



The Minstrel

a drama from the age of the crusades

by Christian Lanciai (1997)
after Walter Scott and Gore Vidal

The characters
(as they appear):

Blondel, minstrel
a hoodlum
a lady
a guest
a gentleman
a prudent man
King Richard Lionheart
Baudoin
Maynard of Goritz
William
an officer
Archduke Leopold of Austria
Countess Valeria
Konrad of Monferrato
Guy de Lusignan
Sir Kenneth Huntingdon
El Hakim, Arabic physician
Theoderic of Engaddi, hermit
King Philip August of France
Grand Master of the Templars
Lady Edith Plantagenet

Other crusaders, servants and attendants

The action takes place in Europe and the Holy Land during the 1190s.

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The Minstrel

Act I scene 1. Darkness. Blondel appears.

Blondel I wander lonely as a cloud in the night, driven forward by an invisible wind to abstruse destinies, without meaning, without direction and without possibility to say anything against the wind. Everything is dark, and I am blind, and only terrors surround me in this world of constant threats by strangers and dangers; for I have lost my king. Abandoned I am quite alone in a world of only darkness, for the only light in the world I had was my king.

(Some light shows a dark street. Blondel encounters a hoodlum.)

Hoodlum Watch your step, you ass hole!

Blondel I am no ass.

Hoodlum Of course you aren't, you blind hedgehog!

Blondel Neither am I any hedgehog.

Hoodlum What are you then? A mole will find his way by faltering better than a sloth like you!

Blondel What kind of an animal is a sloth?

Hoodlum A slothful good-for-nothing of course.

Blondel You are just pulling my legs.

Hoodlum Can't you take a joke? You are too sober! Let me buy you a drink!

Blondel So you don't want to hurt me?

Hoodlum What kind of a knave do you think I am? I just came out from the tavern but will gladly go back there. Come along!

(Pushes him into the tavern, which opens and displays many merry customers in the primitive middle ages.)

Look what I found! Someone who has come wrong!

Lady We have thousands of them. Every single soul is lost in this world.

Hoodlum But this is the servant of a noble man! He is almost like real page!

Blondel Where am I?

Guest In Vienna, of course! Here you are at home!

Blondel (aside) Yes, I am at home here and well taken care of, for no one will here suspect my secret.

Gentleman Where did you find such a small quaint fellow, you hooligan?

Hoodlum He was just wandering loose and distracted in the street, so I thought I could get him a drink and help the poor fellow to some orientation.

Gentleman He is not from this country.

Hoodlum Any devil can see that! What will it be, you lost miserable fool?

Blondel Anything.

Gentleman Who are you?

Blondel I think I have lost my memory.

Lady I know who he is. Anyone can see that he is someone's discarded lackey.

Gentleman Well he certainly has no master, but who was his master?

Lady Anyone can see that. Such pale weaklings are wandering all around Europe searching for their masters, who have fallen somewhere fighting the wild Saracens in the deserts of the far east.

Gentleman (to Blondel) Are you the son of a crusader?

Blondel No.

Guest I think he might be a minstrel.

Hoodlum And why do you think so?

Guest He looks like it.

Gentleman (confidently) Are you a minstrel?

Blondel (doesn't answer but blushes)

Lady He blushes!

Guest (triumphant) He is a minstrel!

Several (the call goes around) We have a minstrel among us!

Lady Sing for us, Minstrel!

Guest Vienna needs all songs!

(Everyone has great expectations of the minstrel, who clears the throat.)

Blondel I am sorry, noble company, but I can no longer sing, for we have lost the war, Jerusalem is fallen, and the griefs and sorrows in the desert have dried out my singing voice.

Guest He is a minstrel!

Lady Sing for us anyway, gentle minstrel!

Gentleman If you have lost your zest for singing, you can still tell us something.

Lady Yes, tell us something!

Guest Tell us some story of the lovely Berengaria.

Blondel Do you know about Berengaria then?

Gentleman The whole world knows Berengaria of Navarre.

Blondel (inspired) The Queen of Cyprus, lovelier than Venus, born from whiter and purer foam than Aphrodite...

Guest He is coming to it.

Gentleman Tell me, why did Richard Lionheart really marry Berengaria?

Blondel (smiles) His mother ordered him.

Gentleman I thought so.

Lady He is a true minstrel! Tell us more!

Blondel About Berengaria's beauty?

Guest About anything!

Blondel It was the imperious queen Eleanor who commanded king Richard to give heirs to his country, but Richard preferred to go for a crusade. Was queen Eleanor discouraged by that? Oh no! She then threatened Richard to give his throne to John without land, unless Richard married at once. When Richard heard this he was already in Sicily and was possessed with sacred anger, so he vanquished the kingdom of Cyprus for himself. The fleet of Navarre was there at the time, and on the king's ship was his fair daughter Berengaria. Just to appease the mother, Richard Lionheart there and then married the lovely Berengaria.

Guest (delighted) He can even tell us gossip from the courts!

A prudent man You talk about it as if you had seen king Richard and his queen yourself.

Blondel (apprehensive) No, not at all.

Prudent man Don't be afraid. Tell us. Was she very beautiful?

Blondel (to the man) Not very. She is small and rather simple. But she has an honest heart and is sincere and righteous.

Prudent man Then you have been there.

Lady Tell us more! Where is Berengaria now?

Blondel (openly to all) She was sent by king Richard home to England.

Lady Wasn't he pleased with her presence?

Blondel No, that was not the problem. He thought the terrible wars were not the proper place for a beautiful woman.

Hoodlum I think he sent her packing, since he must have found other and better women on location.

Guest And why do you think so?

Hoodlum Everyone knows, that in the east everyone has a harem.

Gentleman Only Saladin, the sultan and the emirs.

Hoodlum What kind of nonsense is that? All loose women in Europe have been sent to the Levant.

Gentleman Yes, as washer-women!

Hoodlum Washer-women? Is that what you think?

Gentleman Even the pope says so.

Hoodlum That pope can kiss his arse with all his washer-women!

Guest Please, don't start fighting now!

Hoodlum Who wants to fight over some washer-women!

Lady I know for sure, that those washer-women went their quite willingly and with delight! For the host of crusaders was just all the wildest and maddest villains of Europe!

Gentleman And what has our minstrel to say about that?

Blondel (somewhat embarrassed) It's true that there are erotic difficulties and problems in the East. Mohammed himself, the prophet of Islam, was not satisfied with only four wives but added at least five serving maids more.

Hoodlum What was it I told you? The East can turn on anyone to any virility!

Blondel But there are also terrible diseases.

Guest As a result of love?

Blondel No, because of the climate.

Lady He has been there! It is obvious!

Prudent man Where is king Richard now?

Blondel (frightened) That I must not tell you.

Prudent man You don't need to be afraid. Do not mind the merry guests here. They are innocent, and there are no spies here. I know who you are. You are king Richard's own minstrel.

Blondel How do you know?

Prudent man I have heard you singing myself outside Jerusalem.

Blondel We never managed to capture Jerusalem.

Prudent man I know. That ruined the entire international enterprise. But come with me aside. Tell me how you got separated from your king.

Blondel This is confidential.

Prudent man I know. Where is king Richard now?

Blondel He is taken prisoner by the duke Leopold.

Prudent man So they succeeded in capturing him. So he got into Austria?

Blondel There was no other way. The problems started in Acre. We didn't reach any further than Zara. From there the only way was through the country.

Prudent man And you travelled incognito of course?

Blondel My king thought he could make it.

Prudent man Tell me how they trapped him.

Blondel The problems started in Goritz.

Scene 2. The inn of Goritz.

