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Sword and crozier, drama in five acts

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Poet Lore

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SWORD AND CROZIER

Drama in Five Acts

BY INDRIDI EINARSSON

(Authorized translation from the Icelandic by Lee M. Hollander)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BOTOLF, bishop of Holar

KOLBEIN ARNORSSON 'THE YOUNG,' chieftain of the 'North
Quarter of
Iceland,' thirty-four years old

HELGA, his wife

SALVOR, woman physician

THOROLF BJARNASON }

ASBJORN ILLUGASON } Henchmen of Kolbein Arnorsson

HAF BJARNASON }

KOLBEIN KALDALJOS, kinsman of Kolbein Arnorsson and
steward of the bishopric of Holar, seventy years old

BRAND KOLBEINSSON, his son, chieftain of Reynistad, thirty-
three years old

JORUN, his wife

KALF, eight years old } their sons

THORGEIR, six years old }

BRODDI THORLEIFSSON, brother-in-law of Kolbein Arnorsson

SIGURD, deacon

HELGI SKAFTASON } henchmen of Brand

ALF OF GROF }

EINAR THE RICH, of Vik

HELGI, priest at Holar

ILLUGI, the blind beggar
BOY LEADING ILLUGI

JARNGRIM

Followers of Thorolf Bjarnason, of Brand, and of Kolbein Arnorsson.
People of Holar in Hjaltadel.

The scene is laid in the district of Skagafirth, in the North of Iceland. The action takes place during the winter previous to the battle of Hunafloi, 1244 A.D.

ACT I

SCENE I

(So-called 'Little Hall' in BRAND'S manor-house at Reynistad. Enter the DEACON SIGURD, THOROLF BJARNASON, ALF OF GROF, and EINAR THE RICH, of Vik.)

Deacon Sigurd.—Thorolf, Lady Jorun bade you wait here until her husband comes.

Thorolf.—Where is Brand Kolbeinsson? I bear a message for him from my Lord Kolbein the Young.

Sigurd.—Why comes he not himself?

Alf.—Kolbein is nigh unto d—

Thorolf.—Are you garrulous again, Alf?

Sigurd.—He lies sick with his wound, I ween.

Thorolf and Alf (remain silent).

Einar the Rich (aside).—That news I ought to bring secretly to Thord Kakali.

Thorolf.—Why will Lady Jorun not speak to her guests?

Sigurd.—She bade me say that she had seen you last, Thorolf Bjarnason, at such business that she cares not to see you any more.

Thorolf (laughs).—Last I saw her at the slaying of Kalf Guttormsson, her father, and of Guttorm, her brother.

Sigurd.—Much good reason has my lady if she cares to see you no more.

Einar.—You are the man who most egged on to the deed, that father and son should be slain.

Thorolf.—No, Urækja it was, the son of Snorri Sturlason. A most useful deed it was. Ever since Kolbein's men have obeyed his commands without gainsaying.

Einar.—More useful still, I suppose you think that you snatched from out of Kalf's hands the crucifix he held when kneeling to receive the mortal stroke.

Thorolf.—His blood would have spurted on the cross, had it been held so near. (*Wrathfully.*) And likewise would I do to you, Einar the Rich, if Kolbein struck off your head. Your wife is a kinswoman of Thord Kakali, and dreamt have I that you will find an earlier grave than will I.

Einar.—An evil business it is to threaten me with death. No one knows who will be buried first. A faithful follower of Kolbein I have been.

Thorolf.—'Scarce shall I trust you,
Troll, quoth Haustkoll.'

Sigurd.—Wicked speech this is and witless.

(*Enter BRAND KOLBEINSSON, BRODDI THORLEIFSSON, HELGI SKAFTASON, and others.*)

Brand.—You here, Thorolf Bjarnason?

Thorolf.—Ay, sir; and with a message for you, for Broddi, and for other chieftains, from Kolbein the Young.

Brand.—Is it that Thord Kakali is expected from the West with war?

Thorolf.—Not to my knowledge. He is still busy drinking the arvel after Tumi his brother, whom we put to death this last week!

