

Plays: Comrades; Facing Death; Pariah; Easter

August Strindberg

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by August Strindberg

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PLAYS:
Comrades
Facing Death

Pariah
Easter

by AUGUST STRINDBERG

Translated by Edith and Waerner Oland

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PARIAH

A Play in I Act.

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FOREWORD

August Strindberg died at Stockholm On May 14, 1912, just ten days after the first of his plays given in English in the United States had completed a month's engagement. This play was "The Father," which, on April 9, 1912, was produced at the Berkeley Theatre in New York, the same little theatre that witnessed in 1894 the first performance in this country of Ibsen's "Ghosts."

It happened that August Lindberg, the eminent Swedish actor and friend of Strindberg [who, by the way, was the first producer of "Ghosts" in any language], was visiting this country and came to see a performance of "The Father." His enthusiasm over the interpretation given Strindberg, in the English rendering of the play as well as in the acting, led him to cable a congratulatory message to Strindberg; and upon departing for Stockholm, he asked for some of the many letters of appreciation from significant sources which the production of "The Father" had called forth. These he wished to give to Strindberg as further assurance "that he has," to use Herr Lindberg's words, "the right representatives in this country." It is gratifying to those who esteem it a rare privilege to be the introducers of Strindberg's powerful dramatic art to the American stage to know that he finally found his genius recognized on this side of the ocean.

"Comrades," the first play in the present volume, belongs to the same momentous creative period as "The Father" and "Countess Julie," although there is little anecdotic history attaching to this vigorous comedy. It was written in Denmark, where Strindberg, after finishing "The Father" in Switzerland in 1887, went with his family to live for two years, and was published March 21, 1888.

Although the scene of the comedy is laid in Paris, all the characters are Swedish, which may be accounted for by the fact that

the feminist movement, of which "Comrades" is a delicious, stinging satire, had been more agitated at that time in Scandinavia than elsewhere. That Paris was chosen as a background for this group of young artists and writers was probably reminiscent of the time, the early eighties, when Strindberg with his wife and children left Sweden and, after spending some time with a colony of artists not far from Fontainebleau, came to Paris, where there were many friends of other days, and established themselves in that "sad, silent Passy," as Strindberg's own chronicle of those times reads. There he took his walks in the deserted arcades of the empty Trocadero Palace, back of which he lived; went to the Theatre Francais, where he saw the great success of the day, and was startled that "an undramatic bagatelle with threadbare scenery, stale intrigues and superannuated theatrical tricks, could be playing on the foremost stage of the world;" saw at the Palais de l'Industrie the triennial exhibition of art works, "the creme de la creme of three salons, and found not one work of consequence." After some time he came to the conclusion that "the big city is not the heart that drives the pulses," but that it is "the boil that corrupts and poisons," and so betook himself and his family to Switzerland, where they lived in the vicinity of Lake Lemman, which environment was made use of years later in the moving one-act play, "Facing Death," presented herewith.

"Pariah," the other one-act play appearing in this volume, is the generally recognized masterpiece of all the short one-act plays. The dialogue is so concentrated that it seems as if not one line could be cut without the whole structure falling to pieces, and in these terse speeches a genius is revealed that, with something of the divine touch, sounds the depths of the human heart and reveals its inmost thoughts. "Pariah" was published in 1890 and "Facing Death" in 1898.

The period of Strindberg's sojourn in Switzerland, 1884-87, was most important in the evolution of the character and work of the man who, throughout his career, was to engage himself so penetratingly and passionately in the psychology of woman, and love, and the problems of marriage, as to acquire the reputation, undeserved though it was, of woman-hater. That this observation and analysis of woman was not induced by natural antipathy to the sex, nor by unhappiness in his own married experience, is made clear by the facts of his life up to the time when such investigation was undertaken. What, then, did sway him to such a choice of theme? Examination of the data of this period from Strindberg's own annals reveals the following influences: Ibsen from his Norwegian throne had hailed woman and the laborer as the two rising ranks of nobility, and Strindberg asked himself if this was ironic, as usual, or prophetic. Feminine individualism was the cult of the hour. The younger generation had, through the doctrines of evolution, become atheistic. Strindberg tells of asking a young writer how he could get along without God. "We have woman instead," was the reply. This was the last stage of Madonna worship! And how had it happened that the new generation had replaced God with woman? "God was the remotest source; when he failed they grasped at the next, the mother. But then they should at least choose the real mother, the real woman, before whom, no matter how strong his spirit, man will always bow when she appears with her life-giving attributes. But the younger generation had pronounced contempt for the mother, and in her place had set up the loathsome, sterile,

degenerate amazon--the blue-stockings!"

Earnestly pondering these matters, Strindberg at length decided to write a book about woman, a subject, he declares, which up to this time he had not wanted to think about, as he himself "lived in a happy erotic state, ennobled and beautified by the rejuvenating and expiatory arrival of children." But nevertheless he decided to write such a book, and so with sympathy and much old-fashioned veneration for motherhood the task was undertaken.

Regarding the mother as down-trodden, he wanted to think out a means for her deliverance. To obtain a clear vision he chose as a method the delineation of as large a number as possible of marriage cases that he had seen--and he had seen many, as most of his contemporary friends were married. Of these he chose twelve, the most characteristic, and then he went to work. When he had written about half that number, he stopped and reviewed the collection. The result was entirely different from what he had expected.

Then chance came to his aid, for in the pension where he was living, thirty women were stopping. He saw them at all meals, between meals, and all about, idle, gossiping, pretentious, longing for pleasure. "There were learned ladies who left the Saturday Review behind them on the chairs; there were literary ladies, young ladies, beautiful ladies." When he saw their care-free, idle life, with concern he asked himself: "Whom do these parasites and their children live on?" Then he discovered the bread-winners. "The husband sat in his dark office far away in London; the husband was far away with a detachment in Tonkin; the husband was at work in his bureau in Paris; the husband had gone on a business trip to Australia." And the three men who were there gave him occasion to reflect about the so-called female slave. "There was a husband who had a fiercely hot attic room, while the wife and daughter had a room with a balcony on the first floor. An elderly man passed by, who, although himself a brisk walker, was now leading his sickly wife step by step, his hand supporting her back when making an ascent; he carried her shawls, chair, and other little necessities, reverently, lovingly, as if he had become her son when she had ceased to be his wife. And there sat King Lear with his daughter,--it was terrible to see. He was over sixty, had had eight children, six of whom were daughters, and who, in his days of affluence, he had allowed to manage his house and, no doubt, the economy thereof. Now he was poor, had nothing, and they had all deserted him except one daughter who had inherited a small income from an aunt. And the former giant, who had been able to work for a household of twelve, crushed by the disgrace of bankruptcy, was forced to feel the humiliation of accepting support from his daughter, who went about with her twenty-nine women friends, receiving their comfort and condolence, weeping over her fate, and sometimes actually wishing the life out of her father."

The immediate result of all this observation and consequent analysis was the collection of short stories in two volumes called "Marriages," the first of which, published in 1884, gave rise to Strindberg's reputation of being a pessimist, and the second, two years later, to that of woman-hater, which became confirmed by the portrayals of women in his realistic dramas that soon followed, notably that of Laura in "The Father." That part of the woman-hater legend which one encounters most often is that Strindberg was

revealing his own marital miseries in the sex conflicts of these dramas, particularly in "The Father," notwithstanding the fact that this play was written five years before his first marriage was dissolved, and little more than two years after his avowed hesitancy to undertake the dissection of womankind on account of the "happy erotic state" in which he was living.

And that his analytical labors and personal experiences, far from bringing about an acquired aversion for woman, never even let him be warned, is attested by the fact of his having founded three families. One is forced to suspect that instead of being a woman-hater, he was rather a disguised and indefatigable lover of woman, and that his wars on woman and his fruitless endeavors to get into harmony with the other half of the race were, fundamentally, a warring within himself of his own many-sided, rich nature. He said of himself that he had been sentenced by his nature to be the faultfinder, to see the other side of things. He hated the Don Juans among men as intensely as he did the lazy parasites among women--the rich and spoiled ones who declaimed loudest about woman's holy duties as wife and mother, but whose time was given up to being hysterical and thinking out foolish acts,--these women enraged him.

However, the psychology of woman represents but one phase of Strindberg. In a book called "The Author," styled by him "a self-evolutionary history," which was written during the germinating period of the realistic dramas, but was not given out for publication until 1909, there is a foreword which contains the following significant avowal from the Strindberg of the last years: "The author had not arrived in 1886; perhaps only came into being then. The book presented herewith is consequently only of secondary interest as constituting a fragment; and the reader should bear in mind that it was written over twenty years ago. The personality of the author is consequently as unfamiliar to me as to the reader--and as unsympathetic. As he no longer exists, I can no longer assume any responsibility for him, and as I took part in his execution [1898] I believe I have the right to regard the past as expiated and stricken out of the Big Book." The "execution" in 1898 referred to was the spiritual crisis through which Strindberg passed when he emerged from the abysmal pessimism of "The Inferno;" then began the gradual return to spiritual faith which, in the end, caused him to declare himself a Swedenborgian.

The play, "Easter," included in the present collection, belongs to this period; it is a strange mingling of symbolism and realism, bearing the spiritual message of the resurrection. It was the most popular play produced at the Intimate Theatre in Stockholm, having been given there over two hundred times; and in Germany, also, it has been one of the plays most appreciated. That "Easter" is representative of the last phase, spiritually, of the great man is evidenced by the closing incident of his life. His favorite daughter, Kirtlin, was in the room as death approached. Strindberg called to her, and asked for the Bible; receiving the book, he opened it, and placing it across his breast, said, "This is the best book of all," and then, with his last breath, "Now everything personal is obliterated."

COMRADES
Comedy in Four Acts

CHARACTERS

AXEL, an artist
BERTHA, his wife, artist
ABEL, her friend
WILLMER, litterateur
OESTERMARK, a doctor
MRS. HALL, his divorced wife
THE MISSES HALL, her daughters by a second marriage
CARL STARCK, lieutenant
MRS. STARCK, his wife
MAID

COMRADES

[SCENE for the whole play.--An artist's studio in Paris; it is on the ground floor, has glass windows looking out on an orchard. At back of scene a large window and door to hall. On the walls hang studies, canvases, weapons, costumes and plaster casts. To right there is a door leading to Axel's room; to left a door leading to Bertha's room. There is a model stand left center. To right an easel and painting materials. A large sofa, a large store through the doors of which one sees a hot coal fire. There is a hanging-lamp from ceiling. At rise of curtain Axel and Doctor Oestermark are discovered.]

AXEL [Sitting, painting]. And you, too, are in Paris!

DR. OESTERMARK. Everything gathers here as the center of the world; and so you are married--and happy?

AXEL. Oh, yes, so, so. Yes, I'm quite happy. That's understood.

DR. OESTERMARK. What's understood?

AXEL. Look here, you're a widower. How was it with your marriage?

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, very nice--for her.

AXEL. And for you?

DR. OESTERMARK. So, so! But you see one must compromise, and we compromised to the end.

AXEL. What do you mean by compromise?

DR. OESTERMARK. I mean--that I gave in!

AXEL. You?

DR. OESTERMARK. Yes, you wouldn't think that of a man like me, would you?

AXEL. No, I would never have thought that. Look here, don't you believe in woman, eh?

DR. OESTERMARK. No, sir! I do not. But I love her.

AXEL. In your way--yes!

DR. OESTERMARK. In my way--yes. How about your way?

AXEL. We have arranged a sort of comradeship, you see, and friendship is higher and more enduring than love.

DR. OESTERMARK. H'm--so Bertha paints too. How? Well?

AXEL. Fairly well.

DR. OESTERMARK. We were good friends in the old days, she and I,-- that is, we always quarreled a little.--Some visitors. Hush! It is Carl and his wife!

AXEL [Rising]. And Bertha isn't at home! Sacristi! [Enter Lieutenant Carl Starck and his wife.] Welcome! Well, well, we certainly meet here from all corners of the world! How do you do, Mrs. Starck? You're looking well after your journey.

MRS. STARCK. Thanks, dear Axel, we have certainly had a delightful trip. But where is Bertha?

CARL. Yes, where is the young wife?

AXEL. She's out at the studio, but she'll be home at any moment now. But won't you sit down?

[The doctor greets the visitors.]

CARL. Hardly. We were passing by and thought we would just look in to see how you are. But we shall be on hand, of course, for your invitation for Saturday, the first of May.

AXEL. That's good. You got the card then?

MRS. STARCK. Yes, we received it while we were in Hamburg. Well, what is Bertha doing nowadays?

AXEL. Oh, she paints, as I do. In fact, we're expecting her model, and as he may come at any moment, perhaps I can't risk you to sit down after all, if I'm going to be honest.

CARL. Do you think we would blush, then?

MRS. STARCK. He isn't nude, is he?

AXEL. Of course.

CARL. A man? The devil!--No, I couldn't allow my wife to be mixed up with anything of that sort. Alone with a naked man!

AXEL. I see you still have prejudices, Carl.

CARL. Yes, you know--

MRS. STARCK. Fie!

DR. OESTERMARK. Yes, that's what I say, too.

AXEL. I can't deny that it, is not altogether to my taste, but as long as I must have a woman model--

MRS. STARCK. That's another matter.

AXEL. Another?

MRS. STARCK. Yes, it is another matter--although it resembles the other, it is not the same. [There is a knock.]

AXEL. There he is!

MRS. STARCK. We'll go, then. Good-bye and au revoir. Give my love to Bertha.

AXEL. Good-bye, then, as you're so scared. And au revoir.

CARL and DR. OESTERMARK. Good-bye, Axel.

CARL [To Axel]. You stay in here, at least, while--

AXEL. No, why should I?

CARL [Goes shaking his head]. Ugh!

[Axel alone starts to paint. There is a knock.]

AXEL. Come in. [The model enters.] So, you are back again. Madame hasn't returned yet.

THE MODEL. But it's almost twelve, and I must keep another appointment.

AXEL. Is that so? It's too bad, but--h'm--something must have detained her at the studio. How much do I owe you?

THE MODEL. Five francs, as usual.

AXEL [Paying him]. There. Perhaps you'd better wait awhile, nevertheless.

THE MODEL. Yes, if I'm needed.

AXEL. Yes, be kind enough to wait a few minutes.

[The model retires behind a screen. Axel alone, draws and whistles. Bertha comes in after a moment.]

AXEL. Hello, my dear! So you're back at last?

BERTHA. At last?

AXEL. Yes, your model is waiting.

BERTHA [Startled]. No! No! Has he been here again?

AXEL. You had engaged him for eleven o'clock.

BERTHA. I? No! Did he say that?

AXEL. Yes. But I heard you when you made the engagement yesterday.

BERTHA. Perhaps it's so, then, but anyway the professor wouldn't let us leave and you know how nervous one gets in the last hours. You're not angry with me, Axel?

AXEL. Angry? No. But this is the second time, and he gets his five francs for nothing, nevertheless.

BERTHA. Can I help it if the professor keeps us? Why must you always pick on me?

AXEL. Do I pick on you?

BERTHA. What's that? Didn't you--

AXEL. Yes, yes, yes! I picked on you--forgive me--forgive me--for thinking that it was your fault.

BERTHA. Well, it's all right there. But what did you pay him with?

AXEL. To be sure. Gaga paid back the twenty francs he owed me.

BERTHA [Takes out account-book.] So, he paid you back? Come on, then, and I'll put it down, for the sake of order. It's your money, so of course you can dispose of it as you please, but as you wish me to take care of the accounts--[Writes] fifteen francs in, five francs out, model. There.

AXEL. No. Look here. It's twenty francs in.

BERTHA. Yes, but there are only fifteen here.

AXEL. Yes, but you should put down twenty.

BERTHA. Why do you argue?

AXEL. Did I--Well, the man's waiting--

BERTHA. Oh, yes. Be good and get things ready for me.

AXEL. [Puts model stand in place. Calls to model]. Are you undressed yet?

THE MODEL [From back of screen]. Soon, monsieur.

BERTHA [Closes door, puts wood in stove]. There, now you must go out.

AXEL [Hesitating]. Bertha!

BERTHA. Yes?

AXEL. Is it absolutely necessary--with a nude model?

BERTHA. Absolutely!

AXEL. H'm--indeed!

BERTHA. We have certainly argued that matter out.

AXEL. Quite true. But it's loathsome nevertheless--[Goes out right.]

BERTHA [Takes up brushes and palette. Calls to model]. Are you ready?

THE MODEL. All ready.

BERTHA. Come on, then. [Pause.] Come on. [There is a knock.] Who is it? I have a model.

WILLMER [Outside]. Willmer. With news from the salon.

BERTHA. From the salon! [To model]. Dress yourself! We'll have to postpone the sitting.--Axel! Willmer is here with news from the salon.

[Axel comes in, also Willmer; the model goes out unnoticed during the following scene.]

WILMER. Hello, dear friends! Tomorrow the jury will begin its work. Oh, Bertha, here are your pastels. [Takes package from pocket.]

BERTHA. Thanks, my good Gaga; how much did they cost? They must have been expensive.

WILLMER. Oh, not very.

BERTHA. So they are to start tomorrow. So soon? Do you hear, Axel?

AXEL. Yes, my friend.

BERTHA. Now, will you be very good, very, very good?

AXEL. I always want to be good to you, my friend.

BERTHA. You do? Now, listen. You know Roubey, don't you?

AXEL. Yes, I met him in Vienna mid we became good friends, as it's called.

BERTHA. You know that he is on the jury?

AXEL. And then what?

BERTHA. Well--now you'll be angry, I know you will.

AXEL. You know it? Don't prove it, then.

BERTHA [Coaxing]. You wouldn't make a sacrifice for your wife,

would you?

AXEL. Go begging? No, I don't want to do that.

BERTHA. Not for me? You'll get in anyway, but for your wife!

AXEL. Don't ask me.

BERTHA. I should really never ask you for anything!

AXEL. Yes, for things that I can do without sacrificing--

BERTHA. Your man's pride!

AXEL. Let it go at that.

BERTHA. But I would sacrifice my woman's pride if I could help you.

AXEL. You women have no pride.

BERTHA. Axel!

AXEL. Well, well, pardon, pardon!

BERTHA. You must be jealous. I don't believe you would really like it if I were accepted at the salon.

AXEL. Nothing would make me happier. Believe me, Bertha.

BERTHA. Would you be happy, too, if I were accepted and you were refused?

AXEL. I must feel and see. [Puts his hand over his heart.] No, that would be decidedly disagreeable, decidedly. In the first place, because I paint better than you do, and because--

BERTHA [Walking up and down]. Speak out. Because I am a woman!

AXEL. Yes, just that. It may seem strange, but to me it's as if you women were intruding and plundering where we have fought for so long while you sat by the fire. Forgive me, Bertha, for talking like this, but such thoughts have occurred to me.

BERTHA. Has it ever occurred to you that you're exactly like all other men?

AXEL. Like all others? I should hope so!

BERTHA. And you have become so superior lately. You didn't use to be like that.

AXEL. It must be because I am superior! Doing something that we men have never done before!

BERTHA. What! What are you saving! Shame on you!

WILLMER. There, there, good friends! No, but, dear friends--Bertha, control yourself.

[He gives her a look which she tries to make out.]

BERTHA [Changing]. Axel, let's be friends! And hear me a moment. Do you think that my position in your house--for it is yours--is agreeable to me? You support me, you pay for my studying at Julian's, while you yourself cannot afford instruction. Don't you think I see how you sit and wear out yourself and your talent on these pot-boiling drawings, and are able to paint only in leisure moments? You haven't been able to afford models for yourself, while you pay mine five hard-earned francs an hour. You don't know how good--how noble--how sacrificing you are, and also you don't know how I suffer to see you toil so for me. Oh, Axel, you can't know how I feel my position. What am I to you? Of what use am I in your house? Oh, I blush when I think about it!

AXEL. What, what, what! Aren't you my wife?

BERTHA. Yes, but--

AXEL. Well, then?

BERTHA. But you support me.

AXEL. Well, isn't that the right thing to do?

BERTHA. It was formerly--according to the old scheme of marriage, but we weren't to have it like that. We were to be comrades.

AXEL. What talk! Isn't a man to support his wife?

BERTHA. I don't want it. And you, Axel, you must help me. I'm not your equal when it's like that, but I could be if you would humble yourself once, just once! Don't think that you are alone in going to one of the jury to say a good word for another. If it were for yourself, it would be another matter, but for me--Forgive me! Now I beg of you as nicely as I know how. Lift me from my humiliating position to your side, and I'll be so grateful I shall never trouble you again with reminding you of my position. Never, Axel!

AXEL. Don't ask me; you know how weak I am.

BERTHA [Embracing him]. Yes, I shall ask you--beg of you, until you fulfil my prayer. Now, don't look so proud, but be human! So!
[Kisses him.]

AXEL [To Willmer]. Look here, Gaga, don't you think that women are terrible tyrants?

WILLMER [Pained]. Yes, and especially when they are submissive.

BERTHA. See, now, the sky is clear again. You'll go, won't you, Axel? Get on your black coat now, and go. Then come home, and we'll strike out together for something to eat.

AXEL. How do you know that Roubey is receiving now?

BERTHA. Don't you think that I made sure of that?

AXEL. What a schemer you are!

BERTHA [Takes a black cutaway coat from wardrobe]. Well, one would never get anywhere without a little wire-pulling, you know. Here's your black coat. So!

AXEL. Yes. But this is awful. What am I to say to the man?

BERTHA. H'm. Oh, you'll hit, on something on the way. Say that--that--that your wife--no--that you're expecting a christening--

AXEL. Fie, Bertha.

BERTHA. Well, say that you can get him decorated, then.

AXEL. Really you frighten me, Bertha!

BERTHA. Say what you please, then. Come, now, and I'll fix your hair so you'll be presentable. Do you know his wife?

AXEL. No, not at all.

BERTHA [Brushing his hair]. Then you must get an introduction to her. I understand that she has great influence, but that she doesn't like women.

AXEL. What are you doing to my hair?

BERTHA. I am fixing it as they are wearing it now.

AXEL. Yes, but I don't want it that way.

BERTHA. Now then--that's fine. Just mind me. [She goes to chiffonier and takes out a case which contains a Russian Annae order. She tries to put it in Axel's buttonhole.]

AXEL. No, Bertha. You've gone far enough now. I won't wear that decoration.

BERTHA. But you accepted it.

AXEL. Yes, because I couldn't decline it. But I'll never wear it.

BERTHA. Do you belong to some political party that is so liberal-minded as to suppress individual freedom to accept distinctions?

AXEL. No, I don't. But I belong to a circle of comrades who have promised each other not to wear their merit on their coats.

BERTHA. But who have accepted salon medals!

AXEL. Which are not worn on their coats.

BERTHA. What do you say to this, Gaga?

WILLMER. As long as distinctions exist, one does one's self harm to go about with the mark of infamy, and the example no one is likely to follow. Take them away for all of me--I certainly can't get them away from the others.

AXEL. Yes, and when my comrades who are more deserving than I do not wear them, I would lower them by wearing the emblem.

BERTHA. But it doesn't show under your overcoat. No one will know, and you won't brand any one.

WILLMER. Bertha is right there. You'll wear your order under your coat, not on your coat.

AXEL. Jesuits! When you are given a finger, you take the whole arm.

[Abel comes in wearing fur coat and cap.]

BERTHA. Oh, here's Abel! Come on, now, and settle this controversy.

ABEL. Hello, Bertha! Hello, Axel! How are you, Gaga? What's the matter?

BERTHA. Axel doesn't want to wear his order, because he daren't on account of his comrades.

ABEL. Comrades come before a wife, of course--that's an unwritten law. [She sits by table, takes up tobacco and rolls a cigarette.]

BERTHA [Fastens ribbon in Axel's buttonhole and puts the star back in case] He can help me without hurting any one, but I fear he would rather hurt me!

AXEL. Bertha, Bertha! But you people will drive me mad! I don't consider it a crime to wear this ribbon, nor have I taken any oath that I wouldn't do so, but at our exhibitions it's considered cowardly not to dare to make one's way without them.

BERTHA. Cowardly, of course! But you're not going to take your own course this time--but mine!

ABEL. You owe it to the woman who has consecrated her life to you to be her delegate.

AXEL. I feel that what you people are saying is false, but I haven't the time or energy to answer you now; but there is an answer! It's as if you were drawing a net about me while I sit absorbed in my work. I can feel the net winding about me, but my foot gets entangled when I want to kick it aside. But, you wait, if only I free my hands, I'll get out my knife and cut the meshes of your net! What were we talking about? Oh, yes, I was going to make a call. Give me my gloves and my overcoat. Good-bye, Bertha! Good-bye. Oh, yes,--where does Roubey live?

WILLMER, ABEL and BERTHA [In unison]. Sixty-five Rue des Martyrs.

AXEL. Why, that's right near here!

BERTHA. Just at the corner. Thanks, Axel, for going. Does the sacrifice feel very heavy?

AXEL. I can't feel anything but that I am tired of all this talk and that it will be delightful to get out. Good-bye. [Goes out.]

ABEL. It's too bad about Axel. It's a pity. Did you know that he is refused?

BERTHA. And I, then?

ABEL. That's not settled yet. As you wrote your own name with French spelling, you won't be reached until O.

BERTHA. There's still hope for me?

ABEL. Yes, for you, but not for Axel.

WILLMER. Now, we'll see something!

BERTHA. How do you know that he is refused?

ABEL. H'm, I met a "hors concours" who knew, and I was quite prepared to witness a scene when I came in here. But of course he hasn't received the notice yet.

BERTHA. No, not that I know of. But, Abel, are you sure that Axel will meet Madame Roubey and not Monsieur?

ABEL. What should he see Monsieur Roubey for? He hasn't any say about it, but she is president of the Woman-Painters Protective Society.

BERTHA. And I am not refused--yet?

ABEL. No, as I said, and Axel's call is bound to do good. He has a Russian order, and everything Russian is very popular in Paris just now. But it's too bad about Axel just the same.

BERTHA. Too bad? Why? They haven't room for everybody on the salon walls. There are so many women refused that a man might put up with it and be made to feel it for once. But if I get in now--we'll soon hear how he painted my picture, how he has taught me, how he has paid for my lessons. But I shall not take any notice of that, because it isn't true.

WILLMER. Well, we're bound to see something unusual happen now.

BERTHA. No, I believe--granted that I am not refused--that we'll see something very usual. But nevertheless I'm afraid of the actual moment. Something tells me that things won't be right between Axel and me again.