Richard (enters dressed as a monk, long-haired and harrowed)

And what do you think then the Jew said? Yes, he claimed that I had stolen it! I then grabbed that scoundrel by the collar and thundered: "Are you accusing me of being a thief, you miserable miser?" He then yelled in fear: "Pardon me, but such a precious ruby is very rare in the humble hands of a poor monk, especially if he wishes to sell it!" I then dropped the wretch to hell and spat at him and left.

Baudoin Was it wise to thus draw attention and to demonstrate it so openly?

Richard Baldwin, you if anyone knows that I can never control myself and not even in a priestly outfit. But where is my minstrel? I miss Blondel of Néel.

Baudoin He should be here. (*enter Blondel*)

Richard There you are in the right moment! I need to be cheered up! What is your song for today?

Blondel My king, my songs became too melancholy from the desolation and death of the desert. You know that I have never more sung a song since the battle of the Lord's city Jerusalem which we lost.

Richard Your wonderful melancholy at least always soothes and quiets my wrath. You are good for me, my minstrel! You must never part from me. You are all I have left of the desert and the wild beauty of the holy land of the crusades. I lost everything there and most of all my youth, but I still have got you.

Blondel It's a joy to feel to be of some use and good in the world, although the strings of my harp are broken.

Blondel You are the whole world, Blondel, for it has lost its Jerusalem forever.

Baudoin Don't you think that someone later could retrieve Jerusalem?

Richard My friend, we came with violence and war to the country which was holy, and we filled up the whole country with our violence. That was our mistake. Now all Asia has learnt from us that violence and are able to hit back. We can never retake Jerusalem with violence. And who will then take the city without force?

Baudoin It seems next to impossible.

Richard You are quite right, my good Baldwin.

(Maynard of Golitz breaks in with some knights.)

Maynard (to the host) Is that monk still here who is trying to sell rubies?

(The host quietly indicates Richard. Maynard turns on him.)

Maynard My good man, I wish to speak with you.

Richard At your service, if I can be of any.

Maynard Who are you?

Richard Villiers, Norman merchant on his way home from Acre.

Maynard Yes, I believe that well enough. You tried to market a ruby.

Richard We needed a little money.

Maynard May I see the ruby?

Richard Do you wish to buy it?

Maynard I might have a customer for you.

Richard (shows the ruby) A precious stone from the blessed Arabia.

Maynard (eyes the stone) You say? *(signs to his men, who leave)* I happen to know the Jew you tried to sell the stone to. He happens to be an expert. He noticed the peculiarity of the stone at once and reported to me. This is no ordinary stone, my good Villiers.

Richard Then perhaps I could have a good price for it.

Maynard Just tell me how you came in possession of it.

Richard I bought it on Cyprus.

Maynard So, and from whom?

Richard At the market.

Maynard You are a bad liar for a merchant. You can do better.

Richard Do you then wish to accuse me like the Jew did?

Maynard I only accuse you of bad playacting. You hit the Jew both yellow and blue for not wanting to buy the stone. Is that proper for a pious monk? And is that the right way for a business man to succeed in business?

Richard What is your point?

Maynard I will tell you what this stone tells me. I am well familiar with all the crown jewels of Europe. England's king Henry gave his queen Eleanor seven golden rings with rubies, each for every day of the week, and each ring was grafted with an H for Henry and an E for Eleanor, the two letters romantically intertwined with each other. Your ruby ring is one of those seven. Naturally I get curious as to how you got over it.

Richard I got it as a gift.

Maynard By whom? By king Richard Lionheart?

Richard No.

Maynard I can't believe that anyone in king Henry's English family willingly would have parted with such a ring. Therefore I believe you must have stolen it.

Richard I have not solen it.

Maynard Prove it! (*Richard controls himself with difficulty.*) My friend, if this ring is not with the king, he would miss it. I might get a reward for finding it. For it belongs to him, there is no doubt about it. He will surely give me a reward although I am related with Konrad of Monferrato, whom he murdered and which deed paralysed and shattered the crusade, its unity and optimism. Perhaps you even stole it from Konrad's assassin?

Richard If you want to buy the ring, offer me a price. You have no right to obtain it any other way.

Maynard How could I buy the ring when it doesn't belong to anyone of us? It is my obvious duty to send it home to England.

Richard The king is not there.

Maynard How do you know? Perhaps you know then where he is? There is a rumour that he is now travelling through Austria incognito. My greedy cousin duke Leopold has asked me to watch the roads, in case Richard Lionheart would try to sneak through the country without without taking advantage of our most conscientious and obligatory hospitality.

Richard (rises in fury and tries to reach his sword under his cloak)

Maynard (moving back one step) You have no chance. A number of knights are waiting outside, and they are heavily armed.

Richard What do you want?

Maynard King Richard, I have better reasons to wish all the evil in the world to my cousin than a harrowed monk as a jetsom from the Levant. But you must leave Goritz at once. You are not safe here. Carry on your journey in less company, and avoid Vienna by all means.

Richard Do you think I murdered Konrad of Monferrato?

Maynard He was your prime competitor, your quarrel was the most notorious in the world, and you if anyone had a motive clear enough, so there is much to speak for it. But I will not deal with it. I can never put myself in judgement over a king.

Richard Thank you, Maynard of Goritz.

Maynard Vanish discreetly tonight. And do not try again to offer the crown jewels of London for sale. (*leaves*)

Richard (with a sigh of relief) There are still noble men left even in Austria.

Baudoin Richard, we have no time to lose.

Richard Yes, he is right. We must split up in smaller parties and travel different ways. Let's get out of here and not say goodbye to anyone. (*They break up.*)

Intermezzo.

Blondel But that was just the first warning. In Oberhaus we got into trouble when the king fell ill. We had to stay long at the inn, and even if the landlord didn't

ask any questions others did. When I visited the church the priest showed a considerable interest in my travelling company, and he asked me straight if one of them was my king. Of course I answered no, but one day I was taken care of by six knights. It was just as the king had recovered and we planned to continue...

Prudent man What was the king's illness?

Blondel The ordinary crusade plague – fever and coughing. Some call it the desert cold, but it's almost like phthisis.

Prudent man What happened?

Scene 3. The inn of Oberhaus.

Richard (like before) Why isn't Blondel coming?

Baudoin I guess he is at church again.

Richard What's the use of prayers in our condition?

William He is the only one among us who is pious and still praying. He prays for all of us. We should be grateful to him.

Richard But do you think it helps?

William That's an entirely different matter.

(Some knights bring in the unconscious Blondel.)

Officer Is this your man?

Richard (rising, very upset) What's the matter?

Officer He claims you are king Richard Lionheart.

Richard (ominously calm) I can see that you tortured him. What is a tortured man's word worth, when the forced torture could make anyone confess whatever you would want him to confess?

Officer Your royal highness, the whole world knows you and know that you try to travel incognito through Austria.

Richard Have I no right to do so?

Officer Our duke Leopold seems to think that you should pay him a visit to his castle on the way. Anything else would be a great impropriety.

Richard If duke Leopold wishes to see me he should come himself.

Leopold (opens the door and enters) I was only waiting for a formal invitation. Welcome, Richard, to our Austria. It's not so hot here as in the deserts of Arabia.

Richard No, instead it is so cold that you would almost prefer the desert heat.

Leopold Are you not happy to see me, companion in arms? We are after all colleagues!

Richard I am sure you are happier to see me. What do you want with me?

Leopold I want you as my honorary guest at Trierstein.

Richard For how long?

Leopold Not longer than what is proper from the point of view of hospitality.

Richard You want me as your prisoner.

Leopold Brother, there are things to settle between us, such as how my brother Konrad died.

