

Pan Tadeusz

by

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)

Book Eight

The Foray

Argument:

The Chief Steward's astronomy. The Chamberlain's views on comets. A mysterious scene in the Judge's room.

Tadeusz's skillful attempts at self-extrication land him in hot water. The foray. The last protest of the Sergeant-at-Arms. The Count takes Soplica Manor. Storm and butchery. Gerwazy as cellarer. The feast.

Translated by Christopher A. Zakrzewski

There is a moment of brooding calm before the storm when the advancing thundercloud draws up overhead and checks the breath of the winds with a louring look. With flashing eyes it sweeps the earth in silence, marking out the places where shortly it will discharge its volley of bolts. Just such a calm brooded over the Manor. It was as if a foreboding of unearthly events had sealed the lips of its inmates and borne their spirits into the realm of dreams.

After supper the Judge and his guests went outdoors to take the evening air. Seating themselves on the turf bench in front of the house, the entire party gazed up at the heavens in an attitude of gloomy silence. The sky seemed to be sinking, contracting, pressing ever closer to the earth, until, like a pair of lovers draped in darkness, earth and sky began their intimate colloquy, confiding their feelings through stifled sighs, murmurs, whispers, and half-uttered words; all this comprised the peculiar music of the evening.

The screech owl, moaning from the gable, launched the concert. Bats rustled their delicate wings, flitting about by the house where the casement panes and peoples' faces shone. Closer still, drawn in great numbers by the ladies' white dresses, whirled the bats' tiny sisters, the moths. They picked on Sophy in the worst way, beating upon her face and sparkling eyes, which they took for a pair of candles. A dancing swarm of insects hummed in the air, as if chiming notes on a glass harmonica. Among these myriad sounds Sophy made out the midges' harmonies, the gnats' jarring semitones.

Meanwhile, in the field, the evening concert had scarcely begun. The musicians had just finished tuning their instruments. Already the corncrake, first fiddle of the meadow, had rasped three times. From the swamp

ground yonder the bittern's booming bass replied. Snipe rose whirling in the air, repeating their drum-like cadences. At last, picking up the hum of the insects and the din of the birds, two ponds broke forth in a two-part chorus like the enchanted lakes of the high Caucasus—mute by day and melodious at night. One pond had clear blue waters verged with sand; from deep within its bosom issued a soft and solemn moan. The other pond, with its miry bed and mud-choked waters, echoed back with a cry both sad and passionate. In both ponds warbled frogs without number. Each choir was tuned to a mighty chord. One boomed *fortissimo*, the other hummed—*sotto voce*. One seemed to complain mournfully, the other merely sighed. So, like a pair of Aeolian harps playing by turns, the ponds conversed across the fields.

The shades of twilight deepened; only the eyes of wolves flashed like lighted tapers from the thickets and the osier-beds bordering the brook. Yonder, on the diminishing horizon, glimmered the shepherds' campfires. At length, kindling her silver lamp, the moon swung clear of the forest and lit up both earth and sky. Side by side like a happy couple they slept, partly uncovered by the moonlight, the sky's chaste arms enfolding the silvery bosom of the earth. Opposite the moon a star winked out, then another, then a thousand, then a million—chief among them Castor and his brother Pollux, whom the ancient Slavs called Lele and Polele. In the people's zodiac these stars have now been renamed; the former is called Lithuania, the latter, the Polish Crown.

Farther off gleamed the two pans of the celestial *Scales*. Upon these dishes, on the day of Creation (the old folk say), God weighed the earth and all the planets in turn; then, fixing these bodies in the abysses of space, he suspended the golden scales from the firmament to serve as a prototype for man's own scales and balances. To the north shone the circle of the starry *Sieve*. God is said to have used it to sift the grains of rye before scattering them from on high for the benefit of our father Adam, whom he had cast out of the Garden of Delights for his sin.

Still higher in the heavens, bereft of its charger, stood *David's Chariot*, its long shaft pointing to the North Star. The old Lithuanians know better. They insist the populace errs in calling it David's, for it is the Angel's car. Lucifer rode it eons ago, when he threw down the gauntlet before God. He was careering along the Milky Way toward Heaven's gates, when Michael struck him down and drove the chariot off the road. There among the stars the car lies ruined; no one may repair it, for the Archangel Michael has laid a ban on it.

The old Lithuanians also know (this from the rabbis no doubt) that the huge *Dragon* of the zodiac, which

winds its starry coils around the heavens, is not a serpent as astronomers mistakenly say, but a fish—*Leviathan* by name. For eons it inhabited the deeps, but after the Great Flood it perished for want of water. The angels then hung the remains from heaven's rafters as both a curiosity and a reminder to the world. Even so did the parish priest of Mir garnish the walls of his church with the excavated ribs and thighbones of giants.

