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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PLAYS BY AUGUST STRINDBERG, THIRD SERIES ***

PLAYS

BY

AUGUST STRINDBERG

THIRD SERIES

SWANWHITE
SIMOOM
DEBIT AND CREDIT
ADVENT
THE THUNDERSTORM
AFTER THE FIRE

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

AUTHORIZED EDITION

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1921

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INTRODUCTION

The collection of plays contained in this volume is unusually representative, giving what might be called a cross-section of Strindberg's development as a dramatist from his naturalistic revolt in the middle eighties, to his final arrival at resigned mysticism and Swedenborgian symbolism.

"Swanwhite" was written in the spring of 1901, about the time when Strindberg was courting and marrying his third wife, the gifted Swedish actress Harriet Bosse. In the fall of 1902 the play appeared in book form, together with "The Crown Bride" and "The Dream Play," all of them being issued simultaneously, at Berlin, in a German translation made by Emil Schering.

Schering, who at that time was in close correspondence with Strindberg, says that the figure of *Swanwhite* had been drawn with direct reference to Miss Bosse, who had first attracted the attention of Strindberg by her spirited interpretation of *Biskra* in "Simoom." And Schering adds that it was Strindberg's bride who had a little previously introduced him to the work of Maeterlinck, thereby furnishing one more of the factors determining the play.

Concerning the influence exerted upon him by the Belgian playwright-philosopher, Strindberg himself wrote in a pamphlet named "Open Letters to the Intimate Theatre" (Stockholm, 1909):

"I had long had in mind skimming the cream of our most beautiful folk-ballads in order to turn them into a picture for the stage. Then Maeterlinck came across my path, and under the influence of his puppet-plays, which are not meant for the regular stage, I wrote my Swedish scenic spectacle, 'Swanwhite.' It is impossible either to steal or to borrow from Maeterlinck. It is even difficult to become his pupil, for there are no free passes that give entrance to his world of beauty. But one may be urged by his example into searching one's own dross-heaps for gold—and it is in that sense I acknowledge my debt to the master.

"Pushed ahead by the *impression* made on me by Maeterlinck, and borrowing his divining-rod for my purposes, I turned to such sources [*i.e.*, of Swedish folk-lore] as the works of Geijer, Afzelius, and Dybeck. There I found a superabundance of princes and princesses. The stepmother theme I had discovered on my own hook as a *constant*—it figures in twenty-six different Swedish folk-tales. In the same place I found the resurrection theme, as, for instance, it appears in the story of *Queen Dagmar*. Then I poured it all into my separator, together with the *Maids*, the *Green Gardener* and the *Young King*, and in a short while the cream began to flow—and for that reason the story is my own. But it has also been made so by the fact that I have lived through that tale in my own fancy—a Spring in time of Winter!"

Swedish critics have been unanimous in their praise of this play. John Landquist, who has since become Strindberg's literary executor, spoke of it once as "perhaps the most beautiful and most genuine fairy tale for old or young ever written in the Swedish language." Tor Hedberg has marvelled at the charm with which *Swanwhite* herself has been endowed—"half child, half maid; knowing nothing, yet guessing all; playing with love as a while ago she was playing with her dolls." On the stage, too—in Germany as well as in Sweden—little *Swanwhite* has celebrated great triumphs. Whether that figure, and the play surrounding it, will also triumph in English-speaking countries, remains still to be seen. But if, contrary to my hopes, it should fail to do so, I want, in advance, to shift the blame from the shoulders of the author to my own. In hardly any other work by Strindberg do form and style count for so much. The play is, in its original shape, as poetical in form as in spirit—even to the extent of being strongly rhythmical in its prose, and containing many of the inversions which are so characteristic of Swedish verse.

It is not impossible to transfer these qualities into English, but my efforts to do so have had to be influenced by certain differences in the very *grain* of the two languages involved. Like all other languages, each possesses a natural basic rhythm. This rhythm varies frequently and easily in Swedish, so that you may pass from iambic to trochaic metre without giving offence to the ear—or to that subtle rhythmical susceptibility that seems to be inherent in our very pulses. But the rhythm dearest and most natural to the genius of the Swedish language seems to be the falling pulse-beat manifested in the true trochee. The swing and motion of English, on the other hand, is almost exclusively, commandingly iambic. And it was not until I made the iambic *rising* movement prevail in my translation, that I felt myself approaching the impression made on me by the original. But for that very reason—because the genius of the new medium has forced me into making the movement of my style more monotonous—it is to be feared that the rhythmical quality of that movement may seem overemphasised. Should such a criticism be advanced, I can only answer: I have tried several ways, and this is the only one that will *work*.

"Simoom" seems to have been written in 1888, in close connection with "Creditors" and "Pariah." And, like these, it shows the unmistakable influence of Edgar Allan Poe, with whose works Strindberg had become acquainted a short while before. The play was first printed in one of the three thin volumes of varied contents put out by Strindberg in 1890 and 1891 under the common title of "Pieces Printed and Unprinted." But, strange to say, it was not put on the stage (except in a few private performances) until 1902, although, from a purely theatrical viewpoint, Strindberg—master of stagecraft though he was—had rarely produced a more effective piece of work.

"Debit and Credit" belongs to the same general period as the previous play, but has in it more of Nietzsche than of Poe. Its central figure is also a sort of superman, but as such he is not taken too seriously by his creator. The play has humour, but it is of a grim kind—one seems to be hearing the gritting of teeth through the laughter. Like "Simoom," however, it should be highly effective on the stage. It was first published in 1893, with three other one-act plays, the volume being

named "Dramatic Pieces."

"Advent" was published in 1899, together with "There Are Crimes and Crimes," under the common title of "In a Higher Court." Its name refers, of course, to the ecclesiastical designation of the four weeks preceding Christmas. The subtitle, literally rendered, would be "A Mystery." But as this term has a much wider application in Swedish than in English, I have deemed it better to observe the distinction which the latter language makes between mysteries, miracle-plays, and moralities.

The play belongs to what Strindberg called his "Inferno period," during which he struggled in a state of semi-madness to rid himself of the neurasthenic depression which he regarded as a punishment brought about by his previous attitude of materialistic scepticism. It is full of Swedenborgian symbolism, which, perhaps, finds its most characteristic expression in the two scenes laid in "The Waiting Room." The name selected by Strindberg for the region where dwell the "lost" souls of men is not a mere euphemism. It signifies his conception of that place as a station on the road to redemption or annihilation.

In its entirety the play forms a Christmas sermon with a quaint blending of law and gospel. A prominent Swedish critic, Johan Mortensen, wrote: "Reading it, one almost gets the feeling that Strindberg, the dread revolutionist, has, of a sudden, changed into a nice village school-teacher, seated at his desk, with his rattan cane laid out in front of him. He has just been delivering a lesson in Christianity, and he has noticed that the attention of the children strayed and that they either failed to understand or did not care to take in the difficult matters he was dealing with. But they must be made to listen and understand. And so—with serious eyes, but with a sly smile playing around the corners of his mouth—he begins all over again, in that fairy-tale style which never grows old: 'Once upon a time!'"

In November, 1907, a young theatrical manager, August Falck, opened the Intimate Theatre at Stockholm. From the start Strindberg was closely connected with the venture, and soon the little theatre, with its tiny stage and its auditorium seating only one hundred and seventy-five persons, was turned wholly into a Strindberg stage, where some of the most interesting and daring theatrical experiments of our own day were made. With particular reference to the needs and limitations of this theatre, Strindberg wrote a series of "chamber plays," four of which were published in 1907—each one of them appearing separately in a paper-covered duodecimo volume.

The first of these plays to appear in book form—though not the first one to be staged—was "The Thunder-Storm," designated on the front cover as "Opus I." Two of the principal ideas underlying its construction were the abolition of intermissions—which, according to Strindberg, were put in chiefly for the benefit of the liquor traffic in the theatre café—and the reduction of the stage-setting to quickly inter-changeable backgrounds and a few stage-properties. Concerning the production of "The Thunder-Storm," at the Intimate Theatre, Strindberg wrote subsequently that, in their decorative effects, the first and last scenes were rather failures. But he held the lack of space wholly responsible for this failure. His conclusion was that the most difficult problem of the small theatre would be to give the illusion of distance required by a scene laid in the open—particularly in an open place surrounded or adjoined by buildings. Of the second act he wrote, on the other hand, that it proved a triumph of artistic simplification. The only furniture appearing on the stage consisted of a buffet, a piano, a dinner-table and a few chairs—that is, the pieces expressly mentioned in the text of the play. And yet the effect of the setting satisfied equally the demands of the eye and the reason.

"The Thunder-Storm" might be called a drama of old age—nay, *the* drama of man's inevitable descent through a series of resignations to the final dissolution. Its subject-matter is largely autobiographical, embodying the author's experiences in his third and last marriage, as seen in retrospect—the anticipatory conception appearing in "Swanwhite." However, justice to Miss Harriet Bosse, who was Mrs. Strindberg from 1901 to 1904, requires me to point out that echoes of the dramatist's second marriage also appear, especially in the references to the postmarital relationship.

"After the Fire" was published as "Opus II" of the chamber-plays, and staged ahead of "The Thunder-Storm." Its Swedish name is *Brända Tomten*, meaning literally "the burned-over site." This name has previously been rendered in English as "The Burned Lot" and "The Fire Ruins." Both these titles are awkward and ambiguous. The name I have now chosen embodies more closely the fundamental premise of the play.

The subject-matter is even more autobiographical than that of "The Thunder-Storm"—almost as much so as "The Bondwoman's Son." The perished home is Strindberg's own at the North Tollgate Street in Stockholm, where he spent the larger part of his childhood and youth. The old *Mason*, the *Gardener*, the *Stone-Cutter*, and other figures appearing in the play are undoubtedly lifted straight out of real life—and so are probably also the exploded family reputation and the cheap table painted to represent ebony—although one may take for granted that the process has not taken place without a proper disguising of externals.

There is one passage in this little play which I want to point out as containing one of the main keys to Strindberg's character and art. It is the passage where *The Stranger*—who, of course, is none but the author himself—says to his brother: "I have beheld life from every quarter, from every standpoint, from above and from below, but always it has seemed to me like a scene staged for my particular benefit."

SWANWHITE

(SVANEHVIT)

A FAIRY PLAY

1902

CHARACTERS

THE DUKE
THE STEPMOTHER
SWANWHITE
THE PRINCE
SIGNE }
ELSA } *Maids*
TOVA }
THE KITCHEN GARDENER
THE FISHERMAN
THE MOTHER OF SWANWHITE
THE MOTHER OF THE PRINCE
THE GAOLER
THE EQUERRY
THE BUTLER
THE FLOWER GARDENER
TWO KNIGHTS

An apartment in a mediæval stone castle. The walls and the cross-vaulted ceiling are whitewashed. In the centre of the rear wall is a triple-arched doorway leading to a balcony with a stone balustrade. There are draperies of brocade over the doorway. Beyond the balcony appear the top branches of a rose-garden, laden with white and pink roses. In the background there can be seen a white, sandy beach and the blue sea.

To the right of the main doorway is a small door which, when left open, discloses a vista of three closets, one beyond the other. The first one is stored with vessels of pewter arranged on shelves. The walls of the second closet are hung with all sorts of costly and ornate garments. The third closet contains piles and rows of apples, pears, melons, pumpkins, and so forth.

The floors of all the rooms are inlaid with alternating squares of black and red. At the centre of the apartment stands a gilded dinner-table covered with a cloth; a twig of mistletoe is suspended above the table. A clock and a vase filled with roses stand on the table, near which are placed two gilded tabourets. Two swallows' nests are visible on the rear wall above the doorway. A lion skin is spread on the floor near the foreground. At the left, well to the front, stands a white bed with a rose-coloured canopy supported by two columns at the head of the bed (and by none at the foot). The bed-clothing is pure white except for a coverlet of pale-blue silk. Across the bed is laid a night-dress of finest muslin trimmed with lace. Behind the bed stands a huge wardrobe containing linen, bathing utensils, and toilet things. A small gilded table in Roman style (with round top supported by a single column) is placed near the bed; also a lamp-stand containing a Roman lamp of gold. At the right is an ornamental chimney-piece. On the mantel stands a vase with a white lily in it.

In the left arch of the doorway, a peacock is asleep on a perch, with its back turned toward the audience.

In the right arch hangs a huge gilded cage with two white doves at rest.

As the curtain rises, the three maids are seen in the doorways of the three closets, each one half hidden by the door-post against which she leans. SIGNE, the false maid, is in the pewter-closet, ELSA in the clothes-closet, and TOVA in the fruit-closet.

The DUKE enters from the rear. After him comes the STEPMOTHER carrying in her hand a wire-lashed whip.

The stage is darkened when they enter.

STEMMOTHER. Swanwhite is not here?

DUKE. It seems so!

STEMMOTHER. So it seems, but—is it seemly? Maids!—Signe!—Signe, Elsa, Tova!

The maids enter, one after the other, and stand in front of the STEMMOTHER.

STEPMOTHER. Where is Lady Swanwhite?

SIGNE *folds her arms across her breast and makes no reply.*

STEPMOTHER. You do not know? What see you in my hand?—Answer, quick! [*Pause*] Quick! Do you hear the whistling of the falcon? It has claws of steel, as well as bill! What is it?

SIGNE. The wire-lashed whip!

STEPMOTHER. The wire-lashed whip, indeed! And now, where is Lady Swan white?

SIGNE. How can I tell what I don't know?

STEPMOTHER. It is a failing to be ignorant, but carelessness is an offence. Were you not placed as guardian of your young mistress?—Take off your neckerchief!—Down on your knees!

The DUKE turns his back on her in disgust.

STEPMOTHER. Hold out your neck! And I'll put such a necklace on it that no youth will ever kiss it after this!—Hold out your neck!—Still more!

SIGNE. For Christ's sake, mercy!

STEPMOTHER. 'Tis mercy that you are alive!

DUKE. [*Pulls out his sword and tries the edge of it, first on one of his finger-nails, and then on a hair out of his long beard*] Her head should be cut off—put in a sack—hung on a tree—

STEPMOTHER. So it should!

DUKE. We are agreed! How strange!

STEPMOTHER. It did not happen yesterday.

DUKE. And may not happen once again.

STEPMOTHER. [*To Signe, who, still on her knees, has been moving farther away*] Stop! Whither? [*She raises the whip and strikes; Signe turns aside so that the lash merely cuts the air.*]

SWANWHITE. [*Comes forward from behind the bed and falls on her knees*] Stepmother—here I am—the guilty one! She's not at fault.

STEPMOTHER. Say "mother"! You must call me "mother"!

SWANWHITE. I cannot! One mother is as much as any human being ever had.

STEPMOTHER. Your father's wife must be your mother.

SWANWHITE. My father's second wife can only be my stepmother.

STEPMOTHER. You are a stiffnecked daughter, but my whip is pliant and will make you pliant too.

[She raises the whip to strike SWANWHITE.]

DUKE. [*Raising his sword*] Take heed of the head!

STEPMOTHER. Whose head?

DUKE. Your own!

The STEPMOTHER turns pale at first, and then angry; but she controls herself and remains silent; long pause.

STEPMOTHER. [*Beaten for the moment, she changes her tone*] Then will Your Grace inform your daughter what is now in store for her?

DUKE. [*Sheathing his sword*] Rise up, my darling child, and come into my arms to calm yourself.

SWANWHITE. [*Throwing herself into the arms of the DUKE*] Father!—You're like a royal oak-tree which my arms cannot encircle. But beneath your leafage there is refuge from all threatening showers. [*She hides her head beneath his immense beard, which reaches down to his waist*] And like a bird, I will be swinging on your branches—lift me up, so I can reach the top.

The DUKE holds out his arm.

SWANWHITE. [*Climbs up on his arm and perches herself on his shoulder*] Now lies the earth beneath me and the air above—now I can overlook the rosery, the snowy beach, the deep-blue sea, and all the seven kingdoms stretched beyond.

DUKE. Then you can also see the youthful king to whom your troth is promised—

SWANWHITE. No—nor have I ever seen him. Is he handsome?

DUKE. Dear heart, it will depend on your own eyes how he appears to you.

SWANWHITE. [*Rubbing her eyes*] My eyes?—They cannot see what is not beautiful.

DUKE. [*Kissing her foot*] Poor little foot, that is so black! Poor little blackamoorish foot!

The STEPMOTHER gives a sign to the maids, who resume their previous positions in the closet doors; she herself steals with panther-like movements out through the middle arch of the doorway.

SWANWHITE. [*Leaps to the floor; the DUKE places her on the table and sits down on a chair beside it; SWANWHITE looks meaningly after the STEPMOTHER*] Was it the dawn? Or did the wind turn southerly? Or has the Spring arrived?

DUKE. [*Puts his hand over her mouth*] You little chatter-box! You joy of my old age—my evening star! Now open wide your rosy ear, and close your little mouth's crimson shell. Give heed, obey, and all will then be well with you.

SWANWHITE. [*Putting her fingers in her ears*] With my eyes I hear, and with my ears I see—and now I cannot see at all, but only hear.

DUKE. My child, when still a cradled babe, your troth was plighted to the youthful King of Rigalid. You have not seen him yet, such being courtly usage. But the time to tie the sacred knot is drawing near. To teach you the deportment of a queen and courtly manners, the king has sent a prince with whom you are to study reading out of books, gaming at chess, treading the dance, and playing on the harp.

SWANWHITE. What is the prince's name?

DUKE. That, child, is something you must never ask of him or anybody else. For it is prophesied that whosoever calls him by his name shall have to love him.

SWANWHITE. Is he handsome?

DUKE. He is, because your eye sees beauty everywhere.

SWANWHITE. But is he beautiful?

DUKE. Indeed he is. And now be careful of your little heart, and don't forget that in the cradle you were made a queen.—With this, dear child, I leave you, for I have war to wage abroad.—Submit obediently to your stepmother. She's hard, but once your father loved her—and a sweet temper will find a way to hearts of stone. If, despite of promises and oaths, her malice should exceed what is permissible, then you may blow this horn [*he takes a horn of carved ivory from under his cloak*], and help will come. But do not use it till you are in danger—not until the danger is extreme.—Have you understood?

SWANWHITE. How is it to be understood?

DUKE. This way: the prince is here, is in the court already. Is it your wish to see the prince?

SWANWHITE. Is it my wish?

DUKE. Or shall I first bid you farewell?

SWANWHITE. The prince is here already?

DUKE. Already here, and I—already there—far, far away where sleeps the heron of forgetfulness, with head beneath his wing.

SWANWHITE. [*Leaping into the lap of the DUKE and burying her head in his beard*] Mustn't speak like that! Baby is ashamed!

DUKE. Baby should be spanked—who forgets her aged father for a little prince. Fie on her!

A trumpet is heard in the distance.

DUKE. [*Rises quickly, takes SWANWHITE in his arms, throws her up into the air and catches her again*] Fly, little bird, fly high above the dust, with lots of air beneath your wings!—And then, once more on solid ground!—I am called by war and glory—you, by love and youth! [*Girding on his sword*] And now hide your wonder-horn, that it may not be seen by evil eyes.

SWANWHITE. Where shall I hide it? Where?

DUKE. The bed!

SWANWHITE. [*Hiding the horn in the bed-clothing*] There! Sleep well, my little tooteroot! When it is time, I'll wake you up. And don't forget your prayers!

DUKE. And child! Do not forget what I said last: your stepmother must be obeyed.

SWANWHITE. In all?

DUKE. In all.

SWANWHITE. But not in what is contrary to cleanliness!—Two linen shifts my mother let me have each sennight; this woman gives but one! And mother gave me soap and water, which stepmother denies. Look at my little footies!

DUKE. Keep clean within, my daughter, and clean will be the outside. You know that holy men, who, for the sake of penance, deny themselves the purging waters, grow white as swans, while evil ones turn raven-black.

SWANWHITE. Then I will be as white—!

DUKE. Into my arms! And then, farewell!

SWANWHITE. [*Throwing herself into his arms*] Farewell, my great and valiant hero, my glorious father! May fortune follow you, and make you rich in years and friends and victories!

DUKE. Amen—and let your gentle prayers be my protection!

[He closes the visor of his golden helmet.

SWANWHITE. [*Jumps up and plants a kiss on the visor*] The golden gates are shut, but through the bars I still can see your kindly, watchful eyes. [*Knocking at the visor*] Let up, let up, for little Red Riding-hood. No one at home? "Well-away," said the wolf that lay in the bed!

DUKE. [*Putting her down on the floor*] Sweet flower of mine, grow fair and fragrant! If I return—well—I return! If not, then from the starry arch above my eye shall follow you, and never to my sight will you be lost, for there above all-seeing we become, even as the all-creating Lord himself.

Goes out firmly, with a gesture that bids her not to follow. SWANWHITE falls on her knees in prayer for the DUKE; all the rose-trees sway before a wind that passes with the sound of a sigh; the peacock shakes its wings and tail.

SWANWHITE. [*Rises, goes to the peacock and begins to stroke its back and tail*] Pavo, dear Pavo, what do you see and what do you hear? Is any one coming? Who is it? A little prince? Is he pretty and nice? You, with your many blue eyes, should be able to tell. [*She lifts up one of the bird's tail feathers and gazes intently at its "eye".*] Are you to keep your eyes on us, you nasty Argus? Are you to see that the little hearts of two young people don't beat too loudly?—You stupid thing—all I have to do is to close the curtain! [*She closes the curtain, which hides the bird, but not the landscape outside; then she goes to the doves*] My white doves—oh, so white, white, white—now you'll see what is whitest of all—Be silent, wind, and roses, and doves—my prince is coming!

She looks out for a moment; then she withdraws to the pewter-closet, leaving the door slightly ajar so that through the opening she can watch the PRINCE; there she remains standing, visible to the spectators but not to the PRINCE.

PRINCE. [*Enters through the middle arch of the doorway. He wears armour of steel; what shows of his clothing is black. Having carefully observed everything in the room, he sits down at the table, takes off his helmet and begins to study it. His back is turned toward the door behind which SWANWHITE is hiding*] If anybody be here, let him answer! [*Silence*] There is somebody here, for I can feel the warmth of a young body come billowing toward me like a southern wind. I can hear a breath—it carries the fragrance of roses—and, gentle though it be, it makes the plume on my helmet move. [*He puts the helmet to his ear*] 'Tis murmuring as if it were a huge shell. It's the thoughts within my own head that are crowding each other like a swarm of bees in a hive. "Zum, zum," say the thoughts—just like bees that are buzzing around their queen—the little queen of my thoughts and of my dreams! [*He places the helmet on the table and gazes at it*] Dark and arched as the sky at night, but starless, for the black plume is spreading darkness everywhere since my mother's death—[*He turns the helmet around and gazes at it again*] But there, in the midst of the darkness, deep down—there, on the other side, I see a rift of light!—Has the sky been split open?—And there, in the rift, I see—not a star, for it would look like a diamond—but a blue sapphire, queen of the precious stones—blue as the sky of summer—set in a cloud white as milk and curved as the dove's egg. What is it? My ring? And now another feathery cloud, black as velvet, passes by—and the sapphire is smiling—as if sapphires could smile! And there, the lightning flashed, but blue—heat-lightning mild, that brings no thunder!—What are you? Who? And where? [*He looks at the back of the helmet*] Not here! Not there! And nowhere else! [*He puts his face close to the helmet*] As I come nearer, you withdraw.

SWANWHITE steals forward on tiptoe.

PRINCE. And now there are two—two eyes—two little human eyes—I kiss you! [*He kisses the helmet.*

SWANWHITE goes up to the table and seats herself slowly opposite the PRINCE.

The PRINCE rises, bows, with his hand to his heart, and gazes steadily at SWANWHITE.

SWANWHITE. Are you the little prince?

PRINCE. The faithful servant of the king, and yours!

SWANWHITE. What message does the young king send his bride?

PRINCE. This is his word to Lady Swanwhite—whom lovingly he greets—that by the thought of coming happiness the long torment of waiting will be shortened.

SWANWHITE. [*Who has been looking at the PRINCE as if to study him*] Why not be seated, Prince?

PRINCE. If seated when you sit, then I should have to kneel when you stand up.

SWANWHITE. Speak to me of the king! How does he look?

PRINCE. How does he look? [*Putting one of his hands up to his eyes*] I can no longer see him—how strange!

SWANWHITE. What is his name?

PRINCE. He's gone—invisible—

SWANWHITE. And is he tall?

PRINCE. [*Fixing his glance on SWANWHITE*] Wait!—I see him now!—Taller than you!

SWANWHITE. And beautiful?

PRINCE. Not in comparison with you!

SWANWHITE. Speak of the king, and not of me!

PRINCE. I do speak of the king!

SWANWHITE. Is his complexion light or dark?

PRINCE. If he were dark, on seeing you he would turn light at once.

SWANWHITE. There's more of flattery than wit in that! His eyes are blue?

PRINCE. [*Glancing at his helmet*] I think I have to look?

SWANWHITE. [*Holding out her hand between them*] Oh, you—you!

PRINCE. You with *t h* makes youth!

SWANWHITE. Are you to teach me how to spell?

PRINCE. The young king is tall and blond and blue-eyed, with broad shoulders and hair like a new-grown forest—

SWANWHITE. Why do you carry a black plume?

PRINCE. His lips are red as the ripe currant, his cheeks are white, and the lion's cub needn't be ashamed of his teeth.

SWANWHITE. Why is your hair wet?

PRINCE. His mind knows no fear, and no evil deed ever made his heart quake with remorse.

SWANWHITE. Why is your hand trembling?

PRINCE. We were to speak of the young king and not of me!

SWANWHITE. So, you, you are to teach me?

PRINCE. It is my task to teach you how to love the young king whose throne you are to share.

SWANWHITE. How did you cross the sea?

PRINCE. In my bark and with my sail.

SWANWHITE. And the wind so high?

PRINCE. Without wind there is no sailing.

SWANWHITE. Little boy—how wise you are!—Will you play with me?

PRINCE. What I must do, I will.

SWANWHITE. And now I'll show you what I have in my chest. [*She goes to the chest and kneels down beside it; then she takes out several dolls, a rattle, and a hobby-horse*] Here's the doll. It's my child—the child of sorrow that can never keep its face clean. In my own arms I have carried her to the lavender, and there I have washed her with white sand—but it only made her worse. I have spanked her—but nothing helped. Now I have figured out what's worst of all!

PRINCE. And what is that?

SWANWHITE. [*After a glance around the room*] I'll give her a stepmother!

PRINCE. But how's that to be? She should have a mother first.

SWANWHITE. I am her mother. And if I marry twice, I shall become a stepmother.

PRINCE. Oh, how you talk! That's not the way!

SWANWHITE. And you shall be her stepfather.

PRINCE. Oh, no!

SWANWHITE. You must be very kind to her, although she cannot wash her face.—Here, take her—let me see if you have learned to carry children right.

The PRINCE receives the doll unwillingly.

SWANWHITE. You haven't learned yet, but you will! Now take the rattle, too, and play with her.

The PRINCE receives the rattle.

SWANWHITE. That's something you don't understand, I see. [*She takes the doll and the rattle away from him and throws them back into the chest; then she takes out the hobby-horse*] Here is my steed.—It has saddle of gold and shoes of silver.—It can run forty miles in an hour, and on its back I have travelled through Sounding Forest, across Big Heath and King's Bridge, along High Road and Fearful Alley, all the way to the Lake of Tears. And there it dropped a golden shoe that fell into the lake, and then came a fish, and after came a fisherman, and so I got the golden shoe back. That's all there was to that! [*She throws the hobby-horse into the chest; instead she takes out a chess-board with red and white squares, and chess-men made of silver and gold*] If you will play with me, come here and sit upon the lion skin. [*She seats herself on the skin and begins to put up the pieces*] Sit down, won't you—the maids can't see us here!

The PRINCE sits down on the skin, looking very embarrassed.

SWANWHITE. It's like sitting in the grass—not the green grass of the meadow, but the desert grass which has been burned by the sun.—Now you must say something about me! Do you like me a little?

PRINCE. Are we to play?

SWANWHITE. To play? What care I for that?—Oh—you were to teach me something!

PRINCE. Poor me, what can I do but saddle a horse and carry arms—with which you are but poorly served.

SWANWHITE. You are so sad!

PRINCE. My mother died quite recently.

SWANWHITE. Poor little prince!—My mother, too, has gone to God in heaven, and she's an angel now. Sometimes in the nights I see her—do you also see yours?

PRINCE. No-o.

SWANWHITE. And have you got a stepmother?

PRINCE. Not yet. So little time has passed since she was laid to rest.

SWANWHITE. Don't be so sad! There's nothing but will wear away in time, you see. Now I'll give you a flag to gladden you again—Oh, no, that's right—this one I sewed for the young king. But now I'll sew another one for you!—This is the king's, with seven flaming fires—you shall have one with seven red roses on it—but first of all you have to hold this skein of yarn for me. [*She takes from the chest a skein of rose-coloured yarn and hands it to the PRINCE*] One, two, three, and now you'll see!—Your hands are trembling—that won't do!—Perhaps you want a hair of mine among the yarn?—Pull one yourself!

PRINCE. Oh, no, I couldn't—

SWANWHITE. I'll do it, then, myself. [*She pulls a hair from her head and winds it into the ball of yarn*] What is your name?

PRINCE. You shouldn't ask.

SWANWHITE. Why not?

PRINCE. The duke has told you—hasn't he?

SWANWHITE. No, he hasn't! What could happen if you told your name? Might something dreadful happen?

PRINCE. The duke has told you, I am sure.

SWANWHITE. I never heard of such a thing before—of one who couldn't tell his name!

The curtain behind which the peacock is hidden moves; a faint sound as of castanets is heard.

PRINCE. What was that?

SWANWHITE. That's Pavo—do you think he knows what we are saying?

PRINCE. It's hard to tell.

SWANWHITE. Well, what's your name?

Again the peacock makes the same kind of sound with his bill.

PRINCE. I am afraid—don't ask again!

SWANWHITE. He snaps his bill, that's all—Keep your hands still!—Did you ever hear the tale of the little princess that mustn't mention the name of the prince, lest something happen? And do you know—?

The curtain hiding the peacock is pulled aside, and the bird is seen spreading out his tail so that it looks as if all the "eyes" were staring at SWANWHITE and the PRINCE.

PRINCE. Who pulled away the curtain? Who made the bird behold us with its hundred eyes?—You mustn't ask again!

SWANWHITE. Perhaps I mustn't—Down, Pavo—there!

The curtain resumes its previous position.

PRINCE. Is this place haunted?

SWANWHITE. You mean that things will happen—just like that? Oh, well, so much is happening here—but I have grown accustomed to it. And then, besides—they call my stepmother a witch—There, now, I have pricked my finger!

PRINCE. What did you prick it with?

SWANWHITE. There was a splinter in the yarn. The sheep have been locked up all winter—and then such things will happen. Please see if you can get it out.

PRINCE. We must sit at the table then, so I can see.

[They rise and take seats at the table.]

SWANWHITE. [*Holding out one of her little fingers*] Can you see anything?

PRINCE. What do I see? Your hand is red within, and through it all the world and life itself appear in rosy colouring—

SWANWHITE. Now pull the splinter out—ooh, it hurts!

PRINCE. But I shall have to hurt you, too—and ask your pardon in advance!

SWANWHITE. Oh, help me, please!

PRINCE. [*Squeezing her little finger and pulling out the splinter with his nails*] There is the cruel little thing that dared to do you harm.

SWANWHITE. Now you must suck the blood to keep the wound from festering.

PRINCE. [*Sucking the blood from her finger*] I've drunk your blood—and so I am your foster-brother now.

SWANWHITE. My foster-brother—so you were at once—or how do you think I could have talked to you as I have done?

PRINCE. If you have talked to me like that, how did I talk to you?

SWANWHITE. Just think, he didn't notice it!—And now I have got a brother of my own, and that is you!—My little brother—take my hand!

PRINCE. [*Taking her hand*] My little sister! [*Feels her pulse beating under his thumb*] What have you there, that's ticking—one, and two, and three, and four—? *Continues to count silently after having looked at his watch.*

SWANWHITE. Yes, tell me what it is that ticks—so steady, steady, steady? It cannot be my heart, for that is here, beneath my breast—Put your hand here, and you can feel it too. [*The doves begin to stir and cool*] What is it, little white ones?

PRINCE. And sixty! Now I know what makes that ticking—it is the time! Your little finger is the second-hand that's ticking sixty times for every minute that goes by. And don't you think there is a heart within the watch?

SWANWHITE. [*Handling the watch*] We cannot reach the inside of the watch—no more than of the heart—Just feel my heart!

SIGNE. [*Enters from the pewter-closet carrying a whip, which she puts down on the table*] Her Grace commands that the children be seated at opposite sides of the table.

The PRINCE sits down at the opposite end of the table. He and SWANWHITE look at each other in silence for a while.

SWANWHITE. Now we are far apart, and yet a little nearer than before.

PRINCE. It's when we part that we come nearest to each other.

SWANWHITE. And you know that?

PRINCE. I have just learned it!

SWANWHITE. Now my instruction has begun.

PRINCE. You're teaching me!

SWANWHITE. [*Pointing to a dish of fruit*] Would you like some fruit?

PRINCE. No, eating is so ugly.

SWANWHITE. Yes, so it is.

PRINCE. Three maids are standing there—one in the pewter-closet, one among the clothes, and one among the fruits. Why are they standing there?

SWANWHITE. To watch us two—lest we do anything that is forbidden.

PRINCE. May we not go into the rosery?

SWANWHITE. The morning is the only time when I can go into the rosery, for there the bloodhounds of my stepmother are kept. They never let me reach the shore—and so I get no chance to bathe.

PRINCE. Have you then never seen the shore? And never heard the ocean wash the sand along the beach?

SWANWHITE. No—never! Here I can only hear the roaring waves in time of storm.

PRINCE. Then you have never heard the murmur made by winds that sweep across the waters?

SWANWHITE. It cannot reach me here.

PRINCE. [*Pushing his helmet across the table to SWANWHITE*] Put it to your ear and listen.

SWANWHITE. [*With the helmet at her ear*] What is that I hear?

PRINCE. The song of waves, the whispering winds

SWANWHITE. No, I hear human voices—hush! My stepmother is speaking—speaking to the steward—and mentioning my name—and that of the young king, too! She's speaking evil words. She's swearing that I never shall be queen—and vowing that—you—shall take that daughter of her own—that loathsome Lena—

PRINCE. Indeed!—And you can hear it in the helmet?

SWANWHITE. I can.

PRINCE. I didn't know of that. But my godmother gave me the helmet as a christening present.

SWANWHITE. Give me a feather, will you?

PRINCE. It is a pleasure—great as life itself.

SWANWHITE. But you must cut it so that it will write.

PRINCE. You know a thing or two!

SWANWHITE. My father taught me—

The PRINCE pulls a black feather out of the plume on his helmet; then he takes a silver-handled knife from his belt and cuts the quill.

SWANWHITE takes out an ink-well and parchment from a drawer in the table.

PRINCE. Who is Lady Lena?

SWANWHITE. You mean, what kind of person? You want her, do you?

PRINCE. Some evil things are brewing in this house—

SWANWHITE. Fear not! My father has bestowed a gift on me that will bring help in hours of need.

PRINCE. What is it called?

SWANWHITE. It is the horn Stand-By.

PRINCE. Where is it hid?

SWANWHITE. Read in my eye. I dare not let the maids discover it.

PRINCE. [*Gazing at her eyes*] I see!

SWANWHITE. [*Pushing pen, ink and parchment across the table to the PRINCE*] Write it.

The PRINCE writes.

SWANWHITE. Yes, that's the place. [*She writes again.*

PRINCE. What do you write?

SWANWHITE. Names—all pretty names that may be worn by princes!

PRINCE. Except my own!

SWANWHITE. Yours, too!

PRINCE. Leave that alone!

SWANWHITE. Here I have written twenty names—all that I know—and so your name must be there, too. [*Pushing the parchment across the table*] Read!

The PRINCE reads.

SWANWHITE. Oh, I have read it in your eye!

PRINCE. Don't utter it! I beg you in the name of God the merciful, don't utter it!

SWANWHITE. I read it in his eye!

PRINCE. But do not utter it, I beg of you!

SWANWHITE. And if I do? What then?—Can Lena tell, you think? Your bride! Your love!

PRINCE. Oh, hush, hush, hush!

SWANWHITE. [*Jumps up and begins to dance*] I know his name—the prettiest name in all the land!

The PRINCE runs up to her, catches hold of her and covers her mouth with his hand.

SWANWHITE. I'll bite your hand; I'll suck your blood; and so I'll be your sister twice—do you know what that can mean?

PRINCE. I'll have two sisters then.

SWANWHITE. [*Throwing back her head*] O-ho! O-ho! Behold, the ceiling has a hole, and I can see the sky—a tiny piece of sky, a window-pane—and there's a face behind it. Is it an angel's?—See—but see, I tell you!—It's your face!

PRINCE. The angels are not boys, but girls.

SWANWHITE. But it is you.

PRINCE. [*Looking up*] 'Tis a mirror.

SWANWHITE. Woe to us then! It is the witching mirror of my stepmother, and she has seen it all.

PRINCE. And in the mirror I can see the fireplace—there's a pumpkin hanging in it!

SWANWHITE. [*Takes from the fireplace a mottled, strangely shaped pumpkin*] What can it be? It has the look of an ear. The witch has heard us, too!—Alas, alas! [*She throws the pumpkin into the*

fireplace and runs across the floor toward the bed; suddenly she stops on one foot, holding up the other]

Oh, she has strewn the floor with needles—

[She sits down and begins to rub her foot.

The PRINCE kneels in front of SWANWHITE in order to help her.

SWANWHITE. No, you mustn't touch my foot—you mustn't!

PRINCE. Dear heart, you must take off your stocking if I am to help.

SWANWHITE. *[Sobbing]* You mustn't—mustn't see my foot!

PRINCE. But why? Why shouldn't I?

SWANWHITE. I cannot tell; I cannot tell. Go—go away from me! To-morrow I shall tell you, but I can't to-day.

PRINCE. But then your little foot will suffer—let me pull the needle out!

SWANWHITE. Go, go, go!—No, no, you mustn't try!—Oh, had my mother lived, a thing like this could not have happened!—Mother, mother, mother!

PRINCE. I cannot understand—are you afraid of me—?

SWANWHITE. Don't ask me, please—just leave me—oh!

PRINCE. What have I done?

SWANWHITE. Don't leave me, please—I didn't mean to hurt you—but I cannot tell—If I could only reach the shore—the white sand of the beach—

PRINCE. What then?

SWANWHITE. I cannot tell! I cannot tell!

[She hides her face in her hands. Once more the peacock makes a rattling sound with his bill; the doves begin to stir; the three maids enter, one after the other; a gust of wind is heard, and the tops of the rose-trees outside swing back and forth; the golden clouds that have been hanging over the sea disappear, and the blue sea itself turns dark.

SWANWHITE. Does Heaven itself intend to judge us?—Is ill-luck in the house?—Oh, that my sorrow had the power to raise my mother from her grave!

PRINCE. *[.Putting his hand on his sword]* My life for yours!

SWANWHITE. No, don't—she puts the very swords to sleep!—Oh, that my sorrow could bring back my mother! *[The swallows chirp in their nest]* What was that?

PRINCE. *[Catching sight of the nest]* A swallow's nest! I didn't notice it before.

SWANWHITE. Nor I! How did it get there? When?—But all the same it augurs good—And yet the cold sweat of fear is on my brow—and I choke—Look, how the rose itself is withering because that evil woman comes this way—for it is she who comes—

The rose on the table is closing its blossom and drooping its leaves.

PRINCE. But whence came the swallows?

SWANWHITE. They were not sent by her, I'm sure, for they are kindly birds—Now she is here!

STEPMOTHER. *[Enters from the rear with the walk of a panther; the rose on the table is completely withered]* Signe—take the horn out of the bed!

SIGNE goes up to the bed and takes the horn.

STEPMOTHER. Where are you going, Prince?

PRINCE. The day is almost done, Your Grace; the sun is setting, and my bark is longing to get home.

STEPMOTHER. The day is too far gone—the gates are shut, the dogs let loose—You know my dogs?

PRINCE. Indeed! You know my sword?

STEPMOTHER. What is the matter with your sword?

PRINCE. It bleeds at times.

STEPMOTHER. Well, well! But not with women's blood, I trust?—But listen, Prince: how would like to sleep in our Blue Room?

PRINCE. By God, it is my will to sleep at home, in my own bed—

STEPMOTHER. Is that the will of anybody else?

PRINCE. Of many more.

STEPMOTHER. How many?—More than these!—One, two, three—

As she counts, the members of the household begin to pass by in single file across the balcony; all of them look serious; some are armed; no one turns his head to look into the room; among those that pass are the BUTLER, the STEWARD, the KITCHENER, the GAOLER, the CONSTABLE, the EQUERRY.

PRINCE. I'll sleep in your Blue Room.

STEPMOTHER. That's what I thought.—So you will bid ten thousand good-nights unto your love—and so will Swanwhite, too, I think!

