop will bear that.

ALADAR MAROTY. And not my lord Coloman? Surely the Roll of Service . .

JOHN CSABA. It is altered. His portion is the crown. Such was the royal bidding. Had you speech with him this morning?

ALADAR MAROTY. A word only. He was cold and moody.

JOHN CSABA. Legion must be the conceits of a mortal on the eve of Kingship!

ALADAR MAROTY. Speak you of the Bishop?

JOHN CSABA. I have said.

*As they exchange a deep glance, SIMON SZVELA enters hastily from the chapter-house. He plucks CSABA by the sleeve.*

SIMON SZVELA. They are in the cloisters, if . . .  
[*Seeing ALADAR and drawing back.*] A friend?

JOHN CSABA. He will be with us . . . will you not? With the Church to the death?

ALADAR MAROTY. [*Fervently.*] To the death, father.

JOHN CSABA. It is well: today will see her exaltation. Send out those priests: bid them robe immediately.

*ALADAR goes up and dismisses the priests, who retire through a door at the back of the altar.*

JOHN CSABA. Whom have we in the King's body-guard?

SIMON SZVELA. Every second man.

JOHN CSABA. And they carry opportune arms?

SIMON SZVELA. Italian daggers . . . dipped. When I cry "treason," each stabs his neighbour. That begins it.

JOHN CSABA. Good. The righteousness of our cause shall be baptized in the blood of our enemies.

*ALADAR has returned, and stands gazing with clasped hands before a lighted window.*

ALADAR MAROTY. The saints are shining out of Heaven!

SIMON SZVELA. Upon our holy shambles. Come, let us gather our two or three together . . .

*He unbars the lowest door to the right and admits GABRIEL EGUON, GUYON RAKOVSCY and MATTHIAS ODEV. They come forward and he bolts the door behind them, afterwards leaning apart against a pillar, watching them.*

JOHN CSABA. Pax Dei vobiscum. [*They cross themselves.*] None saw you?

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Grimly.*] This is not my first conspiracy. Is the King at hand?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Our King!

ALADAR MAROTY. [*Ecstatically.*] A Churchman — King!

MATTHIAS ODEV. That is upon the issue.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. How . .

JOHN CSABA. Now is the race to the swift. Abide you here, my lords.

*He goes out by the upper door to the right.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*To ODEV.*] How can you question the issue?

MATTHIAS ODEV. I have been too often darkly smitten by chance.

GABRIEL EGUON. That should buckler your spirit the more.

MATTHIAS ODEV. My spirit needs no buckler, as you well know, Gabriel Eguon. But this touches me more nearly than it touches you — any of you! You honour Coloman. I love him.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. I love him, too!

MATTHIAS ODEV. Keep faithful — keep faithful . . only.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. May I die for him!

GABRIEL EGUON. We are making a mighty King — a warrior, a statesman, and a priest . . a very David!

ALADAR MAROTY. A man after the heart of God.

MATTHIAS ODEV. As a man, ay. But . .

SIMON SZVELA. Hist! The King!

*COLOMAN, in full Bishop's robes, enters from the palace door, followed by CSABA. The others make silent obeisance.*

COLOMAN. Now, my lords, my friends — this is behest and benediction in one: my last office as God's priest, my first as your King. Mark you well this Cathedral. Yonder the main door . . that is to you, Eguon. Post your body esquires in that part of the crowd nearest that door; so that those who enter cannot leave. You, Matthias, to you these three doors; this nearest is to the cloisters: yon, in the centre, to the chapter-house: and that small archway, in the deep shadow of the pillar, leads to my palace. The Court will throng this aisle. Therefore station your men without. At the first cries, let them enter . .

[*To RAKOVSCY.*] Hark you, my oak-sired sapling. I have an hundred Venetian mercenaries, private in my palace. [*Giving him a ring.*] Take this, and with it their command. Keep the narrow approaches, the conduits to the Cathedral. Should my brother or any of his party break through us here, fall upon them. You, fathers, hold fast the door behind the altar. To you I commend the priesthood. You will have little difficulty. [*To SZVELA.*] Your work, contriver, is but the performance of your invention. Our induction is perfected between us.

MATTHIAS ODEV. And the women . . the Queen and her ladies? They will be in the Cathedral.

COLOMAN. They are neither dangerous nor of use. Let them but be quiet.

JOHN CSABA. Time draws on, my lord.

COLOMAN. Then thus . . [*He holds up his right hand and they all kneel.*] The God of Samson and of the Maccabees, the Stablisher of strength and liberty, be with you and prosper you, in token of Whose Presence I sign you severally by this cross.

*He stoops and makes the sign of the cross upon each forehead.*

ALL. Amen.

*As they rise, the bells break out anew in a loud, joyful peal.*

JOHN CSABA. The King has left the Palace . .

GABRIEL EGUON. Then break we off.

JOHN CSABA. [*To ALADAR MAROTY.*] When we are dispersed, see to the opening of the doors.

COLOMAN. To our destinies!

*In turn each kisses his hand. There is a movement of departure. CSABA advances to the palace archway: EGUON and RAKOVSCY to the chapter-house door.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. My sword's majority!

GABRIEL EGUON. I remember when I first fleshed my weapon . .

*They go out.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Looking at COLOMAN fixedly, in a low voice.*] O Coloman . .

COLOMAN, *who has raised his hand to lay it tenderly on the old man's shoulder, drops it haughtily and, turning quickly, goes out through the upper door followed by CSABA. ODEV leaves in the wake of the others, bowed and thoughtful. SZVELA remains, leaning idly against his pillar. He produces a red apple, which he munches. ALADAR MAROTY opens the main doors of the Cathedral and several men-at-arms enter. The people surge up the steps outside and ROBERT OF UJHELY is seen thrusting them down. ALADAR retires behind the altar.*

ROBERT OF UJHELY. Back, you lice! [*Several spearmen bar the entrance behind him and he comes forward, addressing the men-at-arms.*] To your posts. [*Some line up from pillar to pillar with linked lances, others stand guard by the southern doors. He points to the cloister entrance.*] Unbolt that door. [*Seeing SZVELA.*] Ha, choirmaster! What's your business . . ?

SIMON SZVELA. I am turned philosopher. The parade of industry amuses me.

ROBERT OF UJHELY. [*With a sneer.*] 'Tis the one occupation they have left you, is it not? [*To the men at the main doors.*] Let them in.

SIMON SZVELA. Oh, my apple has a very sweet core . . even now.

*The crowd pours in through the open doorway, flooding the left aisle and part of the apse. It is formed of both sexes and all stations of life. There is much jostling and laughter and interchange of pleasantries. Followers of the various nobles mix with the populace.*

A MILLER. God, what a mill 'twould make!

ELSE, HIS DAUGHTER. Hush, father . .

A MERCHANT. [*To his wife.*] See those fat candles. [*Tapping his pocket.*] They have fatted me to fifty crowns . .

ANNA. [*An elderly woman.*] That door's to the belfry . . .

AN OLD WOMAN. Is Feth up at the bells now?

ANNA. Yea, our keen King has made him master-bellringer! He scents a skilled man . . . Feth will make the bells shout today. [*Swaying her body from side to side.*] Almos — Almos — Almos!

A COURTESAN. Drawing water, dame?

*A laugh follows.*

ANNA. [*Stepping aside, spitting.*] Harlot!

A MAGISTRATE'S WIFE. [*To her husband.*] Why are we not shewn better precedence?

THE MAGISTRATE. Look, yonder comes an acolyte . . .

HIS WIFE. [*Glancing at ANNA and the COURTESAN.*] Why should I rub shoulders with these?

SIMON SZVELA. [*With a low bow.*] Good madam, touch them not. Even they be sensitive to vermin.

THE COURTESAN. [*Engagingly.*] Look into my eyes. You will find your fortune in them.

SIMON SZVELA. No, fair . . . but I see yours.

THE COURTESAN. [*Pouting.*] What of my lips?

SIMON SZVELA. Two Graces — turned Fates.

*He passes her by.*

THE OLD WOMAN. . . and your son?

ANNA. Still love-mad. [*Indicating ELSE.*] There she goes, proud witch! Sergei-Michael will come to wreck with her.

THE MILLER. If I had this for a store house, I should grow rich in a winter!

ELSE. Father, old Anna is speaking of us. How evil she looks!

*She crosses herself.*

LUDOVIC. [*A young man, standing by her.*] You will never marry Sergei-Michael . . .

ELSE. I think not . . .

SERGEI-MICHAEL. [*Bursting from the crowd.*] Nor will she you, Tawdry!

ANNA. [*Crying out.*] Sergei-Michael!

LUDOVIC. [*Striking him in the face.*] A mask for your mazzard!

THE MILLER. [*Coming between them.*] Be quiet, lads! Respect God's house . . .

SERGEI-MICHAEL. God's mill — !

ANNA *pulls him aside.*

ROBERT OF UJHELY. Peace, beyond there!

A TANNER. [*To a WOOL-DYER.*] Mark you, Sir, how my lord Eguon's men group together?

THE WOOL-DYER. Ay, by the doors. A gay patch of green. He is a good friend to me. Yon is my best dyed ticking . . .

THE TANNER. And to me. I tan for him.

THE WOOL-DYER. So, friend? Then we dip in the same pot.

*They shake hands.*

SIMON SZVELA. True trafficking will risk a burned thumb for a goodly morsel . . . [*They turn to him.*] The bark that tans leather also dyes wool. Be armed for your opportunity . . . [*He passes on: to another.*] Does trade prosper with you, Master Armourer? Which forge you the more — the husk, or the bodkin that sticks the kernel?

THE ARMOURER. [*Laughing.*] I thrive by the mêlée, friend, and when I laugh do many weep. An armourer's face is the land's shibboleth.

SIMON SZVELA. And you . . . laugh . . .

*The bells have stopped. Feth appears at the belfry door, wiping his hands.*

SIMON SZVELA. Hail, master-bellringer! [*Mimicking Anna.*] Almos — Almos — Almos!

*The crowd laughs.*

FETH. [*As if pulling a rope.*] Who's-a . . . plucked-crow . . . Si-mon . . . Szve-la!

*The laughter goes against SZVELA.*

SIMON SZVELA. One that will clean your chaps after death —

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE. An ugly carrion . . .

SIMON SZVELA. And will fashion my lady a waisted figure!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE. [*To her husband.*] Will you suffer it?

THE MAGISTRATE. Hush. The Court is coming in . . .  
SZVELA *laughs softly and moves aside. The Court begins to issue from the cloisters and occupy the southern aisle. Acolytes have entered from behind the altar and parade the Cathedral, swinging their censers.*

THE MERCHANT. [*To his wife.*] Do you snuff the incense? They are burning benzoin from Syria that I procured on my last journey. It was wondrous precious!

ANNA. [*To FETH.*] Sergei-Michael has disgraced us again with his love-brawling.

SERGEI-MICHAEL. He was wooing her and they laughed at me . . .

FETH. Ludovic, the huntsman, and Else? Pooh! How often have I told you she is monied? Could you buy her? [*To ANNA.*] Have we not pealed bravely? The King will be well pleased today with his ringers!

THE WOOL-DYER. There's old Ittakar. How he mouths with his thin lips . . .

THE ARMOURER. They call him Ferret Ittakar. But the King wears him in his bosom.

SIMON SZVELA. That he may the better squeeze him.

THE TANNER. A wizened wild-plum . . . Look, my lord Eguon is grave.

THE ARMOURER. Some say he is no true King's man.

THE WOOL-DYER. He would have favoured Prince Coloman had he bid for the Kingship.

THE TANNER. That was never more than kitchen talk!

SIMON SZVELA. Yet the Prince-Bishop is a great man . . .

THE ARMOURER. Were you one of his'n?

SIMON SZVELA. I? [*Spitting.*] A pox o' traitors!

ELSE. Who is that old man? There — by the pillar.

LUDOVIC. Count Odev.

ELSE. How sad he looks!

LUDOVIC. Men name him "the good Count." He it was who fed his poor through the great famine.

ELSE. Why is he so sad?

LUDOVIC. Perhaps he is sorrowing for one he loves . .

THE MILLER. . . King Almos is a well-favoured, merry gentleman!

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE. But he must mend his goings and doings . .

THE MILLER. Yes, indeed, mistress. [*Over his shoulder, to the COURTESAN.*] Where's your Amen to that?

THE COURTESAN. In her husband's infirmity.

THE MAGISTRATE. Here come the priests.

SIMON SZVELA. All the priests in the world 'll not mend that . . eh, fair?

*From the chapter-house emerges a procession of ecclesiastics bearing banners and crosses, and chanting. They advance to the chancel where they range themselves and kneel, still chanting. The crowd becomes more subdued. FETH hurries away up the belfrey-stairs.*

THE PRIESTS. Rorate coeli desuper, et nubes pluant justum; aperiatur terra, et germinat Salvatorem . .

THE MAGISTRATE'S WIFE. The brothers of Our Lord!

THE MAGISTRATE. Not so loud . .

ELSE. How solemn it is! Who is that stately lady in the black robe?

LUDOVIC. She holding the boy by the hand? She was Bishop Coloman's wife . .

ELSE. Was?

LUDOVIC. When he turned priest she became no-man's wife.

ELSE. Alas . . She looks like a wax Madonna, frozen.

THE PRIESTS. Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei; et opera manum ejus annuntiat firmamentum . .

*An almoner enters carrying a huge cross. He is*

*followed by a second body of acolytes and then the chaplains of the ARCHBISHOP OF GRAN and the PRINCE-BISHOP OF ZAGRAB: then ALADAR MAROTY bearing the King's sword precedes JOHN CSABA. After them come four acolytes supporting a canopy beneath which walk the ARCHBISHOP and COLOMAN, level. The ARCHBISHOP carries a golden horn of oil, and COLOMAN the crown on a rich napkin in a paten. They proceed formally to the altar. Absolute silence prevails for a while in the crowd. The scene is a strange mixture of Norman simplicity and Asiatic splendour. Then a short, sharp peal of bells chimes with a fanfare of trumpets outside.*

THE PRIESTS. Sacerdotes Dei benedicite Dominum; sancti et humiles corde laudate Deum . . . Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison.

THE PEOPLE. Christe eleison. Christe eleison. Christe eleison.

THE PRIESTS. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison . . .

*Here there is a stir among those round the main doors. The royal train enters: ALMOS and his immediate esquires, with OTTO CSUPOR and NICHOLAS HUNYADY, and ILONA and her ladies, one of whom holds BELA in her arms. The train halts in the Chancel. The women kneel, the men stand. The bells cease, and FETH returns.*

MANY IN THE CROWD. [*Murmuring.*] The King . . . the King . . .

THE ARMOURER. He bears himself more kingly than I had hoped.

THE MILLER. A gracious company!

ELSE. The Queen is comely. Her hair is like roped bronze. How terrible my lady Busella looks! Black as a Magyar gipsy . . .

*Ritual is performed about the altar: then the ARCHBISHOP comes forward with extended hands.*

THE ARCHBISHOP. Indulgentiam, absolutionem, et

remissionem . . um . . um . . um . . omnipotens et misericors Dominus.

SIMON SZVELA. How the old rogue trips in's Latin! Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of the old Adam!

SEVERAL NEAR HIM. Peace, villain . .

THE ARCHBISHOP. Dominus vobiscum.

*He retires back.*

THE PRIESTS AND PEOPLE. Et cum spiritu tuo.

COLOMAN *advances to the altar-steps.*

COLOMAN. [*In clear tones.*] Dominus fortitudo plebis suae, et protector salutarium Christi sui est: salvum fac populum tuum Domine; et benedic haereditati tuae, et rege eos usque in seculum. Tollite portas principes vestras; et elevamini portae aeternales: et introibit Rex gloriae. Quis ascendet in montem Domini, aut quis stabit in loco sancto ejus? Innocens manibus, et mundo corde.

THE PRIESTS. Desiderium animae ejus tribuisti ei; et voluntate labiorum ejus non fraudasti eum . .

COLOMAN *comes down, holding out both hands to ALMOS, whom he leads up to a seat in the altar-space. He leans as if to kiss him, and then draws back.*

COLOMAN. Welcome, brother . .

THE PRIESTS. Quoniam praevenisti eum, in benedictionibus dulcedinis. Posuisti in capite ejus, coronam de lapide pretioso.

THE MILLER. I thought he would kiss him then . .

THE ARMOURER. Ay, the kiss of peace.

SIMON SZVELA. That will come after . .

ELSE. What is that glinting under the Bishop's pall?

NICHOLAS HUNYADY *turns to the people, a roll of parchment in his hand.*

LUDOVIC. The Chancellor . .

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Reading.*] In the name of the Holy Trinity and of the indivisible Unity, we here proclaim, Almos, by the Grace of God, hereditary King

of Hungary, to whom we charge you do homage this day in the sight of God and of the Saints.

THE MILLER. A pretty voice!

THE TANNER. He reads well . .

THE PRIESTS. Vocem jucunditatis annuntiate et audiatur alleluia!

*The ARCHBISHOP comes forward with the holy oil. ALMOS kneels before him. The ARCHBISHOP performs the ceremony of anointing.*

THE ARCHBISHOP. Aspergo te, hyssopo et mundabitur.

ALMOS. Asperge me, O Pater. Amen.

THE ARCHBISHOP. [*Mumbling.*] Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare, fratres in unum. Sic . . sicut unguentem in capite, quod descendit in barbam, barbam Aaron.

THE PRIESTS. Omnes gentes, plaudite manibus!

*The ARCHBISHOP returns to the altar, where further ritual is in progress.*

ELSE. See, the Bishop has doffed his mitre . .

*A pause, then COLOMAN advances. In his hands he holds the crown. ALMOS is still kneeling. COLOMAN stands above him.*

COLOMAN. I, Coloman, Prince of Hungary and Bishop of Zagrab, knowing whose minister I am and my extreme responsibilities, and raising, in the sight of you all and for your witness, this sacred crown, I set it upon the head of your most sovran prince.

*He places the circlet upon his own brows: and, tearing off his robes, stands, crowned and in complete armour. There is a moment of intense calm. Then JOHN CSABA hurriedly buckles on him the King's sword. This is followed by a general stir. ALMOS has staggered to his feet when ALADAR MAROTY, snatching up a cross, strikes him down the altar-steps, where he lies half stunned. Soldiers enter with drawn swords from behind the altar.*

SIMON SZVELA. [*Loudly.*] Treason! Treason!

*The storm breaks. The King's bodyguard fall*

*upon one another. EGUON dashes to the head of his esquires and bars the great doors. The people rush to and fro in confusion, shouting and shrieking. Some, throwing open the southern doors, find their passage blocked by ODEV'S men. Those behind press the foremost on to the points of the weapons. A panic ensues. Meanwhile OTTO CSUPOR has fought his way to the King's body and stands over it, waving his sword.*

OTTO CSUPOR. To me, men-at-arms! You snake at the altar!

*Several struggle to him and form a ring round ALMOS. COLOMAN and his men attack them from the altar-steps.*

THE ARCHBISHOP. [*Wildly.*] Fratricide! Cain and Abel!

*He falls in a fit. The priests, who have fled to the altar, gather round him and, at the direction of ALADAR MAROTY, bear him out through the altar-door, themselves gradually following. In the nave the fighting is fierce. The women huddle together in the southern aisle: the men become partisans, joining in the fray.*

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. Save the Queen, good masters — the Queen!

*He bears her, half-swooning, towards the cloister-door. The babe is in her arms. MATTHIAS ODEV meets them.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. By this way! [*To an officer.*] Pass them through. [*To HUNYADY.*] Take her and the child to Gran. Fly!

*As they disappear, BUSELLA seizes ODEV by the arm.*

BUSELLA. Who gave you warrant to do that?

MATTHIAS ODEV. My heart, madam.

BUSELLA. Fool! Destroy the child!

MATTHIAS ODEV. You mother . . . I am childless.

*ROBERT OF UJHELY has freed himself from the mêlée and makes for BUSELLA and STEPHEN.*

ROBERT OF UJHELY. At least we will stamp out the Bishop's spittle!

