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IN THE MAELSTROM OF PASSION

VINCAS KRĖVĖ

Translated by Gerald L. Mayer and Judith Oloskey

This excerpt is the second part of four parts of the historical drama Skirgaila. In the first part, "Between Two Worlds", the Lithuanian grand duke Skirgaila seizes Ona DUONUTĖ, princess of Lyda who is betrothed to the prince of Mozūrai, and keeps her against her will in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Other characters, appealing in this part of the drama, are: Henry the Mo-zovian, Polish diplomat and bishop; Wartenberg and Keller, Teutonic knights; Daugaila, Skirgaila's army leader; Butrimas, Lithuanian nobleman; Jonas Skarbekas, Roman Catholic priest and Skardas, pagan Lithuanian priest.

I

Vilnius High Castle. A small square room; to the right, a bed covered with animal hides. A table and two round, three-footed, backless stools. Wartenberg is seated on one, his cloak, helmet and sword are on the other.

KELLER (*Standing before him, arms folded, smiling*). You see, my God-fearing brother and noble knight, how well a tempting sin in the form of a beautiful maiden can serve the holy Order. You, with all your piety, could not have learned anything about the important affairs of the heart of this brooding ruler of the land of the idol-worshippers.

WARTENBERG (*following Keller's lead and suiting his mood*). May the Lord God and the holy Virgin not see your little transgression. Truly, you served the holy Order, and I shall hasten to inform brother Grand Master and the Supreme Council about your achievements. (*Laughs*). Ha-ha-ha... Except, me-thinks, leaving out the details.

KELLER. I know how you will inform them, smart one. Brother Grand Master and the Supreme Council will hear only of my sins and your merits. But — may God take care of you. I shall find a reward for myself, other than what you expect, with a pretty girl. The fame which you seek shall nevertheless be unable to avoid me.

WARTENBERG (*seriously, unhappily*). Where the voice of the Order demands it, I know how to forget myself and my laurels, and I do not seek fame. Brother Grand Master knows this well.

KELLER. Let the truth be in your words, noble knight. (*Laughs*). Ha-ha-ha!... I am not envious. Being of high birth, I shall attain directly what you are unable to achieve even with the help of all your cleverness.

WARTENBERG (*standing*). At another time I would know another way to answer your jests, noble brother. The knight's sword of the Wartenberg clan has always stood in defense of their honor, and we have sought and seek fame only on the field of battle. Anyone who speaks otherwise, I could tell you, only barks like a dog. (*Sits down*). But the good of the Order now demands that there be peace between us.

KELLER. Let there be peace between us, as you say. Know that I do not like to quarrel and I speak my mind. (*Takes Wartenberg's cloak, helmet and sword, places them on the table, sits down on the stool*). Let the praise of the Council brothers and the thanks of the Grand Master satisfy you. For me, what I shall get from the beautiful maiden will suffice.

WARTENBERG (*after an awkward silence*). If we can successfully carry out what we planned, we shall rile the Poles and the Lithuanians, and this will be beneficial for the Order. We will then easily be able to achieve the purpose for which the two of us have come here.

KELLER. I do not like failures. What I have decided to do, I shall carry out.

WARTENBERG. The Duchy of Lyda shall become ours forever, favoring the Crusaders because we will have restored freedom to her; the grateful Duke of the Mosurians will also become our friend.

KELLER (*laughs*). The Duchy of Lyda will favor us not for that alone. I shall do my best to find some other reasons for this, if it is as nice as it is said to be. Whether it will be worthwhile for the Duke of Mosuria to be grateful, I do not know

(Laughs). Ha-ha-ha!... Methinks I will have the cream, while he shall have to be content with spooning for sour milk.

WARTENBERG. The secret with the help of which we hold the rulers in our hands is ever useful. *(Laughing)*. But are you not placing too much confidence in yourself, clever brother?...

KELLER. There is no woman who, when I wish it, is not mine.

WARTENBERG *(arises and walks around the room, rubbing his palms, contented)*. With the help of the holy Virgin we shall dispose of this matter for the good of the Order, yes, we shall arrange it! Only beware, brother, of incautious frankness.

KELLER. It is my task to open the cage and entice the bird, then let others do what follows: you, the Grand Master, the Council, or anyone. I know how to hoodwink only the women, and only in matters of love.

WARTENBERG. One must know everything that the good of the Order requires. *(Sits down again)*. The way of love here is slippery and dangerous; do not forget, knight, that it requires much shrewdness. *(Firmly)*. Therefore, be wise, noble brother Keller. Hurt by a careless deed, the supposed friends, already filled with hate, will become implacable foes. Then again, the little bird may not want to fly out of her cage.

KELLER. Of course she will want to! I will merely have to see her, and the little bird will come flying out of her cage, and how yet! For it is not happy living in the cage, while the future beckons with freedom, the joys of youth, love... What woman's heart will not yield to such temptation?!...

WARTENBERG. Act, o noble knight. For God and the Order, and be careful. For this is not concern over an easy-going maiden, but the intertwined destiny of nations. While in this accursed castle even the walls can see and hear. The people here are wilder than beasts, and no rights will be able to help us from insults, perhaps even from our doom. *(Arising)*. May the Almighty God and the holy Virgin Mary, our powerful patroness, help you.