A swan comes flying by above the rosery; from the ceiling a poppy flower drops down on the STEPMOTHER, who falls asleep at once, as do the maids.

SWANWHITE. [*Going up to the PRINCE*] Good-night, my Prince!

PRINCE. [*Takes her hand and says in a low voice*] Good-night!—Oh, that it's granted me to sleep beneath one roof with you, my Princess—your dreams by mine shall be enfolded—and then tomorrow we shall wake for other games and other—

SWANWHITE. [*In the same tone*] You are my all on earth, you are my parent now—since she has robbed me of my puissant father's help.—Look, how she sleeps!

PRINCE. You saw the swan?

SWANWHITE. No, but I heard—it was my mother.

PRINCE. Come, fly with me!

SWANWHITE. No, that we mustn't!—Patience! We'll meet in our dreams!—But this will not be possible unless—you love me more than anybody else on earth! Oh, love me—you, you, you!

PRINCE. My king, my loyalty—

SWANWHITE. Your queen, your heart—or what am I?

PRINCE. I am a knight!

SWANWHITE. But I am not. And therefore—therefore do I take you—my Prince—

She puts her hands up to her mouth with a gesture as if she were throwing a whispered name to him.

PRINCE. Oh, woe! What have you done?

SWANWHITE. I gave myself to you through your own name—and with me, carried on *your* wings, yourself came back to you! Oh— [*Again she whispers the name.*]

PRINCE. [*With a movement of his hand as if he were catching the name in the air*] Was that a rose you threw me?

[He throws a kiss to her.

SWANWHITE. A violet you gave me—that was you—your soul! And now I drink you in—you're in my bosom, in my heart—you're mine!

PRINCE. And you are mine! Who is the rightful owner, then?

SWANWHITE. Both!

PRINCE. Both! You and I!—My rose!

SWANWHITE. My violet!

PRINCE. My rose!

SWANWHITE. My violet!

PRINCE. I *love* you!

SWANWHITE. *You love me!*

PRINCE. You *love* me!

SWANWHITE. *I love you!*

The stage grows light again. The rose on the table recovers and opens. The faces of the STEPMOTHER and the three maids are lighted up and appear beautiful, kind, and happy. The STEPMOTHER lifts up her drowsy head and, while her eyes remain closed, she seems to be watching the joy of the two young people with a sunny smile.

SWANWHITE. Look, look! The cruel one is smiling as at some memory from childhood days. See how Signe the False seems faith and hope embodied, how the ugly Tova has grown beautiful, the little Elsa tall.

PRINCE. Our love has done it.

SWANWHITE. So that is love? Blessed be it by the Lord! The Lord Omnipotent who made the world!

[She falls on her knees, weeping.

PRINCE. You weep?

SWANWHITE. Because I am so full of joy.

PRINCE. Come to my arms and you will smile.

SWANWHITE. There I should die, I think.

PRINCE. Well, smile and die!

SWANWHITE. [*Rising*] So be it then!

[*The PRINCE takes her in his arms.*]

STEPMOTHER. [*Wakes up; on seeing the PRINCE and SWANWHITE together, she strikes the table with the whip*] I must have slept!—Oho! So we have got that far!—The Blue Room did I say?—I meant the Blue Tower!—There the prince is to sleep with the Duke of Exeter's daughter!—Maids!

The maids wake up.

STEPMOTHER. Show the prince the shortest way to the Blue Tower. And should he nevertheless lose his way, you may summon the Castellan and the Gaoler, the Equerry and the Constable.

PRINCE. No need of that! Wherever leads my course—through fire or water, up above the clouds or down in the solid earth—there shall I meet my Swanwhite, for she is with me where I go. So now I go to meet her—in the tower! Can you beat that for witchcraft, witch?—Too hard, I think, for one who knows not love!

[*He goes out followed by the maids.*]

STEPMOTHER. [*To SWANWHITE*] Not many words are needed—tell your wishes—but be brief!

SWANWHITE. My foremost, highest wish is for some water with which to lave my feet.

STEPMOTHER. Cold or warm?

SWANWHITE. Warm—if I may.

STEPMOTHER. What more?

SWANWHITE. A comb to ravel out my hair.

STEPMOTHER. Silver or gold?

SWANWHITE. Are you—are you kind?

STEPMOTHER. Silver or gold?

SWANWHITE. Wood or horn will do me well enough.

STEPMOTHER. What more?

SWANWHITE. A shift that's clean.

STEPMOTHER. Linen or silk?

SWANWHITE. Just linen.

STEPMOTHER. Good! So I have heard your wishes. Now listen to mine! I wish that you may have no water, be it warm or cold! I wish that you may have no comb, of any kind, not even of wood or horn—much less of gold or silver. That's how kind I am! I wish that you may wear no linen—but get you at once into the closet there to cover up your body with that dingy sark of homespun! Such is my word!—And if you try to leave these rooms—which you had better not, as there are traps and snares around—then you are doomed—or with my whip I'll mark your pretty face so that no prince or king will ever look at you again!—Then get yourself to bed!

She strikes the table with her whip again, rises and goes out through the middle arch of the doorway; the gates, which have gilded bars, squeak and rattle as she closes and locks them.

Curtain.

The same scene as before, but the golden gates at the rear are shut. The peacock and the doves are sleeping. The golden clouds in the sky are as dull in colour as the sea itself and the land that appears in the far distance.

SWANWHITE is lying on the bed; she has on a garment of black homespun.

The doors to the three closets are open. In each doorway stands one of the maids, her eyes closed and in one of her hands a small lighted lamp of Roman pattern.

A swan is seen flying above the rosery, and trumpet-calls are heard, like those made by flocks of migrating wild swans.

The MOTHER OF SWANWHITE, all in white, appears outside the gates. Over one arm she carries the plumage of a swan and on the other one a small harp of gold. She hangs the plumage on one of the gates, which opens of its own accord and then closes in the same way behind her.

She enters the room and places the harp on the table. Then she looks around and becomes aware of SWANWHITE. At once the harp begins to play. The lamps carried by the maids go out one by one, beginning with that farthest away. Then the three doors close one by one, beginning with the innermost.

The golden clouds resume their former radiance.

The MOTHER lights one of the lamps on the stand and goes up to the bed, beside which she kneels.

The harp continues to play during the ensuing episode.

The MOTHER rises, takes SWANWHITE in her arms, and places her, still sleeping, in a huge arm-chair. Then she kneels down and pulls off SWANWHITE'S stockings. Having thrown these under the bed, she bends over her daughter's feet as if to moisten them with her tears. After a while she wipes them with a white linen cloth and covers them with kisses. Finally she puts a sandal on each foot which then appears shining white.

Then the MOTHER rises to her feet again, takes out a comb of gold, and begins to comb SWANWHITE'S hair. This finished, she carries SWANWHITE back to the bed. Beside her she places a garment of white linen which she takes out of a bag.

Having kissed SWANWHITE on the forehead, she prepares to leave. At that moment a white swan is seen to pass by outside, and one hears a trumpet-call like the one heard before. Shortly afterward the MOTHER OF THE PRINCE, also in white, enters through the gate, having first hung her swan plumage on it.

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. Well met, my sister! How long before the cock will crow?

PRINCE'S MOTHER. Not very long. The dew is rising from the roses, the corn-crake's call is heard among the grass, the morning breeze is coming from the sea.

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. Let us make haste with what we have on hand, my sister.

PRINCE'S MOTHER. You called me so that we might talk of our children.

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. Once I was walking in a green field in the land that knows no sorrow. There I met you, whom I had always known, yet had not seen before. You were lamenting your poor boy's fate, left to himself here in the vale of sorrow. You opened up your heart to me, and my own thoughts, that dwell unwillingly below, were sent in search of my deserted daughter—destined to marry the young king, who is a cruel man, and evil.

PRINCE'S MOTHER. Then I spoke, while you listened: "May worth belong to worth; may love, the powerful, prevail; and let us join these lonely hearts, in order that they may console each other!"

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. Since then heart has kissed heart and soul enfolded soul. May sorrow turn to joy, and may their youthful happiness bring cheer to all the earth!

PRINCE'S MOTHER. If it be granted by the powers on high!

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. That must be tested by the fire of suffering.

PRINCE'S MOTHER. [*Taking in her hand the helmet left behind by the PRINCE*] May sorrow turn to joy—this very day, when he has mourned his mother one whole year!

She exchanges the black feathers on the helmet for white and red ones.

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. Your hand, my sister—let the test begin!

PRINCE'S MOTHER. Here is my hand, and with it goes my son's! Now we have pledged them—

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. In decency and honour!

PRINCE'S MOTHER. I go to open up the tower. And let the young ones fold each other heart to heart.

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. In decency and honour!

PRINCE'S MOTHER. And we shall meet again in those green fields where sorrow is not known.

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. [*Pointing to SWANWHITE*] Listen! She dreams of him!—Oh foolish, cruel woman who thinks that lovers can be parted!—Now they are walking hand in hand within the land of dreams, 'neath whispering firs and singing lindens—They sport and laugh—

PRINCE'S MOTHER. Hush! Day is dawning—I can hear the robins calling, and see the stars withdrawing from the sky—Farewell, my sister!

[She goes out, taking her swan plumage with her.]

SWANWHITE'S MOTHER. Farewell!

She passes her hand over SWANWHITE as if blessing her, then she takes her plumage and leaves, closing the gate after her.

The clock on the table strikes three. The harp is silent for a moment; then it begins to play a new melody of even greater sweetness than before. SWANWHITE wakes up and looks around; listens to the harp; gets up from the bed; draws her hands through her hair; looks with pleasure at her own little feet, now spotlessly clean, and notices finally the white linen garment on the bed. She sits down at the table in the place she occupied

during the evening. She acts as if she were looking at somebody sitting opposite her at the table, where the PRINCE was seated the night before. She looks straight into his eyes, smiles a smile of recognition, and holds out one of her hands. Her lips move at times as if she were speaking, and then again she seems to be listening to an answer.

She points meaningly to the white and red feathers on the helmet, and leans forward as if whispering. Then she puts her head back and breathes deeply as if to fill her nostrils with some fragrance. Having caught something in the air with one of her hands, she kisses the hand and then pretends to throw something back across the table. She picks up the quill and caresses it as if it were a bird; then she writes and pushes the parchment across the table. Her glances seem to follow "his" pen while the reply is being written, and at last she takes back the parchment, reads it, and hides it in her bosom.

She strokes her black dress as if commenting on the sad change in her appearance. Whereupon she smiles at an inaudible answer, and finally bursts into hearty laughter.

By gestures she indicates that her hair has been combed. Then she rises, goes a little distance away from the table, and turns around with a bashful expression to hold out one of her feet. In that attitude she stays for a moment while waiting for an answer. On hearing it she becomes embarrassed and hides her foot quickly under her dress.

She goes to the chest and takes out the chess-board and the chess-men, which she places on the lions skin with a gesture of invitation. Then she lies down beside the board, arranges the men, and begins to play with an invisible partner.

The harp is silent for a moment before it starts a new melody.

The game of chess ends and SWANWHITE seems to be talking with her invisible partner. Suddenly she moves away as if he were coming too close to her. With a deprecating gesture she leaps lightly to her feet. Then she gazes long and reproachfully at him. At last she snatches up the white garment and hides herself behind the bed.

At that moment the PRINCE appears outside the gates, which he vainly tries to open. Then he raises his eyes toward the sky with an expression of sorrow and despair.

SWANWHITE. [*Coming forward*] Who comes with the morning wind?

PRINCE. Your heart's beloved, your prince, your all!

SWANWHITE. Whence do you come, my heart's beloved?

PRINCE. From dreamland; from the rosy hills that hide the dawn; from whispering firs and singing lindens.

SWANWHITE. What did you do in dreamland, beyond the hills of dawn, my heart's beloved?

PRINCE. I sported and laughed; I wrote her name; I sat upon the lion's skin and played at chess.

SWANWHITE. You sported and you played—with whom?

PRINCE. With Swanwhite.

SWANWHITE. It is he!—Be welcome to my castle, my table, and my arms!

PRINCE. Who opens up the golden gates?

SWANWHITE. Give me your hand!—It is as chilly as your heart is warm.

PRINCE. My body has been sleeping in the tower, while my soul was wandering in dreamland—In the tower it was cold and dark.

SWANWHITE. In my bosom will I warm your hand—I'll warm it by my glances, by my kisses!

PRINCE. Oh, let the brightness of your eyes be shed upon my darkness!

SWANWHITE. Are you in darkness?

PRINCE. Within the tower there was no light of sun or moon.

SWANWHITE. Rise up, O sun! Blow, southern wind! And let thy bosom gently heave, O sea!—Ye golden gates, do you believe that you can part two hearts, two hands, two lips—that can by nothing be divided?

PRINCE. Indeed, by nothing!

Two solid doors glide together in front of the gates so that SWANWHITE and the PRINCE can no longer see each other.

SWANWHITE. Alas! What was the word we spoke, who heard it, and who punished us?

PRINCE. I am not parted from you, my beloved, for still the sound of my voice can reach you. It goes through copper, steel, and stone to touch your ear in sweet caress. When in my thoughts you're in my arms. I kiss you in my dreams. For on this earth there is not anything that can part us. Swanwhite. Not anything!

PRINCE. I see you, though my eyes cannot behold you. I taste you, too, because with roses you are filling up my mouth—

SWANWHITE. But in my arms I want you!

PRINCE. I am there.

SWANWHITE. No! Against my heart I want to feel the beat of yours—Upon your arm I want to sleep—Oh, let us, let us, dearest God—oh, let us have each other!

The swallows chirp. A small white feather falls to the ground. SWANWHITE picks it up and discovers it to be a key. With this she opens gates and doors. The PRINCE comes in. SWANWHITE leaps into his arms. He kisses her on the mouth.

SWANWHITE. You do not kiss me!

PRINCE. Yes, I do!

SWANWHITE. I do not feel your kisses!

PRINCE. Then you love me not!

SWANWHITE. Hold me fast!

PRINCE. So fast that life may part!

SWANWHITE. Oh, no, I breathe!

PRINCE. Give me your soul!

SWANWHITE. Here!—Give me yours!

PRINCE. It's here!—So I have yours, and you have mine!

SWANWHITE. I want mine back!

PRINCE. Mine, too, I want!

SWANWHITE. Then you must seek it!

PRINCE. Lost, both of us! For I am you, and you are me!

SWANWHITE. We two are one!

PRINCE. God, who is good, has heard your prayer! We have each other!

SWANWHITE. We have each other, yet I have you not. I cannot feel the pressure of your hand, your lip's caress—I cannot see your eyes, nor hear your voice—You are not here!

PRINCE. Yes, I am here!

SWANWHITE. Yes, here below. But up above, in dreamland, I would meet you.

PRINCE. Then let us fly upon the wings of sleep—

SWANWHITE. Close to your heart!

PRINCE. In my embrace!

SWANWHITE. Within your arms!

PRINCE. This is the promised bliss!

SWANWHITE. Eternal bliss, that has no flaw and knows no end!

PRINCE. No one can part us.

SWANWHITE. No one!

PRINCE. Are you my bride?

SWANWHITE. My bridegroom, you?

PRINCE. In dreamland—but not here!

SWANWHITE. Where are we?

PRINCE. Here below!

SWANWHITE. Here, where the sky is clouded, where the ocean roars, and where each night the earth sheds tears upon the grass while waiting for the dawn; where flies are killed by swallows, doves by hawks; where leaves must fall and turn to dust; where eyes must lose their light and hands their strength! Yes, here below!

PRINCE. Then let us fly!

SWANWHITE. Yes, let us fly!

The GREEN GARDENER appears suddenly behind the table. All his clothes are green. He wears a peaked cap, a big apron, and knee-breeches. At his belt hang shears and a knife. He carries a small watering-can in one hand and is scattering seeds everywhere.

PRINCE. Who are you?

GARDENER. I sow, I sow!

PRINCE. What do you sow?

GARDENER. Seeds, seeds, seeds.

PRINCE. What kind of seeds?

GARDENER. Annuals and biennials. One pulls this way, two pull that. When the bridal suit is on,

the harmony is gone. One and one make one, but one and one make also three. One and one make two, but two make three. Then do you understand?

PRINCE. You mole, you earthworm, you who turn your forehead toward the ground and show the sky your back—what is there you can teach me?

GARDENER. That you are a mole and earthworm, too. And that because you turn your back on the earth, the earth will turn its back on you. [*He disappears behind the table.*]

SWANWHITE. What was it? Who was he?

PRINCE. That was the green gardener.

SWANWHITE. Green, you say? Was he not blue?

PRINCE. No, he was green, my love.

SWANWHITE. How can you say what is not so?

PRINCE. My heart's beloved, I have not said a thing that was not so.

SWANWHITE. Alas, he does not speak the truth!

PRINCE. Whose voice is this? Not that of Swanwhite!

SWANWHITE. Who is this my eyes behold? Not my Prince, whose very name attracted me like music of the Neck, or song of mermaids heard among green waves—Who are you? You stranger with the evil eyes—and with grey hair!

PRINCE. You did not see it until now—my hair, that turned to grey within the tower, in a single night, when I was mourning for my Swanwhite, who is no longer here.

SWANWHITE. Yes, here is Swanwhite.

PRINCE. No, I see a black-clad maid, whose face is black—

SWANWHITE. Have you not seen before that I was clad in black? You do not love me, then!

PRINCE. You who are standing there, so grim and ugly—no!

SWANWHITE. Then you have spoken falsely.

PRINCE. No—for then another one was here! Now—you are filling up my mouth with noisome nettles.

SWANWHITE. Your violets smell of henbane now—faugh!

PRINCE. Thus I am punished for my treason to the king!

SWANWHITE. I wish that I had waited for your king!

PRINCE. Just wait, and he will come.

SWANWHITE. I will not wait, but go to meet him.

PRINCE. Then I will stay.

SWANWHITE. [*Going toward the background*] And this is love!

PRINCE. [*Beside himself*] Where is my Swanwhite? Where, where, where? The kindest, loveliest, most beautiful?

SWANWHITE. Seek her!

PRINCE. 'Twould not avail me here below.

SWANWHITE. Elsewhere then! [*She goes out.*]

The PRINCE is alone. He sits down at the table, covers his face with his hands, and weeps. A gust of wind passes through the room and sets draperies and curtains fluttering. A sound as of a sigh is heard from the strings of the harp. The PRINCE rises, goes to the bed, and stands there lost in contemplation of its pillow in which is a depression showing SWANWHITE'S head in profile. He picks up the pillow and kisses it. A noise is heard outside. He seats himself at the table again.

The doors of the closets fly open. The three MAIDS become visible, all with darkened faces. The STEPMOTHER enters from the rear. Her face is also dark.

STPMOTHER. [*In dulcet tones*] Good morning, my dear Prince! How have you slept?

PRINCE. Where is Swanwhite?

STPMOTHER. She has gone to marry her young king. Is there no thought of things like that in your own mind, my Prince?

PRINCE. I harbour but a single thought—

STPMOTHER. Of little Swanwhite?

PRINCE. She is too young for me, you mean?

STPMOTHER. Grey hairs and common sense belong together as a rule—I have a girl with common sense—

PRINCE. And I grey hairs?

STPMOTHER. He knows it not, believes it not! Come, maids! Come, Signe, Elsa, Tova! Let's have a

good laugh at the young suitor and his grey hairs!

The MAIDS begin to laugh. The STEPMOTHER joins in.

PRINCE. Where is Swanwhite?

STPMOTHER. Follow in her traces—here is one!

[She hands him a parchment covered with writing.]

PRINCE. *[Reading]* And she wrote this?

STPMOTHER. You know her hand—what has it written?

PRINCE. That she hates me, and loves another—that she has played with me; that she will throw my kisses to the wind, and to the swine my heart—To die is now my will! Now I am dead!

STPMOTHER. A knight dies not because a wench has played with him. He shows himself a man and takes another.

PRINCE. Another? When there is only one?

STPMOTHER. No, two, at least! My Magdalene possesses seven barrels full of gold.

PRINCE. Seven?

STPMOTHER. And more. *[Pause.]*

PRINCE. Where is Swanwhite?

STPMOTHER. My Magdalene is skilled in many crafts—

PRINCE. Including witchcraft?

STPMOTHER. She knows how to bewitch a princeling.

PRINCE. *[Gazing at the parchment]* And this was written by my Swanwhite?

STPMOTHER. My Magdalene would never write like that.

PRINCE. And she is kind?

STPMOTHER. Kindness itself! She does not play with sacred feelings, nor seek revenge for little wrongs, and she is faithful to the one she likes.

PRINCE. Then she must be beautiful.

STPMOTHER. Not beautiful!

PRINCE. She is not kind then.—Tell me more of her!

STPMOTHER. See for yourself.

PRINCE. Where?

STPMOTHER. Here.

PRINCE. And this has Swanwhite written—?

STPMOTHER. My Magdalene had written with more feeling

PRINCE. What would she have written?

STPMOTHER. That—

PRINCE. Speak the word! Say "love," if you are able!

STPMOTHER. Lub!

PRINCE. You cannot speak the word!

STPMOTHER. Lud!

PRINCE. Oh, no!

STPMOTHER. My Magdalene can speak it. May she come?

PRINCE. Yes, let her come.

STPMOTHER. *[Rising and speaking to the MAIDS]* Blindfold the prince. Then in his arms we'll place a princess that is without a paragon in seven kingdoms.

SIGNE steps forward and covers the eyes of the Prince with a bandage.

STPMOTHER. *[Clapping her hands]* Well—is she not coming?

The peacock makes a rattling noise with his bill; the doves begin to coo.

STPMOTHER. What is the matter? Does my art desert me? Where is the bride?

Four MAIDS enter from the rear, carrying baskets of white and pink roses. Music is heard from above. The MAIDS go up to the bed and scatter roses over it.

Then come TWO KNIGHTS with closed visors. They take the PRINCE between them toward the rear, where they meet the FALSE MAGDALENE, escorted by two ladies. The bride is deeply veiled.

With a gesture of her hand the STEPMOTHER bids all depart except the bridal couple. She herself leaves last of all, after she has closed the curtains and locked the gates.

PRINCE. Is this my bride?

FALSE MAGDALENE. Who is your bride?

PRINCE. I have forgot her name. Who is your bridegroom?

FALSE MAGDALENE. He whose name may not be mentioned.

PRINCE. Tell, if you can.

FALSE MAGDALENE. I can, but will not.

PRINCE. Tell, if you can!

FALSE MAGDALENE. Tell my name first!

PRINCE. It's seven barrels full of gold, and crooked back, and grim, and hare-lipped! What's my name? Tell, if you can!

FALSE MAGDALENE. Prince Greyhead!

PRINCE. You're right!

The FALSE MAGDALENE throws, off her veil, and Swanwhite stands revealed.

SWANWHITE. [*Dressed in a white garment, with a wreath of roses on her hair*] Who am I now?

PRINCE. You are a rose!

SWANWHITE. And you a violet!

PRINCE. [*Taking off the bandage*] You are Swanwhite!

SWANWHITE. And you—are—

PRINCE. Hush!

SWANWHITE. You're mine!

PRINCE. But you—you left me—left my kisses—

SWANWHITE. I have returned—because I love you!

PRINCE. And you wrote cruel words—

SWANWHITE. But cancelled them—because I love you.!

PRINCE. You told me I was false.

SWANWHITE. What matters it, when you are true—and when I love you?

PRINCE. You wished that you were going to the king.

SWANWHITE. But went to you instead, because I love you!

PRINCE. Now let me hear what you reproach me with.

SWANWHITE. I have forgotten it—because I love you!

PRINCE. But if you love me, then you are my bride.

SWANWHITE. I am!

PRINCE. Then may the heavens bestow their blessing on our union!

SWANWHITE. In dreamland!

PRINCE. With your head upon my arm!

The PRINCE leads SWANWHITE to the bed, in which he places his sword. Then she lies down on one side of the sword, and he on the other. The colour of the clouds changes to a rosy red. The rose-trees murmur. The harp plays softly and sweetly.

PRINCE. Good night, my queen!

SWANWHITE. Good morning, O my soul's beloved!—I hear the beating of your heart—I hear it sigh like billowing waters, like swift-flying steeds, like wings of eagles—Give me your hand!

PRINCE. And yours!—Now we take wing—

STPMOTHER. [*Enters with the MAIDS, who carry torches; all four have become grey-haired*] I have to see that my task is finished ere the duke returns. My daughter, Magdalene, is plighted to the prince—while Swanwhite lingers in the tower—[*Goes to the bed*] They sleep already in each other's arms—you bear me witness, maids!

The MAIDS approach the bed.

STPMOTHER. What do I see? Each one of you is grey-haired!

SIGNE. And so are you, Your Grace!

STPMOTHER. Am I? Let me see!

ELSA *holds a mirror in front of her.*

STEPMOTHER. This is the work of evil powers!—And then, perhaps, the prince's hair is dark again? —Bring light this way!

The MAIDS hold their torches so that the light from them falls on the sleeping couple.

STEPMOTHER. Such is the truth, indeed!—How beautiful they look!—But—the sword! Who placed it there—the sword that puts at naught their plighted troth?

She tries to take away the sword, but the PRINCE clings to it without being awakened.

SIGNE. Your Grace—here's devilry abroad!

STEPMOTHER. What is it?

SIGNE. This is not Lady Magdalene.

STEPMOTHER. Who is it, then? My eyes need help.

SIGNE. 'Tis Lady Swanwhite.

STEPMOTHER. Swanwhite?—Can this be some delusion of the devil's making, or have I done what I least wished?

The PRINCE turns his head in his sleep so that his lips meet those of SWANWHITE.

STEPMOTHER. [*Touched by the beautiful sight*] No sight more beautiful have I beheld!—Two roses brought together by the wind; two falling stars that join in downward flight—it is too beautiful!—Youth, beauty, innocence, and love! What memories, sweet memories—when I was living in my father's home—when I was loved by *him*, the youth whom never I called mine—What did I say I was?

SIGNE. That you were loved by him, Your Grace.

STEPMOTHER. Then I did speak the mighty word. Be-loved—so he named me once—"beloved"—ere he started for the war—[*Lost in thoughts*] It was the last of him.—And so I had to take the one I couldn't bear.—My life is drawing to its close, and I must find my joy in happiness denied myself! I should rejoice—at others' happiness—Some kind of joy, at least—at other people's love—Some kind of love, at least—But there's my Magdalene? What joy for her? O, love omnipotent—eternally creative Lord—how you have rendered soft this lion heart! Where is my strength? Where is my hatred—my revenge? [*She seats herself and looks long at the sleeping couple*] A song runs through my mind, a song of love that *he* was singing long ago, that final night— [*She rises as if waking out of a dream and flies into a rage; her words come with a roar*] Come hither, men! Here, Steward, Castellan, and Gaoler—all of you! [*She snatches the sword out of the bed and throws it along the floor toward the rear*] Come hither, men!

Noise is heard outside; the men enter as before.

STEPMOTHER. Behold! The prince, the young king's vassal, has defiled his master's bride! You bear me witness to the shameful deed! Put chains and fetters on the traitor and send him to his rightful lord! But in the spiked cask put the hussy. [*The PRINCE and SWANWHITE wake up*] Equerry! Gaoler! Seize the prince!

The EQUERRY and the GAOLER lay hands on the PRINCE.

PRINCE. Where is my sword? I fight not against evil, but for innocence!

STEPMOTHER. Whose innocence?

PRINCE. My bride's.

STEPMOTHER. The hussy's innocence! Then prove it!

SWANWHITE. Oh, mother, mother!

The white swan flies by outside.

STEPMOTHER. Maids, bring shears! I'll cut the harlot's hair!

SIGNE *hands her a pair of shears.*

STEPMOTHER. [*Takes hold of SWANWHITE by the hair and starts to cut it, but she cannot bring the blades of the shears together*] Now I'll cut off your beauty and your love! [*Suddenly she is seized with panic, which quickly spreads to the men and the three MAIDS*] Is the enemy upon us? Why are you trembling?

SIGNE. Your Grace, the dogs are barking, horses neighing—it means that visitors are near.

STEPMOTHER. Quick, to the bridges, all of you! Man the ramparts! Fall to with flame and water, sword and axe!

The PRINCE and SWANWHITE are left alone.

GARDENER. [*Appears from behind the table; in one hand he carries a rope, the DUKE'S horn in the*

other] Forgiveness for those who sin; for those who sorrow, consolation; and hope for those who are distressed!

SWANWHITE. My father's horn! Then help is near! But—the prince?

GARDENER. The prince will follow me. A secret passage, underground, leads to the shore. There lies his bark. The wind is favourable! Come!

[The GARDENER and the PRINCE go out. SWANWHITE alone, blows the horn. An answering signal is heard in the distance. The GAOLER enters with the spiked cask. SWANWHITE blows the horn again. The answer is heard much nearer.

The DUKE enters. He and SWANWHITE are alone on the stage.

DUKE. My own beloved heart, what is at stake?

SWANWHITE. Your own child, father!—Look—the spiked cask over there!

DUKE. How has my child transgressed?

SWANWHITE. The prince's name I learned, by love instructed—spoke it—came to hold him very dear.

DUKE. That was no capital offence. What more?

SWANWHITE. At his side I slept, the sword between us—

DUKE. And still there was no capital offence, though I should hardly call it wise—And more?

SWANWHITE. No more!

DUKE. *[To the GAOLER, pointing to the spiked cask]* Away with it! *[To SWANWHITE]* Well, child, where is the prince?

SWANWHITE. He's sailing homeward in his bark.

DUKE. Now, when the tide is battering the shore?—Alone? Swanwhite. Alone! What is to happen?

DUKE. The Lord alone can tell!

SWANWHITE. He's in danger?

DUKE. Who greatly dares has sometimes luck.

SWANWHITE. He ought to have!

DUKE. He will, if free from guilt!

SWANWHITE. He is! More than I am!

STEPMOTHER. *[Entering]* How came you here!

DUKE. A shortcut brought me—I could wish it had been shorter still.

STEPMOTHER. Had it been short enough, your child had never come to harm.

DUKE. What kind of harm?

STEPMOTHER. The one for which there is no cure.

DUKE. And you have proofs?

STEPMOTHER. I've valid witnesses.

DUKE. Then call my butler.

STEPMOTHER. He does not know.

DUKE. *[Shaking his sword at her]* Call my butler!

The STEPMOTHER trembles. Then she claps her hands four times together.

The BUTLER enters.

DUKE. Have made a pie of venison, richly stuffed with onions, parsley, fennel, cabbage—and at once!

The BUTLER steals a sidelong glance at the STEPMOTHER.

DUKE. What are you squinting at? Be quick!

The BUTLER goes out.

DUKE. *[To the STEPMOTHER]* Now call the master of my pleasure-garden.

STEPMOTHER. He does not know!

DUKE. And never will! But he must come! Call, quick!

The STEPMOTHER claps her hands six times.

The FLOWER GARDENER enters.

DUKE. Three lilies bring: one white, one red, one blue.

The GARDENER looks sideways at the STEPMOTHER.

DUKE. Your head's at stake!

The GARDENER goes out.

DUKE. Summon your witnesses!

The STEPMOTHER claps her hands once.

SIGNE *enters.*

DUKE. Tell what you know—but choose your words! What have you seen?

SIGNE. I have seen Lady Swanwhite and the prince together in one bed.

DUKE. With sword between?

SIGNE. Without.

DUKE. I can't believe it!—Other witnesses?

The TWO KNIGHTS enter.

DUKE. Were these the groomsmen?—Tell your tale.

FIRST KNIGHT. The Lady Magdalene I have escorted to her bridal couch.

SECOND KNIGHT. The Lady Magdalene I have escorted to her bridal couch.

DUKE. What's that? A trick, I trow—that caught the trickster!—Other witnesses?

ELSA *enters.*

DUKE. Tell what you know.

ELSA. I swear by God, our righteous judge, that I have seen the prince and Lady Swanwhite fully dressed and with a sword between them.

DUKE. One for, and one against—two not germane.—I leave it to the judgment of the Lord!—The flowers will speak for him.

ELSA. [*Enters*] My gracious master—noble lord!

DUKE. What do you know?

ELSA. I know my gracious mistress innocent.

DUKE. O, child—so you know that! Then teach us how to know it too.

ELSA. When I am saying only what is true—

DUKE. No one believes it! But when Signe tells untruth, we must believe!—And what does Swanwhite say herself? Her forehead's purity, her steady glance, her lips' sweet innocence—do they not speak aloud of slander? And "slander" is the verdict of a father's eye.—Well then—Almighty God on high shall give his judgment, so that human beings may believe!

The FLOWER GARDENER enters carrying three lilies placed in three tall and narrow vases of glass. The DUKE places the flowers in a semicircle on the table. The BUTLER enters with a huge dish containing a steaming pie.

DUKE. [*Placing the dish within the semicircle formed by the three flowers*] The white one stands for whom?

ALL. [*Except SWANWHITE. and the STEPMOTHER*] For Swanwhite.

DUKE. The red one stands for whom?

ALL. [*As before*] The prince.

DUKE. For whom the blue one?

ALL. [*As before*] The youthful king.

DUKE. Well, Tova—child who still has faith in innocence because you too are innocent—interpret now for us the judgment of the Lord—tell us the gentle secrets of these flowers.

ELSA. The evil part I cannot utter.

DUKE. I will. What's good I'll leave for you.—As the steam from the blood of the prurient beast rises upward—as upward the smell of the passionate spices is mounting—what see you?

ELSA. [*Gazing at the three lilies*] The white one folds its blossom to protect itself against defilement. That is Swanwhite's flower.

ALL. Swanwhite is innocent.

ELSA. The red one, too—the prince's lily—closes its head—but the blue one, which stands for the king, flings wide its gorge to drink the lust-filled air.

DUKE. You've told it right! What more is there to see?

ELSA. I see the red flower bend its head in reverent love before the white one, while the blue one

writhes with envious rage.

DUKE. You've spoken true!—For whom is Swanwhite then?

ELSA. For the prince, because more pure is his desire, and therefore stronger, too.

ALL. [*Except SWANWHITE and the STEPMOTHER*] Swanwhite for the prince!

SWANWHITE. [*Throwing herself into her father's arms*] O, father!

DUKE. Call back the prince! Let every trump and bugle summon him. Hoist sail on every bark! But first of all—the spiked cask is for whom?

All remain silent.

DUKE. Then I will say it: for the duchess; for the arch-liar and bawd!—Know, evil woman, that though nothing else be safe against your tricks, they cannot conquer love!—Go—quick—begone!

The STEPMOTHER makes a gesture which for a moment seems to stun the DUKE.

DUKE. [*Draws his sword and turns the point of it toward the STEPMOTHER, having first seated SWANWHITE on his left shoulder*] A-yi, you evil one! My pointed steel will outpoint all your tricks!

The STEPMOTHER withdraws backward, dragging her legs behind her like a panther.

DUKE. Now for the prince!

The STEPMOTHER stops on the balcony, rigid as a statue. She opens her mouth as if she were pouring out venom.

The peacock and the doves fall down dead. Then the STEPMOTHER begins to swell. Her clothes become inflated to such an extent that they hide her head and bust entirely. They seem to be flaming with a pattern of interwoven snakes and branches. The sun is beginning to rise outside. The ceiling sinks slowly into the room, while smoke and fire burst from the fireplace.

DUKE. [*Raising the cross-shaped handle of his sword toward the STEPMOTHER*] Pray, people, pray to Christ, our Saviour!

ALL. Christ have mercy!

The ceiling resumes its ordinary place. The smoke and fire cease. A noise is heard outside, followed by the hum of many voices.

DUKE. What new event is this?

SWANWHITE. I know! I see!—I hear the water dripping from his hair; I hear the silence of his heart, the breath that comes no more—I see that he is dead!

DUKE. Where do you see—and whom?

SWANWHITE. Where?—But I see it!

DUKE. I see nothing.

SWANWHITE. As they must come, let them come quick!

Four little girls enter with baskets out of which they scatter white lilies and hemlock twigs over the floor. After them come four pages ringing silver bells of different pitch. Then comes a priest carrying a large crucifix. Then, the golden bier, with the body of the PRINCE, covered by a white sheet, on which rest white and pink roses. His hair is dark again. His face is youthful, rosy, and radiantly beautiful. There is a smile on his lips.

The harp begins to play. The sun rises completely. The magic bubble around the STEPMOTHER bursts, and she appears once more in her customary shape.

The bier is placed in the middle of the floor, so that the rays of the rising sun fall on it.

SWANWHITE throws herself on her knees beside the bier and covers the Prince's face with kisses.

All present put their hands to their faces and weep.

The FISHERMAN has entered behind the bier.

DUKE. The brief tale tell us, fisherman—

FISHERMAN. Does it not tell itself, my noble lord?—The young prince had already crossed the strait, when, seized by violent longing for his love, he started to swim back, in face of tide and wave and wind—because his bark seemed rudder-less.—I saw his young head breast the billows, I heard him cry her name—and then his corpse was gently dropped upon the white sand at my feet. His hair had turned to grey that night when he slept in the tower; sorrow and wrath had blanched his cheeks; his lips had lost their power of smiling.—Now, when death o'ertook him, beauty and youth came with it. Like wreaths his darkening locks fell round his rosy cheeks; he smiled—and see!—is smiling still. The people gathered on the shore, awed by the gentle spectacle—and man said unto man: lo, this is love!

SWANWHITE. [*Lying down beside the body of the PRINCE*] He's dead; his heart will sing no more; his eyes no longer will light up my life; his breath will shed its dew on me no more. He smiles, but not toward me—toward heaven he smiles. And on his journey I shall bear him company.

DUKE. Kiss not a dead man's lips—there's poison in them!

SWANWHITE. Sweet poison if it bring me death—that death in which I seek my life!

DUKE. They say, my child, the dead cannot gain union by willing it; and what was loved in life has little worth beyond.

SWANWHITE. And love? Should then its power not extend to the other side of death?

DUKE. Our wise men have denied it.

SWANWHITE. Then he must come to me—back to this earth. O gracious Lord, please let him out of heaven again!

DUKE. A foolish prayer!

SWANWHITE. I cannot pray—woe's me! The evil eye still rules this place.

DUKE. You're thinking of the monster which the sunbeams pricked. The stake for her—let her without delay be burned alive!

SWANWHITE. Burn her?—Alive?—Oh, no! Let her depart in peace!

DUKE. She must be burned alive! You, men, see that the pyre is raised close to the shore, and let the winds play with her ashes!

SWANWHITE. [*On her knees before the DUKE*] No, no—I pray you, though she was my executioner: have mercy on her!

STEPMOTHER. [*Enters, changed, freed from the evil powers that have held her in their spell*] Mercy! Who spoke the sacred word? Who poured her heart in prayer for me?

SWANWHITE. I did—your daughter—mother!

STEPMOTHER. O, God in heaven, she called me mother!—Who taught you that?

SWANWHITE. Love did!

STEPMOTHER. Then blessed be love which can work miracles like that!—But, child, then it must also have the power to make the dead return out of the darkling realms of death!—I cannot do it, having not received the grace of love. But you!

SWANWHITE. Poor me—what can I do?

STEPMOTHER. You can forgive, and you can love—Well, then, my little Lady Almighty, you can do anything!—Be taught by me who have no power at all. Go, cry the name of your beloved, and put your hand above his heart! Then, with the help of the Supreme One—calling none but Him for helper—your beloved will hear your voice—if you believe!

SWANWHITE. I do believe—I will it—and—I pray for it!

She goes up to the PRINCE, places one of her hands over his heart, and raises the other toward the sky. Then she bends down over him and whispers something into his ear. This she repeats three times in succession. At the third whisper the PRINCE wakes up. SWANWHITE throws herself at his breast. All kneel in praise and thanksgiving. Music.

Curtain.

SIMOOM

(SAMUM)

1890

CHARACTERS

BISKRA, *an Arabian girl*

YUSUF, *her lover*

GUIMARD, *a lieutenant of Zouaves*

The action takes place in Algeria at the present time.

The inside of a marabout, or shrine. In the middle of the floor stands a sarcophagus forming the tomb of the Mohammedan saint (also called "marabout") who in his lifetime occupied the place. Prayer-rugs are scattered over the floor. At the right in the rear is an ossuary, or charnel-house.

There is a doorway in the middle of the rear wall. It is closed with a gate and covered by a curtain. On both sides of the doorway are loopholes. Here and there on the floor are seen little piles of sand. An aloe plant, a few palm leaves and some alfa grass are thrown together on one spot.

FIRST SCENE

BISKRA *enters. The hood of her burnous is pulled over her head so that it almost covers her face. She carries a guitar at her back. Throwing herself down in a kneeling position on one of the rugs, she begins to pray with her arms crossed over her breast. A high wind is blowing outside.*

BISKRA. Lâ ilâhâ illâ 'llâh!

YUSUF. [*Enters quickly*] The Simoom is coming! Where is the Frank?

BISKRA. He'll be here in a moment.

YUSUF. Why didn't you stab him when you had a chance?

BISKRA. Because he is to do it himself. If I were to do it, our whole tribe would be killed, for I am known to the Franks as Ali, the guide, though they don't know me as Biskra, the maiden.

YUSUF. He is to do it himself, you say? How is that to happen?