MATTHIAS ODEV. A Coloman! [*He runs him through.*] There, madam . . . do you still grudge me the other?

BUSELLA. [*Proudly.*] Yes.

MATTHIAS ODEV. But, I beseech you, into safety.

BUSELLA. My safety is with my husband's destiny . . .

*He disappears into the fight. BUSELLA stands by a pillar, clasping STEPHEN, whose face is hidden in her skirts. In the crowd SERGEI-MICHAEL has sprung upon LUDOVIC and they grapple to the death on the ground. ELSE stands aghast and trembling. Her father holds her with his arm. ANNA whispers to FETH.*

ANNA. The alarm — sound the alarm!

*FETH rushes up the belfry stairs. A moment later a wild tocsin bursts forth.*

SIMON SZVELA. [*To two soldiers.*] Rout out that rats' nest.

*They go up into the belfry. The bells jangle furiously, then are suddenly quiet. The soldiers return with dripping swords. ANNA throws herself, shrieking, upon one of the men.*

ANNA. Where is the King's bell-ringer — the master bell-ringer?

THE SOLDIER. [*Thrusting her away.*] In Hell.

*He slashes at her. The other laughs. The ARMOURER seizes SZVELA by the throat.*

THE ARMOURER. This is your work, choirmaster!

SIMON SZVELA. And your steel, armourer . . .

*He stabs him.*

THE ARMOURER. [*Falling.*] In the heart, devil . . . in the heart!

*All these actions have been practically simultaneous. Gradually the King's men fight their way to the main entrance, supporting ALMOS in their midst. Here they seize up an iron lectern and, using it as a battering-ram, burst*

*the doors and break out, pursued by EGUON'S esquires. ODEV'S men dash through the Cathedral joining in this pursuit and thus leaving the southern entrances free. The women and those of the crowd who have not taken part in the fighting escape by these outlets. The rest press out through the big doors in the wake of the soldiery, still struggling. There are many left dead among the pillars: of the crowd the bodies of ANNA, SERGEI-MICHAEL, LUDOVIC and the ARMOURER are visible.*

*SIMON SZVELA bends over the MAGISTRATE, who is wounded, quietly stripping off his fur-fringed gown. BUSELLA and STEPHEN remain motionless, as if dazed by the sudden stillness. COLOMAN stands alone and grim on the altar-steps, leaning on his sword, moodily surveying the vast spaces of the Cathedral.*

SIMON SZVELA. Come, let me ease you. [*Slipping on the MAGISTRATE'S gown.*] This hid his infirmity. On with you! You shall hide mine . . .

*He hastens to the great doorway where he views the scene outside, whence shouts and the clash of arms can be heard fitfully. There is a long pause. Then COLOMAN lifts his head.*

COLOMAN. This is what the forest sang to me when I was young. O opportunity!

GABRIEL EGUON *enters*. SZVELA *meets him*.

SIMON SZVELA. How swims the tide?

GABRIEL EGUON. Almos has escaped, but we are masters. [*To COLOMAN.*] Come, my liege, show yourself to your people!

*COLOMAN comes slowly down the chancel. BUSELLA advances a few steps to meet him, then hesitates. He stands gazing at her a moment as if in abstraction. Then his face lightens.*

COLOMAN. My Queen . . .

*He takes her by one hand and STEPHEN by the other, and the three move to the doorway.*

MANY VOICES WITHOUT. Coloman! Coloman!

# COLOMAN

## ACT III      SCENE I

### ACT III

#### SCENE I The King's Palace at Pesth.

*The summer chamber. At the back four steps, the length of the whole space, lead up to a columned loggia whence other series of steps lead down beyond into a pleasance of lawns and cypresses. The loggia and pillars are of white marble. In the well of the chamber are couches about a table littered with rolls of parchment and writing materials: also, there are two couches, one on either side of the loggia. To the front, on the left, is an embossed bronze door giving to the King's private apartments: opposite this, an archway tapestried in rose.*

ALADAR MAROTY, now King's Scribe, is seated at the table writing. Below, in the distance of the gardens, a voice is singing.

THE VOICE.

*I am a Swordsmith,  
Yea, and a Songsmith;  
Hark to my hammer!  
List to my fire!*

ALADAR MAROTY. . . We, Coloman, by the grace of God, hereditary King of Hungary, Duke of Illyria, Overlord of the Croats and the plains of Theiss, in this, the tenth year of our reign . . .

THE VOICE.

*Look, I am forging  
Here on my anvil  
Corselet and helmet,  
Backpiece and greave.*

*Here on my heart, tho',  
Am I not forging  
Roses and myrtles,  
Lida, for thee?*

*Before the voice dies GABRIEL EGUON enters from the archway with MATTHIAS ODEV. The latter is aged and leans upon a stick.*

GABRIEL EGUON. What says the Paduan Leech?

MATTHIAS ODEV. That I am for the same house whether I walk or whether they carry me. It is mere old age . .

GABRIEL EGUON. These are humours . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Then humour me. Aid me to sight of the gardens.

*EGUON assists him up to the loggia.*

ALADAR MAROTY. . . the tenth year of our reign . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Lifting his arms to the sun.*] The blessed light! How the trees breathe in the heat!

GABRIEL EGUON. They are like sentinels: they stand at watch.

MATTHIAS ODEV. They are like souls: they yearn to the light. That our maternal earth should ever keep younger than the youngest of her children! How infinite must be her sorrow that her splendid creatures are too brief for the handling of eternal things! And how infinite her contempt . . Man is mocked, my lord. God made us in His own image, but cheated us of His goodliest attribute — immortality. What glory is there left even for youth?

GABRIEL EGUON. My friend, your curiosity is too scrupulous. To have slain one's enemies — that is a man's glory.

THE VOICE.           *Here on my brazier,  
Lo! the hot metal;  
Here in my bosom,  
Lo! my hot love.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. "Here in my bosom, lo! my hot love . . ." That brevity can love so much!

GABRIEL EGUON. Is it a blessing or a curse?

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Drily, sitting on a couch in the loggia.*] That hangs on the woman.

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Descending the steps.*] So, Master King's Scribe, it is today that our liege lord receives in audience this titular King of Jerusalem.

ALADAR MAROTY. Sir Godfrey de Bouillon and his Christian chivalry will ride into the city at noon.

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Tapping an hour-glass on the table.*] Then this sanded globe has but to vomit and I must on with my harness.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Coloman has a large patience with these Crusaders!

ALADAR MAROTY. He is a Christian and they are the Knights of Christ.

GABRIEL EGUON. So they be not a betterment on their precursors —

MATTHIAS ODEV. Walter the Pennyless, Peter the Hermit —

ALADAR MAROTY. The standard-bearer of the Cross!

MATTHIAS ODEV. The prophet of pillage! After their passing, we were as a city that had been sacked.

GABRIEL EGUON. Then Gottschalk and Emico of the Rhine, marauders both, with their vile rabbles. We had to fight them out of our boundaries. This time the King has disposed cavalry to hover on their flanks — seemingly as escort. He will have no repetition of rapine.

ALADAR MAROTY. Sir Godfrey is a noble and reverent prince.

GABRIEL EGUON. If not — God rest his soul!

JOHN CSABA *comes through the bronze doors,*

*carrying a scroll which he hands to ALADAR MAROTY. He is now Bishop of Zagrab.*

JOHN CSABA. Write this fair for the King's sealing. [To EGUON.] Good-morrow, my lord. You have a long march of convoy before you. 'Tis pity we must despatch such a many seasoned men to protect us from our guests, when we need them to scatter the foe at our gates.

GABRIEL EGUON. 'Tis pity, my lord Bishop! After a few festal days Sir Godfrey will ride to the southern frontier, while I, with two thousand picked men, must needs ride at his elbow — to limit his behaviour! So are you left bare to Almos . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Happily we hold him checked.

GABRIEL EGUON. For how long? I am gone but a hill-goat's leaping, yet it is a span fraught with hazard. My going ungarrisons you. Oh, it has been foolish clemency in Coloman to pardon Almos so often! Four times a rebel!

JOHN CSABA. Thrice taken, thrice pardoned, thrice honoured!

MATTHIAS ODEV. Sometimes I question my counsel of moderation. And yet a brother's death . . That were too —

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Lifting his eyebrows.*] Brotherly?

THE VOICE. [*Drawing nearer.*]

*Here on my anvil  
Look! how I shape it —  
Into a troth-ring,  
Lida, for thee!*

JOHN CSABA. Who is this springald has the heart to sing almost in the ears of the rebels?

GABRIEL EGUON. He seems as careless of them as Coloman himself. Yet they are sagely pitched outside the sunrise gate. Myself examined them yesterday. There are some seven thousand of them — but the King does nothing.

JOHN CSABA. The pride of Kingship seems quenched in him . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. He is too austere for the people to love. That is the pinch.

JOHN CSABA. It is the ruffler Almos that takes their hearts, he and his winsome son!

GABRIEL EGUON. While our young prince is a willy-nilly ninny — despite your tutoring, my lord Bishop.

JOHN CSABA. I know it.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Had Coloman a Bela! When the Duke, as is his sly wont, seats him astride his pummel, the golden boy wins all hearts — as how should he not? They dress him in miniature mail with a jewelled girdle. He looks like a little Saint Michael. The rippling hair, the joyous mouth, above all, the eyes . . Those wonderful eyes!

JOHN CSABA. They are neither his father's nor his mother's. Whence got he them?

GABRIEL EGUON. What matter? They lead men even now.

JOHN CSABA. In that they recruit rebels they are basilisks!

MATTHIAS ODEV. A child's eyes are too beautiful to look upon some men's deeds . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY *runs up the steps to the loggia from the garden. He continues his light-hearted song, accompanying himself on a zither.*

*Lo! it is finished*

*Here on my anvil,*

*Here in my heart, love,*

*Troth-ring and troth!*

JOHN CSABA. [*Sourly.*] So, the hawk has become a song-bird!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*Coming forward.*] It is but the moult, my lord Bishop — and a pretty nun. [*Crossing to ODEV and laying his zither tenderly in the old man's lap.*] Your heart is not too heavy, is it, my lord?

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Drawing his fingers wearily over the strings.*] Not yet, but nearly . .

GABRIEL EGUON. Mark me, my headstrong Guyon, do not give battle to the Duke till I come back, if so be you can avoid it. We dare not risk a reverse.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. I shall fight if I am attacked: not otherwise.

JOHN CSABA. They will not attempt the city . .

GABRIEL EGUON. Say you so? Humph!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Still we have Coloman to their Csupor — a Caesar to their Ariovistus!

GABRIEL EGUON. A Caesar . . asleep.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. A Caesar who wrestled with potent Venice for Dalmatia and threw her! Who swept the Normans from the coast-towns. who over-matched the Croats, who invaded trackless Russia! Asleep! Ha!

MATTHIAS ODEV. He is a Caesar in administration, taking great thought for his people's weal.

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I have never understood his strange ideas of governance.

JOHN CSABA. He is too insidiously pagan. He even affects not to believe in witchcraft . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Well, we have prospered.

GABRIEL EGUON. Ay, he is a great King, but a difficult man. If only —

*He pauses suddenly and looks across at ALADAR MAROTY, who is sanding his writing. CSABA interprets his look and turns to the scribe.*

JOHN CSABA. That is finished.

*ALADAR rises, bows, and, gathering up his parchments, goes out through the bronze doors. EGUON brings his fist down on the table.*

GABRIEL EGUON. Szvela!

*The effect on the four men is electrical. There is an eloquent pause, then GUYON bursts out furiously.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. The devil scab him! If hate could infect, he were rotten of an old plague!

JOHN CSABA. Gently, gently. He has ears at every cranny . .

GABRIEL EGUON. The red-rat Chancellor! He sits on Coloman's back like a grim hump.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. A ditch-rogue blossomed into a popinjay!

JOHN CSABA. He is the King's leprosy. He saps his kingliness, he sours his charity. Never an aspiration, never a good deed, but, like the breath of a toad on milk, he fetids it.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. It is a pampered disease . . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Yet he is wise enough for Coloman to love him and for us to fear him.

JOHN CSABA. You grant much to the cunning that has dispossessed you, my lord. He usurps your seat both in the King's Council and in his heart.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Once I sorrowed . . .

GABRIEL EGUON. He stands like some portcullis of ice between Coloman and his friends.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Like a portcullis of ice between Coloman and himself . . .

*BUSELLA enters suddenly from the archway. They pause and turn to her. She comes forward, looking from one to the other with haughty enquiry. They rise and bow.*

BUSELLA. Is not the King himself?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Madam, do you walk to the gardens?

BUSELLA. Do not you hedge me. What were you saying, Matthias Odev? That the King is not himself?

MATTHIAS ODEV. Not with his friends . . .

BUSELLA. I have feared it. That has echoed through my vigils also. Does Coloman regret . . . ?

JOHN CSABA. He has lost his fraternity with Holy Church. He thinks forbidden thoughts. He is tempted of the —

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Chancellor!

BUSELLA. I would have you remember that my lord Szvela is my very especial friend. We — all — are his debtors. Without his gimlet brain, my lord and I were exiles and you under the kibe of my lord's brother.

GABRIEL EGUON. Can good come out of evil?

JOHN CSABA. Yea, my son, when the evil is ecclesiastical.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. But this evil, being not ecclesiastical, warps Coloman's heart.

BUSELLA. You mistake, good Guyon. There is an ague in the King's soul . . . secret, unfathomable . . . I know not what. He is further from me as King than he was as Bishop and, God knows, that was very far. But this springs from himself: 'tis not my lord Szvela's handiwork. A wife misprized should be jealous of every ascendancy over her husband . . . yet my lord Szvela is my very especial friend.

GABRIEL EGUON. Well, while he serves his turn . . .

SIMON SZVELA *enters abruptly from the King's apartments. As Chancellor he is in magnificent and brilliant attire. He turns sharply to EGUON.*

SIMON SZVELA. What? Dallying here, my lord? Serve your turn . . .

GABRIEL EGUON. [*Disdainfully.*] I serve my King!

SIMON SZVELA. Unharnessed and unhelmed? [*Bowing to BUSELLA.*] Fair morrow, madam. Good betide you.

BUSELLA. And us all — today. Gentlemen, this is our Gethsemane as a people. Hungary is a lake in which some immense serpent has its wallow — outwardly calm, inwardly how unsafe! We here are as in a boat in the midst of that lake. O Christ, we must row warily!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Who fears? The army chafes behind these unroyal walls.

SIMON SZVELA. You chafe — and my lord is . . . unharnessed. I have been at thought . . .

GABRIEL EGUON. Psha!

SIMON SZVELA. That state is secure whose captains are controlled by civil authority.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*Turning from him, mockingly.*]  
*I am a Swordsmith . . .*

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Emphatically.*] Peace. Coloman must not be failed.

SIMON SZVELA. You speak well — as always, good my lord.

BUSELLA. Helmet and ermine must take counsel together.

JOHN CSABA. Nor forget to mingle prayer with their counsels.

SIMON SZVELA. Prayer? — a fig! I will gore the Duke in his vitals. Prayer should be always vital, as my lord Bishop has ever faithfully taught, where the blood of our enemies is concerned.

BUSELLA. Then you have been at thought to some purpose, my lord?

SIMON SZVELA. Like the bastard of England, I never take off my clothes before I go to bed . . .

ALADAR MAROTY *appears and crosses excitedly to CSABA.*

ALADAR MAROTY. My lord, the King enquires for you.

JOHN CSABA. What news, what news?

ALADAR MAROTY. The King of Jerusalem is sighted. The wakemen report that his cavalcade has debouched from the hills.

GABRIEL EGUON. I have overstepped my hour. Away with you, Guyon.

*The two warriors run up the steps of the loggia and disappear. ALADAR follows them. CSABA has hurried away through the bronze doors. MATTHIAS ODEV stops the scribe as he passes him.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. Give me your hand. [*Glancing after the others.*] Health is very careless of infirmity. Even I must adorn myself . . .

*ALADAR leads him away. BUSELLA turns to SZVELA in an intimate manner. Her mind is focussed on her husband. She scarcely realizes the intermediate issues.*

BUSELLA. Coloman broods so listless and unmoved

above these cloudy troubles till I misdoubt whether it be strength or indifference.

SIMON SZVELA. It is strength of soul and indifference of heart.

BUSELLA. [*Suddenly clutching his arm.*] Simon, I am afraid. Lately, as I have lain with my lord, he has trembled in his sleep and muttered: and, on a sudden has clasped me, and awaked and thrown me from him. Three nights since, as he lay dreaming, did I watch him weep. It is a terrible thing to watch a man weeping in his sleep . . .

SIMON SZVELA. Did he speak?

BUSELLA. [*In a whisper.*] Yes.

SIMON SZVELA. What said he?

BUSELLA. "He found her dead . . . and I was King." And again, "to be King for that!" Simon, what should it mean? "He found her dead . . . and I was King."

SIMON SZVELA. That's himself.

BUSELLA. But "he found her dead . . ." Her? Meant he me? Yet "dead"—I am alive. And "he found her . . ." Who is he?

SIMON SZVELA. Some figure in a dream.

BUSELLA. And "to be King for that . . ." For what?

SIMON SZVELA. A dream, madam.

BUSELLA. Interpret me that dream, my lord.

SIMON SZVELA. I am no Egyptian, madam. I have no necromancy.

BUSELLA. Interpret it, my lord!

SIMON SZVELA. Have I the cipher to the King's dreams?

BUSELLA. I believe it. Once it came, "when Simon Szvela found her . . ." Who was this woman, my lord, whom you found dead and whom my husband mourns in his secret sleep?

SIMON SZVELA. He dreamed. I have never seen a dead woman. There has been no need for it.

BUSELLA. You are lying. Can a dream without root blossom so many times? Do you think you can deceive a woman, Simon?

SIMON SZVELA. I am not lying. Come, madam, look at me. Should I be chosen as love's ambassador?

BUSELLA. Very well, my lord. Your unlikelihood were your recommendation. Would you swear this to me?

SIMON SZVELA. Willingly.

BUSELLA. Then, now. [*Lifting a carved crucifix from her girdle.*] Here is a crucifix. Within it is a splinter of the Holy Cross. Swear to me that you have never sought any woman for Coloman. By your soul's salvation!

SIMON SZVELA. [*Raising it to his lips.*] By my soul's . . .

*The bronze doors are thrown open with a crash and COLOMAN enters, angry and petulant. After him come STEPHEN and JOHN CSABA. The former is now a youth of some nineteen years. He looks red and shamefaced. The BISHOP is beside himself with rage. SZVELA quietly lets fall the crucifix.*

COLOMAN. Fool, fool, fool, fool . . .

STEPHEN. 'Twas a wager, father. And I have put them back on the altar . . .

COLOMAN. Fool! [*To BUSELLA.*] This fool son of yours, madam, will set us by the ears.

BUSELLA. What's amiss, my dear lord?

COLOMAN. Why, foolery . . .

*He breaks off and wanders up into the loggia where he stands apart looking down into the gardens.*

JOHN CSABA. Sacrilege!

BUSELLA. [*Distressed.*] Stephen . . . ?

STEPHEN. There came a gipsy to the town with a dancing bear.

JOHN CSABA. A scandalous fellow full of fleas.

SIMON SZVELA. And now in prison . . .

STEPHEN. Berthold dared me. What can a gentleman do when he is dared?

JOHN CSABA. They took the bear into the Cathedral.

There they decked him in my vestments laid for sanctity upon the altar — set my own mitre between his scabbed ears! — and then, thus tricked out, they made him dance to the pipe away into the cloisters and among the nuns. And there he became savage!

STEPHEN. He hurt no one. And yet they killed him for it.

BUSELLA. Unprincely boy! You have crossed your father . . .

JOHN CSABA. Would I might have you whipped through the streets!

STEPHEN. And Krisch? [*To SZVELA.*] Shall you hang Krisch, my lord?

SIMON SZVELA. Perhaps. He is poor enough . . .

STEPHEN. [*Appealingly.*] Save him, my lord. [*In a low tone.*] Why, 'twas you encouraged me . . .

