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(#6 in our series by Algernon Charles Swinburne)

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, THE DUKE OF GANDIA ***

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THE DUKE OF GANDIA

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

POPE ALEXANDER VI.

FRANCESCO BORGIA, Duke of Gandia }his sons

CAESAR BORGIA, Cardinal of Valencia }

DON MICHELE COREGLIA, called MICHELOTTO, agent for Caesar Borgia.

GIORGIO SCHIAVONE, a Tiber waterman.

TWO ASSASSINS.

AN OFFICER of the Papal Household.

VANNOZZA CATANEI, surnamed LA ROSA, concubine to the Pope.

LUCREZIA BORGIA, daughter to Alexander and Vannozza.

SCENE: ROME.

TIME: JUNE 14--JULY 22, 1497.

SCENE I

The Vatican

Enter CAESAR and VANNOZZA

CAESAR

Now, mother, though thou love my brother more,
Am I not more thy son than he?

VANNOZZA

Not more.

CAESAR

Have I more Spaniard in me--less of thee?
Did our Most Holiest father thrill thy womb
With more Italian passion than brought forth
Me?

VANNOZZA

Child, thine elder never was as thou -
Spake never thus.

CAESAR

I doubt it not. But I,
Mother, am not mine elder. He desires
And he enjoys the life God gives him--God,
The Pope our father, and thy sacred self,
Mother beloved and hallowed. I desire
More.

VANNOZZA

Thou wast ever sleepless as the wind -
A child anhungered for thy time to be
Man. See thy purple about thee. Art thou not
Cardinal?

CAESAR

Ay; my father's eminence
Set so the stamp on mine. I will not die
Cardinal.

VANNOZZA

Caesar, wilt thou cleave my heart?
Have I not loved thee?

CAESAR

Ay, fair mother--ay.
Thou hast loved my father likewise. Dost thou love
Giulia--the sweet Farnese--called the Fair
In all the Roman streets that call thee Rose?
And that bright babe Giovanni, whom our sire,
Thy holy lord and hers, hath stamped at birth
As duke of Nepi?

VANNOZZA

When thy sire begat
Thee, sinful though he ever was--fierce, fell,
Spaniard--I fear me, Jesus for his sins
Bade Satan pass into him.

CAESAR

And fill thee full,
Sweet sinless mother. Fear it not. Thou hast
Children more loved of him and thee than me -
Our bright Francesco, born to smile and sway,
And her whose face makes pale the sun in heaven,
Whose eyes outlaugh the splendour of the sea,
Whose hair has all noon's wonders in its weft,
Whose mouth is God's and Italy's one rose,
Lucrezia.

VANNOZZA

Dost thou love them then? My child,
How should not I then love thee?

CAESAR

God alone
Knows. Was not God--the God of love, who bade
His son be man because he hated man,
And saw him scourged and hanging, and at last
Forgave the sin wherewith he had stamped us, seeing
So fair a full atonement--was not God
Bridesman when Christ's crowned vicar took to bride
My mother?

VANNOZZA

Speak not thou to me of God.
I have sinned, I have sinned--I would I had died a nun,
Cloistered!

CAESAR

There too my sire had found thee. Priests
Make way where warriors dare not--save when war
Sets wide the floodgates of the weirs of hell.
And what hast thou to do with sin? Hath he
Whose sin was thine not given thee there and then
God's actual absolution? Mary lived
God's virgin, and God's mother: mine art thou,
Who am Christlike even as thou art virginal.
And if thou love me or love me not God knows,
And God, who made me and my sire and thee,
May take the charge upon him. I am I.
Somewhat I think to do before my day
Pass from me. Did I love thee not at all,
I would not bid thee know it.

VANNOZZA

Alas, my son!

CAESAR

Alas, my mother, sounds no sense for men -
Rings but reverberate folly, whence resounds
Returning laughter. Weep or smile on me,
Thy sunshine or thy rainbow softens not
The mortal earth wherein thou hast clad me. Nay,
But rather would I see thee smile than weep,
Mother. Thou art lovelier, smiling.

VANNOZZA

What is this

Thou hast at heart to do? God's judgment hangs
Above us. I that girdled thee in me
As Mary girdled Jesus yet unborn
- Thou dost believe it? A creedless heretic
Thou art not?

CAESAR

I? God's vicar's child?

VANNOZZA

Be God

Praised! I, then, I, thy mother, bid thee, pray,
Pray thee but say what hungers in thy heart,
And whither thou wouldst hurl the strenuous life
That works within thee.