ABEL. And it was just when you were equals that things were going to be right.

WILLMER. It seems to me that your position will be much more clearly defined and much pleasanter when you can sell your pictures and support yourself.

BERTHA. It should be! We'll see--we'll see! [The maid enters with a green letter.] A green letter for Axel! Here it is! Here it is! He is refused! Yes, but this is terrible; however, it will be a consolation to me if I should be refused.

ABEL. But if you are not refused?

BERTHA [Pause].

ABEL. You won't answer that?

BERTHA. No, I won't answer that.

ABEL. Because, if you are accepted, the equality will be destroyed, as you will be his superior.

BERTHA. Superior? A wife superior to her husband--her husband--oh!

WILLMER. It's about time an example was made.

ABEL [To Bertha]. You were at the luncheon today? Was it interesting?

BERTHA. Oh, yes.

WILLMER. When are you going to review my book, Abel?

ABEL. I'm just working on it.

WILLMER. Are you going to be nice to me?

ABEL. Very nice.--Well, Bertha, how and when will you deliver the letter?

BERTHA [Walking about]. That is just, what I am thinking about. If he hasn't met Madame Roubey, and if he hasn't carried out our plan, he will hardly do it after receiving this blow.

ABEL [Rising]. I don't think Axel is so base as to revenge himself on you.

BERTHA. Base? Such talk! Didn't he go just now when I wanted him to, because I am his wife? Do you think he would ever have gone for any one else?

ABEL. Would you like it if he had done it for some one else?

BERTHA. Good-bye to you--you must go now, before he returns!

ABEL. That's what I think. Good bye, Bertha.

WILLMER. Yes, we had better get away. Goodbye for now.

[The maid enters and announces Mrs. Hall.]

BERTHA. Who? Mrs. Hall? Who can that be?

ABEL and WILLMER. Good-bye, Bertha.

[They go out. Mrs. Hall comes in. She is flashily though carelessly dressed. She looks like an adventuress.]

MRS. HALL. I don't know that I have the honor to be known to you,

but you are Mrs. Alberg, nee Alund, are you not?

BERTHA. Yes, I'm Mrs. Alberg. Won't you sit down?

MRS. HALL. My name is Hall. [Sits.] Oh, my lord, but I'm so tired! I have walked up so many stairs--oh-ho-ho-ho, I believe I'll faint!

BERTHA. How can I be of service to you?

MRS. HALL. You know Doctor Oestermark, don't you?

BERTHA. Yes, he's an old friend of mine.

MRS. HALL. An old friend. Well, you see, dear Mrs. Alberg, I was married to him once, but we separated. I am his divorced wife.

BERTHA. Oh! He has never told me about that.

MRS. HALL. Oh, people don't tell such things.

BERTHA. He told me he was a widower.

MRS. HALL. Well, you were a young girl then, and I suppose he isn't so anxious to have it known anyway.

BERTHA. And I who have always believed that Doctor Oestermark was an honorable man!

MRS. HALL [Sarcastic]. Yes, he's a good one! He is a real gentleman, I must say.

BERTHA. Well, but why do you tell me all this?

MRS. HALL. Just wait, my dear Mrs. Alberg wait and you shall hear. You are a member of the society, aren't you?

BERTHA. Yes, I am.

MRS. HALL. Just so; only wait now.

BERTHA. Did you have any children?

MRS. HALL. Two--two daughters, Mrs. Alberg.

BERTHA. That's another matter! And he left you in want?

MRS. HALL. Just wait now! He gave us a small allowance, not enough for the rent even. And now that the girls are grown up and about to start in life, now he writes us that he is a bankrupt and that he can't send us more than half the allowance. Isn't that nice, just now, when the girls are grown up and are going out into life?

BERTHA. We must look into this. He'll be here in a few days. Do you know that you have the law on your side and that the courts can force him to pay? And he shall be forced to do so. Do you understand? So, he can bring children into the world and then leave them empty-handed with the poor, deserted mother. Oh, he'll find out something very different! Will you give me your address?

MRS. HALL [Gives her card]. You are so good, Mrs. Alberg. And you won't be vexed with me if I ask a little favor of you?

BERTHA. You can depend on me entirely. I shall write the secretary immediately--

MRS. HALL. Oh, you're so good, but before the secretary can answer, I and my poor children will probably be thrown out into the street. Dear Mrs. Alberg, you couldn't lend me a trifle--just wait--a trifle of twenty francs?

BERTHA. No, dear lady, I haven't any money. My husband supports me for the time being, and you may be sure that I'm reminded of the fact. It's bitter to eat the bread of charity when one is young, but better times are coming for me too.

MRS. HALL. My dear, good Mrs. Alberg, you must not refuse me. If you do, I am a lost woman. Help me, for heaven's sake.

BERTHA. Are you terribly in need?

MRS. HALL. And you ask me that!

BERTHA. I'll let you have this money as a loan. [She goes to chiffonier.] Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty--lacking twenty. What did I do with it? H'm, luncheon, of course! [She writes in account-book.] Paints twenty, incidentals twenty--there you are.

MRS. HALL. Thank you, my good Mrs. Alberg, thanks, dear lady.

BERTHA. There, there. But I can't give you any more time today. So, good-bye, and depend on me.

MRS. HALL [Uncertain]. Just a moment now.

BERTHA [Listening without]. No, you must go now.

MRS. HALL. Just a moment. What was I going to say?--Well, it doesn't matter.

[Goes out. Bertha is alone for a moment, when she hears Axel coming. She hides the green letter in her pocket.]

BERTHA. Back already? Well, did you meet her--him?

AXEL. I didn't meet him, but her, which was much better. I congratulate you, Bertha. Your picture is already accepted!

BERTHA. Oh, no! What are you saying? And yours?

AXEL. It isn't decided yet--but it will surely go through, too.

BERTHA. Are you sure of that?

AXEL. Of course--

BERTHA. Oh, I'm accepted! Good, how good! But why don't you congratulate me?

AXEL. Haven't I? I'm quite sure that I said, "I congratulate you!" For that matter, one mustn't sell the skin before the bear is killed. To get into the salon isn't anything. It's just a toss-up. It can even depend on what letter one's name begins with. You come in O, as you spelled your name in French. When the lettering starts with M it's always easier.

BERTHA. So, you wish to say that perhaps I got in because my name begins with O?

AXEL. Not on account of that alone.

BERTHA. And if you are refused, it's because your name begins with A.

AXEL. Not exactly that alone, but it might be on that account.

BERTHA. Look here, I don't think you're as honorable as you would seem. You are jealous.

AXEL. Why should I be, when I don't know what has happened to me yet?

BERTHA. But when you do know?

AXEL. What? [Bertha takes out letter. Axel puts his hand to his heart and sits in a chair.] What! [Controls himself.] That was a blow I had not expected. That was most disagreeable!

BERTHA. Well, I suppose I'll have to help you now.

AXEL. You seem to be filled with malicious delight, Bertha. Oh, I feel that a great hate is beginning to grow in here. [Indicating his breast.]

BERTHA. Perhaps I look delighted because I've had a success, but when one is tied to a man who cannot rejoice in another's good fortune, it's difficult to sympathize with his misfortune.

AXEL. I don't know why, but it seems as if we had become enemies now. The strife of position has come between us, and we can never be friends any more.

BERTHA. Can't your sense of justice bend and recognize me as the abler, the victorious one in the strife?

AXEL. You are not the abler.

BERTHA. The jury must have thought so, however.

AXEL. But surely you know that I paint better than you do.

BERTHA. Are you so sure of that?

AXEL. Yes, I am. But for that matter--you worked under better conditions than I. You didn't have to do any pot-boiling, you could go to the studio, you had models, and you were a woman!

BERTHA. Yes, now I'll hear how I have lived on you--

AXEL. Between ourselves, yes, but the world won't know unless you go and tell it yourself.

BERTHA. Oh, the world knows that already. But tell me, why don't you suffer when a comrade, a man comrade, is accepted, although he has less merit than you?

AXEL. I'll have to think about that. You see our feeling toward you women has never been critical--we've taken you as a matter of course, and so I've never thought about our relations as against each other. Now when the shoe pinches, it strikes me that we are not comrades, for this experience makes me feel that you women do not belong here. [Indicating the studio.] A comrade is a more or less loyal competitor; we are enemies. You women have been lying down in the rear while we attacked the enemy. And now, when we have set and supplied the table, you pounce down upon it as if you were in your own home!

BERTHA. Oh, fie, have we ever been allowed in the conflict?

AXEL. You have always been allowed, but you have never wanted to take part, or haven't been able to do so in our domain, where you are now breaking in. Technic had to be put through its whole development and completion by us before you entered. And now you buy the centurions' work for ten francs an hour in a studio, and with money that we have acquired by our work.

BERTHA. You are not honorable now, Axel.

AXEL. When was I honorable? When I allowed you to use me like an old shoe? But now you are my superior--and now I can't strive to be honorable any longer. Do you know that this adversity will also change our economic relations? I cannot think of painting any more, but must give up my life's dream and become a pot-boiler in earnest.

BERTHA. You needn't do that; when I can sell, I will support myself.

AXEL. For that matter, what sort of an alliance have we gone into? Marriage should be built on common interests; ours is built on opposing interests.

BERTHA. You can work all that out by yourself; I'm going out for dinner now,--are you coming?

AXEL. No, I want to be alone with my unhappiness.

BERTHA. And I want company for my happiness.--But we have invited people to come here for the evening--that won't do now, with your misery, will it?

AXEL. It isn't a very brilliant prospect, but there's no way out. Let them come.

BERTHA [Dressing to go out]. But you must be here, or it will look as if you were cowardly.

AXEL. I'll be with you, don't worry--but give me a bit of money before you go.

BERTHA. We've reached the end of our cash.

AXEL. The end?

BERTHA. Yes, money comes to an end too!

AXEL. Can you lend me ten francs?

BERTHA [Taking out pocketbook]. Ten francs? Yes, indeed, if I have it. Here you are. Won't you come along? Tell me. They'll think it rather strange!

AXEL. And play the defeated lion before the triumphant chariot? No, indeed, I'll need my time to learn my part for this evening's performance.

BERTHA. Good-bye then.

AXEL. Good-bye, Bertha. Let me ask you one thing.

BERTHA. What then?

AXEL. Don't come home intoxicated. It would be more disagreeable today than ever.

BERTHA. Does it concern you how I come home?

AXEL. Well, I feel sort of responsible for you, as for a relative, considering that you bear the same name that I do, and besides, it is still disgusting to me to see a woman intoxicated.

BERTHA. Why is it any more disgusting than to see a man intoxicated?

AXEL. Yes, why? Perhaps because you don't bear being seen without a disguise.

BERTHA [Starting]. Good-bye, you old talking-machine. You won't come along?

AXEL. No!

[Bertha goes out; Axel rises, takes off his cutaway to change it for working coat.]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

[Same scene as Act I, but there is a large table with chairs around it in middle of scene. On table there is writing material and a speaker's gavel. Axel is painting. Abel is sitting near him. She is smoking.]

AXEL. They have finished dinner and are having their coffee now. Did they drink much?

ABEL. Oh, yes, and Bertha bragged and was disagreeable.

AXEL. Tell me one thing, Abel, are you my friend, or not?

ABEL. H'm--I don't know.

AXEL. Can I trust you?

ABEL. No--you can't.

AXEL. Why not?

ABEL. Oh, I just feel that you can't.

AXEL. Tell me, Abel, you who have the common sense of a man and can be reasoned with, tell me how it feels to be a woman. Is it so awful?

ABEL [Jokingly]. Yes, of course. It feels like being a nigger.

AXEL. That's strange. Listen, Abel. You know that I have a passion for equity and justice--

ABEL. I know you are a visionary--and that's why things will never go well with you.

AXEL. But things go well with you--because you never feel anything?

ABEL. Yes.

AXEL. Abel, have you really never had any desire to love a man?

ABEL. How silly you are!

AXEL. Have you never found any one?

ABEL. No, men are very scarce.

AXEL. H'm, don't you consider me a man?

ABEL. You! No!

AXEL. That's what I fancied myself to be.

ABEL. Are you a man? You, who work for a woman and go around dressed like a woman?

AXEL. What? I, dressed like a woman?

ABEL. The way you wear your hair and go around bare-necked, while she wears stiff collars and short hair; be careful, she'll soon take your trousers away from you.

AXEL. How you talk!

ABEL. And what is your position in your own house? You beg money from her, and she puts you under her guardianship. No, you are not a man! But that's why she took you, when her affairs were in bad shape.

AXEL. You hate Bertha; what have you against her?

ABEL. I don't know, but perhaps I, too, have been struck with that same passion for justice.

AXEL. Look here. Don't you believe in your great cause any longer?

ABEL. Sometimes! Sometimes not! What can one believe in any more? Sometimes it strikes me that the old ways were better. As mothers we had an honored and respected position when in that way we fulfilled our duty as citizens; as housewives we were a great power, and to bring up a family was not an ignominious occupation. Give me a cognac, Axel. We have talked so much.

AXEL [Getting cognac]. Why do you drink?

ABEL. I don't know. If one could only find the exceptional man!

AXEL. What sort would that be?

ABEL. The man who rules a woman!

AXEL. Well, and if you found one?

ABEL. Then I would--as they say--fall in love with him. Think if this whole noise were _blague_. Think!

AXEL. No, there is surely life, motion in the movement, whatever it is.

ABEL. Yes, there's so much motion--forward and backward! And a good deal of folly can come of the "motion," if they only get the majority for it.

AXEL. If it turns out that way, then you've made a damned lot of noise uselessly, for now it's beginning to be loathsome to live.

ABEL. We make so much noise that we make your heads reel. That's the trouble! Well, Axel, your position will be freer now that Bertha has been able to sell.

AXEL. Sell! Has she sold a picture?

ABEL. Don't you know that? The small picture with the apple-tree.

AXEL. No, she hasn't said anything about it. When did it happen?

ABEL. Day before yesterday. Don't you know about it? Well, then she intends to surprise you with the money.

AXEL. Surprise me? She takes care of the cash herself.

ABEL. So! Then it will--Hush, she is coming.

[Bertha comes in.]

BERTHA [To Abel]. Oh, good evening; are you here? What made you leave us?

ABEL. I thought it was tiresome.

BERTHA. Yes, there is no fun in rejoicing for others!

ABEL. No!

BERTHA [To Axel]. And you sit diligently niggling, I see.

AXEL. Yes, I'm daubing away.

BERTHA. Let me see! That's very good indeed--but the left arm is far too long.

AXEL. Do you think so?

BERTHA. Think so? Can't I see that it is? Give me the brush and--
[She takes brush.]

AXEL. No, let me alone. Aren't you ashamed?

BERTHA. What's that?

AXEL [Vexed]. Shame, I said. [Rises.] Are you trying to teach me how to paint?

BERTHA. Why not?

AXEL. Because you have still much to learn from me. But I can learn nothing from you.

BERTHA. It seems to me that the gentleman is not very respectful to his wife. One should bear in mind the respect one owes to--

ABEL. Now you're old-fashioned. What particular respect does a man owe a woman if they are to be equals?

BERTHA [To Abel]. So you think it's all right for a man to be coarse with his wife?

ABEL. Yes, when she is impudent to him.

AXEL. That's right! Tear each other's eyes out!

ABEL. Not at all! The whole thing is too insignificant for that.

AXEL. Don't say that. Look here, Bertha, considering that our economic condition is to undergo a change from now on, won't you be so good as to let me see the account-book?

BERTHA. What a noble revenge for being refused!

AXEL. What revenge? What has the account-book got to do with my being turned down at the salon? Give me the key to the chiffonier.

BERTHA [Feeling in her pocket]. Very well. H'm! That's strange! I thought I just had it.

AXEL. Find it!

BERTHA. You speak in such a commanding tone. I don't like that.

AXEL. Come now, find the key.

BERTHA [Looking here and there in the room]. Yes, but I can't understand it; I can't find it. It must be lost some way.

AXEL. Are you sure that you haven't got it?

BERTHA. Absolutely sure.

[Axel rings; after a moment the maid comes in.]

AXEL [To maid]. Go fetch a locksmith.

MAID. A locksmith?

AXEL. Yes, a smith who can pick a lock.

[Bertha gives the maid a look.]

MAID. Right away, monsieur.

[Maid goes out. Axel changes his coat, discovers the order on the lapel, tears it off and throws it on the table.]

AXEL. Pardon me, ladies!

BERTHA [Mildly]. Don't mind us. Are you going out?

AXEL. I am going out.

BERTHA. Aren't you going to stay for the meeting?

AXEL. No, I am not!

BERTHA. Yes, but they will think that very discourteous.

AXEL. Let them. I have more important things to do than listening to the drivel of you women.

BERTHA [Worried]. Where are you going?

AXEL. I don't need to account for myself, as I don't ask you to account for your actions.

BERTHA. You won't forget that we have invited guests for the masquerade tomorrow evening?

AXEL. Guests? That's true, tomorrow evening. H'm!

BERTHA. It won't do to postpone it when both Oestermark and Carl have arrived today, and I have asked them to come.

AXEL. So much the better!

BERTHA. And now come home early enough to try on your costume.

AXEL. My Costume? Yes, of course; I am to take the part of a woman.

[The maid enters.]

MAID. The smith hasn't time now, but he'll come within two hours.

AXEL. He hasn't time, eh? Well, perhaps the key will turn up anyway. However, I must be off now. Good-bye.

BERTHA [Very mild]. Good-bye then. Don't come home late.

AXEL. I don't know just what I will do. Goodbye.

[Abel nods good-bye, Axel goes out.]

ABEL. How very cocky his lordship was!

BERTHA. Such impudence! Do you know, I had a good mind to tame him, break him so that he'd come back crawling to me.

ABEL. Yes, that tweak the salon disappointment gave him doesn't seem to have taken all the spunk out of him. Bertha, tell me, have you ever loved that clown?

BERTHA. Loved him? I liked him very much because he was nice to me. But he is so silly and--when he nags as he did just now, I feel that I could hate him. Think of it, it's already around that he painted my picture!

ABEL. Well, if it's gone as far as that, then you must do something eclatant.

BERTHA. If I only knew how!

ABEL. I'm usually inventive. Let me see. Look here, why couldn't you have his refused picture brought home just as all your friends have gathered here?

BERTHA. No, that would look as if I wanted to triumph. No, that would be too terrible.

ABEL. Yes, but if I should have it done? Or Gaga, that would be better still. It would be sent here in Axel's name by the porter. It's got to come home anyway, and it's no secret that it was refused.

BERTHA. No, but you know--

ABEL. What? Hasn't he spread false reports, and haven't you the right to defend yourself?

BERTHA. I would like it to happen very much, but I don't want to have anything to do with the doing of it. I want to be able to stand and swear that I am quite clean and innocent.

ABEL. You shall be able to do so. I'll attend to it.

BERTHA. What do you think he wanted the account-book for? He has never asked to see it before. Do you think he has some scheme in

his head about it?

ABEL. Ye-es! Doubtless. He wants to see if you've accounted for the three hundred francs you got for your picture.

BERTHA. What picture?

ABEL. The one you sold to Madame Roubey.

BERTHA. How do you know about that?

ABEL. The whole crowd knows about it.

BERTHA. And Axel, too?

ABEL. Yes. I happened to mention it because I thought he knew. It was stupid of you not to tell him.

BERTHA. Does it concern him if I sell a--

ABEL. Yes, in a way, of course it concerns him.

BERTHA. Well, then, I will explain that I didn't want to give him another disappointment after he had already had the unhappiness of seeing me accepted at the salon.

ABEL. Strictly speaking, he has nothing to do with your earnings, as you have a marriage compact, and you have every reason to be tight with him. Just to establish a precedent, buck up and stand your own ground when he returns with his lecture tonight.

BERTHA. Oh, I know how to take care of him. But--another matter. How are we to treat the Oestermark case?

ABEL. Oestermark,--yes, he is my great enemy. You had better let me take care of him. We have an old account that is still unsettled, he and I. Calm yourself on that score. I'll make him yield, for we have the law on our side.

BERTHA. What do you intend to do?

ABEL. Invite Mrs. Hall and her two daughters here for tomorrow night, and then we will find out how he takes it.

BERTHA. No, indeed, no scandal in my house!

ABEL. Why not? Can you deny yourself such a triumph? If it's war, one must kill one's enemies, not just wound them. And now it is war. Am I right?

BERTHA. Yes, but a father, and his wife and daughters whom he has not seen for eighteen years!

ABEL. Well, he'll have a chance to see them now.

BERTHA. You're terrible, Abel!

ABEL. I'm a little stronger than you, that's all. Marriage must have softened you. Do you live as married people, h'm?

BERTHA. How foolish you are!

ABEL. You have irritated Axel; you have trampled on him. But he can yet bite your heel.

BERTHA. Do you think he would dare to do anything?

ABEL. I believe he'll create a scene when he comes home.

BERTHA. Well, I shall give him as good as he sends--

ABEL. If you only can! But that business about the chiffonier key-- that was foolish, very foolish.

BERTHA. Perhaps it was foolish. But he will be nice enough again after he has had an airing. I know him.

[The maid comes in with a package.]

MAID. A messenger brought this costume for Monsieur.

BERTHA. Very well, let me have it. That's fine!

MAID. But it must be for madame, as it's a lady's costume.

BERTHA. No, that's all right. It's for monsieur.

MAID. But, heavens! is monsieur to wear dresses too?

BERTHA. Why not, when we have to wear them? But you may leave us now.

[Maid goes out. Bertha opens bundle and takes out Spanish costume.]

ABEL. But that is certainly well thought out. Oh, it's beautiful to avenge any one's stupidities.

[Willmer comes in with a messenger, who carries a package. Willmer is dressed in black frock coat with lapels faced with white, a flower in buttonhole, knee breeches, red cravat, and turned over cuffs.]

WILLMER. Good evening; are you alone? Here are the candles and here are the bottles. One chartreuse and two vermouth; here are two packages of tobacco and the rest of the things.

BERTHA. Well, but you are a good boy, Gaga!

WILLMER. And here is the receipted bill.

BERTHA. Is it paid? Then you have spent money again?

WILLMER. We'll have plenty of time to settle that. But you must hurry now, as the old lady will soon be here.

BERTHA. Then be good enough to open the bottles while I fix the candles.

WILLMER. Of course I will.

[Bertha opens package of candles at table; Willmer stands beside her, taking the wrappers from bottles.]

ABEL. You look quite family-like as you stand there together. You might have made quite a nice little husband, Gaga.

[Willmer puts his arm around Bertha and kisses her on the neck. Bertha turns on Willmer and slaps his face.]

BERTHA. Aren't you ashamed, you little hornet! What are you up to, anyway?

ABEL. If you can stand that, Gaga, then you can stand the knife.

WILLMER [Angry]. Little hornet? Don't you know who I am? Don't you know that I'm an author of rank?

BERTHA. You! who write nothing but trash!

WILLMER. It wasn't trash when I wrote for you.

BERTHA. You only copied what we said, that was all!

WILLMER. Take care, Bertha. You know that I can ruin you!

BERTHA. So, you threaten, you little Fido! [To Abel.] Shall we give the boy a spanking?

ABEL. Think what you are saying!

WILLMER. So! I've been a little Fido, who has been lying on your skirt; but don't forget that I can bite too.

BERTHA. Let me see your teeth!

WILLMER. No, but you shall feel them!

BERTHA. Very well, come on then! Come!

ABEL. Now, now, be quiet before you go too far.

WILLMER [To Bertha]. Do you know what one has a right to say about a married woman who accepts presents from a young bachelor?

BERTHA. Presents?

WILLMER. You've accepted presents from me for two years.

BERTHA. Presents! You should have a thrashing, you lying little snipe, always hanging around the petticoats! Don't you suppose I can squelch you?

WILLMER [With a shrug]. Perhaps.

BERTHA. And you dare throw a shadow on a woman's honor!

WILLMER, Honor! H'm! Does it do you any honor to have had me buy

part of the household things which you have charged up to your husband?

BERTHA. Leave my house, you scamp!

WILLMER. Your house! Among comrades one is not careful, but among enemies one must count every hair! And you shall be compelled to go over the accounts with me--adventuress--depend on that! [Goes out.]

ABEL. You will suffer for this foolishness! To let a friend leave you as an enemy--that's dangerous.

BERTHA. Oh, let him do what he likes. He dared to kiss me! He dared to remind me that I'm a woman.

ABEL. Do you know, I believe a man will always have that in mind. You have been playing with fire.

BERTHA. Fire! Can one ever find a man and a woman who can live like comrades without danger of fire?

ABEL. No, I don't think so; as long as there are two sexes there is bound to be fire.

BERTHA. Yes, but that must be done away with!

ABEL. Yes--it must be--try it!

[The maid comes in; she is bursting with laughter.]

MAID. There is a lady out here who calls herself--Richard--Richard Wahlstroem!

BERTHA [Going toward door]. Oh! Richard is here.

ABEL. Oh, well then, if she has come, we can open the meeting. And now to see if we can disentangle your skein.

BERTHA. Disentangle it, or cut it!

ABEL. Or get caught in it!

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

[Same scene. The hanging-lamp is lighted. Moonlight streams in, lighting up the studio window. There is a fire in the stove. Bertha and the maid are discovered. Bertha is dressed in a negligee with lace. She is sewing on the Spanish costume. The maid is cutting out a frill.]

BERTHA. There's no fun sitting up waiting for one's husband.

MAID. Do you think it is more fun for him to sit and wait for madame? This is the first time that he has been out alone--

BERTHA. Well, what does he do when he sits here alone?

MAID. He paints on pieces of wood.

BERTHA. On wooden panels?

MAID. Yes, he has big piles of wood that he paints on.

BERTHA. H'm! Tell me one thing, Ida; has monsieur ever been familiar with you?

MAID. Oh, never! No, he is such a proper gentleman.

BERTHA. Are you sure?

MAID [Positive]. Does madame think that I am such a--

BERTHA. --What time is it now?

MAID. It must be along toward twelve.

BERTHA. Very well. Then you may go to bed.

MAID. Won't you be afraid to be alone with all these skeletons?

BERTHA. I, afraid?--Hush, some one is coming through the gate--so, good night to you.

MAID. Good night, Madame. Sleep well.

[Goes out. Bertha alone; she puts the work away; throws herself on the couch, arranges lace on her gown, then she jumps up, turns down the lamp to half-light, then returns to couch and pretends to sleep. A pause before Axel enters.]

AXEL. Is any one here? Are you here, Bertha? [Bertha is silent. Axel goes to her.] Are you asleep?