Richard He died my most implacable enemy but not by my hand.
Leopold Prove it!
Richard I can't as long as I don't know the murderer.
Leopold You are shuffling away.
Richard Do you wish to condemn an innocent man without his guilt being proven?
Leopold Many affirm that you are lying, which you are well known for.
Richard My lies are romantic and pathetic when needed but never treacherous.
William He speaks the truth.
Leopold (to William) Do you know who murdered our Konrad?
William Ask the Templars.
Leopold They stand high above such matters. They financed our crusade, but our Konrad's death ruined it.
William Still they might have had their motives.

(Leopold and William argue.)

Richard (aside to Blondel) Blondel, I see no way out of this. I must remain here for the time being. But leave on your own and return to England. You can manage, for you are a minstrel. Your art can open all closed gates and doors and is a better cure against locks and politics than any weapon or key. Here, take this purse, and take that damned ring with the ruby – it is Berengaria's. Deliver them in England and tell them that I live but imprisoned in Austria, for our duke here will never release me except for a handsome ransom.

Blondel All bones in my body ache, but I hear and obey. My violin will open all hearts to you and especially all English hearts.

Richard Thank you, my good minstrel. Raise no attention but sneak away carefully.

Leopold We get nowhere with this meaningless quabble. We have to get to the bottom of it! If necessary we'll have to assign investigations and commissions! Then we'll see if I can part with my brother Richard Lionheart.

Richard Brother, you are indeed making trouble for all Europe. France will without hesitation take part for me against you, and then we will never again be united in Europe. You are ruining the finest thing we have: the crusader spirit!

Leopold Brother Richard, you know as well as I that all we ever did in what once was a holy land was a nuisance of ourselves. We have ravaged with violence and only plundered, raped and murdered. We never accomplished anything and were never of any historical use.

Richard That was the attitude by which we lost Konrad and Jerusalem.

Leopold You did it! The responsibility was yours and no one else's!

Richard The Templars forbade me to attack Jerusalem, and Konrad wished it most of all. Perhaps that was reason enough for them to take his life.

Leopold Anathema! You don't know what you are saying!

Richard Do you?

Leopold Damn! Take this man away! Escort him to my castle! There we shall talk about it!

Richard I see no other choice.
Leopold So you give yourself up to me?
Richard Do I have any choice?
Leopold I will see to it that you will be royally entertained.
Richard You had better. All Europe will watch me as you guard me.
Leopold I am sure we'll reach an understanding. Take him out! And all the others also! But where is the beaten fellow?
Richard He went up to his room to rest. I can only hope that he will survive your treatment.
Leopold He was just a little wiggled.
Richard Yes, he was only whipped to unconsciousness.
Leopold He will recover.
Richard I hope so.
Leopold Come, let's go. After you, king Richard Lionheart.
(shows him politely the way out. All leave in good order.)

Intermezzo 2.

Prudent man Thank you, my friend. So you got away. I will not detain you any longer. You have an important mission to carry through. May you manage well all the way.
Blondel You are from England.
Prudent man Yes.
Blondel How are things in England nowadays?
Prudent man They are not good. John without land wants to make himself king, but he is incapable of governing. Under his rule everything would just turn into chaos, anarchy and rebellion.
Blondel King Richard will come home sooner or later.
Prudent man Yes, but what will then be left of him? In what state will he be when he is allowed to get home to England? He consumed himself in the Orient and already has grey hairs at the age of thirty-five. Blondel, the best days of king Richard are past, and so are England's.

Act II scene 1. A high Gothic hall in a castle.

Countess Valeria (to her servant) I want him to be well taken care of. He must not suspect anything. Be quite normal, you are free to spoil him, but without exaggerations. It's not every day we receive a true minstrel in our castle.

So, allow our guest to enter.

(The doors are opened, and Blondel is admitted.)

Welcome to our humble home, precious minstrel!

Blondel A humble home? Countess, you please to make an understatement.

Valeria Do you like it then?

Blondel I am overwhelmed by this solemn beauty everywhere. The atmosphere here is like that in a cathedral. Everything breathes peace and purity, beauty and moral superiority.

Valeria Minstrel, you flatter me.

Blondel Everything seems old here, but still everything is clean and proper and well preserved. Are you living here quite alone? I haven't seen here anyone but you of your family.

Valeria My brother is dead, and I am the last one left.

Blondel But you are not old.

Valeria Why would you suspect that?

Blondel Your age is impossible to guess. You are as fresh as a beautiful young maid, but at the same time you demonstrate the high maturity of age.

Valeria That was a very kind thing to say.

Blondel If I may say so, everything here breathes a singular timelessness.

Valeria (smiles) Enough flattery for today. Now you are hungry, and you must accept that I invite you for dinner.

Blondel I could hardly refuse it.
(*Very well dressed servants prepare the table for a fantastic dinner.*)

Valeria But tell me now all the news from the great world. It's very seldom that new guests visit us. I understand that you come from Jerusalem and are on your way to England.

Blondel Yes, I am king Richard's minstrel.

Valeria King Richard? Is king Henry no longer king of England?

Blondel That was long ago. King Richard is his son.

Valeria And this son has fought battles by Jerusalem. But why does the king of England travel so far to make war?

Blondel He has almost never been there in England. I am a Frenchman like you, and he is a Norman.

Valeria I know. The Normans went over and conquered Britain just like your king now obviously travels across the entire Mediterranean just to get Jerusalem.

Blondel He was not the first one. A hundred years ago Palestine was conquered, and Jerusalem was taken from the non-Christians.

Valeria Where is Richard now?

Blondel Lost.

Valeria Completely lost?

Blondel Yes, I am searching for him.

Valeria But how could you, a minstrel of his, lose him?

Blondel It's rather long story.

Valeria We have all eternity ahead, and I never tire of listening.

Blondel By Jerusalem there occurred a quarrel between Richard and the other princes. King Philip August had already gone home, tired of all strife, and could no longer diplomatize. One of the noblest princes, prince Konrad of Monferrato, was

murdered in a mysterious way exactly when he and king Richard had made enemies for life, and then some, especially the duke Leopold of Austria, thought that king Richard must have done the deed.

Valeria Konrad of Monferrato, wasn't he the foremost among the warring crusaders in the Orient until king Richard came with Philip August?

Blondel Yes, and he was therefore the one who least of all could accept Richard's superiority.

Valeria But Richard was a king, while Konrad only was a prince.

Blondel Yes, king Richard was of higher rank, and therefore Konrad should not have made trouble.

Valeria But please, continue, I pray. How did he disappear?

Blondel When we returned to Europe, the greedy duke saw his chance and took ignominiously king Richard as a prisoner.

Valeria Is it true?

Blondel Absolutely.

Valeria Have some more wine, I pray you.

Blondel But I got away, and he had time to give me the mission of carrying the news to England that he had been taken into custody. I met two Englishmen on their way to England, wrote everything down for them and put the king's seal on the letter, so that they in England should understand. And since then I am erring here around the forests searching for the king.

Valeria Don't you know where he is?

Blondel First he stayed at Trierstein, duke Leopold's own personal castle, but when I arrived there, they had gone to Vienna. There I took part in a great minstrel feast with success and obtained the first prize out of king Henry's own hand.

Valeria King Henry?

Blondel Yes, the German-Roman emperor, son of the red Frederick Barbarossa but a rather sickly young man.

Valeria It is true. I had him once for my guest.

Blondel But king Richard was not there, and obviously there was a quarrel between the duke and the emperor about him, which was why he was brought to Linz. And when I reached Linz he had been moved further to Durenstein. I was on my way there when a comrade recommended me to pay you a visit on my way.

Valeria And you did right in honouring me with your kind visit. You have so much to relate. But now you are tired from all your trials. Here you can rest and recover for a few days after your adventures.

Blondel Your generosity is more than I deserve.

Valeria A true artist can never be spoiled enough. You deserve everything. But you only introduced your story. Tell me more about Konrad of Monferrato and his strange tragedy.