SZVELA, *laughing silently, lays his finger on his lips.* COLOMAN *comes down into the well of the room.*

BUSELLA. [*To CSABA.*] We are distressed, my honoured lord. Myself will visit the Mother Superior . . .

COLOMAN. [*His tone and manner compelling the discussion to an end.*] No more of it! This is beneath us. [*To CSABA.*] To your priests, my friend. What are these molehills to that mountain without us? I would be alone. [*Laying his hand on BUSELLA'S.*] And yet I would not be quite alone.

SIMON SZVELA. [*To CSABA.*] You had better come.

*He leads the indignant prelate out through the archway.* STEPHEN *stands before his parents.*

BUSELLA. Ah, Coloman . . .

COLOMAN. Wretched boy, what was the purpose of your pleasure? Those fated to thrones should never offend a fool nor consort with a knave. This prank will cost me a new benefice.

BUSELLA. Ask pardon of your father, Stephen.

STEPHEN. I am sorry, Sir.

COLOMAN. Look you, what is that streak of white beyond the cedars?

STEPHEN. Tents, my lord.

COLOMAN. Whose tents?

STEPHEN. My uncle's — the Duke's.

COLOMAN. Blind folly, fiddling us to doom! You have a cousin — your uncle's son, Bela. How speaks report of him?

STEPHEN. Better than of me.

BUSELLA. Deal not so hardly with the boy . . .

COLOMAN. When I have thrown my brother and Death has thrown me, then will the fall lie between you and Bela. [*Turning away abstractedly.*] But go to, you are a fool.

BUSELLA. Do not fret, sweet chuck. He is disturbed with other business.

STEPHEN. May I take my leave, good mother?

BUSELLA. Get you to the Bishop and beg forgiveness.

COLOMAN. [*Overhearing and suddenly attentive.*] No. Let him cool awhile. But you — you may go!

*And STEPHEN goes, hanging his head. COLOMAN resumes his pacing of the room. Then he stops abruptly before BUSELLA.*

COLOMAN. Why are you not wearing those Italian trinkets? Be not too serious nor too civil with this Crusader. He must not know how sorely shall we lack these troops we dispose about him, nor yet deem that we do dispense with them lightly. This is the kernel of all kingship: to run the middle path of omnipotence. Meanness is no sword and prodigality no buckler. Do you not affect those Italian emeralds, Busella? I bought them of a Greek. Why does your son hold himself so loosely? [*Suddenly he breaks off and bursts into peal upon peal of laughter.*] "My own mitre between his scabbed ears . . .!"

BUSELLA. I have laid aside the emeralds. They seem too festal amid these disasteful drifts of circumstance . . . besides, my skin sallows.

COLOMAN. Sallow? Fie! Your eyes are heavy. Do you not sleep?

BUSELLA. Not of late . .

COLOMAN. Is it care? Send it packing. Is it fear? No, not with you . . Grief? Dismiss it. There is nothing which is worth either care, fear or grief. Would you have these thoughts outweigh your self? Well, you are nothing. So these being nothing's thoughts are less than nothing.

BUSELLA. You have your secret griefs, Coloman.

COLOMAN. I? O God!

BUSELLA. Is it the breaking of your priestly vows?

COLOMAN. The breaking of . . nothing?

BUSELLA. Or your fraternal treachery . . is it that?

COLOMAN. The treachery of No-man to nothing!

BUSELLA. I am afraid of your nothings. They work so much.

COLOMAN. How?

BUSELLA. They make you so restless, so distraught yet so reserved.

COLOMAN. Restless? Ha?

BUSELLA. In your sleep. And sometimes, Coloman, they unlock your lips . . these nothings . .

COLOMAN. [*Smiling.*] As now?

BUSELLA. No — in your sleep.

COLOMAN. What do I say in my . . ? [*He pauses, then striding to her he grips her by both shoulders and looks her darkly in the face.*] Busella . .

BUSELLA. Coloman, there is something deadly in your mind. You have woven me a strange tale in your sleep — thread by thread, tear by tear . .

COLOMAN. In my sleep — tears? I? When did this begin?

BUSELLA. I have not reckoned the time but the tenour. Who was it whom Simon Szvela found dead and whom you loved so dearly that your throne cannot redeem . . his . . loss?

COLOMAN. His . . his loss . . ? [*He stops, looking at her askance.*] Why, I have lost my favourite hound: my sole familiar that — God pity it! — loved me for myself. One, mark you, that would come to me

unbidden, and fondle my hand as it hung, idle.

BUSELLA. I have tricked you, Coloman. It was a she whom Master Szvela found dead — eh, my lord?

COLOMAN. Why, yes, 'twas a bitch.

BUSELLA. [*Biting her lips.*] I believe you — verily! Since when was the Chancellor your kennel-lackey?

COLOMAN. Accuse me then! Of what, good madam?

BUSELLA. You have a secret woman.

COLOMAN. So-ho? She must be very secret since I know her not.

BUSELLA. You know her . . . dead. Remember, he found her dead. Who was this . . . she? I will have it!

COLOMAN. I have seen Eastern mountebanks tempt the fangs of their own snakes. You do not know what you will hear.

BUSELLA. Let me hear it. What was her name?

COLOMAN. I never knew it. Am I mad? You may credit me so. 'Twas before I was . . . this. She was a young peasant . . . but I loved her . . .

BUSELLA. She was beautiful?

COLOMAN. [*Speaking with suppressed passion.*] I felt that she was beautiful. I took the crown for her pleasure — to make her believe in me. I would be great for her. She was my Madonna, my Lady of Ambition! I became Hungary's King to be her bondman . . .

BUSELLA. A peasant? And then . . . ?

COLOMAN. She died . . . of the plague. This fellow Szvela knew her. After I had bloodily crowned myself in the Cathedral for her, I sent him to seek her out. He found her in her hut, dead — dead, my white swan on the poor mud floor! — and I was King. I had destroyed my soul for her who was not. To be King for that!

BUSELLA. [*Bitterly.*] Whom can I trust?

COLOMAN. I have been a shadow playing at substance: my only reality — another shadow! She has continued with me. Harvests have rotted, fleeces fallen away, but not her continuity. She has come with the

leaves and with the snows, and has not gone with the falling nor with the melting. These twelve years has this golden madness obsessed me: growing and gathering even as time itself. Dispossession breeds the greater desire. This passion has been nearer to me than my flesh . . . And she I love — a secret, gone to the great secrecy. Pah! Would you see a King the mime of his own heart?

BUSELLA. Oh, that I had had one-tenth of all that love!

COLOMAN. Well, you have got back your wifhood. What more would you?

BUSELLA. I would be loved a little.

COLOMAN. You are loved . . . a little.

BUSELLA. I think this has broken me, Coloman. I had supposed I was your mate.

COLOMAN. Let be, let be.

BUSELLA. Can I not enter your life by any door? I can be much to you, although I am not your . . . mistress! I have stood at your side faithfully through all your perils. The King's honour has been safe in my keeping, if not mine in the King's.

COLOMAN. Honour begets sons like yours.

BUSELLA. [*Crying out as if in physical pain.*] Mother of Lilies!

COLOMAN. I have no more need of women, honourable or dishonourable. They are the bane of action. I have trod the maze, but now I have broken through the hedge! Henceforth I am love's heretic.

BUSELLA. Henceforth I am but your Queen . . .

COLOMAN. [*Moodily.*] Freedom will come when I shall vanish from myself . . . But now — action! Action! Too often has my brain blunted my activity. My brother's strength is in his son. That my greatness, that my ambition should be jeopardied by a child's beauty! I have founded a dynasty — for what? . . . for whom? [*There comes the shrill winding of a horn from the gardens.*] Our guests, Busella. I have been harsh with you. Forgive me. To our station.

*He holds out his hand to lead her up to the loggia, but she does not take it. They ascend the steps severally, and stand looking down into the sunlight.*

COLOMAN. He is a lean man — yonder Godfrey of Normandy . .

*Gradually the room behind them fills with the Court, to whom the horn has been a signal for gathering: JOHN CSABA in his robes with other ecclesiastical dignitaries: SIMON SZVELA and twelve judges in black gowns with the lawyers and scribes in a body: with these, numerous courtiers — men and women — gaily dressed and chattering subduedly. Among the latter are STEPHEN and MATTHIAS ODEV, who is attended by a boy. Those of chief rank range themselves about COLOMAN in the loggia: the rest remain in the well of the room.*

COLOMAN. [*With a half-smile.*] Now are we ready for this King of Jerusalem . .

*The horn sounds once again and the military procession ascends to the loggia from the gardens: SIR GODFREY DE BOUILLON and his followers in the midst of Hungarian warriors, first among whom are GABRIEL EGUON and GUYON RAKOVSCY. COLOMAN embraces SIR GODFREY. He shows himself the great king, profound in statecraft.*

COLOMAN. I rejoice to greet the chivalry of the Holy Cross.

BUSELLA. You are very welcome, gentlemen.

SIR GODFREY. Sire, my brother!

COLOMAN. Sir, this amity is the erasure of old hatreds between our several peoples: the unfolding of a fairer trade and the freer interchange of arts and husbandries. Normandy is as the sun, of old in Heaven: Hungary, the eastern star. You are set forward upon a quest, which we — the grandsons of pagans — are slow to approve, being but of late brought

into the basilicas of Christ. Many of my subjects would return to their ancient altars, but I am wiser. Our Christian baptism has been our deepest policy. Therefore, we are most pleased to welcome you, to give you rest, and to escort you on your road . . . in peace.

SIR GODFREY. We are your grateful brethren in Christ.

JOHN CSABA. Holy Church has taught us the way of Salvation!

SIMON SZVELA. And how to treat our enemies . . .

SIR GODFREY. [*His eye flashing.*] Except they be unbelievers!

MATTHIAS ODEV. Its greatest gift is the inward serenity . . .

COLOMAN. Yet my people are stubborn folk. I find it hard to wean them from their old superstitions — even by the making of laws. I have angered many by my faith in the truth; as when I revoked the trial by ordeal of witches — because there are no such persons.

SIR GODFREY. [*Dubiously.*] We have witches in Normandy. We torture them into our creed.

COLOMAN. I do not serve Christ with torture.

SIR GODFREY. Hm . . . The mystery of pain pierces the mystery of God. I bear letters to you from our most Holy Father, the Pope. He commends us to your prayers: to the prayers of his son, the great king who has so furthered the Faith. But he is constrained to be grieved in that you do not more encourage the founding of monasteries and communities of retreat for pious men.

JOHN CSABA. Yea . . .

COLOMAN. I strive rather for good living among my priests.

MATTHIAS ODEV. The grafting of a faith is more desperate than the conquest of infidels.

COLOMAN. We have our infidels to conquer — heretics against the greatness of their own nation. My brother is my Saracen; his utter destruction my

crusade. As you rode towards the western gate you saw the land in peace, but there, to the east — how the white tents flash back the sun! — lies civil war.

*An absolute silence falls on the room. All turn in the direction to which COLOMAN points. After a moment, SIR GODFREY speaks.*

SIR GODFREY. We are beholden to you for sparing us an escort at a time when you must need every man to your standards.

COLOMAN. [*With an inscrutable smile.*] I am . . . Coloman.

BUSELLA. You must be league-weary, Gentlemen of the Cross. Your chambers are prepared.

SIR GODFREY. [*Bowing over her hand.*] Gracious madam . . .

COLOMAN. We will discuss many things when you have rested . . .

*He leads the knight down the steps and out through the archway. EGUON and RAKOVSCY follow with the other Crusaders. BUSELLA and certain ladies of the court go out by the bronze doors. CSABA and the priests retire through the archway when the knights have passed. The court mingle together, with much talk and some merriment, and by degrees filter away: many across the loggia and down into the gardens, the rest by the archway. An officer approaches SZVELA.*

THE OFFICER. We have your gipsy-fellow, Krisch, without, my lord. What would you with him?

SIMON SZVELA. That is my affair. Bring him in . . . when these buzz-flies are gone . . .

*The officer goes. SZVELA moves among the disappearing crowd. Some converse with him, but most draw back at his approach. At last, when the room is almost empty, he goes up to a girl and whispers to her. She puts her fingers in her ears and runs away screaming. MATTHIAS*

ODEV *has stood watching him, supported by his page.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. Were you witty, Simon — or human?

SIMON SZVELA. Inhuman, my lord. An innocent child tearing a pretty moth.

MATTHIAS ODEV. You are nearing the fatalities of your policy.

SIMON SZVELA. I have been fatal before . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. But never so fatal. [*Suddenly.*] Fear a bastard's bastard.

SIMON SZVELA. What made you say that?

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Simply.*] I do not know. It came to me.

SIMON SZVELA. I am one.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Fear yourself.

SIMON SZVELA. "I, too, have lived in Arcady . . "

*The officer enters from the archway. With him are KRISCH, a wild shaggy creature, heavily manacled, and a soldier. They encounter ODEV as he moves away.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*To SZVELA, with a smile.*] A guest?

SIMON SZVELA. A spy . . [*To the officer.*] I shall not want you again.

*the officer and soldier follow ODEV and his boy through the archway. KRISCH falls on his knees before the CHANCELLOR, who subjects him to a very keen scrutiny.*

SIMON SZVELA. Have you wept for your bear?

KRISCH. Beseech you . . mercy!

SIMON SZVELA. If the gods had meant me to be merciful, they would have created me as a crocodile. You are reported to have entered the city o' Tuesday by the eastern gate, with a dancing bear. You lodged in the stables of Vasala's horsel. Thence you capered your beast through the streets . . and especially through our camp . . where by chance you caught the fancy of our young prince. The rest is chaptered in your bear's death and your own . . roped neck.

KRISCH. Mercy!

SIMON SZVELA. Does Duke Almos pay a good wage?

KRISCH. 'Tis but scant.

SIMON SZVELA. We pay with life — or death. Have you a preference?

KRISCH. Mercy!

COLOMAN *returns through the archway, alone.*

SIMON SZVELA. This is the man, my lord.

COLOMAN. My brother's spy — my son's fellow! Well?

SIMON SZVELA. Sir, a moment . . . [*To KRISCH.*] Were you Duke's man through love or fear?

KRISCH. [*Bearing his arm and showing a terrible scar.*] Fear. But my daughter is hostage for me.

COLOMAN. In the camp? O piteous virtue!

KRISCH. [*Groveling before COLOMAN and clasping his feet.*] O noble king! O gracious king!

COLOMAN. Do not clutch me . . .

SIMON SZVELA. What does her virtue matter?

KRISCH. [*Sorrowfully.*] Nothing.

COLOMAN. Yet you have risked your life to save it.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Taking COLOMAN aside.*] My lord, we have lighted on a pearl of great price in this fellow.

COLOMAN. What? In this unpalatable oyster?

SIMON SZVELA. Through him we have an entrance to your brother. Suppose that he go back to the Duke's camp with two companions — unsavoury as himself — whom we supposedly have maltreated and whom he has chanced upon in an outlying hovel. Suppose that these, by song and buffoonery, penetrate into the entrails of the camp, what is to prevent their filching . . . a child? He who has the son has the power . . .

COLOMAN. Bela!

SIMON SZVELA. The breath of your brother's nostrils!

COLOMAN. Bela! But who is to be trusted with the theft?

SIMON SZVELA. I — and another.

COLOMAN. You?

SIMON SZVELA. Oh, I can play the gipsy!

COLOMAN. You? Think you well, Simon. And the other, the third?

SIMON SZVELA. Give me a glib man who can con a part and we will be three gipsies together.

COLOMAN. This is master-cunning . . .

SIMON SZVELA. The Crusaders' sojourn will give us time to perfect our vagabondage.

COLOMAN. O little man of great thoughts! Be it as you approve. My faith is in you. You are the spirit that walks beside me . . .

SIMON SZVELA. My lord, to the Queen. You must please her today, that she may smile tonight.

COLOMAN. [*Moving to the doors.*] She has been wakeful, so she tells me . . . [*He turns and looks steadily at SZVELA: each trying to read the other's thoughts: then, abruptly.*] That third man must be well picked. [*With a sigh of inexpressible relief.*] I am unburdened at last!

*He opens the bronze doors and passes through.*

*SZVELA looks after him as if almost puzzled.*

*Then he turns to KRISCH.*

SIMON SZVELA. You have heard?

KRISCH. [*Nodding excitedly, wriggling, dog-like, to SZVELA'S feet and gazing up at him adoringly.*] O Master, how may one become as great as you?

SIMON SZVELA. By hazarding all — upon a guess . . .

KRISCH. And how may one be a great king — such as he?

SIMON SZVELA. By believing the guess!

# COLOMAN

## ACT III      SCENE II

### ACT III

#### SCENE II      The Duke's Camp outside Pesth.

*The tent of ALMOS. An interior of moderate girth, hung with heavy folds of a gold material. At the left is the entrance to the camp: from without arises a busy hum of soldiery. At the back is a semi-circular divan, between the horns of which stands an oblong table. The centre of the divan is elevated to make the ducal seat. To the right the tent slopes round in such a manner as to form a somewhat narrow passage-way to the inner sleeping tent of ILONA. In this passage-way is a small couch of skins, which forms BELA'S bed. The inner tent is divided by curtains from the passage-way. It is night. In the body of the tent a brazier is burning which lights the circle, but throws the passage into a bronze shadow.*

*ILONA is seated upon a piled heap of furs in the centre of the tent. Her hands are idly dallying with some roses in her lap. She is watching BELA fencing with FEDOR GYURI, OTTO CSUPOR'S ancient, in the immediate foreground. The boy, a striking figure in complete mail, wields a small rapier-like weapon which the soldier parries with his sheathed sword.*

FEDOR GYURI. Madonnina! Through the middle! Now you may say you have beaten Fedor Gyuri at fence.

BELA. Would it had been my uncle's middle!

ILONA. Wild little Bela . .

BELA. I am not little, mother. I am your knight.

ILONA. [*Laughing, throws him a rose.*] Then here is my guerdon. Twine it in your sword-hilt. So. [*Holding out her hand.*] Now kiss my hand, as my knight should.

*As he kneels to obey she draws him to her, and, seizing him in her arms, hugs and kisses him.*

BELA. [*Struggling free, abashed.*] Mother! You forget I am a soldier.

ILONA. A soldier never runs away from a kiss. What say you, Fedor Gyuri?

FEDOR GYURI. For my part, I am valiant against anything but a bad breath.

ILONA. [*Smiling.*] And that requires encounter before discovery.

FEDOR GYURI. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] We can always fall back after the first brush.

BELA. Have at you again, Fedor!

FEDOR GYURI. Soh! You would catch me napping? [*Sending the boy's sword spinning across the floor.*] There! Y'are a dead man.

ILONA. You were not quick enough! A wise man never shuts his eyes.

FEDOR GYURI. Except as folk say in my Servia, when his son wears the king's face.

BELA. If I wore my uncle Coloman's face I would pluck out my eyes that I might not see myself.

ILONA. Son, son!

BELA. So should I be a wise man, mother. That were to shut one's eyes close.

ILONA. [*Clasping him to her breast.*] Little son . .  
*The curtains of the inner tent are parted and ROSALYS issues, singing merrily.*

ROSALYS. *On a night of dropping gold  
My mouth met my lover's . .*

ILONA. Who will first forget that meeting of lips — you or he, my red Rosalys?

FEDOR GYURI. Rumour whispers that this red maiden has two hearts — one in our camp and one in our enemy's.

ROSALYS. 'Tis better than to have but one and that in one's paunch!

BELA. [*Standing at ILONA'S side and bending over the flowers in her lap.*] Mother, why are some roses red and others white?

ILONA. All roses were white once, until a girl kissed one.

ROSALYS. [*To BELA.*] Little rose, shall I make you red? [*She kisses him.*] I am come to robe you for your dreams.

BELA. Mother, if you were a rose, would you choose to be white or red?

ILONA. 'Twould not matter which I were, were I a rose. I could not see myself.

BELA. Are flowers blind? Is that why they die so soon? Even these are drooping here in your lap. Poor, blind rose! How pitiful, mother, that it cannot see itself . . . or [*laughing up at her*] its mother! Have flowers mothers? It must be an awful thing not to see . . . I would rather be anything than blind. There are so many lovely and curious things in the world to see.