BERTHA. [Softly.] Ah, is it you, my friend? Good evening! I was lying here and fell asleep, and I had such a bad dream.

AXEL. Now you are lying, for I saw you thro' the window from the garden when you took this pose. [Bertha jumps up.]

AXEL [Quietly]. And we don't want any seductive scenes in nightgowns, nor any melodramas. Be calm and listen to what I am going to tell you. [He sits down in the middle of the room.]

BERTHA. What have you got to tell me?

AXEL. A whole lot of things; but I shall begin with the ending. We must dissolve this concubinage.

BERTHA. What? [Throwing herself on the couch.] Oh, my God, what am I not made to live through!

AXEL. No hysteria, or I will empty the water bottle on your laces!

BERTHA. This is your revenge because I defeated you in an open competition!

AXEL. That has no connection with this matter.

BERTHA. You have never loved me!

AXEL. Yes, I have loved you; that was my only motive for marrying you. But why did you marry me? Because you were hard up, and because you had green sickness!

BERTHA. It's fortunate that no one can hear us.

AXEL. It would be no misfortune if any one did hear us. I've treated you like a comrade, with unlimited trust, and I've even made small sacrifices that you know about.--Has the locksmith been here yet?

BERTHA. No, he didn't come.

AXEL. It doesn't matter--I have looked over your accounts.

BERTHA. So, you've been spying in my book, have you?

AXEL. The household account-book is common property. You have entered false expenses and neglected to put down some of the income.

BERTHA. Can I help it if we are not taught bookkeeping at school?

AXEL. Nor are we. And as far as your bringing-up is concerned, you had things much better than I did; you went to a seminary, but I only went to a grade school.

BERTHA. It's not books that bring one up--

AXEL. No, it's the parents! But it's strange that they can't teach their daughters to be honorable--

BERTHA. Honorable! I wonder if the majority of criminals are not to be found among men?

AXEL. The majority of the punished, you should say; but of ninety-nine per cent. of criminal men one can ask with the judge, "Où est la femme?" But--to return to you. You have lied to me all the way through, and finally you have cheated me. For instance, you put down twenty francs for paints instead of for a twenty franc luncheon at Marguery.

BERTHA. That's not true; the luncheon only cost twelve francs.

AXEL. That is to say, you put eight in your pocket. Then you have received three hundred francs for the picture that you sold.

BERTHA. "What a woman earns by her work, she also controls." That's what the law states.

AXEL. That's not a paradox, then? Not monomania?

BERTHA. No, it seems not.

AXEL. Of course, we must not be petty; you control your earnings, and have controlled mine, in an unspeakable way; still, don't you think that, as comrades, you should have told me about the sale?

BERTHA. That didn't concern you.

AXEL. It didn't concern me? Well, then it only remains for me to bring suit for divorce.

BERTHA. Divorce! Do you think I would stand the disgrace of being a divorced wife? Do you think that I will allow myself to be driven from my home, like a servant-maid who is sent away with her trunk?

AXEL. I could throw you out into the street if I wished, but I shall do a more humane thing and get the divorce on the grounds of incompatibility of temperament.

BERTHA. If you can talk like that, you have never loved me!

AXEL. Tell me, why do you think I asked for your hand?

BERTHA. Because you wanted me to love you.

AXEL. Oh, holy, revered, uncorruptible stupidity--yes! I could accuse you of counterfeiting, for you have gone into debt to Willmer and made me responsible for the amount.

BERTHA. Ah, the little insect! he has been talking, has he?

AXEL. I just left him after paying him the three hundred and fifty francs for which you were indebted to him. But we mustn't be small about money matters, and we have more serious business to settle. You have allowed this scoundrel partially to pay for my household, and in doing so you have completely ruined my reputation. What have you done with the money?

BERTHA. The whole thing is a lie.

AXEL. Have you squandered it on luncheon and dinner parties?

BERTHA. No, I have saved it; and that's something you have no conception of, spendthrift!

AXEL. Oh, you saving soul! That negligee cost two hundred francs, and my dressing-gown cost twenty-five.

BERTHA. Have you anything else to say to me?

AXEL. Nothing else, except that you must think about supporting yourself from now on. I don't care to decorate wooden panels any more and let you reap the earnings.

BERTHA. A-ha, you think you can so easily get out of the duty that you made yourself responsible for when you fooled me into becoming your wife? You shall see!

AXEL. Now that I've had my eyes opened, the past is beginning to take on another color. It seems to me almost as if you conjured that courtship of ours; it seems almost as if I had been the victim

of what you women call seduction; it now seems to me as if I had fallen into the hands of an adventuress, who lured my money away from me in a _hotel garni_; it seems almost as if I had lived in vice ever since I was united with you! [Rising.] And now, as you stand there with your back turned to me and I see your neck with your short hair, it is--yes, it is exactly as if--ugh!--as if you were Judith and had given your body to be able to behead me! Look, there is the dress I was going to wear, that you wished to humiliate me with. Yes, you felt that it was debasing to wear those things, and thought it disguised your desire to irritate,--this low-cut bodice and the corsets which were to advertise your woman's wares. No, I return your love-token and shake off the fetters. [He throws down the wedding-ring. Bertha looks at him in wonderment. Axel pushes back his hair.] You didn't want to see that my forehead is higher than yours, so I let my hair conceal it, so as not to humble and frighten you. But now I am going to humble you, and since you were not willing to be my equal when I lowered myself to your level, you shall be my inferior, which you are.

BERTHA. And all this--all this noble revenge because _you_ were _my_ inferior!

AXEL. Yes, I was your inferior, even when I painted your picture!

BERTHA. Did you paint my picture? If you repeat that, I'll strike you.

AXEL. Yes, your kind, who despise raw strength, are always the first to resort to it. Go ahead and strike.

BERTHA [Advancing]. Don't you think I can measure strength with you?

[Axel takes both her wrists in one hand.]

AXEL. No, I don't think so. Are you convinced now that I am also your physical superior? Bend, or I'll break you!

BERTHA. Do you dare strike me?

AXEL. Why not? I know of only one reason why I should not strike you.

BERTHA. What's that?

AXEL. Because you are morally irresponsible.

BERTHA [Trying to free herself]. Let go!

AXEL. When you have begged for forgiveness! So, down on your knees. [He forces her down with one hand.] There, now look up to me, from below! That's your place, that you yourself have chosen.

BERTHA [Giving in]. Axel, Axel, I don't know you any more. Are you he who swore to love me, who begged to carry me, to lift me?

AXEL. It is I. I was strong then, and believed I had the power to do it; but you sapped my strength while my tired head lay in your lap, you sucked my best blood while I slept--and still there was

enough left to subdue you. But get up and let us end this declaiming. We have business to talk over! [Bertha rises, sits on couch and weeps.] Why are you crying?

BERTHA. I don't know! Because I'm weak, perhaps.

[Bertha's attitude and actions are those of complete surrender.]

AXEL. You see--I was your strength. When I took what was mine, you had nothing left. You were a rubber ball that I blew up; when I let go of you, you fell together like an empty bag.

BERTHA [Without looking up]. I don't know whether you are right or not, but since we have quarreled, my strength has left me. Axel, will you believe me,--I have never experienced before what I now feel--

AXEL. So? What do you feel, then?

BERTHA. I can't say it! I don't know whether it is--love, but--

AXEL. What do you mean by love? Isn't it a quiet longing to eat me alive once more? You begin to love me! Why didn't you do that before, when I was good to you? Goodness is stupidity, though; let us be evil! Isn't that right?

BERTHA. Be a little evil, rather, but don't be weak. [Rises.] Axel, forgive me, but don't desert me. Love me! Oh, love me!

AXEL. It is too late! Yesterday, this morning, I would have fallen before you as you stand there now, but it's too late now.

BERTHA. Why is it too late now?

AXEL. Because tonight I have broken all ties, even the last.

BERTHA [Taking his hands]. What do you mean?

AXEL. I have been untrue to you.

BERTHA [Falls in a heap]. Oh!

AXEL. It was the only way to tear myself loose.

BERTHA [Collecting herself]. Who was she?

AXEL. A woman--[Pause.]

BERTHA. How did she look?

AXEL. Like a woman! With long hair and high breasts, et cetera.--Spare yourself.

BERTHA. Do you think I am jealous of one of that kind?

AXEL. One of that kind, two of that kind, many of that kind!

BERTHA [Gasping]. And tomorrow our friends are invited here! Do you want to create a scandal and call in the invitations?

AXEL. No, I don't want to be mean in my revenge. Tomorrow we'll have our friends, and the day after our ways will part.

BERTHA. Yes, our ways must part now. Good night! [Goes to door left.]

AXEL [Going to door right]. Good night!

BERTHA [Stops]. Axel!

AXEL. Yes?

BERTHA. Oh, it wasn't anything!--Yes, wait. [Goes toward Axel with clasped hands.] Love me, Axel! Love me!

AXEL. Would you share with another?

BERTHA [Pause]. If only you loved me!

AXEL. No, I cannot. You can't draw me to you as you used to do.

BERTHA. Love me, be merciful! I am honest now, I believe, otherwise I would never humiliate myself as--as I am doing now, before a man.

AXEL. Even if I had compassion for you, I cannot call forth any love. It has come to an end. It is dead.

BERTHA. I beg for a man's love, I, a woman, and he shoves me away from him!

AXEL. Why not? _We_ should also have leave to say no for once, although we are not always very hard to please.

BERTHA. A woman offers herself to a man and is refused!

AXEL. Feel now how millions have felt, when they have begged on their knees for the mercy of being allowed to give what the other accepts. Feel it for your whole sex, and then tell them how it felt.

BERTHA [Rising]. Good night. The day after tomorrow, then.

AXEL. You still want the party tomorrow, then?

BERTHA. Yes, I want the party tomorrow.

AXEL. Good. The day after tomorrow, then.

[They go out, each their own way right and left.]

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

[SCENE.--Same. But the glass doors leading to orchard are open. The sun is still shining outside and the studio is brightly lighted. The side doors are open. A serving table is seen out in the

orchard; on it are glasses and bottles, et cetera. Axel wears cutaway, but without the decoration, and is wearing a standing collar with four-in-hand scarf. His hair is brushed straight back. Bertha wears a dark gown, cut square, with frilled fichu. She has a flower on the left shoulder. The Misses Hall are extravagantly and expensively dressed. Bertha enters from orchard. She is pale and has dark shadows under her eyes. Abel enters from door at back. They embrace and kiss each other.]

BERTHA. Good afternoon, and welcome.

ABEL. Good afternoon.

BERTHA. And Gaga promised to come?

ABEL. Absolutely certain. He was in a regretful spirit and begged forgiveness. [Bertha straightens out her fichu.] But what is the matter with you today? Has anything happened?

BERTHA. How so? What?

ABEL. You are not like yourself. Have you--? Bertha! Have you--

BERTHA. Don't talk.

ABEL. Your eyes are so full of color and brilliancy! What? Is it possible--? And so pale? Bertha!

BERTHA. I must go out to my guests.

ABEL. Tell me, are Carl and Oestermark here?

BERTHA. Both are out in the orchard.

ABEL. And Mrs. Hall and the girls?

BERTHA. Mrs. Hall will come later, but the girls are in my room.

ABEL. I'm afraid that our scheme of revenge will fall as flat as a pancake.

BERTHA. No, not this--not this one!

[Willmer enters with a bouquet of flowers. He goes to Bertha, kisses her hand, and gives her the bouquet.]

WILLMER. Forgive me! For my love's sake!

BERTHA. No, not on that account, but--it doesn't matter. I don't know why, but today I don't want any enemies.

[Axel comes in. Bertha and Willmer look distressed.]

AXEL [To Bertha, not noticing Willmer]. Pardon--if I disturb--

BERTHA. Not at all.

AXEL. I only wanted to ask if you had ordered the supper?

BERTHA. Yes, of course--as you wished.

AXEL. Very well. I only wanted to know. [Pause.]

ABEL. How festive you two look! [Bertha and Axel are silent. Willmer breaks the embarrassment by starting for the orchard.] Listen, Gaga--

[She hastens out after Willmer.]

AXEL. What have you ordered for the supper?

BERTHA [Looks at him and smiles]. Lobsters and poulet.

AXEL [Uncertain]. What are you smiling at?

BERTHA. My thoughts.

AXEL. What are you thinking then?

BERTHA. I am thinking--no, I really don't know--unless it was about the betrothal supper we had together in the Gardens that spring evening when you had wooed--

AXEL. You had wooed--

BERTHA. Axel!--And now it is the last, last time. It was a short summer.

AXEL. Quite short, but the sun will come again.

BERTHA. Yes, for you who can find sunshine in every street.

AXEL. What is there to hinder you from seeking warmth at the same fire?

BERTHA. And so we shall meet again, perhaps--some evening by street light, you mean?

AXEL. I didn't mean that--but a la bonne heure! That at least will be a free relation.

BERTHA. Yes, very free, especially for you.

AXEL. For you, too, but pleasanter for me.

BERTHA. That's a noble thought.

AXEL. Now, now--don't tear open the old wounds! We were talking about the supper. And we must not forget our guests. So! [Goes toward his room right.]

BERTHA. About the supper--yes, of course! That's what we were talking about.

[She flies toward her room left, stirred and agitated. They both go out. The scene is empty for a moment. Then the Misses Hall come in from the orchard.]

MISS AMELIE. How very dull it is here!

MISS THERESE. Insufferably stupid, and our hosts are not altogether polite.

MISS AMELIE. The hostess is especially unpleasant. And the short-hair kind, too.

MISS THERESE. Yes, but I understand that a lieutenant is coming--

MISS AMELIE. Well, that's good, for these artists are a lot of free traders. Hush, here is a diplomat surely.--He looks so distinguished.

[They sit on couch. Doctor Oestermarck comes in from the orchard; he discovers the Misses Hall and looks at them through his pince-nez.]

DR. OESTERMARK. I am honored, ladies. H'm, one meets so many of one's countrywomen here. Are you artists, too? You paint, I suppose?

MISS AMELIE. No, we don't paint.

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, but just a little, perhaps. Here in Paris all ladies paint--themselves.

MISS THERESE. We don't have to.

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, well, you play then?

MISS AMELIE. Play?

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, I don't mean playing at cards. But all ladies play a little.

MISS AMELIE. Evidently you are just from the country.

DR. OESTERMARK. Yes, just from the country. Can I be of any slight service to you?

MISS THERESE. Pardon, but we don't know with whom we have the honor--?

DR. OESTERMARK. You ladies have evidently just come from Stockholm. In this country we can talk to each other without asking for references.

MISS AMELIE. We haven't asked for references.

DR. OESTERMARK. What do you ask, then? To have your curiosity satisfied? Well, I'm an old family physician and my name is Anderson. Perhaps I may know your names now?--Character not needed.

MISS THERESE. We are the Misses Hall, if that can be of any interest to the doctor.

DR. OESTERMARK. Hall? H'm! I've surely heard that name before. Pardon, pardon me a question, a somewhat countrified question--

MISS AMELIE.--Don't be bashful!

DR. OESTERMARK. Is your father still living?

MISS AMELIE. No, he is dead.

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, yes. Well, now that I have gone so far, there is nothing to do but continue. Mr. Hall was--

MISS THERESE. Our father was a director of the Fire Insurance Company of Goeteborg.

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, well, then I beg your pardon. Do you find Paris to your liking?

MISS AMELIE. Very! Therese, do you remember what I did with my shawl? Such a cold draught here! [Rises.]

MISS THERESE. You left it in the orchard, no doubt.

DR. OESTERMARK [Rising]. No, don't go out. Allow me to find it for you--no--sit still--just sit still.

[Goes out into orchard. After a moment Mrs. Hall comes in from left, quite comfortable with drink; her cheeks are flaming red and her voice is uncertain.]

MISS AMELIE. Look, there's mother! And in that condition again! Heavens, why does she come here? Why did you come here, mother?

MRS. HALL. Keep quiet! I have as much right here as you.

MISS THERESE. Why have you been drinking again? Think if some one should come!

MRS. HALL. I haven't been drinking. What nonsense!

MISS AMELIE. We will be ruined if the doctor should come back and see you. Come, let's go in here and you can get a glass of water.

MRS. HALL. It's nice of you to treat your mother like this and say that she has been drinking, to say such a thing to your own mother!

MISS THERESE. Don't talk, but go in, immediately.

[They lead her in right. Axel and Carl come in from the orchard.]

CARL. Well, you're looking fine, my dear Axel, and you have a manlier bearing than you used to have.

AXEL. Yes, I have emancipated myself.

CARL. You should have done that at the start, as I did.

AXEL. As you did?

CARL. As I did. Immediately I took my position as head of the family, to which place I found myself called both because of my superior mind and my natural abilities.

AXEL. And how did your wife like that?

CARL. Do you know, I forgot to ask her! But to judge by appearances, I should say that she found things as they should be. They only need real men--and human beings can be made even out of women.

AXEL. But at least the power should be divided?

CARL. Power cannot be divided! Either obey or command. Either you or I. I preferred myself to her, and she had to adjust herself to it.

AXEL. Yes, but didn't she have money?

CARL. Not at all. She didn't bring more than a silver soup-spoon to our nest. But she demanded an accounting of it; and she got it. She was a woman of principle, you see!--She is so good, so good, but so am I good to her. I think it's really great sport to be married, what? And besides, she's such a splendid cook!

[The Misses Hall come in from right.]

AXEL. Let me introduce you to the Misses Hall, Lieutenant Starck.

CARL. I am very happy to make your [Carl gives them a look of recognition] acquaintance.

[The young ladies seem surprised and embarrassed; they nod and go out to the orchard somewhat excited.]

CARL. How did they get in here?

AXEL. What do you mean? They are friends of my wife's and this is the first time that they have been here. Do you know them?

CARL. Yes, somewhat!

AXEL. What do you mean to imply?

CARL. H'm, I met them in St. Petersburg late one night!

AXEL. Late one night?

CARL. Yes.

AXEL. Isn't there some mistake?

CARL. No-o! There is no mistake. They were very well known ladies in St. Petersburg.

AXEL. And Bertha allows that kind in my house!

[Bertha comes rushing in from orchard.]

BERTHA. What does this mean? Have you insulted the young ladies?

AXEL. No--but--

BERTHA. They came out of here crying and declared that they couldn't stay in the company of you gentlemen any longer! What has happened?

AXEL. Do you know these young ladies?

BERTHA. They are my friends! Isn't that enough?

AXEL. Not quite enough.

BERTHA. Not quite? Well, but if--

[Dr. Oestermarck comes in from the orchard.]

DR. OESTERMARK. What does this mean? What have you done to the little girls who ran away? I offered to help them with their wraps, but they refused to be helped and had tears in their eyes.

CARL [To Bertha]. I must ask you, are they your friends?

BERTHA. Yes, they are! But if my protection is not sufficient, then perhaps Doctor Oestermarck will take them under his wing, considering that he has a certain claim to them.

CARL. But a mistake has been made here. You mean that I, who have had certain relations with these girls, should appear as their cavalier?

BERTHA. What sort of relations?

CARL. Chance, such as one has with such women!

BERTHA. Such women? That's a lie!

CARL. I'm not in the habit of lying.

DR. OESTERMARK. But I don't understand what I have got to do with these young ladies.

BERTHA. You would prefer to have nothing to do with your deserted children.

DR. OESTERMARK. My children! But I don't understand.

BERTHA. They are your two daughters--daughters of your divorced wife.

DR. OESTERMARK. Since you consider that you have the right to be personal and make my affairs the subject of public discussion, I will answer you publicly. You seem to have taken the trouble to find out that I am not a widower. Good! My marriage, which was childless, was dissolved twenty years ago. Since then I have entered into another relation, and we have a child that is just five years old. These grown girls, therefore, cannot be my children. Now you know the whole matter.

BERTHA. But your wife--whom you threw out upon the world--

DR. OESTERMARK.--No, that wasn't the case either. She walked out, or staggered, if you prefer it, and then she received half my income until at last I found out that--enough said. If you could conceive what it cost me of work and self-denial to support two establishments,

you would have spared me this unpleasant moment, but your kind wouldn't consider anything like that. You needn't know any more, as it really doesn't concern you.

BERTHA. But it would amuse me to know why your first wife left you.

DR. OESTERMARK. I don't think it would amuse you to know that she was ugly, narrow, paltry, and that I was too good for her! Think now, you tender-hearted, sensitive Bertha, think if they really had been my daughters, these friends of yours and Carl's; imagine how my old heart would have been gladdened to see, after eighteen years, these children that I had borne in my arms during the long night of illness. And imagine if she, my first love, my wife, with whom life the first time became life, had accepted your invitation and come here? What a fifth act in the melodrama you wished to offer us, what a noble revenge on one who is guiltless! Thanks, old friend. Thank you for your reward for the friendship I have shown you.

BERTHA. Reward! Yes, I know that I owe you--a fee. [Axel, Carl and the doctor make protestations of "Oh," "Now," "Really," et cetera.] I know that, I know it very well.

[Axel, Carl and doctor say "No," "Fie," "This is going too far."]

DR. OESTERMARK. No, but I'm going to get out of here. Horrors! Yes, you are the right sort! Pardon me, Axel, but I can't help it!

BERTHA [To Axel]. You're a fine man, to allow your wife to be insulted!

AXEL. I can understand neither your allowing yourself to insult, or to be insulted! [Music is heard from the orchard; guitar and an Italian song.] The singers have arrived; perhaps you would all like to step out and have a bit of harmony on top of all this.

[They all go out except the doctor, who goes over to look at some drawings on wall right near door to Axel's room. The music outside is played softly. Mrs. Hall comes in and walks unsteadily across the scene and sits in a chair. The doctor, who does not recognize her, bows deeply.]

MRS. HALL. What music is that out there?

DR. OESTERMARK. They are some Italians, dear lady.

MRS. HALL. Yes? No doubt the ones I heard at Monte Carlo.

DR. OESTERMARK. Oh, perhaps there are other Italians.

MRS. HALL. Well, I believe it's none other than Oestermark! No one could be as quick as he in his retorts.

DR. OESTERMARK [Stares at her]. Ah--think--there are things--that--are less dreadful than dread! It is you, Carolina! And this is the moment that for eighteen years I have been running away from, dreamed about, sought, feared, wished for; wished for that I might receive the shock and afterward have nothing to dread! [He takes out a vial and wets his upper lip with a few drops.] Don't be

afraid; it's not poison, in such little doses. It's for the heart, you see.

MRS. HALL. Ugh, your heart! Yes, you have so much!

DR. OESTERMARK. It's strange that two people cannot meet once every eighteen years without quarreling.

MRS. HALL. It was always you who quarreled!

DR. OESTERMARK. Alone? What!--Shall we stop now?--I must try to look at you. [He takes a chair and sits down opposite Mrs. Hall.] Without trembling!

MRS. HALL. I've become old!

DR. OESTERMARK. That's what happens; one has read about it, seen it, felt it one's self, but nevertheless it is horrifying. I am old, too.

MRS. HALL. Are you happy in your new life?

DR. OESTERMARK. To tell the truth, it's one and the same thing; different, but quite the same.

MRS. HALL. Perhaps the old life was better, then?

DR. OESTERMARK. No, it wasn't better, as it was about the same, but it's a question if it wouldn't have seemed better now, just because it was the old life. One doesn't blossom but once, and then one goes to seed; what comes afterward is only a little aftermath. And you, how are you getting along?

MRS. HALL [Offended]. What do you mean?

DR. OESTERMARK. Don't misunderstand me. Are you contented with--your--lot? I mean--oh, that it should be so difficult to make one's self understood by women!

MRS. HALL. Contented? H'm!

DR. OESTERMARK. Well, you were never contented. But when one is young, one always demands the first class, and then one gets the third class when one is old. Now, I understand that you told Mrs. Alberg here that your girls are my children!

MRS. HALL. I did? That is a lie.

DR. OESTERMARK. Still untruthful, eh? In the old days, when I was foolish, I looked upon lying as a vice; but now I know it to be a natural defect. You actually believe in your lies, and that is dangerous. But never mind about that now. Are you leaving, or do you wish me to leave?

MRS. HALL [Rising]. I will go.

[She falls back into the chair and gropes about.]

DR. OESTERMARK. What, drunk too?--I really pity you. Oh, this is

most unpleasant! Dear me, I believe I'm ready to cry!--Carolina!
No, I can't bear this!

MRS. HALL. I am ill.

DR. OESTERMARK. Yes, that's what happens when one drinks too much. But this is more bitter than I ever thought it could be. I have killed little unborn children to be able to save the mother, and I have felt them tremble in their fight against death. I have cut living muscles, and have seen the marrow flow like butter from healthy bones, but never has anything hurt me so much as this since the day you left me. Then it was as if you had gone away with one of my lungs, so I could only gasp with the other!--Oh, I feel as if I were suffocating now!

MRS. HALL. Help me out of here. It's too noisy. I don't know why we came here, anyway. Give me your hand.

DR. OESTERMARK [Leading her to door]. Before it was I who asked for your hand; and it rested so heavily on me, the little delicate hand! Once it struck my face, the little delicate hand, but I kissed it nevertheless.--Oh, now it is withered, and will never strike again.--Ah, dolce Napoli! Joy of life, what became of it? You who were the bride of my youth!

MRS. HALL [In the hall door]. Where is my wrap?

DR. OESTERMARK [Closing door]. In the hall, probably. This is horrible! [Lights a cigar]. Oh, dolce Napoli! I wonder if it is as delightful as it's said to be in that cholera breeding fishing harbor. _Blague_, no doubt! _Blague! Blague_! Naples--bridal couples, love, joy of life, antiquities, modernity, liberalism, conservatism, idealism, realism, naturalism,--_blague, blague_, the whole thing!

[Axel, Abel, Willmer, Mrs. Starck and Bertha come in from orchard.]

MRS. STARCK. What is happening to the doctor?

DR. OESTERMARK. Pardon, it was only a little _qui pro quo_. Two strangers sneaked in here and we had to identify them.

MRS. STARCK. The girls?

CARL. Well, that has nothing to do with you. I don't know why, but I seem to feel "the enemy in the air."

MRS. STARCK. Ah, you're always seeing the enemy, you dear Carl.

CARL. No, I don't see them, but I feel them.

MRS. STARCK. Well, come to your friend, then, and she will defend you.

CARL. Oh, you're always so good to me.

MRS. STARCK. Why shouldn't I be, when you are so good to me?

[The door at back is opened and the maid and two men come in

carrying a picture.]

AXEL. What's this?