With such stories, all culled from books or passed down by oral tradition, the Chief Steward entertained the guests. Although the old Steward's sight was feeble by night and he could make nothing out in the skies even with the aid of spectacles, yet he knew the name and shape of every constellation by heart. With his finger he pointed them out, along with the trajectories they described.

This evening the guests paid him little attention. No one took the slightest interest in the Sieve, or the Dragon, or the Scales. Today, all eyes and thoughts stood riveted on the new guest that had recently risen to their ken—a comet of great size and power. It had appeared in the west and was bearing northward. With blood-shot eye, it looked askance at the chariot, as if bent on taking Lucifer's place. Trailing its tail like a dragnet, it swept a third of the heavens, gathering up a vast multitude of stars; meanwhile, its head bore higher to the northward, straight for the polar star.

Every night, with a sense of nameless foreboding, the Lithuanian folk gazed up at the heavenly prodigy and read dark meanings into it. But there were other signs as well. Not seldom were ill-omened birds seen gathering in huge flocks in the bare fields. Cawing balefully, they sharpened their bills, as if relishing the prospect of human carrion. Not seldom were dogs seen scratching at the ground, howling in terror, as if they had caught a scent of death, famine, or war. The forest rangers claimed to have seen the Maid of Plagues stalking the churchyard. Towering above the tallest trees she strode, waving a blood-drenched kerchief in her left hand.

The overseer drew all manner of inferences from these signs; he had come to report on the day's labors and was now standing by the fence, quietly holding forth with the accountant. But the Chamberlain, who was sitting on the turf bench, cut short the general talk. All knew he was about to speak, for his large snuffbox flashed out in the moonlight. (The article was wrought of pure gold and inlaid with diamonds; a glass-covered miniature of King Stanislas adorned the lid.) After drumming his fingers on it, he helped himself to a pinch, and spoke: "My dear Steward, all your talk about the stars is but an echo of what you learned at school. When it comes to portents I should rather listen to our common folk. I

also studied the stars—for two years, in Wilno, where the rich and learned lady, Madame Puzynina, endowed a village of two hundred souls for the purchase of various lenses and telescopes. Our famous Father Poczobut, then rector of the Academy, was a watcher of the skies; eventually, he gave up his chair and telescopes and retired to an abbey where he died an exemplary death. I also knew Sniadecki, a very learned man, though a layman. Now as I see it, our astronomers observe planets and comets even as our townsfolk observe the movement of conveyances. They can tell you if someone is driving up to the Royal Castle or departing abroad through the city turnpike. But who rides inside and why, what the ambassador discussed with the King, and if His Majesty replied with a declaration of peace or war—this they never ask. I recall the time Branicki left for Jassy in his carriage. The vile car had a whole host of Targowica partisans in tow, like a comet's tail. The common folk, who took no part in the public deliberations, surmised right away the tail boded treachery! I hear they called the comet a broom that would end up sweeping millions away."

"It is true, Your Excellency," replied the Steward with a bow. "I remember well what I heard as a child. Though I was not yet ten, I recall the time our late-lamented Sapieha was staying at our house. He was still a lieutenant in the dragoons at the time; later he became Marshal of the Royal Court and died Grand Chancellor of Lithuania at the ripe old age of a four score and thirty. He served under Hetman Jablonowski's banner when Sobieski raised the siege of Vienna. The Chancellor described the moment when King Jan mounted his horse for the great battle. The papal nuncio had just blessed him, and the Austrian ambassador (Count Wilczek) was kissing his foot and passing him the stirrup, when the King exclaimed, 'See what goes on in the heavens!' Looking up, they saw a comet streaking westward across the sky like Mohammed's host. Later, Father Bartochowski would write a panegyric under the title *Orientis Fulmen* for the triumphal march through Cracow. He made much of that comet. I have also read about it in a work titled *The Janina*, which describes the late King's entire campaign. The book contains engravings of Mohammed's mighty standard, and just such a comet as we see today."

"Amen to that!" replied the Judge. "I take your omen to foretell the advent of another Jan the Third! Today we have a new great hero in the west. God willing, the comet bears him hither to us!"