Blondel (puts down his glass) Then I ask you, madam, to follow me to the holy arguable country, the home of all exotism and everything divine, the homeland of the passions and fanaticism, the sweet seductive scents and the passions, where man cannot

control himself, where all feelings run amuck, and which no one succeeded in creating himself the lord of, – except God, the untouchable, the unfathomable, majestic entity of the deserts and the beduins, supreme in majesty and cruelty.

Scene 2. In a tent outside Ashkalon.

Guy de Lusignan Isn't the haughty bully coming soon?

Konrad Have some more wine in the meantime, Guy de Lusignan. Just be calm. We will get him down to earth.

Guy He gets more unbearable every day.

Konrad I know. But the worst thing we can do is to get incited. Then he will just strike us down. He loves it and enjoys it when someone gets mad at him, which he only takes for a justification for him to resort to violence. Whatever he says we must keep calm. That's our only chance. Have some wine in the meantime, my good Guy.

Richard (storming in, sumptuously dressed, in glorious health, with ostensibly glittering crown, takes the best seat, a fine Saracen throne)

Well, you bastards, what will it be?

(Blondel follows him but more prudently and takes quietly a place in a corner with his violin.)

Guy I don't find it very proper that our conference is opened by your insulting us.

Richard Do you have any better idea, sourpuss?

Guy Your majesty, you could at least start by wishing us a good evening.

Richard Good evening then, you bastards! And to the point! *(pours himself some wine)* Would you also like some, Blondel?

Blondel No thank you.

Richard You will sing for me later when I am finished with these garrulous knaves.

Konrad King Richard, our conference here is important.

Richard Of course it is! What did you imagine I thought it was? A secret strategic meeting for our next discreet attack against the soldiers' brothel? Ha-ha-ha! *(laughs and drinks)*

Konrad (serious) Richard, we both consider your demeanour hardly worthy of a king of Jerusalem.

Richard What do you think Saladin is doing then in his harems? Do you consider that more worthy?

Guy (takes a run) With respect, your majesty, but both Konrad and I feel that Konrad should have the title of king of Jerusalem.

Richard (going off like being fired like a cannon, rising and spilling wine on both of them) You scoundrels, how dare you! You can never take Jerusalem without me! I am the only king left in the country after Philip August turned yellow and ran off!

Konrad He didn't leave because of cowardice. He tired of our quarrels.

Richard You mean, he got tired of you.

Konrad What do you mean?

Richard You are the only one starting quarrels.

Konrad (starts to get up) Don't you try it!

Guy Gentlemen, sit down and calm down! And don't drink so much wine. That will only make matters worse. Finally you don't know what you are saying and even less what you are doing. Richard, Konrad was in the country before you. He captured Tyrus and held it against Saladin long before your arrival. Without his contributions you could never have landed.

Richard It's a lie!

Konrad (has sat down) Guy, he says you are a liar.

Richard (still standing) Konrad, you are a rotter! And what's worse, you are a villain! How did you get to Palestine? You came like a pirate and sailed straight into the hands of the Arabs and risked the lives of all your men at once!

Konrad (rising) I did not know Acre was fallen!

Guy He made it, Richard. Not a single man was captured. What counts is what he did later on. He fortified the entire coast and took it from Saladin.

Richard Are you suggesting that he even vanquished Acre?

Konrad (ice cold) Richard, you know as well as I, that I was the one who took the city, while you took the honour if it.

Richard The way you go on, Konrad, makes a duel more and more inevitable.

Konrad The sooner the better.

Guy Gentlemen, this will not do! You are like children! Sit down and drink more wine if you want, but don't start fighting! That would dissolve the entire crusade!

Richard (has resumed his seat with Konrad. Both drink more wine.) In this holy land you don't duel. You engage assassins. Or you do as they do in Saladin's family. You discreetly and anonymously poison each other. No one is accountable.

Konrad The stealthy Richard has spoken. For my part I prefer open duelling. Don't you dare, Richard?

Guy Gentlemen, gentlemen! You allow your feelings to get the better of you! Try to control yourselves, for your men's sake! An open conflict between you would throw all Europe into war!

Richard Let's for hell's sake return to the main issue! I mean and claim, that since Philip August has gone home and Frederick Barbarossa is dead, I am the only anointed king left in the crusade with a right to claim the title king of Jerusalem. It's a self-evident fact, which you can't argue against. Besides, I will myself lead the storming of Jerusalem.

Konrad Over my dead body.

Richard What?

Konrad You will not be king of Jerusalem except over my dead body.

Richard So you turn in your veto. Perhaps that makes a duel necessary after all. Or should we rather, for our men's sake and for the high morals of the crusading spirit, see who will first succeed in having the other one secretly murdered?

Guy Richard, you can't be king of Jerusalem. It would disturb the political balance of all Europe.

Richard Why?

Guy Because the claims are of Europe, and you have just an ignominious kingdom far outside.

Konrad Speaking of pirates.

Richard So you don't include England in Europe? Am I then not a Norman? Have I no cousins and relatives on every throne in Europe? Is not the next emperor of Europe a Norman king of Sicily?

Konrad Let him be king of Jerusalem then, but let's be rid of you.

Richard (hits the table) There we are then! It's me personally you can't bear with!

Konrad Richard, you have no detachment. You push and bully everyone. To you everyone is worthless. If a baron presents an alternative plan to your strategy, you furiously beat him up and demonstrably throw him out. That's not politics. It's not royal. It is brutal arbitrariness.

Richard I see our duel becoming more and more unavoidable.

Konrad If you go on like that I will find it necessary to withdraw with my armies from the entire crusade.

Richard Do so! That will solve many problems! Then we don't have to fight about the profits from the sack of Jerusalem!

Konrad And such a man you are supposed to reason with? I leave.

Guy Just one moment! Young Blondel, you have heard all our conversation. You are our only neutral witness. Do you have any advice for us?

Blondel (rising) May I?

Richard Speak out, Blondel. You may say whatever you want.

Blondel I actually have a point of view, which could be important.

Konrad Well?

Blondel You have gathered here to discuss who will be king of Jerusalem and how you will share the plunder, but have you considered, that you haven't actually taken the city yet?

Guy (to the others) Have we thought of that?

Richard An irrelevant question. We can take the city any moment. It's just a question of time.

Konrad Is it? Take the city then but without me, if you can. I am pulling out.

Guy Konrad, you can't.

Konrad I will.

Guy You are most important of all.

Konrad Try to convince that hopeless miscreant about that. *(points at Richard)* I am leaving. *(leaves demonstrably)*

Guy Well, Richard, There we lost half the army. What will you do now?

Richard Take Jerusalem, of course.

Guy And if you fail?

Richard I must not fail.

Guy The city is strongly fortified. All odds are in favour of Saladin.

Richard Can't you make Konrad join anyway?

Guy Never on your terms. On the other side, I can never imagine that the Templars would allow him to pull out.

Richard So we'll have to leave it to the Templars. The case is appealed to them. The conference is concluded. *(drinks)*

Guy Good night, Richard Lionheart. I hope this was not a turning point but just a crisis. *(leaves)*

Richard Well, Blondel, what do you think of the haughty fools?

Blondel *(diplomatically)* I have stated my opinion and will stick to it.

Richard *(content)* Ha-ha! You are the only wise guy in the entire crusade! *(embraces him)*

Blondel But honestly, my king, wouldn't it be wise to try to include Saladin himself in the negotiations? Perhaps the Jerusalem issue could be resolved in peace?

Richard Saladin himself?

Blondel Yes.

Richard He doesn't speak our language.

Blondel There are interpreters.

Richard He will never willingly let go of Jerusalem. He is intent on throwing every single European out of the holy land. He is the hardest nut to crack of all.

Blondel Wouldn't that be reason enough to first of all crack that nut?

Richard But, my dear minstrel, how on earth do you crack such a mountain of resistance and fanatic hatred?