CAESAR

Whither? Am not I

Hinge of the gate that opens heaven--that bids
God open when my sire thrusts in the key -
Cardinal? Canst thou dream I had rather be
Duke?

Enter FRANCESCO

FRANCESCO

Wilt thou take mine office, Caesar mine?
I heard thy laugh deride it. Mother, whence
Comes that sweet gift of grace from dawn to dawn
That daily shows thee sweeter?

CAESAR

Knowest thou none
Lovelier?

VANNOZZA

My Caesar finds me not so fair.
Thou art over fond, Francesco.

CAESAR

Nay, no whit.
Our heavenly father on earth adores no less

Our mother than our sister: and I hold
His heart and eye, his spirit and his sense,
Infallible.

Enter the POPE

ALEXANDER

Jest not with God. I heard
A holy word, a hallowing epithet,
Cardinal Caesar, trip across thy tongue
Lightly.

CAESAR

Most holiest father, I desire
Paternal absolution--when thy laugh
Has waned from lip and eyelid.

ALEXANDER

Take it now,
And Christ preserve thee, Caesar, as thou art,
To serve him as I serve him. Rose of mine,
My rose of roses, whence has fallen this dew
That dims the sweetest eyes love ever lit
With light that mocks the morning?

VANNOZZA

Nay, my lord,
I know not--nay, I knew not if I wept.

ALEXANDER

Our sons and Christ's and Peter's whom we praise,
Are they--are these--fallen out?

FRANCESCO

Not I with him,
Nor he, I think, with me.

CAESAR

Forbid it, God!
The God that set thee where thou art, and there
Sustains thee, bids the love he kindles bind
Brother to brother.

ALEXANDER

God or no God, man

Must live and let man live--while one man's life
Galls not another's. Fools and fiends are men
Who play the fiend that is not. Why shouldst thou,
Girt with the girdle of the church, and given
Power to preside on spirit and flesh--or thou,
Clothed with the glad world's glory--priest or prince,
Turn on thy brother an evil eye, or deem
Your father God hath dealt his doom amiss
Toward either or toward any? Hath not Rome,
Hath not the Lord Christ's kingdom, where his will
Is done on earth, enough of all that man
Thirsts, hungers, lusts for--pleasure, pride, and power -
To sate you and to share between you? Whence
Should she, the godless heathen's goddess once,
Discord, heave up her hissing head again
Between love's Christian children--love's? Hath God
Cut short the thrill that glorifies the flesh,
Chilled the sharp rapturous pang that burns the blood,
Because an hundred even as twain at once
Partake it? Boys, my boys, be wise, and rest,
Whatever fire take hold upon your flesh,
Whatever dream set all your life on fire,
Friends.

CAESAR

Friends? Our father on earth, thy will be done.

FRANCESCO

Christ's body, Caesar! dost thou mock?

CAESAR

Not I.

Hast thou fallen out with me, then, that thy tongue
Disclaims its lingering utterance?

ALEXANDER

Now, by nought,
As nought abides to swear by, folly seen
So plain and heard so loud might well nigh make
Wise men believe in even the devil and God.
What ails you? Whence comes lightning in your eyes,
With hissing hints of thunder on your lips?
Fools! and the fools I thought to make for men
Gods. Is it love or hate divides you--turns
Tooth, fang, or claw, when time provides them prey,
To nip, rip, rend each other?

CAESAR

Hate or love,
Francesco?

FRANCESCO

Why, I hate thee not--thou knowest
I hate thee not, my Caesar.

CAESAR

I believe
Thou dost not hate or love or envy me;
Even as I know, and knowing believe, we all -
Our father, thou and I--triune in heart -
Hold loveliest of all living things to love
This.

Enter LUCREZIA

LUCREZIA

Mother! What do tears and thou for once
Together? Rain in sunshine?

VANNOZZA

Ask thy sire,
Am I not now the moon? Saint Anna bore
Saint Mary Virgin--did not God prefer
The child, and thrust behind with scarce a smile
The mother?

ALEXANDER

Thrust not out thy thorns at heaven,
Rose.

LUCREZIA

But what ailed her? And she will not say.

CAESAR

Sister, I sinned--sin must be mine. A word
Fell out askance between us, and she wept
Because our father chid us.

LUCREZIA

How should strife
Find here a tongue to hiss with? Are not we,
Brothers and sire and sister, sealed of God
Lovers--made one in love?

ALEXANDER

Deride not God,
Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA

Father, dost thou fear him, then?

ALEXANDER

I say not and I know not if I fear.