MAID. The porter said that it must be carried into the studio, as he didn't have any room for it.

AXEL. What foolishness is this? Take it out.

MAID. The mistress sent for the picture herself.

BERTHA. That's not true. For that matter, it's not my picture, anyway. It's your master's. Put it down there. [The maid and the man go out.] Perhaps it isn't yours, Axel? let's see. [Axel places himself in front of picture.] Move a little so we can see.

AXEL [Gives way]. It's a mistake.

BERTHA [Shrieks]. What! What is this! It's a mistake! What does it mean? It's my picture, but it's Axel's number! Oh!

[She falls in a faint. The doctor and Carl carry her into her room left, the women follow.]

ABEL. She is dying!

MRS. STARCK. Heaven help us, what is this! The poor little dear! Doctor Oestermarck, do something, say something--and Axel stands there crestfallen.

[Axel and Willmer are alone.]

AXEL. This is your doing.

WILLMER. My doing?

[Axel takes him by the ear.]

AXEL. Yes, yours, but not altogether. But I am going to give you your share. [He leads him to the door, which he opens with one foot, and kicks out Willmer with the other.] Out with you!

WILLMER. I'll get even for this!

AXEL. I shall be waiting for it!

[Doctor and Carl come in.]

DR. OESTERMARK. What's the trouble with the picture, anyway?

AXEL. Nothing--only that it seemed to represent sulphuric acid.

CARL. Now tell us, are you refused, or is she?

AXEL. I am refused on her picture. I wanted to help her a bit, as a good comrade, and that's why I changed the numbers.

DR. OESTERMARK. Yes, but there is something else too. She says that you don't love her any more.

AXEL. She is right in that. That's how it is, and tomorrow we part.

DR. OESTERMARK and CARL. Part?

AXEL. Yes, when there are no ties to bind things, they loosen of themselves. This wasn't a marriage; it was only living together, or something even worse.

DR. OESTERMARK. There is bad air here. Come, let's go.

AXEL. Yes, I want to get out--out of here. [They start for the door. Abel comes in.]

ABEL. What, are you leaving?

AXEL. Does that astonish you?

ABEL. Let me have a word with you.

AXEL. Go on.

ABEL. Don't you want to go in and see Bertha?

AXEL. No!

ABEL. What have you done to her?

AXEL. I have bent her.

ABEL. I noticed that--she is black and blue around the wrists! Look at me! I didn't think that of you. Well, conqueror, triumph now!

AXEL. It's an uncertain conquest, and I don't even wish for it.

ABEL. Are you sure of that? [She leans over to Axel, in low voice.] Bertha loves you now--now that you have bent her.

AXEL. I know it. But I don't love her any longer.

ABEL. Won't you go in and see her?

AXEL. No, it's all over. [Takes doctor's arm.] Come!

ABEL. May I take a message to Bertha?

AXEL. No! Yes! Tell her, that I despise and abhor her.

ABEL. Good-bye, my friend.

AXEL. Good-bye, my enemy.

ABEL. Enemy?

AXEL. Are you my friend?

ABEL. I don't know. Both and neither. I am a bastard--

AXEL. We are all that, as we are crocheted out of man and woman!

Perhaps you have loved me in your way, as you wanted to separate Bertha and me.

ABEL [Rolling a cigarette]. Loved! I wonder how it seems to love? No, I cannot love; I must be deformed--for it made me happy to see you two until the envy of deformity set me on fire. Perhaps you love me?

AXEL. No, on my honor! You have been an agreeable comrade who happened to be dressed like a woman; you have never impressed me as belonging to another sex; and love, you see, can and should exist only between individuals of opposite sexes--

ABEL. Sex love, yes!

AXEL. Is there any other, then?

ABEL. I don't know! But I am to be pitied. And this hate, this terrible hate! Perhaps that would disappear if you men were not so afraid to love us, if you were not so--how shall I express it--so moral, as it's called.

AXEL. But in heaven's name, be a little more lovable, then, and don't get yourselves up so that one is forced to think of the penal law whenever one looks at you.

ABEL. Do you think I'm such a fright, then?

AXEL. Well, you know, you must pardon me, but you are awful. [Bertha comes in.]

BERTHA [To Axel]. Are you going?

AXEL. Yes, I was just about to go, but now I'll stay.

BERTHA [Softly]. What? You--

AXEL. I shall stay in _my_ home.

BERTHA. In _our_--home.

AXEL. No, in _mine_. In my studio with my furniture.

BERTHA. And I?

AXEL. You may do what you please, but you must know what you risk. You see in my suit I have applied for one year's separation in bed and board. Should you stay, that is to say, if you should seek me during this time, you would have to choose between imprisonment, or being considered my mistress. Do you feel like staying?

BERTHA. Oh, is that the law?

AXEL. That's the law.

BERTHA. You drive me out, then?

AXEL. No, but the law does.

BERTHA. And you think I'll be satisfied with that?

AXEL. No, I don't, for you won't be satisfied until you have taken all the life out of me.

BERTHA. Axel! How you talk! If you knew how I--love you!

AXEL. That doesn't sound irrational, but I don't love you.

BERTHA [Flaring up and pointing to Abel]. Because you love her!

AXEL. No, indeed, I don't. Have never loved her, and never will. What incredible imagining! As if there were not other women and more fascinating than you two!

BERTHA. But Abel loves you!

AXEL. That is possible. I even believe that she suggested something of the kind. Yes, she said so distinctly; let's see, how was it--

BERTHA [Changing]. You are really the most shameless creature I have ever met!

AXEL. Yes, I can well believe that.

BERTHA [Puts on her hat and wrap]. Now you expect to put me out on the street? That is final?

AXEL. On the street, or where you please.

BERTHA [Angry]. Do you think a woman will allow herself to be treated like this?

AXEL. Once you asked me to forget that you were a woman. Very well, I have forgotten it.

BERTHA. But do you know that you have liabilities to the one who has been your wife?

AXEL. You mean the pay for good comradeship? What? A life annuity!

BERTHA. Yes.

AXEL [Putting a few bills on the table]. Here is a month in advance.

BERTHA [Takes money and counts it]. You still have a little honor left!

ABEL. Good-bye, Bertha. Now I am off.

BERTHA. Wait and you can go along with me.

ABEL. No, I won't go any further with you.

BERTHA. What? Why not?

ABEL. I am ashamed to.

BERTHA [Astonished]. Ashamed?

ABEL. Yes, ashamed. Good-bye. [Abel goes out.]

BERTHA. I don't understand. Good-bye, Axel! Thanks for the money.
Are we friends? [Taking his hand.]

AXEL. I am not, at least.--Let go of my hand, or I will believe
that you wish to seduce me again. [Bertha goes toward door.]

AXEL [With a sigh of relief]. Pleasant comrades! Oh!

[The maid enters from the orchard.]

MAID [To Axel]. There is it lady waiting for you.

AXEL. I'll soon be free.

BERTHA. Is that the new comrade?

AXEL. No, not comrade, but sweetheart.

BERTHA. And your wife to be?

AXEL, Perhaps. Because I want to meet, my comrades at the cafe, but
at home I want a wife. [Starts as if to go.] Pardon me!

BERTHA. Farewell, then! Are we never to meet again?

AXEL. Yes, of course! But at the cafe. Good-bye!

CURTAIN.

CHARACTERS

MONSIEUR DURAND, a pension proprietor, formerly connected with the
state railroad

ADELE, his daughter, twenty-seven

ANNETTE, his daughter, twenty-four

THERESE, his daughter, twenty-four

ANTONIO, a lieutenant in an Italian cavalry regiment in French
Switzerland in the eighties

PIERRE, an errand boy

FACING DEATH

[SCENE--A dining-room with a long table. Through the open door is
seen, over the tops of churchyard cypress trees, Lake Lemán, with
the Savoy Alps and the French bathing-resort Evian. To left is a
door to the kitchen. To right a door to inner rooms. Monsieur
Durand stands in doorway looking over the lake with a pair of field
glasses.]

ADELE [Comes in from kitchen wearing apron and turned-up sleeves.
She carries a tray with coffee things]. Haven't you been for the

coffee-bread, father?

DURAND. No, I sent Pierre. My chest has been bad for the last few days, and it affects me to walk the steep hill.

ADELE. Pierre again, eh? That costs three sous. Where are they to come from, with only one tourist in the house for over two months?

DURAND. That's true enough, but it seems to me Annette might get the bread.

ADELE. That would ruin the credit of the house entirely, but you have never done anything else.

DURAND. Even you, Adele?

ADELE. Even I am tired, though I have held out longest!

DURAND. Yes, you have, and you were still human when Therese and Annette cautioned me. You and I have pulled this house through since mother died. You have had to sit in the kitchen like Cinderella; I have had to take care of the service, the fires, sweep and clean, and do the errands. You are tired; how should it be with me, then?

ADELE. But you mustn't be tired. You have three daughters who are unprovided for and whose dowry you have wasted.

DURAND [Listening without]. Doesn't it seem as if you heard the sound of clanging and rumbling down toward Cully? If fire has broken out they are lost, because the wind is going to blow soon, the lake tells me that.

ADELE. Have you paid the fire insurance on our house?

DURAND. Yes, I have. Otherwise I would never have got that last mortgage.

ADELE. How much is there left unmortgaged?

DURAND. A fifth of the fire insurance policy. But you know how property dropped in value when the railroad passed our gates and went to the east instead.

ADELE. So much the better.

DURAND [Sternly]. Adele! [Pause.] Will you put out the fire in the stove?

ADELE. Impossible. I can't till the coffee-bread comes.

DURAND. Well, here it is.

[Pierre comes in with basket. Adele looks in the basket.]

ADELE. No bread! But a bill--two, three--

PIERRE.--Well, the baker said he wouldn't send any more bread until he was paid. And then, when I was going by the butcher's and the

grocer's, they shoved these bills at me. [Goes out.]

ADELE. Oh, God in heaven, this is the end for us! But what's this?
[Opens a package.]

DURAND. Some candles that I bought for the mass for my dear little Rene. Today is the anniversary of his death.

ADELE. You can afford to buy such things!

DURAND. With my tips, yes. Don't you think it is humiliating to stretch out my hand whenever a traveller leaves us? Can't you grant me the only contentment I possess--let me enjoy my sorrow one time each year? To be able to live in memory of the most beautiful thing life ever gave me?

ADELE. If he had only lived until now, you'd see how beautiful he'd be!

DURAND. It's very possible that there's truth in your irony--as I remember him, however, he was not as you all are now.

ADELE. Will you be good enough to receive Monsieur Antonio yourself? He is coming now to have his coffee _without_ bread! Oh, if mother were only living! She always found a way when you stood helpless.

DURAND. Your mother had her good qualities.

ADELE. Although you saw only her faults.

DURAND. Monsieur Antonio is coming. If you leave me now, I'll have a talk with him.

ADELE. You would do better to go out and borrow some money, so that the scandal would be averted.

DURAND. I can't borrow a sou. After borrowing for ten years! Let everything crash at once, everything, everything, if it would only be the end!

ADELE. The end for you, yes. But you never think of us!

DURAND. No, I have never thought of you, never!

ADELE. Do you begrudge us our bringing-up?

DURAND. I am only answering an unjust reproach. Go now, and I'll meet the storm--as usual.

ADELE. As usual--h'm!

[Goes. Antonio comes in from back.]

ANTONIO. Good morning, Monsieur Durand.

DURAND. Monsieur Lieutenant has already been out for a walk?

ANTONIO. Yes, I've been down toward Cully and saw them put out a

chimney fire. Now, some coffee will taste particularly good.

DURAND. It's needless to say how it pains me to have to tell you that on account of insufficient supplies our house can no longer continue to do business.

ANTONIO. How is that?

DURAND. To speak plainly, we are bankrupt.

ANTONIO. But, my good Monsieur Durand, is there no way of helping you out of what I hope is just a temporary embarrassment?

DURAND. No, there is no possible way out. The condition of the house has been so completely undermined for many years that I had rather the crash would come than live in a state of anxiety day and night, expecting what must come.

ANTONIO. Nevertheless I believe you are looking at the dark side of things.

DURAND. I can't see what makes you doubt my statement.

ANTONIO. Because I want to help you.

DURAND. I don't wish any help. Privation must come and teach my children to lead a different life from this which is all play. With the exception of Adele, who really does take care of the kitchen, what do the others do? Play, and sing, and promenade, and flirt; and as long as there is a crust of bread in the house, they'll never do anything useful.

ANTONIO. Granting that, but until the finances are straightened out we must have bread in the house. Allow me to stay a month longer and I will pay my bill in advance.

DURAND. No, thank you, we must stick to this course even if it leads us into the lake! And I don't want to continue in this business, which doesn't bring bread--nothing but humiliations. Just think how it was last spring, when the house had been empty for three months. Then at last an American family came and saved us. The morning after their arrival I ran across the son catching hold of my daughter on the stairs. It was Therese,--he was trying to kiss her. What would you have done in my case?

ANTONIO [Confused]. I don't know--

DURAND. I know what I, as a father, should have done, but--father-like--I didn't do it. But I know what to do the next time.

ANTONIO. On account of that very thing it seems to me that you should think very carefully about what you do, and not leave your daughters to chance.

DURAND. Monsieur Antonio, you are a young man who, for some inexplicable reason, has won my regard. Whether you grant it, or not, I am going to ask one thing of you. Don't form any opinions about me as an individual, or about my conduct.

ANTONIO. Monsieur Durand, I promise it if you will answer me one question; are you Swiss born, or not?

DURAND. I am a Swiss citizen.

ANTONIO. Yes, I know that, but I ask if you were born in Switzerland.

DURAND [Uncertainly]. Yes.

ANTONIO. I asked only--because it interested me. Nevertheless--as I must believe you that your pension must be closed, I want to pay what I owe. To be sure it's only ten francs, but I can't go away and leave an unpaid bill.

DURAND. I can't be sure that this is really a debt, as I don't keep the accounts, but if you have deceived me you shall hear from me. Now I'll go and get the bread. Afterward we'll find out.

[Goes out. Antonio alone. Afterward Therese comes in, carrying a rat-trap. She wears a morning negligee and her hair is down.]

THERESE. Oh, there you are, Antonio! I thought I heard the old man.

ANTONIO. Yes, he went to get the coffee-bread, he said.

THERESE. Hadn't he done that already? No, do you know, we can't stand him any longer.

ANTONIO. How beautiful you are today, Therese! But that rat-trap isn't becoming.

THERESE. And such a trap into the bargain! I have set it for a whole month, but never, never get a live one, although the bait is eaten every morning. Have you seen Mimi around?

ANTONIO. That damned cat? It's usually around early and late, but today I've been spared it.

THERESE. You must speak beautifully about the absent, and remember, he who loves me, loves my cat. [She puts rat-trap on table and picks up an empty saucer from under table.] Adele, Adele!

ADELE [In the kitchen door]. What does Her Highness demand so loudly?

THERESE. Her Highness demands milk for her cat and a piece of cheese for your rats.

ADELE. Go get them yourself.

THERESE. Is that the way to answer Her Highness?

ADELE. The answer fits such talk. And besides, you deserve it for showing yourself before a stranger with your hair not combed.

THERESE. Aren't we all old friends here, and--Antonio, go and speak nicely to Aunt Adele, and then you'll get some milk for Mimi. [Antonio hesitates.] Well, aren't you going to mind?

ANTONIO [Sharply]. No.

THERESE. What kind of a way to speak is that? Do you want a taste of my riding whip?

ANTONIO. Impudence!

THERESE. [Amazed]. What's that? What's that? Are you trying to remind me of my position, my debt, my weakness?

ANTONIO. No, I only want to remind you of my position, my debt, my weakness.

ADELE [Getting the saucer]. Now listen, good friends. What's all this foolishness for? Be friends--and then I'll give you some very nice coffee. [Goes into the kitchen.]

THERESE [Crying]. You are tired of me, Antonio, and you are thinking of giving me up.

ANTONIO. You mustn't cry, it will make your eyes so ugly.

THERESE. Oh, if they are not as beautiful as Annette's--

ANTONIO.--So, it's Annette now? But now look here; all fooling aside, isn't it about time we had our coffee?

THERESE. You'd make a charming married man--not able to wait a moment for your coffee.

ANTONIO. And what a lovable married lady you would be, who growls at her husband because she has made a blunder.

[Annette comes in fully dressed and hair done up.]

ANNETTE. You seem to be quarreling this morning.

ANTONIO. See, there's Annette, and dressed already.

THERESE. Yes, Annette is so extraordinary in every respect, and she also has the prerogative of being older than I am.

ANNETTE. If you don't hold your tongue--

ANTONIO.--Oh, now, now, be good, now, Therese!

[He puts his arm around her and kisses her. Monsieur Durand appears in the doorway as he does so.]

DURAND [Astonished]. What's this?

THERESE [Freeing herself]. What?

DURAND. Did my eyes see right?

THERESE. What did you see?

DURAND. I saw that you allowed a strange gentleman to kiss you.

THERESE. That's a lie!

DURAND. Have I lost my sight, or do you dare lie to my face?

THERESE. Is it for you to talk about lying, you who lie to us and the whole world by saying that you were born a Swiss although you are a Frenchman?

DURAND. Who said that?

THERESE. Mother said so.

DURAND [To Antonio]. Monsieur Lieutenant, as our account is settled, I'll ask you to leave this house immediately, or else--

ANTONIO. Or else?

DURAND. Choose your weapon.

ANTONIO. I wonder what sort of defense you would put up other than the hare's!

DURAND. If I didn't prefer my stick, I should take the gun that I used in the last war.

THERESE. You have surely been at war--you who deserted!

DURAND. Mother said that, too. I can't fight the dead, but I can fight the living.

[Lifts his walking-stick and goes toward Antonio. Therese and Annette throw themselves between the men.]

ANNETTE. Think what you are doing!

THERESE. This will end on the scaffold!

ANTONIO [Backing away]. Good-bye, Monsieur Durand. Keep my contempt--and my ten francs.

DURAND [Takes a gold piece from his vest pocket and throws it toward Antonio]. My curses follow your gold, scamp!

[Therese and Annette following Antonio.]

THERESE and ANNETTE. Don't go, don't leave us! Father will kill us!

DURAND [Breaks his stick in two]. He who cannot kill must die.

ANTONIO. Good-bye, and I hope you'll miss the last rat from your sinking ship. [He goes.]

THERESE [To Durand]. That's the way you treat your guests! Is it any wonder the house has gone to pieces!

DURAND. Yes--that's the way--such guests! But tell me, Therese, my child--[Takes her head between his hands] tell me, my beloved child, tell me if I saw wrong just now, or if you told a falsehood.

THERESE [Peevishly]. What?

DURAND. You know what I mean. It isn't the thing itself, which can be quite innocent--but it is a matter of whether I can trust my senses that interests me.

THERESE. Oh, talk about something else.--Tell us rather what we are going to eat and drink today. For that matter, it's a lie; he didn't kiss me.

DURAND. It isn't a lie. In Heaven's name, didn't I see it happen?

THERESE. Prove it.

DURAND. Prove it? With two witnesses or--a policeman! [To Annette.] Annette, my child, will you tell me the truth?

ANNETTE. I didn't see anything.

DURAND. That's a proper answer. For one should never accuse one's sister. How like your mother you are today, Annette!

ANNETTE. Don't you say anything about mother! She should be living such a day as this!

[Adele comes in with a glass of milk, which she puts on table.]

ADELE [To Durand]. There's your milk. What happened to the bread?

DURAND. Nothing, my children. It will continue to come as it always has up to the present.

THERESE [Grabs the glass of milk from her father]. You shall not have anything, you who throw away money, so that your children are compelled to starve.

ADELE. Did he throw away money, the wretch? He should have been put in the lunatic asylum the time mother said he was ripe for it. See, here's another bill that came by way of the kitchen.

[Durand takes the bill and starts as he looks at it. Pours a glass of water and drinks. Sits down and lights his briar pipe.]

ANNETTE. But he can afford to smoke tobacco.

DURAND [Tired and submissively]. Dear children, this tobacco didn't cost me any more than that water, for it was given to me six months ago. Don't vex yourselves needlessly.

THERESE [Takes matches away]. Well, at least you sha'n't waste the matches.

DURAND. If you knew, Therese, how many matches I have wasted on you when I used to get up nights to see if you had thrown off the bedclothes! If you knew, Annette, how many times I have secretly given you water when you cried from thirst, because your mother believed that it was harmful for children to drink!

THERESE. Well, all that was so long ago that I can't bother about

it. For that matter, it was only your duty, as you have said yourself.

DURAND. It was, and I fulfilled my duty and a little more too.

ADELE. Well, continue to do so, or no one knows what will become of us. Three young girls left homeless and friendless, without anything to live on! Do you know what want can drive one to?

DURAND. That's what I said ten years ago, but no one would heed me; and twenty years ago I predicted that this moment would come, and I haven't been able to prevent its coming. I have been sitting like a lone brakeman on an express train, seeing it go toward an abyss, but I haven't, been able to get to the engine valves to stop it.

THERESE. And now you want thanks for landing in the abyss with us.

DURAND. No, my child, I only ask that you be a little less unkind to me. You have cream for the cat, but you begrudge milk to your father, who has not eaten for--so long.

THERESE. Oh, it's you, then, who has begrudged milk for my cat!

DURAND. Yes, it's I.

ANNETTE. And perhaps it is he who has eaten the rats' bait, too.

DURAND. It is he.

ADELE. Such a pig!

THERESE [Laughing]. Think if it had been poisoned!

DURAND. Alas, if only it had been, you mean!

THERESE. Yes, you surely wouldn't have minded that, you who have so often talked about shooting yourself--but have never done it!

DURAND. Why didn't you shoot me? That's a direct reproach. Do you know why I haven't done it? To keep you from going into the lake, my dear children.--Say something else unkind now. It's like hearing music--tunes that I recognize--from the good old times--

ADELE. Stop such useless talk now and do something. Do something.

THERESE. Do you know what the consequences may be if you leave us in this shape?

DURAND. You will go and prostitute yourselves. That's what your mother always said she'd do when she had spent the housekeeping money on lottery tickets.

ADELE. Silence! Not a word about our dear, beloved mother!

DURAND [Half humming to himself].
In this house a candle burns,
When it burns out the goal he earns,
The goal once won, the storm will come
With a great crash. Yes! No!

[It has begun to blow outside and grown cloudy. Durand rises quickly and says to Adele] Put out the fire in the stove. The wind storm is coming.

ADELE [Looking Durand in the eyes]. No, the wind is not coming.

DURAND. Put out the fire. If it catches fire here, we'll get nothing from the insurance. Put out the fire, I say, put it out.

ADELE. I don't understand you.

DURAND [Looks in her eyes, taking her hand]. Just obey me, do as I say. [Adele goes into kitchen, leaving the door open. To Therese and Annette.] Go up and shut the windows, children, and look after the draughts. But come and give me a kiss first, for I am going away to get money for you.

THERESE. Can you get money?

DURAND. I have a life insurance that I think I am going to realize on.

THERESE. How much can you get for it?

DURAND. Six hundred francs if I sell it, and five thousand if I die. [Therese concerned.] Now, tell me, my child,--we mustn't be needlessly cruel,--tell me, Therese, are you so attached to Antonio that you would be quite unhappy if you didn't get him?

THERESE. Oh, yes!

DURAND. Then you must marry him if he really loves you. But you mustn't be unkind to him, for then you'll be unhappy. Good-bye, my dear beloved child. [Takes her in his arms and kisses her cheeks.]

THERESE. But you mustn't die, father, you mustn't.

DURAND. Would you grudge me going to my peace?

THERESE. No, not if you wish it yourself. Forgive me, father, the many, many times I've been unkind to you.

DURAND. Nonsense, my child.

THERESE. But no one was so unkind to you as I.

DURAND. I felt it less because I loved you most. Why, I don't know. But run and shut the windows.

THERESE. Here are your matches, papa--and there's your milk.

DURAND [Smiling]. Ah, you child!

THERESE. Well, what can I do? I haven't anything else to give you.

DURAND. You gave me so much joy as a child that you owe me nothing. Go now, and just give me a loving look as you used to do. [Therese turns and throws herself into his arms.] So, so, my child, now all is well. [Therese runs out.] Farewell, Annette.

ANNETTE. Are you going away? I don't understand all this.

DURAND. Yes, I'm going.

ANNETTE. But of course you're coming back, papa.

DURAND. Who knows whether he will live through the morrow? Anyway, we'll say farewell.

ANNETTE. Adieu, then, father--and a good journey to you. And you won't forget to bring something home to us just as you used to do, will you?

DURAND. And you remember that, though it's so long since I've bought anything for you children? Adieu, Annette.

[Annette goes. Durand hums to himself.]

Through good and evil, great and small,
Where you have sown, others gather all.

[Adele comes in.] Adele, come, now you shall hear and understand. If I speak in veiled terms, it is only to spare your conscience in having you know too much. Be quiet. I've got the children up in their rooms. First you are to ask me this question, "Have you a life insurance policy?" Well?

ADELE [Questioningly and uncertain]. "Have you a life insurance policy?"

DURAND. No, I had one, but I sold it long ago, because I thought I noticed that some one became irritable when it was due. But I have a fire insurance. Here are the papers. Hide them well. Now, I'm going to ask you something; do you know how many candles there are in a pound, mass candles at seventy-five centimes?

ADELE. There are six.

DURAND [Indicating the package of candles]. How many candles are there there?

ADELE. Only five.

DURAND. Because the sixth is placed very high up and very near--

ADELE.--Good Lord!

DURAND [Looking at his watch]. In five minutes or so, it will be burned out.

ADELE. No!

DURAND. Yes! Can you see dawn any other way in this darkness?

ADELE. No.

DURAND. Well, then. That takes care of the business. Now about another matter. If Monsieur Durand passes out of the world as an [Whispers] incendiary, it doesn't matter much, but his children shall know that he lived as a man of honor up to that time. Well, then, I was born in France, but I didn't have to admit that to the

first scamp that came along. Just before I reached the age of conscription I fell in love with the one who later became my wife. To be able to marry, we came here and were naturalized. When the last war broke out, and it looked as if I was going to carry a weapon against my own country, I went out as a sharpshooter against the Germans. I never deserted, as you have heard that I did--your mother invented that story.