Blondel My king, there is no art that does not crack any superior force.

Richard *(somewhat impressed)* Have some more wine, my friend. And then you will sing for me all night. I will have your art for myself and never show it to Saladin.

Blondel May I go out for a pee first?

Richard By all means, go out and do what you want, as long as you come back *(Blondel goes out)* and never let me down, for art is the only company in the loneliness of power and the only comfort in his desert of the terrible desolation of absolutism. *(empties his cup and calls out:)* Blondel!

Scene 3.

Valeria Was Saladin equally disillusioned?

Blondel The case of Saladin was worse.

Valeria Tell me about him.

Blondel Saladin was a difficult man and impossible to come near.

Valeria Such men are always interesting. Those are the ones who know more than what is beneficial for others to know.

Blondel Pardon me, my lady, but why do you live here quite alone? Have you never had any husband?

Valeria No, I am alone. Such as Saladin and I stand out of time and belong only to eternity.

Blondel Did you know Saladin?

Valeria Not personally, but I understand him.

Blondel How can you understand him without having known him?

Valeria My friend, have some more wine.

Blondel That's what king Richard also always told me for an answer to my questions.

Valeria Believe me, it's the best of all possible answers. But tell me now about Saladin.

Blondel None of us really got to understand him at all, even if we like king Richard always respected him. No one respected him more than king Richard.

Valeria Why?

Blondel Maybe that Richard and Saladin understood each other. Saladin died shortly after Richard had left the holy land, you know.

Valeria Why do you mean that he died?

Blondel He was old and wasted like everyone else.

Valeria But someone among you must have come rather close to Saladin.

Blondel That would have been Sir Kenneth of Huntingdon in that case.

Valeria Who was that?

Blondel A noble knight that got into trouble. He was dishonoured by neglecting his duty as a guard. He had received the honorary commission of watching the British flag but was tempted off his guard, and while he was away someone desecrated the British flag.

Valeria A trap in other words.

Blondel Yes.

Valeria And then Sir Kenneth escaped into the service of Saladin?

Blondel No, he was banned from the vicinity of king Richard with a threat of death if he ever showed himself again, but then Saladin took care of him.

Valeria Did Saladin take care of a banned Christian crusader?

Blondel Yes.

Valeria Typical of Saladin. Well, how did it turn out?

Blondel Sir Kenneth later told it all to me.

Act III scene 1.

Three men around a camp fire in the desert, a wild long-haired hermit, an Arabian physician (with a strong accent) and a dishonoured crusader.

Hermit Cheer up, my son. It's only the world you have lost.

Physician Poor comfort for a Christian warrior who has lost his soul.

Kenneth If only it had been just the world and my soul that I had lost!

Hermit Is there some more, then?

Physician You must realize, Hamako, that he is really shattered.

Kenneth Theoderic of Engaddi, you were once a knight yourself, can't you understand what it feels like to lose your honour?

Theoderic My son, I denounced it willingly. There was nothing more to it than vanity.

Kenneth Not when you lose it!

Physician But how did it happen? I can't understand the cruelty which you Christians show each other.

Kenneth Cruelty! It was my own fault!

Theoderic It was the old usual crusader vanity. Our friend here was ordered by king Richard to guard the English banner as it was erected alone on St. George's hill. King Richard considered it threatened, since the French and the Germans thought their banners would be honoured the same way on the same hill. Well, the vain king Richard did not. And what happens then, when Sir Kenneth watches the English banner? Yes, he is tempted off his guard by a beautiful lady, his heart's only beloved; but it appears, that the one who had used his beloved's ring to lure him away was no one less than queen Berengaria, king Richard's heartsick wife, just to provoke her husband. And while Sir Kenneth was fooled away by these wanton women, someone stole up and removed the banner from St. George's hill. When king Richard learned about it he was so angry that he immediately sentenced Sir Kenneth to have his head cut off.

Physician And that's the king whose life I saved.

Theoderic The worst thing is that that king is absolutely indifferent and insensitive to how he handles the lives of others.

Physician I don't understand the constant division and envy among you Christians. Why did you come here across so many seas and lands under such ordeals if only to quarrel with each other?

Theoderic A good question, my learned El Hakim.

Kenneth We didn't come here to quarrel. Every crusader came here only for the sake of glory.

Hakim Which is so easily lost by your wanton women's intrigues?

Kenneth (angry) They were no wanton ladies! It was the queen and the king's cousin, who is my life's immortally beloved!

Hakim Pardon me, pardon me! Calm down, Sir Kenneth. I am not your enemy and never intend to be so, in contrary to your king and eventual other crusaders who want your head cut off. So it was lucky for you that I was in the vicinity, so that I could save your life from your chivalrous and impeccable king by accepting you as a slave in my service.

Kenneth Slave of a heathen! And for life! And without ever again being able to see my beloved Edith!

Hakim (to Theoderic) He is shattered. We must do something.

Theoderic Can you cure such malaises, El Hakim?

Hakim For the mind that is sharpened in the desert nothing is impossible. I have a plan. Can you playact, Sir Kenneth?

Kenneth If I must.

Hakim Are you good at controlling yourself?

Kenneth (proud) I did not mention the queen's intrigues with one word. I did not defend myself with one word. I rather suffered death than exposed the queen's pettiness.

Hakim I like that. That's what I call figures in the higher school of self-control. Listen, Sir Kenneth. Everything can work out well if you follow my advice exactly.

Kenneth May I hear your plan first?

Hakim I am on good standing with Saladin. I am his physician as well. I know him well and will initiate him in our plan. He will be certain to agree to it with pleasure. I am certain of it. Sir Kenneth, we will remake you into a Nubian deaf and dumb slave, whom we will send as a present to king Richard as an extra body-guard. Richard and Saladin understand each other and appreciate each other. He will understand the complimentary gift, especially since he is well aware of that both Germans and Franks among the crusaders would gladly see him assassinated. He couldn't have a better body-guard than a Sir Kenneth Huntingdon that no one would recognize.

Theoderic A master plan, El Hakim. But can it succeed?

Kenneth How can you make me unrecognizable?

Hakim Simple. Take off your clothes.

(He claps his hands. Enter a servant with a desert suit: a leopard cloth over shoulders and hips and an Arabic turban. Hakim applies a small can and a pellet which he dips in the can and uses to colour Kenneth's face.)

It's the right Nubian colour. Our friend will be unrecognizable immediately. Then it's just up to him to stick to his part.

Theoderic Do you mean, El Hakim, that you are a physician to both Richard Lionheart and Saladin and that you pass freely between their camps?

Hakim Under certain measures of precaution, of course. *(The masking of Sir Kenneth continues during the following.)*

Theoderic Are you then a spy of Saladin's?

Hakim (smiles) No, my friend, I am no spy. Saladin knows without my help everything that goes on in the camp of the crusaders, and Richard Lionheart knows that he knows. I am rather a sort of peace-maker. Saladin wants nothing more than peace.

Theoderic That's what everyone would prefer.

Hakim The challenge is to achieve a peace that everyone could accept.

Theoderic How far have the negotiations reached?

Hakim Our friend here knows, who has been himself a messenger to Saladin.

Kenneth The very latest is, that Saladin not only offers peace but also free access for all Christian pilgrims to all the sacred sites of Jerusalem and outside and the title of protective King of Jerusalem for Richard Lionheart.

Theoderic Those are generous terms. Has king Richard accepted?

Kenneth The problem is the other crusaders and especially the Templars with Konrad of Monferrato, who by any means wish to vanquish Jerusalem by violence, and that is also king Richard's highest ambition. But they are at odds as to who should be given the title king of Jerusalem.

Hakim In that way none of them will ever enter Jerusalem.

Theoderic Who would most deserve the title king of Jerusalem if the city were taken?