Alf.—Yes, and he and his men are now drinking the ale by the bowlful, they say.

Brand.—What of it, if Thord does give his men in plenty?

Thorolf.—And why should we not speak of it, we who know what folly it is for men to drink heavily before going to war?

Einar.—A generous chieftain is Thord Kakali, and likely to accomplish great deeds. No chieftain in this land has ever lost so many men as has he. It is not seeming to make sport of his sorrow.

Thorolf.—None have I ever seen flee so fast as these men of Thord's, they urge each other on to flight.

Brand.—Idle speech is this, Thorolf!

Thorolf.—I say what I will, and care not whether others like it or no.

Broddi.—Where is the message my brother-in-law sends us?

Thorolf (*handing the letter to BRAND*).—I have lived all my life in warfare and am not able to read.

Brand (*handing the letter to DEACON SIGURD*).—Read for us, deacon!

Einar the Rich (*while SIGURD is undoing the strings with which the parchment is tied, aside to ALF OF GROF*).—I know you are no friend of Thorolf; stay behind here and help me to persuade Brand Kolbeinsson.

Alf (*aside to EINAR THE RICH*).—Broddi and all of Thorolf's neighbors hate him because he elbows himself forward ruthlessly. Against my will I left my home with Thorolf; but how shall I help you?

Einar (*aside to ALF*).—Help me dye Thorolf's white coat of mail as red as blood.

Alf (*aside*).—Hush! We would have to fight against great odds.

Einar (*aside*).—Not if Brand Kolbeinsson were on our side.

Alf (*aside*).—Brand—indeed! No, if Broddi Thorleifsson were with us.

Sigurd (*has now untied the parchment, reads*).—"To Brand Kolbeinsson of Stad, to Broddi Thorleifsson, to Kolbein Kaldaljos, and to Paul Kolbeinsson, Kolbein Arnorsson of Flugumyr sends God's greetings and his own. Little we know of Thord Kakali's affairs after Easter. After the slaying of his brother Tumi it is but likely that he is preparing for war against us, and in such case, if he came upon us from the West, we of the North Quarter would want to subject him to a severe test. But now it is so ill with our health that we may no longer conceal it from you. Because of this it is our will that all of you meet me here as soon as possible. Only in this wise may we

prevent the danger now threatening both the entire quarter and our district.'

Brand.—To what danger to the district does the letter refer? Is Kinsman Kolbein sick anew, then?

Thorolf.—Answer that yourself; but well may these words mean that it were better now to take off the 'velvet glove' and bestir one's hands.

Brand (angrily).—Get you gone, Thorolf, at once! Astonishing it is that you should be sent hither to Stad, such enemies as we two have been.

Thorolf.—My course I shall steer wheresoever it take me, whether or no you like it, Brand Kolbeinsson. To horse, yeoman Alf!

Alf.—Unwillingly I followed you, Thorolf, and left my farm work behind. Take with you the two companions that always have followed you—death and the devil!

Thorolf.—Right, you insolent fool, death has ever been my companion. (*BRAND KOLBEINSSON goes to the door and opens it.*) Now you precede me to the door, Brand Kolbeinsson, for higher-born than I you are. But in all tests of manhood, in assemblies and in battles, I have gone before you. There is no danger in going before me now; it is quite safe! (*Exit.*)

Broddi.—An astonishing thing it is that base men should dare to speak in such wise to chieftains!

Brand.—He is a greater friend of my kinsman Kolbein than any other man.

Einar.—And in greater favor even with Lady Helga than with Kolbein.

Sigurd.—He journeyed to Rome with Kolbein. Such a pilgrimage atones for many a sin.

(*Enter LADY JORUN with her and BRAND'S sons, KALF and THORGEIR.*)

Jorun.—What errand brought Thorolf Bjarnason hither to Stad?

Brand.—Kolbein the Young sent him.

Jorun. — Then we shall have to put up with that insult.

Alf. — Your husband he called a 'velvet glove!'

Jorun. — Gentle have his hands ever been to me, and I might well call him so.

Alf. — And a coward he called him.

Jorun. — Slower he is to ill deeds than Thorolf.