FEDOR GYURI. Lovely things are always curious — witness your lovely woman!

ILONA. [*Coldly.*] These occasions are vouchsafed to us for silence.

FEDOR GYURI. I laughed to withhold my tears. I had a little son . . .

ALMOS *enters from the camp, an open chart in his hand. He is pointing out certain dispositions to NICHOLAS HUNYADY and PETER ITTAKAR, who follow him. In their wake comes OTTO CSUPOR.*

ALMOS. There's the breach . . . [*He hands the chart to HUNYADY.*] Well, madam wife, how fare you this

summer night? The air is ominous as with thunder.  
[*Throwing himself down on the skins by the brazier.*]  
What a brave light!

ILONA. You do not feel it too hot, my lord?

ALMOS. No. 'Tis a brave light. I can forgive its heat for its cheer.

BELA. [*Sitting beside him.*] May I not sleep in my armour this once? Father, tell them to let me. If there should lurk a king-dragon in the dark . . .

ALMOS. [*Smiling.*] I do not sleep in mine . . .

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Studying the chart.*] . . . in a line with the four haggard cedars . . .

OTTO CSUPOR. It is well begun. Tomorrow we will lime our birds with burning pitch.

ALMOS. The Crusaders rode forward today. I counted two thousand o' Coloman's men under Gabriel Eugon at their heels. Let them reach but three days' march from the city and we will storm.

OTTO CSUPOR. [*With grim relish.*] After the storming the sack!

FEDOR GYURI. Then give me a torch — but not the torch of Hymen: for it will be Romans and Sabines!

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. We shall do wisely to await Krisch.

OTTO CSUPOR. He will never come back.

PETER ITTAKAR. A dishonest eel! Did I not remark upon his —

FEDOR GYURI. Daughter? He was more chary of her chastity than she has been!

ALMOS. Tush! They have hanged him. [*To BELA.*] You are nearly asleep. Come, you must bid goodnight to your army.

*He picks him up in his arms and carries him to the entrance of the tent. There they stand looking out. Desultory shouting from the nearest soldiers hails the child's appearance.*

PETER ITTAKAR. [*Stretching out his hands to the brazier.*] My poor, thin hands . . . This summer weather is full of change and treachery.

FEDOR GYURI. It is like the love of woman—hot, with sudden coldnesses.

ROSALYS. [*With roguery.*] That you may not cast the clout of desire too soon . . .

*The shouting of the soldiers begins to swell in volume until it becomes a great roar.*

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. How they love the child!

ILONA. This makes one live.

OTTO CSUPOR. Your boy, madam, is Coloman's chiefest foe.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. He is the patron saint of our enterprise.

OTTO CSUPOR. He flames into our men's bellies like strong drink. Hark to them! Fools!—yet it is a useful folly.

ALMOS. [*Returning with BELA still in his arms.*] Could my brother's son this much? Of a surety, this time I am king. Where is there a weak joint in our armour? Never before have we lifted standards so auspiciously. Coloman's necessity has thinned his garrison, as his Chancellor's villeinry has loosened his immediate friends. Can a priest and a choirmaster have the knack of men?

ILONA. Yet they quelled you those three times . . .

ALMOS. To wisdom me for a fourth blow!

ILONA. If that fourth blow fails, will they pardon you a fourth time, O Duke of Dalmatia!

ALMOS. Oh, this brother! Dalmatia? Call you that generosity? A dukedom for a king! This time our son will establish us. [*Looking down at BELA.*] Asleep . . .

ILONA. Give him to me.

ROSALYS. I will bring his white shift from the inner tent.

ILONA. [*Lying him upon his bed.*] Let him sleep as he willed. He is a king's son.

ALMOS. Wife, those are queenly words.

*She laughs up at him as they bend, with ROSALYS, over the child's bed, and he kisses her upon the lips.*

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*To CSUPOR.*] When will our mercenaries, those outlawed English and the archers from Picardy, catch up with us?

OTTO CSUPOR. They should march in by thirty hours hence.

ALMOS. [*Who has re-entered the circle.*] Where is the map? [*HUNYADY hands it to him.*] When we have forced the breach our first point of vantage must be the Burial Hill. It commands the roads to the eastern and southern gates . . . Let them bring in wine. I am thirsty.

FEDOR GYURI *leaves the tent.* ALMOS, *map in hand, takes his seat on the divan, spreading the parchment on the table before him.* CSUPOR and HUNYADY *lean over his shoulders.* ROSALYS *turns and whispers to ILONA.*

ROSALYS. His lips are moving . . .

ILONA. He is babbling to God . . .

PETER ITTAKAR. [*Mumbling by the brazier.*] My lost monies . . . and I grow old . . .

ALMOS. . . and so, straight into the square!

FEDOR GYURI *re-enters abruptly.*

FEDOR GYURI. Krisch is come!

ALMOS. What! After all?

OTTO CSUPOR. What say you?

FEDOR GYURI. Krisch, the gipsy, is come back!

ALMOS. Fetch him.

GYURI *draws aside the entrance-flap and KRISCH appears on the threshold of the tent.*

ILONA. [*Coming forward.*] Have you news, my lord?

ALMOS. Here it comes — on two legs. Well, fellow?

KRISCH. [*Bowing obsequiously.*] O noble king! O gracious king!

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Drawing his dagger and laying it on the table.*] The truth, or —

ALMOS. How many of Coloman's men rode out with the Crusaders?

KRISCH. Some two thousand.

ALMOS. [*To the others.*] That is true. I told you. I counted them. Some two thousand. Well?

KRISCH. But, noble king,—

OTTO CSUPOR. But? [*To ALMOS.*] He qualifies your truth. [*To KRISCH.*] Speak up, vermin! But what?

KRISCH. The great Crusader left double that number of his own men behind in the city.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. What? As an auxiliary garrison?

OTTO CSUPOR. Under treaty with Coloman?

ALMOS. This is grave news.

OTTO CSUPOR. Blood of the Virgin! That's a king's trick! Did I not counsel you to reckon the number of the Crusaders both as they entered and as they left the city? Then could we have tested these tidings.

ALMOS. They entered by the western gate. How was it possible to reckon them?

KRISCH. Masters, do not trouble at this thing. I have done your work well. While in the city I chanced upon two of my tribe who had come from over the hills among the Crusaders' camp-followers, dancing and mumming among the men at night. Once in the city they fell adrift and, being taken by the palace-guard, they were whipped for the amusement of Prince Stephen. My tribe are proud men.

OTTO CSUPOR. What of it?

KRISCH. These two men know the Crusaders who are left. They say they could be won over.

PETER ITTAKAR. I do not believe him.

OTTO CSUPOR. Do you not? Then I do.

ALMOS. Where are these men?

KRISCH. Yonder. Masters, shall I call them?

OTTO CSUPOR. No! Fedor Gyuri—

FEDOR GYURI. [*At the entrance.*] I can see them standing between two sentries with torches.

ALMOS. Have them in.

FEDOR GYURI *disappears.* KRISCH *falls on his knees before* ALMOS.

KRISCH. O king, my daughter . . . ?

ALMOS, CSUPOR and ITTAKAR burst into a harsh laugh. KRISCH hangs his head. Then SIMON SZVELA and COLOMAN enter, marvellously disguised as gipsies, followed by FEDOR GYURI. SZVELA carries a zither.

ALMOS. Are these they?

KRISCH. Ay.

*Those in the tent regard curiously every movement of the newcomers, who make a silent obeisance and stand humbly.*

ALMOS. What is it that you affirm?

*SZVELA begins to speak in a high, rhythmical recitative, accompanying himself mournfully upon the zither.*

SIMON SZVELA. I and my brother are from over the hills, from the pastures of the White Ponies.

We ran at the side of the men with the streaked blood on their breasts and their shields.

At night our songs arose with the rising stars and they listened to us and were glad.

For God has given us freedom, us the wanderers, the freedom of song.

OTTO CSUPOR. Cannot you tell a plain tale plainly?

ALMOS. God's body, yes!

KRISCH. It is the manner of our tribe.

ILONA. But it is charming! And, so the news be the same, what matter?

SIMON SZVELA. They rested in the city, in the house of the king, then like swallows they sped to the south and the sun.

But some of their brothers have tarried and they are falcons tasselled to the king's wrist.

As a stone in the midst of passionate

water is unmoved, so are these knights in the midst of strangers' passions.

But their swords may be bought by gold and by silver, for they are of the tribes of men.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. It is certain that many of these crusading troops are adventurers.

ALMOS. Still . . .

OTTO CSUPOR. Where are these auxiliaries encamped? [To the others.] How will they answer that?

SIMON SZVELA. They are quartered in the palace-gardens.

PETER ITTAKAR. We are being tricked! Have such men as these eyes to pierce a palace?

ALMOS. [To SZVELA.] How know you this?

SIMON SZVELA. The Crusaders bade us in that we might dance to them, as we were wont. And then we were caught by the young prince. He had us whipped and thrust out of the gates. I am a great man in my tribe.

*Here three servants enter, carrying wine. This they set on the table before ALMOS and then quietly leave. ILONA fills the cups. Presently the men begin to drink.*

OTTO CSUPOR. Who leads this hostage company?

SIMON SZVELA. Sir Eustace de Burgh. A ruined gentleman.

FEDOR GYURI. Ready salted to our palate!

ALMOS. How can you bring us into touch with this knight?

SIMON SZVELA. Let one of you make pilgrimage to the burned monastery of St. Sebastian on the hill above Pesth, when you will. Trust us with a message to the knight. He shall be there to meet you. He has the free disposal of himself.

PETER ITTAKAR. What do these gipsies want for their going-between?

ALMOS. Yes. [To SZVELA.] Speak.

SIMON SZVELA. A mug of wine and a mug of gold.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. This is worth our fair considering . .

OTTO CSUPOR. Ay, for if this news be true, our first plan is foiled. Come, sirs, to council. [*To FEDOR GYURI.*] Send these three vagabonds to the guard.

ALMOS. Give them food and let them await our further pleasure.

ILONA. Sweet my lord, may not these gipsies dance and sing for us, for Rosalys and me, first? To a woman in a camp the hours are very heavy.

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Beneath his breath.*] These trivial women . .

ALMOS. Wife, we are at business.

ILONA. It is but a small moment . . My lord, I have so few pleasures. Let me bid them dance and sing to please us. 'Twill not wake the little one. Give me my desire, my lord.

PETER ITTAKAR. It will at least serve to prove their gipsyhood.

OTTO CSUPOR. For once, you have made a point!

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. You wisdom us, Peter Ittakar.

ALMOS. So! Let them wait. [*To SZVELA.*] Show us your tricks.

SIMON SZVELA. What song shall I sing to you, O beautiful Queen?

ILONA. A love-song . .

*SZVELA hands his zither to KRISCH who squats by the passage-way. The latter begins to play, uttering a low crooning sound which occasionally rises to an eerie cry. COLOMAN squats opposite KRISCH. He utters the same sounds, rhythmically moving his hands to the tune. SZVELA begins a kind of slow dance which consists of graceful fantastic movements. ILONA and the men watch them, fascinated. The latter are drinking freely. ROSALYS stands at the entrance to the passage-way also watching the performance.*

SIMON SZVELA.

*Bareback on my plunging pony  
I rode thro' the pines in the morning,  
Singing, singing, singing . . .  
Czene was lurking in the brushwood,  
Czene, the tawny, my tawny-limbed love,  
And she laughed upon me as I passed her,  
Bareback on my plunging pony.*

*Bareback on my plunging pony  
I lifted the bridle, my bridle of rope,  
Calling, calling, calling . . .  
And I leaped my pony over the brushwood.  
But Czene the tawny, my tawny-limbed love,  
Laughed and sped thro' the pines,  
And I followed, galloping, galloping,  
Hallooing, hallooing, hallooing!*

*The music continues. SZVELA reverts to his dancing. The men, who have listened silently, show their appreciation. The crude passion of the song has moved ILONA, for she has sat with bowed head and twining restless hands. Now she looks up and her eyes fall on COLOMAN. She watches him continually, intently. He becomes uneasily aware of her gaze.*

OTTO CSUPOR. Aha, there is life in that!

FEDOR GYURI. And the love of a free man!

PETER ITTAKAR. He takes his breath mellifluously — a very mellifluous fellow! I knew another of his kidney; 'twas a choirmaster . . .

ALMOS. He is a lithe Romany. Look, wife, how he wriggles! I remember that my uncle, the old king, would have it that these tumblers were possessed of unclean spirits. He was a saint and drew it from the Gospels. Myself am not clear in the teaching of Paul upon the Gadarean swine . . .

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Refilling his wine-cup.*] Paul is the marrow-bones of Christianity . .

PETER ITTAKAR. [*Vacantly.*] Why is it that the young priests always take confession?

FEDOR GYURI. To learn the humanities.

SIMON SZVELA.

*Bareback on my plunging pony  
I chased the tawny girl, my tawny-limbed Czene,  
And I caught her by her wild black hair,  
Caught her and held her and kissed her,  
And lifted her up before me  
Bareback on my plunging pony!  
Caught her and held her and kissed her,  
Kissed her hair and her mouth and her neck  
Till her tawny body flushed like a lion's tongue:  
For the might of a man was mine  
And the warmth of a woman hers.  
Our kisses were stars of fire  
As we rode, rode, rode,  
Madly, fiercely, on thro' the pines,  
Bareback on my plunging pony!*

*He flings himself face downwards on the skins,  
panting. The music stops. The men laugh and  
applaud. ILONA rises stretching out her hands  
to ROSALYS.*

FEDOR GYURI. Were I my master's dog I would howl! O little less than the angels!

ILONA. Give them wine . . Their song sears me.

ROSALYS. Come with me apart, madam. Sometimes I could hate men . .

*She leads her to BELA'S couch, beside which they  
both sit, ILONA still intent upon COLOMAN.  
FEDOR GYURI pours out wine for the gipsies.  
ALMOS fumbles in his girdle and throws SZVELA  
a piece of money.*

ALMOS. A zecchin for you!

SIMON SZVELA. [*Groveling for the coin.*] The God of the gipsies be bountiful to you!

FEDOR GYURI. [*Handing him a bowl of wine.*] Have the gipsies an especial god?

SIMON SZVELA. [*Holding up the gold piece.*] Verily — and this is his Host, wherein he is transubstantiated.

FEDOR GYURI. [*Gazing at him narrowly.*] You are a strange gipsy!

SIMON SZVELA. Once I dwelled in a caravan with a mad priest . .

ALMOS. My brother is a mad priest. Madness, it seems, is a humour of the gall, and the gall is . . a pestilent thing. [*To NICHOLAS HUNYADY.*] Give me your considered opinion: what are the origins of madness?

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Slowly and weightily.*] I grew pumpkins in my garden . .

FEDOR GYURI. You carry one beneath your skull-cap!

ALMOS. Old gravity is himself a little — a little . .

OTTO CSUPOR. Pumpkins? My wife had a lover. I laid his head on her pillow, wrapt in a kerchief! I told her 'twas a curious red pumpkin! She is since mad and tears herself.

*He laughs at the recollection.*

PETER ITTAKAR. [*Querulously, to nobody.*] I am a tried counsellor that has grown poor in the Duke's service . .

FEDOR GYURI. [*To SZVELA.*] What is your name?

SIMON SZVELA. Is there a name for a rotten apple?

FEDOR GYURI. Surely. A name of offence, a rank name!

SIMON SZVELA. Then call me Leprosy.

ALMOS. How is your brother called?

SIMON SZVELA. He will answer to Lust.

ALMOS. Let him dance. I have a brother . . a mad priest . . He is called Coloman . .

FEDOR GYURI. We have heard Leprosy mime, let us see Lust dance. [*To COLOMAN.*] Stand out, Shadow!

OTTO CSUPOR. Did not the king say "dance"?

ILONA. [*Coming into the circle of light.*] Sir, I have sickened of this dancing.

ALMOS. 'Twas your affecting, swift-mooded madam.

ILONA. My distraction punishes me . . .

OTTO CSUPOR. He does not listen to you.

ILONA. [*Retiring into the shadow and throwing herself upon the sleeping boy's couch.*] O Bela!

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Suddenly singing in a high cracked voice.*]

*Love me, darling, or I die!*

PETER ITTAKAR. There is no more filthy sight than an old man drunk.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY.

*Night where thou art is not night  
But continuance of light . . .*

PETER ITTAKAR. I would have every old man of a sober, clean countenance — not puffed up, nor red, nor yet hiccoughing . . . I have a discreet stomach.

NICHOLAS HUNYADY. [*Taking ITTAKAR by the beard.*] What? Is't hawthorn?

PETER ITTAKAR. Old villainy!

*He strikes feebly at HUNYADY, misses his aim and falls across the table where he lies in a drunken stupor. OTTO CSUPOR empties a flagon of wine over his prostrate head. ALMOS remains oblivious of the rioting about him.*

ALMOS. This is my court. These are my counselors — grave men. For, as Solomon has it, the white head is a crown of glory. What say you, good Master Leprosy?

SIMON SZVELA. I cap you from the same Solomon: all they that hate me love death.

ALMOS. [*Morosely.*] Death. Death . . . If we take the city I shall not kill my brother. I'll not risk Hell for Bishop Coloman. Let him look to his eyes. Thus

much may a man risk in safety. Eyes, eyes . . . Let him look to his eyes. [*Shaking himself free from his thoughts.*] Bring out my son: I would have him meet Leprosy and Lust—good gentleman both, but with strange names. [*To SZVELA.*] Like you the fondling of children?

SIMON SZVELA. He who has the son has the power.

ALMOS. Truly. Well said. And what says Master Lust?

SIMON SZVELA. The tongue of lust is leprosy.

ILONA. [*With bowed head.*] O Mother of Sorrows, look upon this my sorrow . . .

ALMOS. Now, I shall have no scruples on the killing of choirmaster Szvela . . .

SIMON SZVELA. Torture him, my lord. He tortures me. He is possessed of a devil and, in his turn, possesses Coloman. Therefore is Coloman, by deputy, possessed of a devil.

OTTO CSUPOR. We will sew up a live cat in his living entrails.

SIMON SZVELA. Good, good. Never pity a devil. [*He worms himself along the floor to the foot of BELA'S bed. To ILONA.*] Think, were he to get hold of your little prince . . .

ILONA. Who are you? Oh, go! [*In a low voice.*] I fear for your brother. I know him. Are you not his . . . devil?

SIMON SZVELA. O beautiful Queen, let me kneel once by your son's bed, so shall I bear innocence with me when I go.

ILONA. I fear you, terribly.

ALMOS. [*Suddenly remembering COLOMAN.*] I bade you dance. Cannot you dance?

FEDOR GYURI. [*Who has been watching SIMON and ILONA.*] I do believe these are no gipsies!

ILONA. Rosalys!

ALMOS *has come down from the divan, slightly staggering in his walk. He goes up to COLOMAN, who stands silently before him.*

ALMOS. You are a bold man. I bade you dance and you have not danced. [*Drawing his hand across his forehead.*] God's body, it is hot!

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Roused.*] What if they be Coloman's spies? [*To FEDOR GYURI.*] Heat your dagger in the brazier.

KRISCH. [*Crying out in terror.*] Aie!

ALMOS. Spies! [*To COLOMAN.*] Speak rogue! Prove that you are a mountebank!

COLOMAN. I am Coloman.

*The answer at first produces an intense silence. Then its humour and its incredibility lull suspicion, and the men laugh heartily. Suddenly BELA runs wildly into the centre of the tent. He has awaked, terrified, from a dream.*

BELA. The king-dragon! The king-dragon!

ILONA. Bela! Bela!

SIMON SZVELA. He who has the son —

*He pounces upon the child and seizes him up, at the same time with an adroit kick overturning the brazier. The tent is plunged in smoke and darkness. Then, drawing a long knife from his tunic he slashes open the tent hangings and makes his escape, still carrying the struggling, screaming boy. Someone dashes through the aperture after him. In the meantime, the tent is filled with confusion. ALMOS and OTTO CSUPOR have drawn their swords.*

ALMOS. Guards!