FRANCESCO

Thou canst not. Father, were he terrible,
How long wouldst thou live--thou, his mask on earth?

ALEXANDER

Boy, art thou all a child? What knew they more,
The men that loved and feared and died for God,
Than I and thou who know him not? We know
This life is ours, and sweet, if shame and fear
Make us not less than man: and less were they
Who crawled and writhed and cowered and called on God
To save them from him. Here I stand as he,
God, or God's very figure wrought in flesh,
More godlike than was Jesus. Dare I fear
Whipping and hanging? Thou, my cardinal,
Canst think not to be scourged and crucified -
Ha?

CAESAR

Nay: there lurks no God in me. And thou,
Father, dost thou fear?

ALEXANDER

I? Nought less than God.
But if we take him lightly on our lips
Too light his name will sound in all men's ears
Till earth and air, when man says God, respond
Laughter. Forbear him.

CAESAR

Wisdom lives in thee,
And cries not out along the streets as when
None of God's folk that heard regarded her,
As all that hear thy word regard--or die,

Being not outside God's eyeshot. Dost thou sleep
Here in his special keeping--here--to-night,
Brother?

FRANCESCO

What bids thee care to know?

CAESAR

They say
These holy streets of heaven's most holiest choice
Lie dangerous now in darkness if a man
Walk not on holiest errands. Thou, they say,
Wert scarce a Christlike sacrifice if slain.
Too many dead flow down the Tiber's flow
Nightly. They say it.

FRANCESCO

I never called thee yet
Fool.

CAESAR

Ah, my lord and brother, didst thou now,
Were this not thankless? God--our father's God -
Guide thee! [Exit FRANCESCO.

He goes, and thanks me not. Our sire,
What says the God that lives upon thy lips
And withers in thy silence?

LUCREZIA

Vex him not,
Caesar. Thou seest he is weary.

ALEXANDER

Yea. Come ye
With me. Bethink thee, Caesar. Vex me not.

Exeunt ALEXANDER, VANNOZZA, and LUCREZIA.

CAESAR

Thou wilt not bid me this, I think, again,
Father.

Enter MICHELOTTO

Thou art swift of speed at need. I bade thee
Abide my bidding.

MICHELOTTO

Till my lord were left
Alone.

CAESAR

Thou knewest it?

MICHELOTTO

Where my lord may be
And what beseems his thrall to know of him
I were not worthy, knew I not, to know.

CAESAR

I do not ask thee where my brother sleeps.
And where to-morrow sees him yet asleep -

MICHELOTTO

Ask of the fishers' nets on Tiber.

CAESAR

Nay -
Not I but Rome shall ask it. Pass in peace.
The benediction of my sire be thine. [Exeunt.

SCENE II

A narrow street opening on the Tiber

Enter MICHELOTTO and ASSASSINS

MICHELOTTO

Ye know the lordlier harlot's house--there?

FIRST ASSASSIN

Ay,
Surely.

MICHELOTTO

The first whose foot comes forth is he.

SECOND ASSASSIN

How know we this?

MICHELOTTO

I know it. Ye need but slay.

[Exit.

Enter FRANCESCO

FRANCESCO (singing)

Love and night are life and light;

Sleep and wine and song

Speed and slay the halting day

Ere it live too long.

FIRST ASSASSIN

That shalt not thou. Sing, whosoe'er thou be,

Thy next of songs to Satan.

[They stab him.

FRANCESCO

Dogs! Ye dare?

God! Pity me! God! [Dies.

SECOND ASSASSIN

God receive his soul!

This was a Christian: many a man I have slain

Died with all hell between his lips.

FIRST ASSASSIN

Be thine

Dumb. Lift his feet as I the head.

SECOND ASSASSIN

A boy!

And fair of face as angels

FIRST ASSASSIN

If the nets

Snare not this fish betimes ere others feed,

None that shall heave it airward for the sun

To mock and mar shall say so. Bring him down.

Tiber hath fed on choicer fare than we

May think to feed his throat with ere we die.
[Exeunt with the body.]

SCENE III

The Vatican

ALEXANDER and LUCREZIA

ALEXANDER

The day burns high. Thou hast not seen them--thou?

LUCREZIA

My brethren, sire? Nay, not since yesternight.

ALEXANDER

The night is newly dead. Since yestereven?

LUCREZIA

Nor then. I saw them when we parted here
Last.

ALEXANDER

I believe thou liest not. Girl, the day
Looks pale before thy glory. Brow, cheek, eye,
Lips, throat, and bosom, thou dost overshine
All womanhood man ever worshipped. Once
I held thy mother fairest born of all
That ever turned old Rome to heaven. Thou hast read
Her golden Horace?