Einar. — Me Thorolf threatened with death, and to wrench out of my hands the crucifix, whenever I should lie down for the blow, just as he did to Kalf Guttormsson.

Jorun (moved to tears). — Was that done to my father?

Sigurd. — It was indeed done to him, and a mighty ill deed it was.

Jorun. — I had not thought that men who were to lose their lives would be thus cruelly dealt with.

Alf. — These men have indeed done enough to forfeit *their* lives, and ought to live no longer.

Helgi Skaftason. — If no one can be prevailed upon to kill them I shall undertake it.

Alf. — No one's duty it is as much as yours, Brand Kolbeinsson, to take revenge for the murder of Kalf Guttormsson.

Jorun. — Let no one be so bold as to seek revenge for my father. Full composition did Kolbein the Young pay for reconciliation, after the death of father and son, with the fine of hundred marks silver, which were paid out to my mother and me as stipulated.

Einar. — And yet might Brand and others take revenge for the wrongs they have suffered at the hands of Thorolf, even though Kalf Guttormsson's death be atoned for.

Jorun. — Do not undertake so dangerous an enterprise, my husband. Well you know that if you slay Thorolf his friend Kolbein will slay you all in revenge.

Alf. — Kolbein lies nigh unto death.

Brodidi. — Is his condition so dangerous?

Brand.—Why, have you not told news so important and so—sad until now?

Alf.—I could not, on account of Thorolf. Kolbein holds his malady secret as long as he can.

Brand.—Then my kinsman Kolbein must have summoned us to dispose of his dominions before he dies.

Sigurd.—That is, all the North Quarter and the Westfirths!

Brand.—About the Westfirths we have been at war until now.

Einar.—And his heir? (*All look at BRAND.*) They say that it is the wish of Lady Helga to set Thorolf Bjarnason over all the dominions.

Many.—Thorolf Bjarnason?

Alf.—Impossible!

Broddi.—It would mean the death of one man or many men.

Brand.—Helgi Skaftason, have the saddles laid upon twelve horses! I and eleven men shall ride forthwith to Flugumyr. (*Exit HELGI.*)

Kalf.—Lay saddle on my horse also. I shall ride to Flugumyr to my foster-mother.

Broddi.—What will you of her, my young fellow?

Kalf.—I want to get the weapons she has promised to give me.

Jorun.—No weapons, Kalf! You will not go to Flugumyr, this time; rather too long you have been there as a child. (*Towards BRAND KOLBEINSSON.*) My husband, remember my words. To kill one of my kinsman Kolbein's or Lady Helga's men is to conjure up odds against you, whatever be the provocation. (*Exit with the boys.*)

Broddi.—Never shall that come to pass that a man of low birth govern so large a dominion. (*Exeunt all.*)

SCENE II

(*Room at Flugumyr. LADY HELGA and the woman physician SALVOR enter.*)

Helga.—I have much to do about the house and can attend the patient but little. How is my husband, Salvor?

Salvor.—Rather poorly! He is now confessing to Bishop Botolf, Lady Helga.

Helga.—Confessing? Did he speak about the disposition of his dominions after his death?

Salvor.—The bishop touched upon that, but Kolbein said that this would have to wait until his kinsmen were assembled.

Helga.—To what purpose is the advice of his kinsmen in that matter? I see how it will end.

Salvor.—I have hopes that your husband will again recover his health this time.

Helga.—And how long will he keep it then?

Salvor.—So long as he stirs not.

Helga.—My husband will have to go to war and do battle as long as he lives.

Salvor.—Now he longs for peace.

Helga.—Then is he surely sick! (*Vehemently.*) My husband must not be sick; he will have to speak with his kinsmen, when they come. Give him strong drugs that he may have strength to do so. His sickness must not become known in the Westfirths by Thord Kakali.

Salvor.—Such strong drugs are not without danger.

Helga.—What danger is there in them?

Salvor.—That he loses possession of his senses, and becomes even more sick thereafter.

Helga (vehemently).—His kinsmen must not know that he is sick, or else they will take matters in their own hands. He will have to have drugs so strong as to give him strength to hold council with them.