OTTO CSUPOR. God, that was Szvela!

FEDOR GYURI. I have killed one . . .

*There is a deep groan and the noise of a falling body. Several soldiers rush in with torches. ALMOS and CSUPOR leap through the aperture after SZVELA. ILONA rushes to the prostrate man and kneels by him.*

ILONA. Coloman! Coloman . . .

*FEDOR snatches a brand from a soldier as he passes and thrusts it into the fallen man's face.*

*It is the dead body of KRISCH, the gipsy. FEDOR looks down at ILONA with a grim smile and taking her firmly by the arm hurries her from the tent, which has caught alight from the strewn fuel of the brazier. ROSALYS follows them. Some of the soldiers tear down a part of the blazing hangings and trample them underfoot: others drag out NICHOLAS HUNYADY and PETER ITTAKAR. All around is shouting and tumult, and lights dashing to and fro.*

C O L O M A N

ACT IV

ACT IV

SCENE:           The King's Palace at Pesth.

*The summer chamber at night. The room is softly lighted by a series of hanging lamps. Behind the pillars of the loggia, across the entire lateral, are drawn heavy rose-coloured curtains.*

JOHN CSABA is standing in the well of the chamber looking towards GUYON RAKOVSCY, who stands on the daïs at the juncture of the curtains, listening.

JOHN CSABA. You hear them . . still?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Yes, still.

JOHN CSABA. What does it mean?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. It is a continual murmuring, like the voice of despair.

JOHN CSABA. Rather, like a hive of unhoneved bees.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. I see lights waving to and fro beyond the walls. The Duke's men, being duped, are gone horn-mad.

JOHN CSABA. I have listened to many such swarms in the monastery orchards. But these are men, and robbed of more than honey.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. We have torn the very heart out of their breasts. [*With a wild laugh of enthusiasm.*] What days we are seeing!

JOHN CSABA. We are in God's hands, my son, who has delivered our enemies into our power.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. There is still the anger, and the outnumbering spears of desperation . . Ought I to

give battle in these straights? Would to God, Eguon were back!

JOHN CSABA. There is a sage precept, my son,— which I would not countenance to anyone but you — that says: when God is about other business, put your trust in the Devil. Let us lean upon the Chancellor.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. I can forgive him very much for last night. [*His face lighting up.*] How daring 'twas!

JOHN CSABA. He was too secret in it. What if he had failed? And whom took he with him? We know not — some deep fellow of his. But the achievement is his absolution.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Our falcons are flown back to us with their quarry. A double booty — Bela and his father!

JOHN CSABA. God is very good. Have we them lodged separately?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Ay.

BUSELLA *has entered through the bronze doors.*

BUSELLA. Will they attack?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Perhaps they do not know their own strength.

JOHN CSABA. With their head lopped, they are a helpless trunk. They must entreat for peace.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Otto Csupor lives for battle.

BUSELLA. Oh, we have hostages too precious . . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Bethink you, that army is now his own. An ambitious general hides a crown beneath his helmet. What cares he for the death of his masters?

JOHN CSABA. He is of the pattern of Zimri.

BUSELLA. Tell me, Guyon, did you see the prisoners when they were brought in?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. I did, madam. The Duke was breathless, and pale as from drinking: and his little son clung to his father's girdle, weeping passionately.

JOHN CSABA. How was the Duke taken?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. It seems that my lord Szvela had set a strong ambush by a desolate shrine, whither, when he had obtained the child, he sped. The Duke, pursuing, outstripped the first of his followers, and, fallen among our guard, was in that manner taken. So did they gallop back into the city.

BUSELLA. [*Haughtily.*] 'Twas ably done.

JOHN CSABA. Of a surety, ably is the word.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Ably is small praise for a very especial friend . .

BUSELLA. [*Brushing aside his remark.*] Is this boy, this Bela, so wonderful in beauty?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. In truth, madam. He was arrayed in armour, moulded to his graceful body. His eyes blazed starrily through his weeping: and his windy hair was wild, so wild . . I could have taken him up into my arms and kissed him!

BUSELLA. Hm. You shall kiss him in his shroud.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. What? Queen!

BUSELLA. I can hear someone walking in the loggia . .

*They wait, listening. Then COLOMAN comes between the curtains. There is a strange exultation in his voice and bearing.*

COLOMAN. How your faces are filled with light!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Our faces and our hearts.

COLOMAN. [*Pinching his ear.*] Dear villain, are you not a favourite in the bowers of women?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*Laughing.*] Sire . .

COLOMAN. You shall teach me to dance. Believe me, there is great virtue in dancing. I have heard tell of a mad priest whose life was in very jeopardy through the heaviness of his heels. What's the news o' the court? I have been abed all day.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. All are afire at the capture of the Duke and Bela.

COLOMAN. 'Twas a golden comedy.

BUSELLA. Who were those swift three? Szvela and — ?

COLOMAN. Two vagabonds in the sight of God.

BUSELLA. They say that one was killed.

COLOMAN. Ay, the better man o' the two. Tonight he caravans among the cold stars.

BUSELLA. Here's your master-mummer . .

*SZVELA appears, bowing, in the archway.*

SIMON SZVELA. What song shall I sing to you, O beautiful Queen?

COLOMAN. A love song, Simon, one that will sear a woman's heart.

JOHN CSABA. Rehearse us the rubric of your adventure, my lord Chancellor.

SIMON SZVELA. [*To COLOMAN.*] Sir, shall I?

COLOMAN. Show us your tricks.

SIMON SZVELA. Then, by your leave, madam. There was a brazier in the tent, and they in the tent were drinking, grave sots, with beards o' hawthorn — and a gay woman who feared me, terribly. And Leprosy made merry among them while Lust waited in the shadow. And there was preached a sermon by a would-be Solomon upon the Gadarean swine. And all this because madness is a humour of the gall.

COLOMAN. Cannot you tell a plain tale plainly?

SIMON SZVELA. It is the manner of our tribe. And when they were beyond their gravity, the ashes were strewn and Leprosy laid hold on the child. Shall I more, my lord?

COLOMAN. Thus much may a man risk in safety.

BUSELLA. He risks very little to our curiosity. Tell us — who went with you?

SIMON SZVELA. A fool dispossessed of a daughter, and a wise man possessed of a devil. The fool was left and the wise man is returned — with his devil.

JOHN CSABA. This is vain trifling! You have told us nothing.

SIMON SZVELA. I have told you everything.

*ALADAR MAROTY enters from the archway.*

ALADAR MAROTY. My liege, the Count Odev has been borne hither as was your bidding.

*MATTHIAS ODEV is carried in on a litter-bed by*

*two servants, who set it down and leave. COLOMAN goes to him. SZVELA turns aside and, mounting the loggia, reclines upon the couch on the left, watching the scene below him.*

COLOMAN. Matthias, Matthias . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Why have you troubled me? I had great businesses with Death.

BUSELLA. God rest you, Matthias Odev.

MATTHIAS ODEV. He is about it. [*Kissing her hand.*] I am beyond my knee, madam, but not my lips.

COLOMAN. I have woman's drops in my eyes to see you thus . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. Why, Coloman? Are we not both at the door of good-fortune?

COLOMAN. Old friend, old master . .

BUSELLA. Your service has not been self-seeking. You have loved us . .

*She bends over the old man and kisses him on the forehead.*

COLOMAN. [*Beckoning GUYON apart.*] I would see that child Bela. Send him to me.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Here, my lord?

COLOMAN. Ay.

*As GUYON passes the litter ODEV stops him.*

MATTHIAS ODEV. Guyon, give me your hand. I have loved the earth.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. There is great rapture in life, my lord.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Death, too, has its joys.

*GUYON RAKOVSCY goes out through the archway.*

COLOMAN. [*To ODEV.*] It is not your least great act to have come to us in this hour. We have seized a strip of advantage, but, in the administration of it, we need your calm brain. [*Turning to ALADAR.*] Do you wait?

ALADAR MAROTY. The Duke entreats to be confessed.

COLOMAN. Confessed? Then he knows my mind. Very well. I will send to him. [*ALADAR goes.*] Thus ends his fourth rebellion . . Confession!

BUSELLA. Let it be the end indeed!

JOHN CSABA. In saecula saeculorum . .

COLOMAN. [*To ODEV, eagerly.*] What think you of our triumph?

MATTHIAS ODEV. You have been served boldly in this stratagem, but not overwisely.

COLOMAN. How do you mean?

MATTHIAS ODEV. The taking of the child was well, very well, but you should have refrained from the Duke.

COLOMAN. How! And have left the supreme gift of Chance to rot i' the road!

MATTHIAS ODEV. Chance is more deadly as a giver than as a taker away. Simon Szvela, this will prove the fatality of your policy—this taking of the Duke. Had you been content with the child and left the Duke, Almos and his army had now been at the King's footstool. So full of humility is a stricken father. But, having taken father as well as son, you have confided this army of rebels to the ambition of a savage Magyar—an army stronger than your own! You have loosened the bases of your tower for Csupor's toppling.

SIMON SZVELA *has arisen and paces the dais thoughtfully.*

COLOMAN. Pho, Matthias, you are mad! My brother's men would not follow Otto Csupor! Nicholas Hunyady, Ittakar.. No . . it could not be . .

MATTHIAS ODEV. That was unworthy, Coloman. [*Taking him by the sleeve and pointing to SZVELA.*] Look, it has hit him!

COLOMAN. They are in confusion. Pull the curtain, Simon. Hark to them! Mad wolves! There—put it to. Within the week rides Eguon back.

JOHN CSABA. [*With a slight sneer.*] My lord has the whims of age.

COLOMAN. [*Turning to him.*] Bishop, there is a man, dying, who needs confession. Get you to him.

The whims of age profit us better than the whims of jealousy.

*And the BISHOP goes, outraged. SZVELA has resumed his seat.*

COLOMAN. Matthias, I did forget my courtesy. Forgive me. Your logic may be thorough, but 'tis a touch too subtle. I do not hold with you. This black bull, Csupor, will but run frenzied round his field. He will cry treaty tomorrow. But we talk in a blind circle, for we have the Duke.

BUSELLA. You must not be brotherly with him a fourth time.

COLOMAN. He shall surely die.

MATTHIAS ODEV. O Coloman!

COLOMAN. I were a fool, else. He will never lose this traitor's itch. This brother, whom I have piled with honours — ay, and loved — four times flown at my throat! That a man would not forgive in his dog! These civil discords drain Hungary of her best. Why, we have no breathing-space for thrift. And the poor . . . There are villages in the hills, fatherless, sonless, harvestless. And in the cities neither weaving nor commerce nor learning. How can I be a King and suffer it?

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Wearily.*] Well?

COLOMAN. I have proven the vanity of mercy. This time I choose to be clement to my people. My brother must perish.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Not that, Coloman! Rather, immure him in the hill-monastery at Gran. There he would remain at peace, the guest of the monks, and would trouble you no more.

COLOMAN. Could I be sure of that . . .

BUSELLA. Never could you.

COLOMAN. Besides, my whilom love for him is turned sour. At the last I hate him. And death is the simpler mean.

MATTHIAS ODEV. If hate has become your counsellor . . .

COLOMAN. [*Sadly.*] O my brother . . .

SIMON SZVELA. [*Softly, from the loggia.*] There was a drunken man in a tent . . .

BELA *appears in the archway, accompanied by a soldier. He is still in his armour. His face is pale and his hair dishevelled. He steps across the threshold, unseen by those in the room, and stands timidly. The soldier leaves him.*

BUSELLA. [*Scornfully, to COLOMAN.*] You are a very moth of philosophy, hovering between action and inaction.

COLOMAN. Were I a woman I should not hesitate — cruelty were then my better nature!

BELA. [*Coming into the circle.*] I am hungry . . . which of you is my uncle?

COLOMAN. I. Come hither. [*The boy goes to him reluctantly. COLOMAN takes him by the chin.*] So this is our pretty foe!

BELA. I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!

COLOMAN. Well, and I hate you. So we are quits! Do you understand that?

BELA. Yes. We have been fighting each other.

COLOMAN. We have — and I have won. Do you understand that, too?

BELA. I am not afraid.

COLOMAN. [*Releasing him.*] Ah, that you were not my brother's son!

BELA *leaves him and goes up to ODEV who puts his arms about him.*

BUSELLA. What may you mean by that, my lord? That he were yours?

COLOMAN. Will your spirit never rest?

BELA. Why do your hands tremble?

MATTHIAS ODEV. Because they listen . . .

BUSELLA. Whatever sophistries my lord Philosopher may spin concerning his brother, he can scarcely stammer in his mind anent this pretty plaything.

COLOMAN. [*Savagely.*] What would you have me do?

BUSELLA. Destroy both.

COLOMAN. This is your father in you.

BUSELLA. Husband, when I was childing and we were bidden separate, then you promised me, if my child lived, to preserve him from his enemies. Is not this twain contrived by blood and by opportunity as his most deadly enemy? Almos is of less account—he has wrecked himself: but this child is of terrible imminence—and fatal in his beauty! Those eyes can raise armies. Why, they have made you totter! My maternity broods over Stephen's throne, sleeplessly . . . sleeplessly . . . Sirs, do not think that I hate this boy—he is a fair poppet—but my womb fears him. Kill him.

COLOMAN. This is the very honesty of perversion. And yet how sure! I do think you know me as a man of peace and kindness; but it is sometimes vicious to strain virtue to her limit. Better that two should suffer and I be infamied of Time, than that my people should be thus continually crucified.

MATTHIAS ODEV. It is not your people's fate that moves you. It is your own. O this ambition! It cracks the mould of nobility, and your great man is withdrawn—a grotesque. I remember how once Coloman, Bishop of Zagrab, preached on Cain . . .

COLOMAN. Ha! Abel was innocent against Cain; but my brother has been four times guilty against me. You forget that.

MATTHIAS ODEV. And you forget that you were first guilty against your brother.

COLOMAN. Matthias, I am the King. It is not for you to fathom my heart in this. The heart of a king is a labyrinth of considerations.

MATTHIAS ODEV. O child Coloman! The largeness of life is beyond you yet. You, who lavish your soul on the intricate poise of mood and emotion, would here scant youth of all its visions, all its ecstasies, all its love! You would cheat the rose of its crimson, the young stag of the bloom upon his horns. Oh,

unthinkable! Your brother is yours, and I will not plead for him — but this child is God's. Bethink you, a little space and you were young, meditating, in the peace of your midnight cloister, upon the stars, until you became even the immensity you beheld. Then were you great, too great for . . . [*He pauses.*] Coloman, come forth from that King!

COLOMAN. Oh, that my brain would sicken . . . !

BUSELLA. Are you unnerved? This is death-bed impudence.

COLOMAN. Sew up your lips! I would rather that you were upon that couch than he!

BELA. Shall you kill me, Uncle Coloman?

COLOMAN. Why were you born? Put your hands over your eyes . . .

BELA. Why? Have I hurt you?

BUSELLA. You know that you will kill them.

MATTHIAS ODEV. Do you know what Death is, Coloman? Do you, madam? Do you, Simon? Yet you give it so casually! [*To the little boy beside him.*] Do you know what Death is?

BELA. No.

MATTHIAS ODEV. [*Clasping BELA to him.*] Oh . . . [*To the others, passionately.*] To send the unknown to the unknown!

COLOMAN. Were there a way as sure but less perilous!

SIMON SZVELA. [*Advancing to the edge of the loggia.*] May I commend one to you? — a way of salvation! 'Tis practised among men whose passions are too lilled for the bowstringing of their near relations — the maiming of them. It is a dispensation approved — as I have myself heard — of a very estimable gentleman. "Let him look to his eyes!" My lord, blind them. If you blind a man, it is no murder. So you 'scape Hell. Yet your blinded man is a man destroyed. For who follows a blind man except he that desires the ditch? Thus, in the pursuit of mercy, you

may obtain salvation i' this world without its forfeit in that to come.

BUSELLA. It is not sufficient.

COLOMAN. There is an arrow that splits our wand! A middle furrow! This is wisdom. This sets us free! It is but a little pain, and they have their thoughts . . . This eye, this sensitive pupil, that sees nothing as it is, whose loveliest imaging is distortion, conveys corrosion to the mind. Believe me, to shut this eye is to see truly. For Truth is the little sweet worm i' the core of darkness. I give them . . . perpetual truth!

BELA. [*Crying out.*] You would not blind me, Uncle! [*Turning to ODEV.*] Plead for me . . . [*In a paroxysm of fear, first pulling and then shaking him to rouse him.*] Plead for me! Plead for me! He is asleep . . . Asleep! Oh, wake him!

*But there is no answer, for MATTHIAS ODEV has died quietly. Gradually the others realize what has happened. An awed silence follows. Suddenly a wild commotion and angry voices are raised in the corridor beyond the archway.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. For God's sake, Sir — !

STEPHEN. How? Will you waylay me?

*STEPHEN, flushed with wine, staggers into the room. GUYON RAKOVSCY hurries after him as though to stop him from encountering his father, but halts aghast on the threshold.*

STEPHEN. I am a gentleman. And here is my mother. Good even, mother. Y'are black tonight.

COLOMAN. You ghastly clown! [*He goes up to his son and deliberately strikes him in the face.*] O Heaven and Earth! That I should be an eagle dashed into this cataract of whirlwinds for you? Oh, that you were not! [*To GUYON, indicating BELA.*] Guyon, take away this boy. [*Steadily, but in a low voice and with difficulty.*] Forthwith let him and his father . . . both be blinded.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*In horror.*] You? This? You, whom I have worshipped,—?

COLOMAN. Both be blinded . . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*Slowly, tonelessly.*] So be it . . .

BELA. [*Drawing himself up.*] You can blind me, but you cannot make me afraid. I am a king's son.

*Saying this he draws his little gauntlet from his belt and flings it at COLOMAN. It strikes him on the breast and drops harmlessly. COLOMAN does not seem to have remarked it. BELA himself swoons and falls backward on to the floor. GUYON rushes to him and, lifting him in his arms, kisses him on the lips. His voice is broken with tears.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Little, pale bird . . .

*He carries him out through the archway.*

BUSELLA seizes STEPHEN by the arm and draws him towards the bronze doors.

BUSELLA. Come away. I think I have lost my eternal soul for you tonight.

STEPHEN. [*Tipsily.*] Never fear, mother. I'll burn candles for you.

*They go out. COLOMAN stands for a moment in abstraction. Then he moves to ODEV'S couch and looks down sorrowfully at the dead old man. Then loosening his mantle from his shoulder, he lays it reverently across the litter.*

COLOMAN. Your silence cries aloud.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Who has come down from the loggia.*] I am sorry he is dead. [*ODEV'S two servants appear in the archway.*] They are come to carry him away.

*COLOMAN turns aside as the servants enter and bear off the litter. Then he catches sight of BELA'S little gauntlet on the ground and stoops and picks it up, looking at it wonderingly.*

COLOMAN. Whose is this?

SIMON SZVELA. Your little nephew's. He threw it at you.

COLOMAN. He threw it at me? I did not notice it.  
[*He lays it on the table.*] Csupor . .

SIMON SZVELA. Be at peace. I have despatched a courier to Eguon to bring him back by forced marches. Otto Csupor's uncertainty as to those four thousand shadowy Crusaders will keep him idle tonight.

COLOMAN. You have done well, Simon. [*Seeing that he ascends the loggia.*] Where do you go?

SIMON SZVELA. Into the depth of the gardens.

COLOMAN. The gardens?

SIMON SZVELA. To hear the nightingale.

COLOMAN. [*A pause, then as SZVELA pulls apart the curtains.*] They are quiet now.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Also listening.*] Strangely quiet. Shall you come with me? The night is beautiful.

COLOMAN. No. I'll go read Cicero upon Immortality. Nothing more can trouble me tonight.

*He seats himself at the table and unwinds a roll of parchment which he begins to read intently. SZVELA disappears and presently can be heard singing as he descends until his voice is lost in the distance. A silence. Then ALADAR MAROTY enters.*

ALADAR MAROTY. There is a woman prays to see you, my lord.