The Steward nodded his head gloomily. "Aye, comets augur wars," he said, "but sometimes they bode mere quarrels! It is an ill omen that it should appear directly over the Manor. Perhaps it portends some local

misfortune. Yesterday we had wrangling and disputes enough during the hunt and banquet. In the morning the Notary squabbled with the Assessor, and Tadeusz challenged the Count in the evening—over the bearskin, it would seem. If the Judge had not stopped me, I might have reconciled the parties at the table, for I meant to tell them about a curious hunting incident not unlike the one that occurred yesterday. It happened to the finest pair of shooters of my day: the Honorable Deputy Tadeusz Reytan and the Prince de Nassau. And it happened like this:

“The General Starosta of Podolia, Prince Czartoryski, was traveling up from Volhynia to visit his estates in Poland, or, if I remember rightly, to attend Parliament in Warsaw. On his way, he called on the nobility—partly for amusement, and partly to drum up support. He dropped in on the late Tadeusz Reytan, who became our deputy from Nowogrodek. (I had the honor of growing up in his house.) To honor the Prince’s visit, Reytan arranged a reception. A great number of the nobility came out. They staged a play (the Prince loves the theater). Kaszyc (the one who lives in Jatra) supplied the fireworks. Tyzenhaus sent down a troupe of dancers. Oginski and Soltan (the one from Zdzieciol) provided the orchestra. In a word, the entertainment of the house was lavish beyond measure; and in the forest they held a splendid hunt. Now it is well known to you gentlemen that almost all the Czartoryskis in living memory, though they trace their origins to the Jagiellos, have never been very keen on hunting, not because they are lazy of course, but because of the foreign tastes they have acquired. The Prince would sooner glance into a book than a kennel, and sooner into a lady’s bower than a forest thicket.

“Accompanying him was the German Prince, de Nassau, of whom it was said that while visiting the Libyan lands he had gone on a hunting expedition with the Moorish kings. The Prince was much given to boasting about it. On this occasion we were hunting wild boar. Reytan brought down a huge sow at great risk to his life, for he had fired at close range. All of us were amazed and commended him warmly for his feat of marksmanship. Only de Nassau seemed unimpressed. He strutted about, murmuring all the time under his breath that a good aim proved but a bold eye, while cold steel proved a bold arm. And he began to hold forth again on his Libyan hunting expedition, his Moorish kings, and the tiger he had speared. Reytan listened to him sullenly. Always a hot-tempered fellow, he slapped his sword and cried out, ‘Your Highness! Who looks boldly fights boldly! A boar is as good as a tiger; a sword as good as a spear!’ There followed a heated exchange. Fortunately, Czartoryski intervened and put an end to their dispute in French.

What he said I have no idea, but it was like heaping ashes on smoldering embers, for Reytan had been stung to the quick. He bided his time, swearing to play a trick on the German. That trick nearly cost him his life; and he played it the very next day. Just how, I shall tell you in a moment.”

Here the Steward paused, raised his right hand, and beckoned for the Chamberlain’s snuffbox. He took the snuff slowly, with an air of indifference, as if to keep his listeners in a heightened state of anticipation. At last he resumed, but once again his anecdote, which compelled such rapt attention, was broken off. A servant came out to inform the Judge that a caller had arrived on a matter of urgent business. The Judge bade them goodnight; the company dispersed, some to the house, others to the hayloft. The Judge retired to confer with the caller.

While the rest of the household slept, Tadeusz wandered about the hallway, pacing like a watchman near his uncle’s door. He wished to consult with him on an important matter, and it had to be now, before going to bed. He dared not knock, for the Judge had locked the door. A private conference was in progress. Tadeusz waited in the hall, listening intently.

He heard sobbing inside. Careful not to touch the doorknob, he peered through the keyhole. A strange sight greeted his eye. The Judge and Robak were on their knees, in a tight embrace. Both were weeping and shedding tender tears. Robak was kissing the Judge’s hand, while the Judge, sobbing, clung to the Bernardine’s neck. For a full quarter of an hour they remained silent. At last Robak said softly:

“My brother! Lord knows how well I have kept these secrets to which I bound myself in the confessional out of sorrow for my sins. Lord knows how, having devoted myself entirely to Him and my country, and renounced pride and earthly glory, I have lived until now and wished to die a Bernardine monk—aye, and conceal my name not only from the world, but also from you and my own son! But now my Provincial has given me leave *in articulo mortis* to disclose it. Who knows if I shall return alive. Who knows what goes on in Dobrzyn! O my brother! What an awful, awful bungle! The French are still nowhere near. We must wait until the winter is over; but it seems there is no restraining our nobility. I fear I have been overzealous in arousing them. They mistook my meaning. The Warden has snarled everything up. And now that crazy Count, I hear, has gone to Dobrzyn. I did not dare head him off, and this for a very good reason. Old Matthias knows who I am. If he were to give me away, I should have to forfeit my head to Pocketknife. Nothing will hold the Warden back! My neck is of no account, but the discovery could scupper our plans.