Salvor.—But if he loses possession of his senses during it?

Helga (with a look of relief).—Let me take care of that. Then I shall speak for him, for all his intentions are known to me.

Salvor.—My advice it is not to use strong drugs; they may endanger Kolbein's life.

Helga.—Will you, low-born woman, give advice to a great?

Salvor.—Why seek you then a low-born woman to heal the great?

Helga.—I knew none better. Do as I bid you!

Salvor.—I shall do as you bid, my lady. You run the risk, not I.

(Enter THOROLF.)

Thorolf.—Hail, lady! How is the chieftain's health?

Helga.—Rather good! Salvor says he will not be able to bear going into war for the first.

Thorolf.—Kolbein has a-plenty of men to lead his troops.

Salvor.—Brand Kolbeinsson—

Thorolf.—He, the velvet glove! Whilst Kolbein was on his foray to Reykholar and slew Tumi—a feat now famous—Brand was to dispatch old Sturla Thordsson—the fellow who mostly goes about with ink on his fingers. But Sturla gulled him so that Brand had to return with shame. Brand lacks both forethought *before* battle and that fire *in* battle which wins the victory.

Salvor.—Brand Kolbeinsson is a man of peace.

Helga.—You shall stay here at Flugumyr now, Thorolf, whilst my husband is in ill health. Brand Kolbeinsson would be but a low wall between us and Thord Kakali, should he advance from the West.

Thorolf.—So long have I been one of your household, my lady, that I am bound to obey. But who shall take care of the shipbuilding which I have under way for Kolbein the Young?

Helga.—Your wife Arnfrid; for this is not a place for women to be at.

Salvor.—The ships that are to be used for carrying our war into the Westfirths this spring?

Thorolf.—Yes. This spring we shall lay waste the Westfirths, kill cattle and people, burn down storehouses, farms, and churches, and slay all men we overtake. Thord shall not be able to hold himself there thereafter.

Salvor.—Holy mother of God! Why are the people to suffer all that misery and affliction! Have there not been enough maimings and killings in the Westfirths? Be mindful, Thorolf, that you, too, may be taken captive and your bright coat of mail get a red collar.

Thorolf.—Often have I thought of it. But he who lets himself be kept back by such thoughts had better never venture into danger.

Helga.—Go now, Salvor, and attend to the patient! (*Exit SALVOR.*) The life of my husband is in great danger!

Thorolf. (*coming close to her*).—And shall I then become the Lord of Eyafirth?

Helga (*motioning him away*).—Kolbein the Young still lives. Whilst he is living the disposition of the dominions remains his matter. It may well be, though, that I succeed in making him give you Eyafirth, and then more people from here would settle there than are there now. Then I shall foster up young Kalf, the son of Brand, because he will inherit Skagafirth from his father; and while he is young, and I gain influence over him, it may happen that the men of Skagafirth and Eyafirth would work in unison in all undertakings, and rule the entire country alone.

Thorolf.—Certainly! Certainly!

Helga.—Swear allegiance to me, Thorolf!

Thorolf.—I have ever been faithful to you.

Helga.—Will you be obedient to me, Thorolf?

Thorolf.—Yes, gladly (*kisses her hand*), now as always before.

Helga (*gently*).—You have always been true to me, and that shall be rewarded as soon as ever I can.

(*Enter BRAND KOLBEINSSON, BRODDI, DEACON SIGURD, EINAR THE RICH, ALF, HELGI SKAFTASON, together with six others.*)

Brand.—Hail, lady!

Helga.—Hail, my nephew! Hail, all of you! My husband has been expecting you with impatience.

Einar (aside).—Now we shall see how sick a man Kolbein is.

Helga.—We pray you all to say the least possible about the infirmity of my husband; I have no more than sixty armed men about me.

Broddi.—And who is their leader?

Helga.—Thorolf Bjarnason, Asbjorn Illugason, and Haf Bjarnason.

Broddi.—And Thorolf Bjarnason remains here?

Thorolf.—First I shall return to my estate to give orders as to my affairs.

Helga (aside to THOROLF).—You speak incautiously, to tell them where you mean to go. I read your death in their eyes.