COLOMAN. [*Looking up.*] A woman?

ALADAR MAROTY. And hooded.

COLOMAN. [*After a moment.*] I will see her.

*ALADAR goes to the archway and beckons. A veiled woman enters and stands silently before*

*COLOMAN. ALADAR departs. COLOMAN looks fixedly at the woman who unveils. It is ILONA.*

COLOMAN. [*After a pause.*] You are my brother's wife.

ILONA. Ilona.

COLOMAN. [*As if enjoying the melody of the name.*] Ilona . . Well?

ILONA. Coloman . .

COLOMAN. Sister . .

ILONA. You know why I have come.

COLOMAN. Were you not afraid to come?

ILONA. I had with me my maiden. Your Guyon loves her. So . . .

COLOMAN. Soh?

ILONA. Last night did three in your service bereave me of husband and son. [*Breathlessly.*] You have not killed them?

COLOMAN. No.

ILONA. [*In the same tone.*] You will not kill them?

COLOMAN. I may do.

ILONA. [*Slowly.*] You shall not.

COLOMAN. [*With a smile.*] You are very certain of your advocacy.

ILONA. I am pleading for what I love to a man whom I . . . admire . . .

COLOMAN. Why should I be merciful?

ILONA. You are too great to need not to be merciful.

COLOMAN. What will it profit me to be merciful?

ILONA. What it profits any man to be great . . .

COLOMAN. I mean, are you an envoy of submission from Otto Csupor?

ILONA. We are not intimates, Otto Csupor and I. Had my counsels had the entrance of his to my husband's ear, we had rested content in our Dalmatia. I distrust him; and you — beware of him. I am come here neither as an envoy nor as an ambitious woman, but as your sister and the mother of Bela.

COLOMAN. Where is the wife of Almos?

ILONA. I think she died last night.

COLOMAN. [*Keenly.*] Last night?

ILONA. In her husband's tent. [*Stepping quickly to the table and laying her hand on the gauntlet.*] This is my little Bela's gauntlet! Then you have had him here — before you — to judge him? [*In an agony.*] Coloman, what have you done with him?

COLOMAN. I confided him to your maiden's lover — to my Guyon . . .

ILONA. Thank God! Thank God!

COLOMAN. You must not expect me to be wholly merciful to him. He is too dangerous in these times.

ILONA. What! A little child?

COLOMAN. How was my brother so strong in this fourth . . . fraternity? Because it was your little son who inspired his levies. How perilous an enemy is a man inspired! It must not be again.

ILONA. It shall not be again. You will give me the boy and we will go away together . . . and unto you, peace . . .

COLOMAN. Whither?

ILONA. To Corfu.

COLOMAN. Ah, your home . . .

ILONA. In its golden hills is terraced a villa of silver, looking down upon purple water. There may one forget and live for a child. Terrible enemies! — a broken woman and an unknowing child . . . I will tell him of your greatness and he shall love you.

COLOMAN. [*Bitterly.*] Love me — till when? Till he leaves your lap. Ilona, when he moves among men and they tell him of what he might have been, it will stir his ambition against my seed, and thereof wars and death.

ILONA. What is in your mind then, concerning him?

COLOMAN. My wife, remembering her son, would have him slain.

ILONA. What? And she a mother! O my lord, consider what it is to a mother to see the little warm, rosy feet turned cold and grey — the little soft, plumpy hands wan and withered — the eyes . . . blind! Last night he pitied roses for being blind . . .

COLOMAN. No more, no more . . .

ILONA. Spare him, my lord, as I spared you.

COLOMAN. How spared me?

ILONA. Yes. Last night.

COLOMAN. Ilona . . . Ilona!

ILONA. You were in the tent . . . I knew you at your very coming!

COLOMAN. You knew that and kept me secret?

ILONA. I did.

COLOMAN. A word — and they had killed me!

ILONA. Less than a word.

COLOMAN. Why did you save me?

ILONA. O Coloman, do not ask me. Only believe that it was so, and, for that, give me my son.

COLOMAN. Ilona, tell me. As you want your boy, tell me.

ILONA. O Coloman! In the lanes, beyond the city, there is a lonely shrine . .

*There is a short, intense pause. Then COLOMAN takes her by the hands, drawing her to him.*

COLOMAN. Say my name.

ILONA. Coloman.

COLOMAN. Whisper it.

ILONA. Coloman . .

COLOMAN. Again . .

ILONA. Coloman . .

*He folds her in his arms and they kiss.*

COLOMAN. O flaming perfume! Lips drenched in Persian gardens!

ILONA. My lover . .

COLOMAN. [*Drawing his hand over her forehead and hair.*] Dear, starry brow . .

ILONA. Why do you tremble?

COLOMAN. Now are the skeins of ourselves unravelling, red shuttle to red, gold to gold, fire to fire —

ILONA. I to you.

COLOMAN. O kindly Fates, to have wound our wools so tidily! Ilona, kiss me . . as of old. [*She kisses him.*] Ay, so!

ILONA. These ten years run to seed . .

COLOMAN. Nay, but it was you . . Why did you cease coming to me?

ILONA. I was afraid. Oh, kiss me,—my hair, my lips, my throat . .

COLOMAN. Why were you afraid?

ILONA. Kiss me deep in the shadows of my hair . .

COLOMAN. My lips cannot pierce so far. It is an impenetrable forest. Oh, your fragrance!

ILONA. Forgive me, forgive me, Coloman! But I was afraid . . . I was your brother's wife. Daily and daily I should have feared your eyes . . .

COLOMAN. Oh, those nights, those nights . . . Do you remember?

ILONA. The shrine was dewy in the darkness.

COLOMAN. And your lips dewy upon mine!

ILONA. The night sang about us!

COLOMAN. As now, as now. The breath of the garden wanders through the curtains. Come. Let us look into the garden.

*They ascend into the loggia. COLOMAN flings aside the curtains. The stars glitter fiercely above the trees. The lamps in the room seem to grow pale.*

ILONA. Coloman! Listen . . . It is the nightingale.

COLOMAN. How he spills his soul into the starlight! [*Crushing her passionately to him.*] Ilona!

ILONA. [*Freeing herself.*] No. We shall die of it.

COLOMAN. Come. Sit beside me. [*They sit on one of the couches in the loggia.*] Give me your hands, your hands, Ilona.

ILONA. Did the trees shiver?

COLOMAN. [*Dropping her hands and passing his fingers lightly over her features as a blind man would.*] I cannot accustom myself to you yet. That you should have awaked my passion and then have fled from the threshold of its waking. You have been cruel to me, Ilona. Those first months of desolation—how they charred me! And then, after the old Saint's passing, your message—the message of the woman who would reveal herself, not to the Bishop, but only to the King! So I pinnacled myself, and you did not come—you never came. Your messenger, when I sent him to you afterwards, told me you were dead—of the plague, in a rude hut—a peasant girl! Why is your gaze so puzzled?

ILONA. I never sent to you. I never tried to send to you after . . . after I gave up coming. I knew, then, that my desire was fulfilled . . .

COLOMAN. Now are my eyes unscaled! Gradually I see . . . I was tricked into the crown! I have been used by a lackey who guessed too much and has batted on his guess. O Szvela, omnipotent devil, what malleable metal was I to your hammer of lies!

ILONA. And now . . . ?

COLOMAN. Well, and what now? We must steal away . . . together. Men shall say of Coloman that he vanished in a night.

ILONA. And of Ilona that she vanished in a night.

COLOMAN. It was you I wanted — not the crown. This wormy grandeur is a mask of gold on a dead face. Now let the crown go! For us waits an idyll, Ilona, an idyll that we are both young enough yet to live. A time of peace in the Phaeacian pastures among the Phaeacian hills . . . [*He kisses her softly, tenderly.*] Ilona . . . I, with my old poets and my old dreams, turning from some beautiful page to your beautiful face. And you, brooding, happiness in your eyes, and on your lips, peace. And, perhaps, between us, a third . . .

ILONA. [*Wonderingly.*] A third?

COLOMAN. Our child.

ILONA. [*With a bright smile.*] Bela?

COLOMAN. [*Puzzled.*] Bela . . . ?

ILONA. Yes. Did you not realize? Oh, did you not realize — ?

COLOMAN. [*Dully.*] What?

ILONA. He is your son.

COLOMAN. Christ . . . !

*Leaping up, he dashes down into the well of the room. ILONA follows.*

ILONA. Coloman! Ah! What have you done to him?

COLOMAN. [*Turning on her.*] I have put out his eyes.

*She shrieks wildly and, in the stillness that*

*ensues, the wail of a child in torment rises through the palace. ILONA falls along the steps. COLOMAN bends over her, burying his face in her hair. He babbles to her almost childishly. Then BUSELLA enters swiftly.*

BUSELLA. Coloman, the rebels — !

*She stops, leaning against the bronze doors, gazing at ILONA and COLOMAN.*

COLOMAN. Ilona! Ilona, my beloved! Bela, my son! My little son! Mine, mine, mine!

*There comes a gradual noise and a clashing from the distance. Then SZVELA appears, running breathlessly from the gardens, shouting as he runs.*

SIMON SZVELA. [*As he bounds up the steps.*] My lord! My lord! Csupor has broken into the city! Arm! Arm!

*He stops amazed, the alarm frozen on his lips by the scene at his feet.*

COLOMAN. [*Monotonously.*] My son! My little son! *While peal upon peal of bewildered bells bursts into the night.*

# COLOMAN

## ACT V

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*SCENE:* The ruined Monastery of St. Sebastian above Pesth.

*The old refectory. Three enormous, fungoid walls enclosing a space of deep grass. In that opposite to the spectator is a huge, frowning gateway looking down across a valley brilliant with sunlight in the midst of which rise the glittering spires of Pesth. There is a crumbling gallery in the left wall reached by a broken flight of stairs. In the wall to the spectator's right is a small archway giving on to fields: while on the right of the foreground stands the abbot's seat carved in stone, raised from the ground by a few steps. It is covered with mosses and purple wild flowers. The refectory is sinister with shadow although chequered with occasional lights from the torn windows. There is a sense of doom and mould over the ruin. Sheep are browsing beyond the gateway. An OLD SHEPHERD is seated on the throne, taking a thorn out of his foot. His son leans out from the top of the gallery stairs, birds-nesting. Two large crows disturbed by him sweep across the space with a mournful cawing.*

THE SHEPHERD. A prickle in the ball o' my great toe! [*Calling to his son.*] Did you not hear me? Let the nests be. Beelzebub singe those crows! They caw as I have heard your grandmother, and she — God

purge her! — was a witch. Sure, they are evil things for they fatten on the ruins of a holy house. I'll warrant there are black gloryings here o' nights.

HIS SON. Father, they have settled on the sheep!

THE SHEPHERD. Ay. They are delving in the wool after the ticks. Would to St. Sebastian they had settled on me! Yet it may be that fingers are the dispensation of Genesis . . . Look, here's a yellow lizard lurching himself up the steps into the sun. How his little green eyes watch me! Nine men o' ten would tell you 'twas a lizard, but I know he's a fiend. So, i' Peter's name! [*He throws his cap at it.*] An honest man has a short way with Satan.

HIS SON. [*Who has come down.*] Here's the nest, father.

THE SHEPHERD. [*Leaving his seat and taking an egg out of the nest between his finger and thumb.*] A devil in the shell! [*Holding it to his nose.*] A strong devil!

HIS SON. Shall I scotch him, father?

THE SHEPHERD. Softly. This crackable origin is his dungeon. It must not be broken, or he will escape. Nor must it be hatched or he will come forth. Here's a question for cardinals! How can we finish him?

HIS SON. Eat him, father.

THE SHEPHERD. [*Dubiously.*] That might be very well, but is it i' the Scriptures? A swine can swallow a devil but can a man? Well . . . Put him in your pouch. Your mother shall eat him. A devil is at home in a woman.

*Here four enter through the gateway — THE MILLER, wringing his hands, with ELSE: and with them, THE TANNER, and ILONA, gowned as a woman of the people.*

ELSE. A moment's rest . . .

THE MILLER. What shall I do for a new mill? The storehouse was ablaze. I could smell the roasting corn half a mile out of the city . . .

THE TANNER. [*Wrathfully, shaking his fist in the*

*direction of Pesth.]* Would these two contentious brothers were struggling in my tan pit!

ELSE. [*Comforting her father.*] We have got safe away. Others . . . Darya was killed in the street . . . and her lad. [*Covering her face with her hands.*] Where was God?

THE TANNER. [*Bitterly.*] Where was Coloman?

THE SHEPHERD. What's afoot, gentles?

ELSE. The city is taken! Csupor's Magyars are at work sacking it, running through the streets like flaming oil. The King's men are scattered. The King — vanished in a night!

ILONA. [*Seated on the steps of the throne.*] Coloman the Poor!

THE TANNER. 'Tis Almos whom I pity. There is a tale, noised among the fugitives, how that, when Duke Almos and the little prince Bela had both been made blind, King Coloman ran shrieking through the corridors of the palace, crying aloud that he had blinded his own son. They tell that, in pleading for her son's life, the Duchess Ilona revealed so much of her shame as the King had never guessed. Think you, then, of what Coloman has bereft his brother: his throne, his wife, his son, his sight!

THE MILLER. Yea, neighbour — terrible, terrible!

THE TANNER. And it is whispered now that Coloman is fled, wither no one knows, taking with him the blind Bela.

ELSE. Poor, bookish King! God has been cruel to you.

THE MILLER. Y'are a good lass — sweet as millet-custard.

ILONA. [*With bowed head.*] Seared son, father more seared!

ELSE. [*Softly.*] Who are you that weep for Coloman?

ILONA. [*Raising her head and looking ELSE straightly in the eyes.*] One that touched his life.

ELSE. Are you from the palace?

ILONA. [*Nodding.*] Lately. I was a great man's mistress.

THE TANNER. Ha, a courtesan?

ILONA. [*Dully.*] Yes. A courtesan.

THE SHEPHERD. You have fled from troubles to the habitation of troubles. It does house devils. Why, this very day before dawn, I heard Him — laughing and crying up yonder. [*Drawing his rags about him with a shudder.*] It is a horrible place.

*A straggling party of townsfolk pass across the entrance shouting to one another.*

VOICES AMONG THEM. Hurry! Hurry! The black Magyars!

ELSE. [*As if urging him to resume their journey.*] Father, they are fleeing to the hills . . .

ILONA. The riband winds away!

THE TANNER. [*Pacing up and down impatiently.*] For all his great brain Coloman has shown here but little wisdom. 'Twas a lack-thought thing to send my lord Eguon along with the Crusaders — to protect the countryside at the expense of the capital! Coloman was not rich enough in's sword to succour the two. And he preferred the poor of the villages before the prosperous of the city. It was the king dwindling back into the priest. Scratch a priest and he will bleed milk!

THE SHEPHERD. [*Turning to ILONA, with a leer.*] Why do you leave your fortune? Your trade were safe.

ILONA. It were my death to stay, and yet, poor fool of instinct, I go. My husband rides with Otto Csupor; and my great man is — who knows where? I have known the touch of little fingers . . . O God, that I had been barren! I do think I am the absolute of tragedy. Were my heart an open alphabet it would divert you to madness. In the beginning were a man and a woman fatal to each other: [*her head falls again upon her breast*] in the end . . .

*There is a sudden rustling and* COLOMAN, un-

*kempt and wild-eyed — his clothes torn and muddied — appears at the top of the stairs leading by the hand BELA, whose eyes are bandaged with a black kerchief. The phrase dies on ILONA'S lips. The SHEPHERD seizes the MILLER'S arm, pointing upwards. A fear seems to have fallen upon the group.*

THE SHEPHERD. I told you! I told you!

THE MILLER. [*Clasping his hands.*] Ave Maria, plena gratia . .

THE TANNER. What haggard leper is this?

COLOMAN *comes slowly down among them. He apparently neither sees nor hears them.*

ELSE. [*Suddenly.*] It is the King! [*Throwing herself on her knees before him.*] O my great lord, we were anhungered for you! Bestead your city for your fame's sake. Now we are saved!

COLOMAN. Go to. The night-jar spins and chuckles in the dead wood. [*He looks about him, proudly puzzled.*] Who are these folk?

THE TANNER. [*Bitterly.*] Your too loyal citizens, unhoused — for you!

COLOMAN. I will think upon't. [*Smiling, with the air of one conveying a great secret.*] Softly, we are with the dead . .

*Dropping the boy's hand, he tiptoes round the group laying his finger mysteriously upon the mouth of each. They shrink back at his touch. BELA, bereft of support stretches out his arms with a pitiful cry. ILONA rushes to him and, kneeling by his side, folds him to her.*

ILONA. . . my second travail!

COLOMAN. [*Turning sharply.*] Who spoke? I have loved that voice. Once it foretold me to myself and I fled into the wilderness. [*ILONA hides her face against BELA.*] There is a moving darkness about the boy . . is't a woman?

THE TANNER. [*Grimly.*] I think it is the Duchess Ilona.

COLOMAN. He found her, in a hut, dead of the plague; and so she's no matter. Guyon, is supper ready? Sirs, I have led men to battle. I have been a scholar in Latin; and have opened up the veins of a rose. [*To the TANNER.*] Are you an apothecary?

THE TANNER. [*Humouring him.*] I am, Sir.

COLOMAN. [*Eagerly.*] Can you give sight to the blind?

THE TANNER. That can I.

COLOMAN. Then you are worm no longer but gaudy, an you will. Look you, this child . . . [*He glances round apologetically, almost fearfully.*] A misfortune, good my masters, a misfortune. [*He returns to the TANNER, his voice hoarse with tenseness.*] Put back his eyes, and all the pine forests of Hungary shall be your freehold. [*Angrily thrusting the man from him.*] Clown! You are playing with me! Y'are a tanner. I can smell your trade. [*Then as if fired with a sudden hope.*] Was not Luke an apothecary? O beloved physician . . .

*He clasps his hands above his head in mute imploration. The onlookers watch him intently.*

THE SHEPHERD. [*Profoundly.*] Even a king's brain can come to homespun . . .

ILONA. O little Bela, to think that I was not with you!

BELA. Mother, I shall never see you again.

ILONA. Sweet flesh of my flesh! The very dust is my portion . . .

BELA. Hold me so, mother, for always . . .

ILONA. I am the sorriest mother i' the world . . .

BELA. I did not think anything could hurt so much . . .

ILONA. Bela!

ELSE. [*Turning away, her hands clutching her breast.*] They say that a child is God's mercy to a woman: it is His cruelty.

COLOMAN. [*Realising the presence of ILONA but not her identity, to her, sorrowfully.*] Ay, is it not sad, madam, to see this scanted boy? Have you a son?

ILONA. [*Lifting her tear-seamed face.*] Is your brain so heavy-drugged with one day and one night that you know not . . . me?

COLOMAN. Excellent! But I have not the where-withal to make you merry. [*He stares at her a moment, askance. Then his chained mind makes one desperate leap towards sanity.*] I think we have been lovers. But your cheeks should be fretted from the lips of worms, and your brow pocked, for you died of the plague. Yet the tears of the dead are not palpable! I see you in the midst of a room of lamps overlooking a garden of nightingales. How long since! And a woman comes through the bronze doors, dark and fierce and old. And you lie along the steps, Madonna . . . [*Then, at last, he remembers. Embracing her, he raises the DUCHESS to her feet with the little boy clinging piteously to her, and draws her head down to his breast with a despairing cry.*] Woe unto us, Ilona!

THE TANNER. I cannot look upon this . . .

THE MILLER. Nor I. This is life with its mill-sails broken . . .

ELSE. That we could comfort them! But they look so . . . dread.

THE TANNER. Let us go. I have a cousin in Zagrab . . . [*To ELSE.*] Let your father lean upon me.

ELSE. How good you are!

THE MILLER. To Zagrab — to Zagrab!

*And the three vanish through the archway, hurrying suddenly.*

ILONA. Could love but medicine love! Where grows herb-of-healing for our ill of bane-berry? O Coloman!