KELLER *(smiling)*. You pray, devout brother and noble knight. After all, honest prayer carries much weight with God. *(Laughs)*. In the meanwhile I shall pray to the graceful lady of Kiev; after all, she is the guardian of our bird. Go now, noble brother: I hear her footsteps. *(Smiles)*. Do not hinder me in performing a good deed. *(Hands the cloak and helmet to Wartenberg. When he leaves, Keller returns to the table and stands there. In a little while Ologé enters. She stops in the doorway, her right hand on the door, as though undecided whether to enter or not, glances into the room)*. I am here, my little pigeon. I have been waiting long for you. *(Goes to her with outstretched arms)*.

OLIGÉ *(falls into his open arms)*. My dear! *(Keller hugs her to his breast and kisses her)*. I couldn't come any sooner. I was afraid someone would see me. *(Puts her forefinger to her lips, listens intently)*.

KELLER. Be at ease, my beloved, no one will come. *(Leads her to the bed, sits down and draws her onto his lap)*. You came to stay? Like last night, to spend the night... Right?...

OLIGÉ. I cannot, my beloved. I came only for a little while. I am afraid!... Someone will see, they will talk ...

KELLER *(fondling her)*. I will not let you go now. You will stay like you did last night. Alright? *(Looks into her eyes)*.

OLIGÉ *(pushing his hand away)*. Don't squeeze my breasts so hard: you hurt me. *(She jumps off his lap and sits down next to him, taking his hands in hers)*. I cannot stay now, dearest boy! I came only for a minute. Don't talk, listen!... *(Puts her hand over his mouth)*. Tomorrow, tomorrow I shall be yours all night. Now I must go to serve the princess. I must be on duty in her anteroom. I shall be free only tomorrow night.

KELLER *(takes both her hands in his, fondles them, looking into her eyes)*. Then tomorrow you will let me into the princess's quarters. Alright?... *(Presses her hand to his breast)*.

OLIGÉ: *(astonished)*. The princess's room? What do you want there?

KELLER. I must see the princess. It is important to me! ... *(Kisses her)*. My little pigeon!

OLIGÉ: *(drawing away but leaving her hands in his)*. Why do you need her? Do you understand what danger awaits you, her, and me, should the Duke learn of it? . . .

KELLER *(frees her hands)*. It is your concern to beware, and not to worry about me. I carry a sword for just that purpose, so I would not fear danger.

OLIGÉ. Your sword, dear boy, will help neither you nor us. You still do not know our ruler. *(Covers her face with her hands)*. Oh, if he should ever learn! He would have me buried alive ...

KELLER. You must see to it that he doesn't learn anything. *(Again takes her hands and bends over her, looking into her eyes)*. Cast a spell over him with your beautiful eyes and he won't want to know anything that goes on in the world, like me right now.

OLIGÉ *(as though frightened)*. Him? God love me and protect me from his love. *(Blesses herself)*. Unfortunate indeed would be that maiden upon whom he should direct his attention. Better to die than to be liked by him.- Then, also, I have fallen in love with you, and you alone!...

KELLER. Cast a spell upon him, as you have upon me. *(Puts his arms around her waist)*. You are sweet as sin. Just you want it, and he will forget everything for you, even his graceful princess.

OLIGÉ: *(looks up into his eyes)*. You don't mean that you want me to? ... *(Drawing away from him)*. You wicked one, you do not love me anymore! *(Presses herself to him)*. Kill me, strangle me when your love ends, dearest one. I do not want to belong to another.

KELLER *(one arm around her, strokes her hair with the other hand)*. Do you really love me so much? *(Oligé nods)*. My little pigeon! *(Presses her head to his breast)*. You came to love me so much?! ...

OLIGÉ *(hands folded under her chin and snuggled against him)*. How could I help but fall in love with you! You are a nobleman and a knight, young, handsome, brave ... You are the most beautiful of all our young men. And the duke? Always drunk, angry and moody as an autumn evening. To me it seems — that is why it so cold here, so dreary, so cloudy, why all the people here are so mean, so dull. *(Sits down)*. I almost died, and would have died if not for your love — it was so lonely and boring! *(Taking his hands in hers)*. Sweetheart, take me with you when you return to the land of your fathers!

KELLER. You forget, my little maiden of the south, that I am a monk and it is forbidden for me to live with women.

OLIGÉ (*throws her arms about his neck and presses herself to him*). I will be your slave. (*Looking up into his eyes*). Is it not an honor to serve as a slave for such a brave knight as you? (*Draws away from him*). But you do not love me anymore. . . I see it... (*Covers her eyes with her hands and bows down as though weeping*).

KELLER (*quietly, bending down to her*). Are you not yet convinced how passionately I love you, and know how to love? Stay the night with me and you will see whether I have stopped loving you.

OLIGÉ. I want to be with you always, but you know that I cannot.

KELLER (*hugs her tenderly*). You arrange it so I can see the princess, and we shall both go away from here and never return. I shall carry you to the castle of my forefathers. The Holy Father in Rome will absolve me from my vows, and then you will be my lady, not my slave. Only, arrange it so that I could get to see the princess.

OLIGÉ. I am afraid, dear one. (*Pulls away from him suddenly*). No, no, I cannot! ...