BISKRA. Don't you know that the Simoom makes the brains of the white people dry as dates, so that they have horrible visions which disgust them with life and cause them to flee into the great unknown?

YUSUF. I have heard of such things, and in the last battle there were six Franks who took their own lives before the fighting began. But do not place your trust in the Simoom to-day, for snow has fallen in the mountains, and the storm may be all over in half an hour.—Biskra! Do you still know how to hate?

BISKRA. If I know how to hate?—My hatred is boundless as the desert, burning as the sun, and stronger than my love. Every hour of joy that has been stolen from me since the murder of Ali has been stored up within me like the venom back of a viper's tooth, and what the Simoom cannot do, that I can do.

YUSUF. Well spoken, Biskra, and the task shall be yours. Ever since my eyes first fell upon you, my own hatred has been withering like alfa grass in the autumn. Take strength from me and become the arrow to my bow.

BISKRA. Embrace me, Yusuf, embrace me!

YUSUF. Not here, within the presence of the Sainted one; not now—later, afterward, when you have earned your reward!

BISKRA. You proud sheikh! You man of pride!

YUSUF. Yes—the maiden who is to carry my offspring under her heart must show herself worthy of the honour.

BISKRA. I—no one but I—shall bear the offspring of Yusuf! I, Biskra—the scorned one, the ugly one, but the strong one, too!

YUSUF. All right! I am now going to sleep beside the spring.—Do I need to teach you more of the secret arts which you learned from Sidi-Sheikh, the great marabout, and which you have practised at fairs ever since you were a child?

BISKRA. Of that there is no need. I know all the secrets needed to scare the life out of a cowardly Frank.—The dastard who sneaks upon the enemy and sends the leaden bullet ahead of himself! I know them all—even the art of letting my voice come out of my belly. And what is beyond my art, that will be done by the sun, for the sun is on the side of Yusuf and Biskra.

YUSUF. The sun is a friend of the Moslem, but not to be relied upon. You may get burned, girl!—Take a drink of water first of all, for I see that your hands are shrivelled, and—

He lifts up one of the rugs and steps down into a sort of cellar, from which he brings back a bowl filled with water; this he hands to BISKRA.

BISKRA. [*Raising the bowl to her mouth*] And my eyes are already beginning to see red—my lungs are parching—I hear—I hear—do you see how the sand is sifting through the roof—the strings of my guitar are crooning—the Simoom is here! But the Frank is not!

YUSUF. Come down here, Biskra, and let the Frank die by himself.

BISKRA. First hell, and then death! Do you think I'll weaken? [*Pours the water on one of the sand piles*] I'll water the sand, so that revenge may grow out of it, and I'll dry up my heart. Grow, O hatred! Burn, O sun! Smother, O wind!

YUSUF. Hail to you, mother of Ben Yusuf—for you are to bear the son of Yusuf, the avenger—you!

The wind is increasing. The curtain in front of the door begins to flap. A red glimmer

lights up the room, but changes into yellow during the ensuing scene.

BISKRA. The Frank is coming, and—the Simoom is here!—Go!

YUSUF. In half an hour you shall see me again. [*Pointing toward a sand pile*] There is your hour-glass. Heaven itself is measuring out the time for the hell of the infidels!

[*Goes down into the cellar.*]

SECOND SCENE

BISKRA. GUIMARD *enters looking very pale; he stumbles, his mind is confused, and he speaks in a low voice.*

GUIMARD. The Simoom is here!—What do you think has become of my men?

BISKRA. I led them west to east.

GUIMARD. West—to east!—Let me see!—That's straight east—and west!—Oh, put me on a chair and give me some water!

BISKRA. [*Leads GUIMARD to one of the sand piles and makes him lie down on the floor with his feet on the sand*] Are you comfortable now?

GUIMARD. [*Staring at her*] I feel all twisted up. Put something under my head.

BISKRA. [*Piling the sand higher under his feet*] There's a pillow for your head.

GUIMARD. Head? Why, my feet are down there—Isn't that my feet?

BISKRA. Of course!

GUIMARD. I thought so. Give me a stool now—under my head.

BISKRA. [*Pulls out the aloe plant and pushes it under Guimard's legs*] There's a stool for you.

GUIMARD. And then water!—Water!

BISKRA. [*Fills the empty bowl with sand and hands it to GUIMARD*] Drink while it's cold.

GUIMARD. [*Putting his lips to the bowl*] It is cold—and yet it does not still my thirst! I cannot drink it—I abhor water—take it away!

BISKRA. There's the dog that bit you!

GUIMARD. What dog? I have never been bitten by a dog.

BISKRA. The Simoom has shrivelled up your memory—beware the delusions of the Simoom! Don't you remember the mad greyhound that bit you during the last hunt at Bab-el-Wad?

GUIMARD. The hunt at Bab-el-Wad? That's right!—Was it a beaver-coloured—?

BISKRA. Bitch? Yes.—There you see. And she bit you in the calf. Can't you feel the sting of the wound?

GUIMARD. [*Reaches out a hand to feel his calf and pricks himself on the aloe*] Yes, I can feel it.—Water! Water!

BISKRA. [*Handing him the sand-filled bowl*] Drink, drink!

GUIMARD. No, I cannot! Holy Mother of God—I have rabies!

BISKRA. Don't be afraid! I shall cure you, and drive out the demon by the help of music, which is all-powerful. Listen!

GUIMARD. [*Screaming*] Ali! Ali! No music; I can't stand it! And how could it help me?

BISKRA. If music can tame the treacherous spirit of the snake, don't you think it may conquer that of a mad dog? Listen! [*She sings and accompanies herself on the guitar*] Biskra-biskra, Biskra-biskra, Biskra-biskra! Simoom! Simoom!

YUSUF. [*Responding from below*] Simoom! Simoom!

GUIMARD. What is that you are singing, Ali?

BISKRA. Have I been singing? Look here—now I'll put a palm-leaf in my mouth. [*She puts a piece of leaf between her teeth; the song seems to be coming from above*] Biskra-biskra, Biskra-biskra, Biskra-biskra!

YUSUF. [*From below*] Simoom! Simoom!

GUIMARD. What an infernal jugglery!

BISKRA. Now I'll sing!

BISKRA and YUSUF. [*Together*] Biskra-biskra, Biskra-biskra, Biskra-biskra! Simoom!

GUIMARD. [*Rising*] What are you, you devil who are singing with two voices? Are you man or woman? Or both?

BISKRA. I am Ali, the guide. You don't recognise me because your senses are confused. But if you want to be saved from the tricks played by sight and thought, you must believe in me—believe what I say and do what I tell you.

GUIMARD. You don't need to ask me, for I find everything to be as you say it is.

BISKRA. There you see, you worshipper of idols!

GUIMARD. I, a worshipper of idols?

BISKRA. Yes, take out the idol you carry on your breast.

GUIMARD *takes out a locket.*

BISKRA. Trample on it now, and then call on the only God, the Merciful One, the Compassionate One!

GUIMARD. [*Hesitating*] Saint Edward—my patron saint?

BISKRA. Can he protect you? Can he?

GUIMARD. No, he cannot!—[*Waking up*] Yes, he can!

BISKRA. Let us see!

She opens the gate; the curtain flaps and the grass on the floor moves.

GUIMARD. [*Covering his mouth*] Close the door!

BISKRA. Throw down the idol!

GUIMARD. No, I cannot.

BISKRA. Do you see? The Simoom does not bend a hair on me, but you, the infidel one, are killed by it! Throw down the idol!

GUIMARD. [*Throws the locket on the floor*] Water! I die!

BISKRA. Pray to the Only One, the Merciful and Compassionate One!

GUIMARD. How am I to pray?

BISKRA. Repeat after me.

GUIMARD. Speak on!

BISKRA. There is only one God: there is no other God but He, the Merciful, the Compassionate One!

GUIMARD. "There is only one God: there is no other God but He, the Merciful, the Compassionate One."

BISKRA. Lie down on the floor.

GUIMARD *lies down unwillingly.*

BISKRA. What do you hear?

GUIMARD. I hear the murmuring of a spring.

BISKRA. There you see! God is one, and there is no other God but He, the Merciful and Compassionate One!—What do you see?

GUIMARD. I can hear a spring murmur—I can see the light of a lamp—in a window with green shutters—on a white street—

BISKRA. Who is sitting at the window?

GUIMARD. My wife—Elise!

BISKRA. Who is standing behind the curtain with his arm around her neck?

GUIMARD. That's my son, George.

BISKRA. How old is your son?

GUIMARD. Four years on the day of Saint Nicholas.

BISKRA. And he can already stand behind the curtain with his arm around the neck of another man's wife?

GUIMARD. No, he cannot—but it is he!

BISKRA. Four years old, you say, and he has a blond mustache?

GUIMARD. A blond mustache, you say?—Oh, that's—my friend Jules.

BISKRA. Who is standing behind the curtain with his arm around your wife's neck?

GUIMARD. Oh, you devil!

BISKRA. Do you see your son?

GUIMARD. No, I don't see him any longer.

BISKRA. [*Imitates the tolling of bells on the guitar*] What do you see now?

GUIMARD. I see bells ringing—I taste dead bodies—their smell in my mouth is like rancid butter—faugh!

BISKRA. Can't you hear the priest chanting the service for a dead child?

GUIMARD. Wait!—I cannot hear—[*Wistfully*] But do you want me to?—There!—I can hear it!

BISKRA. Do you see the wreath on the coffin they are carrying?

GUIMARD. Yes—

BISKRA. There are violet ribbons on it—and there are letters printed in silver—"Farewell, my darling George—from your father."

GUIMARD. Yes, that's it! [*He begins to cry*] My George! O George, my darling boy!—Elise—wife—can't you console me?—Oh, help me! [*He is groping around*] Elise, where are you? Have you left me? Answer! Call out the name of your love!

A VOICE. [*Coming from the roof*] Jules! Jules!

GUIMARD. Jules! But my name is—what is my name? It is Charles! And she is calling Jules! Elise—my beloved wife—answer me—for your spirit is here—I can feel it—and you promised never to love anybody else—

The VOICE is heard laughing.

GUIMARD. Who is laughing?

BISKRA. Elise—your wife.

GUIMARD. Oh, kill me! I don't want to live any longer! Life sickens me like sauerkraut at Saint-Doux—You there—do you know what Saint-Doux is? Lard! [*He tries to spit*] Not a drop of saliva left!—Water—water—or I'll bite you!

The wind outside has risen to a full storm.

BISKRA. [*Puts her hand to her mouth and coughs*] Now you are dying, Frank! Write down your last wishes while there is still time—Where is your note-book?

GUIMARD. [*Takes out a note-book and a pencil*] What am I to write?

BISKRA. When a man is to die, he thinks of his wife—and his child!

GUIMARD. [*Writes*] "Elise—I curse you! Simoom—I die—"

BISKRA. And then sign it, or it will not be valid as a testament.

GUIMARD. What shall I sign?

BISKRA. Write: Lâ ilâha illâ 'llâh.

GUIMARD. [*Writing*] It is written.—And can I die now?

BISKRA. Now you can die—like a craven soldier who has deserted his people! And I am sure you'll get a handsome burial from the jackals that will chant the funeral hymn over your corpse. [*She drums the signal for attack on the guitar*] Can you hear the drums—the attack has begun—on the Faithful, who have the sun and the Simoom on their side—they are now advancing—from their hiding-places—[*She makes a rattling noise on the guitar*] The Franks are firing along the whole line—they have no chance to load again—the Arabs are firing at their leisure—the Franks are flying!

GUIMARD. [*Rising*] The Franks never flee!

BISKRA. The Franks will flee when they hear the call to retreat.

[She blows the signal for "retreat" on a flute which she has produced from under her burnoose.

GUIMARD. They are retreating—that's the signal—and I am here—[*He tears off his epaulets*] I am dead!

[He falls to the ground.

BISKRA. Yes, you are dead!—And you don't know that you have been dead a long time.

[She goes to the ossuary and takes from it a human skull.

GUIMARD. Have I been dead?

[He feels his face with his hands.

BISKRA. Long! Long!—Look at yourself in the mirror here! [*She holds up the skull before him.*

GUIMARD. Ah! That's me!

BISKRA. Can't you see your own high cheek-bones? Can't you see the eyes that the vultures have picked out? Don't you know that gap on the right side of the jaw where you had a tooth pulled? Can't you see the hollow in the chin where, grew the beard that your Elise was fond of stroking? Can't you see where used to be the ear that your George kissed at the breakfast-table? Can't you see the mark of the axe—here in the neck—which the executioner made when he cut off the deserter's head—

GUIMARD, who has been watching her movements and listening to her words with

evident horror, sinks down dead.

BISKRA. [*Who has been kneeling, feels his pulse; then she rises and sings*] Simoom! Simoom! [*She opens both gates; the curtain flutters like a banner in the wind; she puts her hand up to her mouth and falls over backward, crying*] Yusuf!

THIRD SCENE

BISKRA. GUIMARD (*dead*). YUSUF *comes out of the cellar.*

YUSUF. [*Having examined the body of GUIMARD, he looks for BISKRA*] Biskra! [*He discovers her and takes her up in his arms*] Are you alive?

BISKRA. Is the Frank dead?

YUSUF. If he is not, he will be. Simoom! Simoom!

BISKRA. Then I live! But give me some water!

YUSUF. [*Carrying her toward the cellar*] Here it is!—And now Yusuf is yours!

BISKRA. And Biskra will be your son's mother, O Yusuf, great Yusuf!

YUSUF. My strong Biskra! Stronger than the Simoom!

Curtain.

DEBIT AND CREDIT

(DEBET OCH KREDIT)

AN ACT

1893

CHARACTERS

AXEL, *Doctor of Philosophy and African explorer*

THURE, *his brother, a gardener*

ANNA, *the wife of THURE*

MISS CECILIA

THE FIANCÉ *of CECILIA*

LINDGREN, *Doctor of Philosophy and former school-teacher*

MISS MARIE

THE COURT CHAMBERLAIN

THE WAITER

A well-furnished hotel room. There are doors on both sides.

FIRST SCENE

THURE *and his WIFE.*

THURE. There's some style to this room, isn't there? But then the fellow who lives here is stylish, too.

WIFE. Yes, so I understand. Of course, I've never seen your brother, but I've heard a whole lot.

THURE. Oh, gossip! *My* brother, the doctor, has gone right across Africa, and that's something everybody can't do. So it doesn't matter how many drinks he took as a young chap—

WIFE. Yes, your brother, the doctor! Who is nothing but a school-teacher, for that matter—

THURE. No, he's a doctor of philosophy, I tell you—

WIFE. Well, that's nothing but one who teaches. And that's just what my brother is doing in the school at Åby.

THURE. Your brother is all right, but he is nothing but a public-school teacher, and that's not the same as a doctor of philosophy—which isn't a boast either.

WIFE. Well, no matter what he is or what you call him, he has cost us a whole lot.

THURE. Of course it has been rather costly, but then he has brought us a lot of pleasure, too.

WIFE. Fine pleasures! When we've got to lose house and home for his sake!

THURE. That's so—but then we don't know yet if his slip-up on the loan had some kind of cause that he couldn't help. I guess it isn't so easy to send registered letters from darkest Africa.

WIFE. Whether he has any excuses or not doesn't change the matter a bit. But if he wants to do something for us—it's nothing more than he owes us.

THURE. Well, we'll see, we'll see!—Anyhow, have you heard they've already given him four decorations?

WIFE. Well, that doesn't help us any. I guess it'll only make him a little more stuck-up. Oh, no, it'll be some time before I get over that the sheriff had to come down on us with the papers—and bring in other people as witnesses—and then—the auction—and all the neighbours coming in and turning all we had upside down. And do you know what made me sorer than all the rest?

THURE. The black—

WIFE. Yes, it was that my sister-in-law should bid in my black silk dress for fifteen crowns. Think of it—fifteen crowns!

THURE. You just wait—just wait a little! We might get you a new silk dress—

WIFE. [*Weeping*] But it'll never be the same one—the one my sister-in-law bid in.

THURE. We'll get another one then!—Now, just look at that gorgeous hat over there! I guess it must be one of those royal chamberlains who's talking with Axel now.

WIFE. What do I care about that!

THURE. Why, don't you think it's fun that a fellow who has the same name as you and I gets to be so respected that the King's own household people have to visit him? If I remember right, you were happy for a whole fortnight when your brother, the school-teacher, had been asked to dine at the bishop's.

WIFE. I can't remember anything of the kind.

THURE. Of course you can't!

WIFE. But I do remember the fifteenth of March, when we had to leave our place for his sake, and we hadn't been married more than two years, and I had to carry away the child on my own arm—Oh!—and then, when the steamer came with all the passengers on board just as we had to get out—all the cocked hats in the world can't make me forget that! And, for that matter, what do you think a royal chamberlain cares about a plain gardener and his wife when they've just been turned out of house and home?

THURE. Look here! What do you think this is? Look at all his decorations!—Look at this one, will you!

He takes an order out of its case, holds it in the palm of his hand, and pats it as if it were a living thing.

WIFE. Oh, that silly stuff!

THURE. Don't you say anything against them, for you never can tell where you'll end. The gardener at Staring was made a director and a knight on the same day.

WIFE. Well, what does that help us?

THURE. No, of course not—it doesn't help us—but these things here [*pointing to the orders*] may help us a whole lot in getting another place.—However, I think we've waited quite a while now, so we'd better sit down and make ourselves at home. Let me help you off with your coat—come on now!

WIFE. [*After a slight resistance*] So you think we're going to be welcome, then? I have a feeling that our stay here won't last very long.

THURE. Tut, tut! And I think we're going to have a good dinner, too, if I know Axel right. If he only knew that we're here—But now you'll see! [*He presses a button and a WAITER enters*] What do you want—a sandwich, perhaps? [*To the WAITER*] Bring us some sandwiches and beer.—Wait a moment! Get a drink for me—the real stuff, you know! [*The WAITER goes out*] You've got to take care of yourself, don't you know.

SECOND SCENE

THURE *and his* WIFE. AXEL. The CHAMBERLAIN.

AXEL. [*To the CHAMBERLAIN*] At five, then—in full dress, I suppose?

CHAMBERLAIN. And your orders!

AXEL. Is it necessary?

CHAMBERLAIN. Absolutely necessary, if you don't want to seem rude, and that's something which you, as a democrat, want least of all. Good-bye, doctor!

AXEL. Good-bye.

In leaving, the CHAMBERLAIN bows slightly to THURE and his WIFE, neither of whom returns the salute.

THIRD SCENE

AXEL. THURE *and his* WIFE.

AXEL. Oh, is that you, old boy?—It seems an eternity since I saw you last. And this is your wife?—Glad to see you!

THURE. Thanks, brother! And I wish you a happy return after your long trip.

AXEL. Yes, that was something of a trip—I suppose you have read about it in the papers—

THURE. Oh, yes, I've read all about it. [*Pause*] And then father sent you his regards.

AXEL. Oh, is he still sore at me?

THURE. Well, you know the old man and his ways. If only you hadn't been a member of that expedition, you know, he would have thought it one of the seven wonders of the world. But as you were along, of course, it was nothing but humbug.

AXEL. So he's just the same as ever! Simply because I am *his* son, nothing I ever do can be of any value. It means he can't think very much of himself either.—Well, so much for that! And how are you getting along nowadays?

THURE. Not very well, exactly! There's that old loan from the bank, you know—

AXEL. Yes, that's right! Well, what happened to it?

THURE. Oh, what happened was that I had to pay it.

AXEL. That's too bad! But we'll settle the matter as soon as we have a chance.

The WAITER comes in with THURE's order on a tray.

AXEL. What's that?

THURE. Oh, it was only me who took the liberty of ordering a couple of sandwiches—

AXEL. Right you were! But I think we ought to have some wine, so I could drink the health of my sister-in-law, as I couldn't get to the wedding.

THURE. Oh, no—not for us! Not so early in the morning! Thanks very much!

AXEL. [*Signals to the WAITER, who goes out*] I should have asked you to stay for dinner, but I have to go out myself. Can you guess where I am going?

THURE. You don't mean to say you're going to the Palace?

AXEL. Exactly—I am asked to meet the Monarch himself.

THURE. Lord preserve us!—What do you think of that, Anna?

His WIFE turns and twists on her chair as if in torment, quite unable to answer.

AXEL. I suppose the old man will turn republican after this, when he hears that His Majesty cares to associate with me.

THURE. See here, Axel—you'll have to pardon me for getting back to something that's not very pleasant—but it has to be settled.

AXEL. Is it that blessed old loan?

THURE. Yes, but it isn't only that. To put it plain—we've had to stand an execution for your sake, and now we're absolutely cleaned out.

AXEL. That's a fine state of affairs! But why in the world didn't you get the loan renewed?

THURE. Well, that's it! How was I to get any new sureties when you were away?

AXEL. Couldn't you go to my friends?

THURE. I did. And the result was—what it was. Can you help us out now?

AXEL. How am I going to help you now? Now when all my creditors are getting after me? And it won't do for me to start borrowing when they are just about to make a position for me. There's nothing that hurts you more than to borrow money. Just wait a little while, and we'll get it all straightened out.

THURE. If we're to wait, then everything's up with us. This is just the time to get hold of a garden—this is the time to start digging and sowing, if you are to get anything up in time. Can't you get a place for us?

AXEL. Where am I to get hold of a garden?

THURE. Among your friends.

AXEL. My friends keep no gardens. Now, don't you hamper me when I try to get up on firm ground! When I am there I'll pull you up, too.

THURE. [*To his WIFE*] He doesn't want to help us, Anna!

AXEL. I cannot—not this moment! Do you think it reasonable that I, who am seeking a job myself, should have to seek one for you, too? What would people be saying, do you think? "There, now,"

they would say, "we've got not only him but his relatives to look after!" And then they would drop me entirely.

THURE. [*Looks at his watch; then to his wife*] We've got to go.

AXEL. Why must you go so soon?

THURE. We have to take the child to a doctor.

AXEL. For the Lord's sake, have you a child, too?

WIFE. Yes, we have. And a sick child, which lost its health when we had to move out into the kitchen so that the auction could be held.

AXEL. And all this for my sake! It's enough to drive me crazy! For my sake! So that I might become a famous man!—And what is there I can do for you?—Do you think it would have been better if I had stayed at home?—No, worse—for then I should have been nothing but a poor teacher, who certainly could not have been of any use to you whatever.—Listen, now! You go to the doctor, but come back here after a while. In the meantime I'll think out something.

THURE. [*To his WIFE*] Do you see now, that he wants to help us?

WIFE. Yes, but can he do it? That's the question.

THURE. He can do anything he wants.

AXEL. Don't rely too much on it—or the last state may prove worse than the first.—Oh, merciful heavens, to think that you have a sick child, too! And for my sake!

THURE. Oh, I guess it isn't quite as bad as it sounds.

WIFE. Yes, so you say, who don't know anything about it—

THURE. Well, Axel, we'll see you later then.

LINDGREN *appears in the doorway.*

WIFE. [*To THURE*] Did you notice he didn't introduce us—to the chamberlain?

THURE. Oh, shucks, what good would that have been?

[*They go out.*]

FOURTH SCENE

AXEL. LINDGREN, *who is shabbily dressed, unshaved, apparently fond of drinking, and looking as if he had just got out of bed.*

AXEL *is startled for a moment at the sight of* LINDGREN.

LINDGREN. You don't recognise me?

AXEL. Yes, now I do. But you have changed a great deal.

LINDGREN. Oh, you think so?

AXEL. Yes, I do, and I am surprised to find that these years can have had such an effect—

LINDGREN. Three years may be pretty long.—And you don't ask me to sit down?

AXEL. Please—but I am rather in a hurry.

LINDGREN. You have always been in a hurry.

[*He sits down; pause.*]

AXEL. Why don't you say something unpleasant?

LINDGREN. It's coming, it's coming!

[*He wipes his spectacles; pause.*]

AXEL. How much do you need?

LINDGREN. Three hundred and fifty.

AXEL. I haven't got it, and I can't get it.

LINDGREN. Oh, sure!—You don't mind if I help myself to a few drops?

He pours out a drink from the bottle brought by the WAITER for THURE.

AXEL. Won't you have a glass of wine with me instead?

LINDGREN. No—why?

AXEL. Because it looks bad to be swilling whisky like that.

LINDGREN. How very proper you have become!

AXEL. Not at all, but it hurts my reputation and my credit.

LINDGREN. Oh, you have credit? Then you can also give me a lift, after having brought me down.

AXEL. That is to say: you are making demands?

LINDGREN. I am only reminding you that I am one of your victims.

AXEL. Then, because of the gratitude I owe you, I shall bring these facts back to your mind: that you helped me through the university at a time when you had plenty of money; that you helped to get my thesis printed—

LINDGREN. That I taught you the methods which determined your scientific career; that I, who then was as straight as anybody, exercised a favourable influence on your slovenly tendencies; that, in a word, I made you what you are; and that, finally, when I applied for an appropriation to undertake this expedition, you stepped in and took it.

AXEL. No, I got it. Because I, and not you, was held to be the man for the task.

LINDGREN. And that settled me! Thus, one shall be taken, and the other left!—Do you think that was treating me fairly?

AXEL. It was what the world calls "ungrateful," but the task was achieved, and by it science was enriched, the honour of our country upheld, and new regions opened for the use of coming generations.

LINDGREN. Here's to you!—You have had a lot of oratorical practice—But have you any idea how unpleasant it feels to play the part of one used up and cast off?

AXEL. I imagine it must feel very much like being conscious of ingratitude, and I can only congratulate you at not finding yourself in a position as unpleasant as my own.—But let us return to reality. What can I do for you?

LINDGREN. What do you think?

AXEL. For the moment—nothing.

LINDGREN. And in the next moment you are gone again. Which means that this would be the last I saw of you.

[*He pours out another drink.*]

AXEL. Will you do me the favour of not finishing the bottle? I don't want the servants to suspect me of it.

LINDGREN. Oh, go to hell!

AXEL. You don't think it's pleasant for me to have to call you down like this, do you?

LINDGREN. Say—do you want to get me a ticket for the banquet to-night?

AXEL. I am sorry to say that I don't think you would be admitted.

LINDGREN. Because—

AXEL. You are drunk!

LINDGREN. Thanks, old man!—Well, will you let me have a look at your botanical specimens, then?

AXEL. No, I am going to describe them myself for the Academy.

LINDGREN. How about your ethnographical stuff?

AXEL. No, that's not my own.

LINDGREN. Will you—let me have twenty-five crowns?

AXEL. As I haven't more than twenty myself, I can only give you ten.

LINDGREN. Rotten!

AXEL. Thus stand the affairs of the man everybody envies. Do you think there is anybody in whose company I might feel happy? Not one! Those that are still down hate me for climbing up, and those already up fear one coming from below.

LINDGREN. Yes, you are very unfortunate!

AXEL. I am! And I can tell you that after my experience during the last half-hour, I wouldn't mind changing place with you. What a peaceful, unassailable position he holds who has nothing to lose! What a lot of interest and sympathy those that are obscure and misunderstood and over-looked always arouse! You have only to hold out your hand and you get a coin. You have only to open your arms, and there are friends ready to fall into them. And then what a powerful party behind you—formed of the millions who are just like you! You enviable man who don't realise your own good fortune!

LINDGREN. So you think me that far down, and yourself as high up as all that?—Tell me, you don't happen to have read to-day's paper? [*He takes a newspaper from his pocket.*]

AXEL. No, and I don't care to read it either.

LINDGREN. But you ought to do it for your own sake.

AXEL. No, I am not going to do it—not even for *your* sake. It is as if you said: "Come here and let me spit at you." And then you are silly enough to demand that I shall come, too.—Do you know, during these last minutes I have become more and more convinced that if I had ever come across you in the jungle, I should beyond all doubt have picked you off with my breech-loader?

LINDGREN. I believe it—beast of prey that you are!

AXEL. It isn't safe to settle accounts with one's friends, or with persons with whom one has been intimate, for it is hard to tell in advance who has most on the debit side. But as you are bringing in a bill, I am forced to look it over.—You don't think it took me long to discover that back of all your generosity lay an unconscious desire to turn me into the strong arm which you lacked—to make me do for you what you couldn't do for yourself? I had imagination and initiative—you had nothing but money and—"pull." So I am to be congratulated that you didn't eat me, and I may be excused for eating you—my only choice being to eat or be eaten!

LINDGREN. You beast of prey!

AXEL. You rodent, who couldn't become a beast of prey—although that was just what you wished! And what you want at this moment is not so much to rise up to me as to pull me down to where you are.—If you have anything of importance to add, you had better hurry up, for I am expecting a visit.

LINDGREN. From your fiancée?

AXEL. So you have snooped that out, too?

LINDGREN. Sure enough! And I know what Marie, the deserted one, thinks and says—I know what has happened to your brother and his wife—

AXEL. Oh, you know my fiancée? For, you see, it so happens that I am not yet engaged!

LINDGREN. No, but I know *her* fiancé.

AXEL. What does that mean?

LINDGREN. Why, she has been running around with another fellow all the time—So you didn't know that?

AXEL. [*As he listens for something going on outside*] Oh, yes, I knew of it, but I thought she was done with him—See here, if you'll come back in a quarter of an hour, I'll try to get things arranged for you in some way or another.

LINDGREN. Is that a polite way of showing me the door?

AXEL. No, it's an attempt to meet an old obligation. Seriously!

LINDGREN. Well, then I'll go—and come back—Good-bye for a while.

FIFTH SCENE

AXEL. LINDGREN. *The WAITER. Then the FIANCÉ, dressed in black, with a blue ribbon in the lapel of his coat.*

WAITER. There's a gentleman here who wants to see you.

AXEL. Let him come in.

The WAITER goes out, leaving the door open behind him. The FIANCÉ enters.

LINDGREN. [*Observing the newcomer closely*] Well, good-bye.

AXEL—and good luck! [*He goes out.*

AXEL. Good-bye.

SIXTH SCENE

AXEL. *The FIANCÉ* [*much embarrassed*]

AXEL. With whom have I the honour—?

FIANCÉ. My name is not a name in the same way as yours, Doctor, and my errand concerns a matter of the heart—

AXEL. Oh, do you happen to be—You know Miss Cecilia?

FIANCÉ. I am the man.

AXEL. [*Hesitating for a moment; then with decision*] Please be seated. [*He opens the door and beckons the WAITER.*

The WAITER enters.

AXEL. [*To the WAITER*] Have my bill made out, see that my trunk is packed, and bring me a carriage in half an hour.

WAITER. [*Bowing and leaving*] Yes, Doctor.

AXEL. [*Goes up to the FIANCÉ and sits down on a chair beside him*] Now let's hear what you have to say?

FIANCÉ. [*After a pause, with unctiousness*] There were two men living in the same city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had sheep and cattle in plenty. The poor man owned nothing but one ewe lamb—

AXEL. What does that concern me?

FIANCÉ. [*As before*] One ewe lamb, which he had bought and was trying to raise.

AXEL. Oh, life's too short. What do you want? Are you and Miss Cecilia still engaged?

FIANCÉ. [*Changing his tone*] I haven't said a word about Miss Cecilia, have I?

AXEL. Well, sir, you had better get down to business, or I'll show you the door. But be quick about it, and get straight to the point, without any frills—

FIANCÉ. [*Holding out his snuff-box*] May I?

AXEL. No, thanks.

FIANCÉ. A great man like you has no such little weaknesses, I suppose?

AXEL. As you don't seem willing to speak, I shall. Of course, it is none of your business, but it may do you good to learn of it, as you don't seem to know it: I am regularly engaged to Miss Cecilia, who formerly was your fiancée.

FIANCÉ. [*Startled*] Who was?

AXEL. Because she has broken with you.

FIANCÉ. I know nothing about it.

AXEL. [*Taking a ring from the pocket of his waistcoat*] That's strange, but now you do know. And here you can see the ring she has given me.

FIANCÉ. So she has broken with me?

AXEL. Yes, as she couldn't be engaged to two men at the same time, and as she had ceased to care for you, she had to break with you. I might have told you all this in a more decent fashion, if you hadn't stepped on my corns the moment you came in.

FIANCÉ. I didn't do anything of the kind.

AXEL. Cowardly and disingenuous—cringing and arrogant at the same time!

FIANCÉ. [*Gently*] You are a hard man, Doctor.

AXEL. No, but I may become one. You showed no consideration for my feelings a moment ago. You sneered, which I didn't. And that's the end of our conversation.

FIANCÉ. [*With genuine emotion*] I feared that you might take away from me my only lamb—but you wouldn't do that, you who have so many—

AXEL. Suppose I wouldn't—are you sure she would stay with you anyhow?

FIANCÉ. Put yourself in my place, Doctor—

AXEL. Yes, if you'll put yourself in mine.

FIANCÉ. I am a poor man—

AXEL. So am I! But judging by what I see and hear, you have certain bliss waiting for you in the beyond. That's more than I have.—And, furthermore, I have taken nothing away from you: I have only received what was offered me. Just as you did!

FIANCÉ. And I who had been dreaming of a future for this young woman—a future full of brightness—

AXEL. Pardon me a piece of rudeness, but you began it: are you so sure that the future of this young woman will not turn out a great deal brighter by my side?

FIANCÉ. You are now reminding me of my humble position as a worker—

AXEL. No, I am reminding you of that young woman's future, which you have so much at heart. And as I am told that she has ceased to care for you, but does care for me, I am only taking the liberty to dream of a brighter future for her with the man she loves than with the man she doesn't love.

FIANCÉ. You are a strong man, you are, and we little ones were born to be your victims!

AXEL. See here, my man, I have been told that you got the better of another rival for Cecilia's heart, and that you were not very scrupulous about the means used for the purpose. How do you think that *victim* liked you?

FIANCÉ. He was a worthless fellow.

AXEL. From whom you saved the girl! And now I save her from you! Good-bye!

SEVENTH SCENE

AXEL. *The* FIANCÉ. CECILIA.

FIANCÉ. Cecilia!

CECILIA *draws back from him.*

FIANCÉ. You seem to know your way into this place?

AXEL. [*To the FIANCÉ*] You had better disappear!

CECILIA. I want some water!

FIANCÉ. [*Picking up the whisky bottle from the table*] The bottle seems to be finished!—Beware of that man, Cecilia!

AXEL. [*Pushing the FIANCÉ out through the door*] Oh, your presence is wholly superfluous—get out!

FIANCÉ. Beware of that man, Cecilia! [*He goes out.*]

EIGHTH SCENE

AXEL. CECILIA.

AXEL. That was a most unpleasant incident, which you might have spared me—both by breaking openly with him and by not coming to my room.

CECILIA. [*Weeping*] So I am to be scolded, too?

AXEL. Well, the responsibility had to be fixed, and now, when that's done—we can talk of something else.—How are you, to begin with?

CECILIA. So, so!

AXEL. Not well, that means?

CECILIA. How are you?

AXEL. Fine—only a little tired.

CECILIA. Are you going with me to see my aunt this after-noon?

AXEL. No, I cannot, for I have to drive out.

CECILIA. And that's more fun, of course. You go out such a lot, and I—never!

AXEL. Hm!

CECILIA. Why do you say "hm"?

AXEL. Because your remark made an unpleasant impression on me.

CECILIA. One gets so many unpleasant impressions these days—

AXEL. For instance?

CECILIA. By reading the papers.

AXEL. So you have been reading those scandalous stories about me! And you believe them?

CECILIA. One doesn't know what to believe.

AXEL. So you really suspect me of being the unscrupulous fellow pictured in those stories? And as you are nevertheless willing to marry me, I must assume that you are moved by purely practical considerations and not by any personal attraction.

CECILIA. You speak so harshly, as if you didn't care for me at all!

AXEL. Cecilia—are you willing to leave this place with me in fifteen minutes?

CECILIA. In fifteen minutes! For where!

AXEL. London.

CECILIA. I am not going with you until we are married.

AXEL. Why?

CECILIA. Why should we leave like that, all of a sudden?

AXEL. Because—it's suffocating here! And if I stay, they'll drag me down so deep that I'll never get up again.

CECILIA. How strange! Are you as badly off as that?

AXEL. Do you come with me, or do you not?

CECILIA. Not until we are married—for afterward you would never marry me.

AXEL. So that's your faith in me!—Will you sit down for a moment, then, while I go in and write a couple of letters?

CECILIA. Am I to sit here alone, with all the doors open?

AXEL. Well, don't lock the door, for then we are utterly lost. [*He goes out to the left.*]

CECILIA. Don't be long!

She goes up to the door leading to the hallway and turns the key in the lock.

NINTH SCENE

CECILIA *alone for a moment.* Then MARIE *enters.*

CECILIA. Wasn't the door locked?

MARIE. Not as far as I could see!—So it was meant to be locked?

CECILIA. I haven't the honour?

MARIE. Nor have I.

CECILIA. Why should you?

MARIE. How refined! Oh, I see! So it's you! And I am the victim—for a while!

CECILIA. I don't know you.

MARIE. But I know you pretty well.

CECILIA. [*Rises and goes to the door at the left*] Oh, you do? [*Opening the door and speaking to AXEL*] Come out here a moment!

TENTH SCENE

CECILIA. MARIE. AXEL.

AXEL. [*Entering; to MARIE*] What do you want here?

MARIE. Oh, one never can tell.

AXEL. Then you had better clear out.

MARIE. Why?

AXEL. Because what there was between us came to an end three years ago.

MARIE. And now there is another one to be thrown on the scrap heap?

AXEL. Did I ever give you any promises that were not kept? Have I ever owed you anything? Have I ever said a word about marriage? Have we had any children together? Have I been the only one to receive your favours?

MARIE. But now you mean to be the only one? With that one over there!

CECILIA. [*Goes up to MARIE*] What do you mean?—I don't know you!

MARIE. No, but there was a time when you did know me. And I remember that when we met in the streets we called each other by our first names. [*To AXEL*] And now you are going to marry her? No, you know, you are really too good for that!

AXEL. [*To CECILIA*] Have you known that woman before?

CECILIA. No.

MARIE. You ought to be ashamed of yourself? I simply didn't recognise you at first because of your swell clothes—

AXEL *gazes intently at CECILIA.*

CECILIA. [*To AXEL*] Come—I'll go with you!

AXEL. [*Preoccupied*] In a moment! Just wait a while! I am only going in to write another letter—But now we'll close the door first of all.

MARIE. No, thank you, I don't want to be locked in as she was a while ago.

AXEL. [*Interested*] Was the door locked?

CECILIA. [*To MARIE*] You don't dare say that the door was locked!

MARIE. As you expected it to be locked, I suppose you had tried to lock it and had not succeeded

AXEL. [*Observes CECILIA; then to MARIE*] It always seemed to me that you were a nice girl, Marie. Will you let me have my letters back now?

MARIE. No.

AXEL. What are you going to do with them?

MARIE. I hear that I can sell them, now when you have become famous.

AXEL. And get your revenge at the same time?

MARIE. Exactly.

AXEL. Is it Lindgren—?

MARIE. Yes!—And here he is now himself.

ELEVENTH SCENE

CECILIA. MARIE. AXEL. LINDGREN.

LINDGREN. [*Enters in high spirits*] Well, what a lot of skirts! And Marie, too—like the cuckoo that's in every nest! Now listen, Axel!

AXEL. I hear you even when I don't see you. You're in a fine humour—what new misfortune has befallen me?

LINDGREN. I was only a little sour this morning because I hadn't had a chance to get wound up. But now I've had a bite to eat—Well, you see—at bottom you don't owe me anything at all. For what I did, I did out of my heart's goodness, and it has brought me both honour and pleasure—and what you got was a gift and no loan!

AXEL. Now you are altogether too modest and generous.

LINDGREN. Not at all! However, one favour calls for another. Would you mind becoming my surety on this note?

AXEL hesitates.

LINDGREN. Well, you needn't be afraid that I'm going to put you in the same kind of fix as your brother did—

AXEL. What do you mean? It was I who put him—

LINDGREN. Yes, to the tune of two hundred crowns—but he got your name as surety for five years' rent—

AXEL. [*In a low voice*] Jesus Christ!

LINDGREN. What's that?—Hm—hm!

AXEL. [*Looking at his watch*] Just wait a few minutes—I have only to write a couple of letters.

CECILIA starts to go with him.

AXEL. [*Holds her back*] Just a few minutes, my dear—[*He kisses her on the forehead*] Just a few minutes!

[He goes toward the left.

LINDGREN. Here's the note—you might sign it while you are at it.

AXEL. Give it to me!

[He goes out with an air of determination.

TWELFTH SCENE

CECILIA. MARIE. LINDGREN.

LINDGREN. Well, girls, are you on good terms again?

MARIE. Oh, yes, and before we get away, we'll be on still better terms.

CECILIA makes a face.

MARIE. I should like to have some fun to-day.

LINDGREN. Come along with me! I'll have money!

MARIE. No!

CECILIA sits down with evident anxiety near the door through which AXEL disappeared—as if seeking support in that direction.

LINDGREN. Let's take in the fireworks to-night—then we can see how a great man looks in red light—what do you say to that, Cissie dear?

CECILIA. Oh, I'll be sick if I have to stay here longer!

MARIE. Well, it wouldn't be the first time.