"Still, I must go and see what passes there, even if it should cost me my life. Without me the nobility is sure to run amok. Keep well, dear brother, keep well, I must hurry. If I die, you alone will heave a sigh for my soul. If war breaks out, the whole secret being known to you, finish what I started; above all, remember that you are a Soplica!"

Here the priest wiped away his tears, straightened his habit, pulled up his cowl, and, opening the shutter quietly at the rear of the study, leapt out into the garden. The Judge remained in his chair, and wept.

Tadeusz waited a moment before rattling the doorknob. The Judge admitted him. Entering quietly, he made a low bow.

"Dear Uncle," he said. "I have been here but a few short days and barely had time to enjoy my stay with you. But I must take my leave this very evening—tomorrow at the latest. As you know, we demanded satisfaction from the Count. Fighting him is my affair and I have issued my challenge. Since dueling is forbidden in Lithuania, I intend to cross the border to the Duchy of Warsaw. The Count is a braggart, I know, but he does not lack courage. I have no doubt he will show up at the appointed place. We shall have it out. God willing, I shall chastise him and then swim the

Lososna to join the ranks of my fellows who stand waiting on the other side. I understand my father's testament provides for my going for a soldier. Who gainsaid it, I have no idea."

"My dear Tadeusz!" replied his uncle. "Has someone scalded you with boiling water, or are you dodging like a hunted fox who waves his brush one way and goes another! True, we have called out the Count and cannot back down. But to leave now! What has got into you? It is customary to dispatch a second before a duel, and set terms. The Count may yet offer an apology and retract his insult. Wait a while; there is plenty of time. Or perhaps there is some other burr under your saddle, eh? Come tell me plainly. What is this about? I am your uncle. I may be getting on in years, but I know what goes on in a young man's heart." (Here Soplica chuckled his nephew's chin). "I have been a father to you. A little bird tells me you have been intriguing with the ladies. By George, our youth waste no time in taking to the fairer sex! Come, Tadeusz, be honest with me; speak plainly."

"Yes, you are right, dear Uncle," mumbled Tadeusz. "There are other reasons, and perhaps I am to blame! A mistake! What can I say? A misfortune! Hard to remedy! No, Uncle, I cannot stay any longer. A youthful error! Please, ask me no more questions. I must leave the Manor without delay."

"There I knew it!" exclaimed his uncle. "A lover's quarrel! Last night I noticed you biting your lip and frowning at a certain young lady. I saw the sour look on her face too. I know all about these trifles. When a pair of children falls in love, there is no end to these little mishaps: happy one minute, sad and fretful the next. Now they snap at each other over God knows what, now they sulk silently in the corner. Sometimes they even bolt for the fields! If such a fit has taken hold of you, be patient. There is a remedy. I will undertake to reconcile you shortly. I know all about these trifles. After all, I too was young once. Now tell me all, for I have something to say as well. This way we will take each other into mutual confidence."

"Uncle!" said Tadeusz, kissing his hand and blushing. "I will tell you the truth. I have grown very fond of the young lady, Sophy, your ward, though I have seen her but on two occasions. They tell me you plan to wed me to the daughter of the Chamberlain, a beautiful girl—a rich man's daughter. But I could never marry Mistress Rose, for I love Sophy. A man's heart is hard to change; and it would be dishonest to marry while loving another. Perhaps time will heal the wound. I am leaving, and for a good long while."

"Tadeusz, my boy!" his uncle broke in. "It strikes me as a strange way of loving. Fleeing the object of your love! I am glad you are frank with me. But do you not see how silly it would be, if you left? What would you say if I myself arranged to wed you to Sophy? Eh? What? Not jumping for joy?"

"Your kindness astonishes me, sir!" replied Tadeusz after a pause. "But it is useless. Your favor would come to naught. Alas! A fool's hope! Mistress Telimena will never allow it!"

"We shall ask her," said the Judge.

"She will never agree," countered Tadeusz abruptly. "No, Uncle, I cannot wait. I must leave soon, at sunrise; only please give me your blessing. I have everything in readiness. I ride for the Kingdom without delay."

The Judge curled his whiskers and glowered angrily at the boy. "You call this plain speaking?" he said. "Is this how you confide in me: first the duel, and now this romantic attachment and this departure of yours? Oh, some intrigue is afoot, I'll warrant. People have talked. I have had you followed! You, sir, are a philanderer and a scapegrace. You, sir, tell lies. And what were you up to the other night, sniffing about the house like a bird dog? Oh Tadeusz! Could it be that you have seduced Sophy and now you mean to fly the coop? Well, young cock, you shall not wriggle out of it so easily. Love or no love, you shall marry Sophy, or bear the lash! Tomorrow you

shall stand at the altar! And he talks of feelings and a constant heart! You, sir, are a lying scoundrel. Faugh! I shall look into this, Tadeusz. I'll make your ears smart yet! I have had trouble enough today—till my head positively aches with it! And now he would deny me a good night's rest! Off to bed with you, sir!"