KELLER (*firmly*). You must, because I want you to. (*Again embraces her gently, presses her to himself*). You do love me? Is it not so? ...

OLIGÉ. That is just why I cannot do it, because I love you. I do not want you to leave me and fall in love with another. When you ride out of here may God forgive you if you do not keep your given word to me, but now, here in this castle, you must live only in me, love only me, belong only to me... (*Covers her face with her hands*). Or I do not want to live. . . (*Weeps, sobbing quietly*).

KELLER (*stroking her hair, soothingly*). Be calm, dear heart. Do you think the princess would want to fall in love with me? Have you already forgotten how the people of this land hate us?

OLIGÉ (*through her tears*). I just cannot believe that there could be found a woman who would be able to resist you! It is impossible not to love you! (*Wiping her tears with her apron*). I see that I have already become offensive to you. I am only a common girl, not the daughter of a nobleman... (*Angrily, hands balled into fists*). Ooh, how I hate her now!... (*Twisting her hands*). Why did I give in to you so soon, why didn't I resist you longer?... Then you would still be in love with me.

KELLER. Why? How often women ask themselves, why?, but not one has ever yet been able to answer that question; at least I have never heard it. (*Encircles her waist*). Trust me, it is not about love that I shall talk with her. I love you, and my soul needs no other love. It is my task to complete an important mission of the Order with her, upon which even my own fate will depend. But I cannot go openly to see her!

OLIGÉ. Tell me, what do you have to talk about with her tomorrow? Then maybe I shall try.

KELLER. With you I can speak only about love. The matters of the Order are not the concern of women.

OLIGÉ (*removing his arm from her waist*). And the princess? Is she not a woman?

KELLER. She is the ruler of a wide land... (*Convincingly, taking her hands in his, then placing them to his face*). Trust me, I shall not abandon you, I shall not give up your love for all the duchies or princes of the world... But upon this, whether I see her or do not, depends your and my destiny. (*Lets go of her hands*). You must obey me or you will perish... No, not you, both of Us, you and I together will perish.

OLIGÉ (*places her hands in her lap*). I am so afraid! You don't know how cruel the duke is when he is angry. When he learns of this he will show no mercy for me or for you.

Dear God! Why did you give me this love? I had been so at peace, I had been living so freely... (*Places her hands behind her head and moves it from side to side, negatively*). No, no, I cannot do it, dearest. And do not ask me any more... I am afraid of you also... I do not believe...

KELLER (*hands on hips, looks at her*). I didn't know that you are afraid. Do you remember what you said the first time I saw you? That you feared nothing, and I believed you. And I fell, in love with you because I believed. (*Takes her by her upper arm*). Now, listen to me, dear ...

OLIGÉ (*pulling her arm away*). Don't touch me! It hurts me... I am not afraid of the duke, I am afraid of her, afraid of you. (*He places his hands gently on her shoulders*). My dear, do not go to her! (*Bitterly*). Better you do away with me, spill my blood to the last drop, just do not go to her!...

KELLER (*lifts her right hand to his lips, kisses the upturned palm, then caresses it*). My little silly girl. Don't tell me you don't trust me, that you don't believe what I say? If you love me, you must have trust in me.

OLIGÉ. (*withdrawing her hand*). If I love you?... I do love you, still, I do not trust you... I cannot trust you because I love you... (*Jumps up quickly and seizes his hand*). Alright, I shall arrange it so that you can see her, but I shall also be there.

KELLER (*firmly*). I must see her alone.

OLIGÉ (*drops his hand, angrily*). No, you shall never see her.

KELLER (*stands, firmly*). I must see her!... (*Harshly, seizing her by the arm*). You hear me, slave...

OLIGÉ (*pulling her arm away*). Oh, don't touch me! Let me go or I will scream! ... (*She breaks away and runs out of the room*).

KELLER (*stands still for a while, deep in thought*). She has affected me with her love, this girl... Poor thing, how jealous she is... (*Shaking his head*). However, she will do as I want.

II

The ladies' room in Vilnius High Castle. Everything is the same as in scene 5, Act I. Princess Ona DUONUTĖ sits by the window, weaving. Ologé stops weaving, puts the shuttle aside, rises and approaches the princess. Wringing her hands, in a contrite voice, she speaks.

OLIGÉ. My dear princess! You are always sad and sorrowing ... When I see how you suffer it hurts my heart and I want to weep with you. It is nothing when it is a dark and dreary day, but now it is so bright, it is such a quiet and peaceful evening, and the heart is so happy, and I want so much, oh, how I want that you be happy too, and that everyone be happy.

(Extending her hands, with longing). Oh, if only I knew how to achieve that!...

ONA DUONUTÉ. You cannot help me, *(after glancing at her)* and there is no need to. Those who can, did not want to... *(Smiles)*. Don't mind my sadness, little maiden, while you are young and happy you have no cares, nor do you know what trouble is.

OLIGÉ *(waving both her hands as though trying to brush away a clinging mosquito)*. Oh, dear princess, if you only knew my misfortune, you would not say that I have no cares. *(Shaking her head)*. But I don't even want to think about it in the daytime. Only at night... *(Sadly)* If only there were no night!...