LINDGREN. Scrap, girls, and I'll watch you! Fight till the fur flies—won't you?

THIRTEENTH SCENE

CECILIA. MARIE. LINDGREN. THURE *and his* WIFE *enter.*

LINDGREN. Well, well! Old friends! How are you?

THURE. All right.

LINDGREN. And the child?

THURE. The child?

LINDGREN. Oh, you have forgotten it?—Are you equally forgetful about names?

THURE. Names?

LINDGREN. Signatures!—He must be writing an awful lot in there!

THURE. Is my brother, the doctor, in there?

LINDGREN. I don't know if the doctor is there, but your brother went in there a while ago.—And, for that matter, we might find out. [*He knocks at the door*] Silent as the grave! [*Knocks again*] Then I'll walk right in.

[*He goes out; everybody appears restless and anxious.*]

CECILIA. What can it mean?

MARIE. Well, we'll see now.

THURE. What has happened here?

WIFE. Something is up!—You'll see he doesn't help us!

LINDGREN. [*Returns, carrying in his hand a small bottle and some letters*] What does it say? [*He reads the label on the bottle*] Cyanide of potassium!—How stupid! What a sentimental idiot—to kill himself for so little—[*Everybody cries out*] So you were no beast of prey, my dear Axel!—But —[*He stares through the open door into the adjoining room*—he's not there—and his things are gone, too. So he has skipped out! And the bottle has never been opened! That means—he meant to kill himself, but changed his mind!—And these are his posthumous writings. "To Miss Cecilia"—seems to contain some round object—probably an engagement ring—there you are! —"To my brother THURE" [*He holds up the letter to the light*]—with a piece of blue paper inside—must be a note—for the amount involved! You're welcome!

The FIANCÉ appears in the doorway at the right.

THURE. [*Who has opened his letter*] Do you see that he helped us after all—

WIFE. Oh, in that way!

LINDGREN. And here's my note—without his name—He's a strong one, all right! *Diable!*

MARIE. Then the fireworks will be called off, I suppose?

FIANCÉ. Was there nothing for me?

LINDGREN. Yes, I think there was a fiancée—somewhere over there!—I tell you, that fellow is a wonder at clearing up tangled affairs!—Of course, it makes me mad to think that I let myself be fooled—but I'll be darned if I don't think I would have done just as he did!—And so would you, perhaps?—Or what do you think?

Curtain.

ADVENT

(ADVENT)

A MIRACLE PLAY

1899

CHARACTERS

The JUDGE
The OLD LADY, *wife of the Judge*
AMELIA
ADOLPH
The NEIGHBOUR
ERIC
THYRA
being the same person
The OTHER ONE
The FRANCISCAN
The PLAYMATE
The WITCH
The PRINCE
Subordinate characters, shadows, etc.

ACT I. THE VINEYARD WITH THE MAUSOLEUM

ACT II. THE DRAWING-ROOM

ACT III. THE WINE-CELLAR

THE GARDEN

ACT IV. THE CROSS-ROADS

THE "WAITING-ROOM"

THE CROSS-ROADS

ACT I

The background represents a vineyard. At the left stands a mausoleum. It consists of a small whitewashed brick building with a door and a pointed window that lacks mullions and panes. The roof is made of red tiles. A cross crowns the gable. Clematis vines with purple-coloured, cross-shaped flowers cover the front wall, at the foot of which appear a number of other flowers.

A peach-tree carrying fruit stands near the foreground. Beneath it sit the OLD LADY and the OLD LADY.

The Judge wears a green cap with a peak, yellow knee-breeches, and—a blue coat—all dating back to 1820. The Old Lady wears a kerchief on her head and carries a stick, spectacles, and snuff-box. She has the general appearance of a "witch." At the right is a small expiatory chapel containing an image of the Holy Virgin. The fence in front of it is hung with wreaths and nosegays. A prie-dieu is placed against the fence.

JUDGE. Life's eve has at last brought the sunshine which its morning promised us. Early rains and late rains have blessed meadow and field. And soon the songs of the vintagers will be heard all over the country.

OLD LADY. Don't talk like that; somebody might hear you.

JUDGE. Who could be listening here, and what harm could it do to thank God for all good gifts?

OLD LADY. It's better not to mention one's good fortune lest misfortune overhear it.

JUDGE. What of it? Was I not born with a caul?

OLD LADY. Take care, take care! There are many who envy us, and evil eyes are watching us.

JUDGE. Well, let them! That's the way it has always been. And yet I have prospered.

OLD LADY. So far, yes. But I don't trust our neighbour. He has been going around the village saying that we have cheated him out of his property—and much more of the same kind which I don't care to repeat. Of course, it doesn't matter when one has a clean conscience and can point to a spotless life. Slander cannot hurt me. I go to confession and mass, and I am prepared to close my eyes whenever my hour may strike in order to open them again when I shall stand face to face with my Judge. And I know also what I am going to answer then.

JUDGE. What are you going to answer?

OLD LADY. Like this: I was not without fault, O Lord, but even if I was but a poor, sinful human creature, I was nevertheless a little better than my neighbour.

JUDGE. I don't know what has brought you to these thoughts just now, and I don't like them. Perhaps it is the fact that the mausoleum is to be consecrated in a few days?

OLD LADY. Perhaps that is it, for, as a rule, I don't give much thought to death. I have still every tooth left in my mouth, and my hair is as plentiful as when I was a bride.

JUDGE. Yes, yes—you have eternal youth, you as well as I, but just the same we shall have to pass away. And as fortune has smiled on us, we have wanted to avail ourselves of the privilege of resting in ground belonging to ourselves. And so we have built this little tomb for ourselves here, where every tree knows us, where every flower will whisper of our labours, and our troubles, and our struggles—

OLD LADY. Yes, struggles against envious neighbours and ungrateful children—

JUDGE. There you said it: ungrateful children.—Have you seen anything of Adolph?

OLD LADY. No, I haven't seen him since he started out this morning to raise the money for the rent.

JUDGE. The money which he will never get—and I still less. But he knows now that the time of grace is up, for this is the third quarter rent that he has failed to pay.

OLD LADY. Yes, out with him into the world, and let him learn to work instead of sitting here and playing at son-in-law. I'll keep Amelia and the children—

JUDGE. Do you think Amelia will let herself be separated from Adolph?

OLD LADY. I think so, when it is a question whether her children are to inherit anything from us or not—No, look! There it is again!

On the wall of the mausoleum appears a spot of sunlight like those which children are fond of producing with a small mirror.^[1] It is vibrating as if it were reflected by running water.

JUDGE. What is it? What is it?

OLD LADY. On the mausoleum. Don't you see?

JUDGE. It's the reflection of the sun on the river. It means——

OLD LADY. It means that we'll see the light of the sun for a long time to come——

JUDGE. On the contrary. But that's all one. The best pillow for one's head is a good conscience, and the reward of the righteous never fails.—There's our neighbour now.

NEIGHBOUR. [*Enters*] Good evening, Judge. Good evening, madam.

JUDGE. Good evening, neighbour. How goes it? It wasn't yesterday we had the pleasure. And how are your vines, I should have asked?

NEIGHBOUR. The vines, yes—there's mildew on them, and the starlings are after them, too.

JUDGE. Well, well! There's no mildew on my vines, and I have neither seen nor heard of any starlings.

NEIGHBOUR. Fate does not distribute its gifts evenly: one shall be taken and the other left.

OLD LADY. I suppose there are good reasons for it?

NEIGHBOUR. I see! The reward of the righteous shall not fail, and the wicked shall not have to wait for their punishment.

JUDGE. Oh, no malice meant! But you have to admit, anyhow, that it's queer: two parcels of land lie side by side, and one yields good harvests, the other poor ones——

NEIGHBOUR. One yields starlings and the other not: that's what I find queerer still. But, then, everybody wasn't born with a caul, like you, Judge.

JUDGE. What you say is true, and fortune *has* favoured me. I am thankful for it, and there are moments when I feel proud of it as if I had deserved it.—But listen, neighbour—you came as if you had been sent for.—That leasehold of mine is vacant, and I wanted to ask you if you care to take it.

[1] In Sweden such spots are called "sun-cats."

The OLD LADY has in the meantime left her seat and gone to the mausoleum, where she is busying herself with the flowers.

NEIGHBOUR. Oh, the leasehold is vacant. Hm! Since when?

JUDGE. Since this morning.

NEIGHBOUR. Hm! So!—That means your son-in-law has got to go?

JUDGE. Yes, that good-for-nothing doesn't know how to manage.

NEIGHBOUR. Tell me something else, Judge. Haven't you heard that the state intends to build a military road across this property?

JUDGE. Oh, I have heard some rumours to that effect, but I don't think it's anything but empty talk.

NEIGHBOUR. On the contrary, I have read it in the papers. That would mean condemnation proceedings, and the loser would be the holder of the lease.

JUDGE. I cannot think so, and I would never submit to it. I to leave this spot where I expect to end my days in peace, and where I have prepared a final resting-place to escape lying with all the rest ——

NEIGHBOUR. Wait a minute! One never knows what may prove one's final resting-place. My father, who used to own this property, also expected to be laid to rest in his own ground, but it happened otherwise. As far as the leasehold is concerned, I must let it go.

JUDGE. As you please. On my part the proposition was certainly disinterested, as you are a man without luck. For it is no secret that you fail in everything you undertake, and people have their own thoughts about one who remains as solitary and friendless as you. Isn't it a fact that you haven't a single friend?

NEIGHBOUR. Yes, it's true. I have not a single friend, and that doesn't look well. It is something I cannot deny.

JUDGE. But to turn to other matters—is it true, as the legend has it, that this vineyard once was a battle-field, and that this explains why the wine from it is so fiery?

NEIGHBOUR. No, that isn't what I have heard. My father told me that this had been a place of execution, and that the gallows used to stand where the mausoleum is now.

JUDGE. Oh, how dreadful! Why did you tell me?

NEIGHBOUR. Because you asked, of course.—And the last man to be hanged on this spot was an unrighteous judge. And now he lies buried here, together with many others, among them being also an innocent victim of his iniquity.

JUDGE. What kind of stories are those! [*He calls out*] Caroline!

NEIGHBOUR. And that's why his ghost has to come back here. Have you never seen him, Judge?

JUDGE. I have never seen anything at all!

NEIGHBOUR. But I have seen him. As a rule, he appears at the time when the grapes are harvested, and then they hear him around the wine-press down in the cellar.

JUDGE. [*Calling out*] Caroline!

OLD LADY. What is it?

JUDGE. Come here!

NEIGHBOUR. And he will never be at peace until he has suffered all the torments his victim had to pass through.

JUDGE. Get away from here! Go!

NEIGHBOUR. Certainly, Judge! I didn't know you were so sensitive. [*He goes out.*]

OLD LADY. What was the matter?

JUDGE. Oh, he told a lot of stories that upset me. But-but—he is plotting something evil, that fellow!

OLD LADY. Didn't I tell you so! But you always let your tongue run whenever you see anybody—What kind of foolish superstition was he giving you?

JUDGE. I don't want to talk of it. The mere thought of it makes me sick. I'll tell you some other time.—There's Adolph now!

ADOLPH. [*Entering*] Good evening!

JUDGE. [*After a pause*] Well?

ADOLPH. Luck is against me. I have not been able to get any money.

JUDGE. I suppose there are good reasons for it?

ADOLPH. I can see no reason why some people should fare well and others badly.

JUDGE. Oh, you can't?—Well, look into your own heart; search your own thoughts and actions, and you'll find that you have yourself to blame for your misfortunes.

ADOLPH. Perhaps I may not call myself righteous in every respect, but at least I have no serious crimes on my conscience.

OLD LADY. You had better think well——

ADOLPH. I don't think that's needful, for my conscience is pretty wakeful——

JUDGE. It can be put to sleep——

ADOLPH. Can it? Of course I have heard of evil-doers growing old in crime, but as a rule their consciences wake up just before death; and I have even heard of criminals whose consciences have awakened after death.

JUDGE. [*Agitated*] So that they had to come back, you mean? Have you heard that story, too? It's strange that everybody seems to have heard it except me——

OLD LADY. What are you talking about? Stick to business instead.

ADOLPH. Yes, I think that's wiser, too. And, as the subject has been broached, I want to tell you what I propose——

JUDGE. Look here, my boy! I think it a good deal more appropriate that I should tell you what I have decided. It is this: that from this day you cease to be my tenant, and that before the sun sets you must start out to look for work.

ADOLPH. Are you in earnest?

JUDGE. You ought to be ashamed! I am not in the habit of joking. And you have no cause for complaint, as you have been granted respite twice.

ADOLPH. While my crops have failed three times. Can I help that?

JUDGE. Nor have I said so. But I can help it still less. And you are not being judged by me. Here is the contract—here's the broken agreement. Was that agreement broken by me? Oh, no! So I am without responsibility and wash my hands of the matter.

ADOLPH. This may be the law, but I had thought there ought to be some forbearance among relatives—especially as, in the natural course of events, this property should pass on to your offspring.

OLD LADY. Well, well: the natural course of events! He's going around here wishing the life out of us! But you just look at me: I am good for twenty years more. And I am *going* to live just to spite you!

JUDGE. [*To Adolph*] What rudeness—what a lack of all human feeling—to ask a couple of old people outright: are you not going to die soon? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, I say! But now you have broken the last tie, and all I can say is: go your way, and don't let yourself be seen here any more!

ADOLPH. That's plain talk! Well, I'll go, but not alone——

OLD LADY. So-o—you imagined that Amelia, our own child, should follow you out on the highways, and that all you would have to do would be to unload one child after another on us! But we have

already thought of that and put a stop to it—

ADOLPH. Where is Amelia? Where?

OLD LADY. You may just as well know. She has gone on; a visit to the convent of the Poor Clares—only for a visit. So now you know it's of no use to look for her here.

ADOLPH. Some time you will have to suffer for your cruelty in depriving a man in distress of his only support. And if you break up our marriage, the penalty of that breach will fall on you.

JUDGE. You should be ashamed of putting your own guilt on those that are innocent! Go now! And may you hunger and thirst, with every door closed to you, until you have learned gratitude!

ADOLPH. The same to you in double measure!—But let me only bid my children good-bye, and I will go.

JUDGE. As you don't want to spare your children the pain of leave-taking, I'll do so—have already done it, in fact.

ADOLPH. That, too! Then I believe you capable of all the evil that has been rumoured. And now I know what our neighbour meant when he said that you couldn't—endure the sun!

JUDGE. Not another word! Or you will feel the heavy hand of law and justice—

He raises his right hand so that the absence of its forefinger becomes visible.

ADOLPH. [*Takes hold of the hand and examines it*] The hand of justice!—The hand of the perjurer whose finger stuck to the Bible when he took his false oath! Woe unto you! Woe! For the day of retribution is at hand, and your deeds will rise like corpses out of these hillsides to accuse you.

OLD LADY. What is that he is saying? It feels as if he were breathing fire at us!—Go, you lying spirit, and may hell be your reward!

ADOLPH. May Heaven reward you—according to your deserts—and may the Lord protect my children! [*He goes out.*]

JUDGE. What was that? Who was it that spoke? It seemed to me as if the voice were coming out of some huge underground hall.

OLD LADY. Did you hear it, too?

JUDGE. God help us, then!—Do you remember what he said about the sun? That struck me as more peculiar than all the rest. How could he know—that it is so? Ever since my birth the sun has always burned me, and they have told me this is so because my mother suffered from sunstroke before I was born—but that you also—

OLD LADY. [*Frightened*] Hush! Talk of the devil, and—Isn't the sun down?

JUDGE. Of course it is down!

OLD LADY. How can that spot of sunlight remain on the mausoleum, then?

[The spot moves around.]

JUDGE. Jesus Maria! That's an omen!

OLD LADY. An omen, you say! And on the grave! That doesn't happen every day—and only a few chosen people who are full of living faith in the highest things—

[The spot of light disappears.]

JUDGE. There is something weird about the place to-night, something ghastly.—But what hurt me most keenly was to hear that good-for-nothing wishing the life out of us in order to get at the property. Do you know what I—well, I wonder if I dare to speak of it—

OLD LADY. Go on!

JUDGE. Have you heard the story that this spot here used to be a place of execution?

OLD LADY. So you have found that out, too?

JUDGE. Yes—and you knew it?—Well, suppose we gave this property to the convent? That would make the ground sacred, and it would be possible to rest in peace in it. The income might go to the children while they are growing up, and it would mean an additional gain, as Adolph would be fooled in his hope of inheriting from us. I think this a remarkably happy solution of a difficult problem: how to give away without losing anything by it.

OLD LADY. Your superior intelligence has again asserted itself, and I am quite of your opinion. But suppose condemnation proceedings should be started—what would happen then?

JUDGE. There is plenty of time to consider that when it happens. In the meantime, let us first of all, and as quietly as possible, get the mausoleum consecrated—

FRANCISCAN. [*Enters*] The peace of the Lord be with you, Judge, and with you, madam!

JUDGE. You come most conveniently, Father, to hear something that concerns the convent—

FRANCISCAN. I am glad of it.

The spot of light appears again on the mausoleum.

OLD LADY. And then we wanted to ask when the consecration of the mausoleum might take place.

FRANCISCAN. [*Staring at her*] Oh, is that so?

JUDGE. Look, Father—look at that omen—

OLD LADY. Yes, the spot must be sacred, indeed—

FRANCISCAN. That's a will-o'-the-wisp.

OLD LADY. Is it not a good sign? Does it not carry some kind of message? Does it not prompt a pious mind to stop and consider? Would it not be possible to turn this place into a refuge for desert wanderers who are seeking—

FRANCISCAN. Madam, let me speak a word to you in private. [*He moves over to the right.*]

OLD LADY. [*Following him*] Father?

FRANCISCAN. [*Speaking in a subdued voice*] You, madam, enjoy a reputation in this vicinity which you don't deserve, for you are the worst sinner that I know of. You want to buy your pardon, and you want to steal heaven itself, you who have already stolen from the Lord.

OLD LADY. What is it I hear?

FRANCISCAN. When you were sick and near death you made a vow to the Lord that in case of recovery you would give a monstrance of pure gold to the convent church. Your health was restored and you gave the holy vessel, but it was of silver—gilded. Not for the sake of the gold, but because of your broken vow and your deception, you are already damned.

OLD LADY. I didn't know it. The goldsmith has cheated me.

FRANCISCAN. You are lying, for I have the goldsmith's bill.

OLD LADY. Is there no pardon for it?

FRANCISCAN. No! For it is a mortal sin to cheat God.

OLD LADY. Woe is me!

FRANCISCAN. The settlement of your other crimes will have to take place within yourself. But if you as much as touch a hair on the heads of the children, then you shall learn who is their protector, and you shall feel the iron rod.

OLD LADY. The idea—that this infernal monk should dare to say such things to me! If I am damned—then I want to be damned! Ha, ha!

FRANCISCAN. Well, you may be sure that there will be no blessing for your house and no peace for yourself until you have suffered every suffering that you have brought on others.—May I speak a word with you, Judge?

The Judge approaches.

OLD LADY. Yes, give him what he deserves, so that one may be as good as the other.

FRANCISCAN. [*To the Judge*] Where did you get the idea of building your tomb where the gallows used to stand?

JUDGE. I suppose I got it from the devil!

FRANCISCAN. Like the idea of casting off your children and robbing them of their inheritance? But you have also been an unrighteous judge—you have violated oaths and accepted bribes.

JUDGE. I?

FRANCISCAN. And now you want to erect a monument to yourself! You want to build yourself an imperishable house in heaven! But listen to me: this spot will never be consecrated, and you may consider it a blessing if you are permitted to rest in common ground among ordinary little sinners. There is a curse laid on this soil, because blood-guilt attaches to it and because it is ill-gotten.

JUDGE. What am I to do?

FRANCISCAN. Repent, and restore the stolen property.

JUDGE. I have never stolen. Everything has been legally acquired.

FRANCISCAN. That, you see, is the worst part of all—that you regard your crimes as lawful. Yes, I know that you even consider yourself particularly favoured by Heaven because of your righteousness. But now you will soon see what harvest is in store for you. Thorns and thistles will grow in your vineyard. Helpless and abandoned you shall be, and the peace of your old age will turn into struggle and strife.

JUDGE. The devil you say!

FRANCISCAN. Don't call him—he'll come anyhow!

JUDGE. Let him come! Because we believe, we have no fear!

FRANCISCAN. The devils believe also, and tremble!—Farewell! [*He goes out.*]

JUDGE. [*To his wife*] What did he say to you?

OLD LADY. You think I'll tell? What did he have to say to you?

JUDGE. And you think I'll tell?

OLD LADY. Are you going to keep any secrets from me?

JUDGE. And how about you? It's what you have always done, but I'll get to the bottom of your tricks some time.

OLD LADY. Just wait a little, and I'll figure out where you keep the money that is missing.

JUDGE. So you are hiding money, too! Now there is no longer any use in playing the hypocrite—just let yourself be seen in all your abomination, you witch!

OLD LADY. I think you have lost your reason—not that it was much to keep! But you might at least preserve an appearance of decency, if you can—

JUDGE. And you might preserve your beauty—if you can! And your perennial youth—ha, ha, ha! And your righteousness! You must have known how to bewitch people, and hoodwink them, for now I see how horribly ugly and old you are.

OLD LADY. [*On whom the spot of light now appears*] Woe! It is burning me!

JUDGE. There I see you as you really are! [*The spot jumps to the JUDGE*] Woe! It is burning me now!

OLD LADY. And how you look! [*Both withdraw to the right.*]

[*The NEIGHBOUR and AMELIA enter from the left.*]

NEIGHBOUR. Yes, child, there is justice, both human and divine, but we must have patience.

AMELIA. I am willing to believe that justice is done, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. But I cannot love my mother, and I have never been able to do so. There is something within me that keeps telling me that she is not only indifferent to me but actually hostile.

NEIGHBOUR. So you have found it out?

AMELIA. Why—she hates me, and a mother couldn't do that!

NEIGHBOUR. Well, well!

AMELIA. And I suffer from not being able to do my duty as a child and love her.

NEIGHBOUR. Well, as *that* has made you suffer, then you will soon—in the hour of retribution—learn the great secret of your life.

AMELIA. And I could stand everything, if she were only kind to my children.

NEIGHBOUR. Don't fear on that account, for her power is now ended. The measure of her wickedness has been heaped full and is now overflowing.

AMELIA. Do you think so? But this very day she tore my Adolph away from me, and now she has humiliated me still further by dressing me as a servant girl and making me do the work in the kitchen.

NEIGHBOUR. Patience!

AMELIA. Yes, so you say! Oh, I can understand deserved suffering, but to suffer without cause—

NEIGHBOUR. My dear child, the prisoners in the penitentiary are suffering justly, so there is no honour in that; but to be permitted to suffer unjustly, that's a grace and a trial of which steadfast souls bring home golden fruits.

AMELIA. You speak so beautifully that everything you say seems true to me.—Hush! There are the children—and I don't want them to see me dressed like this.

She and the NEIGHBOUR take up a position where they are hidden by a tall shrub.

ERIC and THYRA enter; the spot of light rests now on one of them and now on the other.

ERIC. Look at the sun spot!

THYRA. Oh, you beautiful sun! But didn't he go to bed a while ago?

ERIC. Perhaps he is allowed to stay up longer than usual because he has been very good all day.

THYRA. But how could the sun be good? Now you are stupid, Eric.

ERIC. Of course the sun can be good—doesn't he make the grapes and the peaches?

THYRA. But if he is so good, then he might also give us a peach.

ERIC. So he will, if we only wait a little. Aren't there any on the ground at all?

THYRA. [*Looking*] No, but perhaps we might get one from the tree.

ERIC. No, grandmother won't let us.

THYRA. Grandmother has said that we mustn't shake the tree, but I thought we could play around the tree so that one might fall down anyhow—of itself.

ERIC. Now you are stupid, Thyra. That would be exactly the same thing. [*Looking up at the tree*] Oh, if only a peach would fall down!

THYRA. None will fall unless you shake.

ERIC. You mustn't talk like that, Thyra, for that is a sin.

THYRA. Let's pray God to let one fall.

ERIC. One shouldn't pray God for anything nice—that is, to eat!—Oh, little peach, won't you fall? I want you to fall! [*A peach falls from the tree, and ERIC picks it up*] There, what a nice tree!

THYRA. But now you must give me half, for it was I who said that the tree had to be shaken—

OLD LADY. [*Enters with a big birch rod*] So you have been shaking the tree—now you'll see what you'll get, you nasty children—

ERIC. No, grandmother, we didn't shake the tree!

OLD LADY. So you are lying, too. Didn't I hear Thyra say that the tree had to be shaken? Come along now, and I'll lock you up in the cellar where neither sun nor moon is to be seen—

AMELIA. [*Coming forward*] The children are innocent, mother.

OLD LADY. That's a fine thing—to stand behind the bushes listening, and then to teach one's own children how to lie besides!

NEIGHBOUR. [*Appearing*] Nothing has been spoken here but the truth, madam.

OLD LADY. Two witnesses behind the bushes—exactly as if we were in court. But I know the tricks, I tell you, and what I have heard and seen is sufficient evidence for me.—Come along, you brats!

AMELIA. This is sinful and shameful—

The NEIGHBOUR signals to AMELIA by putting his finger across his lips.

AMELIA. [*Goes up to her children*] Don't cry, children! Obey grandmother now—there is nothing to be afraid of. It is better to suffer evil than to do it, and I know that you are innocent. May God preserve you! And don't forget your evening prayer!

The OLD LADY goes out with the children.

AMELIA. Belief comes so hard, but it is sweet if you can achieve it.

NEIGHBOUR. Is it so hard to believe that God is good—at the very moment when his kind intentions are most apparent?

AMELIA. Give me a great and good word for the night, so that I may sleep on it as on a soft pillow.

NEIGHBOUR. You shall have it. Let me think a moment.—This is it: Isaac was to be sacrificed—

AMELIA. Oh, no, no!

NEIGHBOUR. Quiet, now!—Isaac was to *be* sacrificed, but he never was!

AMELIA. Thank you! Thank you! And good night!

She goes out to the right.

NEIGHBOUR. Good night, my child!

[He goes slowly out by a path leading to the rear.

THE PROCESSION OF SHADOWS *enters from the mausoleum and moves without a sound across the stage toward the right; between every two figures there is a distance of five steps:*

DEATH *with its scythe and hour-glass.*

THE LADY IN WHITE—*blond, tall, and slender; on one of her fingers she wears a ring with a green stone that seems to emit rays of light.*

THE GOLDSMITH, *with the counterfeit monstrance.*

THE BEHEADED SAILOR, *carrying his head in one hand.*

THE AUCTIONEER, *with hammer and note-book.*

THE CHIMNEY-SWEEP, *with rope, scraper, and broom.*

THE FOOL, *carrying his cap with the ass's ears and bells at the top of a pole, across which is placed a signboard with the word "Caul" on it.*

THE SURVEYOR, *with measuring rod and tripod.*

THE MAGISTRATE, *dressed and made up like the JUDGE; he carries a rope around his neck; and his right hand is raised to show that the forefinger is missing.*

The stage is darkened at the beginning of the procession and remains empty while it lasts.

When it is over, the JUDGE enters from the left, followed by the OLD LADY.

JUDGE. Why are you playing the ghost at this late hour?

OLD LADY. And how about yourself?

JUDGE. I couldn't sleep.

OLD LADY. Why not?

JUDGE. Don't know. Thought I heard children crying in the cellar.

OLD LADY. That's impossible. Oh, no, I suppose you didn't dare to sleep for fear I might be prying in your hiding-places.

JUDGE. And you feared I might be after yours! A pleasant old age this will be for Philemon and Baucis!

OLD LADY. At least no gods will come to visit us.

JUDGE. No, I shouldn't call them gods.

At this moment the PROCESSION begins all over again, starting from the mausoleum as before and moving in silence toward the right.

OLD LADY. O Mary, Mother of God, what is this?

JUDGE. Merciful heavens! [*Pause*]

OLD LADY. Pray! Pray for us!

JUDGE. I have tried, but I cannot.

OLD LADY. Neither can I! The words won't come—and no thoughts! [*Pause*]

JUDGE. How does the Lord's Prayer begin?

OLD LADY. I can't remember, but I knew it this morning. [*Pause*] Who is the woman in white?

JUDGE. It is she—Amelia's mother—whose very memory we wanted to kill.

OLD LADY. Are these shadows or ghosts, or nothing but our own sickly dreams?

JUDGE. [*Takes up his pocket-knife*] They are delusions sent by the devil. I'll throw cold steel after them.—Open the knife for me, Caroline! I can't, don't you see?

OLD LADY. Yes, I see—it isn't easy without a forefinger.—But I can't either! [*She drops the knife*]

JUDGE. Woe to us! Steel won't help here! Woe! There's the beheaded sailor! Let us get away from here!

OLD LADY. That's easy to say, but I can't move from the spot.

JUDGE. And I seem to be rooted to the ground.—No, I am not going to look at it any longer!

[He covers his eyes with one hand.]

OLD LADY. But what is it? Mists out of the earth, or shadows cast by the trees?

JUDGE. No, it's our own vision that plays us false. There I go now, and yet I am standing here. Just let me get a good night's sleep, and I'll laugh at the whole thing!—The devil! Is this masquerade never going to end?

OLD LADY. But why do you look at it then?

JUDGE. I see it right through my hand—I see it in the dark, with my eyelids closed!

OLD LADY. But now it's over.

The PROCESSION has passed out.

JUDGE. Praised be—why, I can't get the word out!—I wonder if it will be possible to sleep to-night? Perhaps we had better send for the doctor?

OLD LADY. Or Father Colomba, perhaps?

JUDGE. He can't help, and he who could won't!—Well, let the Other One do it then!

THE OTHER ONE enters from behind the Lady Chapel. He is extremely thin and moth-eaten. His thin, snuff-coloured hair is parted in the middle. His straggly beard looks as if it were made out of tow. His clothes are shabby and outgrown, and he seems to wear no linen. A red woollen muffler is wound around his neck. He wears spectacles and carries a piece of rattan under his arm.

JUDGE. Who is that?

THE OTHER ONE. [*In a low voice*] I am the Other One!

Judge. [*To his wife*] Make the sign of the cross! I can't!

THE OTHER ONE. The sign of the cross does not frighten me, for I am undergoing my ordeal merely that I may wear it.

JUDGE. Who are you?

THE OTHER ONE. I became the Other One because I wanted to be the First One. I was a man of evil, and my punishment is to serve the good.

JUDGE. Then you are not the Evil One?

THE OTHER ONE. I am. And it is my task to torment you into finding the cross, before which we are to meet some time.

OLD LADY. [*To Judge*] Don't listen to him! Tell him to go!

THE OTHER ONE. It won't help. You have called me, and you'll have to bear with me.

The JUDGE and the OLD LADY go out to the left.

THE OTHER ONE *goes after them.*

Curtain.

ACT II

A huge room with whitewashed walls and a ceiling of darkened beams. The windows are small and deeply set, with bars on the outside. The room is crowded with furniture of every kind: wardrobes, chiffoniers, dressers, chests, tables. On the furniture are placed silver services, candelabra, candlesticks, pitchers, table ware, vases, statues, etc.

There is a door in the rear. Portraits of the JUDGE and the OLD LADY hang on the rear wall, one on either side of the door.

A harp stands beside a small sewing-table with an easy chair near it.

AMELIA *is standing before a table at the right, trying to clean a coffee-set of silver.*

The sun is shining in through the windows in the background.

NEIGHBOUR. [*Enters*] Well, child, how is your patience?

AMELIA. Thank you, neighbour, it might be worse. But I never had a worse job than this silver service here. I have worked at it for half an hour and cannot get it clean.

NEIGHBOUR. That's strange, but I suppose there are reasons for it, as the Judge says. Could you sleep last night?

AMELIA. Thank you, I slept very well. But do you know that father spent the whole night in the vineyard with his rattle—?

NEIGHBOUR. Yes, I heard him. What kind of foolish idea was that?

AMELIA. He thought he heard the starlings that had come to eat the grapes.

NEIGHBOUR. Poor fellow! As if the starlings were abroad nights!—And the children?

AMELIA. Well, the children—she is still keeping them in the cellar, and I hope she won't forget to give them something to eat.

NEIGHBOUR. He who feeds the birds will not forget your children, my dear Amelia. And now I'll tell you something which, as a rule, shouldn't be told. There is a small hole in the wall between the Judge's wine-cellar and my own. When I was down there this morning to get the place aired out, I heard voices. And when I looked through the hole, I saw Eric and Thyra playing with a strange little boy.

AMELIA. You could see them, neighbour? And—

NEIGHBOUR. They were happy and well—

AMELIA. Who was their playmate?

NEIGHBOUR. That's more than I can guess.

AMELIA. This whole dreadful house is nothing but secrets.

NEIGHBOUR. That is true, but it is not for us to inquire into them.

JUDGE. [*Enters, carrying a rattle*] So you are in here conspiring, neighbour! Is it not enough that your evil eye has brought the starlings into my vineyard? For you do have the evil eye—but we'll soon put it out. I know a trick or two myself.

NEIGHBOUR. [*To AMELIA*] Is it worth while to set him right? One who doesn't believe what is told him! [*He goes out.*]

AMELIA. No, this is beyond us!

JUDGE. Tell me, Amelia, have you noticed where your mother is looking for things when she believes herself to be alone?

AMELIA. No, father.

JUDGE. I can see by your eyes that you know. You were looking this way. [*He goes up to a chest of drawers and happens to get into the sunlight*] Damn the sun that is always burning me! [*He pulls down one of the shades and returns to the chest of drawers*] This must be the place!—Now, let me see! The stupidest spot is also the cleverest, so that's where I must look—as in this box of perfume, for instance—And right I was! [*He pulls out a number of bank-notes and stocks*] What's this? Twelve English bills of a pound each. Twelve of them!—Oho! Then it is easy to imagine the

rest. [*Pushes the bills and securities into his pockets*] But what is it I hear? There are the starlings again! [*He goes to an open window and begins to play the rattle*] Get away there!

OLD LADY. [*Enters*] Are you still playing the ghost?

JUDGE. Are you not in the kitchen?

OLD LADY. No, as you see, I am not. [*To AMELIA*] Are you not done with the cleaning yet?

AMELIA. No, mother, I'll never get done with it. The silver won't clean, and I don't think it is real.

OLD LADY. Not real? Let me see!—Why, indeed, it's quite black! [*To the JUDGE, who in the meantime has pulled down another shade*] Where did you get this set from?

JUDGE. That one? Why, it came from an estate.

OLD LADY. For your services as executor! What you got was like what you gave!

JUDGE. You had better not make any defamatory remarks, for they are punishable under the law.

OLD LADY. Are you crazy, or was there anything crazy about my remark?

JUDGE. And for that matter, it is silver—sterling silver.

OLD LADY. Then it must be Amelia's fault.

A VOICE. [*Coming through the window from the outside*] The Judge can turn white into black, but he can't turn black into white!

JUDGE. Who said that?

OLD LADY. It seemed as if one of the starlings had been speaking.

JUDGE. [*Pulling down the remaining shade*] Now the sun is here, and a while ago it seemed to be over there.

OLD LADY. [*To AMELIA*] Who was it that spoke?

AMELIA. I think it was that strange school-teacher with the red muffler.

JUDGE. Ugh! Let us talk of something else.

SERVANT GIRL. [*Enters*] Dinner is served.

[She goes out; a pause follows.]

OLD LADY. You go down and eat, Amelia.

AMELIA. Thank you, mother. [*She goes out.*

The JUDGE sits down on a chair close to one of the chests.

OLD LADY. [*Sliding up to the chest of drawers >where the box of perfume stands*] Are you not going to eat anything?

JUDGE. No, I am not hungry. How about you?

OLD LADY. I have just eaten. [*Pause.*

JUDGE. [*Takes a piece of bread from his pocket*] Then you'll excuse me, I'm sure.

OLD LADY. There's a roast of venison on the table.

JUDGE. You don't say so!

OLD LADY. Do you think I poison the food?

JUDGE. Yes, it tasted of carbolic acid this morning.

OLD LADY. And what I ate had a sort of metallic taste—

JUDGE. If I assure you that I have put nothing whatever in your food—

OLD LADY. Then I don't believe you. But I can assure you—

JUDGE. And I won't believe it. [*Eating his bread*] Roast of venison is a good thing—I can smell it from here—but bread isn't bad either. [*Pause.*

OLD LADY. Why are you sitting there watching that chest?

JUDGE. For the same reason that makes you guard those perfumes.

OLD LADY. So you have been there, you sneak-thief!

JUDGE. Ghoul!

OLD LADY. To think of it—such words between us! *Us!*

[She begins to weep.]

JUDGE. Yes, the world is evil and so is man.

OLD LADY. Yes, you may well say so—and ungrateful above all. Ungrateful children rob you of the rent; ungrateful grandchildren rob the fruit from the trees. You are right, indeed: the world is evil—

JUDGE. I ought to know, I who have had to witness all the rottenness, and who have been forced to pass the death sentence. That is why the mob hates me, just as if I had made the laws—

OLD LADY. It doesn't matter what the people say, if you have only a clean conscience—[*Three loud knocks are heard from the inside of the biggest wardrobe*] What was that? Who is there?

JUDGE. Oh, it was that wardrobe. It always cracks when there is rain coming. [*Three distinct knocks are heard again.*]

OLD LADY. It's some kind of performance started by that strolling charlatan.

The cover of the coffee-pot which AMELIA was cleaning, opens and drops down again with a bang; this happens several times in succession.

JUDGE. What was *that*, then?

OLD LADY. Oh, yes, it's that same juggler. He can play tricks, but he can't scare me. [*The coffee-pot acts as before.*]

JUDGE. Do you think he is one of those mesmerists?

OLD LADY. Well, whatever it happens to be called—

JUDGE. If that's so, how can he know our private secrets?

OLD LADY. Secrets? What do you mean by that?

A clock begins to strike and keeps it up as if it never meant to stop.

JUDGE. Now I am getting scared.

OLD LADY. Then Old Nick himself may take me if I stay here another minute! [*The spot of sunlight appears suddenly on the portrait of the OLD LADY*] Look! He knows that secret, too!

JUDGE. You mean that there is a portrait of *her* behind yours?

OLD LADY. Come away from here and let us go down and eat. And let us see whether we can't sell off the house and all the rest at auction—

JUDGE. You are right—sell off the whole caboodle and start a new life!—And now let us go down and eat.

THE OTHER ONE *appears in the doorway.*

The JUDGE and the OLD LADY draw back from him.

JUDGE. That's an ordinary human being!

OLD LADY. Speak to him!

JUDGE. [*To THE OTHER ONE*] Who are you, sir?

THE OTHER ONE. I have told you twice. That you don't believe me is a part of your punishment, for if you could believe, your sufferings would be shortened by it.

JUDGE. [*To his wife*] It's—*him*—sure enough! For I feel as if I were turning into ice. How are we to get rid of him?—Why, they say that the unclean spirits cannot bear the sound of music. Play something on the harp, Caroline.

Though badly frightened, the OLD LADY sits down at the table on which the harp stands and begins to play a slow prelude in a minor key.

THE OTHER ONE *listens reverently and with evident emotion.*

OLD LADY. [*To the JUDGE*] Is he gone?

THE OTHER ONE. I thank you for the music, madam. It lulls the pain and awakens memories of better things even in a lost soul—Thank you, madam!—Speaking of the auction, I think you are doing right, although, in my opinion, an honest declaration of bankruptcy would be still better—Yes, surrender your goods, and let every one get back his own.

JUDGE. Bankruptcy? I have no debts—

THE OTHER ONE. No debts!

OLD LADY. My husband *has* no debts!

THE OTHER ONE. No debts! That would be happiness, indeed!

JUDGE. Well, that's the truth! But other people are in debt to me—

THE OTHER ONE. Forgive them then!

JUDGE. This is not a question of pardon, but of payment—

THE OTHER ONE. All right! Then you'll be made to pay!—For the moment—farewell! But we'll meet frequently, and the last time at the great auction! [*He goes out backward.*]

JUDGE. He's afraid of the sun—he, too! Ha-ha!

THE OTHER ONE. Yes, for some time yet. But once I have accustomed myself to the light, I shall hate darkness.

[He disappears.]

OLD LADY. [*To the JUDGE*] Do you really think he is—the Other One?

JUDGE. Of course, that's not the way he is supposed to look but then times are changing and we with them. They used to say that he had gold and fame to give away, but this fellow goes around dunning—

OLD LADY. Oh, he's a sorry lot, and a charlatan—that's all! A milksop who doesn't dare to bite, no matter how much he would like to!

THE OTHER ONE. [*Standing in the doorway again*] Take care, I tell you! Take care!

JUDGE. [*Raising his right hand*] Take care yourself!

THE OTHER ONE. [*Pointing at the JUDGE with one hand as if it were a revolver*] Shame!

JUDGE. [*Unable to move*] Woe is me!

THE OTHER ONE. You have never believed in anything good. Now you shall have to believe in the Evil One. He who is *all goodness* can harm nobody, you see, and so he leaves that to such villains as myself. But for the sake of greater effectiveness, you two must torture yourselves and each other.