With that he flung open the door and summoned the Sergeant-at-Arms to help him disrobe.

Tadeusz left quietly, hanging his head, the bitter interview very much on his mind. Never in his life had he been so harshly scolded. He sensed the justice of his uncle's charges and blushed at his conduct. What now? What if Sophy should find out? Should he ask for her hand? But what would Telimena say? No, he could stay no longer. Lost in his thoughts, he had hardly taken a few steps when something swept into his path. Looking up, he saw a ghostly white figure advancing toward him. Tall and thin and haggard it glided along, the tremulous moonlight glancing off its gown.

"You ingrate!" it groaned, stopping before him. "You sought out my glances and now you shun them. You sought out my words and now stop up your ears as if my words and glances were poison! It serves me right. Now I see what you are. A man! Not given to coquetry, I was loath to torment you. I sought to make you happy. And this is how you repay me! Triumph over my tender heart has hardened yours. Having won my heart too quickly, you are as quick to scorn it. Oh, serves me right! But believe me, this cruel lesson has taught me to despise myself with even greater scorn than yours!"

"Telimena!" he replied. "Honest to God, it is not that I am unfeeling; nor do I shun you out of scorn. But consider the matter yourself. People have been watching and spying on us. Can we go on like this, in the open? What will people say? Why, it isn't proper! My God, it is a sin!"

"A sin!" she replied with a bitter smile. "O babe in the woods! You lambkin! If I, a woman in love, could not care less if the whole world should find out about me and blacken my name, why should you, a man, who can blithely own to having a dozen lovers! Tell me the truth. You mean to desert me."

And she burst into tears.

"Telimena!" said the youth. "What would people say on seeing an able-bodied man of my age settling down in the country for a life of love when so many young men, so many husbands are leaving their wives and children and crossing the frontier to group and march under Poland's colors? Even if I cared to stay, does it depend on me? My father declared in his will that I should be a soldier in the Polish army. Now my uncle has repeated

the command. I leave tomorrow. I have made my decision and, by God, I will not go back on it."

"Far be it from me to stand in the way of your fame and happiness," replied Telimena. "You are a man. You will find a lover worthier of your heart, richer and fairer! Only before we part, grant me this one solace. Tell me your affections sprang from the heart, that this was not an idle dalliance, a wanton fling, but true love. Tell me my darling Tadeusz loves me! Let me hear once more from his own lips the words, 'I love you.' Let me carve them deep in my heart, imprint them in my mind, so that, knowing how you loved me once, I may the more readily forgive you."

Once again she burst into sobs. Seeing her weep and entreat him so tenderly for a mere trifle, Tadeusz felt an anguish of pity. Honest compassion welled up within him. Had he then searched the recesses of his heart, he would have been at pains to tell if he loved her or not.

"Telimena!" he said with feeling. "Heaven strike me if it should be untrue that I was fond of—aye, even loved—you. Our moments together were brief, but they passed so sweetly and tenderly that they shall long remain in my heart. Honest to God, I will never forget you!"

Telimena leapt up and flung her arms around his neck.

"I knew it!" she said. "You do love me. So I live again! Today I was on the point of taking my life. But now that you love me, my darling, can you really think of leaving me? My heart and all I own are yours. I will follow you wherever you go. With you, every nook in this earth

shall be dear to me. Believe me, our love shall turn the most barren wasteland into a garden of delights."

"What!" exclaimed Tadeusz, tearing himself free from her embrace "Have you taken leave of your senses? Where? What for? Follow me, a simple soldier? You a camp follower!"

"Then we shall be married!" she said.

"No! Never!" cried Tadeusz. "I have no intention of marrying at this time. Nor will I be anyone's lover. Trifles! Enough of this! I beg you, my sweet, come to your senses! Compose yourself! I am grateful to you, but marriage is out of the question. Let us love each other, but at a distance. I cannot stay any longer. No, no, I must go. Keep well, my Telimena. I leave tomorrow."