ADELE. Mother never lied--

DURAND.--So, so. Now the ghost has risen and stands between us again. I cannot enter an action against the dead, but I swear I am speaking the truth. Do you hear? And as far as your dowry is concerned, that is to say your maternal inheritance, these are the facts: first, your mother through carelessness and foolish speculations ruined your paternal inheritance so completely that I had to give up my business and start this pension. After that, part of her inheritance had to be used in the bringing-up of you children, which of course cannot be looked upon as thrown away. So it was also untrue that--

ADELE. No, that's not what mother said on her death-bed--

DURAND.--Then your mother lied on her death-bed, just as she had done all through her life. And that's the curse that has been following me like a spook. Think how you have innocently tortured me with these two lies for so many years! I didn't want to put disquiet into your young lives which would result in your doubting your mother's goodness. That's why I kept silent. I was the bearer of her cross throughout our married life; carried all her faults on my back, took all the consequences of her mistakes on myself until at last I believed that I was the guilty one. And she was not slow, first to believe herself to be blameless, and then later the victim. "Blame it on me," I used to say, when she had become terribly involved in some tangle. And she blamed and I bore! But the more she became indebted to me, the more she hated me, with the limitless hatred of her indebtedness. And in the end she despised me, trying to strengthen herself by imagining she had deceived me. And last of all she taught you children to despise me, because she wanted support in her weakness. I hoped and believed that this evil but weak spirit would die when she died; but evil lives and grows like disease, while soundness stops at a certain point and then retrogrades. And when I wanted to change what was wrong in the habits of this household, I was always met with "But mother said," and therefore it was true; "Mother used to do this way," and therefore it was right. And to you I became a good-for-nothing when I was kind, a miserable creature when I was sensitive, and a scamp when I let you all have your way and ruin the house.

ADELE. It's honorable to accuse the dead who can't defend themselves!

DURAND [Fast and exalted]. I am not dead yet, but I will be soon. Will you defend me then? No, you need not. But defend your sisters. Think only of my children, Adele. Take a motherly care of Therese; she is the youngest and liveliest, quick for good and bad, thoughtless but weak. See to it that she marries soon, if it can be arranged. Now, I can smell burning straw.

ADELE. Lord protect us!

DURAND [Drinks from glass]. He will. And for Annette you must try to find a place as teacher, so that she can get up in the world and into good company. You must manage the money when it falls due. Don't be close, but fix up your sisters so that they will be presentable to the right kind of people. Don't save anything but the family papers, which are in the top drawer of my chiffonier in the middle room. Here is the key. The fire insurance papers you have. [Smoke is seen forcing its way through the ceiling.] It will soon be accomplished now. In a moment you will hear the clanging from St. Francois. Promise me one thing. Never divulge this to your sisters. It would only disturb their peace for the rest of their lives. [He sits by table.] And one thing more, never a hard word against their mother. Her portrait is also in the chiffonier; none of you knew that, because I found it was enough that her spirit walked unseen in the home. Greet Therese, and ask her to forgive me. Don't forget that she must have the best when you buy her clothes; you know her weakness for such things and to what her weakness can bring her. Tell Annette--

[A distant clanging of bells is heard; the smoke increases.
Monsieur Durand drops his head in his hands on the table.]

ADELE. It's burning, it's burning! Father, what's the matter with you? You'll be burned up! [Durand lifts his head, takes the water glass up and puts it down with a meaningful gesture.] You have--taken--poison!

DURAND [Nods affirmatively]. Have you the insurance papers? Tell Therese--and Annette--

[His head falls. The bell in distance strikes again. Rumbling and murmur of voices outside.]

CURTAIN.

PARIAH, OR THE OUTCAST

One-Act Play

CHARACTERS

MR. X., an archeologist
MR. Y., a traveller from America

Both middle-aged

PARIAH, OR THE OUTCAST

[SCENE--Simple room in a country house; door and window at back, through which one sees a country landscape. In the middle of the room a large dining table; on one side of it books and writing materials and on the other side some antiques, a microscope, insect boxes, alcohol jars. To the left of scene a book-shelf, and all the

other furnishings are those of a country gentleman. Mr. Y. enters in his shirt-sleeves, carrying an insect net and a botanical tin box. He goes directly to the book-shelf, takes down a book and reads stealthily from it. The after-service bell of a country church rings. The landscape and room are flooded with sunshine. Now and then one hears the clucking of hens outside. Mr. X. comes in also in shirt-sleeves. Mr. Y. starts nervously, returns the book to its place, and pretends to look for another book on the shelf.]

MR. X. What oppressive heat! We'll surely have a thunder-shower.

MR. Y. Yes? What makes you think so?

MR. X. The bells sound like it, the flies bite so, and the hens are cackling. I wanted to go fishing, but I couldn't find a single worm. Don't you feel rather nervous?

MR. Y. [Reflectively]. I? Well, yes.

MR. X. But you always look as if you expected a thunder-shower.

MR. Y. Do I?

MR. X. Well, as you are to start off on your travels again tomorrow, it's not to be wondered at if you have the knapsack fever. What's the news? Here's the post. [Takes up letters from the table.] Oh, I have palpitation of the heart every time I open a letter. Nothing but debts, debts! Did you ever have any debts?

MR. Y. [Reflecting]. No-o-o.

MR. X. Well, then, of course you can't understand how it feels to have unpaid bills come in. [He reads a letter.] The rent owing--the landlord clamoring--and my wife in despair. And I, I sitting up to my elbows in gold. [Opens an iron-mounted case, which stands on the table. They both sit down, one on each side of the case.] Here is six thousand crowns' worth of gold that I've dug up in two weeks. This bracelet alone would bring the three hundred and fifty crowns I need. And with all of it I should be able to make a brilliant career for myself. The first thing I should do would be to have drawings made and cuts of the figures for my treatises. After that I would print--and then clear out. Why do you suppose I don't do this?

MR. Y. It must be because you are afraid of being found out.

MR. X. Perhaps that, too. But don't you think that a man of my intelligence should be able to manage it so that it wouldn't be found out? I always go alone to dig out there on the hills--without witnesses. Would it be remarkable to put a little something in one's pockets?

MR. Y. Yes, but disposing of it, they say, is the dangerous part.

MR. X. Humph, I should of course have the whole thing smelted, and then I should have it cast into ducats--full weight, of course--

MR. Y. Of course!

MR. X. That goes without saying. If I wanted to make counterfeit money--well, it wouldn't be necessary to dig the gold first. [Pause.] It's remarkable, nevertheless, that if some one were to do what I can't bring myself to do, I should acquit him. But I should not be able to acquit myself. I should be able to put up a brilliant defense for the thief; prove that this gold was _res nullius_, or no one's, and that it got into the earth before there were any land rights; that even now it belongs to no one but the first comer, as the owner had never accounted it part of his property, and so on.

MR. Y. And you would not be able to do this if--h'm!--the thief had stolen through need, but rather as an instance of a collector's mania, of scientific interest, of the ambition to make a discovery,--isn't that so?

MR. X. You mean that I wouldn't be able to acquit him if he had stolen through need? No, that is the only instance the law does not pardon. That is simple theft, that is!

MR. Y. And that you would not pardon?

MR. X. H'm! Pardon! No, I could hardly pardon what the law does not, and I must confess that it would be hard for me to accuse a collector for taking an antique that he did not have in his collection, which he had dug up on some one else's property.

MR. Y. That is to say, vanity, ambition, could gain pardon where need could not?

MR. X. Yes, that's the way it is. And nevertheless need should be the strongest motive, the only one to be pardoned. But I can change that as little as I can change my will not to steal under any condition.

MR. Y. And you count it a great virtue that you cannot--h'm--steal?

MR. X. With me not to steal is just as irresistible as stealing is to some, and, therefore, no virtue. I cannot do it and they cannot help doing it. You understand, of course, that the idea of wanting to possess this gold is not lacking in me. Why don't I take it then? I cannot; it's an inability, and a lack is not a virtue. And there you are!

[Closes the case with a bang. At times stray clouds have dimmed the light in the room and now it darkens with the approaching storm.]

MR. X. How close it is! I think we'll have some thunder.

[Mr. Y. rises and shuts the door and window.]

MR. X. Are you afraid of thunder?

MR. Y. One should be careful.

[They sit again at table.]

MR. X. You are a queer fellow. You struck here like a bomb two weeks ago, and you introduced yourself as a Swedish-American who

travels, collecting insects for a little museum.

MR. Y. Oh, don't bother about me.

MR. X. That's what you always say when I get tired of talking about myself and want to devote a little attention to you. Perhaps it was because you let me talk so much about myself that you won my sympathy. We were soon old acquaintances; there were no corners about you for me to knock against, no needles or pins to prick. There was something so mellow about your whole personality; you were so considerate, a characteristic which only the most cultivated can display; you were never noisy when you came home late, never made any disturbance when you got up in the morning; you overlooked trifles, drew aside when ideas became conflicting; in a word, you were the perfect companion; but you were altogether too submissive, too negative, too quiet, not to have me reflect about it in the course of time. And you are fearful and timid; you look as if you led a double life. Do you know, as you sit there before the mirror and I see your back, it's as if I were looking at another person. [Mr. Y. turns and looks in the mirror.] Oh, you can't see your back in the mirror. Front view, you look like a frank, fearless man who goes to meet his fate with open heart, but back view,--well, I don't wish to be discourteous, but you look as if you carried a burden, as if you were shrinking from a lash; and when I see your red suspenders across your white shirt--it looks like--like a big brand, a trade mark on a packing box.

MR. Y. [Rising]. I believe I will suffocate--if the shower doesn't break and come soon.

MR. X. It will come soon. Just be quiet. And the back of your neck, too, it looks as if there were another head on it, with the face of another type than you. You are so terribly narrow between the ears that I sometimes wonder if you don't belong to another race. [There is flash of lightning.] That one looked as if it struck at the sheriff's.

MR. Y. [Worried]. At the--sh-sheriff's!

MR. X. Yes, but it only looked so. But this thunder won't amount to anything. Sit down now and let's have a talk, as you are off again tomorrow.--It's queer that, although I became intimate with you so soon, you are one of those people whose likeness I cannot recall when they are out of my sight. When you are out in the fields and I try to recall your face, another acquaintance always comes to mind--some one who doesn't really look like you, but whom you resemble nevertheless.

MR. Y. Who is that?

MR. X. I won't mention the name. However, I used to have dinner at the same place for many years, and there at the lunch counter I met a little blond man with pale, worried eyes. He had an extraordinary faculty of getting about in a crowded room without shoving or being shoved. Standing at the door, he could reach a slice of bread two yards away; he always looked as if he was happy to be among people, and whenever he ran into an acquaintance he would fall into rapturous laughter, embrace him, and do the figure eight around him, and carry on as if he hadn't met a human being for years; if

any one stepped on his toes he would smile as if he were asking pardon for being in the way. For two years I used to see him, and I used to amuse myself trying to figure out his business and character, but I never asked any one who he was,--I didn't want to know, as that would have put an end to my amusement. That man had the same indefinable characteristics as you; sometimes I would make him out an undergraduate teacher, an under officer, a druggist, a government clerk, or a detective, and like you, he seemed to be made up of two different pieces and the front didn't fit the back. One day I happened to read in the paper about a big forgery by a well-known civil official. After that I found out that my indefinable acquaintance had been the companion of the forger's brother, and that his name was Straman; and then I was informed that the afore-mentioned Straman had been connected with a free library, but that he was then a police reporter on a big newspaper. How could I then get any connection between the forgery, the police, and the indefinable man's appearance? I don't know, but when I asked a man if Straman had ever been convicted, he answered neither yes nor no--he didn't know. [Pause.]

MR. Y. Well, was he ever--convicted?

MR. X. No, he had not been convicted.

[Pause.]

MR. Y. You mean that was why keeping close to the police had such attraction for him, and why he was so afraid of bumping into people?

MR. X. Yes.

MR. Y. Did you get to know him afterward?

MR. X. No, I didn't want to.

MR. Y. Would you have allowed yourself to know him if he had been convicted?

MR. X. Yes, indeed.

[Mr. Y. rises and walks up and down.]

MR. X. Sit still. Why can't you sit quietly.

MR. Y. How did you get such a liberal attitude towards people's conduct? Are you a Christian?

MR. X. No,--of course I couldn't be,--as you've just heard. The Christians demand forgiveness, but I demand punishment for the restoration of balance, or whatever you like to call it, and you, who have served time, ought to understand that.

MR. Y. [Stops as if transfixed. Regards Mr. X. at first with wild hatred, then with surprise and wonderment.] How--do--you--know--that?

MR. X. It's plain to be seen.

MR. Y. How? How can you see it?

MR. X. I have taught myself. That's an art, too. But we won't talk about that matter. [Looks at his watch. Takes out a paper for signing. Dips a pen and offers it to Mr. Y.] I must think about my muddled affairs. Now be so kind as to witness my signature on this note, which I must leave at the bank at Malmoe when I go there with you tomorrow morning.

MR. Y. I don't intend to go by way of Malmoe.

MR. X. No?

MR. Y. No.

MR. X. But you can witness my signature nevertheless.

MR. Y. No-o. I never sign my name to papers--

MR. X. --Any more! That's the fifth time that you have refused to write your name. The first time was on a postal receipt,--and it was then that I began to observe you; and now, I see that you have a horror of touching pen and ink. You haven't sent a letter since you've been here. Just one postal-card, and that you wrote with a blue pencil. Do you see now how I have figured out your mis-step? Furthermore, this is the seventh time that you have refused to go to Malmoe, where you have not gone since you have been here. Nevertheless you came here from America just to see Malmoe; and every morning you have walked southward three miles and a half to the windmill hill just to see the roofs of Malmoe; also, when you stand at the right-hand window, through the third window-pane to the left, counting from the bottom up, you can see the turrets of the castle, and the chimneys on the _state prison_. Do you see now that it is not that I am so clever but that you are so stupid?

MR. Y. Now you hate me.

MR. X. No.

MR. Y. Yes, you do, you must.

MR. X. No--see, here's my hand.

MR. Y. [Kisses the proffered hand].

MR. X. [Drawing back his hand]. What dog's trick is that?

MR. Y. Pardon! But thou art the first to offer me his hand after knowing--

MR. X. --And now you are "thou-ing" me! It alarms me that, after serving your time, you do not feel your honor retrieved, that you do not feel on equal footing,--in fact, just as good as any one. Will you tell me how it happened? Will you?

MR. Y. [Dubiously]. Yes, but you won't believe what I say. I'm going to tell you, though, and you shall see that I was not a common criminal. You shall be convinced that mis-steps are made, as one might say, involuntarily--[Shakily] as if they came of their own accord, spontaneously, without intention, blamelessly!--Let me

open the window a little. I think the thunder shower-has passed over.

MR. X. Go ahead.

MR. Y. [Goes and opens the window, then comes and sits by the table again and tells the following with great enthusiasm, theatrical gestures and false accents]. Well, you see I was a student at Lund, and once I needed a loan. I had no dangerously big debts, my father had some means--not very much, to be sure; however, I had sent away a note of hand to a man whom I wanted to have sign it as second security, and contrary to all expectations, it was returned to me with a refusal. I sat for a while benumbed by the blow, because it was a disagreeable surprise, very disagreeable. The note lay before me on the table, and beside it the letter of refusal. My eyes glanced hopelessly over the fatal lines which contained my sentence. To be sure it wasn't a death-sentence, as I could easily have got some other man to stand as security; as many as I wanted, for that matter--but, as I've said, it was very unpleasant; and as I sat there in my innocence, my glance rested gradually on the signature, which, had it been in the right place, would have made my future. That signature was most unusual calligraphy--you know how, as one sits thinking, one can scribble a whole blotter full of meaningless words. I had the pen in my hand--[He takes up the pen] like this, and before I knew what I was doing it started to write,--of course I don't want to imply that there was anything mystical spiritualistic, behind it--because I don't believe in such things!--it was purely a thoughtless, mechanical action--when I sat and copied the beautiful autograph time after time--without, of course, any prospect of gain. When the letter was scribbled all over, I had acquired skill enough to reproduce the signature remarkably well [Throws the pen down with violence] and then I forgot the whole thing. That night my sleep was deep and heavy, and when I awakened I felt that I had been dreaming, but I could not recall the dream; however, it seemed as though the door to my dream opened a little when I saw the writing table and the note in memory--and when I got up I was driven to the table absolutely, as if, after ripe consideration, I had made the irrevocable resolution to write that name on the fateful paper. All thought of risk, of consequence, had disappeared--there was no wavering--it was almost as if I were fulfilling a precious duty--and I wrote. [Springs to his feet.] What can such a thing be? Is it inspiration, hypnotic suggestion, as it is called? But from whom? I slept alone in my room. Could it have been my uncivilized ego, the barbarian that does not recognize conventions, but who emerged with his criminal will and his inability to calculate the consequences of his deed? Tell me, what do you think about such a case?

MR. X. [Bored]. To be honest, your story does not quite convince me. There are holes in it,--but that may be clue to your not being able to remember all the details,--and I have read a few things about criminal inspirations--and I recall--h'm--but never mind. You have had your punishment, you have had character enough to admit your error, and we won't discuss it further.

MR. Y. Yes, yes, yes, we will discuss it; we must talk, so that I can have complete consciousness of my unswerving honesty.

MR. X. But haven't you that?

MR. Y. No, I haven't.

MR. X. Well, you see, that's what bothers me, that's what bothers me. Don't you suppose that each one of us has a skeleton in his closet? Yes, indeed! Well, there are people who continue to be children all their lives, so that they cannot control their lawless desires. Whenever the opportunity comes, the criminal is ready. But I cannot understand why you do not feel innocent. As the child is considered irresponsible, the criminal should be considered so too. It's strange--well, it doesn't matter; I'll regret it later.
[Pause.] I killed a man once, and I never had any scruples.

MR. Y. [Very interested]. You--did?

MR. X. Yes--I did. Perhaps you wouldn't like to take a murderer's hand?

MR. Y. [Cheerily]. Oh, what nonsense!

MR. X. Yes, but I have not been punished for it.

MR. Y. [Intimate, superior]. So much the better for you. How did you get out of it?

MR. X. There were no accusers, no suspicions, no witnesses. It happened this way: one Christmas a friend of mine had invited me for a few days' hunting just outside of Upsala; he sent an old drunken servant to meet me, who fell asleep on the coach-box and drove into a gate-post, which landed us in the ditch. It was not because my life had been in danger, but in a fit of anger I struck him a blow to wake him, with the result that he never awakened again--he died on the spot.

MR. Y. [Cunningly]. And you didn't give yourself up?

MR. X. No, and for the following reasons. The man had no relatives or other connections who were dependent on him. He had lived out his period of vegetation and his place could soon be filled by some one who was needed more, while I, on the other hand, was indispensable to the happiness of my parents, my own happiness, and perhaps to science. Through the outcome of the affair I was cured of the desire to strike any more blows, and to satisfy an abstract justice I did not care to ruin the lives of my parents as well as my own life.

MR. Y. So? That's the way you value human life?

MR. X. In that instance, yes.

MR. Y. But the feeling of guilt, the "restoration of balance?"

MR. X. I had no guilty feeling, its I had committed no crime. I had received and given blows as a boy, and it was only ignorance of the effect of blows on old people that caused the fatality.

MR. Y. Yes, but it is two years' hard labor for homicide--just as much as for--forgery.

MR. X. You may believe I have thought of that too, and many a night have I dreamed that I was in prison. Ugh! is it as terrible as it's said to be behind bolts and bars?

MR. Y. Yes, it is terrible. First they disfigure your exterior by cutting off your hair, so if you did not look like a criminal before, you do afterward, and when you look at yourself in the mirror, you become convinced that you are a desperado.

MR. X. It's the mask that they pull off; that's not a bad idea.

MR. Y. You jest! Then they cut down your rations, so that every day, every hour you feel a distinct difference between life and death; all life's functions are repressed; you feel yourself grovelling, and your soul, which should be bettered and uplifted there, is put on a starvation cure, driven back a thousand years in time; you are only allowed to read what was written for the barbarians of the migratory period; you are allowed to hear about nothing but that which can never come to pass in heaven, but what happens on earth remains a secret; you are torn from your own environment, moved down out of your class; you come under those who come under you; you have visions of living in the bronze age, feel as if you went about in an animal's skin, lived in a cave, and ate out of a trough! Ugh!

MR. X. That's quite rational. Any one who behaves as if he belonged to the bronze age ought to live in the historic costume.

MR. Y. [Spitefully]. You scoff, you, you who have behaved like a man of the stone age! And you are allowed to live in the gold age!

MR. X. [Searchingly and sharp]. What do you mean by that last expression--the gold age?

MR. Y. [Insidiously]. Nothing at all.

MR. X. That's a lie; you are too cowardly to state your whole meaning.

MR. Y. Am I cowardly? Do you think that? I wasn't cowardly when I dared to show myself in this neighborhood, where I have suffered what I have.--Do you know what one suffers from most when one sits in there? It is from the fact that the others are not sitting in there too.

MR. X. What others?

MR. Y. The unpunished.

MR. X. Do you allude to me?

MR. Y. Yes.

MR. X. I haven't committed any crime.

MR. Y. No? Haven't you?

MR. X. No. An accident is not a crime.

MR. Y. So, it's an accident to commit murder?

MR. X. I haven't committed any murder.

MR. Y. So? Isn't it murder to slay a man?

MR. X. No, not always. There is manslaughter, homicide, assault resulting in death, with the subdivisions, with or without intent. However, now I am really afraid of you, for you belong in the most dangerous category of human beings, the stupid.

MR. Y. So you think that I am stupid? Now listen! Do you want me to prove that I am very shrewd?

MR. X. Let me hear.

MR. Y. Will you admit that I reason shrewdly and logically when I say this? You met with an accident which might have brought you two years of hard labor. You have escaped the ignominious penalty altogether. Here sits a man who also has been the victim of an accident, an unconscious suggestion, and forced to suffer two years of hard labor. This man can wipe out the stain he has unwittingly brought upon himself only through scientific achievement; but for the attainment of this he must have money--much money, and that immediately. Doesn't it seem to you that the other man, the unpunished one, would restore the balance of human relations if he were sentenced to a tolerable fine? Don't you think so?

MR. X. [Quietly]. Yes.

MR. Y. Well, we understand each other.--H'm! How much do you consider legitimate?

MR. X. Legitimate? The law decrees that a man's life is worth at the minimum fifty crowns. But as the deceased had no relatives, there's nothing to be said on that score.

MR. Y. Humph, you will not understand? Then I must speak more plainly. It is to me that you are to pay the fine.

MR. X. I've never heard that a homicide should pay a fine to a forger, and there is also no accuser.

MR. Y. No? Yes, you have me.

MR. X. Ah, now things are beginning to clear up. How much do you ask to become accomplice to the homicide?

MR. Y. Six thousand crowns.

MR. X. That's too much. Where am I to get it? [Mr. Y. points to the case.] I don't want to do that, I don't want to become a thief.

MR. Y. Don't pretend. Do you want me to believe that you haven't dipped into that case before now?

MR. X. [As to himself]. To think that I could make such a big mistake! But that's the way it always is with bland people. One is

fond of gentle people, and then one believes so easily that he is liked; and just on account of that I have been a little watchful of those of whom I've been fond. So you are fully convinced that I have helped myself from that case?

MR. Y. Yes, I'm sure of it.

MR. X. And you will accuse me if you do not receive the six thousand crowns?

MR. Y. Absolutely. You can't get out of it, so it's not worth while trying to do so.

MR. X. Do you think I would give my father a thief for son, my wife a thief for husband, my children a thief for father, and my confreres a thief for comrade? That shall never happen. Now I'll go to the sheriff and give myself up.

MR. Y. [Springs up and gets his things together]. Wait a moment.

MR. X. What for?

M\$. Y. [Stammering]. I only thought--that as I'm not needed--I wouldn't need to be present--and could go.

MR. X. You cannot. Sit down at your place at the table, where you've been sitting, and we will talk a little.

MR. Y. [Sits, after putting on a dark coat]. What's going to happen now?

MR. X. [Looking into mirror]. Now everything is clear to me! Ah!

MR. Y. [Worried]. What do you see now that's so remarkable?

MR. X. I see in the mirror that you are a thief, a simple, common thief. Just now, when you sat there in your shirt-sleeves, I noticed that something was wrong about my book-shelf, but I couldn't make out what it was, as I wanted to listen to you and observe you. Now, since you have become my antagonist, my sight is keener, and since you have put on that black coat, that acts as a color contrast against the red backs of the books, which were not noticeable before against your red suspenders, I see that you have been there and read your forgery story in Bernheim's essay on hypnotic suggestion, and returned the book upside down. So you stole that story too! In consequence of all this I consider that I have the right to conclude that you committed your crime through need, or because you were addicted to pleasures.

MR. Y. Through need. If you knew--

MR. X. If you knew in what need I have lived, and lived, and still live! But this is no time for that. To continue, that you have served time is almost certain, but that was in America, for it was American prison life that you described; another thing is almost as certain--that you have not served out your sentence here.

MR. Y. How can you say that?

MR. X. Wait until the sheriff comes and you will know. [Mr. Y. rises.] Do you see? The first time I mentioned the sheriff in connection with the thunderbolt, you wanted to run then, too; and when a man has been in that prison he never wants to go to the windmill hill every day to look at it, or put himself behind a window-pane to--to conclude, you have served one sentence, but not another. That's why you were so difficult to get at. [Pause.]

MR. Y. [Completely defeated]. May I go now?

MR. X. Yes, you may go now.

MR. Y. [Getting his things together]. Are you angry with me?

MR. X. Yes. Would you like it better if I pitied you?

MR. Y. [Wrathfully]. Pity! Do you consider yourself better than I am?

MR. X. Of course I do, as I am better. I am more intelligent than you are, and of more worth to the common weal.

MR. Y. You are pretty crafty, but not so crafty as I am. I stand in check myself, but, nevertheless, the next move you can be checkmated.

MR. X. [Fixing Mr. Y. with his eye]. Shall we have another bout? What evil do you intend to do now?

MR. Y. That is my secret.

MR. X. May I look at you?--You think of writing an anonymous letter to my wife, disclosing my secret.

MR. Y. Yes, and you cannot prevent it. You dare not have me imprisoned, so you must let me go; and when I have gone I can do what I please.

MR. X. Ah, you devil! You've struck my Achilles heel--will you force me to become a murderer?

MR. Y. You couldn't become one! You timid creature!

MR. X. You see, then, there is a difference in people after all, and you feel within you that I cannot commit such deeds as you, and that is your advantage. But think if you forced me to deal with you as I did with the coachman!

[Lifts his hand as if to strike. Mr. Y. looks hard at Mr. X.]

MR. Y. You can't do it. He who dared not take his salvation out of the case couldn't do that.