LUCREZIA

Else were I cast out
From all their choir who serve the Muses.

ALEXANDER

Ay.
'Fair mother's fairer daughter,' dost thou deem
That praise was ever merited as by thee?
I cannot.

LUCREZIA

I concern myself no whit
If so it were or were not.

ALEXANDER

Thou dost well.
Thou hast not seen, thou sayest, Francesco?

LUCREZIA

Nay -
Give me some reliquary to swear it on -
Some rosary--crucifix or amulet,
Sorcerous or sacred.

ALEXANDER

Never twins were born
More like than thou and he--nor lovelier: yet
No twins were ye.

LUCREZIA

What ails thy Holiness?

ALEXANDER

I am ill at ease: my heart is sick. Last night
No revel here was held, and yet the day
Strikes heavier on me wearier, body and soul,
Than though we had rioted out with raging mirth
The lifelong length of darkness.

LUCREZIA

Evil hours
Fret somewhiles all folk living; none sees why:
No child sleeps always all night long.

ALEXANDER

Wast thou
Wakeful? No trouble clung about thee? Nought
Made the air of night heavier with presage felt
As joy feels fear and withers? I am not
Afraid: methinks I am very fear itself.

Enter an Officer of the household

OFFICER

His holiness be gracious towards me.

ALEXANDER

Speak.

Thy face is death's: let death upon thy lips
Live.

OFFICER

Sire, the humblest hireling knave in Rome -
A waterman that plies his craft all night -
Craves audience even of thee.

ALEXANDER

A Roman?

OFFICER

Nay.

Some outlander--some Greek--they call the knave
George the Slavonian.

ALEXANDER

They?

OFFICER

The fisherfolk
On Tiber.

ALEXANDER

Bid him in: bid God himself
Come in with doom upon me. [Exit Officer.

Hear'st thou, child -
Daughter?

LUCREZIA

What horror hangs on thee?

ALEXANDER

Abide,
And thou shalt know as I know.

Enter GIORGIO SCHIAVONE

Speak. I say,
Speak. What thou art I know: and what I am
Thou knowest--and yet thou knowest not.

GIORGIO

Holiest sire,
Last night I kept my boat on Tiber--Sire,
The thing I saw was nothing of my deed -
It shook me out of sleep to see it--Lord,
Have mercy: look not so upon me.

ALEXANDER

Dog,
Speak, while thy tongue is thine.

GIORGIO

Two men came down
And peered along the water-side: and two
Came after--men whose eyes raked all the night,
Searching the shore--I lay beneath my boat -
Beside it on the darkling side--and saw.
Then came a horseman--Sire, his horse was white -
The moonshine made his mane like dull white fire -
And on his crupper heavily hung a corpse,
Arms held from swaying on this side, legs on that,
I know not which on either--but the men
Held fast that held: and hard on Tiber side
They swung the crupper towards the water--sharp
And swift as man may steer a horse--and caught
And slung their dead into the stream: and he
Drifted, and caught the moon across his face
That shone like life against it: and the chief
Till then sat silent as the moon at watch,
And then bade hurl stones on the drifting dead
And sink him out of sight; and seeing this done,
Rode thence, and they strode after.

ALEXANDER

Man, and thou -
Thou?

GIORGIO

Sire, I set my heart again to sleep:
I turned and slept under my boatside.

ALEXANDER

Man -
Dog--devil, if this be truth, and if my fear
Lie not--how hadst thou heart to hold thy peace?
How comes it that the warders of the shore

Knew not of thee, while yet the crime was hot,
What crime had made night hell?

GIORGIO

A thousand times
I have seen such sights, but never till this hour
Seen him who cared to hear of them.

ALEXANDER

Till now,
Never. He looks in God's mute face and mine,
And says it. God be good to me! But God
Will not--or is not. Where is then thy dead,
Devil, called of God from hell to smite--to scourge -
Me?

GIORGIO

Sire, at hand I left him.

ALEXANDER

Stir not. Bid
Thy fellows bring my dead before me. [Exit Officer.
Nay,
But mine it is not yet--it may not be
Mine--while it may not be, it is not. Child,
It shall not be thy brother. Pray no prayer.
Prayer never yet brought profit. Be not pale.
Fear strikes more deep into the fearful heart
The wound it heals not.

Enter Officers with the body of FRANCESCO

What is he they bring?
O God! Thou livest! And my child is dead!
[Falls.