Kenneth In my view it would be the old cautious Guy de Lusignan. That would also be the only wise choice diplomatically.

Hakim (ready with his masking and proud of the result) Well, Hamako! What do you think? Have I succeeded?

Theoderic Splendid! No one could ever believe that this Nubian slave was once related with the royal house of Scotland!

Kenneth Now you have taken everything away from me and even my face. May I at least in my heart continue to be a Christian?

Hakim My friend, the great prophet Mohammed wished to convert all to Islam by force if necessary. I disclaim such aggressive religious politics. The Arabian Allah, the allpowerful lord of the Hebrews and the Christian God are all one and the same. No one can ever become a Muslim unless he wishes himself to be one. And since the religion of the Hebrews and the Christians is older than Islam, I see no logic reason for Jews or Christians to ever become Muslims.

Theoderic As wisely spoken as if from Saladin's own mouth.

Hakim Of course, I had it from him.

Kenneth I am satisfied. I will play the act and wage my life as my king's deaf and dumb Nubian slave without letting my secret across my lips if necessary. Thanks for allowing me to keep my soul.

Hakim No one can take that away from you, my friend.

Theoderic But how are things at Ashkalon now? What do the various Christian princes have to say about Saladin's proposal? What is the general inclination?

Scene 2. The Christian camp.

All the princes are gathered for a conference. Only Richard is absent.)

Leopold (rising) As representative of the highest worldly power, his glorious majesty the emperor Henry VI of the Roman holy empire of the German nation, and as archduke of Austria, I consider myself called upon to introduce these discussions of sultan Saladin's latest proposal of peace. Never imagine, gentlemen, that I ever wanted any quarrel with king Richard Lionheart of Normandie. But don't believe either that I ever appreciated his capriciousness or ever was an admirer of his wild temper. I call Heaven as witness that I know nothing about this new trouble about the theft of the British banner from St. George's hill. I am unofficially informed that king Richard's own chosen guard was cheated to leave his guard by the temptations of a secret mistress and that someone then took the opportunity to remove the

unguarded banner. I don't know anything more. I swear myself free from any responsibility. Thereby I give the word to our most honoured brother king Philip August of France. (*retires*)

(*great consternation among all*)

Konrad Your majesty, you can't pull out now, when we at last are ready to reclaim Jerusalem!

Philip (coldly) Do you think so, Konrad of Monferrato? You have still not succeeded in taking a stone out of Jerusalem, while you have wasted your energy on arguing about who should have the title king of Jerusalem while Saladin only scornfully smiles at your disunity and discord. I am tired of all your internal quarrels and don't believe any more in a positive conquest of Jerusalem.

Grand Master of the Templars Your majesty, your grace (*to the archduke*) and other brothers of the crusade, I have never seen our internal differences of mind as the main obstacle to our target, the conquest of Jerusalem, but the greatest obstruction of our cause has always been king Richard Lionheart's impossible attitude. The latest row of the flag has only been the latest symptom. King Richard is incalculable. He doesn't know himself what he wants, he is hopelessly arrogant, he blows up for nothing and will go berserk with anyone who dares to displease him, and at the same time he claims the right of being the allpowerful and only leader of the entire crusade, and strikes down on anyone who doesn't agree to be less good. In brief, he is an uncouth bear and is not fit for leadership for so many men.

Richard (has entered) Then you lose the opportunity of that honour, Philip.

Philip Take the city then without my help, if you can! It's all yours! It's just lying there waiting for you! Pluck it as a ripe fruit! Please yourselves with it! It's only waiting for you!

Richard We will, Philip, whatever brother Leopold of Austria and Konrad of Monferrato and the Grand Master of the Templars may find out to sabotage the enterprise!

Leopold (rising) This is intolerable!

Richard (at once) Don't you think I know that you negotiated with Saladin behind my back about a separate peace deal?

Konrad We only want to secure what we already have won.

Richard And what have you won in this country without me? And all that, you now wish to secure for yourselves behind my back to leave me out!

Grand Master (sighs) Here he goes again.

Philip Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Can't you see the situation? Here we have a brilliant peace proposal directly from Saladin himself, and instead of regarding it and debating it, you immediately fly at each others' throats in wild arguments and senseless accusations and abuse! This desert is no sand-box for children!

(*silence*)

Leopold Brother Philip is right. Why don't we listen to what Saladin might have to say?

Richard (makes a great effort) I know all about Saladin's proposal, so I had better immediately shed light on its interesting points and its disadvantage. He most generously promises Jerusalem to us as an open city to all Christian pilgrims with other sacred pilgrim sites all over the country, and he wants me as a protective king for Jerusalem. So his wish is in unequalled magnanimity that we should get on well together about Jerusalem in peace.

Philip (can't believe his ears) But that is wonderful! Who could possibly have anything against it? What more could we wish for? The only thing we actually really wanted was the church of the holy sepulchre!

Leopold It almost sounds too good to be true. Brother Richard, what is the problem?

Richard As a seal on the reconciliation and fraternization between the Christian and the Moslem religion and mentality, Saladin suggests, that his brother would confirm the pact of friendship in marriage with the queen of Naples, my sister.

(some murmurs)

Leopold Thus a matrimony between a heathen prince and a Christian princess? And what position does her brother take to that idea?

Richard It would have been possible, if Saladin's brother then had moved to Naples and become a Christian. But if it means that my sister must move to Arabia to become a muslim harem lady, it is unfortunately impossible.

Philip Religious and political deadlock, in other words.

Richard Exactly, brother Philip.

Philip I am glad I have pulled out.

Richard And what about the rest of you? Are you equally pusillanimous? Do you give up Jerusalem that easily? We can still take it by force! Saladin has nothing to put against our united armies, and if we just could gather them together against Jerusalem, the matter would be settled. Does not such an impertinent and insulting offer by Saladin, such a humiliating outrage against our Christian faith and my own royal sister, deserve that we retaliate with a vengeance?

Konrad I stand with Richard in this. Such an outrageous insult cannot be tolerated.

Leopold Richard, you are right! Let the Turk devil and the faithless dogs have their genitals cut off in their own blasted harems in the sight of their ladies!

More and more Against Jerusalem!

Others Richard, lead us against Jerusalem!

(The meeting is concluded in enthusiasm, and Richard is carried out in triumph.)

Only Philip shrugs his head and retires.)

Scene 3.

Valeria So the peace went down the drain just because the crusaders were so retarded, stupid and vain.

Blondel You speak as if you were a Muslim.

Valeria Saladin just wanted to achieve something good. He was only constructive, while the crusaders only wanted to destroy and satisfy their greed.

Blondel How do you know? Did you know Saladin?

Valeria No, but I must have known him in another lifetime.

Blondel What do you mean?

Valeria Don't you know anything about the transmigration of souls and reincarnation?

Blondel I have heard about it. But that is something that belongs in India, isn't it?

Valeria It touches all humanity. But you must believe me, that Saladin meant no harm.

Blondel Not even when he conquered Jerusalem and took it away from us?

Valeria You took it from the Arabs. They took it back. That was not more than reasonable. But after having taken it back, Saladin offered it as a gift to the Christians, but they refused it. Instead they made war against the generous donor Saladin, giving him no answer but swords and violence. That broke his heart.

Blondel How so? Did he give up?

Valeria Don't you know anything about it?

Blondel No. When we left Acre we assumed that he would soon retake all the harbour cities one by one.

Valeria He didn't. He died instead of grief and disappointment over the false and weak hearts of Richard and the other crusaders.

Blondel You know more about this than I.

Valeria But have some more wine, young Blondel. We still have many nights ahead together. We have many stories still to tell. It could up to a thousand and more, if we use our time well.

Blondel (drinks) Why not?

Valeria A wise response, master Blondel. Tell me now about the Leopard knight.