ONA DUONUTÉ *(stops weaving)*. I would also want to forget everything, but I cannot. In vain do I pray to God.

OLIGÉ *(sits next to her on the bench, in friendly fashion)*. You have many friends, dear princess. And powerful friends... This I well know. You mean they wanted not to give you help?

ONA DUONUTÉ. Friends can help you only in little things, but in big things — they cannot. And I do not blame them for deserting me. Life is precious to everyone, and I cannot demand that they sacrifice theirs for me, a poor orphan. *(Looks at her suspiciously)*. But why do you care how my friends act toward me?

OLIGÉ *(secretively, sidling closer)*. I know a man who would do for you anything you wished. You only have to say the word. *(Ona Duonuté looks at her in amazement, speculatively)*. It is this one, a knight from the land of the Germans. He is young, handsome, daring and fearless!...

ONA DUONUTÉ. A German?... *(Shows astonishment)*. A German, you say? *(Smiles)*. The Germans, little maiden, are our greatest enemies, and can we possibly expect any good from them? They are all treacherous people, and who can trust their word?

OLIGÉ *(heatedly)*. It may be true that they are deceitful, but not this one. He is a true knight and once he gives his word, he keeps it, he will not deceive. *(Proudly)*. He is a real falcon!

ONA DUONUTÉ. Why should he care about my fate? He is neither my friend, not neighbor, nor even an acquaintance. I would not trust a friend from the German lands anyway! ...

OLIGÉ. The people say that he is a close friend of a Polish duke and often visits with him. I myself heard and others heard how he was angry with our ruler, who abducted you by force and holds you like a prisoner in his castle.

ONA DUONUTÉ *(joyously)*. You say he is a friend of the Polish duke? *(Oligé nods; then suspiciously)*. But where could he have learned all this about me?

OLIGÉ *(sidling still closer)*. Others have told him. After all, everyone talks only about you in the castle, everyone is sorry for you. What is secret, that the duke is holding you captive, that he intends to take a wife? It is said that this knight belittled our ruler to his face! And indeed, he would do everything, he would help you, if you would only speak to him with one little word. It is also said that he did not hide this fact and that is why the ruler frowns upon him. *(Leaning over, whispering into the princess's ear)*. He may want to see you, but please be careful, do not agree with him.

ONA DUONUTÉ *(glancing at her)*. Why do you think that he will want to see me? And how could he, if everyone, even you yourself, guard me so closely?

OLIGÉ *(drawing away quickly)*. Oh, don't say that, princess. He can do whatever he sets his mind to. There is no other such courageous knight, either in our country or in other lands. *(Arises, pleadingly)*. But do not speak to him, do not look at him, I pray you, gentle princess. His eyes give birth to unhappiness.

ONA DUONUTÉ *(attentively)*. Why are you so upset? Do you know something? After all, I shall not see him...

OLIGÉ. You will see him! It is said that all the maidens who see him fall in love with him and become unhappy ... And you are such a lovely princess, so pure...

ONA DUONUTÉ *(emotionally)*. Do you know something? Speak!...

OLIGÉ *(fidgeting)*. No, no! I know nothing... But I think that you will see him, you will have to see him ... *(Pleadingly, hands clasped together)*. My dear princess, do not be angry that I speak nonsense... I went through so much today ... Perhaps I shall even be more foolish... *(Falls to her knees to kiss the princess's hands)*.

ONA DUONUTÉ *(looks intently at Oligé)*. Now I do not understand you at all. What has happened to you? *(Places her hand on Oligé's head and bends down towards her)*. Did you fall in love with him? Is that what it is?... *(Oligé hides her face in her lap. Stroking her hair)*. You poor girl!... How could you fall in love with a German?!...

OLIGÉ. Do not ask me, mistress! ... I don't know myself... *(Raises tear-filled eyes)*. Oh, how unhappy I am! ...

ONA DUONUTÉ. Truly unhappy. I am afraid — God will punish you for falling in love with an evil German ...

OLIGÉ. Am I to blame that my heart... *(Rises suddenly and covers her face with her hands)*. I shall go ... I will go ... I cannot...

ONA DUONUTÉ. Have fear of God! ... To become enamored of a man from a foreign country! .. And a German, yet! ...

OLIGÉ. It is all the same to me now ... I know that I am already lost... *(Runs out of the room)*.

ONA DUONUTÉ. That poor girl!... *(Leans back against the wall, hands in her lap, closes her eyes as though daydreaming, sits motionless for a while. Keller appears in the doorway. He stands there, leaning on his sword, until the princess opens her eyes and sees him. She arises)*. Who are you? How did you get in here?

KELLER *(speaks firmly)*. I am your friend, as to how I got in here, it is not important. I am here to return you to freedom.

ONA DUONUTÉ. How do you know that I need to be freed?

KELLER. A heart which loves yearns for light and sun, and they are not here. A heart which loves goes out to there where liberty is, where there is space — to freedom.

ONA DUONUTÉ. I do not understand what you are saying. Who gave you the right to force your way into this room and speak to me in this manner?