MR. X. Then you don't believe that I ever took from the case?

MR. Y. You were too cowardly, just as you were too cowardly to tell your wife that she is married to a murderer.

MR. X. You are a different kind of being from me--whether stronger

or weaker I do not know--more criminal or not--that doesn't concern me. But you are the stupider, that's proven. Because you were stupid when you forged a man's name instead of begging as I have had to do; you were stupid when you stole out of my book--didn't you realize that I read my books? You were stupid when you thought that you were more intelligent than I am and that you could fool me into becoming a thief; you were stupid when you thought, that the restoration of balance would be accomplished by the world's having two thieves instead of one, and you were most stupid when you believed that I have built my life's happiness without having laid the cornerstone securely. Go and write your anonymous letter to my wife about her husband being a homicide--that she knew as my fiancée. Do you give up now?

MR. Y. Can I go?

MR. X. Now you shall go--immediately. Your things will follow you.

CURTAIN.

EASTER

CHARACTERS

MRS. HEYST

ELIS, her son. Instructor in a preparatory school

ELEONORA, her daughter

CHRISTINE, Elis' fiancée

BENJAMIN, a freshman

LINDKVIST

EASTER

[Scene for the entire play.--The interior of a glass-enclosed piazza, furnished like a living-room. A large door at the middle back leading out into the garden with fence and garden gate visible. Beyond one sees the tops of trees (indicating that the house is situated on a height), and in the distance the cathedral and another high building loom against the sky. The glass windows which extend across the entire back of scene are hung with flowered yellow cretonne, which can be drawn open. A mirror hangs on the panel between door and window on the left. Below the mirror is a calendar. To the right of door a writing table covered with books and writing materials. A telephone is also on it. To L. of door is a dining table, stove and bureau. At R. in foreground it small sewing table with lamp on it. Near it are two arm-chairs. A hanging lamp at center. Outside in the street an electric light. At L. there is a door leading from piazza to the house, at R. a door leading to the kitchen. Time, the present.]

ACT I.

[Thursday before Easter. The music before curtain is: Haydn: Sieben Worte des Erloesers. Introduction: Maestoso Adagio.]

[A ray of sunlight falls across the room and strikes one of the chairs near the sewing table. In the other chair, untouched by the sunshine, sits Christine, running strings thro' muslin sash-curtains. Elis enters wearing a winter overcoat, unbuttoned. He carries a bundle of legal documents which he puts on the writing table. After that he takes off his overcoat and hangs it at L.]

ELIS. Hello, sweetheart.

CHRISTINE. Hello, Elis.

ELIS [Looks around]. The double windows are off, the floor scoured, fresh curtains at the windows--yes, it is spring again! The ice has gone out of the river, and the willows are beginning to bud on the banks--yes, spring has come and I can put away my winter overcoat. [Weighs his overcoat in his hand and hangs it up.] You know, it's so heavy--just as tho' it had absorbed the weight of the whole winter's worries, the sweat and dust of the school-room.

CHRISTINE. But you have a vacation now.

ELIS. Yes, Easter. Five days to enjoy, to breathe, to forget. [Takes Christine's hand a minute, and then seats himself in arm-chair.] Yes, the sun has come again. It left us in November. How well I remember the day it disappeared behind the brewery across the street. Oh, this winter, this long winter.

CHRISTINE [With a gesture toward kitchen]. Sh! Sh!

ELIS. I'll be quiet--But I'm so happy that it's over with. Oh, the warm sun! [Rubs his hands as tho' bathing them in the sunshine.] I want to bathe in the sunshine and light after all the winter gloom--

CHRISTINE. Sh! Sh!

ELIS. Do you know, I believe that good luck is coming our way--that hard luck is tired of us.

CHRISTINE. What makes you think so?

ELIS. Why, as I was going by the cathedral just now a white dove flew down and alighted in front of me, and dropped a little branch it was carrying right at my feet.

CHRISTINE. Did you notice what kind of branch it was?

ELIS. Of course it couldn't have been an olive branch, but I believe it was a sign of peace--and I felt the life-giving joy of spring. Where's mother?

CHRISTINE [Points toward kitchen]. In the kitchen.

ELIS [Quietly and closing his eyes]. I hear the spring! I can tell that the double windows are off, I hear the wheel hubs so plainly. And what's that?--a robin chirping out in the orchard, and they are hammering down at the docks and I can smell the fresh paint on the steamers.

CHRISTINE. Can you feel all that--here in town?

ELIS. Here? It's true we are _here_, but I was up there, in the North, where our home lies. Oh, how did we ever get into this dreadful city where the people all hate each other and where one is always alone? Yes, it was our daily bread that led the way, but with the bread came the misfortunes: father's criminal act and little sister's illness. Tell me, do you know whether mother has ever been to see father since he's been in prison?

CHRISTINE. Why, I think she's been there this very day.

ELIS. What did she have to say about it?

CHRISTINE. Nothing--she wouldn't talk about it.

ELIS. Well, one thing at least has been gained, and that is the quiet that followed the verdict after the newspapers had gorged themselves with the details. One year is over: and then we can make a fresh start.

CHRISTINE. I admire your patience in this suffering.

ELIS. Don't. Don't admire anything about me. I am full of faults--you know it.

CHRISTINE. If you were only suffering for your own faults--but to be suffering for another!

ELIS. What are you sewing on?

CHRISTINE. Curtains for the kitchen, you dear.

ELIS. It looks like a bridal veil. This fall you will be my bride, won't you, Christine?

CHRISTINE. Yes--but--let's think of summer first.

ELIS. Yes, summer! [Takes out the check book.] You see the money is already in the bank, and when school is over we will start for the North, for our home land among the lakes. The cottage stands there just as it did when we were children, and the linden trees. Oh, that it were summer already and I could go swimming in the lake! I feel as if this family dishonor has besmirched me so that I long to bathe, body and soul, in the clear lake waters.

CHRISTINE. Have you heard anything from Eleonora?

ELIS. Yes--poor little sister! She writes me letters that tear my heart to pieces. She wants to get out of the asylum--and home, of course. But the doctor daren't let her go. She would do things that might lead to prison, he says. Do you know, I feel terribly conscience-stricken sometimes--

CHRISTINE [Starting]. Why?

ELIS. Because I agreed with all the rest of them that it was best to put her there.

CHRISTINE. My dear, you are always accusing yourself. It was fortunate she could be taken care of like that--poor little thing!

ELIS. Well, perhaps you're right. It is best so. She is as well off there as she could be anywhere. When I think of how she used to go about here casting gloom over every attempt at happiness, how her fate weighed us down like a nightmare, then I am tempted to feel almost glad about it. I believe the greatest misfortune that could happen would be to see her cross this threshold. Selfish brute that I am!

CHRISTINE. Human being that you are!

ELIS. And yet--I suffer--suffer at the thought of her misery and my father's.

CHRISTINE. It seems as tho' some were born to suffer.

ELIS. You poor Christine--to be drawn into this family, which was cursed from the beginning! Yes, doomed!

CHRISTINE. You don't know whether it's all trial or punishment, Elis. Perhaps I can help you through the struggles.

ELIS. Do you think mother has a clean dress tie for me?

CHRISTINE [Anxiously]. Are you going out?

ELIS. I'm going out to dinner. Peter won the debate last night, you know, and he's giving a dinner tonight.

CHRISTINE. And you're going to that dinner?

ELIS. You mean that perhaps I shouldn't because he has proven such an unfaithful friend and pupil?

CHRISTINE. I can't deny that I was shocked by his unfaithfulness, when he promised to quote from your theories and he simply plundered them without giving you any credit.

ELIS. Ah, that's the way things go, but I am happy in the consciousness that "this have I done."

CHRISTINE. Has he invited you to the dinner?

ELIS. Why, that's true--come to think of it, he didn't invite me. That's very strange. Why didn't I think of that before! Why, he's been talking for years as though I were to be the guest of honor at that dinner, and he has told others that. But if I am not invited--then of course it's pretty plain that I'm snubbed, insulted, in fact. Well, it doesn't matter. It isn't the first time--nor the last. [Pause.]

CHRISTINE. Benjamin is late. Do you think he will pass his examinations?

ELIS. I certainly do--in Latin particularly.

CHRISTINE. Benjamin is a good boy!

ELIS. Yes, but he's somewhat of a grumbler. You know of course why he is living here with us?

CHRISTINE. IS it because--

ELIS. Because--my father was the boy's guardian and spent his fortune for him, as he did--for so many others. Can you fancy, Christine, what agony it is for me as their instructor to see those fatherless boys, who have been robbed of their inheritance, suffering the humiliations of free scholars? I have to think constantly of their misery to be able to forgive them their cruel glances.

CHRISTINE. I believe that your father is truly better off than you.

ELIS. Truly!

CHRISTINE. But Elis, we should think of summer, and not of the past.

ELIS. Yes, of summer! Do you know, I was awakened last night by some students singing that old song, "Yes, I am coming, glad winds, take this greeting to the country, to the birds--Say that I love them, tell birch and linden, lake and mountain, that I am coming back to them--to behold them again as in my childhood hours--" [He rises--moved.] Shall I ever go back to them, shall I ever go out from this dreadful city, from Ebal, accursed mountain, and behold Gerizim again? [Seats himself near the door.]

CHRISTINE. Aye, aye--that you shall!

ELIS. But do you think my birches and lindens will look as they used to--don't you think the same dark veil will shroud them that has been lying over all nature and life for us ever since the day when father--[Points to the empty arm-chair which is in the shadow.] Look, the sun has gone.

CHRISTINE. It will come again and stay longer.

ELIS. That's true. As the days lengthen the shadows shorten.

CHRISTINE. Yes, Elis, we are going toward the light, believe me.

ELIS. Sometimes I believe that, and when I think of all that has happened, all the misery, and compare it with the present--then I am happy. Last year you were not sitting there, for you had gone away from me and broken off our betrothal. Do you know, that was the darkest time of all. I was dying literally bit by bit; but then you came back to me--and I lived. Why did you go away from me?

CHRISTINE. Oh; I don't know--it seems to me now as if there was no reason. I had an impulse to go--and I went, as tho' I were walking in my sleep. When I saw you again I awoke--and was happy.

ELIS. And now we shall go on together forevermore. If you left me now I should die in earnest.--Here comes mother. Say nothing, let her live in her imaginary world in which she believes that father is a martyr and that all those he sacrificed are rascals.

MRS. HEYST [Comes from kitchen. She is paring an apple. She is simply dressed and speaks in an innocent voice]. Good afternoon, children. Will you have your apple dumpling hot or cold?

ELIS. Cold, mother dear.

MRS. HEYST. That's right, my boy, you always know what you want and say so. But you aren't like that, Christine. Elis gets that from his father; he always knew what he wanted and said so frankly, and people don't like that--so things went badly with him. But his day will come, and he'll get his rights and the others will get their just deserts. Wait now, what was it I had to tell you? Oh, yes, what do you think? Lindkvist has come here to live! Lindkvist, the biggest rascal of them all!

ELIS [Rises, disturbed]. Has he come here?

MRS. HEYST. Yes, indeed, he's come to live right across the street from us.

ELIS. So now we must see him coming and going day in and day out. That too!

MRS. HEYST. Just let me have a talk with him, and he'll never show his face again! For I happen to know a few things about him! Well, Elis, how did Peter come out?

ELIS. Oh, finely!

MRS. HEYST. I can well believe that! When do you think you will join the debating club?

ELIS. When I can afford it!

MRS. HEYST. "When I can afford it." Humph, that isn't a very good answer! And Benjamin--did he get through his examinations all right?

ELIS. We don't know yet; but he'll soon be here.

MRS. HEYST. Well, I don't quite like the way Benjamin goes around looking so conscious of his privileges in this house--but we shall take him down soon enough. But he's a good boy just the same. Oh, yes, there's a package for you, Elis. [Goes out to kitchen and comes back directly with a package.]

ELIS. Mother does keep track of everything, doesn't she? I sometimes believe that she is not so simple minded as she seems to be.

MRS. HEYST. See, here's the package. Lina received it. Perhaps it is an Easter present!

ELIS. I'm afraid of presents since the time I received a box of cobblestones. [Puts the package on the table.]

MRS. HEYST. Now I must go back to my duties in the kitchen. Don't you think it is too cold with the door open?

ELIS. Not at all, mother.

MRS. HEYST. Elis, you shouldn't hang your overcoat there. It looks so disorderly. Now, Christine, will my curtains be ready soon?

CHRISTINE. In just a few minutes, mother.

MRS. HEYST [To Elis]. Yes, I like Peter; he is my favorite among your friends. But aren't you going to his dinner this evening, Elis?

ELIS. Yes, I suppose so.

MRS. HEYST. Now, why did you go and say that you wanted your apple dumpling cold when you are going out to dinner? You're so undecided, Elis. But Peter isn't like that.--Shut the door when it gets chilly, so that you won't get sniffles.[Goes out R.]

ELIS. The good old soul--and always Peter. Does she like to tease you about Peter?

CHRISTINE [Surprised and hurt]. Me?

ELIS [Disconcerted]. Old ladies have such queer notions, you know.

CHRISTINE. What have you received for a present?

ELIS [Opening package]. A birch rod!

CHRISTINE. From whom?

ELIS. It's anonymous. It's just an innocent joke on the schoolmaster. I shall put it in water--and it will blossom like Aaron's staff. "Rod of birch, which in my childhood's hour"--And so Lindkvist has come here to live!

CHRISTINE. Well, what about him?

ELIS. We owe him our biggest debt.

CHRISTINE. _You_ don't owe him anything.

ELIS. Yes, one for all and all for one; the family's name is disgraced as long as we owe a farthing.

CHRISTINE. Change your name!

ELIS. Christine!

CHRISTINE [Puts down work, which is finished]. Thanks, Elis, I was only testing you.

ELIS. But you must not tempt me. Lindkvist is not a rich man, and needs what is due him.--When my father got through with it all it was like a battle-field of dead and wounded--and mother believes father is a martyr! Shall we go out and take a walk?

CHRISTINE. And try to find the sunshine? Gladly!

ELIS. I can't understand how it can be that our Saviour suffered for us and yet we must continue to suffer.

CHRISTINE. Here comes Benjamin.

ELIS. Can you see whether he looks happy or not?

CHRISTINE [Looks out door]. He walks so slowly, he's stopped at the fountain--and bathing his eyes.

ELIS. And this too!

CHRISTINE. Wait until--

ELIS. Tears! Tears!

CHRISTINE. Patience.

[Enter Benjamin. He has a kind face and seems very downcast. He carries several books and a portfolio.]

ELIS. Well, how did you get along in Latin?

BENJAMIN. Badly!

ELIS. Let me see your examination paper. What did you do?

BENJAMIN. I used "ut" with the indicative, altho' I knew it should be the subjunctive.

ELIS. Then you are lost! But how could you do that?

BENJAMIN [Submissively]. I can't, explain it--I knew how it should be. I meant to do it right, but some way I wrote it wrong. [Seats himself dejectedly near dining table.]

ELIS [Sinks down near writing desk and opens Benjamin's portfolio]. Yes, here it is--the indicative, oh!

CHRISTINE [Faintly, with effort]. Well, better luck next time--life is long.

ELIS. Terribly long.

BENJAMIN. Yes, it is.

ELIS [Sadly but without bitterness]. But that everything should come at the same time! You were my best pupil, so what can I expect of the others? My reputation as a teacher is lost. I shall not be allowed to teach any longer and so--complete ruin! [To Benjamin.] Don't take it to heart so--it is not your fault.

CHRISTINE [With great effort]. Elis, courage, courage, for God's sake.

ELIS. What shall I get it from?

CHRISTINE. What you got it from before.

ELIS. But things are not as they were. I seem to be in complete disgrace now.

CHRISTINE. There is no disgrace in undeserved suffering. Don't be impatient. Be equal to the test, for it is just another test. I feel sure of that.

ELIS. Can a year for Benjamin become less than three hundred and sixty-five days?

CHRISTINE. Yes, a cheerful spirit makes the days shorter.

ELIS [Smiling]. Blow upon the burn; that heals it, children are told.

CHRISTINE. Be a child then, and let me tell you that. Think of your mother, how she bears everything.

ELIS. Give me your hand; I am sinking.
[Christine reaches out her hand to him.]
Your hand trembles.--

CHRISTINE. No, not that I know of--

ELIS. You are not so strong as you seem to be--

CHRISTINE. I do not feel any weakness--

ELIS. Why can't you give me some strength then?

CHRISTINE. I have none to spare!

ELIS [Looking out of the window]. Do you see who that is coming?

[Christine goes and looks out of window, then falls upon her knees, crushed.]

CHRISTINE. This is too much!

ELIS. Our creditor, he who can take our home and all our belongings away from us. He, Lindkvist, who has come here and ensconced himself in the middle of his web like a spider, to watch the flies--

CHRISTINE. Let us run away!

ELIS [At window]. No--no running away! Now when you grow weak I become strong--now he is coming up the street--and he casts his evil eye over toward his prey.

CHRISTINE. Stand aside, at least.

ELIS [Straightening himself]. No, he amuses me. His face lights up with pleasure, as tho' he could already see his victims in his trap. Come on! He is counting the steps up to our gate and he sees by the open door that we are at home.--But he has met some one and stands there talking.--He is talking about us, for he's pointing over here.

CHRISTINE. If only he doesn't meet mother, so that she can't make

him harsh with her angry words!--Oh, prevent that, Elis!

ELIS. Now he is shaking his stick, as if he were protesting that in our case mercy shall not pass for justice. He buttons his overcoat to show that at least he hasn't yet had the very clothes on his back taken from him. I can tell by his mouth what he is saying. What shall I reply to him? "My dear sir, you are in the right. Take everything, it belongs to you."

CHRISTINE. There is nothing else you could say.

ELIS. Now he laughs. But it is a kind laugh, not a malicious one! Perhaps he isn't so mean after all, but he'll see that he gets every penny coming to him, nevertheless! If he would only come, and stop his blessed prating.--Now, he is swinging his stick again.-- They always carry a stick, men who have debtors, and they always wear galoshes that say "Swish, swish," like lashes through the air-- [Christine puts hand against his heart.] Do you hear how my heart beats? It sounds like an ocean steamer. Now, thank Heaven, he's taking his leave with his squeaking galoshes! "Swish, swish," like a switch! Oh, but he wears a watch charm! So he can't be utterly poverty-stricken. They always have watch charms of carnelian, like dried flesh that they have cut out of their neighbors' backs. Listen to the galoshes. "Angry, angrier, angriest, swish, swish." Watch him! The old wolf! He sees me! He sees me! He bows! He smiles! He waves his hand--and [Sinks down near the writing table, weeping] he has gone by!

CHRISTINE. Praise be to God!

ELIS [Rising]. He has gone by--but he will come again. Let's go out in the sunshine.

CHRISTINE. And what about dining with Peter?

ELIS. As I am not invited, I cannot go. For that matter, what should I do there in the festivity! Just go and meet an unfaithful friend! I should only make a pretense of not being hurt by what he has done.

CHRISTINE. I'm glad, for then you will stay here with us.

ELIS. I'd rather do that, as you know. Shall we go?

CHRISTINE. Yes, this way.

[Goes towards left. As Elis passes Benjamin he puts his hand on Benjamin's shoulder.]

ELIS. Courage, boy!

[Benjamin hides his face in his hands.]

ELIS [Takes the birch rod from the dining table and puts it behind the looking-glass]. It wasn't an olive branch that the dove was carrying--it was a birch rod!

[They go out.]

[Eleonora comes in from back: she is sixteen, with braids down her back. She carries an Easter lily in a pot. Without seeing, or pretending not to see Benjamin, she puts the lily on the dining table and then goes and gets a water-bottle from the sideboard and waters the plant. Then seats herself near dining table right opposite Benjamin and contemplates him and then imitates his gestures and movements.]

[Benjamin stares at her in astonishment.]

ELEONORA [Points to lily]. Do you know what that is?

BENJAMIN [Boyishly, simply]. It's an Easter lily--that's easy enough; but who are you?

ELEONORA [Sweetly, sadly]. Well, who are you?

BENJAMIN. My name is Benjamin and I live here with Mrs. Heyst.

ELEONORA. Indeed! My name is Eleonora and I am the daughter of Mrs. Heyst.

BENJAMIN. How strange no one ever said anything about you!

ELEONORA. People do not talk about the dead!

BENJAMIN. The dead?

ELEONORA. I am dead civilly, for I have committed a very bad deed.

BENJAMIN. You!

ELEONORA. Yes, I spent a trust fund; but that wasn't so much, for it was money as ill-gotten as ill-spent--but that my poor old father should be blamed for it and be put in prison--you see, that can never be forgiven.

BENJAMIN. So strangely and beautifully you talk! And I never thought of that--that my inheritance might have been ill-gotten.

ELEONORA. One should not confine human beings, one should free them.

BENJAMIN. You have freed me from a delusion.

ELEONORA. You are a charity pupil?

BENJAMIN. Yes, it is my sorrowful lot to have to live upon the charity of this poor family.

ELEONORA. You must not use harsh words or I shall have to go away. I am so sensitive I cannot bear anything harsh. Nevertheless it's my fault that you are unhappy.

BENJAMIN. Your father's fault, you mean.

ELEONORA. That is the same thing, for he and I are one and the same person. [Pause.] Why are you so dejected?

BENJAMIN. I have had a disappointment!

ELEONORA. Should you be downcast on that account? "Rod and punishment bring wisdom, and he who hates punishment must perish--" What disappointment have you had?

BENJAMIN. I have failed in my Latin examination--altho' I was so sure I would pass.

ELEONORA. Just so; you were so sure, so sure, that you would even have laid a wager that you would get thro' it.

BENJAMIN. I did have a bet on it.

ELEONORA. I thought so. You see that's why it happened--because you were so sure.

BENJAMIN. Do you think that was the reason?

ELEONORA. Certainly it was! Pride goeth before a fall!

BENJAMIN. I shall remember that the next time.

ELEONORA. That is a worthy thought; those who are pleasing to God are of humble spirit.

BENJAMIN. Do you read the Bible?

ELEONORA. Yes, I read it!

BENJAMIN. I mean, are you a believer?

ELEONORA. Yes, I mean that I am. So much so that if you should speak wickedly about God, my benefactor, I would not sit at the same table with you.

BENJAMIN. How old are you?

ELEONORA. For me there is no time nor space. I am everywhere and whensoever. I am in my father's prison, and in my brother's school-room. I am in my mother's kitchen and in my sister's little shop far away. When all goes well with my sister and she makes good sales I feel her gladness, and when things go badly with her I suffer--but I suffer most when she does anything dishonest. Benjamin, your name is Benjamin, because you are the youngest of my friends; yes, all human beings are my friends, and if you will let me adopt you, I will suffer for you too.

BENJAMIN. I don't quite understand the words you use, but I think I catch the meaning of your thoughts. And I will do whatever you want me to.

ELEONORA. Will you begin then by ceasing to judge human beings, even when they are convicted criminals--

BENJAMIN. Yes, but I want to have a reason for it. I have read philosophy, you see.

ELEONORA. Oh, have you! Then you shall help me explain this from a

great philosopher. He said, "Those that hate the righteous, they shall be sinners."

BENJAMIN. Of course all logic answers that in the same way, that one can be doomed to commit crime--.

ELEONORA. And that the crime itself is a punishment.

BENJAMIN. That is pretty deep! One would think that that was Kant or Schopenhauer.

ELEONORA. I don't know them.

BENJAMIN. What book did you read that in?

ELEONORA. In the Holy Scripture.

BENJAMIN. Truly? Are there such things in it?

ELEONORA. What an ignorant, neglected child you are! If I could bring you up!

BENJAMIN. Little you!

ELEONORA. I don't believe there is anything very wicked about you. You seem to me more good than bad.

BENJAMIN. Thank you.

ELEONORA [Rising]. You must never thank me for anything. Remember that.--Oh, now my father is suffering. They are unkind to him. [Stands as tho' listening.] Do you hear what the telephone wires are humming?--those are harsh words, which the soft red copper does not like--when people slander each other thro' the telephone the copper moans and laments--[Severely] and every word is written in the book--and at the end of time comes the reckoning!

BENJAMIN. You are so severe!

ELEONORA. I? Not !! How should I dare to be? I, I? [She goes to the stove, opens it, and takes out several torn pieces of white letter paper and puts them on the dining table.]

BENJAMIN. [Rises and looks at the pieces of paper which Eleonora is putting together.]

ELEONORA [To herself]. That people should be so thoughtless as to leave their secrets in the stove! Whenever I come I always go right to the stove! But I don't do it maliciously--I wouldn't do anything like that, for then I should feel remorse.

BENJAMIN. It is from Peter, who writes and asks Christine to meet him. I have been expecting that for a long time.

ELEONORA [Putting her hands over the bits of paper]. Oh, you, what have you been expecting? Tell me, you evil minded being, who believes nothing but bad of people. This letter could not mean anything wrong to me, for I know Christine, who is going to be my sister sometime. And that meeting will avert misfortune for brother

Elis. Will you promise me to say nothing of this, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN. I don't exactly think I should like to talk much about it!

ELEONORA. People who are suspicious become so unjust. They think they are so wise, and they are so foolish!--But what is all this to me!

BENJAMIN. Yes, why _are_ you so inquisitive?

ELEONORA. You see that is my illness--that I must know all about everything or else I become restless--

BENJAMIN. Know about everything?

ELEONORA. That is a fault which I cannot overcome. And I even know what the birds say.

BENJAMIN. But they can't talk?

ELEONORA. Haven't you heard birds that people have taught to talk?

BENJAMIN. Oh, yes--that people have taught to talk!

ELEONORA. That is to say they can talk. And we find those that have taught themselves or are like that instinctively--they sit and listen without our knowing it and then they repeat these things afterward. Just now as I was coming along I heard two magpies in the walnut tree, who sat there gossiping.

BENJAMIN. How funny you are! But what were they saying?

ELEONORA. "Peter," said one of them, "Judas," said the other. "The same thing," said the first one. "Fie, Fie, Fie," said the other. But have you noticed that the nightingales only sing in the grounds of the deaf and dumb asylum here?

BENJAMIN. Yes, they do say that's so. Why do they do that?

ELEONORA. Because those who have hearing do not hear what the nightingales say: but the deaf and dumb hear it!

BENJAMIN. Tell me some more stories.

ELEONORA. Yes, if you are good.

BENJAMIN. How good?

