

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

THE PLAY IS SET IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC WORLD WHERE SOCIETY HAS ONCE MORE RETURNED TO A FEUDAL, MEDIEVAL STATE. IN THE DARKNESS WE HEAR SHOUTS, THE SOUND OF CHAOS. LIGHTS UP TO REVEAL KERNA, THE GOVERNOR OF THIS PROVINCE IN A LIVING AREA IN HIS RESIDENCE. HE OPENS A LETTER SEALED WITH WAX, READS IT BUT SHOWS LITTLE EMOTION. HE SEEMS RESIGNED TO THE LETTER'S CONTENTS. ENTER HENDEL, HIS WIFE.

HENDEL

Kerna, there are militia at the gate. What's going on?

KERNA

I'm sorry Hendel.

KERNA HANDS HER THE LETTER AND INDICATES FOR HER TO READ IT. SHE READS QUIETLY BUT IS CLEARLY SHOCKED AS SHE DISCOVERS THE LETTER'S CONTENTS.

HENDEL

Exile? For how long? Months? Years?

KERNA

It's permanent.

HENDEL

But they can't do this.

KERNA

The High Council have decided; their decree is permanent exclusion.

HENDEL

But you're Governor of this province.

KERNA

It counts for nothing anymore. My title's gone. I'm to be stripped of all rank.

HENDEL

There must be something we can do; someone we can go to for help.

KERNA

There's no-one, Hendel.

HENDEL

Then what's to become of us?

KERNA

This is not about 'us', Hendel.

HENDEL

What are you saying?

KERNA

The order applies to me.

HENDEL

No.

HENDEL BEGINS TO CRUMPLE WITH THE REALISATION. KERNA MOVES TO COMFORT HER BUT SHE WILL NOT HAVE IT.

HENDEL

What gives them the right?

KERNA

They are the High Council; they do as they please.

HENDEL

There must be something we can do.

KERNA

Don't you think I've tried? There's nothing to be done. I wish there were, but there isn't. The High Council have exercised their power, and that is that.

HENDEL

Once you would have fought this!

KERNA

Once, maybe, but the world's a different place now.

HENDEL

You used to be so strong.

KERNA

I'm sorry.

HENDEL

Then I'll come with you.

KERNA

No!

HENDEL

Why not?

KERNA

Because they won't allow it; they know it's not losing all this that's my punishment, it's being separated from you and the children.

HENDEL

So you will endure all this...

KERNA

What would you have me do?

HENDEL

Give them up!

KERNA

I can't; I made a promise. I won't betray that trust!

HENDEL

So you would put us through all of this, and what for? A few peasants?

KERNA

The earthers deserve some dignity.

HENDEL

Are we not entitled to the same consideration?

KERNA TURNS HIS HEAD AWAY FROM HER; HE IS CAUGHT ON THE HORNS OF THIS DILEMMA.

HENDEL

All of this to uphold your principles. It has cost us everything, Kerna. Dear God, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?

KERNA

You must go to Dreipentz. Take the children. Explain to your parents what's happened. You must stay with them while matters are resolved here. There should be enough left after the militia have finished for you and the children to begin again.

HENDEL

Kerna, why can't I make you understand? I don't want any of this without you.

KERNA

You think I don't know that? But the High Council's decision means we have no choice.

HENDEL

Talk to them. Tell them you've reconsidered. Tell them...

KERNA

It will make no difference. Do you really think they'd believe me; turning my back on everything I've argued for these past years.

HENDEL

Isn't it worth trying? Aren't we worth trying for?

KERNA

It's too late, Hendel. The die are cast; however much you might like to turn back the clock.

HENDEL

But...

KERNA

I won't, will not, treat these people as animals, Hendel.

HENDEL

No.

KERNA

Something we once agreed on.

HENDEL

And still do... it's just the price is too high.

KERNA

It was always going to be, and if you're honest, you know that. We went into this with our eyes open, Hendel. We knew what might happen one day.

HENDEL

And now it has.

KERNA

Yes. The moment we stood out against them we became vulnerable. The law now classifies the 'earthers' as 'sub-human'; food production their sole reason for existence. All the while we met their production targets for the harvest we had a fragile security but once those quotas were missed...

HENDEL

We are not to blame for the low yield this year!

KERNA

And neither are the earthers! The seed would not germinate, but the consequence is that the terraces are bare and so too now the barns. The High Council's response? Punishment. Punish the earthers and make an example of selected families.

HENDEL

It's so unfair.

KERNA

Their view is that the state prospers when the earthers are enslaved. They see providing them with decent rations, adequate housing and proper conditions as indulgence. Their solution? The prod. Well I will not use it, nor will I allow it to be used in any land over which I have jurisdiction.

HENDEL

You are a good man.

KERNA

No. In their eyes, Hendel, I am the cause.

SUDDENLY THERE IS A COMMOTION AND TWO CHILDREN, A BOY, BARU, AND A GIRL, PRETA, ENTER AGITATED. THEY ARE FOLLOWED BY THE MAID, DOCHA.

BARU

Mother, there are militia in the house. They're in father's room!

HENDEL

I thought I told you to keep the children to their rooms, Docha.

DOCHA

I tried, madam, but there are soldiers everywhere.

BARU

What's happening?

HENDEL

Maybe you would like to explain to the children why they have to leave their home.

PRETA

Leaving? Why? Where are we going?