COLOMAN. Love has despoiled us of ourselves. We are as smoke of seed-blow — ghosts of ghosts, disinherited, lost!

ILONA. Your arms have fallen from me like two shadows . . .

COLOMAN. To be thus, and this! Have I shot an arrow into Heaven and slain God?

THE SHEPHERD. [*With malevolent contempt.*] You parchment King!

COLOMAN. Let me be . .

THE SHEPHERD. Like all bookmen you are tallow to a hot woman. Lapping up melancholy while your enemy thieves your sop! Yonder lies a goodly city — is it yours? Yonder flee good, lusty citizens — are they your men and women? God aid them, they believed in you!

COLOMAN. Silence your cruelty. What are you that you should sting? Leave us.

THE SHEPHERD. What is dignity without a sword? A bed-louse! [*Shaking his trembling arms impotently in the air.*] Oh, that I were young . . I would have my stone for Goliath. [*To his son.*] Come, boy. We are nothing to this great man. Gather the sheep. I am old and of the earth . .

HIS SON. [*Running on before, shrilly.*] Hai! Hai! Hai!

THE SHEPHERD. . .and tormented of many devils . .  
*And they, also, disappear beneath the arch.*

COLOMAN. Let not even the ashes slip too swiftly through our fingers. Our silken purposes are not severed, they are but tangled. The weft is still to weave!

ILONA. My heart is broken. I am only a soul.

COLOMAN. Hush. How came you here?

ILONA. After it was found that you were fled with our son, I followed, begging this vesture of a courtesan — how meet for me! And when I could not come upon you, nor yet learn any tidings of you, I was caught up into the whirl of the fugitives and carried hither. Is it chance that draws metal to metal?

COLOMAN. Is this to be our peace together, we three? Are these the Phaeacian hills?

ILONA. There is no pastoral happiness for us evermore on earth: a king dishevelled, a child blinded, a woman hunted of her eyeless husband.

COLOMAN. In very deed, then, our guilt is public to my brother!

ILONA. Otto Csupor, when he had achieved the city, straightway delivered Almos; and, when they were come up from the dungeon, they were met by your royal Scribe, Aladar Maroty, who, having acceded to them, interpreted them the rumour blown through every door.

COLOMAN. Of our . . . obsession? So, in my distraction, I babbled!

ILONA. And what winged quicksilver was that babbling!

COLOMAN. And now, say you, they are a-cry after you?

ILONA. Yes, Coloman.

COLOMAN. To what end?

ILONA. To slay our son here, whom you already have half slain.

COLOMAN. No, no, no . . . Be gentle with me. Would Almos slay what he has so greatly loved? — for he did love him, did he not? [*Clasping BELA in his arms.*] O my son! [*To ILONA.*] And you — what of you?

ILONA. Me he would make the kept harlot of his camp.

COLOMAN. Ilona!

ILONA. Mary, turret of Ivory, be my refuge!

COLOMAN. For the while you are securest here. The fleeing masses will be cut down by cavalry. My citizens cut down by cavalry — and I, an onlooker! Guyon was too young and I had sent away old Eguon. That left but Coloman, and he, for a day and for a night, vanished from himself. And now, one limb of that poor beast, his mind, is broken, and he cannot go o' three legs. O Pesth, my fair city! O my people! I have been a womanish king to you. In my supreme hour my genius cracked like an eggshell, and, at the last, I was only of the red earth — mortal, human, common!

ILONA. Hyssop your heart. For a brief minute we are a family: for a brief minute I am your wife. And

it falls to a wife to be of good cheer and to uplift her lord's head in his adversity. Therefore let us be calm and homely, and talk one to the other very simply, as we were children.

COLOMAN. Two children at play with a blind child!

ILONA. [*Taking his hands as they kneel above BELA who is playing in the grass at their feet.*] And we, my lord, are almost blinded from our poor tears . . . [*To BELA.*] What is it, sweeting?

BELA. What is moving under the earth?

COLOMAN. Under the earth?

BELA. Beneath my hand. It has been moving for a long time, in a line . . .

ILONA. 'Tis a little blind brother of yours — a mole.

BELA. [*Turning towards COLOMAN.*] Did you blind him? Was he, too, your son?

*For a long pause COLOMAN and ILONA regard each other. Then a confused shouting arises and sounds of hurrying, as a vast stream of populace crosses the space of the archway. There is every evidence of panic and uncontrollable terror in their movements.*

SEVERAL PERSONS. For your lives! For your lives! Nothing is safe!

*One member of the crowd, the WOOL-DYER, seeing there are people in the ruins enters excitedly.*

THE WOOL-DYER. Up with you, friends! Queen Busella has left the Citadel. Lord Rakovscy's phalanx is broken. All is lost!

*He dashes back into the crowd which presently straggles to an end. The noise dies away.*

COLOMAN. I think that the world must sound so to the dead in graves . . .

ILONA. Truly, the city has been stricken at very heart. What ailed the proud armies of Coloman, my lord?

COLOMAN. The love of Coloman for Ilona. A dark disease, O priestess of destruction!

ILONA. [*In a low voice.*] In the end was the woman fatal to the man . . .

COLOMAN. Busella has fought to the bitter doom. Hers was the man's spirit. She was more my mate than you: yet it is you I love, not she. O God, solve me these opposites!

ILONA. Even God cannot solve love.

BELA. [*Suddenly.*] Mother, some horrible thing is coming. It does not walk and it does not creep . . . but I can feel the air shudder . . . Mother, hide me from it!

ILONA. [*Hiding the boy's face in her lap: rapidly, to COLOMAN.*] The child is right. Someone is coming. Do you not hear it? It is like a man, panting. Coloman, who is it?

*As they wait, listening, SIMON SZVELA appears in the archway. He has been hurrying. He has thrown a long, enveloping, green cloak over his rich tunic, with the cap of a Venetian merchant. He stands for a moment, uncertain, outside the ruin. Then ILONA, overcome with fear, gives vent to a half-stifled cry, and the CHANCELLOR starts and enters the enclosure. He stops, amazed.*

COLOMAN. [*Bitterly.*] Well met, my lord choir-master!

SIMON SZVELA. That we are met is well, but thus met, ill. [*Looking round him.*] Is this the Bishop's oratory or his burrow?

COLOMAN. Tell me, are you scholarly in the instincts of animals?

SIMON SZVELA. Why, very well, I think.

COLOMAN. Does not the red rat leave falling houses?

SIMON SZVELA. No more than the ecclesiastical maggot, in some old library, leaves pagan vellum — while 'tis sweet i' the mouth. [*Looking at COLOMAN very curiously.*] Yet rat and rabbit may have a last word together. [*He seats himself for a moment on the steps of the abbot's throne, and surveys his companions with a cynical geniality.*] What a change of weeds and welfare has this little company known since a king and

his chancellor went a-mumming! Into what Egypt does this holy family flee? For my own part, I make for Venice, thence to Rome, where I may yet howl my "Praise God" on a Jew's harp in Peter's chair — ha-ha-ha! — unless . . . unless what, Madonna?

ILONA. [*Watching him: fascinated: her voice dry and heavy.*] This time you are not come for my boy . . .

SIMON SZVELA. No. He is past my necessities. Verily, I am a Pope i' the egg, unless I can work anew my old miracle . . .

COLOMAN. What was that, scoffer?

SIMON SZVELA. My especial miracle, sir — the raising of a man from the dead.

COLOMAN. [*To ILONA.*] When there were carp in my fountain, this fellow was a potter of nightingales . . .

ILONA. I gather your intent, conjurer, but here's a pass beyond your magic.

SIMON SZVELA. By your leave, taffeta. [*Rising.*] My lord, yesterday and you held Hungary in fee, today and you are but a prince of tinkers. Know you what has happened in the city?

COLOMAN. It is a tale that is told, a wind that is passed.

SIMON SZVELA. We are a sick man dying because the physician's mule has untimely cast a shoe. Guyon Rakovscy fights like a Paladin, but the troops in their agony have cried for "Coloman"— for "Coloman"; And Coloman was with his . . .

COLOMAN. Simon!

SIMON SZVELA. Had some privy devil but whispered me to seek the lost jewel of our fortunes in this broken casket, we had held firm till Gabriel Eguon's coming. For he comes, sure and swift: it may be within the hour. Yet we perish for immediancy! Mahoun and Termagant! Cannot you see that if you go into battle even now you are the rallying-point? You would transmute the field!

COLOMAN. Go you to Venice, Simon . . . I am in the autumn of my ambition.

SIMON SZVELA. Y'are sere with stale passion! To me, if not to you, exile will come cold! Has my child outgrown my teaching? 'Tis the old indecisions! Action was ever your text, my lord Bishop, but your sermon never ventured beyond evasion.

COLOMAN. And your evasion, friend, it would seem, were Venice. [*He opens SZVELA'S cloak and discloses several fat bags of gold in his belt.*] I am pleased to see that my Chancellor has not been improvident! Are these your "monies of King Coloman"?

SIMON SZVELA. A mere picking . . . My schemes, look you, change with the weather. Like the swallow i' the madrigal I was for the south, but the finding you prolongs my summer. Besides, the moons of Italy breed distempers . . .

COLOMAN. But not the moons of Venice, Simon! Go you to Venice.

SIMON SZVELA. Whether I prevail with you or no, I shall not now beyond Hungary. If you cannot drive a dead horse, you must sell his carcass. [*His voice and manner changed: imploringly.*] O Coloman, for God's sake, be compelled by me!

COLOMAN. I think you forget my unhappiness. I have read of Greek kings who were much troubled of God in their house from the beginning to the end. But upon me, in one night, is fallen a fatality of sorrow. See, I am visited of grey hairs — the foliage of my greyer thoughts. Marked you never the great oak-tree before the church door at Gran, how it is bound with iron chains to keep it from bursting? It was I who bound that tree, Simon! Would that in like manner I had bound my heart . . .

SIMON SZVELA. A wise man should feel with his head, not his heart; else he were better born a jelly-fish. 'A has no back-bone!

COLOMAN. There happens a time to all men when they may set their spent horoscopes to immutable sleep. It is nothing to be busy; it is everything to feel. Do you remember the Virgil lots which No-Man took in his

garden beneath the Pleiades? From that day I was lost, because I was no more afraid; and they who have not any more fear have not any more wisdom. But now have I met fear . . . [*Indicating ILONA and BELA.*] Henceforward these are my kingdom. Their wrongs, which I have wrought, master me. Their forgiveness, the which I beg, shall become my winter ambition.

SIMON SZVELA. What is this weeping, gay woman and this blind basilisk to the empire you so wanton with? Has Hungary no soul? Further, Eguon, Rakovscy, myself . . . Sir, would you betray your friends?

COLOMAN. I am too burned to steal you any more roast pippins from the fire. [*Looking up with a whimsical smile. He has seated himself on the steps.*] Man is like the Persian silk-worm, who, when he has lived his fill, spins himself a yellow sanctuary in which to philosophize. And there, wrapt within himself, his thoughts take the colour o' their compass, and he desires no more his empire of mulberry leaves. [*His voice becoming grave.*] This doom, my lord, is my yellow sanctuary. [*Wearily.*] It may be that my brain is a torn parchment . . . [*Then vehemently.*] But this I know, Szvela, I shall not back with you, by God's agony!

SIMON SZVELA. I suppose there are some would consider you a sad figure.

ILONA. [*To SZVELA, with proud bitterness.*] Be kindly to us, black spirit! You carry a Milanese knife. Deafen our ears with death.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Turning to her.*] And you, rosa mystica . . . What power is it in you soft women that can so crumple up the iron politics of men? You, with whom in all my life, I have spoken barely ten words, have been absolute to destroy me! What most fantastic brain would have dreamed of your hooded freedoms o' nights with a hoodwinked priest, who knew you as something dark from the darkness — and no more. I have watched you of old from the organ, at Sunday mass . . . praying, endlessly praying . . . Oh, that I had

known what secret lay snug behind that clicking rosary!

ILONA. You could not have. It was love . . .

SIMON SZVELA. I guessed the fact, but not the woman. Love to me, as to the mathematician, is detestation: it is too incalculable. To hang your prosperities on a lover's actions is to go hang! I had my pieces before me on the chess-board. I knew to a square whither they would move; and, lo! a hand, unseen, unforeseen, scatters the pattern of my pawns and spoils my game. For which I love not this love.

COLOMAN. And now the one measure of your mathematics is to show you the straightest line to Venice . . .

SIMON SZVELA. [*Stung to savage mockery.*] Blessed are they that are outcast, that go a-whoring, that are demented, for they cannot be brought lower than they are!

COLOMAN. We are none of us but the shadows of our fates . . .

SIMON SZVELA. You pricked bubble! And I have balanced you on my reed for so long i' the air . . . I was born with a king's brain, you with a king's opportunity. I had to absorb your insignificant ambitions into the mosaic of my imperial self. But for me you might have died an old Bishop and smelled of sanctity beneath a Latin epitaph on an onion-stone. Whereas now Time will lay you by in the spices of laws and battles and legends of disaster — because once we two talked together in a garden. Yet of us have great things happened in Hungary, O my partner, manifestations of power and power and again power! And in all this, I was — that I was!

COLOMAN. [*Turning and advancing menacingly upon him, white with passion.*] Dog and slave! There is in these fingers that could find your throat! O Heaven, give me the natural rage of a man! This vulture has followed my true self from wilderness to wilderness, smelling my sickness of life, flapping his sinister wings over my doomed soul. And here he waits to see me

die! Come, father of lies, behold your children and grow pale . . . You lied to me of my beloved, you lied to me of her message, you lied to me of her death. O God, that a moving, breathing thing so foully slimy should wear the likeness of Thyself! Why is there no angel, guardian of a man's ears? You have encompassed me about with the four walls of evil. Evil have been your ends, evil your means; evil at board, evil in council. That tryst of blood in the Cathedral, the fackel of so much civil war, was authored and finished by you — I but the miserable mask and mouth-piece, stitched together with my own conceits! You turned me foreign to my friends and dishumoured me from their honest counsels. The continual slow dropping of your misanthropy froze my human arteries. Even those who loved me . . . Matthias, Matthias . . . [*Suddenly.*] Who sits i' the abbot's chair? Are you come from Heaven at my calling?

ILONA. Why do you look so, my lord?

COLOMAN. [*Drawing his hand across his forehead.*] No, no — no, no! I thought that I was companioned by an old friend's spirit. Such things are not! Yet there were tears on his cheeks, and in his eyes, tears . . . Was it? Was it not? Which is the ghost and which is I?

BELA. [*Putting his hand into COLOMAN'S.*] Of whom do you speak? I have only heard three voices . . .

COLOMAN. [*Bending over him in passionate grief.*] O all and to come of lamentation! Kiss me . . . Let me guide your lips to my cheek — no, no, no! I dare not!

BELA. Father . . .

COLOMAN. Take him to you, Ilona, for God's sake! [*ILONA takes the boy in her arms and, sitting on the ground, gradually hushes him to sleep, sheltering him from the noises of the ensuing scenes. To SZVELA.*] Now, enginer of tragedy, I will be swift with you! This fledgeling, this frail boy, my son, has borne the full brunt of your most mischievous inventions. You

it was who sowed in me the thought to steal him, and, after that, the thought to blind him! My son! That this broken pillar were my brazier and these fingers my burning irons to hiss their way into your unkindly sockets! [*Seizing him by the throat.*] Apes and peacocks! [*As they grapple.*] Y'are on the Rialto, Simon! The Gondolier o' the Styx waits for his obol! [*He throws him to the ground.*] So fall skittles!

*Here five soldiers, bloody and panting, enter from the archway and pass across the space, conversing brokenly. They go out by the small arch to the right. Simultaneously others are seen hurrying beyond the archway in the same direction as the earlier fugitives. The far-off clashings heard previously are now grown louder and more continuous. SIMON SZVELA clammers to his feet, choking and gasping. Then BUSELLA, surrounded by GUYON RAKOVSCY, STEPHEN, JOHN CSABA and the captains of the bodyguard, enter in breathless haste.*

BUSELLA. The traitors are endebted to their English mercenaries!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. And to their Picard bowmen. [*Plucking the shaft of an arrow from his targe and flinging it to the ground.*] Here's French goosequill..

JOHN CSABA. [*Peering at the group in the enclosure.*] These should be known faces . . .

BUSELLA. [*Coming forward.*] Coloman! Coloman..

COLOMAN. Once, madam, I was he.

JOHN CSABA. [*To SZVELA, maliciously.*] Is it you, my lord Chancellor?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. At last, O my King! Gird you, for we are beset today!

COLOMAN. I can catch rats, Guyon . . .

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*To BUSELLA.*] Madam, the King is ill . . .

BUSELLA. [*Looking at ILONA.*] And there is his sickness . . .

*The two women silently regard each other.*

STEPHEN. [*Whispering, to SZVELA.*] Wherefore this green cloak, sweet my lord?

SIMON SZVELA. [*Opening his cloak.*] Because it has a black lining . . .

*He turns and, passing through the soldiery, walks rapidly away to the left of the main archway.*

JOHN CSABA. [*Looking after him.*] Soh, is his broth grown cold?

COLOMAN. [*Gently to RAKOVSCY.*] I am awaited, am I not?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. We have awaited you hungrily these many fierce hours!

COLOMAN. I meant not of you, dear warrior . . . but of my Omega.

BUSELLA. Sirs, we waste our occasion in this mouldy trap. Let us reshape our field till we can hear the horsemen's horns of my lord Eguon.

JOHN CSABA. What if the messenger died by the road? Had we not better entreat a parley? 'Twould commit us to nothing.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Parley? A pulpit counsel! [*To COLOMAN.*] My lord, I kneel to you. Fight, fight!

COLOMAN. [*Sorrowfully.*] O Guyon, simplify me to myself . . .

*A wounded OFFICER with a drawn sword enters excitedly.*

BUSELLA. Here's one from the middle battle. Well, sir.

THE OFFICER. O madam, I am spent. We are broken — pierced in the belly of our line! We have lost the mounds and are falling back on this monastery. Get you hence, for Christ Jesu's sake! By your leave, a kerchief . . .

*He falls dead into the arms of two captains.*

*BUSELLA snatches the sword from his nerveless hand. The captains bear him away.*

BUSELLA. [*Thrusting the sword upon COLOMAN.*] Fight, if not for Hungary, if not for me, at least for your brother's wife and the child of you twain!

COLOMAN. [*Recoiling a moment.*] Comes Escalabore from his pool? [*His fingers closing about the hilt almost mechanically.*] I did not think ever to hold a sword again . . . [*Trying its poise.*] 'Twas with such a weapon that I smote the Croats! [*Loudly.*] With such a weapon now will I cleave this black Csupor from crown to base! [*Brandishing it, he cries his battle-cry.*] Coloman cometh!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*With wild ardour.*] A Coloman!  
A Coloman!

*The cry is taken up by the soldiers within and without the enclosure. COLOMAN dashes through the archway followed by GUYON and STEPHEN, with the captains. Quickly the refectory is emptied. There remain only BUSELLA and ILONA, who has wrapped BELA in a shawl and lain him, sleeping, on the grass. JOHN CSABA drops on his knees in the archway, fervently telling his beads: but ever and anon raising his head to mark the progress of the distant battle.*

BUSELLA. [*Clasping her hands.*] God be with you,  
O my lost lord . . .

JOHN CSABA. Pater noster, qui es in coelis . . .

*Then BUSELLA turns swiftly to ILONA.*

BUSELLA. Let me look at your face—in the light. 'Tis not so ill. Yet it was not that fabulous bronze hair, those woodland eyes, this dewy throat—dim auguries of moonlessness!—for he saw you not. It was that lodestone of the rose, deep in the petals. It was that inward woman, deep in yourself. Where can I lay my finger and say “this was it”? Such puissance over the passion of a man lives in elusiveness . . . a sudden soft hand, the fragrance of the flesh, the rich voice subtled to a whisper!

ILONA. Oh, in the name of God . . .