ELEONORA. If you will never be exacting about words with me, never say that I said so and so, or so and so. Shall I tell you more about birds? There is a wicked bird that is called a rat-hawk: as you may know by its name, it lives on rats. But as it is an evil bird it has hard work to catch the rats. Because it can say only one single word, and that a noise such as a cat makes when it says "miau." Now when the rat-hawk says "miau" the rats run and hide themselves--for the rat-hawk doesn't understand what it is saying so it is often without food, for it is a wicked bird! Would you like to hear more? Or shall I tell you something about flowers? Do

you know when I was ill I was made to take henbane, which is a drug that has the power to make one's eyes magnify like a microscope. Well, now I see farther than others, and I can see the stars in the daylight!

BENJAMIN. But the stars are not up there then, are they?

ELEONORA. How funny you are! The stars are always up there--and now, as I sit facing the west, I can see Cassiopea like a W up there in the middle of the Milky Way. Can you see it?

BENJAMIN. No, indeed I can't see it.

ELEONORA. Let me call your attention to this, that some can see that which others do not do not be too sure of your own eyes therefore! Now I'm going to tell you about that flower standing on the table: it is an Easter lily whose home is in Switzerland; it has a calyx which drinks sunlight, therefore it is yellow and can soothe pain. When I was passing a florist's, just now, I saw it and wanted to make a present of it to brother Elis. When I tried to go into the shop I found the door was locked--because it is confirmation day. But I must have the flower--I took out my keys and tried them--can you believe it, my door key worked! I went in. You know that flowers speak silently! Every fragrance uttered a multitude of thoughts, and those thoughts reached me: and with my magnifying eyes I looked into the flowers' workrooms, which no one else has ever seen. And they told me about their sorrows which the careless florist causes them--mark you, I did not say cruel, for he is only thoughtless. Then I put a coin on the desk with my card, took the Easter lily and went out.

BENJAMIN. How thoughtless! Think if the flower is missed and the money isn't found?

ELEONORA. That's true! You are right.

BENJAMIN. A coin can easily disappear, and if they find your card it's all up with you.

ELEONORA. But no one would believe that I wanted to take anything.

BENJAMIN [Looking hard at her]. They wouldn't?

ELEONORA [Rising]. Ah! I know what you mean! Like father, like child! How thoughtless I have been! Ah! That which must be, must be! [Sits.] It must be so.

BENJAMIN. Couldn't we say that--

ELEONORA. Hush! Let's talk of other things! Poor Elis! Poor all of us! But it is Easter, and we ought to suffer. Isn't there a recital tomorrow? [Benjamin nods his head.] And they give Haydn's Seven Words on the Cross! "Mother, behold thy son!" [She weeps with face in hands.]

BENJAMIN. What kind of illness have you had?

ELEONORA. An illness that is not mortal unless it is God's will! I expected good, and evil came; I expected light, and darkness came.

How was your childhood, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN. Oh, I don't know. Kind of tiresome! And yours?

ELEONORA. I never had any. I was born old. I knew everything when I was born, and when I was taught anything it was only like remembering. I knew human weaknesses when I was four years old, and that's why people were horrid to me.

BENJAMIN. Do you know, I, too, seem to have thought everything that you say.

ELEONORA. I am sure you have. What made you think that the coin I left at the florist's would be lost?

BENJAMIN. Because what shouldn't happen always does happen.

ELEONORA. Have you noticed that too? Hush, some one is coming. [Looks toward back.] I hear--Elis, oh, how good! My only friend on earth! [She darkens.] But--he didn't expect me! And he will not be glad to see me--no, he won't be, I am sure he won't be. Benjamin, have a pleasant face and be cheerful when my poor brother comes in. I am going in here while you prepare him for my being here. But no matter what he says, don't you say anything that would hurt him, for that would make me unhappy. Do you promise? [Benjamin nods.] Give me your hand.

BENJAMIN [Reaches out his hand].

ELEONORA [Kisses him on the top of his head]. So! Now you are my little brother. God bless and keep you! [Goes toward the left and as she passes Elis' overcoat she pats it lovingly on the sleeve.] Poor Elis! [She goes out L.]

ELIS [In from back, troubled].

MRS. HEYST [In from kitchen].

ELIS. Oh, so there you are, mother.

MRS. HEYST. Was it you? I thought I heard a strange voice!

ELIS. I have some news. I met our lawyer in the street.

MRS. HEYST. Well?

ELIS. The case is going to the superior court--and to gain time I've got to read all the minutes of the case.

MRS. HEYST. Well, that won't take you long.

ELIS [Pointing to the legal documents on the writing desk]. Oh, I thought that was all over with, and now I must weary myself by going through all that torture again--all the accusations, all the testimony and all the evidence, all over again!

MRS. HEYST. Yes, but the superior court will free him!

ELIS. No, mother, he has confessed.

MRS. HEYST. But there may be some mistakes in the trial which count. When I talked with our lawyer he said there might be some technical errors--I think that's what he called them.

ELIS. He said that to console you.

MRS. HEYST [Coldly]. Are you going out to dinner?

ELIS. No.

MRS. HEYST. Oh, so you've changed your mind again.

ELIS. Yes.

MRS. HEYST. Oh, you are so changeable!

ELIS. I know it, but I am tossed about like a chip in a high sea.

MRS. HEYST. I surely thought I heard a strange voice that I half recognized. But I must have been mistaken.[Points to Elis' overcoat.] That coat ought not to hang there, I said. [Goes out R.]

ELIS [Goes to L. Sees the lily on table]. Where did that plant come from?

BENJAMIN. There was a young lady here with it.

ELIS. Young lady! What's that? Who was it?

BENJAMIN. It was--

ELIS. Was it--my sister?

BENJAMIN. Yes.

ELIS [Sinks down near table]. [Pause.]
Did you talk with her?

BENJAMIN. Yes, indeed!

ELIS. Oh, God, is there more to be endured? Was she angry with me?

BENJAMIN. She? No, she was so sweet, so gentle.

ELIS. How wonderful! Did she talk about me? Was she very vexed with me?

BENJAMIN. No, on the contrary she said you were her best, her only friend on earth.

ELIS. What a strange change!

BENJAMIN. And when she went, she patted your coat on the sleeve--

ELIS. Went? Where has she gone?

BENJAMIN [Pointing to the window door]. In there!

ELIS. She is in there then?

BENJAMIN. Yes.

ELIS. You look so happy and cheerful, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN. She talked so beautifully to me.

ELIS. What did she talk about?

BENJAMIN. She told me some of her own stories--and a lot about religion.

ELIS [Rising]. Which made you happy?

BENJAMIN. Yes, indeed!

ELIS. Poor Eleonora, who is so unfortunate herself and yet can make others happy! [Goes to door left, hesitating.] God help us!

ACT II.

[Good Friday evening. The music before and thro' the act, Haydn's Sieben Worte. Largo No. 1. "Pater dimitte illis." Same scene. Curtains are drawn, lighted up by electric light in the street. The hanging lamp is lighted. On dining table a small lamp, also lighted. There is a glimmer from the lighted stove. Elis and Christine are sitting at the sewing table. Benjamin and Eleonora are seated at dining table reading, opposite each other, with the small lamp between them--Eleonora has a shawl over her shoulders.]

[They are all dressed in black. The papers that Elis brought in the First Act are on the writing table in a disorderly condition, the Easter lily stands on sewing table. An old clock stands on the dining table. Now and then one sees shadows of people passing by in the street.]

[The cathedral organ is heard faintly.--The following scene must be played softly.]

ELIS [Softly to Christine]. Yes--it's Good Friday--Long Friday they call it in some countries. Ah--yes--it is long. And the snow has softened the noises in the street like straw spread before the house of the dying. Not a sound to be heard--[Music louder] only the cathedral organ-- [A long pause.]

CHRISTINE. Mother must have gone to vespers.

ELIS. Yes.--She never goes to high mass any more. The cold glances people give her hurt her too much.

CHRISTINE. It's queer about these people they sort of demand that we should keep out of the way, and they even see fit to--

ELIS. Yes--and perhaps they are right.--

CHRISTINE. On account of the wrong-doing of one, the whole family is excommunicated--

ELIS. Yes--that is the way things go.

[Eleonora pushes the lamp over to Benjamin that he may see better.]

ELIS [Noticing them]. Look at them!

CHRISTINE. Isn't it beautiful? How well they get along together.

ELIS. How fortunate it is that Eleonora has grown so calm and contented. Oh, that it might only last!

CHRISTINE. Why shouldn't it last?

ELIS. Because--happiness doesn't last very long usually.

CHRISTINE. Elis!

ELIS. Oh, I am afraid of everything today.

[Benjamin moves the lamp slowly over to Eleonora's side.]

CHRISTINE. Look at them! [Pause.]

ELIS. Have you noticed the change in Benjamin? His fierce defiance has given way to quiet submissiveness.

CHRISTINE. It's her doing. Her whole being seems to give out sweetness.

ELIS. She has brought with her the spirit of peace, that goes about unseen and exhales tranquillity. Even mother seems to be affected by her. When she saw her a calmness seemed to come over her that could never have been expected.

CHRISTINE. Do you think that she is really recovered now?

ELIS. Yes. If it weren't for this over-sensitiveness. Now she is reading the story of the crucifixion and some of the time she is weeping.

CHRISTINE. We used to read it at school, I remember, on Wednesdays, when we fasted.

ELIS. Don't talk so loud--she will hear you.

CHRISTINE. Not now--she is so far away.

ELIS. Have you noticed the quiet dignity that has come into Benjamin's face?

CHRISTINE. That's on account of suffering. Too much happiness makes everything commonplace.

ELIS. Don't you think it may be--love? Don't you think that those little--

CHRISTINE. Sh--sh--don't touch the wings of the butterfly--or it will fly away.

ELIS. They must be looking at each other, and only pretending to read. I haven't heard them turn over any pages.

CHRISTINE. Hush!

[Eleonora rises, goes on tip-toe to Benjamin and puts her shawl over his shoulders. Benjamin protests mildly but gives in to her wish--Eleonora returns to her seat and pushes the lamp over to Benjamin's side.]

CHRISTINE. She doesn't know how well she wishes. Poor little Eleonora--[Pause.]

ELIS [Rises]. Now I must return to the law papers.

CHRISTINE. Do you think anything will be gained by going over all that again?

ELIS. Only one thing. That is to keep up mother's hope. I only pretend to read--but a word now and then pricks me like a thorn in the eye. The evidence of the witnesses, the summaries--father's confession--like this: "the accused admitted with tears"--tears--tears--so many tears--and these papers with their official seals that remind one of false notes and prison bars--the ribbons and red seals--they are like the five wounds of Christus--and public opinion that will never change--the endless anguish--this is indeed fit work for Good Friday! Yesterday the sun was shining--and in our fancy we went out to the country,--Christine, think if we should have to stay here all summer.

CHRISTINE. We would save a great deal of money--but it would be disappointing.

ELIS. I couldn't live thro' it--I have stayed here three summers--and it's like a dead city to me. The rats come out from the cellars and alleys--while the cats are out spending the summer in the country. And all the old women that couldn't get away sit peeking through the blinds gossiping about their neighbors--"See, he has his winter suit on"--and sneer at the worn-down heels of the passers-by. And from the poor quarters wretched beings drag themselves out of their holes, cripples, creatures without noses or ears, the wicked and unfortunate--filling the parks and squares as if they had conquered the city--there where the well-dressed children just played, while their parents or maids looked on and encouraged them in their frolics. I remember last summer when I--

CHRISTINE. Oh, Elis--Elis--look forward--look forward.

ELIS. Is it brighter there?

CHRISTINE. Let us hope so.

ELIS [Sits at writing table]. If it would only stop snowing out there, so we could go out for a walk!

CHRISTINE. Dearest Elis, yesterday you wanted night to come, so that we might be shielded from the hateful glances of the people. You said, "Darkness is so kind," and that it's like drawing the

blanket over one's head.

ELIS. That only goes to prove that my misery is as great one way as the other. [Reading papers.] The worst part of the suit is all the questioning about father's way of living.--It says here that we gave big dinner parties.--One witness practically says that my father was a drunkard--no, that's too much. No. No, I won't--as tho'--I must go thro' it, I suppose.--Aren't you cold?

CHRISTINE. No. But it isn't warm here. Isn't Lina home?

ELIS. She's gone to church.

CHRISTINE. Oh, yes, that's so. But mother will soon be home.

ELIS. I am always afraid to have her come home. She has had so many experiences of people's evil and malice.

CHRISTINE. There is a strain of unusual melancholy in your family, Elis.

ELIS. And that's why none but the melancholy have ever been our friends. Light-hearted people have always avoided us--shrunk from us.

CHRISTINE. There is mother, going in the kitchen door.

ELIS. Don't be impatient with her, Christine.

CHRISTINE. Impatient! Ah, no, it's worse for her than any of us. But I can't quite understand her.

ELIS. She is always trying to hide our disgrace. That's why she seems so peculiar. Poor mother!

MRS. HEYST [Enters, dressed in black, psalm book in hand, and handkerchief]. Good evening, children.

ALL. Good evening, mother dear.

MRS. HEYST. Why are you all in black, as tho' you were in mourning? [Pause.]

ELIS. Is it still snowing, mother?

MRS. HEYST. It's sleeting now. [Goes over to Eleonora.] Aren't you cold out here? [Eleonora shakes her head.] Well, my little one, you are reading and studying, I see. [To Benjamin.] And you too? Well, you won't overdo. [Eleonora takes her mother's hand and carries it to her lips.]

MRS. HEYST [Hiding her feelings]. So, my child--so--so--

ELIS. Have you been to vespers, mother?

MRS. HEYST. Yes, but they had some visiting pastor, and I didn't like him, he mumbled his words so.

ELIS. Did you meet any one you knew?

MRS. HEYST. Yes, more is the pity.

ELIS. Then I know whom--

MRS. HEYST. Yes, Lindkvist. And he came up to me and--

ELIS. Oh, how terrible, how terrible--

MRS. HEYST. He asked how things were going--and imagine my fright--he asked if he might come and see us this evening.

ELIS. On a holy day?

MRS. HEYST. I was speechless--and he, I am afraid, mistook my silence for consent. So he may be here any moment.

ELIS [Rises]. Here?

MRS. HEYST. He said he wished to leave a paper of some sort which was important.

ELIS. A warrant! He wants to take our furniture.

MRS. HEYST. But he looked so queer. I didn't quite understand him.

ELIS. Well, then--let him come--he has right and might on his side, and we must bow down to him.--We must receive him when he comes.

MRS. HEYST. If I could only escape seeing him!

ELIS. Yes, you must stay in the house.

MRS. HEYST. But the furniture he cannot take. How could we live if he took the things away? One cannot live in empty rooms.

ELIS. The foxes have holes, the birds nests there are many homeless ones who sleep under the sky.

MRS. HEYST. That's the way rogues should be made to live--not honest people.

ELIS [By the writing table]. I have been reading it all over again.

MRS. HEYST. Did you find any faults? What was it the lawyer called them? Oh--technical errors?

ELIS. No. I don't think there are any.

MRS. HEYST. But I met our lawyer just now and he said there must be some technical errors a challengeable witness, an unproven opinion--or a contradiction, he said. You should read carefully.

ELIS. Yes, mother dear, but it's somewhat painful reading all this--

MRS. HEYST. But now listen to this. I met our lawyer, as I said, and he told me also that a burglary had been committed here in town yesterday, and in broad daylight.

[Eleonora and Benjamin start and listen.]

ELIS. A burglary! Where?

MRS. HEYST. At the florist's on Cloister street. But the whole thing is very peculiar. It's supposed to have happened this way: the florist closed his place and went to church where his son--or was it his daughter?--was being confirmed. When he returned, about three o'clock--or perhaps it was four, but that doesn't matter--well, he found the door of the store wide open and his flowers were gone--at least a whole lot of them. [They all look at her questioningly.] Well, anyway, a yellow tulip was gone, which he missed first.

ELIS. A yellow tulip? Had it been a lily I would have been afraid.

MRS. HEYST. No, it was a tulip, that's sure, well, they say the police are on the track of the thief anyway.

[Eleonora has risen as if to speak, but is quieted by Benjamin, who goes to her and whispers something to her.]

MRS. HEYST. Think of it, on Holy Thursday! When young people are being confirmed at the church, to break into a place and steal! Oh, the town must be full of rogues, and that's why they throw innocent people into prison!

ELIS. Do you know who it is they suspect?

MRS. HEYST. No. But it was a peculiar thief. He didn't take any money from the cash drawer.

CHRISTINE. Oh, that this day were ended!

MRS. HEYST. And if Lina would only return--[Pause.] Oh, I heard something about the dinner Peter gave last night. What do you think--the Governor himself was there.

ELIS. The Governor at Peter's--? I'm astonished. Peter has always avowed himself against the Governor's party.

MRS. HEYST. He must have changed then.

ELIS. He wasn't called Peter for nothing, it seems.

MRS. HEYST. But what have you got against the Governor?

ELIS. He is against progress--he wants to restrict the pleasures of the people, he tries to dictate to the boards of education--I've felt his interference in my school.

MRS. HEYST. I can't understand all that--but it doesn't matter. Anyhow the Governor made a speech, they say, and Peter thanked him heartily.

ELIS. And with great feeling, I can fancy, and denied his master, saying, "I know not this man," and again the cock crew. Wasn't the Governor's name Pontius and his surname Pilate?

[Eleonora starts as if to speak but Benjamin quiets her again.]

MRS. HEYST. You mustn't be so bitter, Elis. Human beings are weak and we must come in contact with them.

ELIS. Hush,--I hear Lindkvist coming.

MRS. HEYST. What? Can you hear him in all this snow?

ELIS. Yes, I can hear his stick striking the pavement--and his squeaking galoshes. Please, mother, go into the house.

MRS. HEYST. No. I shall stay and tell him a few things.

ELIS. Dear, dear mother, you must go in or it will be too painful.

MRS. HEYST [Rising, with scorn]. Oh, may the day that I was born be forgotten--

CHRISTINE. Don't blaspheme, mother.

MRS. HEYST. Should not the lost have this trouble rather than that the worthy should suffer torture?

ELIS. Mother!

MRS. HEYST. Oh, God! Why have you forsaken me and my children?
[Goes out L.]

ELIS. Oh--do you know that mother's indifference and submission torture me more than her wrath?

CHRISTINE. Her submission is only pretended or make-believe. There was something of the roar of the lioness in her last words. Did you notice how big she became?

ELIS [At window, listening]. He has stopped--perhaps he thinks the time ill-chosen.--But that can't be it--he who could write such terrible letters,--and always on that blue paper! I can't look at a blue paper now without trembling.

CHRISTINE. What will you tell him--what do you mean to propose?

ELIS. I don't know. I have lost all my reasoning powers.--Shall I fall on my knees to him and beg mercy--can you hear him? I can't hear anything but the blood beating in my ears.

CHRISTINE. Let us face the worst calmly--he will take everything and--

ELIS. Then the landlord will come and ask for some other security, which I cannot furnish.--He will demand security, when the furniture is no longer here to assure him of the rent.

CHRISTINE [Peeking through the curtain]. He isn't there now.--He is gone!

ELIS [Rushing to window]. He's gone?--Do you know, now that I think of Lindkvist, I see him as a good-natured giant who only scares

children. How could I have come to think that?

CHRISTINE. Oh, thoughts come and go--

ELIS. How lucky that I was not at that dinner yesterday--I would surely have made a speech against the Governor, and so I would have spoiled everything for us.

CHRISTINE. Do you realize that now?

ELIS. Thanks for your advice, Christine. You knew your Peter.

CHRISTINE. My Peter?--

ELIS. I meant--my Peter.--But--look--he is here again, woe unto us!

[One can see the shadow of Lindkvist on the curtain, who is nearing slowly. The shadow gets larger and larger, until it is giant-like. They stand in fear and tremble.]

ELIS. Look,--the giant--the giant that wants to swallow us.

CHRISTINE. Now it's time to laugh, as when reading fairy-tales.

ELIS. I can't laugh any more.

[The shadow slowly disappears.]

CHRISTINE. Look at the stick and you must laugh. [Pause.]

ELIS [Brightly]. He's gone--he's gone--yes, I can breathe again now, as he won't return until tomorrow. Oh, the relief!

CHRISTINE. Yes, and tomorrow the sun will be shining,--the snow will be gone and the birds will be singing--eve of the resurrection!

ELIS. Yes, tell me more like that--I can see everything you say.

CHRISTINE. If you could but see what is in my heart, if you could see my thoughts and my good intentions, my inmost prayer, Elis--Elis--when I now ask--[Hesitates.]

ELIS. What? Tell me.

CHRISTINE. When I beg you now to--

ELIS [Alarmed]. Tell me--

CHRISTINE. It's a test. Will you look at it as a test?

ELIS. A test? Well then.

CHRISTINE. Let me--do let me--No, I daren't. [Eleonora listens.]

ELIS. Why do you torture me?

CHRISTINE. I'll regret it, I know. So be it! Elis, let me go to the recital this evening.

ELIS. What recital?

CHRISTINE. Haydn's "Seven Words on the Cross," at the cathedral.

ELIS. With whom?

CHRISTINE. Alice.

ELIS. And?

CHRISTINE. Peter!

ELIS. With Peter?

CHRISTINE. See, now you frown. I regret telling you, but it's too late now.

ELIS. Yes. It is somewhat late now, but explain--

CHRISTINE. I prepared you, told you that I couldn't explain, and that's the reason I begged your boundless faith.

ELIS [Mildly]. Go. I trust you. But I suffer to know that you seek the company of a traitor.

CHRISTINE. I realize that, but this is to be a test.

ELIS. Which I cannot endure.

CHRISTINE. You must.

ELIS. I would like to, but I cannot. But you must go nevertheless.

CHRISTINE. Your hand!

ELIS [Giving his hand]. There-- [The telephone rings; Elis goes to it.] Hello!--No answer. Hello!--No answer but my own voice.--Who is it?--That's strange. I only hear the echo of my own words.

CHRISTINE. That might be possible.

ELIS [Still at 'phone]. Hello!--But this is terrible! [Hangs up receiver.] Go now, Christine, and without any explanations, without conditions. I shall endure the test.

CHRISTINE. Yes, do that and all will be well.

ELIS. I will.--[Christine starts R.] Why do you go that way?

CHRISTINE. My coat and hat are in there. Good bye for now. [Goes out R.]

ELIS. Good-bye, my friend, [Pause] forever. [He rushes out L.]

ELEONORA. God help us, what have I done now? The police are after the guilty one, and if I am discovered--then--[With a shriek] they'll send me back there. [Pause.] But I mustn't be selfish. Oh, poor mother and poor Elis!

BENJAMIN [Childishly]. Eleonora, you must tell them that I did it.

ELEONORA. Could you make another's guilt yours, you child?

BENJAMIN. That's easy, when one knows he's innocent.

ELEONORA. One should never deceive.

BENJAMIN. No, but let me telephone to the florist and explain to him.

ELEONORA. No, I did wrong, and I must take the consequences. I have awakened their fear of burglars, and I must be punished.

BENJAMIN. But what if the police come in?

ELEONORA. That would be dreadful--but what must be, must be. Oh, that this day were ended! [Takes clock from table and puts the hands forward.] Dear old clock, go a little faster--tick, tick, tick. [The clock strikes eight.] Now it's eight. [Moves hands again.] Tick, tick, tick. [Business with clock.] Now it's nine--ten--eleven--twelve--o'clock. Now it is Easter eve, and the sun will soon be rising, and then we'll color the Easter eggs.

BENJAMIN. You can make time fly, can't you?

ELEONORA. Think, Benjamin, of all the anemones and violets that had to stay in the snow all winter and freeze there in the darkness.

BENJAMIN. How they must suffer!

ELEONORA. Night is hardest for them--they are afraid of the darkness, but they can't run away, and so they must stay there thro' the long winter night, waiting for spring, which is their dawn. Everybody and everything must suffer, but the flowers suffer most. Yes, and the song-birds, they have returned; where are they to sleep tonight?

BENJAMIN [Childishly]. In the hollow trees.

ELEONORA. There aren't hollow trees enough to hold them all. I have only noticed two hollow trees in the orchard, and that's where the owls live, and they kill the song birds. [Elis is heard playing the piano inside. Eleonora and Benjamin listen for a few moments.] Poor Elis, who thinks that Christine has gone from him, but I know that she will return.

BENJAMIN. Why don't you tell him, if you know?

ELEONORA. Because Elis must suffer; every one should suffer on Good Friday, that they may remember Christ's suffering on the cross. [The sound of a policeman's whistle is heard off in the distance.]

ELEONORA [Starts up]. What was that?

BENJAMIN. Don't you know?

ELEONORA. No.

BENJAMIN. It's the police.

ELEONORA. Ah, yes, that's the way it sounded when they came to take father away--and then I became ill.--And now they are coming to take me.

BENJAMIN [Rushing to the door and guarding it]. No, no, they must not take you. I shall defend you, Eleonora.

ELEONORA. That's very beautiful, Benjamin, but you mustn't do that.

BENJAMIN [Looking thro' curtain]. There are two of them. [Eleonora tries to push Benjamin aside. He protests mildly.] No, no, not you, then--I don't want to live any longer.

ELEONORA. Benjamin, go and sit down in that chair, child, sit down.

[Benjamin obeys much against his will.]

ELEONORA [Peeps thro' curtain]. Oh! [Laughs.] It's only some boys. Oh, we doubters! Do you think that God would be angry, when I didn't do any harm, only acted thoughtlessly? It served me right--I shouldn't have doubted.

BENJAMIN. But tomorrow that man will come and take the things.

ELEONORA. Let him come. Then we'll go out under the sky, away from everything--away from all the old home things that father gathered for us, that I have seen since I was a child. Yes, one should never own anything that ties one down to earth. Out, out on the stony ways to wander with bruised feet, for that road leads upward. That's why it's the hard road.

BENJAMIN. Now you are so serious again!

ELEONORA. We must be today. But do you know what will be hardest to part with? This dear old clock. We had it when I was born and it has measured out all my hours and days. [She takes the clock from table.] Listen, it's like a heart beating,--just like a heart.--They say it stopped the very hour that grandfather died. We had it as long ago as that. Good-bye, little timekeeper, perhaps you'll stop again soon. [Putting clock on table again.] Do you know, it used to gain time when we had misfortune in the house, as tho' it wished to hasten thro' the hours of evil, for our sake of course. But when we were happy it used to slow down so that we might enjoy longer. That's what this good clock did. But we have another, a very bad one--and now it has to hang in the kitchen. It couldn't bear music, and as soon as Elis would play on the piano it would start to strike. Oh, you needn't smile; we all noticed it, not I alone, and that's why it has to stay out in the kitchen now, because it wouldn't behave. But Lina doesn't like it either, because it won't be quiet at night, and she cannot time eggs by it. When she does, the eggs are sure to be hard-boiled--so Lina says. But now you are laughing again.