OLD LADY. [*Kneeling before THE OTHER ONE*] Spare us! Help us! Mercy!

THE OTHER ONE. [*With a gesture as if he were tearing his clothes*] Get up, woman! Woe is me! There is One, and One only, to whom you may pray! Get up now, or—Yes, now you believe, although I don't wear a red cloak, and don't carry sword or purse, and don't crack any jokes—but beware of taking me in jest! I am serious as sin and stern as retribution! I have not come to tempt you with gold and fame, but to chastise you with rods and scorpions—[*The clock begins to strike again; the stage turns dark*] Your time is nearly up. Therefore, put your house in order—because die you must! [*A noise as of thunder is heard*] Whose voice is speaking now? Do you think *he* can be scared off with your rattle when he comes sweeping across your vineyard? Storm and Hail are his names; destruction nestles under his wings, and in his claws he carries punishment. Put on your caul now, and don your good conscience.

[The rattling of the hail-storm is heard outside.]

JUDGE. Mercy!

THE OTHER ONE. Yes, if you promise repentance.

JUDGE. I promise on my oath—

THE OTHER ONE. You can take no oath, for you have already perjured yourself. But promise first of all to set the children free—and then all the rest!

JUDGE. I promise! Before the sun has set, the children shall be here!

THE OTHER ONE. That's the first step ahead, but if you turn back, then you'll see that I am as good as my name, which is—Legion!

He raises the rattan, and at that moment the JUDGE comes able to move again.

Curtain.

ACT III

A wine-cellar, with rows of casks along both side walls. The doorway in the rear is closed by an iron door.

Every cask is marked with the name of the urine kept in it. Those nearest the foreground have small shelves above the taps, and the shelves hold glasses.

At the right, in the foreground, stands a wine-press and near it are a couple of straw-bottomed chairs.

Bottles, funnels, siphons, crates, etc., are scattered about the place.

ERIC and THYRA are seated by the wine-press.

ERIC. I think it's awfully dull.

THYRA. I think grandmother is nasty.

ERIC. You mustn't talk like that.

THYRA. No, perhaps not, but she *is* nasty.

ERIC. You mustn't, Thyra, for then the little boy won't come and play with us again.

THYRA. Then I won't say it again. I only wish it wasn't so dark.

ERIC. Don't you remember, Thyra, that the boy said we shouldn't complain—

THYRA. Then I won't do it any more—[*The spot of sunlight appears on the ground*] Oh, look at the sun-spot!

[*She jumps up and places her foot on the light.*]

ERIC. You mustn't step on the sun, Thyra. That's a sin!

THYRA. I didn't mean to step on him. I just wanted to have him. Now see—I have him in my arms, and I can pat him.—Look! Now he's kissing me right on the mouth.

The PLAYMATE enters from behind one of the casks; he wears a white garment reaching below his knees, and a blue scarf around the waist; on his feet are sandals; he is blond, and when he appears the cellar grows lighter.

ERIC. [*Goes to meet him and shakes hands with him*] Hello, little boy!—Come and shake hands, Thyra!—What's your name, boy? You must tell us to-day.

The PLAYMATE merely looks at him.

THYRA. You shouldn't be so forward, Eric, for it makes him bashful.—But tell me, little boy, who is your papa?

PLAYMATE. Don't be so curious. When you know me better, you'll learn all those things.—But let us play now.

THYRA. Yes, but nothing instructive, for that is so tedious. I want it just to be nice.

PLAYMATE. [*Smiling*] Shall I tell a story?

THYRA. Yes, but not out of the Bible, for all those we know by heart—

The PLAYMATE smiles again.

ERIC. You say such things, Thyra, that he gets hurt—

PLAYMATE. No, my little friends, you don't hurt me—But now, if you are really good, we'll go and play in the open—

ERIC. Oh, yes, yes!—But then, you know, grandmother won't let us—

PLAYMATE. Yes, your grandmother has said that she wished you were out, and so we'll go before she changes her mind. Come on now!

THYRA. Oh, what fun! Oh—

The door in the rear flies open and through the doorway is seen a sunlit field planted with rye ready for the harvest. Among the yellow ears grow bachelor's-buttons and daisies.

PLAYMATE. Come, children! Come into the sunlight and feel the joy of living!

THYRA. Can't we take the sun-spot along? It's a pity to leave it here in the darkness.

PLAYMATE. Yes, if it is willing to go with you. Call it!

ERIC and THYRA go toward the door, followed by the spot of light.

ERIC. Isn't it a nice little spot! [*Talks to the spot as if it were a cat*] Puss, puss, puss, puss!

PLAYMATE. Take it up on your arm, Thyra, for I don't think it can get over the threshold.

THYRA gets the spot of light on her arm, which she bends as if carrying something.

All three go out; the door closes itself. Pause.

The JUDGE enters with a lantern, the OLD LADY with the birch rod.

OLD LADY. It's cool and nice here, and then there is no sun to bother you.

JUDGE. And how quiet it is. But where are the children?

[*Both look for the children.*]

JUDGE. It looks as if they had taken us at our word.

OLD LADY. Us? Please observe that I didn't promise anything, for he—you know—talked only to you toward the end.

JUDGE. Perhaps, but this time we had better obey, for I don't want to have any more trouble with hail-storms and such things.—However, the children are not here, and I suppose they'll come back when they get hungry.

OLD LADY. And I wish them luck when they do! [*The rod is snatched out of her hand and dances across the floor; finally it disappears behind one of the casks*] Now it's beginning again.

JUDGE. Well, why don't you submit and do as he—you know who!—says? I, for my part, don't dare to do wrong any longer. The growing grapes have been destroyed, and we must take pleasure in what is already safe. Come here, Caroline, and let us have a glass of something good to brace us up! [*He knocks on one of the casks and draws a glass of wine from it*] This is from the year of the

comet—anno 1869, when the big comet came, and everybody said it meant war. And, of course, war did break out.

[*He offers a filled glass to his wife.*]

OLD LADY. You drink first!

JUDGE. Well, now—did you think there might be poison in this, too?

OLD LADY. No, really, I didn't—but—we'll never again know what peace is, or happiness!

JUDGE. Do as I do: submit! [*He drinks.*]

OLD LADY. I want to, and I try to, but when I come to think how badly other people have treated us, I feel that I am just as good as anybody else. [*She drinks*] That's a very fine wine! [*She sits down.*]

JUDGE. The wine is good, and it makes the mind easier.—Yes, the wiseacres say that we are rascallions, one and all, so I can't see what right anybody has to go around finding fault with the rest. [*He drinks*] My own actions have always been legal; that is, in keeping with prevailing laws and constitutions. If others happened to be ignorant of the law, they had only themselves to blame, for no one has a right to ignorance of that kind. For that reason, if Adolph does not pay the rent, it is he who breaks the law, and not I.

OLD LADY. And yet the blame falls on you, and you are made to appear like a criminal. Yes, it is as I have always said: there is no justice in this world. If you had done right, you should have brought suit against Adolph and turned out the whole family. But then it isn't too late yet— [*She drinks.*]

JUDGE. Well, you see, if I were to carry out the law strictly, then I should sue for the annulment of his marriage, and that would cut him off from the property—

OLD LADY. Why don't you do it?

JUDGE. [*Looking around*] We-e-ell!—I suppose that would settle the matter once for all. A divorce would probably not be granted, but I think it would be possible to get the marriage declared invalid on technical grounds—

OLD LADY. And if there be no such grounds?

JUDGE. [*Showing the influence of the wine*] There are technical grounds for everything, if you only look hard enough.

OLD LADY. Well, then! Think of it—how that good-for-nothing is wishing the life out of us—but now he'll see how "the natural course of events" makes the drones take to the road—

JUDGE. Ha-ha! You're right, quite right! And then, you know, when I think it over carefully—what reason have we for self-reproach? What wrong have we done? It's mean to bring up that about the monst'rance—it didn't hurt anybody, did it? And as for my being guilty of perjury: that's a pure lie. I got blood-poison in the finger—that's all—and quite a natural thing.

OLD LADY. Just as if I didn't know it. And I may as well add that this hail-storm a while ago—why, it was as plain a thing as if it had been foretold in the Farmer's Almanac!

JUDGE. Exactly! That's what I think too. And for that reason, Caroline, I think we had better forget all that fool talk—and if you feel as I do, we'll just turn to another priest and get him to consecrate the mausoleum.

OLD LADY. Well, why shouldn't we?

JUDGE. Yes, why shouldn't we? Perhaps because that mesmerist comes here and talks a lot of superstitious nonsense?

OLD LADY. Tell me, do you really think he is nothing but a mesmerist?

JUDGE. [*Blustering*] That fellow? He's a first-class charlatan. A che-ar-la-tan!

OLD LADY. [*Looking around*] I am not so sure.

JUDGE. But I am sure. Su-ure! And if he should ever come before my eyes again—just now, for instance—I'll drink his health and say: here's to you, old humourist! [*As he raises the glass, it is torn out of his hand and is seen to disappear through the wall*] What was that? [*The lantern goes out.*]

OLD LADY. Help!

[*A gust of wind is heard, and then all is silence again.*]

JUDGE. You just get some matches, and I'll clear this matter up. For I am no longer afraid of anything. Not of anything!

OLD LADY. Oh, don't, don't!

THE OTHER ONE. [*Steps from behind one of the casks*] Now we'll have to have a talk in private.

JUDGE. [*Frightened*] Where did you come from?

THE OTHER ONE. That is no concern of yours.

JUDGE. [*Straightening himself up*] What kind of language is that?

THE OTHER ONE. Your own!—Off with your cap! [*He blows at the JUDGE, whose cap is lifted off his head and falls to the ground*] Now you shall hear sentence pronounced: you have wanted to sever

what has been united by Him whose name I may not mention. Therefore you shall be separated from her who ought to be the staff of your old age. Alone you must run the gauntlet. Alone you must bear the qualms of sleepless nights.

JUDGE. Is that mercy?

THE OTHER ONE. It is justice; it is the law: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth! The gospel has a different sound, but of that you didn't want to hear. Now, move I along. [*He beats the air with the rattan.*]

The scene changes to a garden with cypresses and yew-trees clipped in the shape of obelisks, candelabra, vases, etc. Under the trees grow roses, hollyhocks, foxgloves, etc. At the centre of it is a spring above which droops a gigantic fuchsia in full bloom.^[1]

Back of the garden appears a field of rye, all yellow and ready to be cut. Bachelor's-buttons and daisies grow among the rye. A scarecrow hangs in the middle of the field. The distant background is formed by vineyards and light-coloured rocks with beech woods and ruined castles on them.

A road runs across the stage in the near background. At the right is a covered Gothic arcade. In front of this stands a statue of the Madonna with the Child.

ERIC and THYRA enter hand in hand with the PLAYMATE.

ERIC. Oh, how beautiful it is!

THYRA. Who is living here?

PLAYMATE. Whoever feels at home has his home here.

THYRA. Can we play here?

PLAYMATE. Anywhere except in that avenue over there to the right.

ERIC. And may we pick the flowers?

PLAYMATE. You may pick any flowers you want, but you mustn't touch the tree at the fountain.

THYRA. What kind of tree is that?

ERIC. Why, you know, it is one of those they call [*lowering his voice*] "Christ's Blood-drops."

THYRA. You should cross yourself, Eric, when you mention the name of the Lord.

ERIC. [*Makes the sign of the cross*] Tell me, little boy, why mustn't we touch the tree?

THYRA. You should obey without asking any questions, Eric.—But tell me, little boy, why is that ugly scarecrow hanging there? Can't we take it away?

PLAYMATE. Yes, indeed, you may, for then the birds will come and sing for us.

ERIC and THYRA run into the rye-field and tear down the scarecrow.

ERIC. Away with you, you nasty old scarecrow! Come and eat now, little birds! [*The Golden Bird comes flying from the right and perches on the fuchsia*] Oh, see the Golden Bird, Thyra!

THYRA. Oh, how pretty it is! Does it sing, too?

[*The bird calls like a cuckoo.*]

ERIC. Can you understand what the bird sings, boy?

PLAYMATE. No, children, the birds have little secrets of their own which they have a right to keep hidden.

THYRA. Of course, Eric, don't you see, otherwise the children could tell where the nests are, and then they would take away the eggs, and that would make the birds sorry, and they couldn't have any children of their own.

ERIC. Don't talk like a grown-up, Thyra.

PLAYMATE. [*Putting a finger across his lips*] Hush! Somebody is coming. Now let us see if he likes to stay with us or not.

The CHIMNEY-SWEEP enters, stops in surprise, and begins to look around.

PLAYMATE. Well, boy, won't you come and play with us?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. [*Takes off his cap; speaks bashfully*] Oh, you don't want to play with me.

PLAYMATE. Why shouldn't we?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. I am sooty all over. And besides I don't know how to play—I hardly know what it is.

THYRA. Think of it, the poor boy has never played.

PLAYMATE. What is your name?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. My name? They call me Ole—but—

PLAYMATE. But what's your other name?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. Other name? I have none.

PLAYMATE. But your papa's name?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. I have no papa.

PLAYMATE. And your mamma's?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. I don't know.

PLAYMATE. He has no papa or mamma. Come to the spring here, boy, and I'll make you as white as a little prince.

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. If anybody else said it, I shouldn't believe it—

PLAYMATE. Why do you believe it then, when I say it?

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. I don't know, but I think you look as if it would be true.

PLAYMATE. Give the boy your hand, Thyra!—Would you give him a kiss, too?

THYRA. [*After a moment's hesitation*] Yes, when you ask me!

[1] The Swedish name of this plant is "Christ's Blood-drops."

She kisses the CHIMNEY-SWEEP. Then the PLAYMATE dips his hand in the spring and sprays a little water on the face of the CHIMNEY-SWEEP, whose black mask at once disappears, leaving his face white.

PLAYMATE. Now you are white again. And now you must go behind that rose-bush there and put on new clothes.

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. Why do I get all this which I don't deserve?

PLAYMATE. Because you don't believe that you deserve it.

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. [*Going behind the rose-bush*] Then I thank you for it, although I don't understand what it means.

THYRA. Was he made a chimney-sweep because he had been bad?

PLAYMATE. No, he has never been bad. But he had a bad guardian who took all his money away from him, and so he had to go out into the world to earn a living—See how fine he looks now!

The CHIMNEY-SWEEP enters dressed in light summer clothes.

PLAYMATE. [*To the CHIMNEY-SWEEP*] Go to the arcade now, and you'll meet somebody you love—and who loves you!

CHIMNEY-SWEEP. Who could love me?

PLAYMATE. Go and find out.

The CHIMNEY-SWEEP goes across the stage to the arcade, where he is met by the LADY IN WHITE, who puts her arms around him.

THYRA. Who is living in there?

PLAYMATE. [*With his finger on his lips*] Polly Pry!—But who is coming there?

The OLD LADY appears on the road with a sack on her back and a stick in her hand.

ERIC. It's grandmother! Oh, now we are in for it!

THYRA. Oh, my! It's grandmother!

PLAYMATE. Don't get scared, children. I'll tell her it's my fault.

ERIC. No, you mustn't, for then she'll beat you.

PLAYMATE. Well, why shouldn't I take a beating for my friends?

ERIC. No, I'll do it myself!

THYRA. And I, too!

PLAYMATE. Hush! And come over here—then you won't be scolded. [*They hide.*]

OLD LADY. [*Goes to the spring*] So, this is the famous spring that is said to cure everything—after the angel has stirred it up, of course!—But I suppose it is nothing but lies. Well, I might have a drink anyhow, and water is water. [*She bends down over the spring*] What is it I see? Eric and Thyra with a strange boy! What can it mean? For they are not here. It must be an oracle spring. [*She takes a cup that stands by the spring, fills it with water and drinks*] Ugh, it tastes of copper—he must have been here and poisoned the water, too! Everything is poisoned! Everything!—And I feel tired, too, although the years have not been hard on me—[*She looks at her reflection in the spring and tosses her head*] On the contrary, I look quite youthful—but it's hard to walk, and still harder to get up—[*She struggles vainly to rise*] My God, my God, have mercy! Don't leave me lying here!

PLAYMATE. [*Makes a sign to the children to stay where they are; then he goes up to the OLD LADY and wipes the perspiration from her forehead*] Rise, and leave your evil ways!

OLD LADY. [*Rising*] Who is that?—Oh, it's you, my nice gentleman, who has led the children astray?
PLAYMATE. Go, ungrateful woman! I have wiped the sweat of fear from your brow; I have raised you up when your own strength failed you, and you reward me with angry words. Go—go!

OLD LADY *stares astonished at him; then her eyes drop, and she turns and goes out.*

ERIC *and* THYRA *come forward.*

ERIC. But I am sorry for grandmother just the same, although she is nasty.

THYRA. It isn't nice here, and I want to go home.

PLAYMATE. Wait a little! Don't be so impatient.—There comes somebody else we know.

The JUDGE appears on the road.

PLAYMATE. He cannot come here and defile the spring. [*He waves his hand; the spot of sunlight strikes the JUDGE, making him turn around and walk away*] It is nice of you to be sorry for the old people, but you must believe that what I do is right. Do you believe that?

ERIC *and* THYRA. Yes, we believe it, we believe it!

THYRA. But I want to go home to mamma!

PLAYMATE. I'll let you go.

THE OTHER ONE *appears in the background and hides himself behind the bushes.*

PLAYMATE. For now I must go. The Angelus bell will soon be ringing—

ERIC. Where are you going, little boy?

PLAYMATE. There are other children I must play with—far away from here, where you cannot follow me. But now, when I leave you here, don't forget what I have told you: that you mustn't touch the tree!

ERIC. We'll obey! We will! But don't go away, for it will soon be dark!

PLAYMATE. How is that? Anybody who has a good conscience and knows his evening prayer has nothing, nothing to be afraid of.

THYRA. When will you come back to us, little boy?

PLAYMATE. Next Christmas I come back, and every Christmas!—Good night, my little friends!

He kisses their foreheads and goes out between the bushes; when he reappears in the background, he is carrying a cross with a banner like that carried by the Christ-Child in old paintings; the Angelus bell begins to ring; as he raises the banner and waves it in greeting to the children, he becomes surrounded by a clear, white light; then he goes out.

ERIC *and* THYRA *kneel and pray silently while the bell is ringing.*

ERIC. [*Having crossed himself*] Do you know who the boy was, Thyra?

THYRA. It was the Saviour!

THE OTHER ONE *steps forward.*

THYRA. [*Scared, runs to Eric, who puts his arms around her to protect her*] My!

ERIC. [*To THE OTHER ONE*] What do you want? You nasty thing!

THE OTHER ONE. I only wanted—Look at me!

ERIC. Yes?

THE OTHER ONE. I am looking like this because once I touched the tree. Afterward it was my joy to tempt others into doing the same. But now, since I have grown old, I have come to repent, and now I am remaining here to warn men, but nobody believes me—nobody—because I lied once.

ERIC. You don't need to warn us, and you can't tempt us.

THE OTHER ONE. Tut, tut, tut! Not so high-and-mighty, my little friend! Otherwise it's all right.

ERIC. Well, go away then, for I don't want to listen to you, and you scare my sister!

THE OTHER ONE. I am going, for I don't feel at home here, and I have business elsewhere. Farewell, children!

AMELIA. [*Is heard calling from the right*] Eric and Thyra!

ERIC *and* THYRA. Oh, there is mamma—dear little mamma!

AMELIA *enters.*

ERIC *and* THYRA *rush into her arms.*

THE OTHER ONE *turns away to hide his emotion.*

Curtain.

ACT IV

A cross-roads surrounded by pine woods. Moonlight.

The WITCH stands waiting.

OLD LADY. Well, at last, there you are.

WITCH. You have kept me waiting. Why have you called me?

OLD LADY. Help me!

WITCH. In what way?

OLD LADY. Against my enemies.

WITCH. There is only one thing that helps against your enemies: be good to them.

OLD LADY. Well, I declare! I think the whole world has turned topsyturvy.

WITCH. Yes, so it may seem.

OLD LADY. Even the Other One—you know who I mean—has become converted.

WITCH. Then it ought to be time for you, too.

OLD LADY. Time for me? You mean that my years are burdening me? But it is less than three weeks since I danced at a wedding.

WITCH. And you call that bliss! Well, if that be all, you shall have your fill of it. For there is to be a ball here to-night, although I myself cannot attend it.

OLD LADY. Here?

WITCH. Just here. It will begin whenever I give the word—

OLD LADY. It's too bad I haven't got on my low-necked dress.

WITCH. You can borrow one from me—and a pair of dancing shoes with red heels.

OLD LADY. Perhaps I might also have a pair of gloves and a fan?

WITCH. Everything! And, in particular, any number of young cavaliers who will proclaim you the queen of the ball.

OLD LADY. Now you are joking.

WITCH. No, I am not joking. And I know that they have the good taste at these balls to choose the right one for queen—and in speaking of the right one, I have in mind the most worthy—

OLD LADY. The most beautiful, you mean?

WITCH. No, I don't—I mean the worthiest. If you wish, I'll start the ball at once.

OLD LADY. I have no objection.

WITCH. If you step aside a little, you'll find your maid—while the hall is being put in order.

OLD LADY. [*Going out to the right*] Think of it—I am going to have a maid, too! You know, madam, that was the dream of my youth—which never came true.

WITCH. There you see: "What youth desires, age acquires." [*She blows a whistle*]

Without curtain-fall, the stage changes to represent the bottom of a rocky, kettle-shaped chasm. It is closed in on three sides by steep walls of black rock, wholly stripped of vegetation. At the left, in the foreground, stands a throne. At the right is a platform for the musicians.

A bust of Pan on a square base stands in the middle of the stage, surrounded by a strange selection of potted plants: henbane, burdock, thistle, onion, etc.

The musicians enter. Their clothing is grey; their faces are chalk-white and sad; their gestures tired. They appear to be tuning their instruments, but not a sound is heard.

Then comes the LEADER OF THE ORCHESTRA.

After him, the guests of the ball: cripples, beggars, tramps. All are pulling on black gloves as they come in. Their movements are dragging; their expressions funereal.

Next: The MASTER OF CEREMONIES, who is really THE OTHER ONE—a septuagenarian dandy wearing a black wig which is too small for him, so that tufts of grey hair appear underneath. His mustaches are waxed and pointed. He wears a monocle and has on an outgrown evening dress and top-boots. He looks melancholy and seems to be suffering because of the part he has to play.

The SEVEN DEADLY SINS enter and group themselves around the throne as follows:

PRIDE COVETOUSNESS
LUST ANGER

Finally the PRINCE enters. He is hunchbacked and wears a soiled velvet coat with gold buttons, ruffles, sword, and high boots with spurs.

The ensuing scene must be played with deadly seriousness, without a trace of irony, satire, or humour. There is a suggestion of a death-mask in the face of every figure. They move noiselessly and make simple, awkward gestures that convey the impression of a drill.

PRINCE. [*To the MASTER OF CEREMONIES*] Why do you disturb my peace at this midnight hour?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Always, brother, you are asking why. Have you not seen the light yet?

PRINCE. Only in part. I can perceive a connection between my suffering and my guilt, but I cannot see why I should have to suffer eternally, when He has suffered in my place.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Eternally? You died only yesterday. But then time ceased to exist to you, and so a few hours appear like an eternity.

PRINCE. Yesterday?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Yes.—But because you were proud and wanted no assistance, you have now to bear your own sufferings.

PRINCE. What have I done, then?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. What a sublime question!

PRINCE. But why don't you tell?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. As our task is to torture each other by truth-telling—were we not called "heroes of truth" in our lifetime?—I shall tell you a part of your own secret. You were, and you are still, a hunchback—

PRINCE. What is that?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. There you see! You don't know what is known to everybody else. But all those others pitied you, and so you never heard the word that names your own deformity.

PRINCE. What deformity is that? Perhaps you mean that I have a weak chest? But that is no deformity.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. A "weak chest"—yes, that is your own name for the matter. However, people kept the disfigurement of your body hidden from you, and they tried to assuage your misfortune by showing you sympathy and kindness. But you accepted their generosity as an earned tribute, their encouraging words as expressions of admiration due to your superior physique. And at last you went so far in conceit that you regarded yourself as a type of masculine beauty. And when, to cap it all, woman granted you her favours out of pity, then you believed yourself an irresistible conqueror.

PRINCE. What right have you to say such rude things to me?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Right? I am filling the saddening duty which forces one sinner to punish another. And soon you will have to fulfil the same cruel duty toward a woman who is vain to the verge of madness—a woman resembling you as closely as she possibly could.

PRINCE. I don't want to do it.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Try to do anything but what you must, and you'll experience an inner discord that you cannot explain.

PRINCE. What does it mean?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. It means that you cannot all of a sudden cease to be what you are: and you are what you have wanted to become. [*He claps his hands.*]

The OLD LADY enters, her figure looking as aged and clumsy as ever; but she has painted her face and her head is covered by a powdered wig; she wears a very low-necked, rose-coloured dress, red shoes, and a fan made out of peacock feathers.

OLD LADY. [*A little uncertain*] Where am I? Is this the right place?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Quite right, for you are in the place we call the "waiting-room." It is so called [*he sighs*], because here we have to spend our time waiting—waiting for something that will come some time—

OLD LADY. Well, it isn't bad at all—and there is the music—and there is a bust—of whom?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. It's a pagan idol called Pan, because to the ancients he was all they had. And as we, in this place, are of the old order, more or less antiquated, he has been put here for us to look at.

OLD LADY. Why, we are not old—

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Yes, my Queen. When the new era opened [*he sighs*], we couldn't keep up with it, and so we were left behind—

OLD LADY. The new era? What kind of talk is that? When did it begin?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. It is easy to figure out when the year one began—It was night, for that matter; the stars were shining brightly, and the weather must have been mild, as the shepherds remained in the open—

OLD LADY. Oh, yes, yes—Are we not going to dance here to-night?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Of course, we are. The Prince is waiting for a chance to ask you—

OLD LADY. [*To the* MASTER OF CEREMONIES] IS he a real Prince?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. A real one, my Queen. That is to say, he has full reality in a certain fashion—

OLD LADY. [*To the* PRINCE, *who is asking her to dance*] You don't look happy, my Prince?

PRINCE. I am not happy.

OLD LADY. Well, I can't say that I find it very hilarious—and the place smells of putty, as if the glazier had just been at work here. What is that strange smell, as of linseed-oil?

PRINCE. [*With an expression of horror*] What are you saying? Do you mean that charnel-house smell?

OLD LADY. I fear I must have said something impolite—but then, it isn't for the ladies to offer pleasantries—that's what the cavalier should do—

PRINCE. What can I tell you that you don't know before?

OLD LADY. That I don't know before? Let me see—No, then I had better tell you that you are very handsome, my Prince.

PRINCE. Now you exaggerate, my Queen. I am not exactly handsome, but I have always been held what they call "good-looking."

OLD LADY. Just like me—I never was a beauty—that is, I *am* not, considering my years—Oh, I am so stupid!—What was it I wanted to say?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Let the music begin!

The musicians appear to be playing, but not a sound is heard.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Well? Are you not going to dance?

PRINCE. [*Sadly*] No, I don't care to dance.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. But you must: you are the only presentable gentleman.

PRINCE. That's true, I suppose—[*pensively*] but is that a fit occupation for me?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. How do you mean?

PRINCE. At times it seems as if I had something else to think of, but then—then I forget it.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Don't brood—enjoy yourself while youth is with you and the roses of life still bloom on your cheeks. Now! Up with the head, and step lively—

The PRINCE grins broadly; then he offers his hand to the OLD LADY, and together they perform a few steps of a minuet.

OLD LADY. [*Interrupting the dance*] Ugh! Your hands are cold as ice! [*goes to the throne*] Why are those seven ladies not dancing?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. How do you like the music, Queen?

OLD LADY. It's splendid, but they might play a little more *forte*—

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. They are soloists, all of them, and formerly each one of them wanted to make himself heard above the rest, and so they have to use moderation now.

OLD LADY. But I asked why the seven sisters over there are not dancing. Couldn't you, as master of ceremonies, make them do so?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. I don't think it would be of any use trying, for they are obstinate as sin—But please assume your throne, my Queen. We are going to perform a little play in honour of the occasion—

OLD LADY. Oh, what fun! But I want the prince to ... escort me—

PRINCE. [*To the* MASTER OF CEREMONIES] Have I got to do it?

OLD LADY. You ought to be ashamed of yourself—you with your hunch!

PRINCE. [*Spits in her face*] Hold your tongue, you cursed old hag!

OLD LADY. [*Cuffs him on the ear*] That'll teach you!

PRINCE. [*Jumps at her and knocks her down*] And that's, for you!

All the rest cover their faces with their hands.

PRINCE. [*Tears off the OLD LADY'S wig so that her head appears totally bald*] There's the false scalp! Now we'll pull out the teeth!

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Enough! Enough!

He helps the OLD LADY to rise, and gives her a kerchief to cover her head.

OLD LADY. [*Crying*] Goodness gracious, that I could let myself be fooled like that! But I haven't deserved any better, I admit.

PRINCE. No, you have deserved a great deal worse. You should leave my hunch alone, for otherwise hell breaks loose—It's a miserable thing to see an old woman like you so foolish and so degraded. But, then, you are to be pitied—as all of us are to be pitied.

ALL. We are all to be pitied!

PRINCE. [*With a sneer*] The queen!

OLD LADY. [*In the same tone*] The prince!—But haven't we met before?

PRINCE. Perhaps—in our youth—for I am old, too. You had too much frippery on before—but now, when the disguise has been taken away—I begin to distinguish certain features—

OLD LADY. Don't say anything more—don't say anything more—Oh, what have I come to—what is happening to me?

PRINCE. Now I know: you are my sister!

OLD LADY. But—my brother is dead! Have I been deceived? Or are the dead coming back?

PRINCE. Everything comes back.

OLD LADY. Am I dead or am I living?

PRINCE. You may well ask that question, for I don't know the difference. But you are exactly the same as when I parted from you once: just as vain and just as thievish.

OLD LADY. Do you think you are any better?

PRINCE. Perhaps! I am guilty of all the seven deadly sins, but you have invented the eighth one—that of robbing the dead.

OLD LADY. What are you thinking of now?

PRINCE. Twelve years in succession I sent you money to buy a wreath for mother's grave, and instead of buying it you kept the money.

OLD LADY. How do you know?

PRINCE. How I came to know of it is the only thing that interests you about that crime of yours.

OLD LADY. Prove it!

PRINCE. [*Taking a number of bills from his pocket*] Here is the money!

The OLD LADY sinks to the ground. A church bell begins to ring. All bend their heads, but nobody kneels.

LADY IN WHITE. [*Enters, goes up to the OLD LADY, and assists her in rising*] Do you know me?

OLD LADY. No.

LADY IN WHITE. I am Amelia's mother. You have taken the memory of me away from her. You have erased me from her life. But now you are to be wiped out, and I shall recover my child's love and the prayers my soul needs.

OLD LADY. Oh, somebody has been telling tales to that hussy—then I'll set her to herd the swine

The PRINCE strikes her on the mouth.

LADY IN WHITE. Don't strike her!

OLD LADY. Are you interceding for me?

LADY IN WHITE. It is what I have been taught to do.

OLD LADY. You hypocrite! If you only dared, you would wish me buried as deep as there are miles from here to the sun!

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Down with you—monster!

[As he touches her with his staff she falls to the ground

Again the scene is changed while the curtain remains up. The bust of Pan sinks into the earth. The musicians and the throne with its attendant sins disappear behind pieces of scenery that are lowered from above. At last the cross-roads with the surrounding pine woods appear again, and the OLD LADY is discovered lying at the foot of a sign-post.

WITCH. Get up!

OLD LADY. I cannot—I am frozen stiff—

WITCH. The sun will rise in a moment. The cock has crowed. The matin bells are ringing.

OLD LADY. I don't care for the sun.

WITCH. Then you'll have to walk in darkness.

OLD LADY. Oh, my eyes! What have you done to me?

WITCH. I have only turned out the light because it troubled you. Now, up and away with you—through cold and darkness—until you drop!

OLD LADY. Where is my husband?—Amelia! Eric and Thyra! My children!

WITCH. Yes, where are they? But wherever they may be, you shall not see them until your pilgrimage is ended. Now, up and away! Or I will loose my dogs!

The OLD LADY gropes her way out.

The court-room. In the background is the desk of the presiding judge, decorated in white and gold with the emblems of justice. In front of the desk, covering the centre of the floor, stands a big table, and on it are placed writing-materials, inkstand, Bible, bell, and gavel.

The axe of the executioner hangs on the rear wall, with a pair of handcuffs below it and a big black crucifix above.

The JUDGE enters and makes his way into the room on tiptoe. The bell rings. The gavel raps once on the table. All the chairs are pulled up to the table at once. The Bible is opened. The candles on the table become lighted.

For a moment the JUDGE stands still, stricken with horror. Then he resumes his advance toward a huge cabinet. Suddenly the doors of this fly open. A number of documents are thrown out, and the JUDGE picks them up.

JUDGE. [*Reassured*] This time I am in luck! Here are the accounts of my guardianship; here is the contract for the lease—my report as executor—all of it! [*The handcuffs on the wall begin to clank*] Make all the noise you please! As long as the axe stays still, I won't be scared. [*He puts the documents on the table and goes back to close the door of the cabinet, but this flies open again as soon as he shuts it*] Everything has a cause: *ratio sufficiens*. This door must have a spring with which I am not familiar. It surprises me that I don't know it, but it cannot scare me. [*The axe moves on the wall*] The axe moved—as a rule, that foretells an execution, but to-day it means only that its equilibrium has become disturbed in some way. Oh, no, nothing will give me pause but seeing my own ghost—for that would be beyond the tricks of any charlatan.

The GHOST enters from behind the cabinet; the figure resembles in every way the JUDGE, but where the eyes should be appear two white surfaces, as on a plaster bust.

JUDGE. [*Frightened*] Who are you?

GHOST. I am not—I have been. I have been that unrighteous judge who is now come here to receive his sentence.

JUDGE. What have you done then, poor man?

GHOST. Everything wrong that an unrighteous judge might do. Pray for me, you whose conscience is clear—

JUDGE. Am I—to pray for you?

GHOST. Yes, you who have caused no innocent blood to be shed—

JUDGE. That's true; that's something I haven't done. And besides, as I have always obeyed the letter of the law, I have good reason to let myself be called a righteous judge—yes, without irony!

GHOST. It would, indeed, be a bad moment for joking, as the Invisible Ones are sitting in judgment—

JUDGE. What do you mean? Who are sitting in judgment?

GHOST. [*Pointing to the table*] You don't see them, but I do. [*The bell rings; a chair is pushed back from the table*] Pray for me!

JUDGE. No, I won't. Justice must take its course. You must have been a great offender to reach consciousness of your guilt so late.

GHOST. You are as stern as a good conscience.

JUDGE. That's just the word for it. Stern, but just!

GHOST. No pity, then?

JUDGE. None whatever.

GHOST. No mercy?

JUDGE. No mercy!

The gavel raps on the table; the chairs are pushed away.

GHOST. Now the verdict is being delivered. Can't you hear?

JUDGE. I hear nothing.

GHOST. [*Pointing to the table*] And you see nothing? Don't you see the beheaded sailor, the surveyor, the chimney-sweep, the lady in white, the tenant—

JUDGE. I see absolutely nothing.

GHOST. Woe unto you, then, when your eyes become opened as mine have been. Now the verdict has been given: guilty!

JUDGE. Guilty!

GHOST. You have said it—yourself! And you have already been sentenced. All that remains now is the big auction.

Curtain.

ACT V

The same room as in the second act, but it is now arranged for the auction. Benches are placed in the middle of the room. On the table behind which the auctioneer is to preside stand the silver coffee-set, the clock, vases, candelabra, etc.

The portraits of the JUDGE and the OLD LADY have been taken down and are leaning against the table.

The NEIGHBOUR and AMELIA are on the stage.

AMELIA. [*Dressed as a scrub-woman*] Before my mother left, she ordered me to clean the hallway and the stairs. It is winter now, and cold, and I cannot say that it has been any pleasure to carry out her order—

NEIGHBOUR. So you didn't get any pleasure out of it? Well, my child, I must say that you demand rather too much of yourself. But as you have obeyed, and stood the test, your time of trial shall be over, and I will let you know your life's secret.

AMELIA. Speak out, neighbour, for I dare hardly trust my good resolutions much longer.

NEIGHBOUR. Well, then! The woman you have been calling mother is your stepmother. Your father married her when you were only one year old. And the reason you have never seen your mother is that she died when you were born.

AMELIA. So that was it!—How strange to have had a mother and yet never to have seen her! Tell me—did you ever see her?

NEIGHBOUR. I knew her.

AMELIA. How did she look?

NEIGHBOUR. Well, how *did*, she look?—Her eyes were blue as the blossom of the flax—her hair was yellow as the dry stalks of wheat—

AMELIA. And tall and slender—and her hand was small and white as if it had touched nothing but silk in all her days—and her mouth was shaped like a heart, and her lips looked as if none but good words had ever passed them.

NEIGHBOUR. How can you know all that?

AMELIA. Because that is the image which appears in my dreams when I have not been good—And then she raises her hand as if to warn me, and on one of her fingers there is a ring with a green stone that seems to radiate light. It is she!—Tell me, neighbour, is there a picture of her in the place?

NEIGHBOUR. There used to be one, but I don't know whether it's still here.

AMELIA. So this one is my stepmother? Well, God was good when he let me keep my mother's image free from stain—and hereafter I shall find it quite natural that this other woman is cruel to me.

NEIGHBOUR. Cruel stepmothers exist to make children kind. And you were not kind, Amelia, but you have become so, and for that reason I shall now give you a Christmas present in advance.

He takes the portrait of the OLD LADY out of its frame, when in its place appears a picture in water-colours corresponding to the description given above.

AMELIA. [*Kneeling in front of the picture*] My mother—mother of my dreams! [*Rising*] But how can I keep the picture when it is to be sold at auction?

NEIGHBOUR. You can, because the auction has already taken place.

AMELIA. Where and when was it held?

NEIGHBOUR. It was held elsewhere—in a place not known to you—and to-day the things are merely to be taken away.

AMELIA. What a lot of queer things are happening! And how full of secrets the house is!—But tell me, where is my stepmother? I have not seen her in a long time.

NEIGHBOUR. I suppose it must be told: she is in a place from which nobody returns.

AMELIA. Is she dead?

NEIGHBOUR. She is dead. She was found frozen to death in a swamp into which she had stumbled.

AMELIA. Merciful God have pity on her soul!

NEIGHBOUR. So he will in time, especially if you pray for her.

AMELIA. Of course I will.

NEIGHBOUR. How good you have become, my child—as a result of her becoming so bad!

AMELIA. Don't say so now when she is dead—

NEIGHBOUR. Right you are! Let her rest in peace!

AMELIA. But where is my father?

NEIGHBOUR. That's a secret to all of us. But it is sweet of you to ask for him before you ask for your own Adolph.

AMELIA. Adolph—yes, where is he? The children are crying for him, and Christmas is near.—Oh, what a Christmas this will be to us!

NEIGHBOUR. Leave to each day its own trouble—and now take your Christmas present and go. The affairs connected with the auction are to be settled, and then you'll hear news.

AMELIA. [*Takes the portrait of her mother*] I go, but no longer alone—and I have a feeling that something good is about to happen, but what I cannot tell.

[She goes out to the right.]

NEIGHBOUR. But I know! Yet you had better go, for what is about to happen here should not be seen by children.

He opens the door in the rear and rings a bell to summon the people to the auction. The people enter in the following order: THE POOR, a large number of them; the SAILOR; the CHIMNEY-SWEEP; the NEIGHBOUR, who takes his place in front of the rest; the WIDOW and the FATHERLESS CHILDREN; the SURVEYOR; THE OTHER ONE, carrying the auctioneer's hammer and a pile of documents.

THE OTHER ONE. [*Takes his place at the table and raps with the hammer*] At a compulsory auction held at the court-house for the disposal of property left by the late circuit judge, the items now to be described were bid in by the Court on behalf of absent creditors, and may now be obtained and taken away by their respective owners.

JUDGE. [*Enters, looking very aged and miserable*] In the name of the law—hold!

THE OTHER ONE. [*Pretends to throw something at the JUDGE, who stands aghast and speechless*] Don't speak of the law! Here the Gospel is preached—but not for you, who wanted to buy heaven with stolen money.—First: the widow and her fatherless children. There is the silver set which the judge accepted from you for his false report as executor. In his stained hands the silver has turned black, but I hope that in yours it will once more turn white.—Then we come to the ward, who had to become a chimney-sweep, after being cheated out of his inheritance. Here are the receipted bills and the property due to you from your guardian. And you need not thank him for his accounting.—Here stands the surveyor who, although he was innocent, had to serve two years in prison because he had made an illegal partition—the maps handed to him for the purpose having been falsified in advance. What can you do for him, Judge? Can you undo what has happened, or restore his lost honour?

JUDGE. Oh, that fellow—give him a bill and he'll be satisfied! His honour wasn't worth a penny, anyhow.