BUSELLA. I do think it was that subtle whisper, that mystery of you, which held him so long caught in your spools of gossamer. Your shadow has been the mistress of my house these many years. I have fought

a forlorn battle with the distemper of a man's imagination . . and we were once lovers, Coloman and I!

JOHN CSABA. *Et dimitte nobis debita nostra . .*

BUSELLA. Can you fathom what it is to a woman to lie in a cold bed and be clasped by her dreaming bedfellow as the bedfellow of his dream? The memory of you was a poppy-syrup to Coloman's nobility; he drank of you and drank deep and was mazed, and then he awaked — and drank again!

ILONA. Had I not left him?

BUSELLA. As the salt leaves the sea . . I have it in me to be barbaric with you.

JOHN CSABA. *Sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris . .*

ILONA. I am so bruised with life that I am become indifferent to blows. My coronal is of fated cypress twined with disastrous myrtle. Add to it your sprig of bitter hemlock. What does it matter? You do but trouble a woman fallen on age.

BUSELLA. You were a girl unfolded when first you covenanted with Coloman . .

ILONA. I was a wife, thrust into unseasonable womanhood by a jewelled boor. Mine were politic nuptials. By God, I could not have borne a child to Almos! I came to this rich, sombre court a Greek girl whose days had been as a summer sojourn under an almond tree. I found my bridegroom drunken — a young Silenus: and, in my revulsion, I happened upon Coloman. He was walking in a pleached alley, planted with pomegranates, and he spoke to me like a wise man and with tenderness, and picked me a fruit. But as Ilona I moved him not. It was as the peasant girl who stopped him in the darkness and bade him love her that I got him for the father of my firstborn.

JOHN CSABA. *Libera nos a malo . .*

ILONA. I was a mother, it would seem, before I conceived. You, to whom I am a light woman, ponder

this well. It was no common desire that drove me to Coloman.

BUSELLA. You have a passionate voice yet you speak with strange dispassion. Is your speech a mask of ice laid over deep water? Tell me, my lady Ilona, how much was Coloman himself to you?

ILONA. [*Averting her gaze.*] A man wise, and temperate in his wisdom . . .

BUSELLA. Little sophist . . . You loved him! If they bear him back unto us dead will you look upon him less moved than I?

ILONA. Spare me . . . I grew to love him.

BUSELLA. Ilona, speak truth to me. You loved him even in that pleached alley planted with pomegranates . . .

ILONA. I will speak truth to you. I loved Coloman as the pinetree loves the wind or as the valley the first star. I have cried it aloud from my casement to the green east, and laid bare my bosom from my tent hungrily to the brazen moon. I yearned for Coloman in secret even as he for me; but I dared not find him and he could not find me. Yet through him this poor shuttlecock of a woman, battledored by gownsmen and legates, was made, after her fashion, happy! Through him was her child compounded of a pure element!

BUSELLA. [*Pointing to the sleeping boy.*] And through him were those jocund eyes — bodkined!

ILONA. He has but marred what himself did make. I must struggle after content. Now, proud wife of Coloman, you have it i' the teeth! Do with me according to your pride.

BUSELLA. We are two strange-fated women met to quarrel over a doom that is none of man! There is a remorseless fellowship in this . . .

JOHN SCABA. Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, sancta Dei Genitrix . . .

BUSELLA. [*Bowing her head.*] What meditations are there for us two in the night watches to come!

ILONA. We shall be as a sea-shore scarred by the sea . .

JOHN CSABA. *Nec attinget illas cruciatus . .*

BELA. [*Awaking.*] Mother . . [*Rising in terror.*] Mother!

ILONA. I am here.

BELA. Let me come to you . .

ILONA. [*Holding out her arms to him.*] Come.

*But in his blindness he passes her and goes to  
BUSELLA whose hand he takes.*

BELA. Kiss me . . [*BUSELLA bends over him.*] You are weeping.

ILONA. Weeping?

BUSELLA. [*Lifting up her face.*] I, too, am a woman . .

ILONA. There are such hidden lightnings in the silences of ourselves.

*JOHN CSABA has risen and hurries forward.*

JOHN CSABA. [*To BUSELLA.*] Madam, the King has left the battle! He makes back unattended. Our men are in retreat towards the lemon avenues that slope upward away from Pesth. May God in His benevolence deal evilly with these Magyars!

BUSELLA. Then are you and I beyond history, my lord bishop?

JOHN CSABA. But not beyond Providence, daughter. Mater Christi, exaudi nos!

*COLOMAN, haggard and breathless, enters from the archway, his snapped sword in his hand.*

JOHN CSABA. The King!

COLOMAN. Escalabore — broken! [*He throws the weapon from him, sinking upon the steps. The steel clangs on the stone.*] My strength is outfought . .

JOHN CSABA. This is . . disaster?

COLOMAN. Have you eyes, ears, senses? My brother overwhelms us. A black monk of some strange brotherhood walks in the midst of the fight. He leads the rebels through our defences, and none can tell who he be! [*Rising he comes to them with forced calm-*

ness.] You are imperilled. Listen: I have made provision for you . . . for us. I have directed Guyon to furnish a troop of spears who will bear you company to the monastery at Gran. To them, and to you, John Csaba, I commit these three. I will not be failed — nor will I fail. You have your orders. [*Approaching the women.*] And you, what can I say to you at this last? For I have loved you both. In an old tale there were two sad women who went together . . . Go you into peace.

BUSELLA. Coloman! Husband!

ILONA. [*Softly and tenderly.*] And you — ?

COLOMAN. I am foretold. Therefore let us kiss, making an end. Busella, wife, farewell! [*He kisses her. Then, turning to ILONA.*] And you, O southern star . . . [*He kisses ILONA.*] Lift me up your child. [*She does so. He passes his hands over the boy's forehead.*] O pardon me, little shuttered house, for your dark windows. [*She sets him down.*] Let him not remember me. [*To BUSELLA.*] Your son has fought at my side today . . . a valiant boy! [*He puts his arms about them both.*] Now do we part, dear women, nor shall we again greet nor take leave . . . for I think there is no Heaven.

JOHN CSABA. [*Who has stood apart from the group extending his arms towards them in blessing.*] The peace of God which passeth all understanding . . .

*He is too moved to continue. GUYON RAKOVSCY enters quickly from the archway to the right.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. I have your spears, Sir.

COLOMAN. Then go, and quickly. [*To CSABA.*] Your horses are Arabian: their speed is your sole reliance. Remember, and farewell.

JOHN CSABA. You have been my consecrate brother. I commend you to our God.

THE WOMEN, with BELA, have passed through the small archway to the right. CSABA follows. COLOMAN remains looking after them in a reverie.

COLOMAN. I feel now as when on strange summer dawns, among my fig-trees, I have heard the trumpet of the last star.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. And now, back into battle!

COLOMAN. You paw the ground, you restless charger. My hand is from your rein. Go!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Not without you. A moment and these walls are to the enemy! Look yonder, where they come, and Almos and Csupor with the black monk! I would give my father's sword for one glimpse of that monk's face!

COLOMAN. Is it some old enemy of mine . . . or friend?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Hasten! The flash of an arrow cuts us off!

COLOMAN. There are forests in my Hungary where, in winter, travel the white sledges, overtaken by the swift wolves. Then, oftentimes, the man, confiding the horses to his woman, leaps among the pack, and with his lifeblood stays the pursuit.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. King, I am that man!

COLOMAN. No, I. The dance of swords awaits you, my general.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Then am I a rebel — I budge not!

COLOMAN. [*His eye flashing.*] What, would you balk me in my last hour of empire? I am still your king. Back into battle! [*Softening.*] Yet do not think me unmindful that you are my loved familiar. [*Embracing him.*] Guyon!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. Hail and farewell!

*He goes.* COLOMAN mounts the steps and seats himself on the abbot's throne, waiting. There is a long pause. Then ALMOS — his eyes bandaged with white linen — led by OTTO CSUPOR and FEDOR GYURI appears outside the main archway. With them is SIMON SZVELA. His Venetian cloak is turned about so as to display the black lining. The hood, like that of a black Capuchin, has fallen back from his face.

FEDOR GYURI. [*Gazing up at the frowning archway.*] This is Hell-gate. Mark it for tomorrow.

ALMOS. I slip, good Csupor . .

OTTO CSUPOR. You have walked over a battlefield . .

FEDOR GYURI. Your soles are red with it, my lord!

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Menacingly to SZVELA.*] Look you, Sirrah Double-coat, if this prospers you shall be the "my lord" you affect — if not, I'll dung my vines with you!

SIMON SZVELA. [*With a deprecatory bow.*] I am a man, desperate . .

ALMOS. Is it here?

SIMON SZVELA. Here.

*They enter the enclosure.*

OTTO CSUPOR. [*Almost wonderingly.*] Did he tarry?

SIMON SZVELA. [*Pointing to the abbot's throne.*] Look.

ALMOS. Bring me to him. [*They lead him forward.*] Is he alone? Sits he or stands he?

SIMON SZVELA. He sits — alone.

ALMOS. Let me face him. [*SZVELA sets him opposite the throne.*] In my right hand . . [*He holds out his open palm and OTTO CSUPOR places the handle of a long poignard in his fingers. ALMOS grips it feverishly.*] So! Why does he not speak?

OTTO CSUPOR. He was ever sullen . .

ALMOS. I am ready.

*SZVELA leads him to the foot of the throne. COLOMAN surveys them without stirring.*

SIMON SZVELA. There are steps . .

*SZVELA supports him up the steps. ALMOS puts out his hand and touches COLOMAN.*

ALMOS. Where do I touch him?

SIMON SZVELA. At the heart.

ALMOS. [*Thrusting his face close to COLOMAN'S, at the same time lifting the bandage from his eyes with his left hand, during which COLOMAN watches him sorrowfully but without wincing.*] Look well upon me. [*Then lowering the bandage, he stabs COLOMAN swiftly*

*in the side.] I have done it! [He raises the poignard in the air and then flings it down the steps, turning and groping to descend.] Come to me, Csupor!*

OTTO CSUPOR *and* GYURI *lead him down.* SIMON SZVELA *puts his own napkin into COLOMAN'S hands, who presses it listlessly to his wound.*

SIMON SZVELA. [*Before he, too, descends.*] And yet . . .

OTTO CSUPOR. [*To ALMOS.*] And now the other quarry, my lord—

ALMOS. Yes. Ilona.

*They guide him out to the right by the small archway. SZVELA stands at the base of the steps, one foot resting on the highest, elbow on knee and chin in hand, looking up at the dying COLOMAN.*

COLOMAN. [*After a pause, slowly.*] Was I worth so great price to you, Simon?

SIMON SZVELA. As what, my lord?

COLOMAN. Your soul. All men attain their desire. You, being of the world, have achieved the world. I hunger and thirst for elsewhere. Is there anything put together that does not house its own decay? [*With a smile.*] Your pity is even as your love of life, cruel: it stops me here. [*Throwing the napkin to the ground.*] Let me forth!

SIMON SZVELA. The No-Man is freed from the great sorrow of his race . . .

COLOMAN. I am lost in the tide of my beloved's hair. I hear trees rustling in a great wind. And now there is no noise . . .

*He dies.*

SIMON SZVELA. [*Slowly, still contemplating COLOMAN.*] Who is dead if I am alive?

*The din of battle suddenly increases in a rapid crescendo. At the back in the far distance can be seen bodies of Magyar troops hurrying across the fields towards Pesth. Then, suddenly, above the clamour comes the shrill winding of horns.*

*For a moment SZVELA seems struck with panic.*

SIMON SZVELA. The horns of Eguon! [FEDOR GYURI enters from the small archway. SZVELA rushes to him.] How now? What now? Your brows are bloodied!

FEDOR GYURI. As we swarmed this hill of lemon groves there came over the crest of it horsemen, horsemen, horsemen! — their lances sparkling in the sun . .

SIMON SZVELA. Speak, Speak!

FEDOR GYURI. Our foot, being wearied with plunder and pursuit, are, I do think, in mid-rout! Duke Almos is stuck by an arrow and slain not two hundred paces from these walls. [*Drawing SZVELA to an aperture.*] And look, there Otto Csupor and Eguon himself are met!

SIMON SZVELA. Ay, and Csupor is smitten . . By Hercules, a great blow! [*Quickly.*] Tell me, who besides Otto Csupor and the Duke knew of my disaffection from Coloman?

FEDOR GYURI. [*Unwarily.*] I only, my lord. You were muffled . .

SIMON SZVELA. And Almos and Csupor are dead . . We will make a bargain together.

FEDOR GYURI. No, I'll seek sanctuary, I ha' done with the wars.

SIMON SZVELA. What! Fedor Gyuri a coward! [*Airily.*] Stay! A louse upon your jerkin! [FEDOR stops, taken completely off his guard and with his back to him: SZVELA draws his knife and strikes him in the armpit. He drops with a dull groan. SZVELA stands over him, smilingly re-sheathing his weapon.]

SIMON SZVELA. The third mouth — shut. You are no nice sight, my friend. [*He slips his cloak from his shoulders and covers the dead man.*] A pall for you. War is very like peace — only more honest.

*Even as he speaks a rabble of struggling soldiery passes across the near background, the King's men throwing back and pursuing the dispersed Magyars. Much ugly talk is bandied between the combatants. SZVELA watches them contem-*

*platively as they disappear. From the small archway there enter GUYON RAKOVSCY, GABRIEL EGUON and STEPHEN, talking as they come. Attending them are several captains.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. [*To EGUON.*] Of you shall men speak as Eguon the Timely . . . God be praised for our good luck! We shall have saved him!

GABRIEL EGUON. You said he was here. Where?

STEPHEN. [*Seeing COLOMAN.*] O my father . . .

*They turn aghast to the throne. STEPHEN mounts the steps.*

SIMON SZVELA. [*Coming forward.*] Here's tragedy, my lords!

GABRIEL EGUON. Have I saved a dead man's kingdom?

GUYON RAKOVSCY. My loved master . . .

STEPHEN. [*Bending over COLOMAN.*] Foully stabbed!

GUYON RAKOVSCY. That a little gash should let out so omnipotent a man!

GABRIEL EGUON. [*To SZVELA.*] What was your part in this?

SIMON SZVELA. [*Pointing to the dead body of GYURI.*] I killed . . . him.

GUYON RAKOVSCY. And he—the King? [*As he examines the cloak over the body.*] The black monk!

GABRIEL EGUON. Do I know him? [*GUYON uncovers the face.*] No.

SIMON SZVELA. [*Peering over their shoulders.*] A mean fellow—he looks a mercenary.

GABRIEL EGUON. Bear him away.

*The captains take up the body and depart. STEPHEN has come down from the throne. In his hand is a piece of crumpled linen. He speaks with a simple dignity which becomes him very well.*

STEPHEN. A napkin, wet with my father's blood. Some kindly goodman did give it. I would thank him.

SIMON SZVELA. It is mine.

STEPHEN. I see 'tis so embroidered . . . [*He loosens*

*a jewelled chain from his neck and hangs it about SZVELA'S.]* Sweet friend, my father's friend, wear you this in his sweet memory. I have no words to thank you all. This is too sudden a coming into my kingdom. Pardon my omissions. [*To GUYON, very gently.*] You, who were more his son than I, fetch hither a golden litter for the dead Coloman. Nay, do not take it so. [*To EGUON.*] And you, set our body-horsemen in a solemn circle about this ruin. Do not kneel to me — yet.

*He turns away, and stands, rapt, before his dead father.*

GUYON RAKOVSCY. This is a sad conquering . .

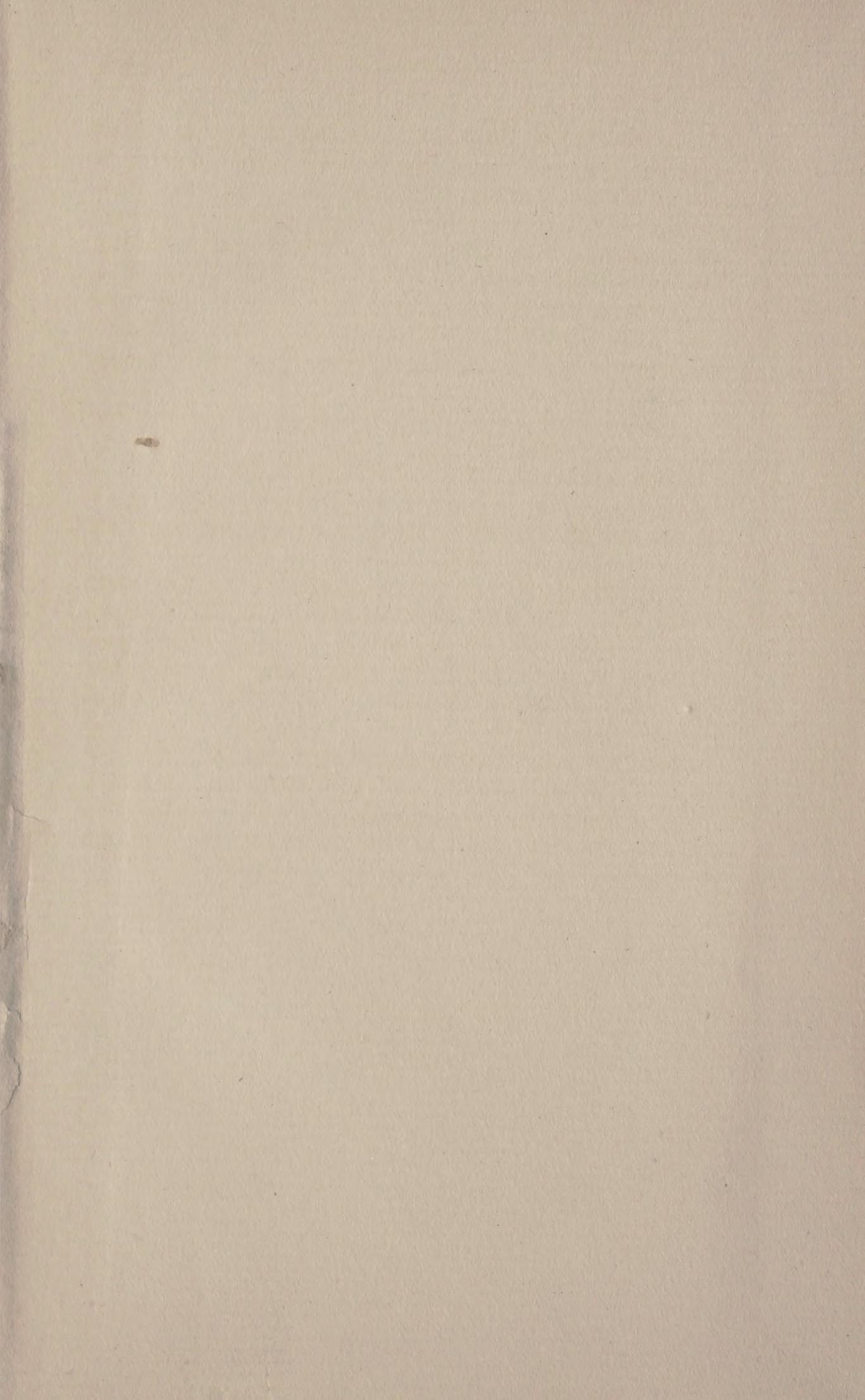
GABRIEL EGUON. [*Patting him on the shoulder.*] I am too old to be sad. Death is a shallow stream: we can see through it. Go down with me.

*And they go out together through the archway.*

STEPHEN. Not here do we take our last leave, O my father. [*Coming, with a smile, to SZVELA.*] Come you to Pesth at my right hand. My father would often speak of you as the door-post of Hungary. You are a great man.

SIMON SZVELA. And he was a great spirit.

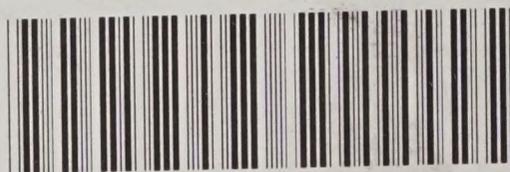
*They walk quickly and silently away. A peace, grand and yet sinister, settles on the ruin. The crows sweep back to their nests and the sunlight plays upon the dead King's hands.*







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