BENJAMIN. Yes, how can I help--

ELEONORA. You are a good boy, Benjamin, but you must be serious. Keep the birch rod in mind; it's hanging behind the mirror.

BENJAMIN. But you say such funny things, that I _must_ smile. And why should we be weeping always?

ELEONORA. Shall we not weep in the vale of tears?

BENJAMIN. H'm.

ELEONORA. You would rather laugh all the time, and that's why trouble comes your way. But it's when you are serious that I like you best. Remember that. [Pause.]

BENJAMIN. Do you think that we will get out of this trouble, Eleonora?

ELEONORA. Yes, most of it will take care of itself, when Good Friday is over, but not all of it--today the birch rod, tomorrow the Easter eggs--today snow--tomorrow thaw. Today death--tomorrow life--resurrection.

BENJAMIN. How wise you are!

ELEONORA. Even now I can feel that it is clearing outside--and that the snow is melting--I can smell the melting snow. And tomorrow violets will sprout against walls facing south. The clouds are lifting--I feel it--I can breathe easier. Oh, I know so well when the heavens are clear and blue.--Go and pull the shades up, Benjamin. I want God to see us.

[Benjamin rises and obeys. Moonlight streams into the room.]

ELEONORA. The moon is full--Easter moon! But you know it is really the sun shining, although the moon gives us the light--the light!

ACT III.

[Easter eve. The music before and thro' this act, Haydn's Sieben Worte. No. 5. Adagio. Scene the same. The curtains are up. The landscape outside is in a grey light. There is a fire in the stove. The doors are closed. Eleonora is seated near the stove with a bunch of crocuses in her hand. Benjamin enters from R.]

ELEONORA. Where have you been all this long time, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN. It hasn't been very long.

ELEONORA. I have wanted you so!

BENJAMIN. Have you? And where have you been, Eleonora?

ELEONORA. I went down street and bought these crocuses, and now I must warm them. They were frozen. Poor dears!

BENJAMIN. Yes. It's so chilly today, there isn't a bit of sunshine.

ELEONORA. The sun is behind the fog. There aren't any clouds, just sea-fog. I can smell the salt in the air.--

BENJAMIN. Did you see any birds out there?

ELEONORA. Yes, flocks of them, starting north for their summer home. And not one will fall to the earth unless God wills it.

ELIS [Enters from R.]. Has the evening paper come yet?

ELEONORA. No, Elis.

[Elis starts to cross the room--when he is at C. Christine enters from L.]

CHRISTINE [Without noticing Elis]. Has the paper come?

ELEONORA. No, it hasn't come.

[Christine crosses room and goes out R., passing Elis, who goes out too. Neither looks at the other.]

ELEONORA. Huh! how cold and chilly! Hate has entered this house. As long as love reigned one could bear it, but now,--huh! how cold!

BENJAMIN. Why were they so anxious about the evening paper?

ELEONORA. Don't you know? There will be something in it about--

BENJAMIN. What?

ELEONORA. Everything! The theft, the police, and more too--

MRS. HEYST [From R.]. Has the paper come?

ELEONORA. No, mother dear.

MRS. HEYST [As she goes out]. Let me know first when it does come.

ELEONORA. The paper, the paper! Oh, that the print shop would burn down or that the editor were taken ill, or something--No, no. I mustn't say that. I mustn't. Do you know, Benjamin, I was with my father last night.

BENJAMIN [Surprised]. Last night?

ELEONORA. Yes, while I slept. And then I was with my sister. She told me that she sold thirty dollars' worth of things day before yesterday, and that she had earned five dollars for herself.

BENJAMIN. That wasn't much.

ELEONORA. It's a great deal, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN [Slyly]. And who else did you meet in your sleep?

ELEONORA. Why do you ask that? You mustn't try to tease me, Benjamin. You would like to know my secrets--but you mustn't.

BENJAMIN. Well, then you can't know my secrets either.

ELEONORA [Listening]. Can you hear the telephone wires humming? Now

the paper is out, and now they are 'phoning each other, "Have you read about it?"--"Yes, indeed I have!"--"Isn't it terrible?"

BENJAMIN. What is terrible?

ELEONORA. Everything. Life is terrible, but we must be satisfied. Think of Elis and Christine. They love each other, and yet hate has come between them, so that when they walk thro' the room the thermometer drops several degrees. She went to the recital last night and today they won't speak to each other. And why,--why?

BENJAMIN. Because your brother is jealous.

ELEONORA. Don't mention that word. What do we know about it, for that matter,--more than that it is disease and punishment? One must never touch evil, for then one will surely catch it. Look at Elis, haven't you noticed how changed he is since he started to read those papers?

BENJAMIN. About the law-suit?

ELEONORA. Yes. It is as if evil had crept into his soul; it is reflected in his face and eyes. Christine feels this, and not to be contaminated by it, she encases herself in an armor of ice. And those papers--if I could only burn them! They are filled with meanness, falsehood and revenge. Therefore, my child, you must keep away from evil and unclean things, both with your lips and heart.

BENJAMIN. How you understand everything!

ELEONORA. Do you know something else that I feel? If Elis and Christine get to know that I bought the Easter lily in that unusual way, they will--

BENJAMIN. What will they do?

ELEONORA. They will send me back--_there_. Where I just came from. Where the sun never shines. Where the walls are dark and bare. Where one hears only crying and lamentation. Where I sat away a year of my life.

BENJAMIN. Where do you mean?

ELEONORA. There, where one is tortured more than in prison. Where the unfortunate dwell, where unquiet reigns, where despair never sleeps, and whence no one returns.

BENJAMIN. Worse than prison? How could that be?

ELEONORA. In prison one is tried and heard, but there in _that_ place no one listens. Poor little Easter lily that was the cause of all this! I meant so well, and it turned but so badly!

BENJAMIN. But don't you go to the florist and tell him how it happened. You would be like a lamb led to the sacrifice.

ELEONORA. It doesn't complain when it knows that it _must_ be sacrificed, and doesn't even seek to get away. What else can _I_ do?

ELIS [Enters from R., a letter in his hand]. Hasn't the paper come yet?

ELEONORA. No, brother dear.

ELIS [Turns toward kitchen door]. Lina must go out and get an evening paper.

[Mrs. Heyst enters from R., Eleonora and Benjamin show fear.]

ELIS [To Eleonora and Benjamin]. Go out for a few moments. I want to speak to mother.

[Eleonora and Benjamin go out.]

MRS. HEYST. Have you received word from the asylum?

ELIS. Yes.

MRS. HEYST. What do they want?

ELIS. They demand Eleonora's return.--

MRS. HEYST. I won't allow it. She's my own child--

ELIS. --And my sister.

MRS. HEYST. What do you mean to do?

ELIS. I don't know. I can't think any more.

MRS. HEYST. But I can. Eleonora, the child of sorrow, has found happiness, tho' it's not of this world. Her unrest has turned to peace, which she sheds upon others. Sane or not, she has found wisdom. She knows how to carry life's burdens better than I do, better than all of us. Am I sane, for that matter? Was I sane when I thought my husband innocent altho' I knew that he was convicted by the evidence, and that he confessed? And you, Elis--are you sane when you can't see that Christine loves you, when you believe that she hates you?

ELIS. How can I be in the wrong? Didn't she go out with my false friend last night?

MRS. HEYST. She did, but you knew about it. Why did she go? Well, you should be able to divine the reason.

ELIS. No. I cannot.

MRS. HEYST. You will not. Very well, then you must take the consequences.

[The kitchen door opens a little and Lina's hand is seen with evening paper. Mrs. Heyst takes paper and gives it to Elis.]

ELIS. That was the last misfortune. With Christine. I could carry the other burdens, but now the last support has been pulled away and I am falling.

MRS. HEYST. Well, fall then--but land right side up, and then you can start again. Any news worth reading in the paper?

ELIS. I don't know. I am afraid to look at it today.

MRS. HEYST. Give it to me, then. I am not--

ELIS. No, wait a moment--

MRS. HEYST. What are you afraid of?

ELIS. The worst of all.

MRS. HEYST. The worst has happened so many times that it doesn't matter. Oh, my boy, if you knew my life--if you could have seen your father go down to destruction, as I did, and I couldn't warn all those to whom he brought misfortune! I felt like his accomplice when he went down--for, in a way, I knew of the crime, and if the judge hadn't been a man of great feeling, who realized my position as a wife and mother, I too would have been punished.

ELIS. What was really the cause of father's fall? I have never been able to understand.

MRS. HEYST. Pride--pride. Which brings us all down.

ELIS. But why should the innocent suffer for _his_ wrong-doing?

MRS. HEYST. Hush. No more. [She takes paper and reads. Elis walks up and down, worried and nervous.] Ah, what's this? Didn't I say that there was a yellow tulip among the things stolen at the florist's?

ELIS. Yes, I remember.

MRS. HEYST. But here it says that it was an Easter lily.

ELIS [With fear]. An Easter lily? Does it say that?

[They look at each other. A long pause.]

MRS. HEYST [Sinking into a chair]. It's Eleonora. Oh, God keep us!

ELIS. It wasn't the end then.

MRS. HEYST. Prison or the asylum--

ELIS. But it's impossible. She couldn't have done this. Impossible!

MRS. HEYST. And now the family name must be dragged in disgrace again.

ELIS. Do they suspect her?

MRS. HEYST. They say that suspicion leads in a certain direction--it's pretty plain where.

ELIS. I must talk to her.

MRS. HEYST. Don't speak harshly to her. I can stand no more. Oh, she is lost--regained but lost again! Speak kindly to her. [She goes out R.]

ELIS [At door L.]. Oh,--[Calls] Eleonora, come out here. I want to speak to you.

ELEONORA [Coming in, her hair down]. I was just putting up my hair.

ELIS. Never mind that. Tell me, little sister, where did you get that flower?

ELEONORA. I took it from--

ELIS. Oh, God!

[Eleonora hangs her head, crushed, with her arms over her breast.]

ELEONORA. But I--I left money there, beside the--

ELIS. You left the money? You paid for it, then?

ELEONORA. Yes and no. It's provoking, but I haven't done anything wrong--I meant well--do you believe me?

ELIS. I believe you, little sister--but the newspapers don't know that you are innocent.

ELEONORA. Dear me! Then I must suffer for this also. [She bends her head forward; her hair falls over her face.] What do they want to do with me now? Let them do what they will!

BENJAMIN [Enters from L., beside himself]. No, no. You mustn't touch her. She hasn't done any harm--I know it--as it was I--I--I-- [He breaks down] who did it.

ELEONORA. Don't believe what he is saying--it was I.

ELIS. What shall I believe--whom shall I believe?

BENJAMIN. Me!

ELEONORA. Me, me!

BENJAMIN. Let me go to the police--

ELIS. Hush, Benjamin, hush.

ELEONORA. No, I'll go--I'll go.

ELIS. Quiet, children. Here comes mother.

[Mrs. Heyst enters R., takes Eleonora in her arms and kisses her tenderly.]

MRS. HEYST [Stirred]. My dear, dear child! You have come back to your mother and you shall stay with me.

ELEONORA. You kiss me, mother? You haven't kissed me in years. Why

just now?

MRS. HEYST. Why, because now--because the florist is out there and asks pardon for making all this fuss.--The money has been found, and your card and--

[Eleonora springs into the arms of Elis and kisses him. Then she goes to Benjamin and kisses him quickly on the forehead.]

ELEONORA [To Benjamin]. You good child, who wanted to suffer for my sake! Why did you do it?

BENJAMIN. Because--I--I--like--you so much, Eleonora.

MRS. HEYST. Well, my children, put on some things now and go out into the orchard. It's clearing up.

ELEONORA. Oh, it's clearing--and soon the sun will be shining!

[She takes Benjamin's hand and they both go out L.]

ELIS. Mother, can't we throw the rod into the fire soon?

MRS. HEYST. Not yet. There is still something--

ELIS. Is it--Lindkvist?

MRS. HEYST. Yes. He is out there. But he looks so queer and bent on talking to you. Too bad he talks so much and always about himself.

ELIS. Let him come. Now that I have seen a ray of sunlight, I am not afraid to meet the giant. Let him come.

MRS. HEYST. But don't irritate him. Providence has placed our destiny in his hands--and he who humbleth himself shall be exalted and he who exalteth himself--well--you know what happens to him.

ELIS. I know. Listen--the galoshes--squeak, squeak, squeak! Does he mean to come in with them on? And why not? They are his own carpets.

[There are three raps on door R.]

MRS. HEYST. Elis, think of us all.

ELIS. I do, mother.

[Mrs. Heyst opens door R. Lindkvist enters, Mrs. Heyst goes out. He is an elderly man of serious, almost tragic aspect, with black bushy eyebrows. Round, black-rimmed eye-glasses. He carries a stout stick in his hand, he is dressed in black, with, fur coat, and over his shoes wears galoshes that squeak.]

LINDKVIST [After looking at Elis]. My name is Lindkvist.

ELIS [Reserved]. Heyst is my name--won't you sit down?

[Lindkvist sits in chair R. of sewing table--looks at Elis with a stern eye.]

ELIS [After a pause]. How can I be of service?

LINDKVIST [With good humor]. H'm. Last evening I had the honor to notify you of my intended visit, but thinking it over, and realizing that it was a holy evening, I refrained from coming then, as my visit is not of a social nature--and I don't talk business on a holy evening.

ELIS. We are very grateful.

LINDKVIST. We are not grateful. [Pause.] However, day before yesterday I made a casual call on the Governor.--[Stops to notice how Elis takes it.] Do you know the Governor?

ELIS [Carelessly.]. I haven't that honor.

LINDKVIST. Then you shall have that honor.--We spoke about your father.

ELIS. No doubt.

LINDKVIST [Takes out a paper and lays it down on table]. And I got this paper from him, from the Governor.

ELIS. I've been expecting this for some time, but before you go any further allow me to ask you a question.

LINDKVIST. Go ahead.

ELIS. Why don't you put that warrant in the hands of the executors, so we could escape this long and painful business?

LINDKVIST. So--so--my young man.

ELIS. Young or not, I ask no mercy, only justice.

LINDKVIST. Well, well, no mercy--no mercy--eh? Do you see this paper that I put here on the corner of the table?

ELIS. Yes.

LINDKVIST. Ah,--now I put it back again. [Puts it back in his pocket.] Well, then, justice, only justice. Listen, my young friend. Once upon a time, I was deprived of my money and in a disagreeable manner. When I wrote you a courteous letter, asking how much time you needed, you saw fit to answer with an uncourteous note--and treated me as if I were a usurer, a plunderer of widows and children--altho' I was really the one plundered, and you belonged to the plunderer's party. But as I was more judicious, I contented myself with answering your note courteously, but to the point. You know my blue paper, eh? I see you do. And I can put the seals on, too, if I choose--but I don't, not yet. [Looks around the room.]

ELIS. As you please; the things are at your disposal.

LINDKVIST. I wasn't looking at the furniture. I looked to see if your mother was in the room. She no doubt loves justice as much as

you do?

ELIS. Let us hope so.

LINDKVIST. Good. Do you know that if justice, which you value so highly, had its course, your mother, who only knew of your father's criminal act, could have been imprisoned?

ELIS. No! No!

LINDKVIST. Yes! Yes! And it isn't too late even now.

ELIS [Rises]. My mother--

[Lindkvist takes out another paper, also blue, and places it on the table.]

LINDKVIST. See--now I put down another paper, and it's blue, too, but as yet--no seals.

ELIS. Oh, God,--my mother! "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

LINDKVIST. Yes, my young lover of justice, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." That's the way it goes. Now, if I should put this question to myself: "You, Joseph Lindkvist, born in poverty and brought up in denial and work, have you the right at your age to deprive yourself and children--mark you, _your children_--of the support, which you thro' industry, economy and denial,--mark you, _denial_,--saved penny by penny? What will you do, Joseph Lindkvist, if you want justice? You plundered no one--but if you resent being plundered, then you cannot stay in this town, as no one would speak to the terrible creature who wants his own hard-earned money returned." So you see there exists a grace which is finer than justice, and that is mercy.

ELIS. You are right. Take everything. It belongs to you.

LINDKVIST. I have right on my side, but I dare not use it.

ELIS. I shall think of your children and not complain.

LINDKVIST. Good. Then I'll put the blue paper away again.--And now we'll go a step further.

ELIS. Pardon me, but do they intend to accuse my mother?

LINDKVIST. We will go a step further first--I take it that you don't know the Governor personally?

ELIS. No, and I don't want to know him.

[Lindkvist takes out paper again and shakes it warningly at Elis.]

LINDKVIST. Don't, don't say that. The Governor and your father were friends in their youth, and he wishes to see and know you. You see. "As ye sow," and so forth, in everything--everything. Won't you go to see him?

ELIS. No.

LINDKVIST. But the Governor

ELIS. Let us change the subject.

LINDKVIST. You must speak courteously to me, as I am defenseless. You have public opinion on your side, and I have only justice on mine. What have you got against the Governor? He doesn't like this and that, what some people would call pleasure.--But that belongs to his eccentricities, and we needn't exactly respect his eccentricities, but we can overlook them and hold to fundamental facts as human beings; and in the crises of human life we must swallow each other skin and hair, as the saying goes. But will you go to see the Governor?

ELIS. Never.

LINDKVIST. Are you that sort of creature?

ELIS. Yes.

LINDKVIST [Rises, walks about waving his blue paper.] That's too bad--too bad.--Well, then I must start from the other end.--A revengeful person has threatened to take legal steps against your mother.

ELIS. What do you say?

LINDKVIST. Go to see the Governor.

ELIS. No.

LINDKVIST [Taking Elis by the shoulders]. Then you are the most miserable being that I have ever met in all my experience.--And now I shall go and see your mother.

ELIS. No, no. Don't go to her.

LINDKVIST. Will you go to see the Governor then?

ELIS. Yes.

LINDKVIST. Tell me again and louder.

ELIS. Yes.

LINDKVIST [Giving Elis blue paper]. Then that matter is over with--and there is an end to that paper, and an end to your troubles on that score.

[Elis takes paper without looking at it.]

LINDKVIST. Then we have number two--that was number one. Let us sit down. [They sit as before.] You see--if we only meet each other half-way, it will be so much shorter.--Number two--that is my claim on your home.--No illusions--as I cannot and will not give away my family's common property, I must have what is owing me, to the last penny.

ELIS. I understand--

LINDKVIST. So. You understand that?

ELIS. I didn't mean to offend you.

LINDKVIST. No. I gather as much. [He lifts his glasses and looks at Elis.] The wolf, the angry wolf--eh? The rod--the rod--the giant of the mountains, who does not eat children--only scares them--eh? And I shall scare you--yes, out of your senses. Every piece of furniture must come out and I have the warrant in my pocket. And if there isn't enough--you'll go to jail, where neither sun nor stars shine.--Yes, I can eat children and widows when I am irritated.--And as for public opinion? Bah! I'll let that go hang. I have only to move to another city. [Elis is silent.] You had a friend who is called Peter. He is a debater and was your student in oratory. But you wanted him to be a sort of prophet.--Well, he was faithless. He crowed twice, didn't he? [Elis is silent.]

LINDKVIST. Human nature is as uncertain as things and thought. Peter was faithless--I don't deny it, and I won't defend him--in that. But the heart of mankind is fathomless, and there is always some gold to be found. Peter was a faithless friend, but a friend nevertheless.

ELIS. A faithless--

LINDKVIST. Faithless--yes, but a friend, as I said. This faithless friend has unwittingly done you a great service.

ELIS [Sneeringly]. Even that.

LINDKVIST. [Moving nearer to Elis]. As ye sow, so shall ye reap!

ELIS. It's not true of evil.

LINDKVIST. It's true of everything in life. Do you believe me?

ELIS. I must, or else you will torture the life out of me.

LINDKVIST. Not your life--but pride and malice I will squeeze out of you.

ELIS. But to continue--

LINDKVIST. Peter has done you a service, I said.

ELIS. I want no services from him--

LINDKVIST. Are you there again? Then listen! Thro' your friend Peter's intervention the Governor was able to protect your mother. Therefore you must write and thank Peter. Promise me that.

ELIS. Any other man in the world--but not him.

LINDKVIST [Nearer to Elis]. Then I must squeeze you again. How much money have you in the bank?

ELIS. What has that got to do with it? I cannot be responsible for

my father's debts!

LINDKVIST. Oh, indeed? Weren't you among those who ate, and drank, when my children's money was spent in this house? Answer.

ELIS. I can't deny it.

LINDKVIST. Well, then, you must sit down immediately and write a check for the balance. You know the sum.

ELIS [As in a dream]. Even that?

LINDKVIST. Yes, even that.--Be good enough to make it out now.

[Elis rises and takes out check-book and pen.]

LINDKVIST. Make it on yourself or an order--

ELIS. Even then it won't be enough.

LINDKVIST. Then you must go out and borrow the rest. Every penny must be paid.

ELIS [Handing check to Lindkvist]. There--everything I have.--That is my summer and my, bride. I haven't anything else to give you.

LINDKVIST. Then you must go out and borrow, as I said.

ELIS. I can't do it.

LINDKVIST. Then you must get security.

ELIS. No one would give security to a Heyst.

LINDKVIST. So. Then I'll propose an alternative. Thank Peter, or you will have to come up with the whole sum.

ELIS. I won't have anything to do with Peter.

LINDKVIST. Then you are the most miserable creature that I have ever known. You can by a simple courtesy save your mother's dwelling and your fiancée's happiness, and you won't do it. There must be some motive that you won't come out with. Why do you hate Peter?

ELIS. Put me to death--but don't torture me any longer.

LINDKVIST. Are you jealous of him?

[Elis shrugs his shoulders.]

LINDKVIST. So--that's the way things stand. [Rises and walks up and down.] Did you read the evening paper?

ELIS. Yes, more is the pity!

LINDKVIST. All of it?

ELIS. No, not all.

LINDKVIST. No? Then you didn't read of Peter's engagement?

ELIS. No. That I did not know about.

LINDKVIST. And to whom do you think?

ELIS. To whom?

LINDKVIST. Why, he is engaged to Miss Alice, and it was made known at a certain recital, where your fiancée helped spread the glad news.

ELIS. Why should it have been such a secret?

LINDKVIST. Haven't two young people the right to keep their hearts' secrets from you?

ELIS. And on account of their happiness I had to suffer this agony!

LINDKVIST. Yes, just as others have suffered for your happiness-- your mother, your father, your fiancée, your sister, your friends. Sit down and I'll tell you a little story.

[Elis sits, against his will, through this scene and the following. It is clearing outside.]

LINDKVIST. It's about forty years since I came to this town, as a boy, you understand--alone, unknown, without even one acquaintance, to seek a position. All I owned was one silver dollar. The night that I arrived was a dark, rainy one. As I didn't know of any cheap hotel, I asked the passers-by about one, but no one stopped to answer. Took me for a beggar, most likely. When I was at the height of my despair, a young man came up and asked me why I was crying--evidently I was crying.--I told him my need, and he turned from his course and took me to a hotel, and comforted me with friendly words. As I entered the hotel the glass door of a store next door was thrown open and hit my elbow and was smashed to pieces. The furious owner of the store grabbed me and insisted that I should pay for it, or else he would call the police. Can you imagine my despair? The kindly-intentioned unknown man, who was a witness of the affair, protested, and went to the trouble of calling the police himself, explained, and saved me from a night in the street. This man was your father! So you see, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." And for your father's sake, I have foregone what is owed me. Therefore take this paper and keep your check. [Rises.] And as you find it hard to say thanks, I'll go immediately, and especially as I find it painful to be thanked. [Goes to door back.] Go to your mother as soon as your feet can carry you and relieve her of her worries. [Elis starts to Lindkvist to thank him, but Lindkvist makes a gesture toward R.] Go--

[Elis hastens out R. The center door opens and Eleonora and Benjamin enter. On seeing Lindkvist, she shows extreme fear.]

LINDKVIST. Well, little ones, step in and have no fear. Do you know who I am? [In a blustering voice.] I am the giant of the mountains,--muh, muh, muh!--and yet I am not dangerous. Come here, Eleonora. [She goes to him and he takes her head in his hand and

looks into her eyes.] You have your father's kind eyes,--he was a good man--but he was weak. [Kissing her forehead.] There.

ELEONORA. You speak well of my father? Can it be any one wishes him well?

LINDKVIST. I can--ask your brother Elis.

ELEONORA. Then you don't want to harm us?

LINDKVIST. No, my dear child.

ELEONORA. Well, help us then.

LINDKVIST. Child, I can't help your father in his sentence. I can't help Benjamin in his Latin. But everything else is helped already. Life doesn't give everything, and nothing is given for nothing. Therefore you must help me,--will you?

ELEONORA. Poor me, what can I do?

LINDKVIST. What is the date today?

ELEONORA. Why, it's the sixteenth.

LINDKVIST. Good. Before the twentieth you must, have your brother Elis make a call on the Governor, and you must get him to write a letter to Peter.

ELEONORA. Is that all?

LINDKVIST. Oh, you dear child! But if he neglects these things the giant will come again and say muh, muh!

ELEONORA. Why should the giant come and scare children?

LINDKVIST. So that the children will be good.

ELEONORA. That's true. The giant is right. [She kisses Lindkvist's coat sleeve.] Thanks, dear giant.

LINDKVIST. You should say _Mr._ Giant, I should think.

ELEONORA. Oh, no. That's not your real name--

LINDKVIST [Laughing]. Good-bye, children. Now you can throw the rod in the fire.

ELEONORA. No, we must keep it. Children are so forgetful.

LINDKVIST. How well you know children, little one! [He goes out.]

ELEONORA. We are going to the country, Benjamin. Within two months! Oh, if the time would only pass quickly. [She takes calendar and tears the pages off one by one.] April, May, June, and the sun is shining on them all. Now you must thank God, who helped us to the country.

BENJAMIN [Bashfully]. Can't I say my thanks in silence?

ELEONORA. Yes, you can say it in silence, for now the clouds are gone, and it can be heard up there.

[Christine has entered from L. and stopped. Elis and Mrs. Heyst from R. Christine and Elis start to meet each other with loving smiles. Before they meet--]

CURTAIN.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, PLAYS: COMRADES; FACING DEATH; PARIAH; EASTER ***

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