THE OTHER ONE. [*Slaps the JUDGE on the mouth, while the rest spit at him and mutter with clinched fists*] Here is the brother of the sailor who was beheaded in spite of his innocence. Can you restore his brother to life? No! And you cannot pay for his life with yours, as it is not worth as much.—And finally we come to the neighbour whom you cheated out of his property in a perfectly legal way. Not familiar with the tricks of the law, the neighbour has, contrary to prevailing practice, placed the judge's son-in-law in charge of the property as life tenant, wiping out his previous indebtedness and making him also legal heir to the property.

JUDGE. I appeal to a higher court!

THE OTHER ONE. This case has passed through all the instances except the highest, and that far you cannot reach with your stamped papers. For if you tried, all these poor people whom you have robbed of their living would cry out: Guilty!—Thus we are done with all that could be properly disposed of. What remains here still undisposed of goes to the poor: clocks, vases, jewelry and other valuables that have served as bribes, graft, tips, souvenirs—all in a perfectly legal way because evidence and witnesses were wanting. You poor, take back your own! Your tears have washed the guilt from the ill-gotten goods. [*The POOR begin to plunder*] And now remains the last item to be sold by me. This pauper here, formerly a judge, is offered to the lowest bidder for board at the expense of the parish. How much is offered? [*Silence*] No offer? [*Silence*] First, second, third time—no offer? [*To the JUDGE*] There, you see! Nobody wants you. Well, then, I have to take you myself and send you to your well-earned punishment.

JUDGE. Is there no atonement?

THE OTHER ONE. Yes, punishment atones.—Take him into the woods and stone him in accordance with the law of Moses—for no other law was ever known to him. Away with him! [*The people pounce on the JUDGE and jostle him.*]

The scene changes to the "waiting-room." The same setting as in the second scene of the fourth act: a kettle-shaped chasm surrounded by steep black rocks. (The same people are on the stage.)

In the background appear a pair of huge scales for the weighing of newcomers.

The JUDGE and the OLD LADY are seated opposite each other at a small table.

JUDGE. [*Staring in front of himself as if lost in a dream*] Hush!—I had a dream! They were throwing stones at me—and yet I felt no pain—and then everything turned black and vacant until this moment—How long it may have lasted, I cannot tell—Now I am beginning to hear again—and to feel. It feels as if I were being carried—oh, how cold it is—they are washing me, I think—I am lying in something that has six sides like a cell in a honeycomb and that smells like a carpenter shop—I am being carried, and a bell is ringing—Wait! Now I am riding, but not in a street-car, although the bell is ringing all the time—Now I am sinking down, down, as if I were drowning—boom, boom, boom: three knocks on the roof—and then the lessons begin—the teacher is leading—and now the boys are singing—What can it be?—And then they are knocking on the roof again, incessantly—boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—silence—it's over! [*He wakes up*] Where am I? I choke! It's so stuffy and close here!—Oh, it's you!—Where are we? Whose bust is that?

OLD LADY. They say it is the new god.

JUDGE. But he looks like a goat.

OLD LADY. Perhaps it is the god of the goats?

JUDGE. "The goats on the left side—" What is that I am recalling?

PRINCE. It is the god Pan.

JUDGE. Pan?

PRINCE. Exactly! Just exactly! And when, in the night, the shepherds—no, not *those* shepherds—catch sight of a hair of his hide they are seized with panic—

JUDGE. [*Rising*] Woe! I don't want to stay here! Woe! Can't I get out of here? I want to get out!

[He runs around, looking vainly for a way out.]

THE OTHER ONE. [*Enters dressed as a Franciscan friar*] You'll find nothing but entrances—no exits!

JUDGE. Are you Father Colomba?

THE OTHER ONE. No, I am The Other One.

JUDGE. As a monk?

THE OTHER ONE. Don't you know that The Other One turns monk when he grows old; and don't you think it is well that he does so some time? But, seriously speaking—for here everything is serious—this is my holiday attire, which I am permitted to wear only this one day of the year in order that I may remember what I have had and what I have lost.

JUDGE. [*Alarmed*] What day of the year is it to-day?

THE OTHER ONE. [*Bending his head with a sigh*] It is Christmas Eve!

JUDGE. [*Approaching the OLD LADY*] Think of it, it is Christmas Eve?—And you know I don't dare to ask where we are—I dare not—but let us go home, home to our children, to our own— [*He cries.*]

OLD LADY. Yes, let us go from here, home to ourselves, that we may start a new life in peace and harmony—

THE OTHER ONE. It is too late!

OLD LADY. Oh, dear, sweet fellow—help us, have mercy on us, forgive us!

THE OTHER ONE. It is too late!

JUDGE. [*Taking the OLD LADY by the hand*] I am choking with dread! Don't ask him where we are; I don't want to know! But one thing I do want to know: will there ever be an end to this?

THE OTHER ONE. Never!—That word "end" is not known to us here.

JUDGE. [*Crushed*] No end! [*Looking around*] And does the sun never enter this place of damp and cold?

THE OTHER ONE. Never, for those who dwell here have not loved the sun!

JUDGE. It is true: I have cursed the sun.—May I confess my sins?

THE OTHER ONE. No, you must keep them to yourself until they begin to swell and stop up your throat.

OLD LADY. [*Kneeling*] O—I don't know how to pray!

She rises and walks restlessly back and forth, wringing her hands.

THE OTHER ONE. Because for you there is no one to whom you might pray.

OLD LADY. [*In despair*] Children—send somebody to give me a word of hope and pardon.

THE OTHER ONE. It will not be done. Your children have forgotten you—they are now rejoicing at your absence.

A picture appears on the rocky wall in the rear: the home, with ADOLPH, AMELIA, ERIC, and THYRA around the Christmas tree; in the background, the PLAYMATE.

JUDGE. You say they are seated at the Christmas table rejoicing at our misfortune?—No, now you lie, for they are better than we!

THE OTHER ONE. What new tune is that? I have always heard that you were a righteous man—

JUDGE. I? I was a great sinner—the greatest one that ever was!

THE OTHER ONE. Hm! Hm!

JUDGE. And if you say anything of the children you are guilty of a sin. I know that they are praying for us.

OLD LADY. [*On her knees*] I can hear them tell their rosaries: hush—I hear them!

THE OTHER ONE. You are completely mistaken. What you hear is the song of the workmen who are tearing down the mausoleum.

JUDGE. The mausoleum! Where we were to have rested in peace!

PRINCE. Shaded by a dozen wreaths.

JUDGE. Who is that?

PRINCE. [*Pointing to the OLD LADY*] She is my sister, and so you must be my brother-in-law.

JUDGE. Oh—that lazy scamp!

PRINCE. Look here! In this place we are all lazy scamps.

JUDGE. But we are not all hunchbacks!

PRINCE. [*Strikes him a blow on the mouth*] Don't touch the hunch or there will be hell to pay!

JUDGE. What a way to treat a man of my ability and high social position! What a Christmas!

PRINCE. Perhaps you expected your usual creamed codfish and Christmas cake?

JUDGE. Not exactly, but there ought to be something to feed on—

PRINCE. Here we are keeping a Christmas fast, you see.

JUDGE. How long will it last?

PRINCE. How long? We don't measure time here, because it has ceased to exist, and a minute may last a whole eternity.

OLD LADY. We suffer only what our deeds have deserved—so don't complain—

PRINCE. Just try to complain, and you'll see what happens.—We are not squeamish here, but bang away without regard for legal forms.

JUDGE. Are they beating carpets out there—on a day like this?

PRINCE. No, it is an extra ration of rod all around as a reminder for those who may have forgotten the significance of the day.

JUDGE. Do they actually lay hands on our persons? Is it possible that educated people can do things like that to each other?

PRINCE. This is a place of education for the badly educated; and those who have behaved like scoundrels are treated like such.

JUDGE. But this passes all limits!

PRINCE. Yes, because here we are in the limitless! Now get ready! I have already been out there and had my portion.

JUDGE. [*Appalled*] What humiliation! That's to strip you of all human worth!

PRINCE. Ha ha! Human worth! Ha ha!—Look at the scales over there. That's where the human worth is—and invariably found wanting.

JUDGE. [*Sits down at the table*] I could never have believed—

PRINCE. No, you could only believe in your caul and your own righteousness. And yet you had both Moses and the Prophets and more besides—for the very dead walked for your benefit.

JUDGE. The children! The children! Is it not possible to send them a word of greeting and of warning?

PRINCE. No! Eternally, no!

The WITCH comes forward with a big basketful of stereoscopes.

JUDGE. What is it?

WITCH. Christmas gifts for the righteous. Stereoscopes, you know. [*Handing out one*] Help yourself. They don't cost anything.

JUDGE. There's a kind soul at last. And a little attention to a man of my age and rank does honour both to your tact and to your heart—

WITCH. That's very nice of you, Judge, but I hope you don't mind my having given some thought to the others, too.

JUDGE. [*Disappointed*] Are you poking fun at me, you damned old hag?

WITCH. [*Spitting in his face*] Hold your tongue, petti-fogger!

JUDGE. What company I have got into!

WITCH. Is it not good enough for you, you old perjurer, you grafter, you forger, you robber of orphans, you false pleader? Now have a look in the peep-show and take in the great spectacle: "From the Cradle to the Grave." There is your whole biography and all your victims—just have a look now. That's right!

JUDGE *looks in the stereoscope; then he rises with horror stamped on his face.*

WITCH. I hope this slight attention may add to the Christmas joy!

She hands a stereoscope to the OLD LADY, and proceeds thereafter to give one to each person present.

JUDGE. [*Sitting at the table, where now the OLD LADY takes a seat opposite him*] What do you see?

OLD LADY. Everything is there; everything!—And do you notice that everything is black? All life that seemed so bright is now black, and even moments which I thought full of innocent joy have an appearance of something nauseating, foul, almost criminal. It is as if all my memories had decayed, including the fairest among them—

JUDGE. You are right. There is not one memory that can bring light into this darkness. When I look at her who was the first love of my youth, I see nothing but a corpse. When I think of my sweet Amelia, there appears—a harlot. The little ones make faces at me like gutter-snipes. My court has become a pigsty; the vineyard, a rubbish-heap full of thistles; and the mausoleum—Oh, horrors!—an outhouse! When I think of the green woods, the leafage appears snuff-coloured and the trunks look bleached as mast tops. The blue river seems to flow out of a dung-heap and the blue arch above it looks like a smoky roof—Of the sun itself I can recall nothing but the name; and what was called the moon—the lamp that shed its light on bays and groves during the amorous nights of my youth—I can remember only as—no, I cannot remember it at all. But the words are left, although they have only sound without sense.—Love, wine, song! Flowers, children, happiness!—Don't the words sound pretty? And it is all that is left!—Love? What *was* it, anyhow?

OLD LADY. What was it?—Two cats on a back-yard fence.

JUDGE. [*Sheepishly*] Yes, that's it! That's what it was! Three dogs on a sidewalk. What a sweet recollection!

OLD LADY. [*Pressing his hand*] Yes, it is sweet!

JUDGE. [*Looking at his watch*] My watch has stopped. I am so hungry—and I am thirsty, too, and I long for a smoke. But I am also tired and want to sleep. All my desires are waking. They claw at me and hound me, but not one of them can I satisfy. We are lost! Lost, indeed!

OLD LADY. And I long for a cup of tea more than I can tell!

JUDGE. Hot green tea—that's just what I should like now—with a tiny drop of rum in it.

OLD LADY. No, not rum! I should prefer some cakes—

PRINCE. [*Who has drawn near to listen*] Sugared, of course? I fear you'll have to whistle for them.

OLD LADY. Oh, this dreadful language hurts me more than anything, else.

PRINCE. That's because you don't know yet how something else is going to hurt you.

JUDGE. What is that?

OLD LADY. No, don't! We don't want to know! Please!

PRINCE. Yes, I am going to tell. It begins with—

OLD LADY. [*Puts her fingers in her ears and cries out*] Mercy! Don't, don't, don't!

PRINCE. Yes, I will—and as my brother-in-law is curious, I'll tell it to him. The second letter is—

JUDGE. This uncertainty is worse than torture—Speak out, you devil, or I'll kill you!

PRINCE. Kill, ha ha! Everybody is immortal here, body and soul, what little there is left. However, the third letter is—and that's all you'll know!

MAN IN GREY. [*A small, lean man with grey clothes, grey face, black lips, grey beard, and grey hands; he speaks in a very low voice*] May I speak a word with you, madam?

OLD LADY. [*Rising in evident alarm*] What is it about?

MAN IN GREY. [*Smiling a ghastly, malicious smile*] I'll tell—out there.

OLD LADY. [*Crying*] No, no; I won't!

MAN IN GREY. [*Laughing*]; It isn't dangerous. Come along! All I want is to *speak* to you. Come now!

[*They go toward the background and disappear.*]

PRINCE. [*To the JUDGE*] A little Christmas entertainment is wholesome.

JUDGE. Do you mean to maltreat a woman?

PRINCE. Here all injustices are abolished, and woman is treated as the equal of man.

JUDGE. You devil!

PRINCE. That's all right, but don't call me hunchback, for that touches my last illusion.

THE OTHER ONE. [*Steps up to the table*] Well, how do you like our animal magnetism? It *can* work wonders on black-guards!

JUDGE. I understand nothing of all this.

THE OTHER ONE. That's just what is meant, and it is very nice of you to admit that there are things you don't understand.

JUDGE. Granting that I am now in the realm of the dead—

THE OTHER ONE. Say "hell," for that is what it's called.

JUDGE. [*Stammering*] Th-then I should like to remind you that He who once descended here to redeem all lost—

PRINCE. [*At a sign from THE OTHER ONE he strikes the JUDGE in the face*] Don't argue!

JUDGE. They won't even listen to me! It is beyond despair! No mercy, no hope, no end!

THE OTHER ONE. Quite right! Here you find only justice and retribution—especially justice: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth! Just as you wanted it!

JUDGE. But among men there is pardon—and that you don't have here.

THE OTHER ONE. Monarchs alone possess the right to pardon. And as a man of law you ought to know that a petition for pardon must be submitted before it can be granted.

JUDGE. For me there can be no pardon!

THE OTHER ONE. [*Gives the PRINCE a sign to step aside*] You feel, then, that your guilt is too great?

JUDGE. Yes.

THE OTHER ONE. Then I'll speak kindly to you. There is an end, you see, if there is a beginning. And you have made a beginning. But the sequel will be long and hard.

JUDGE. Oh, God is good!

THE OTHER ONE. You have said it!

JUDGE. But—there is one thing that cannot be undone—there is one!

THE OTHER ONE. You are thinking of the monstrosity which should have been of gold but was of silver? Well, don't you think that He who changed water into wine may also change silver into gold?

JUDGE. [*On his knees*] But my misdeed is too great, too great to be forgiven.

THE OTHER ONE. Now you overestimate yourself again. But rise up. We are about to celebrate Christmas in our own fashion.—The light of the sun cannot reach here, as you know—nor that of the moon. But on this night, and on this alone, a star rises so far above the rocks that it is visible from here. It is the star that went before the shepherds through the desert—and *that* was the morning star.

[*He claps his hands together.*]

The bust of Pan sinks into the ground. The OLD LADY returns, looking reassured and quietly happy. With a suggestion of firm hope in mien and gesture, she goes up to the JUDGE and takes his hand. The stage becomes filled with shadows that are gazing up at the rocks in the rear.

CHORUS I. [*Two sopranos and an alto sing behind the stage, accompanied only by string instruments and a harp.*]

Puer natus est nobis;
Et filius datus est nobis,
Cujus imperium super humerum ejus;
Et vocabitur nomen ejus
Magni consilii Angelus.

CHORUS II. [*Soprano, alto, tenor, basso.*]

Cantate Domino canticum novum
Quia mirabilia fecit!

The star becomes visible above the rocks in the rear. All kneel down. A part of the rock glides aside, revealing a tableau: the crib with the child and the mother; the shepherds adoring at the left, the three Magi at the right.

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Et in terra pax
Hominibus bonæ voluntatis!

Curtain.

THE THUNDERSTORM

(OVÄDER)

A CHAMBER PLAY

1907

CHARACTERS

THE MASTER, *a retired government official*
THE CONSUL, *his brother*
STARCK, *a confectioner*
AGNES, *daughter of Starck*
LOUISE, *a relative of the Master*
GERDA, *the Master's divorced wife*
FISCHER, *second husband of Gerda*
THE ICEMAN
THE LETTER-CARRIER
THE LAMPLIGHTER
THE LIQUORDEALER'S MAN
THE MILKMAID

SCENE I—IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE
SCENE II—INSIDE THE HOUSE
SCENE III—IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE

FIRST SCENE

The front of a modern house with a basement of granite. The upper parts are of brick covered with yellow plastering. The window-frames and other ornaments are of sandstone. A low archway leads through the basement to the court and serves also as entrance to the confectioner's shop. The corner of the house appears at the right of the stage, where the avenue opens into a small square planted with roses and various other flowers. At the corner is a mail-box. The main floor, above the basement, has large windows, all of which are open. Four of these windows belong to an elegantly furnished dining-room. The four middle windows in the second story have red shades which are drawn; the shades are illumined by light from within.

Along the front of the house runs a sidewalk with trees planted at regular intervals. There is a lamp-post in the extreme foreground and beside it stands a green bench.

STARCK, *the confectioner, comes out with a chair and sits down on the sidewalk.*

The MASTER is visible in the dining-room of the main floor, seated at the table. Behind him appears an oven built of green majolica tiles. On its mantelshelf stands a large photograph between two candelabra and some vases containing flowers. A young girl in a light dress is just serving the final course.

The MASTER'S brother, the CONSUL, appears in front of the house, coming from the left, and knocks with his walking-stick on the sill of one of the dining-room windows.

CONSUL. Will you soon be through?

MASTER. I'll come in a moment.

CONSUL. [*Saluting the confectioner*] Good evening, Mr. Starck. It's still hot—

STARCK. Good evening, Consul. Yes, it's the dog-day heat, and we have been making jam all day.

CONSUL. Is that so? It's a good year for fruit, then?

STARCK. It might be worse. Well, the spring was cold, but the summer turned out unbearably hot.

It was hard on us who had to stay in the city.

CONSUL. I got back from the country yesterday—one begins to wish oneself back when the evenings grow dark.

STARCK. Neither I nor my wife have been out of the city. Of course, business is at a standstill, but you have to be on hand to make ready for the winter. First come strawberries, then cherries, then raspberries, and last gooseberries, cantaloupes and all the fall fruits—

CONSUL. Tell me something, Mr. Starck. Is the house here to be sold?

STARCK. Not that I have heard.

CONSUL. There are a lot of people living here?

STARCK. Something like ten families, I think, counting those in the rear also. But nobody knows anybody else. There is unusually little gossiping in the house. It seems rather as if everybody were hiding. I have lived here ten years, and during the first two years we had for neighbours a strange family that kept very quiet in the daytime. But at night they began to stir about, and then carriages would come and fetch things away. Not until the end of the second year did I learn that they had been running a private sanatorium, and that what was being taken away at night were dead bodies.

CONSUL. Horrible!

STARCK. And they call it the Silent House.

CONSUL. Yes, there isn't much talking done here.

STARCK. More than one drama has been played here, nevertheless.

CONSUL. Tell me, Mr. Starck, who lives up there on the second floor, right above my brother?

STARCK. Up there, where the light comes through the red shades—a tenant died there during the summer. Then the place stood empty for a month, and a week ago a new family moved in. I haven't seen them. I don't know their name. I don't think they ever go out. Why did you ask, Consul?

CONSUL. Whew—I don't know! Those four red shades look like stage curtains behind which some sanguinary tragedies are being rehearsed—or I imagine so, at least. There is a palm at one of the windows looking like a rod made of wire—you can see the shadow of it on the shade. If only some people were to be seen—

STARCK. I have seen plenty of them, but not until later—at night.

CONSUL. Was it men or women you saw?

STARCK. Both, I guess—but now I must get back to my pots. [*He disappears into the gateway.*]

MASTER. [*Still inside, has risen from the table and lighted a cigar; he is now standing at the open window, talking to his brother outside*] I'll be ready in a moment. Louise is only going to sew a button on one of my gloves.

CONSUL. Then you mean to go down-town?

MASTER. Perhaps we'll take a turn in that direction—Whom were you talking with?

CONSUL. Just the confectioner—

MASTER. Oh, yes—a very decent fellow—and, for that matter, my only companion here during the summer.

CONSUL. Have you really stayed at home every night—never gone out?

MASTER. Never! Those light evenings make me timid. They are pleasant in the country, of course, but here in the city they produce the effect of something unnatural—almost ghastly. But no sooner has the first street lamp been lighted than I feel calm once more and can resume my evening walks. In that way I can get tired and sleep better at night. [*LOUISE hands him the glove*] Thank you, my child. You can just as well leave the windows open, as there are no mosquitoes. [*To the CONSUL*] Now I'm coming.

A few moments later he can be seen coming out of the house on the side facing the square; he stops at the corner to drop a letter in the mail-box; then he comes around the corner to the front of the house and sits down on the bench beside his brother.

CONSUL. But tell me: why do you stay in the city when you *could* be in the country?

MASTER. I don't know. I have lost my power of motion. My memory has tied me for ever to these rooms. Only within them can I find peace and protection. In there—yes! It is interesting to look at your own home from the outside. Then I imagine that some other man is pacing back and forth in there—Just think: for ten years I have been pacing back and forth in there!

CONSUL. Is it ten years now?

MASTER. Yes, time goes quickly—once it is gone. But when it is still going it seems slow enough.—That time the house was new. I watched them putting down the hard-wood floor in the dining-room and painting the doors; and *she* was permitted to pick out the wall-paper, which is still there—Yes, that was then! The confectioner and I are the oldest tenants in the place, and he, too, has had a few experiences of his own—he is one of those people who never succeed but are always in some kind of trouble. In a way, I have been living his life also, and bearing his burdens

besides my own.

CONSUL. Does he drink, then?

MASTER. No-o—nothing of that kind, but there is no *go* to him. Well, he and I know the history of this house: how they have arrived in bridal coaches and left in hearses, while the mail-box at the corner became the recipient of all their confidences.

CONSUL. There was a death here in the middle of the summer, wasn't there?

MASTER. Yes, a case of typhoid—the man was manager of a bank—and then the flat stood vacant for a month. The coffin came out first, then the widow and the children, and last of all the furniture.

CONSUL. That was on the second floor?

MASTER. Yes, up there, where you see the light—where those new people are, about whom I know nothing at all.

CONSUL. Haven't you seen anything of them either?

MASTER. I never ask any questions about the other tenants. What comes to me unasked, I accept—but I never make any wrong use of it, and I never interfere, for I am anxious for the peace of my old age.

CONSUL. Old age—yes! I think it's nice to grow old, for then there isn't so much left to be recorded.

MASTER. Indeed, it is nice. I am settling my accounts, both with life and with people, and I have already begun to pack for the journey. Of course, the solitude has its draw-backs, but when there is nobody who can make any demands on you, then you have won your freedom—the freedom to come and go, to think and act, to eat and sleep, in accordance with your own choice.

At this moment the shade in one of the windows on the second floor is raised a little way, so that part of a woman's dress becomes visible. Then it is quickly drawn again.

CONSUL. They are astir up there—did you see?

MASTER. Yes, there is such a lot of mystery about it—and at night it is worse than ever. Sometimes there is music, but it's always bad; and sometimes I think they are playing cards; and long after midnight carriages drive up and take away people.—I never make a complaint against other tenants, for then they want to get even, and nobody wants to change his ways. The best thing is to remain oblivious of everything.

A gentleman, dressed in a dinner coat but bareheaded, comes out of the house and drops a big pile of letters into the mail-box; then he disappears into the house again.

CONSUL. That fellow must have a lot of correspondence.

MASTER. It looked to me like circulars.

CONSUL. But who is he?

MASTER. Why, that's the new tenant up there on the second floor.

CONSUL. Oh, is that so! What do you think he looked like?

MASTER. I don't know. Musician, conductor, a touch of musical comedy, with a leaning to vaudeville—gambler—Adonis—a little of everything—

CONSUL. Black hair should have gone with that pale complexion of his, but his hair was brown—which means that it had been dyed, or that he wears a wig. A tuxedo at home indicates an empty wardrobe, and the movements of his hands as he dropped the letters into the box suggested shuffling and cutting and dealing—[*At this moment waltz music becomes faintly audible from the second floor*] Always waltzes—perhaps they have a dancing-school—but it's always the same waltz—what's the name of it now?

MASTER. Why, I think—that's "Pluie d'or"—I know it by heart.

CONSUL. Have you heard it in your own house?

MASTER. Yes, that one and the "Alcazar Waltz."

LOUISE becomes visible in the dining-room, where she is putting things in order and wiping the glassware on the buffet.

CONSUL. Are you still pleased with Louise?

MASTER. Very.

CONSUL. Isn't she going to marry?

MASTER. Not that I know of.

CONSUL. Is there no fiancé in sight?

MASTER. Why do you ask?

CONSUL. Have you had any thoughts of that kind?

MASTER. I? No, thank you! When I married the last time I was not too old, as we had a child in due

time, but I have grown too old since then, and now I want to spend my evening in peace—Do you think I want another master in my own house, who would rob me of life and honour and goods?

CONSUL. Oh, nobody took your life or your goods—

MASTER. Do you mean to say that my honour suffered any harm?

CONSUL. Don't you know?

MASTER. What *do* you mean?

CONSUL. In leaving you, she killed your honour.

MASTER. Then I have been a dead man for five years without knowing it.

CONSUL. You haven't known it?

MASTER. No, but now I'll tell you in a few words what really happened. When, at fifty, I married a girl much younger than myself—one whose heart I had won and who gave me her hand fearlessly and willingly—then I promised her that if ever my age should become a burden to her youth I would go my own way and give her back her freedom. Since the child had come in due time, and neither one of us wanted another, and since our little girl had begun to grow apart from me, so that I had come to feel superfluous, I did go my way—that is, I took a boat, as we were living on an island—and that was the end of the whole story. I had redeemed my promise and saved my honour—what more besides?

CONSUL. All right—but she thought it an attack on her own honour, because she had meant to go away herself. And so she killed you by tacit accusations which never reached your ears.

MASTER. Did she accuse herself also?

CONSUL. No, she had no reason to do so.

MASTER. Then no harm has been done.

CONSUL. Do you know what has become of her and the child since then?

MASTER. I don't want to know! Having at last outlived the horrors of longing, I came to regard the whole business as buried; and as none but beautiful memories were left behind in our rooms, I remained where I was. However, I thank you for that piece of valuable information!

CONSUL. Which one?

MASTER. That she had no reason for self-accusation, for if she had it would constitute an accusation against me—

CONSUL. I think you are living under a serious misconception—

MASTER. If I am, leave me alone! A clear conscience—comparatively clear, at least—has always been the diving-suit that has enabled me to descend into the vast deeps without being suffocated. [*Rising*] To think of it—that I got out of it with my life! And now it's all over!—Suppose we take a turn down the avenue?

CONSUL. All right, then we can see them light the first street lamp of the season.

MASTER. But won't the moon be up to-night—the harvest-moon?

CONSUL. Why, I think the moon is full just now—

MASTER. [*Going to one of the windows and talking into the dining-room*] Please hand me my stick, Louise. The light one—I just want to hold it in my hand.

LOUISE. [*Handing out a cane of bamboo*] Here it is, sir.

MASTER. Thank you, my girl. Now turn out the light in the dining-room if you have nothing to do there. We'll be gone a little while—I cannot tell just how long.

The MASTER and the CONSUL go out to the left. LOUISE remains standing by the open window. STARCK comes out of the gateway.

STARCK. Good evening, Miss Louise. It's awfully hot!—So your gentlemen have disappeared?

LOUISE. They have gone for a stroll down the avenue—the first time my master has gone out this summer.

STARCK. We old people love the twilight, which covers up so many defects both in ourselves and others. Do you know, Miss Louise, my old woman is getting blind, but she won't have an operation performed. She says there is nothing to look at, and that sometimes she wishes she were deaf, too.

LOUISE. Well, one does feel that way—at times.

STARCK. Of course, you are leading a very quiet life in there, with plenty of everything, and nothing to worry about. I have never heard a loud voice or the slamming of a door—perhaps, even, it is a little too quiet for a young lady like yourself?

LOUISE. Not at all! I love the quiet, and whatever is dignified, graceful, measured—with nobody blurting out things, and all thinking it a duty to overlook the less pleasant features of daily life.

STARCK. And you have never any company?

LOUISE. No, only the consul comes here—and the like of the love between those two brothers I have never seen.

STARCK. Who is the elder of the two?

LOUISE. That's more than I can tell. Whether there is a year or two between them, or they are twins, I don't know, for they treat each other with mutual respect, as if each one of them was the elder brother.

AGNES *appears, trying to get past STARCK without being seen by him.*

STARCK. Where are you going, girl?

AGNES. Oh, I am just going out for a little walk.

STARCK. That's right, but get back soon.

AGNES *goes out.*

STARCK. Do you think your master is still mourning the loss of his dear ones?

LOUISE. He doesn't mourn—he doesn't even feel any regrets, for he doesn't want them back—but he is always with them in his memory, where he keeps only their beautiful traits.

STARCK. But doesn't the fate of his daughter trouble him at times?

LOUISE. Yes, he cannot help fearing that the mother may have married again, and then, of course, everything depends on how the child's stepfather turns out.

STARCK. I have been told that the wife refused alimony at first, but that now, when five years have passed, she has sent him a lawyer with a demand for many thousands—

LOUISE. [*With reserve*] I know nothing about it.

STARCK. I believe, however, that she was never more beautiful than in his memory—

THE LIQUORDEALER'S MAN. [*Enters, carrying a crateful of bottles*] Excuse me, but does Mr. Fischer live here?

LOUISE. Mr. Fischer? Not so far as I know.

STARCK. Perhaps Fischer is the name of that fellow on the second floor? Around the corner—one flight up.

THE LIQUORDEALER'S MAN. [*Going toward the square*] One flight up—thanks. [*He disappears around the corner.*]

LOUISE. Carrying up bottles again—that means another sleepless night.

STARCK. What kind of people are they? Why don't they ever show themselves?

LOUISE. I suppose they use the back-stairs, for I have never seen them. But I do hear them.

STARCK. Yes, I have also heard doors bang and corks pop—and the popping of other things, too, I guess.

LOUISE. And they never open their windows, in spite of the heat—they must be Southerners.—Why, that's lightning—a lot of it!—I guess it's nothing but heat-lightning, for there has been no thunder.

A VOICE. [*Is heard from the basement*] Starck, dear, won't you come down and help me put in the sugar!

STARCK. All right, old lady, I'm coming! [*To LOUISE*] We are making jam, you know. [*As he goes*] I'm coming, I'm coming! [*He disappears into the gateway again.*]

LOUISE *remains standing at the window.*

CONSUL. [*Enters slowly from the right*] Isn't my brother back yet?

LOUISE. No, sir.

CONSUL. He wanted to telephone, and I was to go ahead. Well, I suppose he'll be here soon.—What's this? [*He stoops to pick up a post-card*] What does it say?—"Boston club at midnight: Fischer."—Do you know who Fischer is, Louise?

LOUISE. There was a man with a lot of wine looking for Fischer a while ago—up on the second floor.

CONSUL. On the second floor—Fischer! Red shades that make the place look like a drug-store window at night! I fear you have got bad company in the house.

LOUISE. What is a Boston club?

CONSUL. Oh, there need be no harm in it at all—in this case I don't know, however.—But how did the post-card—? Oh, it was *he* who dropped it a while ago. Then I'll put it back in the box.—Fischer? I have heard that name before. In connection with something I cannot recall just now—May I ask a question, Miss Louise: does my brother never speak of—the past?

LOUISE. Not to me.

CONSUL. Miss Louise—one more question LOUISE. Excuse me, but here comes the milk, and I have to receive it. [*She leaves the dining-room.*]

The MILKMAID appears from the right and enters the house from the square.

STARCK. [*Comes out again, takes off his white linen cap, and puffs with heat*] In and out, like a badger at its hole—it's perfectly horrid down there by the ovens—and the evening doesn't make it any cooler.

CONSUL. All this lightning shows that we are going to have rain—Well, the city isn't pleasant, exactly, but up here you have quiet at least: never any rattling carriages, and still less any street-cars—it's just like the country.

STARCK. Of course, it's quiet, but it's too quiet for business. I know my trade, but I am a poor salesman—have always been, and can't learn—or it may be something else. Perhaps I haven't got the proper manner. For when customers act as if I were a swindler I get embarrassed at first, and then as mad as it is possible for me to become. But nowadays I haven't the strength to get really mad. It has been worn out of me—everything gets worn out.

CONSUL. Why don't you go to work for somebody else?

STARCK. Who would want me?

CONSUL. Have you ever tried?

STARCK. What would be the use of it?

CONSUL. Oh—well!

At this moment a long-drawn "O-oh" is heard from the apartment on the second floor.

STARCK. What, in the name of Heaven, are they up to in that place? Are they killing each other?

CONSUL. I don't like this new and unknown element that has come into the house. It is pressing on us like a red thunder-cloud. What kind of people are they? Where do they come from? What do they want here?

STARCK. It's so very dangerous to delve in other people's affairs—you get mixed up in them yourself—

CONSUL. Do you know anything about them?

STARCK. No, I don't know anything at all.

CONSUL. Now they're screaming again, this time in the stairway—

STARCK. [*Withdrawing into the gateway and speaking in a low voice*] I don't want to have anything to do with this.

GERDA, the divorced wife of the MASTER, comes running from the house into the square. She is bareheaded, with her hair down, and very excited. The CONSUL approaches her, and they recognise each other. She draws back from him.

CONSUL. So it's you—my former sister-in-law?

GERDA. Yes, it is I.

CONSUL. How did you get into this house, and why can't you let my brother enjoy his peace?

GERDA. [*Bewildered*] They didn't give us the right name of the tenant below—I thought he had moved—I couldn't help it—

CONSUL. Don't be afraid—you don't have to be afraid of me, Gerda! Can I be of any help to you? What's happening up there?

GERDA. He was beating me!

CONSUL. Is your little girl with you?

GERDA. Yes.

CONSUL. So she has got a stepfather?

GERDA. Yes.

CONSUL. Put up your hair and calm yourself. Then I'll try to straighten this matter out. But spare my brother—

GERDA. I suppose he hates me?

CONSUL. No, don't you see that he has been taking care of your flowers in the bed over there? He brought the soil himself, in a basket, don't you remember? Don't you recognise your blue gentians and the mignonette, your *Malmaison* and *Merveille de Lyons* roses, which he budded himself? Don't you understand that he has cherished the memory of yourself and of the child?

GERDA. Where is he now?

CONSUL. Taking a walk along the avenue, but he will be here in a few minutes with the evening papers. When he comes from that side he uses the back door, and he goes straight into the dining-room to read the papers. Stand still and he won't notice you.—But you must go back to your own rooms—

GERDA. I can't! I can't go back to that man.

CONSUL. Who is he, and what?

GERDA. He—has been a singer.

CONSUL. Has been—and what is he now? An adventurer?

GERDA. Yes!

CONSUL. Keeps a gambling-house?

GERDA. Yes!

CONSUL. And the child? Bait?

GERDA. Oh, don't say that!

CONSUL. It's horrible!

GERDA. You are too harsh about the whole thing.

CONSUL. Of course, filth must be handled gently—so very gently! But a just cause should be dragged in the dirt. Why did you defile his honour, and why did you lure me into becoming your accomplice? I was childish enough to trust your word, and I defended your unjust cause against his.

GERDA. You forget that he was too old.

CONSUL. No, he wasn't *then*, as you had a child at once. When he proposed, he asked if you wanted to have a child with him, and he vowed in the bargain to give you back your freedom when his promise had been kept and old age began to weigh him down.

GERDA. He deserted me, and that was an insult.

CONSUL. Not to you! Your youth prevented it from being a reflection on you.

GERDA. He should have let me leave him.

CONSUL. Why? Why did you want to heap dishonour on him?

GERDA. One of us had to bear it.

CONSUL. What strange paths your thoughts pursue! However, you have killed him, and fooled me into helping you. How can we rehabilitate him?

GERDA. If he is to be rehabilitated, it can only be at my expense.

CONSUL. I cannot follow your thoughts, which always turn to hatred. But suppose we leave the rehabilitation alone and think only of how his daughter is to be saved: what can we do then?

GERDA. She is my child. She's mine by law, and my husband is her father—

CONSUL. Now *you* are too harsh about it! And you have grown cruel and vulgar—Hush! Here he comes now.

The MASTER enters from the left with a newspaper in his hand; he goes into the house pensively by the back door, while the CONSUL and GERDA remain motionless, hidden behind the corner of the house.

Then the CONSUL and GERDA come down the stage. A moment later the MASTER becomes visible in the dining-room, where he sits down to read the paper.

GERDA. It was he!

CONSUL. Come over here and look at your home. See how he has kept everything as it was—arranged to suit your taste.—Don't be afraid. It's so dark out here that he can't see us. The light in the room blinds him, you know.

GERDA. How he has been lying to me!

CONSUL. In what respect?

GERDA. He hasn't grown old! He had grown tired of me—that was the whole thing! Look at his collar—and his tie—the very latest fashion! I am sure he has a mistress!

CONSUL. Yes, you can see her photograph on the mantelshelf, between the candelabra.

GERDA. It is myself and the child! Does he still love me?

CONSUL. Your memory only!

GERDA. That's strange!

The MASTER ceases to read and stares out through the window.

GERDA. He is looking at us!

CONSUL. Don't move!

GERDA. He is looking straight into my eyes.

CONSUL. Be still! He doesn't see you.

GERDA. He looks as if he were dead—

CONSUL. Well, he has been killed.

GERDA. Why do you talk like that?

An unusually strong flash of heat-lightning illumines the figures of the CONSUL and

GERDA.

The MASTER rises with an expression of horror on his face. GERDA takes refuge behind the corner of the house.

MASTER. Carl Frederick! [*Coming to the window*] Are you alone? I thought—Are you really alone?

CONSUL. As you see.

MASTER. The air is so sultry, and the flowers give me a headache—I am just going to finish the newspaper.

[He resumes his former position.

CONSUL. Now let us get at your affairs. Do you want me to go with you?

GERDA. Perhaps! But it will be a hard struggle.

CONSUL. But the child must be saved. And I am a lawyer.

GERDA. Well, for the child's sake, then! Come with me!

[They go out together.

MASTER. [*Calling from within*] Carl Frederick, come in and have a game of chess!—Carl Frederick!

Curtain.

SECOND SCENE

Inside the dining-room. The brick stove appears at the centre of the rear wall. To the left of it there is a door leading into the pantry. Another door to the right of it leads to the hallway. At the left stands a buffet with a telephone on it. A piano and a tall clock stand at the right. There are doors in both side walls.

The MASTER is in the room, and LOUISE enters as the curtain rises.

MASTER. Where did my brother go?

LOUISE. [*Alarmed*] He was outside a moment ago. He can't be very far away.

MASTER. What a dreadful noise they are making up above! It is as if they were stepping on my head! Now they are pulling out bureau drawers as if they were were preparing for a journey—running away, perhaps.—If you only knew how to play chess, Louise!

LOUISE. I know a little—

MASTER. Oh, if you just know how to move the pieces, that will be enough—Sit down, child. [*He sets up the chess pieces*] They are carrying on up there so that they make the chandelier rattle—and the confectioner is heating up down below. I think I'll have to move soon.

LOUISE. I have long thought that you ought to do so anyhow.

MASTER. Anyhow?

LOUISE. It isn't good to stay too long among old memories.

MASTER. Why not? As time passes, all memories grow beautiful.

LOUISE. But you may live twenty years more, and that is too long a time to live among memories which, after all, must fade and which may change colour entirely some fine day.

MASTER. How much you know, my child!—Begin now by moving a pawn—but not the one in front of the queen, or you will be mate in two moves.

LOUISE. Then I start with the knight—

MASTER. Hardly less dangerous, girl!

LOUISE. But I think I'll start with the knight just the same.

MASTER. All right. Then I'll move my bishop's pawn.

STARCK appears in the hallway, carrying a tray.

LOUISE. There's Mr. Starck with the tea-cakes. He doesn't make any more noise than a mouse.

[She rises and goes out into the hallway to receive the tray, which she then carries into the pantry.

MASTER. Well, Mr. Starck, how is the old lady?

STARCK. Oh, thank you, her eyes are about as usual.

MASTER. Have you seen anything of my brother?

STARCK. He is walking back and forth outside, I think.

MASTER. Has he got any company?

STARCK. No-o—I don't think so.

MASTER. It wasn't yesterday you had a look at these rooms, Mr. Starck.

STARCK. I should say not—it's just ten years ago now—

MASTER. When you brought the wedding-cake.—Does the place look changed?

STARCK. It is just as it was—the palms have grown, of course—but the rest is just as it was.

MASTER. And will remain so until you bring the funeral cake. When you have passed a certain age, nothing changes, nothing progresses—all the movement is downward like that of a sleigh going down-hill.

STARCK. Yes, that's the way it is.