With that, he put on his hat and turned to leave. But, like Medusa's head, Telimena's eyes and face froze him in his tracks. Against his will he remained, staring in terror at the pale figure standing motionless, breathless, lifeless before him. Stretching forth her hand like a sword poised for the thrust, she pointed her finger straight at his eyes, and cried:

"Hah! Just what I wanted to hear, worm's tongue! Lizard's heart! That on account of you I should scorn the addresses of the Count, the Notary, and the Assessor; that you should seduce me, then cast me off like an orphan—that is of no account; after all, you are a man, and I know your knavery! That you, like others of your sex, should break faith with me is no surprise, but I had no idea you could lie so basely! I listened in at your uncle's door! So it is the child, Sophy, is it? Fond of her, eh? Treacherous designs! No sooner do you beguile one hapless soul than under her very nose you seek out a fresh victim! Flee if you like, but my curse shall hound you; or else remain here, and I shall tell the world of your perfidy. No more shall your arts deceive others as they deceived me! Out of my sight! I scorn you, sir! You are a liar, a base scoundrel!"

Tadeusz flinched under the force of her invective. These were mortal insults to a nobleman's ear; no Soplica had ever been so rebuked. His face turned pale as a corpse. He stamped his foot, bit his lip, and muttered, "Stupid fool!"

He stalked off; but the word "scoundrel" resonated within his heart. The youth cringed inside; he knew he had brought it all on himself. He had done Telimena a great wrong; his conscience told him her rebuke was just. Yet her reproaches made him despise her all the more. O Sophy! But he dared not think of her for shame. So his uncle had meant to wed them all along! Dear, sweet Sophy! She might have been his wife. But Satan had so ensnared him in web upon web of sin and lies and now with a sneer left him rebuked and despised by all! A few brief days and his prospects lay in ashes! And he felt the justice of his requital.

Suddenly the thought of the duel flashed like an anchor of repose in the turmoil of his brain. "Murder the Count! The scoundrel!" he cried out in anger. "Avenge myself or die!" But what exactly for, he did not know. The rage subsided as swiftly as it arose. Once more he was seized by an anguish of sorrow. What if he was right and the Count and Sophy had an understanding between them? Well, what of it? Perhaps the Count was truly in love with her. Perhaps she loved him in return and would take him for her spouse! What right had he to break up this attachment? Who was he, hapless one, to ruin other people's happiness?"

He fell into a desperate funk. He saw no way out for him except in immediate flight. Where? To his grave, no doubt! And with his fist pressed to his heavy brow, he made for the two ponds at the bottom of the fields. Stopping by the miry pool, he plunged his gaze into the greenish depths and drew the muddy scent luxuriously into his lungs. Like every wild extravagance, self-slaughter

has its fanciful aspect. In the mad turmoil of his thoughts, Tadeusz felt an inexpressible urge to drown himself in those turbid waters.

But Telimena, surmising the youth's despair from his wild demeanor and seeing him make for the ponds, took fright on his account. Though burning still with righteous anger, she was at heart a caring soul. True, it pained her that Tadeusz had dared love another, and for this she had meant to punish him; but never did she wish to see him dead. With outstretched arms she bolted after him, crying, "Stop! No matter! Love, wed, leave, as you please, but for God's sake, stop!" But he had forged on ahead at a run and was now standing on the bank.

Now, by a strange quirk of fate, the Count was at this very moment riding at the head of his troop of jockeys along that very bank. Entranced by the serenity of the night and the marvelous music of the aquatic orchestra (those very same choirs that sang like Aeolian harps; no creatures sing as sweetly as our Polish frogs!), he drew rein. Forgetting all about the raid, he turned his ear to the pond and listened intently. His eye swept the fields and the immensity of the sky; clearly, he was composing a nocturnal landscape in his mind.

It was indeed a picturesque spot. The two bodies of water leaned into each other like a pair of lovers. The water of the pond to the right stood smooth and unruffled like a maiden's cheek. The pond on the left was darker; like the swarthy face of a youth sprouting a manly down. The first pool was verged all round with golden sand as with locks of flaxen hair, while the brow of the other bristled with osiers and tufts of willow. Both pools stood draped in garments of herbage.

Two rills flowed from each of the ponds. Like two arms they met and merged into a single stream. Farther down, the stream tumbled into a gloomy ravine and fled away, though you could see it still, for its waves bore the light of the moon along. The water cascaded in sheets; each sheet sparkled with bouquets of moonbeams. Inside the ravine, the light broke into shivers only to be gathered up and borne away by the stream. Meanwhile, from above, fresh bouquets of moonbeams cascaded down. You fancied the Naiad of Switez were sitting by the pond: with one hand she decants a bottomless pitcher, while dipping into her apron pocket with the other, she playfully bestrews the brook with fistfuls of enchanted gold.

Once through the ravine, the brook flowed out on a level plain. There, slowing to a leisurely meander, it fell silent; yet still you could see it move, for the moonbeams continued to glint along the shimmering surface of the stream. So moves the lovely snake of Zmudz, the one the Lithuanian folk call *givojtos*. [15] Though he seems to

slumber in the heather, yet he moves all the time, for his skin, ever changeful, turns now gold, now silver, until he vanishes from sight among the ferns and mosses. So too the meandering brook hid among the alders whose feathery forms loomed up on the edge of the horizon like spirits half seen and half wreathed in mist.