Blondel Who?

Valeria The so called Kenneth Huntingdon, the royal Scotsman, who loved Richard Lionheart's cousin, he, who later converted to islam.

Blondel Did he? I know nothing about that.

Valeria Like the fair Philip August of France he tired of the petty quarrels and constant fights between the crusaders. He got exonerated as a deaf and dumb Nubian slave by first saving Richard Lionheart's life from an assassin and then by the help of his dog finding out who stole the banner from St. George's hill only to split the crusaders. It was that exposure which led to the murder of Konrad of Monferrato, since he and the Grand Master of the Templars were involved in the intrigue – don't ask me how, but both died in mysterious circumstances. Then the whole crusade collapsed, and Richard gave up and went home. But what finally broke him down was his favourite Sir Kenneth Huntingdon's treachery against him.

Blondel I always wondered what happened. Do you know?

Valeria King Richard gave him full restitution as thanks for having saved his life twice and for having exposed the violator of the English banner, and he gave him

even his cousin for a wife in gratitude. But as soon as they were married they ran off out into the desert.

Blondel How is it possible?

Act IV scene 1.

The exotic cave of the hermit.

(Kenneth and Edith kneeling seeking protection with the hermit.)

Theoderic I can't approve of your action, but you have come to me as confessors, and I can never give you away. But we must discuss the matter thoroughly.

Kenneth For our part the matter is clear, father. We can't accept a religion which justifies violence in the name of religion.

Theoderic Is Islam a better alternative?

Kenneth No, we denounce both Christianity and Islam.

Theoderic Do you then want to become Jews?

Kenneth Both Christianity and Islam come from Jewry, which was the first religion to in the name of God justify violence.

Theoderic But doesn't the fifth command in the second book of Moses expressly say: You shall not kill?

Edith That's just the thing and the double standard that we reject.

Theoderic So you don't wish to belong to any religion?

Kenneth In the name of love we wish to renounce all violence. Is there no religion doing that?

Theoderic That's precisely what Christianity does.

Kenneth And therefore the Christians consider themselves justified in slaughtering all non-Christians in the world and force them to be baptized under threat of death by the sword if they won't.

Theoderic The Christians learned that mentality from the Muslims.

Kenneth And what about you, father? Didn't you yourself detach yourself from the Christian world because of its violence?

Theoderic And therefore I live in a monastery. The monastery is the only solution for you, my children. And then you must renounce your marriage.

Kenneth Is there no middle way?

Hakim (entering suddenly) Pardon my intrusion, my good friends, but I happened to be here as a guest, when our friend Hamako here called on me when he heard that you would come.

Kenneth Doctor Hakim!

Hakim (humbly) At your service, my youths.

Kenneth (presents him to Edith) This Arabian doctor saved my honour and the king's life. Saladin himself offered his science as a present to the king, and he accepted it and was temporarily cured. Then followed my dishonour...

Edith It was my fault.

Kenneth But Hakim saved me by taking care of me, masking me as Nubian deaf and dumb slave and gave me as a present to the king as a special body-guard. As such I could avert an attempt against the king's life and expose a political conspiracy. That's why king Richard allowed us to marry.

Edith So this doctor Hakim is to blame for everything.

Kenneth He is the noblest soul I have ever known. Can you solve our problem, learned Hakim?

Hakim My friends, I have struggled with that problem myself all my life. What is true in the New Testament, which was written down not until 30 and 70 years after the prophet Isa Ben Miryam? If Isa Ben Miryam was such a true and learned prophet, why didn't he write his preaching himself, so that we could have had it uncorrupted? And what was really the matter with his resurrection? Did he die or did he not? The Arabs suggest that he only apparently died and explain the resurrection, that his own friends carried him unconscious out of the grave and saved him, and that is also the opinion of the Jews. But the problems are even greater concerning our prophet Mohammed. He was a criminal robber who attacked caravans and used extortion to make the caravan people convert to his preaching. He banned Jews and Christians from Mecca and Medina. His god Allah was from the beginning just an Arabic local god, whom the prophet elevated to the same status and identity as the god of the Jews. Most things in the Quran he stole from the Bible of the Hebrews. In brief, he was just a religious copyist and adventurer.

Theoderic Are you an Arab proclaiming this?

Hakim No, my friend, I happen to be Kurd.

Kenneth So what should we do?

Hakim What do you intend to do?

Kenneth Keep away out here in the desert until we have reached some clarity.

Hakim For your own sake, I ask you to return with king Richard to Europe and England.

Kenneth Should we then accept the limitless hypocrisy of the Christian church?

Hakim Do you have any choice? Do you think you could wreck it? Do you think I could wreck Islam? Do you think that even the allpowerful sultan Saladin could wreck Islam to make a better religion? No, my friends, if Saladin or I or you made a new better religion than Islam and it had any success, it would soon just like Christianity and Islam derail and become a new arbitrary religion like all the others.

Theoderic You seem to know much about Saladin, my good doctor. Is he as critical as you against Islam?

Hakim Yes, even more. Islam is his life's greatest disappointment. Only one disappointment grew even worse.

Theoderic Which?

Hakim Richard Lionheart.

Theoderic Tell us.

Hakim He thought he and Richard Lionheart could reach an agreement. He believed in a unification between Islam and Christianity. He thought the corruption

of both religions could be overcome and cured. He regarded your crusades as a wonderful opportunity for a dialogue between west and east, between Christianity and Islam. And you had the most brilliant leader in the world of your enterprise, a fantastic man, with both the courage and the heart of a lion. Just such a name, Lionheart, made me retreat out of admiration of his being. But when it came to determination, he preferred violence to peace, hatred to love and the folly of vanity to the patient afterthought of eternal wisdom.

(Theoderic, Kenneth and Edith have all marvelled at his revelation.)

I am sorry. I spoke too much. The game is over. How is it you Europeans say? It's time to remove the masks. Yes, I am a man of great disillusion. No one is more painfully aware than I of how my own infeasible religion Islam hopelessly derailed from the beginning, and my bitter disappointment is with all mankind. Still I didn't give up but searched for some hope among men. I learned the physician's science and healing art and started to treat people's ailments anonymously to know man better, and I learned your lingua franca to learn to understand you crusaders. As an Arabic doctor with lingua franca I could find my way in to even the death bed of Richard Lionheart. Yes, he was actually dying, and it was my joy to be able to rescue his life. I saw him as the hope for humanity and for saving both my and your religion. I thought that we two together could bring forth a new better religion free from all the stains and dross of Christianity and Islam. So I cured him, which made him presumptuous enough to reject my peace proposition. I wanted to give him everything, and he just ignored this perhaps most wonderful chance in history for something good.

(silence)

Theoderic Do you know why he rejected the peace proposition?

Hakim No, I could never understand it. Did he have any reason?

Kenneth It was your offer of a marriage between his sister and your brother. Why did you have to make that proposal?

Hakim (with a sigh) So that's why he said no. The old usual proud inflexible western racism.

I had to make it. It was a test. I had reason to mistrust all people. You can't take anything for granted, especially not in politics, and assume that the other party is without guile. My vision of our united religions could only be accomplished if the proud Christianity could lay off its arrogance.

Kenneth Richard would have agreed to the proposal if your brother had agreed to go to Naples and become a Christian. Would your brother have agreed to that?

Hakim Never. It would have been an impossibility.

Kenneth In the same way it was impossible for us to accept that king Richard's sister would have been made an Arabic princess in Arabia.

Theoderic Was the proposition really necessary?

Hakim In our Oriental world all pacts of friendship are sealed with a marriage between the parties as a solidification of the union and as a security for it to last.

Theoderic Don't you then see the difference between our religions, o thou wonderful great and wise servant of man?

Hakim Explain it to me, holy hermit.