MASTER. And it is peaceful, the way I have it here. No love, no friends, only a little company to break up the solitude. Then human beings are just human beings, without any claims on your feelings and sympathies. Then you come loose like an old tooth, and drop out without pain or regrets. Take Louise, for instance—a pretty young girl, the sight of whom pleases me like a work of art that I don't wish to possess—there is nothing to disturb our relationship. My brother and I meet like two old gentlemen who never get too close to each other and never exact any confidences. By taking up a neutral position toward one's fellow-men, one attains a certain distance—and as a rule we look better at a distance. In a word, I am pleased with my old age and its quiet peace—[*Calling out*] Louise!

LOUISE. [*Appearing in the doorway at the left and speaking pleasantly as always*] The laundry has come home, and I have to check it off. [*She disappears again.*]

MASTER. Well, Mr. Starck, won't you sit down and chat a little—or perhaps you play chess?

STARCK. I can't stay away from my pots, and the oven has to be heated up at eleven. It's very kind of you, however—

MASTER. If you catch sight of my brother, ask him to come in and keep me company.

STARCK. So I will—so I will! [*He goes.*]

MASTER. [*Alone; moves a couple of pieces on the chess-board; then gets up and begins to walk about*] The peace of old age—yes! [*He sits down at the piano and strikes a few chords; then he gets up and walks about as before*] Louise! Can't you let the laundry wait a little?

LOUISE. [*Appears again for a moment in the doorway at the left*] No, I can't, because the wash-woman is in a hurry—she has husband and children waiting for her.

MASTER. Oh! [*He sits down at the table and begins to drum with his fingers on it; tries to read the newspaper, but tires of it; lights matches only to blow them out again at once; looks repeatedly at the big clock, until at last a noise is heard from the hallway*] Is that you, Carl Frederick?

THE MAIL-CARRIER. [*Appears in the doorway*] It's the mail. Excuse me for walking right in, but the door was standing open.

MASTER. Is there a letter for me?

THE MAIL-CARRIER. Only a post-card.

[*He hands it over and goes out.*]

MASTER. [*Reading the post-card*] Mr. Fischer again! Boston club! That's the man up above—with the white hands and the tuxedo coat. And to me! The impertinence of it! I have got to move!—Fischer!—[*He tears up the card; again a noise is heard, in the hallway*] Is that you, Carl Frederick?

THE ICEMAN. [*Without coming into the room*] It's the ice!

MASTER. Well, it's nice to get ice in this heat. But be careful about those bottles in the box. And put one of the pieces on edge so that I can hear the water drip from it as it melts—That's my water-clock that measures out the hours—the long hours—Tell me, where do you get the ice from nowadays?—Oh, he's gone!—Everybody goes away—goes home—to hear their own voices and get some company—[*Pause*] Is that you, Carl Frederick?

Somebody in the apartment above plays Chopin's Fantaisie Impromptu, Opus 66, on the piano—but only the first part of it.

MASTER. [*Begins to listen, is aroused, looks up at the ceiling*] My *Impromptu*?

[*He covers his eyes with one hand and listens.*]

The CONSUL enters through the hallway.

MASTER. Is that you, Carl Frederick?

The music stops.

CONSUL. It is I.

MASTER. Where have you been so long?

CONSUL. I had some business to clear up. Have you been alone?

MASTER. Of course! Come and play chess now.

CONSUL. I prefer to talk. And you need also to hear your own voice a little.

MASTER. True enough—only it is so easy to get to talking about the past.

CONSUL. That makes us forget the present.

MASTER. There is no present. What's just passing is empty nothingness. One has to look ahead or behind—and ahead is better, for there lies hope!

CONSUL. [*Seating himself at the table*] Hope—of what?

MASTER. Of change.

CONSUL. Well! Do you mean to say you have had enough of the peace of old age?

MASTER. Perhaps.

CONSUL. It's certain then. And if now you had the choice between solitude and the past?

MASTER. No ghosts, however!

CONSUL. How about your memories?

MASTER. They don't walk. They are only poems wrought by me out of certain realities. But if dead people walk, then you have ghosts.

CONSUL. Well, then—in your memory—who brings you the prettiest mirage: the woman or the child?

MASTER. Both! I cannot separate them, and that's why I never tried to keep the child.

CONSUL. But do you think you did right? Did the possibility of a stepfather never occur to you?

MASTER. I didn't think that far ahead at the time, but afterward, of course, I have had—my thoughts—about—that very thing.

CONSUL. A stepfather who abused—perhaps debased—your daughter?

MASTER. Hush!

CONSUL. What is it you hear?

MASTER. I thought I heard the "little steps"—those little steps that came tripping down the corridor when she was looking for me.—It was the child that was the best of all! To watch that fearless little creature, whom nothing could frighten, who never suspected that life might be deceptive, who had no secrets! I recall her first experience of the malice that is in human beings. She caught sight of a pretty child down in the park, and, though it was strange to her, she went up to it with open arms to kiss it—and the pretty child rewarded her friendliness by biting her in the cheek first and then making a face at her. Then you should have seen my little Anne-Charlotte. She stood as if turned to stone. And it wasn't pain that did it, but horror at the sight of that yawning abyss which is called the human heart. I have been confronted with the same sight myself once, when out of two beautiful eyes suddenly shot strange glances as if some evil beast had appeared behind those eyes. It scared me literally so that I had to see if some other person were standing behind that face, which looked like a mask.—But why do we sit here talking about such things? Is it the heat, or the storm, or what?

CONSUL. Solitude brings heavy thoughts, and you ought to have company. This summer in the city seems to have been rather hard on you.

MASTER. Only these last few weeks. The sickness and that death up above—it was as if I had gone through it myself. The sorrows and cares of the confectioner have also become my own, so that I keep worrying about his finances, about his wife's eye trouble, about his future—and of late I have been dreaming every night about my little Anne-Charlotte. I see her surrounded by dangers—unknown, undiscovered, nameless. And before I fall asleep my hearing grows so unbelievably acute that I can hear her little steps—and once I heard her voice—

CONSUL. But where is she then?

MASTER. Don't ask me!

CONSUL. And if you were to meet her on the street?

MASTER. I imagine that I should lose my reason or fall in a faint. Once, you know, I stayed abroad very long, during the very time when our youngest sister was growing up. When I returned, after several years, I was met at the steam-boat landing by a young girl who put her arms around my neck. I was horrified at those eyes that searched mine, but with unfamiliar glances—glances that expressed absolute terror at not being recognised. "It is I," she repeated again and again before at last I was able to recognise my own sister. And that's how I imagine it would be for me to meet my daughter again. Five years are enough to render you unrecognisable at that age. Think of it: not to know your own child! That child, who is the same as before, and yet a stranger! I couldn't survive such a thing. No, then I prefer to keep the little girl of four years whom you see over there on the altar of my home. I want no other one. [*Pause*] That must be Louise putting things to rights in the linen closet. It has such a clean smell, and it reminds me—oh, the housewife at her

linen closet; the good fairy that preserves and renews; the housewife with her iron, who smooths out all that has been ruffled up and who takes out all wrinkles—the wrinkles, yes—[Pause] Now—I'll—go in there to write a letter. If you'll stay, I'll be out again soon.

[He goes out to the left.

The CONSUL coughs.

GERDA. [Appears in the door to the hallway] Are you—[The clock strikes] Oh, mercy! That sound—which has remained in my ears for ten years! That clock which never kept time and yet measured the long hours and days and nights of five years. [She looks around] My piano—my palms—the dinner-table—he has kept it in honour, shining as a shield! My buffet—with the "Knight in Armour" and "Eve"—Eve with her basketful of apples—In the right-hand upper drawer, way back, there was a thermometer lying—[Pause] I wonder if it is still there? [She goes to the buffet and pulls out the right-hand drawer] Yes, there it is!

CONSUL. What does that mean?

GERDA. Oh, in the end it became a symbol—of instability. When we went to housekeeping the thermometer was not put in its place at once—of course, it ought to be outside the window. I promised to put it up—and forgot it. He promised, and forgot. Then we nagged each other about it, and at last, to get away from it, I hid it in this drawer. I came to hate it, and so did he. Do you know what was back of all that? Neither one of us believed that our relationship would last, because we unmasked at once and gave free vent to our antipathies. To begin with, we lived on tiptoe, so to speak—always ready to fly off at a moment's notice. That was what the thermometer stood for—and here it is still lying! Always on the move, always changeable, like the weather. [She puts away the thermometer and goes over to the chess-board] My chess pieces! Which he bought to kill the time that hung heavy on our hands while we were waiting for the little one to come. With whom does he play now?

CONSUL. With me.

GERDA. Where is he?

CONSUL. He is in his room writing a letter.

GERDA. Where?

CONSUL. [Pointing toward the left] There.

GERDA. [Shocked] And here he has been going for five years?

CONSUL. Ten years—five of them alone!

GERDA. Of course, he loves solitude.

CONSUL. But I think he has had enough of it.

GERDA. Will he turn me out?

CONSUL. Find out for yourself! You take no risk, as he is always polite.

GERDA. I didn't make that centrepiece—

CONSUL. That is to say, you risk his asking you for the child.

GERDA. But it was he who should help me find it again—

CONSUL. Where do you think Fischer has gone, and what can be the purpose of his flight?

GERDA. To get away from the unpleasant neighbourhood, first of all; then to make me run after him. And he wanted the girl as a hostage, of course.

CONSUL. As to the ballet—that's something the father *must not* know, for he hates music-halls.

GERDA. [Sitting down in front of the chess-board and beginning, absent-mindedly, to arrange the pieces] Music-halls—oh, I have been there myself.

CONSUL. You?

GERDA. I have accompanied on the piano.

CONSUL. Poor Gerda!

GERDA. Why? I love that kind of life. And when I was a prisoner here, it wasn't the keeper, but the prison itself, that made me fret.

CONSUL. But now you have had enough?

GERDA. Now I am in love with peace and solitude—and with my child above all.

CONSUL. Hush, he's coming!

GERDA. [Rises as if to run away, but sinks down on the chair again] Oh!

CONSUL. Now I leave you. Don't think of what you are to say. It will come of itself, like the "next move" in a game of chess.

GERDA. I fear his first glance most of all, for it will tell me whether I have changed for better or for worse—whether I have grown old and ugly.

CONSUL. [Going out to the right] If he finds you looking older, then he will dare to approach you. If he finds you as young as ever, he will have no hope, for he is more diffident than you think.—

Now!

The MASTER is seen outside, passing by the door leading to the pantry; he carries a letter in his hand; then he disappears, only to become visible again a moment later in the hallway, where he opens the outside door and steps out.

CONSUL. [*In the doorway at the right*] He went out to the mail-box.

GERDA. No, this is too much for me! How can I possibly ask *him* to help me with this divorce? I want to get out! It's too brazen!

CONSUL. Stay! You know that his kindness has no limits. And he'll help you for the child's sake.

GERDA. No, no!

CONSUL. And he is the only one who can help you.

MASTER. [*Enters quickly from the hallway and nods at GERDA, whom, because of his near-sightedness, he mistakes for LOUISE; then he goes to the buffet and picks up the telephone, but in passing he remarks to GERDA*] So you're done already? Well, get the pieces ready then, and we'll begin all over again—from the beginning.

GERDA stands paralysed, not understanding the situation.

MASTER. [*Speaks in the telephone receiver, with his back to Gerda*] Hello!—Good evening! Is that you, mother?—Pretty well, thank you! Louise is waiting to play a game of chess with me, but she is a little tired after a lot of bother—It's all over now—everything all right—nothing serious at all.—If it's hot? Well, there has been a lot of thundering, right over our heads, but nobody has been struck. False alarm!—What did you say? Fischer?—Yes, but I think they are going to leave.—Why so? I know nothing in particular.—Oh, is that so?—Yes, it leaves at six-fifteen, by the outside route, and it gets there—let me see—at eight-twenty-five.—Did you have a good time?—[*With a little laugh*] Oh, he's impossible when he gets started! And what did Marie have to say about it?—How I have had it during the summer? Oh, well, Louise and I have kept each other company, and she has got such an even, pleasant temper.—Yes, she is very nice, indeed!—Oh, no, nothing of that kind!

GERDA, who has begun to understand, rises with an expression of consternation on her face.

MASTER. My eyes? Oh, I am getting a little near-sighted. But I feel like the confectioner's old wife: there is nothing to look at. Wish I were deaf, too! Deaf and blind! The neighbours above make such a lot of noise at night—it's a gambling club—There now! Somebody got on the wire to listen. [*He rings again.*]

LOUISE appears in the door to the hallway without being seen by the MASTER; GERDA stares at her with mingled admiration and hatred; LOUISE withdraws toward the right.

MASTER. [*At the telephone*] Is that you? The cheek of it—to break off our talk in order to listen!—To-morrow, then, at six-fifteen.—Thank you, and the same to you!—Yes, I will, indeed!—Good night, mother! [*He rings off.*]

LOUISE has disappeared. GERDA is standing in the middle of the floor.

MASTER. [*Turns around and catches sight of GERDA, whom he gradually recognises; then he puts his hand to his heart*] O Lord, was that you? Wasn't Louise here a moment ago?

GERDA remains silent.

MASTER. [*Feebly*] How—how did you get here?

GERDA. I hope you pardon—I just got to the city—I was passing by and felt a longing to have a look at my old home—the windows were open—

[*Pause.*]

MASTER. Do you find things as they used to be?

GERDA. Exactly, and yet different—there is a difference

MASTER. [*Feeling unhappy*] Are you satisfied—with your life?

GERDA. Yes. I have what I was looking for.

MASTER. And the child?

GERDA. Oh, she's growing, and thriving, and lacks nothing.

MASTER. Then I won't ask anything more. [*Pause*] Did you want anything—of me—can I be of any service?

GERDA. It's very kind of you, but—I need nothing at all now when I have seen that you lack nothing either. [*Pause*] Do you wish to see Anne-Charlotte?

MASTER. I don't think so, now when I have heard that she is doing well. It's so hard to begin over again. It's like having to repeat a lesson at school—which you know already, although the teacher

doesn't think so—I have got so far away from all that—I live in a wholly different region—and I cannot connect with the past. It goes against me to be impolite, but I am not asking you to be seated—you are another man's wife—and you are not the same person as the one from whom I parted.

GERDA. Am I then so—altered?

MASTER. Quite strange to me! Your voice, glance, manner—

GERDA. Have I grown old?

MASTER. That I cannot tell!—They say that not a single atom in a person's body remains wholly the same after three years—and in five years everything is renewed. And for that reason you, who stand over there, are not the same person as the sufferer who once sat here—you seem such a complete stranger to me that I can only address you in the most formal way. And I suppose it would be just the same in the case of my daughter, too.

GERDA. Don't speak like that. I would much rather have you angry.

MASTER. Why should I be angry?

GERDA. Because of all the evil I have done you.

MASTER. Have you? That's more than I know.

GERDA. Didn't you read the papers in the suit?

MASTER. No-o! I left that to my lawyer. [*He sits down.*]

GERDA. And the decision of the court?

MASTER. No, why should I? As I don't mean to marry again, I have no use for that kind of documents.

Pause. GERDA seats herself.

MASTER. What did those papers say? That I was too old?

GERDA'S silence indicates assent.

MASTER. Well, that was nothing but the truth, so that need not trouble you. In my answer I said the very same thing and asked the Court to set you free again.

GERDA. You said, that—

MASTER. I said, not that I *was*, but that I was about to *become* too old *for you!*

GERDA. [*Offended*] For me?

MASTER. Yes.—I couldn't say that I was too old when we married, for then the arrival of the child would have been unpleasantly explained, and it was *our* child, was it not?

GERDA. You know that, of course! But—

MASTER. Do you think I should be ashamed of my age?—Of course, if I took to dancing and playing cards at night, then I might soon land in an invalid's chair, or on the operating-table, and that would be a shame.

GERDA. You don't look it—

MASTER. Did you expect the divorce to kill me?

The silence of GERDA is ambiguous.

MASTER. There are those who assert that you *have* killed me. Do you think I look like a dead man?

GERDA appears embarrassed.

MASTER. Some of your friends are said to have caricatured me in the papers, but I have never seen anything of it, and those papers went into the dump five years ago. So there is no need for your conscience to be troubled on my behalf.

GERDA. Why did you marry me?

MASTER. Don't you know why a man marries? And you know, too, that I didn't have to go begging for love. And you ought to remember how we laughed together at all the wiseacres who felt compelled to warn you.—But why you led me on is something I have never been able to explain—When you didn't look at me after the marriage ceremony, but acted as if you had been attending somebody else's wedding, then I thought you had made a bet that you could kill me. As the head of the department, I was, of course, hated by all my subordinates, but they became your friends at once. No sooner did I make an enemy than he became *your* friend. Which caused me to remark that, while it was right for you not to hate your enemies, it was also right that you shouldn't *love* mine!—However, seeing where you stood, I began to prepare for a retreat at once, but before leaving I wanted a living proof that you had not been telling the truth, and so I stayed until the little one arrived.

GERDA. To think that you could be so disingenuous!

MASTER. I learned to keep silent, but I never lied!—By degrees you turned all my friends into detectives, and you lured my own brother into betraying me. But worst of all was that your

thoughtless chatter threw suspicions on the legitimacy of the child.

GERDA. All that I took back!

MASTER. The word that's on the wing cannot be pulled back again. And worse still: those false rumours reached the child, and now she thinks her mother a——

GERDA. For Heaven's sake!

MASTER. Well, that's the truth of it. You raised a tall tower on a foundation of lies, and now the tower of lies is tumbling down on your head.

GERDA. It isn't true!

MASTER. Yes, it is! I met Anne-Charlotte a few minutes ago——

GERDA. You have met——

MASTER. We met on the stairs, and she said I was her uncle. Do you know what an uncle is? That's an elderly friend of the house and the mother. And I know that at school I am also passing as her uncle.—But all that is dreadful for the child!

GERDA. You have met——

MASTER. Yes. But why should I tell anybody about it? Haven't I a right to keep silent? And, besides, that meeting was so shocking to me that I wiped it out of my memory as if it had never existed.

GERDA. What can I do to rehabilitate you?

MASTER. You? What could you do? That's something I can only do myself. [*For a long time they gaze intently at each other*] And for that matter, I have already got my rehabilitation. [*Pause.*]

GERDA. Can't I make good in some way? Can't I ask you to forgive, to forget——

MASTER. What do you mean?

GERDA. To restore, to repair——

MASTER. Do you mean to resume, to start over again, to reinstate a master above me? No, thanks! I don't want you.

GERDA. And this I had to hear!

MASTER. Well, how does it taste? [*Pause.*]

GERDA. That's a pretty centrepiece.

MASTER. Yes, it's pretty.

GERDA. Where did you get it? [*Pause.*]

LOUISE *appears in the door to the pantry with a bill in her hand.*

MASTER. [*Turning toward her*] Is it a bill?

GERDA *rises and begins to pull on her gloves with such violence that buttons are scattered right and left.*

MASTER. [*Taking out the money*] Eighteen-seventy-two. That's just right.

LOUISE. I should like to see you a moment, sir.

MASTER. [*Rises and goes to the door, where LOUISE whispers something into his ear*] Oh, mercy ——

LOUISE *goes out.*

MASTER. I am sorry for you, Gerda!

GERDA. What do you mean? That I am jealous of your servant-girl?

MASTER. No, I didn't mean that.

GERDA. Yes, you meant that you were too old for me, but not for her. I catch the insulting point—She's pretty—I don't deny it—for a servant-girl——

MASTER. I am sorry for you, Gerda!

GERDA. Why do you say that?

MASTER. Because you are to be pitied. Jealous of my servant—that ought to be rehabilitation enough.

GERDA. Jealous, I——

MASTER. Why do you fly in a rage at my nice, gentle kinswoman?

GERDA. "A little more than kin."

MASTER. No, my dear, I have long ago resigned myself—and I am satisfied with my solitude—[*The telephone rings, and he goes to answer it*] Mr. Fischer? No, that isn't here.—Oh, yes, that's me.—Has he skipped?—With whom, do you say?—with Starck's daughter! Oh, good Lord! How old is she?—Eighteen! A mere child! [*Rings off.*]

GERDA. I knew he had run away.—But with a woman!—Now you're pleased.

MASTER. No, I am not pleased. Although there is a sort of solace to my mind in finding justice exists in this world. Life is very quick in its movements, and now you find yourself where I was.

GERDA. Her eighteen years against my twenty-nine—I am old—too old for him!

MASTER. Everything is relative, even age.—But now let us get at something else. Where is your child?

GERDA. My child? I had forgotten it! My child! My God! Help me! He has taken the child with him. He loves Anne-Charlotte as his own daughter—Come with me to the police—come!

MASTER. I? Now you ask too much.

GERDA. Help me!

MASTER. [*Goes to the door at the right*] Come, Carl Frederick—get a cab—take Gerda down to the police station—won't you?

CONSUL. [*Enters*] Of course I will! We are human, are we not?

MASTER. Quick! But say nothing to Starck. Matters may be straightened out yet—Poor fellow—and I am sorry for Gerda, too!—Hurry up now!

GERDA. [*Looking out through the window*] It's beginning to rain—lend me an umbrella. Eighteen years—only eighteen—quick, now!

She goes out with the CONSUL.

MASTER. [*Alone*] The peace of old age!—And my child in the hands of an adventurer!—Louise!

LOUISE *enters*.

MASTER. Come and play chess with me.

LOUISE. Has the consul—

MASTER. He has gone out on some business. Is it still raining?

LOUISE. No, it has stopped now.

MASTER. Then I'll go out and cool off a little. [*Pause*] You are a nice girl, and sensible—did you know the confectioner's daughter?

LOUISE. Very slightly.

MASTER. Is she pretty?

LOUISE. Ye-es.

MASTER. Have you known the people above us?

LOUISE. I have never seen them.

MASTER. That's an evasion.

LOUISE. I have learned to keep silent in this house.

MASTER. I am forced to admit that pretended deafness can be carried to the point where it becomes dangerous.—Well, get the tea ready while I go outside and cool off a little. And, one thing, please—you see what is happening, of course—but don't ask me any questions.

LOUISE. I? No, sir, I am not at all curious.

MASTER. I am thankful for that!

Curtain.

THIRD SCENE

The front of the house as in the First Scene. There is light in the confectioner's place in the basement. The gas is also lit on the second floor, where now the shades are raised and the windows open.

STARCK *is sitting near the gateway.*

MASTER. [*Seated on the green bench*] That was a nice little shower we had.

STARCK. Quite a blessing! Now the raspberries will be coming in again—

MASTER. Then I'll ask you to put aside a few jars for us. We have grown tired of making the jam ourselves. It only gets spoiled.

STARCK. Yes, I know. Jars of jam are like mischievous children: you have to watch them all the time. There are people who put in salicylic acid, but those are newfangled tricks in which I take no stock.

MASTER. Salicylic acid—yes, they say it's antiseptic—and perhaps it's a good thing.

STARCK. Yes, but you can taste it—and it's a trick.

MASTER. Tell me, Mr. Starck, have you got a telephone?

STARCK. No, I have no telephone.

MASTER. Oh!

STARCK. Why do you ask?

MASTER. Oh, I happened to think—a telephone is handy at times—for orders—and important communications—

STARCK. That may be. But sometimes it is just as well to escape—communications.

MASTER. Quite right! Quite right!—Yes, my heart always beats a little faster when I hear it ring—one never knows what one is going to hear—and I want peace—peace, above all else.

STARCK. So do I.

MASTER. [*Looking at his watch*] The lamplighter ought to be here soon.

STARCK. He must have forgotten us, for I see that the lamps are already lit further down the avenue.

MASTER. Then he'll be here soon. It will be a lot of fun to see our lamp lighted again.

The telephone in the dining-room rings. LOUISE comes in to answer the call. The MASTER rises and puts one hand up to his heart. He tries to listen, but the public cannot hear anything of what is said within. Pause. After a while LOUISE comes out by way of the square.

MASTER. [*Anxiously*] What news?

LOUISE. No change.

MASTER. Was that my brother?

LOUISE. No, it was the lady.

MASTER. What did she want?

LOUISE. To speak to you, sir.

MASTER. I don't want to!—Have I to console my executioner? I used to do it, but now I am tired of it.—Look up there! They have forgotten to turn out the light—and light makes empty rooms more dreadful than darkness—the ghosts become visible. [*In a lowered voice*] And how about Starck's Agnes? Do you think he knows anything?

LOUISE. It's hard to tell, for he never speaks about his sorrows—nor does anybody else in the Silent House!

MASTER. Do you think he should be told?

LOUISE. For Heaven's sake, no!

MASTER. But I fear it isn't the first time she gave him trouble.

LOUISE. He never speaks of her.

MASTER. It's horrible! I wonder if we'll get to the end of it soon? [*The telephone rings again*] Now it's ringing again. Don't answer. I don't want to hear anything.—My child—in such company! An adventurer and a strumpet!—It's beyond limit!—Poor Gerda!

LOUISE. It's better to have certainty. I'll go in—You must do something!

MASTER. I cannot move—I can receive blows, but to strike back—no!

LOUISE. But if you don't repel a danger, it will press closer; and if you don't resist, you'll be destroyed.

MASTER. But if you refuse to be drawn in, you become unassailable.

LOUISE. Unassailable?

MASTER. Things straighten out much better if you don't mess them up still further by interference. How can you want me to direct matters where so many passions are at play? Do you think I can suppress anybody's emotions, or give them a new turn?

LOUISE. But how about the child?

MASTER. I have surrendered my rights—and besides—frankly speaking—I don't care for them—not at all now, when *she* has been here and spoiled the images harboured in my memory. She has wiped out all the beauty that I had cherished, and now there is nothing left.

LOUISE. But that's to be set free!

MASTER. Look, how empty the place seems in there—as if everybody had moved out; and up there—as if there had been a fire.

LOUISE. Who is coming there?

AGNES enters, excited and frightened, but trying hard to control herself; she makes for the gateway, where the confectioner is seated on his chair.

LOUISE [*To the MASTER*] There is Agnes? What can this mean?

MASTER. Agnes? Then things are getting straightened out.

STARCK. [*With perfect calm*] Good evening, girl! Where have you been?

AGNES. I have been for a walk.

STARCK. Your mother has asked for you several times.

AGNES. Is that so? Well, here I am.

STARCK. Please go down and help her start a fire under the little oven.

AGNES. Is she angry with me, then?

STARCK. You know that she cannot be angry with you.

AGNES. Oh, yes, but she doesn't say anything.

STARCK. Well, girl, isn't it better to escape being scolded?

AGNES disappears into the gateway.

MASTER. [*To LOUISE*] Does he know, or doesn't he?

LOUISE. Let's hope that he will remain in ignorance.

MASTER. But what can have happened? A breach? [*To STARCK*] Say, Mr. Starck—

STARCK. What is it?

MASTER. I thought—Did you notice if anybody left the house a while ago?

STARCK. I saw the iceman, and also a mail-carrier, I think.

MASTER. Oh! [*To LOUISE*] Perhaps it was a mistake—that we didn't hear right—I can't explain it—Or maybe he is not telling the truth? What did she say when she telephoned?

LOUISE. That she wanted to speak to you.

MASTER. How did it sound? Was she excited?

LOUISE. Yes.

MASTER. I think it's rather shameless of her to appeal to me in a matter like this.

LOUISE. But the child!

MASTER. Just think, I met my daughter on the stairway, and when I asked her if she recognised me she called me uncle and told me that her father was up-stairs. Of course, he is her stepfather, and has all the rights—They have just spent their time exterminating me, blackguarding me—

LOUISE. A cab is stopping at the corner.

Starck withdraws into the gateway.

MASTER. I only hope they don't come back to burden me again! Just think: to have to hear my child singing the praise of her father—the other one! And then to begin the old story all over again: "Why did you marry me?"—"Oh, you know; but what made you want me?"—"You know very well!"—And so on, until the end of the world.

LOUISE. It was the consul that came.

MASTER. How does he look?

LOUISE. He is taking his time.

MASTER. Practising what he is to say, I suppose. Does he look satisfied?

LOUISE. Thoughtful, rather—

MASTER. Hm!—That's the way it always was. Whenever he saw that woman he became disloyal to me. She had the power of charming everybody but me. To me she seemed coarse, vulgar, ugly, stupid; to all the rest she seemed refined, pleasant, handsome, intelligent. All the hatred aroused by my independence centred in her under the form of a boundless sympathy for whoever wronged me in any way. Through her they strove to control and influence me, to wound me, and, at last, to kill me.

LOUISE. Now, I'll go in and watch the telephone—I suppose this storm will pass like all others.

MASTER. Men cannot bear independence. They want you to obey them. Every one of my subordinates in the department, down to the very messengers, wanted me to obey him. And when I wouldn't they called me a despot. The servants in our house wanted me to obey them and eat food that had been warmed up. When I wouldn't, they set my wife against me. And finally my wife wanted me to obey the child, but then I left, and then all of them combined against the tyrant—which was I!—Get in there quick now, Louise, so we can set off our mines out here.

The CONSUL enters from the left.

MASTER. Results—not details—please!

CONSUL. Let's sit down. I am a little tired.

MASTER. I think it has rained on the bench.

CONSUL. It can't be too wet for me if you have been sitting on it.

MASTER. As you like!—Where is my child?

CONSUL. Can I begin at the beginning?

MASTER. Begin!

CONSUL [*Speaking slowly*] I got to the depot with Gerda—and at the ticket-office I discovered him and Agnes—

MASTER. So Agnes was with him?

CONSUL. And so was the child!—Gerda stayed outside, and I went up to them. At that moment *he* was handing Agnes the tickets, but when she discovered that they were for third class she threw them in his face and walked out to the cab-stand.

MASTER. Ugh!

CONSUL. As soon as I had established a connection with the man, Gerda hurried up and got hold of the child, disappearing with it in the crowd—

MASTER. What did the man have to say?

CONSUL. Oh, you know—when you come to hear the other side—and so on.

MASTER. I want to hear it. Of course, he isn't as bad as we thought—he has his good sides—

CONSUL. Exactly!

MASTER. I thought so! But you don't want me to sit here listening to eulogies of my enemy?

CONSUL. Oh, not eulogies, but ameliorating circumstances—

MASTER. Did you ever want to listen to me when I tried to explain the true state of affairs to you? Yes, you did listen—but your reply was a disapproving silence, as if I had been lying to you. You have always sided with what was wrong, and you have believed nothing but lies, and the reason was—that you were in love with Gerda! But there was also another reason—

CONSUL. Brother, don't say anything more! You see nothing but your own side of things.

MASTER. How can you expect me to view my conditions from the standpoint of my enemy? I cannot take sides against myself, can I?

CONSUL. I am not your enemy.

MASTER. Yes, when you make friends with one who has wronged me!—Where is my child?

CONSUL. I don't know.

MASTER. What was the outcome at the depot?

CONSUL. He took a south-bound train alone.

MASTER. And the others?

CONSUL. Disappeared.

MASTER. Then I may have them after me again. [*Pause*] Did you see if they went with him?

CONSUL. He went alone.

MASTER. Well, then we are done with that one, at least. Number two—there remain now—the mother and the child.

CONSUL. Why is the light burning up there in their rooms?

MASTER. Because they forgot to turn it out.

CONSUL. I'll go up—

MASTER. No, don't go!—I only hope that they don't come back here!—To repeat, always repeat, begin the same lesson all over again!

CONSUL. But it has begun to straighten out.

MASTER. Yet the worst remains—Do you think they will come back?

CONSUL. Not she—not since she had to make you amends in the presence of Louise.

MASTER. I had forgotten that! She really did me the honour of becoming jealous! I do think there is justice in this world!

CONSUL. And then she learned that Agnes was younger than herself.

MASTER. Poor Gerda! But in a case like this you mustn't tell people that justice exists—an avenging justice—for it is sheer falsehood that they love justice! And you must deal gently with their filth. And Nemesis—exists only for the other person.—There it's ringing again? That telephone makes a noise like a rattlesnake!

LOUISE *becomes visible at the telephone inside. Pause.*

MASTER. [*To LOUISE*] Did the snake bite?

LOUISE. [*At the window*] May I speak to you, sir?

MASTER. [*Going up to the window*] Speak out!

LOUISE. The lady has gone to her mother, in the country, to live there with her little girl.

MASTER. [*To his brother*] Mother and child in the country—in a good home! Now it's straightened out!—Oh!

LOUISE. And she asked us to turn out the light up-stairs.

MASTER. Do that at once, Louise, and pull down the shades so we don't have to look at it any longer.

LOUISE *leaves the dining-room.*

STARCK. [*Coming out on the sidewalk again and looking up*] I think the storm has passed over.

MASTER. It seems really to have cleared up, and that means we'll have moonlight.

CONSUL. That was a blessed rain!

STARCK. Perfectly splendid!

MASTER. Look, there's the lamplighter coming at last!

The LAMPLIGHTER enters, lights the street lamp beside the bench, and passes on.

MASTER. The first lamp! Now the fall is here! That's our season, old chaps! It's getting dark, but then comes reason to light us with its bull's-eyes, so that we don't go astray.

LOUISE *becomes visible at one of the windows on the second floor; immediately afterward everything is dark up there.*

MASTER. [*To LOUISE*] Close the windows and pull down the shades so that all memories can lie down and sleep in peace! The peace of old age! And this fall I move away from the Silent House.

Curtain.

AFTER THE FIRE

(BRÄNDA TOMTEN)

A CHAMBER PLAY

1907

CHARACTERS

RUDOLPH WALSTRÖM, *a dyer*
THE STRANGER, *who is brother of RUDOLPH*
ARVID WALSTRÖM *brother of RUDOLPH*
ANDERSON, *a mason (brother-in-law of the gardener)*
MRS. ANDERSON, *wife of the mason*
GUSTAFSON, *a gardener (brother-in-law of the mason)*
ALFRED, *son of the gardener*
ALBERT ERICSON, *a stone-cutter (second cousin of the hearse-driver)*
MATHILDA, *daughter of the stone-cutter*
THE HEARSE-DRIVER (*second cousin of the stone-cutter*)
A DETECTIVE
SJÖBLOM, *a painter*
MRS. WESTERLUND, *hostess at "The Last Nail," formerly a nurse at the dyer's*
MRS. WALSTRÖM, *wife of the dyer*
THE STUDENT
THE WITNESS

FIRST SCENE

The left half of the background is occupied by the empty shell of a gutted one-story brick house. In places the paper remains on the walls, and a couple of brick stoves are still standing.

Beyond the walls can be seen an orchard in bloom.

At the right is the front of a small inn, the sign of which is a wreath hanging from a pole. Tables and benches are placed outside.

At the left, in the foreground, there is a pile of furniture and household utensils that have been saved from the fire.

SJÖBLOM, the painter, is painting the window-frames of the inn. He listens closely to everything that is said.

ANDERSON, the mason, is digging in the ruins.

The DETECTIVE enters.

DETECTIVE. Is the fire entirely out?

ANDERSON. There isn't any smoke, at least.

DETECTIVE. Then I want to ask a few more questions. [*Pause*] You were born in this quarter, were you not?

ANDERSON. Oh, yes. It's seventy-five years now I've lived on this street. I wasn't born when they built this house here, but my father helped to put in the brick.

DETECTIVE. Then you know everybody around here?

ANDERSON. We all know each other. There is something particular about this street here. Those that get in here once, never get away from it. That is, they move away, but they always come back again sooner or later, until at last they are carried out to the cemetery, which is way out there at the end of the street.

DETECTIVE. You have got a special name for this quarter, haven't you?

ANDERSON. We call it the Bog. And all of us hate each other, and suspect each other, and blackguard each other, and torment each other [*Pause*].

DETECTIVE. The fire started at half past ten in the evening, I hear—was the front door locked at that time?

ANDERSON. Well, that's more than I know, for I live in the house next to this.

DETECTIVE. Where did the fire start?

ANDERSON. Up in the attic, where the student was living.

DETECTIVE. Was he at home?

ANDERSON. No, he was at the theatre.

DETECTIVE. Had he gone away and left the lamp burning, then?

ANDERSON. Well, that's more than I know. [*Pause*].

DETECTIVE. Is the student any relation to the owner of the house?

ANDERSON. No, I don't think so.—Say, you haven't got anything to do with the police, have you?

DETECTIVE. How did it happen that the inn didn't catch fire?

ANDERSON. They slung a tarpaulin over it and turned on the hose.

DETECTIVE. Queer that the apple-trees were not destroyed by the heat.

ANDERSON. They had just budded, and it had been raining during the day, but the heat made the buds go into bloom in the middle of the night—a little too early, I guess, for there is frost coming, and then the gardener will catch it.

DETECTIVE. What kind of fellow is the gardener?

ANDERSON. His name is Gustafson—

DETECTIVE. Yes, but what sort of a man is he?

ANDERSON. See here: I am seventy-five—and for that reason I don't know anything bad about Gustafson; and if I knew I wouldn't be telling it! [*Pause*].

DETECTIVE. And the owner of the house is named Walström, a dyer, about sixty years old, married —

ANDERSON. Why don't you go on yourself? You can't pump me any longer.

DETECTIVE. Is it thought that the fire was started on purpose?

ANDERSON. That's what people think of all fires.

DETECTIVE. And whom do they suspect?

ANDERSON. The insurance company always suspects anybody who has an interest in the fire—and for that reason I have never had anything insured.

DETECTIVE. Did you find anything while you were digging?

ANDERSON. Mostly one finds all the door-keys, because people haven't got time to take them along when the house is on fire—except now and then, of course, when they have been taken away—

DETECTIVE. There was no electric light in the house?

ANDERSON. Not in an old house like this, and that's a good thing, for then they can't put the blame

on crossed wires.

DETECTIVE. Put the blame?—A good thing?—Listen—

ANDERSON. Oh, you're going to get me in a trap? Don't you do it, for then I take it all back.

DETECTIVE. Take back? You can't!

ANDERSON. Can't I?

DETECTIVE. No!

ANDERSON. Yes! For there was no witness present.

DETECTIVE. No?

ANDERSON. Naw!

The DETECTIVE coughs. The WITNESS comes in from the left.

DETECTIVE. Here's *one* witness.

ANDERSON. You're a sly one!

DETECTIVE. Oh, there are people who know how to use their brains without being seventy-five. [*To the WITNESS*] Now we'll continue with the gardener.

[They go out to the left.]

ANDERSON. There I put my foot in it, I guess. But that's what happens when you get to talking.

ANDERSON *enters with her husband's lunch in a bundle.*

ANDERSON. It's good you came.

ANDERSON. Now we'll have lunch and be good—you might well be hungry after all this fuss—I wonder if Gustafson can pull through—he'd just got done with his hotbeds and was about to start digging in the open—why don't you eat?—and there's Sjöblom already at work with his putty—just think of it, that Mrs. Westerlund got off as well as she did—morning, Sjöblom, now you've got work, haven't you?

MRS. WESTERLUND *comes in.*

ANDERSON. Morning, morning, Mrs. Westerlund—you got out of this fine, I must say, and then—

MRS. WESTERLUND. I wonder who's going to pay me for all I am losing to-day, when there's a big funeral on at the cemetery, which always makes it a good day for me, and just when I've had to put away all my bottles and glassware—

ANDERSON. Who's that they're burying to-day? I see such a lot of people going out that way—and then, of course, they've come to see where the fire was, too.

MRS. WESTERLUND. I don't think they're burying anybody, but I've heard they're going to put up a monument over the bishop—worst of it is that the stone-cutter's daughter was going to get married to the gardener's son—him, you know, who's in a store down-town—and now the gardener has lost all he had— isn't that his furniture standing over there?

ANDERSON. I guess that's some of the dyer's, too, seeing as it came out helter-skelter in a jiffy—and where's the dyer now?

MRS. WESTERLUND. He's down at the police station testifying.

ANDERSON. Hm-hm!—Yes, yes!—And there's my cousin now—him what drives the hearse—he's always thirsty on his way back.

HEARSE-DRIVER. [*Enters*] How do, Malvina! So you've gone and started a little job of arson out here during the night, have you? Looks pretty, doesn't it. Would have been better to get a new shanty instead, I guess.

MRS. WESTERLUND. Oh, mercy me! But whom have you been taking out now?

HEARSE-DRIVER. Can't remember what his name was—only *one* carriage along, and no flowers on the coffin at all.

MRS. WESTERLUND. Sure and it wasn't any happy funeral, then! If you want anything to drink you'll have to go 'round to the kitchen, for I haven't got things going on this side yet, and, for that matter, Gustafson is coming here with a lot of wreaths—they've got something on out at the cemetery to-day.

HEARSE-DRIVER. Yes, they're going to put up a moniment to the bishop—'cause he wrote books, I guess, and collected all kinds of vermin—was a reg'lar vermin-hunter, they tell me.

MRS. WESTERLUND. What's that?

HEARSE-DRIVER. Oh, he had slabs of cork with pins on 'em, and a lot of flies—something beyond us here—but I guess that's the proper way—can I go out to the kitchen now?