KELLER. I foresaw this question as I was coming here. I thought that I would answer you thusly; the feeling of a friend for one whom you love. But I thought that way only before I saw you. Now I do not want to be hypocritical and shall only say to you: do not refuse my help! Know ye that happiness belongs to the one who boldly seeks it where and when he can. Do

not insult me by mistrusting me, virgin maiden! In obtaining the honorable title of a knight I made a vow to defend the holy chastity of maidens, to succor the weak and the wronged. True, I often forget these vows, more often than the honor of a knight demands, but now your pretty face has again reminded me of them. Lives there a knight in a Christian land who, upon seeing your heavenly beauty, would not be moved and would dare have at least one unchaste thought about you! Such a man would not merit the honorable title of a knight, but only that of a heathen, a pagan, a cur! ...

ONA DUONUTÉ (*quietly, head bowed*). I want ever so much to believe your words, knight. But who am I that my fate could make you sad?

KELLER. Virgin maiden, have I not heard of the misfortune which befell you, do I not know how you are torturing yourself? Is my heart made of stone that upon seeing your virgin beauty I would not be affected (*Raising his eyes heavenward*). What happiness to feel myself your champion! For one instant of such happiness I am resolved to place my life in danger a thousand times. (*Proudly*). Only say the word, one word — and I pledge you by the sword of my forefathers that I shall do everything which is possible as well as the impossible.

ONA DUONUTÉ. I have heard too much that is evil about you knights of the Cross, to unhesitatingly trust your words, even though I yearn very much for succor. The people say that you are very deceitful and that you do nothing without some ulterior motive in mind.

KELLER (*silent for a moment, head lowered as though in thought. Raises his head*). You do well that you do not trust us. I myself came to you led by wily ideas, but your bright eyes have cured my soul and I now stand before you pure in heart. By the suffering of the Savior I pledge to you that my lips are speaking the truth and there is no untruth in my words.

ONA DUONUTÉ. Can I trust you? (*Steps closer*). I am a weak and inexperienced maiden. May shame be upon you if you came here only to make fun of me.

KELLER. Many sins burden my conscience, I have done much wrong to people, not because I myself am evil, but because I too easily obeyed the voice of evil persons. But now my soul has seen the light and I began hating my easy nature and those who led me into temptation. I was coming to you with unchaste designs upon you but, now, here I stand as I would before God and say to you: trust me and place yourself in my care without any qualms. Do not trust others, but believe in me. (*Places his hand bearing the sword to his chest, extends the other and takes one step forward*). By the salvation of my mother I pledge to you that I shall rescue you from here and return you to freedom.

ONA DUONUTÉ. I do not wish to hurt your feelings, noble knight, but I am terrified at having to trust an unknown person.

KELLER. You have no other way out if you have the courage to live as you desire. I have already told that I came to you led by deceitful purposes, but even they offered you a far better fate than that which awaits you here. However, I was then still an easy-going person, while now I am not the same. In that moment when I looked into your limpid, bright yet sad eyes, I changed into another person and now I would truly have no mercy even on my brother if he should even think evil about you. (*Quietly in a gentle murmur*). Like an angel of God, with your quiet eyes, your heavenly beauty, you compelled my soul to trust, my heart to flame with a love as pure as heavenly dew. It is not like that feeling which until now I felt for other maidens. I can only respect you as I respect the Deliverer of the Salvation of the world. I shall die for you, but even in my thoughts I shall not touch you, shall not desire you. From this moment I began hating all those women whom I ever had. (*Pressing his left hand to his breast*). Believe me, I want only to be your friend and brother. I shall do everything that you command, even if you should want me to take you to the one you love.

ONA DUONUTÉ (*moved by his plea*). Swear to me, noble knight, that there is no falsehood in your words.

KELLER. I swear by the lance of Saint George that I speak that which I think and feel. I have sworn to you under our oath that no one who wears golden spurs and the belt of a knight will dare to violate. (*Pressing his sword to his breast with both hands*). Tell me who your friends are and I shall let them know when you will be free, so they could escort you to where you wish to go. If you still do not trust me, you will surely trust them. Just think about the fate awaiting you here. (*Gently, quietly*). You — are a fragile flower. Like a flower you need sun and warmth, and under this dark roof you will only wither away. You, to kiss whose feet would be the greatest happiness for me, will have to please the drunken lusts of the dark pagan! (*Firmly, thumping his sword on the floor*). No, this shall never be.

ONA DUONUTÉ. I pray day and night to the most holy Virgin, the patroness of all orphans, that such would not befall me.

KELLER. If you do not want to place your trust in me and follow my advice, I shall rescue you in another way: I shall slay the ruthless ruler of this land of idolworshippers and let heaven and earth be my judge. So be it!...

ONA DUONUTÉ. Do not do that, noble knight. I believe you and want to trust you. May the grace of the most holy Virgin be yours, that you felt sorry for me, an orphan. Here is my ring. Those who were my father's friends will give you the necessary help when they see it in your hands. (*Removes the ring from her finger and hands it to Keller*).

KELLER (*draws near and kneels to accept the ring*). Thank you, princess! I am an unworthy person who can do much evil, but I shall not do it to you! I only pray of thee, do not tempt me with mistrust. (*While kneeling slips the ring on his finger*).

ONA DUONUTÉ (*giving him her hand*). Swear to me now that you will not abandon me and will not let me sink into even greater misfortune.

