

peror! Greetings and victory! Hold out for six hours more, at the most, and all is saved! The Emperor is at hand with his whole army; the heads of his columns are not two hours behind me. And yet I have ridden! I have ridden! *(He clutches at his heart; the parchment falls from his hand. He staggers.)* I have ridden! *(The words burst from his throat. The blood gushes from his mouth, and he falls dead.)*

**The Young Plump Elder:** The Fool was right!

*(All shrink, appalled, realizing the risk they have taken, and the needlessness of it. A long silence of agony.)*

**The Prophet:** Pray, pray, thou favored of the Lord! There is no salvation in the arm of flesh!

**The Most Reverend Elder** *(trembling):* Let us lift up our eyes unto the Lord in the hour of our distress; let us utter our calamity in his ears, and let our hearts be humbled before him!

**Chorus of Elders:** Let the Lord give ear unto the complaining of his servants!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** In the extremity of the City is our hope fixed upon the Lord; let the Lord send us a saviour in the time of our need, even a saviour to lead us upon the mountains of victory!

**Chorus:** Let the Lord behold our disquietude; let him open the Eye of Mercy upon us!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord, thy people await the outpouring of thy salvation; as a great river bursting from the ice-dam let thy might flood forth upon us; as the moon that breaketh from a cloud, as a panther that leapeth from the woodland, so let thy victory shine forth!

**Chorus:** O Lord, let thy glory be manifest in our salvation!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! the prophets have prophesied in the market-place, and in the cathedrals have the preachers made proclamation of the Saviour. The sacred bards of olden time have made songs concerning him; the carver and the gilder have limned our hope upon oak and upon marble; in bronze and in orichalc hath the sculptor cast his statue.

**Chorus:** We have believed the word of the prophet! We have had faith in the word of the Lord God.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** With the eye of faith may we behold him, a span and half a span above the common height of man. His silver armor flashes in the moonlight; on his helm the ruby dragon glows and sparkles with the fire of his wrath. In his hand is the sword of vengeance; and in the crook of his left arm is the battleaxe of victory!

**Chorus:** O Lord, let us behold also with our eyes! Let us come to the hour of fulfilment!

*(The sun is now near his setting. His rays strike through the western window.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! O God of Blabre! By the devotion of thy people, we adjure thee to hear us! By thy saints and martyrs, by thy hermits and thy virgins, we recall thy favor! We invoke thee by the commemoration of thy glory!

**Chorus:** We adjure thee, we commemorate thy glory!

*(A pause, while all bend deeper in prayer. The door opens, and the Fool rushes in, dishevelled.)*

**The Fool:** The suburbs are filled with the advancing armies of the Gnogues! They move slowly, fearing stratagem, O brother fools! But they advance, inexorable as death him-

self. The banner of black crawls in the suburbs of Blabre! *(He goes to the window.)* All the other fools are kneeling too — and the black banner creeps towards the heart of Blabre!

*(They do not notice him, openly, but a trembling again takes hold on them.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord, vouchsafe unto thy servants the earnest of thy salvation!

**Chorus:** O Lord, hear us!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Lord, suffer not the enemy to enter the city!

**Chorus:** O Lord, arise and smite the hosts of them that hate us!

**The Fool:** From every side the banners of black writhe on like serpents.

*(The sunlight, leaving the kneeling crowd, now strikes nearer the roof.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! it is the hour. It is the hour of our salvation.

**Chorus:** Lord, let thy mercy be extended upon us! Let the last ray of the sun be darkened before the dawn of thy salvation!

*(The Herald rises, as if by a sudden instinct, and takes a position by the side of the altar, on a raised dais, so that he can see fully out of the eastern window.)*

**The Fool:** The heads of the main columns issue from the alleys. They see the people kneeling; the captains halt in amazement.

**The Most Venerable Elder** *(losing patience):* Is there no sign, no sign, O Lord, of the Saviour?

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

*(The sun's rays, striking the ceiling, grow pale. The scene begins to darken.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord, it is the hour of the fulfilment of thy word! It is the hour of the salvation of Blabre at the hand of the Lord God!

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

**The Fool:** The captains meet at the edge of the market-place; they consult; they withdraw; it is as if they waited even as we wait!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** The fear of the vengeance of the Lord is already upon them!

**The Fool:** The captains are whispering some order; it passes down the ranks like the wind through a field of wheat.

**The Herald** *(turning to the western window for a moment):* The rim of the sun is gone down beneath the waters.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Is there no sign of the Saviour?

**Chorus:** Is there no sign of the Saviour?

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Mighty and merciful! Strong to save! Lord of our people, Lord almighty, Lord God everlasting, send us, we beseech thee, send us the Saviour!

**Chorus:** Send us the Saviour.

**The Fool:** The Gnogues are deploying; it is as if they were forming in four ranks, ready to charge.

*(The stage is now in total darkness.)*

**Chorus:** Send us, O send us, the Saviour.

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

**The Most Reverend Elder** *(to the Prophet):* Hast thou lied unto us in the name of the Lord?

**The Herald:** Look! I see a glint as of silver upon the bridge