A watermill stood hidden in the ravine between the two ponds. Like an old guardian eavesdropping on his lovesick charges, it grumbled angrily, swaying back and forth, tossing its head and arms and muttering threats. So, coming suddenly to life, it shook its mossy brow and set its many-fingered fist in whirling motion with a loud clatter. No sooner did it begin to grate its sharp-toothed jaws, than it drowned out the love-talk of the ponds and roused the Count from his reverie.

Astonished to see Tadeusz standing so close to his armed party, he cried out, "To arms! Seize him!" The jockeys leapt from their horses; and before Tadeusz could take stock of what was happening, they had taken him captive. Then, galloping on to the manor, they quickly overran the courtyard. The house awoke. The dogs yammered. The watchmen cried alarm. The Judge ran out, half-dressed. At first he took the armed troop for brigands, but then he recognized the Count.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried. The Count flashed his sword over him, but when he saw he was unarmed, he stayed his ardor.

"Soplica!" he said. "Ancestral foe of my clan! This day I punish you for all your offenses, both ancient and new. This day, before I avenge the insult to my honor, you shall render me an account for the seizure of my fortune!"

"In the name of the Father and the Son!" exclaimed the Judge, crossing himself. "Faugh! Are you a brigand, sir? Upon my word, does this befit a **man of your birth, your rank in the world—your breeding?** I will brook no harm done here!"

Meanwhile, the Judge's servants had run up, some bearing cudgels, others muskets. The Chief Steward stood some distance off, eyes fixed on the Count, a knife up his sleeve.

They would have set to on the spot, if the Judge had not stopped them. Defense was futile; even now a new enemy was approaching. A light flashed among the alders, followed instantly by the discharge of a harquebus. Even now a troop of horsemen came thundering across the bridge. "Harrow! Hang Soplica!" roared a thousand voices. The Judge recognized Gerwazy's battle cry and shuddered.

"This is nothing!" cried the Count. "There will be more of us yet. Judge, lay down your arms! These are my allies."

But then the Assessor ran up.

"I arrest you in the name of His Imperial Highness!" he cried. "Surrender your sword, sir, or I shall call out the army! You know the penalty for mounting a raid at night. Ukase Twelve Hundred stipulates that—"

The Count struck him in the face with the flat of his blade. The Assessor went down without a sound and crept away among the nettles. All thought him wounded or dead.

"So there *is* banditry afoot!" cried the Judge.

A collective groan went up, overtopped by Sophy's shriek. Flinging her arms around the Judge, she began to squeal like a child undergoing a ritual bloodletting. Meanwhile, Telimena leapt in among the horses. With joined hands stretched out toward the Count, her head thrown back, hair spread wildly across her shoulders, she cried out in terror:

"Upon your honor! By all that is holy, we beg you upon our knees! Do you dare refuse us, Count? Harsh man! You must slay us women first!"

She went off in a dead faint.

Surprised and not a little unnerved by this scene, the Count leapt to her aid.

"Mistress Sophy!" he cried. "Mistress Telimena! Never will I imbrue this sword in the blood of defenseless souls. People of Soplica Manor! You are my prisoners. This is how I did it once in Italy near the crag the Sicilians call Birbante Rocca. There I took a robber's camp. Those bearing arms I slew; those without weapons I seized and bound. They walked behind my horsemen, a splendid train adorning my triumphal march. Later we hanged them at Etna's foot."

It was a singular stroke of good luck for the Soplicas that the Count had swifter horses than the nobility. In his zeal to be the first to engage the enemy, he and his jockeys had outstripped the main body of horsemen by at least a mile. Well-disciplined and orderly, his men comprised a regular army of sorts, unlike the rest of the nobility, who, as is often the case with insurgents, were unruly and all too eager to string up their foes.

Now that his ardor and rage had cooled, the Count considered how he might end the raid without bloodshed. He bade his men lock the Soplicas in the house as prisoners of war, and stationed guards at the doors.

Then with a "Harrow! Hang Soplica!" the nobility rushed on in a body, encircled the grounds, and took them by storm; all the more easily as their captain had already been taken and his garrison had fled the field. Still, the victors' blood was up; they sought out the foe. Barred from the house, they ran to the farmyard and burst into the kitchen. The sight of the pots and pans and the hearth not yet grown cold, the smell of recent cooking,

and the sound of dogs crunching on the scraps of the evening meal—all this went straight to their hearts and set their thoughts on a different course. While cooling their wrath, it inflamed their desire for food. Worn out by their

ride and the whole day spent in deliberations, they thrice roared in unison, “Meat! Meat!” “Drink! Drink!” came the refrain. The nobility broke up into two choirs, one calling for meat, the other for drink. The cries went echoing through the Manor, and wherever they were heard, mouths watered, bellies growled. And so, at a signal from the kitchen, the entire army dispersed to forage for victuals.