KELLER. On the salvation of my soul I swear to you. (*Kisses her hand, then the hem of her gown, rises and leaves; the princess stands still for a while, thinking, then she also leaves the room*).

OLIGÉ (*enters, disappointed, bewildered*). What have I heard? My God, how could it be! ... (*Truly perplexed*). And me, 'how about me? ... Am I going to let him go? He passed by me and didn't even glance at me... (*Angrily*). No, never! I shall die — so be it — but I will not surrender him to her. (*Loudly, striking her balled fists together*). No I shall not give him up! ...

III

The great guest-hall of High Castle. Everything as in Scene II, Act I. Skirgaila and his coterie of minor noblemen enter quickly. He is angry. All have hunting implements: apparently just returned from a hunt.

DAUGAILA (*just managing to keep up with the duke*). Now you have convinced yourself that I spoke the truth to you. It is not for nothing that the Germans and the Poles arrived here at the same time. They had agreed in advance, plotting against you and Lithuania.

SKIRGAILA (*pacing*). I know why they came, and at this moment you do not have to know. (*Stops, places his right hand under his left armpit*). The time is long past when the Poles were friendly with the Germans.

DAUGAILA (*leaning with his left hand on the table, glances from under lowered brows at Skirgaila*). You yourself interrogated those people and they confessed to you. Do you not trust their words? Why then did you order them to be hanged?

SKIRGAILA (*standing sidewise to Daugaila, glances at him*). I know what I know. You keep quiet and do not question me. I am the ruler here, not you. (*Lowers his head*). We are here and we shall soon learn everything. (*Raises his head and turns to his court*). Call the Germans here! (*Several escorts leave*).

BUTRIMAS (*walks to center*). I think that the Poles should also be called and questioned at the same time, especially their pope who arrived here long before the others. He often visits the duchy and must know everything. Daugaila is right in suspecting him.

DAUGAILA. That pope is a shrewd rascal! He knows how to cover up his trail like a fox. (*To the soldiers who stand at the door*). Bring the Poles here also.

STARDAS (*from the corner*). And what have you planned? Have you forgotten that they are our guests and the envoys of foreign nations? It would be the greatest shame for you and the whole country if even one hair of their heads should be harmed through your fault. (*Coming to the center*). The Gods severely punish those who by degrading their guests offend hospitality!

SKIRGAILA. Concern yourself, priest, with your psalms, and do not interfere in our work. (*Going to the table*). Do not talk to me of the gods: they have lost their power and are unable to avenge or to punish.

STARDAS (*grandly, arms upraised*). Ruler, the gods are still almighty!

SKIRGAILA (*sitting down*). Why are the Germans still not here? Are they trying my patience? (*Some of the escorts run out to hurry up the coming of the Germans. Leaning his head on his hand, Skirgaila calmly waits. Wartenberg and Keller appear almost immediately. Both greet the ruler with a bow of the head. Wartenberg bows low Keller barely nods*). Tell me, Germans, on what matter of business have you come here? (*Drums impatiently with his fingers on the table*). Well, I am waiting for an answer.

WARTENBERG (*bowing low*). Do you mean that the Exalted Duke does not yet know? For I have already had the honor in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary to offer you assistance and intercession with the Holy Father and the Caesar of Rome, should you want to exchange the hat of a duke for the wreath of a king, which is much more becoming to you. Through our lips the Holy Order expresses its friendly sentiments to you, agreement with all your ideas and offers an alliance, should your goals require it.

SKIRGAILA. You told me all this, but your actions bespeak something else. (*Angrily*). Who gave you the right to interfere in the affairs of my family?

KELLER (*proudly*). We shall answer for our conduct only to those who have appointed us here.

SKIRGAILA (*Rising, angry*). No, you will answer to me, German, or to my executioner! ...

WARTENBERG. Your Enlightened Highness, if you address us in such a manner you forget that we two are emissaries of the powerful Order. The Holy Order will not tolerate such degradation of their honorable representatives. If in your view we acted incorrectly in some instances, you may complain to our brother the Grand Master or to the Council of the Order. They will mete out our punishment if it is proven that your complaint is valid.

SKIRGAILA. Ha! To complain to the wolf about his cubs! No, the ruler of Lithuania himself judges those who have offended him, and needs no other judges. (*Turning to his men*). Call in the guards. (*Turns away*).

WARTENBERG. We are envoys whose right of immunity is protected by all the Christian nations, and even by idol-worshiping nations. (*Proudly*). Let the whole world know about your conduct and let the disgrace fall upon you and your entire nation.

SKIRGAILA (*his back to them*). You are transgressors, not envoys.

WARTENBERG. Our mighty Order will know how to properly uphold the honor of its emissaries. Unfortunate is that land, that nation and those of their rulers will be held accountable for any such dishonor.

SKIRGAILA (*barely containing himself*). Alright, alright, let your Order demand what it wants. But I don't think they will be able to raise you from the dead. (*Enter the armed guards. He pointed to the Germans*). Seize them. To gaol! ...

WARTENBERG (*stepping forward quickly*). I demand to be told how I am responsible for your anger?

SKIRGAILA (*stops the guards with a wave of his hand; they stand at the door*). Ah, you speak, as you should have spoken. (*Turns and faces him*). You should have spoken that way at once. Which one of you planned the kidnaping of my betrothed? The two of you?