Theoderic Our female ideal is the holy virgin. Isa Ben Miryam himself never had any sexual intercourse with women. He was above sexuality. In the same way our church tries to keep above sexuality to avoid being dragged down by its weakness and dirt. For you it's the contrary. Your prophet required four wives and had a number of extra maids in addition, who were not just washer-women. He legislated that all moslem men should be allowed four wives and to be able to divorce any one of them for the slightest reason and even to have them executed for infidelity when needed. At the same time he made it a law that an Arabic woman may only divorce her husband if she can produce four witnesses to his infidelity. Is it fair, o great prince of peace of the world, you the noblest man of all?

Hakim I have already confessed my disillusion and disappointment.

Theoderic But was it then necessary to bring up the idea? You had everything: peace, the agreement, the understanding, the political solution, demilitarization, but then you also had to demand a Christian wife for a Muslim. That was also the weakness of your great prophet: for him sex was imperative to religion. But we can only see a religion without sex as sacred.

Saladin You holiest hermit, you open to me an abyss in exposing the supreme human weakness and limitation of our religion.

Theoderic And we have come to terms with the tragedy of the crusades and reached an end on it.

Saladin(resigns) So my dear young ones, what will you do?

Kenneth Great Saladin, we will follow your advice and follow king Richard home to England.

Saladin And religiously? How will you solve your Christian moral problem?

Kenneth The crusades were an effort and a good effort. They prove by their historical reality that new efforts can be made.

Salain (with beaming eyes) To in spite of all realize my visions?

Kenneth It is not in our power. But it might be in the future.

Saladin Yes, that hope remains for us.

Theoderic The ancient Greeks knew well enough, that hope is the last thing that dies in man.

Saladin And as I see it her only hope is cooperation, especially between Islam and Christianity, for they are the world's two greatest and most dynamic religions. To go on fighting century after century, as we have been doing now for almost a hundred years since you first came across the seas, is just excessively silly and self-destructive. I myself have failed. Richard Lionheart was my hope, my great hope, and it went out, perhaps in spite of all by my own eastern vanity, perhaps by his presumption, probably by both. I will not wish to go on living after he has left the country, for I see no hope among your Christian leaders after him.

Edith But what will come of it then? You are after all the leader of Islam and has the highest responsibility.

Saladin I will tell you exactly what will happen. You leave the country, and I die. Gradually my successors will reconquer Ashkalon, Tyrus, Haifa and Acre. Muslims and Christians will return to being hopeless strangers and enemies to each other, since our religion never can accept or even understand the Christian ideal of virtue, chastity and purity, which we must consider insane, since it prevents children from being born, why we in time must get the upper hand on Christianity. We will dominate the Mediterranean and gradually vanquish the Byzantine empire bit by bit, until we might storm even Constantinople and break into Greece and perhaps expand in Europe and reach Hungary and Vienna. It depends on what happens in the far east, where the Mongols are pressing us. Your only hope and ours and that of the future, as I see it, would be if there could arise some leader among you who could make and win his way in to Jerusalem by peaceful means, diplomacy and reason. If he then could reform your Christianity it could save your world and religion and civilization, while I could hardly believe that Islam ever could be reformed, since not a letter of our angry holy simplistic book could be altered, while you Christians always bring forth new Christian philosophers and thinkers who are eager to renew your church. There is hope for you but not for us.

(silence)

It is late. I have given myself away. I shouldn't have done that. But now it's too late. I must break it up.

Kenneth Farewell, great venerable enlightened prince. To have met you and be able to associate with you carries greater weight with me than all my association with the wild Lionheart.

Saladin Thank you, my friend. Take well care of your wife, and never deceive her.

Edith We will miss you. I still hope you will stay on as the regent of the east as long as possible.

Saladin My days are counted, my child.

Theoderic Thanks for your confidence, you noblest of princes. Perhaps our different religions still one day might reach an agreement.

Saladin In the long run that's the only thing that could save the world. Thanks and farewell, holy hermit. Don't exaggerate your mortifications. *(leaves)*

Kenneth We have had the privilege of associating with the great Saladin. He came to us as a poor doctor.

Edith We shall never forget him.

Theoderic May the world never forget him.

Act V scene 1.

Valeria The rest is history. Saladin died only half a year after you had left the holy land. He died as he had lived in pious magnanimity and humble modesty.

Blondel As befits the greatest and noblest of princes. But it gives me pain to hear, my lady, that he died so forlorn. I never thought that possible. But how do you know?

Valeria Don't bother about that. Go home to your king instead. He needs you.

Blondel Have you so quickly tired of my company?

Valeria My friend, I allow you to leave for your own good. Or else the risk is that you will remain here forever. You like it too well here, and I also enjoy your company too well. Three days is set as the limit in the east for unreserved hospitality. After three days the guest should go on or become one of the family. It would be wise of you not to become one of my family. (*Blondel wants to protest, Valeria averts it with a sign.*) And your king needs you. He expects you at Durenstein.

Blondel So you give me leave just like that?

Valeria Yes, my friend. I had the power to keep you here, there are rumours about me and my family that we are vampires and that our guests never are seen to leave our castle, but the finest families are always disparaged. Go home to England with your king and save at least England. The rest of the world is lost.

Blondel Does my king know that I am here?

Valeria He knows that you are on your way to him.

Blondel (rises intuitively) What am I then waiting for? My king is expecting me! I must go at once!

Valeria Yes, my friend, do so, before I change my mind.

Blondel Thanks for your wonderful hospitality, my good lady. I will at least see to it that you will never be disparaged.

Valeria I hope so indeed.

Blondel (kisses her hand and leaves) For me you are just a great unfathomable mystery, but perhaps that was the way it was meant to be.

Valeria You are welcome to look at it that way, my friend. You had better make haste now. (*Blondel takes his violin and leaves.*)

(*Valeria waits and sits alone for some time before she rises and claps her hands. One of the noble servants enters immediately.*)

Valeria Let the coffin be carried in.

(*The servant bows and leaves. Soon four servants carry in a coffin draped in a banner with the cross of St. George: the coffin of a crusader.*)

Leave me alone with him.

(*The servants bow courteously and leave.*)

(*When Valeria is alone with the coffin she flings herself across it in wild grief with heart-rending lamentation, crying bitterly.*)

Theoderic! Theoderic! Why did you abandon me! Why was I not allowed to keep you!

(*cries and laments most grievously, then gradually calms down.*)

You never learned that, my young minstrel. The hermit of Engaddi was my husband, and now he is dead. The coffin arrived here just before you. He never loved me, our marriage was settled by our families, since he was unluckily in love with a common girl, who therefore was sent by her family to a convent. As a nun she

followed the crusaders to Palestine as a nurse. Theoderic learned about it and therefore took the cross. He found his life's only love in the end, but then she was dead. She lies buried in his hermit's cave, where he took her and buried her to forever reject our society and the crusades and everything that separated him from her. There he cried for her every day as an ascetic hermit until he died of mortification and his grief. Now he has come home, but I accuse all Christianity and its ideal of purity and virtue, for I loved him! They took him away from me!

Why then did I allow him to leave? A man must be allowed his freedom, women must never stand in the way of his self-indulgence. May he be mad, as long as he may be able to love! Call his madness what you want, call it Christianity or Islam, call it crusades or war, call it music or poetry, but allow him free reins with his madness, for only that way he will remain a child for us women to be able to love.

Theoderic, my husband, let me now grieve myself to death over you, like you methodically and intentionally cried out your heart for an unhappy nun. And let our grief account for all humanity with all its follies, especially Christianity and Islam with all their deranged crusades and eternal wars, which they only indulge in by eternal self-destructive vanity. May they some time at last reach an end, so that we women finally on one day may keep our men.

(embraces the coffin with all her dying passion.)

Curtain.

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