SCENE IV

The Vatican

ALEXANDER and CAESAR

ALEXANDER

Thou hast done this deed.

CAESAR

Thou hast said it.

ALEXANDER

Dost thou think
To live, and look upon me?

CAESAR

Some while yet.

ALEXANDER

I would there were a God--that he might hear.

CAESAR

'Tis pity there should be--for thy sake--none.

ALEXANDER

Wilt thou slay me?

CAESAR

Why?

ALEXANDER

Am not I thy sire?

CAESAR

And Christendom's to boot.

ALEXANDER

I pray thee, man,
Slay me.

CAESAR

And then myself? Thou art crazed, but I
Sane.

ALEXANDER

Art thou very flesh and blood?

CAESAR

They say,
Thine.

ALEXANDER

If the heaven stand still and smite thee not,
There is no God indeed.

CAESAR

Nor thou nor I
Know.

ALEXANDER

I could pray to God that God might be,
Were I but mad. Thou sayest I am mad: thou liest:
I do not pray.

CAESAR

Most holiest father, no.
Thy brain is not so sick yet. Thou and God
Friends? Man, how long would God have let thee live -
Thee?

ALEXANDER

Long enough he hath kept me, to behold
His face as fire--if his it be--and earth
As hell--and thee, begotten of my loins,
Satan.

CAESAR

The firstfruits of thy fatherhood
Were something less than Satan. Man of God,
Vaunt not thyself.

ALEXANDER

I would I had died in the womb.

CAESAR

Thou shalt do better, dying in Peter's chair:
Thou shalt die famous.

ALEXANDER

Ay: no screen from that,
No shelter, no forgetfulness on earth.

We shall be famed for ever. Hell and night,
Cover me!

CAESAR

Hast thou heard that prayers are heard?
Or hast thou known earth, for a man's cry's sake,
Cleave, and devour him?

ALEXANDER

I have done this thing.
Thou hast not done it: thy deed is none of thine:
Upon my hand, upon my head, the blood
Rests.

CAESAR

Wilt thou sleep the worse for this next year?

ALEXANDER

I will not live a seven days' space beyond
This.

CAESAR

Thou hast lived thy seven days' space in hell,
Father: they say thou hast fasted even from sleep.

ALEXANDER

Ay.

CAESAR

What they say and what thou sayest I hold
False. Though thou hast wept as woman, howled as wolf,
Above our dead, thou art hale and whole. And now
Behoves thee rise again as Christ our God,
Vicarious Christ, and cast as flesh away
This grief from off thy godhead. I and thou,
One, will set hand as never God hath set
To the empire and the steerage of the world.
Do thou forget but him who is dead, and was
Nought, and bethink thee what a world to wield
The eternal God hath given into thine hands
Which daily mould him out of bread, and give
His kneaded flesh to feed on. Thou and I
Will make this rent and ruinous Italy
One. Ours it shall be, body and soul, and great
Above all power and glory given of God
To them that died to set thee where thou art -

Throned on the dust of Caesar and of Christ,
Imperial. Earth shall quail again, and rise
Again the higher because she trembled. Rome
So bade it be: it was, and shall be.

ALEXANDER

Son,
Art thou my son?

CAESAR

Whom should thy radiant Rose
Have found so fit to ingraft with, and bring forth
So strong a scion as I am?

ALEXANDER

By my faith -
Wherein, I know not--by my soul, if that
Be--I believe it. God forgot his doom
When he thou hast slain drew breath before thee

CAESAR

God
Must needs forget--if God remember. Now
This thing thou hast loved, and I that swept him hence
Held never fit for hate of mine, is dead,
Wilt thou be one with me--one God? No less,
Lord Christ of Rome, thou wilt be.

ALEXANDER

Ay? The Dove?

CAESAR

What dove, though lovelier than the swan that lured
Leda to love of God on earth, might match
Lucrezia?

ALEXANDER

None. Thou art subtle of soul and strong.
I would thou hadst spared him--couldst have spared him.

CAESAR

Sire,
I would so too. Our sire, his sire and mine,
I slew not him for lust of slaying, or hate,
Or aught less like thy wiser spirit and mine.

ALEXANDER

Not for the dove's sake?

CAESAR

Not for hate or love.

Death was the lot God bade him draw, if God
Be more than what we make him.

ALEXANDER

Bread and wine

Could hardly turn so bitter. Canst thou sleep?

CAESAR

Dost thou not? Flesh must sleep to live. Am I
No son of thine?

ALEXANDER

I would I saw thine end,
And mine: and yet I would not.

CAESAR

Sire, good night.

[Exeunt

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