KELLER (*leaning on sword, grandly*). I alone. But not your betrothed, only a poor orphan girl whom you seized by force and are holding in your castle.

SKIRGAILA (*steps forward immediately, faces Keller, glaring into his eyes, arms folded*). You, alone?

KELLER (*calmly*). I alone.

SKIRGAILA. I swear by Perkunas's thunder that you will not escape punishment if you are guilty. But I would rather have mercy on you. What have you to say to justify your action?

KELLER. I could tell you much, but by the lance of Saint George I swear that I do not know how and do not want to defend myself like a woman, with the tongue. I would rather my sword defend me.

SKIRGAILA. Your answer befits a brave man. (*Turns away and goes to the table*). I would much rather have such a one for

a friend than as a foe.

KELLER. I am happy that I am your enemy. (*Taking off his gauntlet*). I demand God's judgment. Let Him prove which of us is deserving of His punishment. (*Throws the gauntlet at Skirgaila's feet*). I believe there are knights here who know what that means.

DAUGAILA. Highness, he is challenging you to a duel. Among your brave boyars there are many who long to spill German blood in your defense.

BUTRIMAS. Allow me, ruler, to pick up the gauntlet. I am certain that it will not be healthy for him.

SKIRGAILA (*glances at them angrily*). Be silent! The duke, duke alone, judges here. I do not need the judgment of his gods. (*To the guards*). To prison with him!

KELLER (*pushes away the nearest guard who had gripped him by his arm*). Keep away; (*Draws his sword from the scabbard*). A true knight surrenders his sword only together with his life. (*He rushes to the door. There is a brief scuffle with the guards who are aided by the duke's escorts. Stardas defends Keller who succeeds in escaping through the door. Skirgaila, meantime, remains seated, watches calmly*).

SKIRGAILA (*after Keller has made his escape*). There are many of you, and he was alone, yet he escaped.

DAUGAILA (*resheathing his dagger*). It was his good fortune that we did not have our swords. But he will not get away. The guards will seize him at the castle gates.

SKIRGAILA (*noting that Stardas is wounded in the hand, sincerely*). And he wounded you, my unfortunate priest?

STARDAS (*pressing his wounded hand with the other*). To shed blood in battle with the enemy is not a small favor, one which rarely occurs now. But it was difficult and sore for me, that I shed blood in defending a German against my own people. (*Looking at him with a long stare, the duke says nothing; Stardas withdraws*).

SKIRGAILA (*standing*). Call the princess here. (*To Wartenberg*). And you, German, go freely to your Grand Master and describe to him as you wish what you have seen here. Tell him to send me only decent people if he wants me to be his friend, not the kind who eat bread in my home and plot evil deeds against me.

WARTENBERG. By the honor of the Order I swear that neither I, nor the Grand Master, nor the Order are responsible for the conduct by a reckless youth. The punishment for one guilty of offending the obligation of hospitality is severe and will appease your anger. But do not touch him, Enlightened Highness, if you want the Order to be your friend and that peace reign between us. We shall forget the sad misunderstanding, the cause of which was the unwise idea of a rash youngster. But only the Order punishes knights of the Order!

SKIRGAILA (*glaring at him from lowered brows*). I say to you, German: go, so you go away! You have told me what you had to say. Go now and ride from the castle. (*To Stardas*). You, priest, see to it that he rides from here immediately, while no one has done him any harm. Hear?

STARDAS. I hear you, ruler (*Bowing to the duke, Warten-berg withdraws, escorted by Stardas*).

BUTRIMAS (*hurrying in*). Highness, the German has escaped, and he was not halted at the gate because he was riding your horse.

SKIRGAILA (*astonished*). My horse? (*Seizes Butrimas by his waist-front*). Who dared to give him my charger?

BUTRIMAS. We came in here after dismounting, leaving the horses at the door. The German hurried to mount your horse before they could stop him, and he escaped. The gate guards recognized your horse and thought that you were riding him.

SKIRGAILA (*turning to Daugaila*). The gods help a brave man. I am glad that he got away. He is a bold soldier and a courageous man.

BUTRIMAS. There is no gainsaying that he is a brave man. He is not like that other German, who looks more like a fox than a brave man.

DAUGAILA (*calmly, waving his hand*). He won't ride far, anyway: he does not know the trails in our forests. We will send riders and apprehend him.

SKIRGAILA (*to Daugaila*). Find out who was at fault that I lost my steed and punish him. (*Daugaila pauses, as though about to speak, but waves his hand and leaves*).

STARDAS. It is not fitting for a valiant soldier to pay attention to the threats of a frightened man, and it is not worth it for you to repeat his words. (*To Butrimas*). Send the riders quickly, and they better not dare to return without the German.

BUTRIMAS. I shall try to catch him and think that it will not take us long. (*He leaves, and several escorts with him*).

SKIRGAILA (*to Stardas*). He will make good his escape and the riders will not find him. Stardas: the gods support a brave soldier. Even though the German does not honor them, he is frank, and his heart knows no fear.

STARDAS. If the riders cannot trace him, he will die of hunger in the forest or will be torn to pieces by the beasts. (*Enter the princess, led by several maidens*).