Meanwhile, Gerwazy, repulsed from the Judge’s rooms, was forced to defer to the Count’s guards. Unable to avenge himself on his enemy, he turned his mind to his second main objective. Being practiced and skilled in the law, he was eager to establish the Count’s legal title to his new inheritance. He set out in search of the Sergeant-at-Arms. After a lengthy search, he found him skulking behind the stove. Seizing him by the collar, he dragged him out into the yard.

“Mr. Sergeant-at-Arms!” he said, prodding his breast with Pocketknife. “The Count makes bold to bid Your Honor proclaim before our gentry brethren his lordship’s formal *intromissio* of the castle, the Soplica manor, the village, fields, both sowed and fallow; in a word, *cum grovibus, forestis, et borderibus, peasantibus, scultetis et omnibus rebus; et quibusdam aliis*. You know how it goes. So out with it; let’s hear you bark! And leave nothing out!”

“Now hold on a moment, Mr. Warden!” said Protazy, uncowed, thrusting his hands under his belt. “I am quite ready to do the bidding of any party, but I warn you, a decree proclaimed under duress and in the dark of night carries no weight.”

“Duress? What duress?” replied the Warden. “There is no violence here. Why, I am asking you nicely, sir! If you find it dark, old Pocketknife here shall oblige and strike you a light so bright that seven churches couldn’t hold a candle to it!”

“Come now, dear Gerwazy!” Protazy replied. “Why so testy? I am but a court usher. It is not up to me to examine the merits of a lawsuit. The party merely summons the usher, tells him what to say, and he proclaims it. An usher is an emissary of the law, and one does not punish emissaries; so I cannot imagine why you are keeping me under guard. I will pen a writ at once. Bid someone fetch me a lamp; meanwhile, I shall make the announcement. Brothers! Come to order!”

So as to be better heard, he climbed a large pile of logs that lay seasoning by the garden fence. Directly he reached

the top he vanished from sight as if swept away by the wind. They heard him land with a thump in the cabbage patch below, then saw his white confederate cap streak like a dove through the dark hemp. Watering Can took a potshot at it and missed. There was a rustle of stalks. Protazy had reached the hop thicket. “I protest!” he yelled. By now he was sure of his escape; behind him were the osier-bed and the brook’s miry ground.

Protazy’s protest was like the final cannon shot upon the taking of a rampart; all resistance ceased at Soplica Manor. The ravenous nobility fell to looting and pillaging at will. Baptist set up post in the cowshed. There he felled an ox and two calves with blows to the head. Razor slit their throats with his slender blade. With no less skill did Bodkin stick the sucklings and porkers between the shoulder blades. Now it was the poultry’s turn to face slaughter. The watchful geese, ancient Rome’s preservers, honked in vain for help: no Manlius stood by to repel the treacherous Gaul. Matthias Watering Can broke into the pen. He wrung the necks of some, others he took alive, lashing them to his belt by their necks. The geese gurgled and writhed; the ganders hissed and nipped at their assailant—all in vain. Covered in sparks of goose down and borne on by the wheel-like flapping motion of their wings, Matthias made straight for the kitchen. You would have sworn he was *Chochlik*—the winged evil sprite.

But the most appalling, if quietest, butchery took place in the chicken coop. Young Sadsack burst inside. Using a halter for a noose, he yanked the ruffled hens and cockerels from their roosts. One after another he wrung their necks and piled them on the floor. Beautiful birds! Fattened on pearls of barley. Foolish Sadsack! What fit of madness took you? Now you shall never appease Sophy’s wrath!

Recalling the old days, Gerwazy appealed to the nobility for their belts. Lowering them into the Soplica cellars, they hoisted up puncheons of silvery vodka, oak-seasoned mead, and ale. Some of the casks they broached at once. The rest they seized lustily and, like a swarm of ants, rolled them to the castle where the entire host was gathering to spend the night; it was there that the Count had established his headquarters.

Laying a hundred bonfires, they began to boil, broil, and grill. Tables groaned with meat. Rivers of spirits flowed. The nobility meant to eat, drink, and sing the night out. Gradually, they began to drowse and yawn. Eye after eye drooped shut. Heads began to nod. Every man dropped off where he sat, one over his bowl, another over his tankard, still another over his joint of beef. Sleep, death’s brother, had finally vanquished the victors. ▲