Alf.—You will not refuse me to keep you company on the way home?

Thorolf.—No; I care not to have your company, you insolent fool!

Helga.—You will remain here with us, Thorolf, on account of the infirmity of my husband and our defencelessness otherwise; you can send some one else to arrange matters on your estate.

(LADY HELGA and those about her exeunt by door. BRODDI, ALF, and EINAR THE RICH remain behind in the foreground.)

Broddi.—Lady Helga has become suspicious of us.

Einar.—Sharp are the eyes of my Lady Helga whenever Thorolf is concerned.

Alf.—He has slipped from our grasp, the hellhound!

(KOLBEIN THE YOUNG, pale and weak, is borne in on shields by ASBJORN ILLUGASON, HAF BJARNASON, and others. BISHOP BOTOLF and SALVOR enter with them.)

Kolbein.—Hail to you all!

Botolf.—Pax vobiscum!

(*They bow to KOLBEIN and the BISHOP. KOLBEIN is borne to the high seat. HELGA stands beside him, also SALVOR keeps near him always.*)

Brand (coming forward).—How stands matters with you, kinsman Kolbein?

Kolbein.—Not so very well.

Brodidi (coming forward).—You have but a small body-guard about you to-day, brother-in-law!

Kolbein (pointing to BISHOP BOTOLF).—This body-guard *alone* has been sufficient for some time.

Brand.—You have summoned us to meet you.

Kolbein.—I wanted, with the assistance of my kinsmen and of others, to make such provisions for our dominions as would most likely result in peace for the district.

Brand.—Peace we should desire for every consideration, since many regions are beginning to grow poor.

Sigurd.—The wars have fanned into flame hatred and malice over all the land.

Botolf.—Blessed are the peacemakers!

Kolbein.—During these last days the deep wound I received in the battle of Orlygsstad has been troubling me sorely, and I am so exhausted that I often look forward to death. Now you well know that Thord Kakali has lost through me both father and five brothers. That stands in the way of peace in the district. I therefore offer to go abroad and give up all my dominions.

Helga.—Give up all dominions!

Botolf.—And yield them to King Hakon?

Kolbein.—If King Hakon should lay claim to my lands I should give him six feet of land, or so much less as he lacks in height. To give Iceland to him is as bad as yielding up one's soul to the devil.

Brand.—But who is to receive the lands?

Kolbein.—I shall give all my dominions to Thord Kakali, and thus atone for the killing of his father and brothers. Your own cases would then be at his mercy. I expect that you will fare well in this, because just then did Thord prove to be my best friend when I entrusted my matters entirely to him; at that time you were also on friendly terms, you and the men from Skagafirth.

Botolf.—That would be a disposition promising peace, if the king himself is not to receive the dominion. (*Aside.*) It is the same as if King Hakon did receive it.

Brand.—You will deprive me of my rightful inheritance, and give up *all* your dominions to Thord! Then will I rather fight for them until I fall.

Brodidi.—Thord may think he has so much to settle with us that we could not endure the punishments he would inflict upon us—that is, if we had any desire to do so.

Einar.—If all dominions were given up to Thord he would treat us well.

Botolf.—And then there would be peace on earth and good-will among men.

Thorolf.—In Thord's Hall all we, your men, would have to sit up on the lower bench. His men whom we have pursued, wounded, stripped of their clothes, and beaten whenever we engaged them, they would take revenge on us, under cover of him. All of us desire but one of two things, *to do battle* until we gain peace, or else, to fall with such renown as is granted us.

Asbjorn.—We will follow no other man whilst you live.

The followers of Kolbein.—No, no other man!

Kolbein.—Then your other choice is that all yeomen at their own expense guard in four parties the frontier during the remainder of winter. The first will have to be on the Skagafirth, to guard the road over the Kjol and the ways leading from Storasand. The second guard will have to be in Vididale, Vatnsdale, and Nupsdale to watch the paths over the Grimstungu-heath, and the one over Tvidægra-heath. The third and fourth guards will have to be in Midfirth and Hrutafirth, and to protect the ways along the Holta-