SKIRGAILA (*he has turned to the table, stands sidewise to the princess and casts a sidelong glance at her*). You wanted to run away from the castle with the German? (*To Stardas*). Stardas, did you ever before hear that in ancient times a Lithuanian damsel determined to flee from the land of her fathers with a German? Are there any ballads which tell of such a thing?

STARDAS. There are, Highness. And this used to happen in the old days. Love knows how to unite even the hearts of enemies.

ONA DUONUTĖ (*quietly*). I did not plan on running away with a German, but only to save myself from your subjugation. (*Louder, her head raised proudly*). What right have you to insult me, you who seized me by force and hold me captive like a slave?

SKIRGAILA. I wanted to take you for my wife, but you really deserve to be left in the status of a slave.

ONA DUONUTĖ. Who told you that I would not want to be the slave of the lowest swineherd rather than your wife?

SKIRGAILA (*the same way*). Alright, alright! We shall see. (*Turns to the door*). Why are the Poles not here yet? Quick! Bring the Polish pope here.

DAUGAILA (*entering*). He is here already, Highness.

JONAS SKARBEEKAS (*coming to the front*). I am here, Enlightened Highness. It fell to my lot to witness the unhappy events which will bring great disappointment to your brother, and to our common enemies a powerful tool to slander you in the eyes of the world.

SKIRGAILA. Of what concern to you are my enemies and friends! (*Goes close to the princess*). Quickly now, pope, do what is necessary according to your religion so that she (*pointed to the princess*) would become my wife.

JONAS SKARBEEKAS (*placing his hands together and raising his eyes heavenward*). The holy secret of marriage — is a great secret: it joins two souls forever; therefore it can be performed only with prayer and love, not with a heart full of anger.

SKIRGAILA (*harshly*). It is not your affair, silly pope, to pay attention to what is in my heart. If it is necessary to pray, then pray, but quick about it.

JONAS SKARBEEKAS (*the same way*). God our Lord permits matrimony to be performed only when the other half expresses approval for this union. This grace of God must be for everyone's happiness, but not for travail. Let me hear from the princess's lips that she too wants this.

ONA DUONUTĒ. I am compelled by force, as are you, holy man, and there is no agreement from me for this.

SKIRGAILA. The two of you want to try my patience again today. (*Seizing the princess's hand roughly*). Do as I order, pope! There is no other will here, when I have stated mine. Hear?

ONA DUONUTĒ (*trying to free herself*). Let go of me! I am the daughter of a ruler, not a slave.

JONAS SKARBEEKAS (*raising his eyes heavenward and his hands in prayer*). I am the servant of my God and my king. I cannot do that which God forbids and which can be unpleasant for my honorable king.

SKIRGAILA (*grasping her arm so strongly that the princess winces in pain; to a soldier*). Place a spear to him, and run him through if he dares utter another word in opposition. (*The soldier does as he is told*). Well, pope, hurry to do what you're supposed to do: the ruler awaits.

JONAS SKARBEEKAS (*turning to the soldier*). Pierce my breast! I am not afraid of death. I fear only to offend God and hurt the Holy Church.

SKIRGAILA. You are a brave man, and I admire that kind. It is too bad, but the word of the ruler does not change. (*To the soldier*). Run him through, then call pope Jonas.

ONA DUONUTĒ (*halting the soldier by seizing his spear*). Holy man, you will only die in vain by opposing him, and you will not rescue me from captivity.

JONAS SKARBEEKAS. Alright, I shall marry you if you agree to it, but let God see that I do this under force. (*Enter Henry the Mazovian, Jonas of Buchov and Zindram of Mashkovic*).

HENRY THE MAZOVIAN. I forbid you! There is still a God in heaven, there is still the king in Cracow, and I am still here to defend the two of them from coercion.

SKIRGAILA. Well, here is another one! (*To another soldier*). You there! Put a spear to his neck and kill him if he so much as dares to interfere with me. (*The soldier places the tip of his spear against Henry*).

ZINDRAM OF MASHKOVIC (*draws his sword and strikes the spear*). Put that spear away, slave! (*Jonas of Buchov also draws his sword*).

JONAS OF BUCHOV. Where are we? In what sort of land? A bishop and a king's messenger! ...

SKIRGAILA (*again seizing the princess's arm*). Sheath those swords! Sheath your swords, Poles! Did you get an urge to rot in my dungeons?! Oh, you knaves! To threaten me in my own home!

HENRY THE MAZOVIAN. This conduct will cost you dearly, Highness. The Voluine and Podole territories, which are now in our hands, will not now suffice as compensation for the harm done to Poland's honor.

SKIRGAILA. Oh, I know that you have already plotted to seize Voluine and Podole... But you miscalculated badly, Poles: your king and queen are sitting under lock and key in my custody in Gardinas fortress and shall remain there, as you will right here, until the last of your soldiers leaves the fortresses at Podole and Voluine. (*Turning to Jonas Skarbekas*). Well, pope! Do what you have to do. (*Jonas Skarbekas blesses himself then makes the sign of the cross over the duke and princess. With a wave of his hand Skirgaila orders the soldiers to lower their spears. The Polish knights look at one another, replace their swords in the scabbards and stand still, glaring angrily*).