MRS. WESTERLUND. Yes, if you use the back door, I think you can get something wet—

HEARSE-DRIVER. But I want to have a word with the dyer before I drive off—I've got my horses over at the stone-cutter's, who's my second cousin, you know. Haven't got any use for him, as you

know, too, but we're doing business together, he and I—that is, I put in a word for him with the heirs, and so he lets me put my horses into his yard—just let me know when the dyer shows up—luck, wasn't it, that he didn't have his works here, too—

[*He goes out, passing around the inn.*]

MRS. WESTERLUND *goes into the inn by the front door.*

ANDERSON, *who has finished eating, begins to dig again.*

ANDERSON. Do you find anything?

ANDERSON. Nails and door-hinges—all the keys are hanging in a bunch over there by the front door.

ANDERSON. Did they hang there before, or did you put them there?

ANDERSON. No, they were hanging there when I got here.

ANDERSON. That's queer—for then somebody must have locked all the doors and taken out the keys before it began burning! That's queer!

ANDERSON. Yes, of course, it's a little queer, for in that way it was harder to get at the fire and save things. Yes—yes! [*Pause.*]

ANDERSON. I worked for the dyer's father forty years ago, I did, and I know the people, both the dyer himself and his brother what went off to America, though they say he's back now. The father, he was a real man, he was, but the boys were always a little so-so. Mrs. Westerlund over here, she used to take care of Rudolph, and the two brothers never could get along, but kept scrapping and fighting all the time.—I've seen a thing or two, I have—yes, there's a whole lot what has happened in that house, so I guess it was about time to get it smoked out.—Ugh, but that was a house! One went this way and another that, but back they had to come, and here they died and here they were born, and here they married and were divorced.—And Arvid, the brother what went off to America—him they thought dead for years, and at least he didn't take what was coming to him after his father, but now they say he's come back, though nobody has seen him—and there's such a lot of talking—Look, there's the dyer back from the police station!

ANDERSON. He doesn't look happy exactly, but I suppose that's more than can be expected—Well, who's that student that lived in the attic? How does he hang together with the rest?

ANDERSON. Well, that's more than I know. He had his board there, and read with the children.

ANDERSON. And also with the lady of the house?

ANDERSON. No-o, they played something what they called tennis, and quarrelled the rest of the time—yes, quarrelling and backbiting, that's what everybody is up to in this quarter.

ANDERSON. Well, when they broke the student's door open they found hairpins on the floor—it had to come out, after all, even if the fire had to sweep over it first—

ANDERSON. I don't think it was the dyer that came, but our brother-in-law, Gustafson—

ANDERSON. He's always mad, and to-day I suppose he's worse than ever, and so he'll have to come and dun me for what I owe him, seeing what he has lost in the fire—

ANDERSON. Now you shut up!

GUSTAFSON. [*Enters with a basketful of funeral wreaths and other products of his trade*] I wonder if I am going to sell anything to-day so there'll be enough for food after all this rumpus?

ANDERSON. Didn't you carry any insurance?

GUSTAFSON. Yes, I used to have insurance on the glass panes over my hotbeds, but this year I felt stingy, and so I put in oiled paper instead—gosh, that I could be such a darned fool!—[*Scratching his head*] I don't get paid for that, of course. And now I've got to cut and paste and oil six hundred paper panes. It's as I have always said: that I was the worst idiot among us seven children. Gee, what an ass I was—what a booby! And then I went and got drunk yesterday. Why in hell did I have to get drunk that day of all days—when I need all the brains I've got to-day? It was the stone-cutter who treated, because our children are going to get married to-night, but I should have said no. I didn't want to, but I'm a ninny who can't say no to anybody. And that's the way when they come and borrow money of me—I can't say no—darned fool that I am! And then I got in the way of that policeman, who snared me with all sorts of questions. I should have kept my mouth shut, like the painter over there, but I can't, and so I let out this, that, and the other thing, and he put it all down, and now I am called as a witness!

ANDERSON. What was it you said?

GUSTAFSON. I said I thought—that it looked funny to me—and that somebody must have started it.

ANDERSON. Oh, that's what you said!

GUSTAFSON. Yes, pitch into me—I've deserved it, goose that I am!

ANDERSON. And who could have started it, do you think?—Don't mind the painter, and my old woman here never carries any tales.

GUSTAFSON. Who started it? Why, the student, of course, as it started in his room.

ANDERSON. No—*under* his room!

GUSTAFSON. Under, you say? Then I *have* gone and done it!—Oh, I'll come to a bad end, I'm sure! —*Under* his room, you say—what could have been there—the kitchen?

ANDERSON. No, a closet—see, over there! It was used by the cook.

GUSTAFSON. Then it must have been her.

ANDERSON. Yes, but don't you say so, as you don't know.

GUSTAFSON. The stone-cutter had it in for the cook last night—I guess he must have known a whole lot—

ANDERSON. You shouldn't repeat what the stone-cutter says, for one who has served isn't to be trusted—

GUSTAFSON. Ash, that's so long ago, and the cook's a regular dragon, for that matter—she'd always haggle over the vegetables—

ANDERSON. There comes the dyer from the station now—you'd better quit!

The STRANGER enters, dressed in a frock coat and a high hat with mourning on it; he carries a stick.

ANDERSON. It wasn't the dyer, but he looks a lot like him.

STRANGER. How much is one of those wreaths?

GARDENER. Fifty cents.

STRANGER. Oh, that's not much.

GARDENER. No, I am such a fool that I can't charge as I should.

STRANGER. [*Looking around*] Has there—been a fire—here?

GARDENER. Yes, last night.

STRANGER. Good God! [*Pause*] Who was the owner of the house?

GARDENER. Mr. Walström.

STRANGER. The dyer?

GARDENER. Yes, he used to be a dyer, all right. [*Pause*].

STRANGER. Where is he now?

GARDENER. He'll be here any moment.

STRANGER. Then I'll look around a bit—the wreath can lie here till I come back—I meant to go out to the cemetery later.

GARDENER. On account of the bishop's monument, I suppose?

STRANGER. What bishop?

GARDENER. Bishop Stecksén, don't you know—who belonged to the Academy.

STRANGER. Is he dead?

GARDENER. Oh, long ago!

STRANGER. I see!—Well, I'll leave the wreath for a while.

He goes out to the left, studying the ruins carefully as he passes by.

ANDERSON. Perhaps he came on account of the insurance.

ANDERSON. Not that one! Then he would have asked in a different way.

ANDERSON. But he looked like the dyer just the same.

ANDERSON. Only he was taller.

GUSTAFSON. Now, I remember something—I should have a bridal bouquet ready for to-night, and I should go to my son's wedding, but I have no flowers, and my black coat has been burned. Wouldn't that make you—Mrs. Westerlund was to furnish the myrtle for the bride's crown, being her godmother—that's the myrtle she stole a shoot of from the dyer's cook, who got hers from the dyer's first wife—she who ran away—and I was to make a crown of it, and I've clean forgotten it—well, if I ain't the worst fool that ever walked the earth! [*He opens the inn door*] Mrs. Westerlund, can I have the myrtle now, and I'll do the job!—I say, can I have that myrtle! Wreath, too, you say—have you got enough for it?—No?—Well, then I'll let the whole wedding go hang, that's all there is to it!—Let them walk up to the minister's and have him splice them together, but it'll make the stone-cutter mad as a hornet.—What do you think I should do?—No, I can't—haven't slept a wink the whole night.—It's too much for a poor human creature.—Yes, I am a ninny, I know—go for me, will you!—Oh, there's the pot—thanks! And then I need scissors, which I haven't got—and wire—and string—where am I to get them from?—No, of course, nobody wants to break off his work for a thing like that.—I'm tired of the whole mess—work fifty years, and then have it go up in smoke! I haven't got strength to begin over again—and the way it comes all at once, blow on blow—did you ever! I'm going to run away from it! [*He goes out*].

RUDOLPH WALSTRÖM. [*Enters, evidently upset, badly dressed, his hands discoloured by the dyes*] Is it all out now, Anderson?

ANDERSON. Yes, now it's out.

RUDOLPH. Has anything been discovered?

ANDERSON. That's a question! What's buried when it snows comes to light when it thaws!

RUDOLPH. What do you mean, Anderson?

ANDERSON. If you dig deep enough you find things.

RUDOLPH. Have you found anything that can explain how the fire started?

ANDERSON. Naw, nothing of that kind.

RUDOLPH. That means we are still under suspicion, all of us.

ANDERSON. Not me, I guess.

RUDOLPH. Oh, yes, for you have been seen up in the attic at unusual hours.

ANDERSON. Well, I can't always go at usual hours to look for my tools when I've left them behind. And I did leave my hammer behind when I fixed the stove in the student's room.

RUDOLPH. And the stone-cutter, the gardener, Mrs. Westerlund, even the painter over there—we are all of us under suspicion—the student, the cook, and myself more than the rest. Lucky it was that I had paid the insurance the day before, or I should have been stuck for good.—Think of it: the stone-cutter suspected of arson—he who's so afraid of doing anything wrong! He's so conscientious *nowadays* that if you ask him what time it is he won't swear to it, as his watch *may* be wrong. Of course, we all know he got two years, but he's reformed, and I'll swear now he's the straightest man in the quarter.

ANDERSON. But the police suspect him because he went wrong once—and he ain't got his citizenship back yet.

RUDOLPH. Oh, there are so many ways of looking at a thing—so many ways, I tell you.—Well, Anderson, I guess you'd better quit for the day, seeing as you're going to the wedding to-night.

ANDERSON. Yes, that wedding—There was somebody looking for you a while ago, and he said he would be back.

RUDOLPH. Who was it?

ANDERSON. He didn't say.

RUDOLPH. Police, was it?

ANDERSON. Naw, I don't think so.—There he is coming now, for that matter. [*He goes out, together with his wife.*]

The STRANGER enters.

RUDOLPH. [*Regards him with curiosity at first, then with horror; wants to run away, but cannot move*] Arvid!

STRANGER. Rudolph!

RUDOLPH. So it's you!

STRANGER. Yes. [*Pause.*]

RUDOLPH. You're not dead, then?

STRANGER. In a way, yes!—I have come back from America after thirty years—there was something that pulled at me—

I wanted to see my childhood's home once more—and I found those ruins! [*Pause*] It burned down last night?

RUDOLPH. Yes, you came just in time. [*Pause.*]

STRANGER. [*Dragging his words*] That's the place—such a tiny place for such a lot of destinies! There's the dining-room with the frescoed walls: palms, and cypresses, and a temple beneath a rose-coloured sky—that's the way I dreamt the world would look the moment I got away from home. And the stove with its pale blossoms growing out of conches. And the chimney cupboard with its metal doors—I remember as a child, when we had just moved in, somebody had scratched his name on the metal, and then grandmother told us it was the name of a man who had killed himself in that very room. I quickly forgot all about it, but when I later married a niece of the same man, it seemed to me as if my destiny had been foretold on that plate of metal.—You don't believe in that kind of thing, do you?—However, you know how my marriage ended!

RUDOLPH. Yes, I've heard—

STRANGER. And there's the nursery—yes!

RUDOLPH. Don't let us start digging in the ruins!

STRANGER. Why not? After the fire is out you can read things in the ashes. We used to do it as children, in the stove—

RUDOLPH. Come and sit down at the table here!

STRANGER. What place is that? Oh, the tavern—"The Last Nail"—where the hearse-drivers used to

stop, and where, once upon a time, condemned culprits were given a final glass before they were taken to the gallows—Who is keeping it?

RUDOLPH. Mrs. Westerlund, who used to be my nurse.

STRANGER. Mrs. Westerlund—I remember her. It is as if the bench sank from under me, and I was sent tumbling through the past, sixty whole years, down into my childhood. I breathe the nursery air and feel it pressing on my chest. You older ones weighed me down, and you made so much noise that I was always kept in a state of fright. My fears made me hide in the garden—then I was dragged forward and given a spanking—always spankings—but I never knew why, and I don't know it yet. And yet she was my mother—

RUDOLPH. Please!

STRANGER. Yes, you were the favourite, and as such you always had her support—Then we got a stepmother. Her father was an undertaker's assistant, and for years we had been seeing him drive by with funerals. At last he came to know us so well by sight that he used to nod and grin at us, as if he meant to say: "Oh, I'll come for you sooner or later!" And then he came right into our house one day, and had to be called grandfather—when our father took his daughter for his second wife.

RUDOLPH. There was nothing strange in that.

STRANGER. No, but somehow, as our own destinies, and those of other people, were being woven into one web—

RUDOLPH. Oh, that's what happens everywhere—

STRANGER. Exactly! It's the same everywhere. In your youth you see the web set up. Parents, relatives, comrades, acquaintances, servants form the warp. Later on in life the weft becomes visible. And then the shuttle of fate runs back and forth with the thread—sometimes it breaks, but is tied up again, and it goes on as before. The reed clicks, the thread is packed together into curlicues, and one day the web lies ready. In old age, when the eye has learned how to see, you discover that those curlicues form a pattern, a monogram, an ornament, a hieroglyph, which only then can be interpreted: that's life! The world-weaver has woven it! [*Pause; he rises*] Over there, in that scrap-heap, I notice the family album. [*He walks a few steps to the right and picks up a photograph album*] That's the book of our family fate. Grandfather and grandmother, father and mother, brothers and sisters, relatives, acquaintances—or so-called "friends"—schoolmates, servants, godparents. And, strange to say, wherever I have gone, in America or Australia, to Hongkong or the Congo, everywhere I found at least one countryman, and as we began to dig it always came out that this man knew my family, or at least some godfather or maid servant—that, in a word, we had some common acquaintances. I even found a relative in the island of Formosa—

RUDOLPH. What has put those ideas into your head?

STRANGER. The fact that life, however it shaped itself—I have been rich and poor, exalted and humbled; I have suffered a shipwreck and passed through an earthquake—but, however life shaped itself, I always became aware of connections and repetitions. I saw in one situation the result of another, earlier one. On meeting *this* person I was reminded of *that* one whom I had met in the past. There have been incidents in my life that have come back time and again, so that I have been forced to say to myself: this I have been through before. And I have met with occurrences that seemed to me absolutely inevitable, or predestined.

RUDOLPH. What have you done during all these years?

STRANGER. Everything! I have beheld life from every quarter, from every standpoint, from above and from below, and always it has seemed to me like a scene staged for my particular benefit. And in that way I have at last become reconciled to a part of the past, and I have come to excuse not only my own but also other people's so-called "faults." You and I, for instance, have had a few bones to pick with each other—

RUDOLPH *recoils with a darkening face.*

STRANGER. Don't get scared now—

RUDOLPH. I never get scared!

STRANGER. You are just the same as ever.

RUDOLPH. And so are you!

STRANGER. Am I? That's interesting!—Yes, you are still living in that delusion about your own bravery, and I remember exactly how this false idea became fixed in your mind. We were learning to swim, and one day you told how you had dived into the water, and then mother said: "Yes, Rudolph, he has courage!" That was meant for me—for me whom you had stripped of all courage and self-assurance. But then came the day when you had stolen some apples, and you were too cowardly to own up to it, and so you put it on me.

RUDOLPH. Haven't you forgotten that yet?

STRANGER. I haven't forgotten, but I have forgiven.—From here, where I am sitting, I can see that very tree, and that's what brought it into my mind. It's over there, you see, and it bears golden pippins.—If you look, you'll see that one of its biggest branches has been sawed off. For it so happened that I didn't get angry with you on account of my unjust punishment, but my anger

turned against the tree. And two years later that big branch was all dried up and had to be sawed off. It made me think of the fig-tree that was cursed by the Saviour, but I was not led into any presumptuous conclusions.—However, I still know all those trees by heart, and once, when I had the yellow fever in Jamaica, I counted them over, every one. Most of them are still there, I see. There's the snow-apple which has red-striped fruit—a chaffinch used to nest in it. There's the melon-apple, standing right in front of the garret where I used to study for technological examinations; there's the spitzenburg, and the late astrachan; and the pear-tree that used to look like a poplar in miniature; and the one with pears that could only be used for preserves—they never ripened, and we despised them, but mother treasured them above all the rest; and in that tree there used to be a wryneck that was always twisting its head around and making a nasty cry—That was fifty years ago!

RUDOLPH. [*Iratel*y] What are you driving at?

STRANGER. Just as touchy and ill-tempered as ever! It's interesting.—There was no special purpose back of my chatter—my memories insist on pushing forward—I remember that the garden was rented to somebody else once, but we had the right to play in it. To me it seemed as if we had been driven out of paradise—and the tempter was standing behind every tree. In the fall, when the ground was strewn with ripe apples, I fell under a temptation that had become irresistible—

RUDOLPH. You stole, too?

STRANGER. Of course I did, but I didn't put it off on you!—When I was forty I leased a lemon grove in one of the Southern States, and—well, there were thieves after the trees every night. I couldn't sleep, I lost flesh, I got sick. And then I thought of—poor Gustafson here!

RUDOLPH. He's still living.

STRANGER. Perhaps he, too, stole apples in his childhood?

RUDOLPH. Probably.

STRANGER. Why are your hands so black?

RUDOLPH. Because I handle dyed stuffs all the time.—Did you have anything else in mind?

STRANGER. What could that have been?

RUDOLPH. That my hands were not clean.

STRANGER. Fudge!

RUDOLPH. Perhaps you are thinking of your inheritance?

STRANGER. Just as mean as ever! Exactly as you were when eight years old!

RUDOLPH. And you are just as heedless, and philosophical, and silly!

STRANGER. It's a curious thing—but I wonder how many times before we have said just what we are saying now? [*Pause*] I am looking at your album here—our sisters and brothers—five dead!

RUDOLPH. Yes.

STRANGER. And our schoolmates?

RUDOLPH. Some taken and some left behind.

STRANGER. I met one of them in South Carolina—Axel Ericson—do you remember him?

RUDOLPH. I do.

STRANGER. One whole night, while we were on a train together, he kept telling me how our highly respectable and respected family consisted of nothing but rascals; that it had made its money by smuggling—you know, the toll-gate was right here; and that this house had been built with double walls for the hiding of contraband. Don't you see that the walls are double?

RUDOLPH. [*Crushed*] So that's the reason why we had closets everywhere?

STRANGER. The father of that fellow, Ericson, had been in the custom-house service and knew our father, and the son told me a lot of inside stories that turned my whole world of imagined conditions topsyturvy.

RUDOLPH. You gave him a licking, I suppose?

STRANGER. Why should I lick him?—However, my hair turned grey that night, and I had to edit my entire life over again. You know how we used to live in an atmosphere of mutual admiration; how we regarded our family as better than all others, and how, in particular, our parents were looked up to with almost religious veneration. And then I had to paint new faces on them, strip them, drag them down, eliminate them. It was dreadful! Then the ghosts began to walk. The pieces of those smashed figures would come together again, but not properly, and the result would be a regular wax cabinet of monsters. All those grey-haired gentlemen whom we called uncles, and who came to our house to play cards and eat cold suppers, they were smugglers, and some of them had been in the pillory—Did you know that?

RUDOLPH. [*Completely overwhelmed*] No.

STRANGER. The dye works were merely a hiding-place for smuggled yarn, which was dyed in order to prevent identification. I can still remember how I used to hate the smell of the dyeing vat—there was something sickeningly sweet about it.

RUDOLPH. Why did you have to tell me all this?

STRANGER. Why should I keep silent about it and let you make yourself ridiculous by your boasting about that revered family of yours? Have you never noticed people grinning at you?

RUDOLPH. No-o! [*Pause*].

STRANGER. I am now looking at father's bookcase in the pile over there. It was always locked, you remember. But one day, when father was out, I got hold of the key. The books in front I had seen through the glass doors, of course. There were volumes of sermons, the collected works of great poets, handbooks for gardening, compilations of the statutes referring to customs duties and the confiscation of smuggled goods; the constitution; a volume about foreign coins; and a technical work that later determined my choice of a career. But back of those books there was room for other things, and I began to explore. First of all I found the rattan—and, do you know, I have since learned that that bitter plant bears a fruit from which we get the red dye known as "dragon's blood": now, isn't that queer! And beside the rattan stood a bottle labelled "cyanide of potassium."

RUDOLPH. I suppose it was meant for use over at the works.

STRANGER. Or elsewhere, perhaps. But this is what I had in mind: there were some bundles of pamphlets with illustrated covers that aroused my interest. And, to put it plain, they contained the notorious memoirs of a certain chevalier—I took them out and locked the case again. And beneath the big oak over there I studied them. We used to call that oak the Tree of Knowledge—and it was, all right! And in that way I left my childhood's paradise to become initiated, all too early, into those mysteries which—yes!

RUDOLPH. You, too?

STRANGER. Yes, I, too! [*Pause*] However—let us talk of something else, as all that is now in ashes.—Did you have any insurance?

RUDOLPH. [*Angrily*] Didn't you ask that a while ago?

STRANGER. Not that I can recall. It happens so often that I confuse what I have said with what I have intended to say, and mostly because I think so intensely—ever since that day when I tried to hang myself in the closet.

RUDOLPH. What is that you are saying?

STRANGER. I tried to hang myself in the closet.

RUDOLPH. [*Speaking very slowly*] Was that what happened that Holy Thursday Eve, when you were taken to the hospital—what the rest of us children were never permitted to know?

STRANGER. [*Speaking in the same manner*] Yes.—There you can see how little we know about those that are nearest to us, about our own homes and our own lives.

RUDOLPH. But why did you do it?

STRANGER. I was twelve years old, and tired of life! It was like groping about in a great darkness—I couldn't understand what I had to do here—and I thought the world a madhouse. I reached that conclusion one day when our school was turned out with torches and banners to celebrate "the destroyer of our country." For I had just read a book which proved that our country had been brought to destruction by the worst of all its kings—and that was the one whose memory we had to celebrate with hymns and festivities.^[1]

[*Pause*].

RUDOLPH. What happened at the hospital?

STRANGER. My dear fellow, I was actually put into the morgue as dead. Whether I was or not, I don't know—but when I woke up, most of my previous life had been forgotten, and I began a new one, but in such a manner that the rest of you thought me peculiar.—Are you married again?

RUDOLPH. I have wife and children—somewhere.

STRANGER. When I recovered consciousness I seemed to myself another person. I regarded life with cynical calm: it probably had to be the way it was. And the worse it turned out the more interesting it became. After that I looked upon myself as if I were somebody else, and I observed and studied that other person, and his fate, thereby rendering myself callous to my own sufferings. But while dead I had acquired new faculties—I could see right through people, read their thoughts, hear their intentions. In company, I beheld them stripped naked—Where did you say the fire started?

RUDOLPH. Why, nobody knows.

STRANGER. But the newspapers said that it began in a closet right under the student's garret—what kind of a student is he?

RUDOLPH. [*Appalled*] Is it in the newspapers? I haven't had time to look at them to-day. What more have they got?

STRANGER. They have got everything.

RUDOLPH. Everything?

STRANGER. The double walls, the respected family of smugglers, the pillory, the hairpins—

RUDOLPH. What hairpins?

STRANGER. I don't know, but they are there. Do you know?

RUDOLPH. Naw!

STRANGER. Everything was brought to light, and you may look for a stream of people coming here to stare at all that exposed rottenness.

RUDOLPH. Lord have mercy! And you take pleasure at seeing your family dragged into scandal?

STRANGER. My family? I have never felt myself related to the rest of you. I have never had any strong feeling either for my fellow men or myself. I think it's interesting to watch them—that's all—What sort of a person is your wife?

RUDOLPH. Was there anything about her, too?

STRANGER. About her and the student.

RUDOLPH. Good! Then I was right. Just wait and you'll see!—There comes the stone-cutter.

STRANGER. You know him?

RUDOLPH. And so do you. A schoolmate—Albert Ericson.

STRANGER. Whose father was in the customs service and whose brother I met on the train—he who was so very well informed about our family.

RUDOLPH. That's the infernal cuss who has blabbed to the papers, then!

ERICSON *enters with a pick and begins to look over the ruins.*

STRANGER. What a ghastly figure!

RUDOLPH. He's been in jail—two years. Do you know what he did? He made some erasures in a contract between him and myself—

STRANGER. You sent him to jail! And now he has had his revenge!

RUDOLPH. But the queerest part of it is that nowadays he is regarded as the most honest man in the whole district. He has become a martyr, and almost a saint, so that nobody dares say a word against him.

STRANGER. That's interesting, indeed!

DETECTIVE. [*Entering, turns to ERICSON*] Can you pull down that wall over there?

ERICSON. The one by the closet?

DETECTIVE. That's the one.

ERICSON. That's where the fire started, and I'm sure you'll find a candle or a lamp around there—for I know the people!

DETECTIVE. Go ahead then!

ERICSON. The closet door was burned off, to be sure, but the ceiling came down, and that's why we couldn't find out, but now we'll use the beak on it! [*He falls to with his pick*] Ho-hey, ho-ho!—Ho-hey, leggo!—Ho-hey, for that one!—Do you see anything?

DETECTIVE. Not yet.

ERICSON. [*Working away as before*] Now I can see something!—The lamp has exploded, but the stand is left!—Who knows this forfeit for his own?—Didn't I see the dyer somewhere around here?

DETECTIVE. There he is sitting now. [*He picks the lamp from the debris and holds it up*] Do you recognise your lamp, Mr. Walström?

RUDOLPH. That isn't mine—it belonged to our tutor.

DETECTIVE. The student? Where is he now?

RUDOLPH. He's down-town, but I suppose he'll soon be here, as his books are lying over there.

DETECTIVE. How did his lamp get into the cook's closet? Did he have anything to do with her?

RUDOLPH. Probably!

DETECTIVE. The only thing needed now is that he identify the lamp as his own, and he will be arrested. What do you think of it, Mr. Walström?

RUDOLPH. I? Well, what is there to think?

DETECTIVE. What reason could he have for setting fire to another person's house?

RUDOLPH. I don't know. Malice, or mere mischief—you never can tell what people may do—Or perhaps there was something he wanted to cover up.

DETECTIVE. That would have been a poor way, as old rottenness always will out. Did he have any grudge against you?

RUDOLPH. It's likely, for I helped him once when he was hard up, and he has hated me ever since, of course.

DETECTIVE. Of course? [*Pause*] Who is he, then?

RUDOLPH. He was raised in an orphanage—born of unknown parents.

DETECTIVE. Haven't you a grown-up daughter, Mr. Walström?

RUDOLPH. [*Angered*] Of course I have!

DETECTIVE. Oh, you have! [*Pause; then to ERICSON*] Now you bring those twelve men of yours and pull down the walls quick. Then we'll see what new things come to light.

[*He goes out.*]

ERICSON. That'll be done in a jiffy. [*Goes out.*]

[*Pause.*]

STRANGER. Have you really paid up your insurance?

RUDOLPH. Of course!

STRANGER. Personally?

RUDOLPH. No, I sent it in as usual.

STRANGER. You sent it—by somebody else! That's just like you!—Suppose we take a turn through the garden and have a look at the apple-trees.

RUDOLPH. All right, and then we'll see what happens afterward.

STRANGER. Now begins the most interesting part of all.

RUDOLPH. Perhaps not quite so interesting if you find yourself mixed up in it.

STRANGER. I?

RUDOLPH. Who can tell?

STRANGER. What a web it is!

RUDOLPH. There was a child of yours that went to the orphanage, I think?

STRANGER. God bless us!—Let's go over into the garden!

Curtain.

- [1] This refers to King Charles XII of Sweden, whose memory Strindberg hated mainly because of the use made of it by the jingo elements of the Swedish upper classes.

SECOND SCENE

The same setting as before with the exception that the walls have been torn down so that the garden is made visible, with its vast variety of spring flowers—daphnes, deutzias, daffodils, narcissuses, tulips, auriculas—and with all the fruit-trees in bloom.

ERICSON, ANDERSON *and his old wife*, GUSTAFSON, *the HEARSE-DRIVER*, MRS. WESTERLUND, *and the painter*, SJÖBLOM, *are standing in a row staring at the spot where the house used to be.*

STRANGER. [*Entering*] There they stand, enjoying the misfortune that's in the air and waiting for the victim to appear—he being the principal item. That the fire was incendiary they take for granted, merely because they want it that way.—And all these rascals are the friends and comrades of my youth. I am even related to the hearse-driver through my stepmother, whose father used to help carry out the coffins—[*He speaks to the crowd of spectators*] Look here, you people, I shouldn't stand there if I were you. There may have been some dynamite stored in the cellar, and if such were the case an explosion might take place any moment.

The curious crowd scatters and disappears.

STRANGER. [*Stoops over the scrap-heap and begins to poke in the books piled there*] Those are the student's books—Same kind of rot as in my youth—Livy's Roman history, which is said to be lies, every word—But here's a volume out of my brother's library—"Columbus, or the Discovery of America"! My own book, which I got as a Christmas gift in 1857. My name has been erased. This means it was stolen from me—and I accused one of our maids, who was discharged on that account! Fine business! Perhaps it led to her ruin—fifty years ago! Here is the frame of one of our family portraits; my renowned grandfather, the smuggler, who was put in the pillory—fine!—But what is this? The foot-piece of a mahogany bed—the one in which I was born! Oh, damn!—Next item: a leg of a dinner-table—the one that was an heirloom. Why, it was supposed to be of ebony, and was admired on that account! And now, after fifty years, I discover it to be made of painted maple. Everything had its colours changed in our house to render it unrecognisable, even the clothes of us children, so that our bodies always were stained with various dyes. Ebony—humbug! And here's the dining-room clock—smuggled goods, that, too—which has measured out

the time for two generations. It was wound up every Saturday, when we had salt codfish and a posset made with beer for dinner. Like all intelligent clocks, it used to stop when anybody died, but when I died it went on just as before. Let me have a look at you, old friend—I want to see your insides. [*As he touches the clock it falls to pieces*] Can't stand being handled! Nothing could stand being handled in our home—nothing! Vanity, vanity!—But there's the globe that was on top of the clock, although it ought to have been at the bottom. You tiny earth: you, the densest and the heaviest of all the planets—that's what makes everything on you so heavy—so heavy to breathe, so heavy to carry. The cross is your symbol, but it might just as well have been a fool's cap or a strait-jacket—you world of delusions and deluded!—Eternal One—perchance Thy earth has gone astray in the limitless void? And what set it whirling so that Thy children were made dizzy, and lost their reason, and became incapable of seeing what really is instead of what only seems?—Amen!—And here is the student!

The STUDENT enters and looks around in evident search of somebody.

STRANGER. He is looking for the mistress of the house. And he tells everything he knows—with his eyes. Happy youth!—Whom are you looking for?

STUDENT. [*Embarrassed*] I was looking—

STRANGER. Speak up, young man—or keep silent. I understand you just the same.

STUDENT. With whom have I the honour—

STRANGER. It's no special honour, as you know, for once I ran away to America on account of debts—

STUDENT. That wasn't right.

STRANGER. Right or wrong, it remains a fact.—So you were looking for Mrs. Walström? Well, she isn't here, but I am sure that she will come soon, like all the rest, for they are drawn by the fire like moths—

STUDENT. By a candle!

STRANGER. That's what *you* say, but I should rather have said "lamp," in order to choose a more significant word. However, you had better hide your feelings, my dear fellow, if you can—I can hide mine!—We were talking of that lamp, were we not? How about it?

STUDENT. Which lamp?

STRANGER. Well, well! Every one of them lies and denies!—The lamp that was placed in the cook's closet and set fire to the house?

STUDENT. I know nothing about it.

STRANGER. Some blush when they lie and others turn pale. This one has invented an entirely new manner.

STUDENT. Are you talking to yourself, sir?

STRANGER. I have that bad habit.—Are your parents still living?

STUDENT. They are not.

STRANGER. Now you lied again, but unconsciously.

STUDENT. I never tell a lie!

STRANGER. Not more than three in these few moments! I know your father.

STUDENT. I don't believe it.

STRANGER. So much the better for me!—Do you see this scarf-pin? It's pretty, isn't it? But I never see anything of it myself—I have no pleasure in its being there, while everybody else is enjoying it. There is nothing selfish about that, is there? But there are moments when I should like to see it in another man's tie so that I might have a chance to admire it. Would you care to have it?

STUDENT. I don't quite understand—Perhaps, as you said, it's better not to wear it.

STRANGER. Perhaps!—Don't get impatient now. She will be here soon.—Do you find it enviable to be young?

STUDENT. I can't say that I do.

STRANGER. No, youth is not its own master; it has never any money, and has to take its food out of other hands; it is not permitted to speak when company is present, but is treated as an idiot; and as it cannot marry, it has to ogle other people's wives, which leads to all sorts of dangerous consequences. Youth—humbug!

STUDENT. That's right! As a child, you want to grow up—that is, reach fifteen, be confirmed, and put on a tall hat. When you are that far, you want to be old—that is, twenty-one. Which means that nobody wants to be young.

STRANGER. And when you grow old in earnest, then you want to be dead. For then there isn't much left to wish for.—Do you know that you are to be arrested?

STUDENT. Am I?

STRANGER. The detective said so a moment ago.

STUDENT. Me?

STRANGER. Are you surprised at that? Don't you know that in this life you must be prepared for anything?

STUDENT. But what have I done?

STRANGER. You don't have to do anything in order to be arrested. To be suspected is enough.

STUDENT. Then everybody might be arrested!

STRANGER. Exactly! The rope might be laid around the neck of the whole race if justice were wanted, but it isn't. It's a disgusting race: ugly, sweating, ill-smelling; its linen dirty, its stockings full of holes; with chilblains and corns—ugh! No, an apple-tree in bloom is far more beautiful. Or look at the lilies in the field—they seem hardly to belong here—and what fragrance is theirs!

STUDENT. Are you a philosopher, sir?

STRANGER. Yes, I am a great philosopher.

STUDENT. Now you are poking fun at me!

STRANGER. You say that to get away. Well, begone then! Hurry up!

STUDENT. I was expecting somebody.

STRANGER. So I thought. But I think it would be better to go and meet—

STUDENT. She asked you to tell me?

STRANGER. Oh, that wasn't necessary.

STUDENT. Well, if that's so—I don't want to miss—

[He goes out.]

STRANGER. Can that be my son? Well, if it comes to the worst—I was a child myself once, and it was neither remarkable nor pleasant—And I am his—what of it? And for that matter—who knows?—Now I'll have a look at Mrs. Westerlund. She used to work for my parents—was faithful and good-tempered; and when she had been pilfering for ten years she was raised to the rank of a "trusted" servant. *[He seats himself at the table in front of the inn]* There are Gustafson's wreaths—just as carelessly made as they were forty years ago. He was always careless and stupid in all he did, and so he never succeeded with anything. But much might be pardoned him on account of his self-knowledge. "Poor fool that I am," he used to say, and then he would pull off his cap and scratch his head.—Why, there's a myrtle plant! *[He knocks at the pot]* Not watered, of course! He always forgot to water his plants, the damned fool—and yet he expected them to grow.

SJÖBLOM, the painter, appears.

STRANGER. I wonder who that painter can be. Probably he belongs also to the Bog, and perhaps he is one of the threads in my own web.

SJÖBLOM is staring at the STRANGER all this time.

STRANGER. *[Returning the stare]* Well, do you recognise me?

SJÖBLOM. Are you—Mr. Arvid?

STRANGER. Have been and am—if perception argues being.

[Pause.]

SJÖBLOM. I ought really to be mad at you.

STRANGER. Well, go on and be so! However, you might tell me the reason. That has a tendency to straighten matters out.

SJÖBLOM. Do you remember—

STRANGER. Unfortunately, I have an excellent memory.

SJÖBLOM. Do you remember a boy named Robert?

STRANGER. Yes, a regular rascal who knew how to draw.

SJÖBLOM. And I was to go to the Academy in order to become a real painter, an artist. But just about that time—colour-blindness was all the go. You were studying at the Technological Institute then, and so you had to test my eyes before your father would consent to send me to the art classes. For that reason you brought two skeins of yarn from the dye works, one red and the other green, and then you asked me about them. I answered—called the red green and the green red—and that was the end of my career—

STRANGER. But that was as it should be.

SJÖBLOM. No—for the truth of it was, I could distinguish the colours, but not—the *names*. And that wasn't found out until I was thirty-seven—

STRANGER. That was an unfortunate story, but I didn't know better, and so you'll have to forgive me.

SJÖBLOM. How can I?

STRANGER. Ignorance is pardonable! And now listen to me. I wanted to enter the navy, made a trial cruise as mid-shipman, seemed to become seasick, and was rejected! But I could stand the sea, and my sickness came from having drunk too much. So my career was spoiled, and I had to choose another.

SJÖBLOM. What have I got to do with the navy? I had been dreaming of Rome and Paris—

STRANGER. Oh, well, one has so many dreams in youth, and in old age too, for that matter. Besides, what's the use of bothering about what happened so long ago?

SJÖBLOM. How you talk! Perhaps you can give me back my wasted life—

STRANGER. No, I can't, but I am under no obligation to do so, either. That trick with the yarn I had learned at school, and you ought to have learned the proper names of the colours. And now you can go to—one dauber less is a blessing to humanity!—There's Mrs. Westerlund!

SJÖBLOM. How you *do* talk. But I guess you'll get what's coming to you!

MRS. WESTERLUND *enters*.

STRANGER. How d'you do, Mrs. Westerlund? I am Mr. Arvid—don't get scared now! I have been in America, and how are you? I am feeling fine! There has been a fire here, and I hear your husband is dead—policeman, I remember, and a very nice fellow. I liked him for his good humour and friendly ways. He was a harmless jester, whose quips never hurt. I recall once—

MRS. WESTERLUND. O, merciful! Is this my own Arvid whom I used to tend—

STRANGER. No, that wasn't me, but my brother—but never mind, it's just as well meant. I was talking of your old man who died thirty-five years ago—a very nice man and a particular friend of mine—

MRS. WESTERLUND. Yes, he died. [*Pause*] But I don't know if—perhaps you are getting him mixed up—

STRANGER. No, I don't. I remember old man Westerlund perfectly, and I liked him very much.

MRS. WESTERLUND. [*Reluctantly*] Of course it's a shame to say it, but I don't think his temper was very good.

STRANGER. What?

MRS. WESTERLUND. Well—he had a way of getting around people, but he didn't mean what he said—or if he did he meant it the other way around—

STRANGER. What is that? Didn't he mean what he was saying? Was he a hypocrite?

MRS. WESTERLUND. Well, I don't like to say it, but I believe—

STRANGER. Do you mean to say that he wasn't on the level?

MRS. WESTERLUND. N—yes—he was—a little—well, he didn't mean exactly what he said—And how have you been doing, Mr. Arvid?

STRANGER. Now a light is dawning on me!—The miserable wretch! And here I have been praising him these thirty-five years. I have missed him, and I felt something like sorrow at his departure—I even used some of my tobacco allowance to buy a wreath for his coffin.

MRS. WESTERLUND. What was it he did? What was it?

STRANGER. The villain! [*Pause*] Well—he fooled me—it was Shrove Tuesday, I remember. He told me that if one took away every third egg from a hen she would lay so many more. I did it, got a licking, and came near getting into court. But I never suspected him of having told on me.—He was always hanging around our kitchen looking for tid-bits, and so our maids could do just what they pleased about the garbage—oh, now I see him in his proper aspect!—And here I am now getting into a fury at one who has been thirty-five years in his grave?—So he was a satirist, he was—and I didn't catch on—although I understand him now.

MRS. WESTERLUND. Yes, he was a little satirical all right—I ought to know that!

STRANGER. Other things are coming back to me now—and I have been saying nice things about that blackguard for thirty-five years! It was at his funeral I drank my first toddy—And I remember how he used to flatter me, and call me "professor" and "the crown prince"—ugh—And there is the stone-cutter! You had better go inside, madam, or we'll have a row when that fellow begins to turn in his bills. Good-bye, madam—we'll meet again!

MRS. WESTERLUND. No we won't. People ought never to meet again—it is never as it used to be, and they only get to clawing at each other—What business did you have to tell me all those things—seeing everything was all right as it was [*She goes out*].

ERICSON, *the stone-cutter, comes in*.

STRANGER. Come on!

ERICSON. What's that?

STRANGER. Come on, I said!

ERICSON *stares at him*.

STRANGER. Are you looking at my scarf-pin? I bought it in London.

ERICSON. I am no thief!

STRANGER. No, but you practise the noble art of erasure. You wipe out!

ERICSON. That's true, but that contract was sheer robbery, and it was strangling me.

STRANGER. Why did you sign it?

ERICSON. Because I was hard up.

STRANGER. Yes, that *is* a motive.

ERICSON. But now I am having my revenge.

STRANGER. Yes, isn't it nice!

ERICSON. And now *they* will be locked up.

STRANGER. Did *we* ever fight each other as boys?

ERICSON. No, I was too young.

STRANGER. Have we never told lies about each other, or robbed each other, or got in each other's way, or seduced each other's sisters?

ERICSON. Naw, but my father was in the customs service and yours was a smuggler.

STRANGER. There you are! That's something, at least!

ERICSON. And when my father failed to catch yours he was discharged.

STRANGER. And you want to get even with me because your father was a good-for-nothing?

ERICSON. Why did you say a while ago that there was dynamite in the cellar?

STRANGER. Now, my dear sir, you are telling lies again. I said there *might* be dynamite in the cellar, and everything is possible, of course.

ERICSON. And in the meantime the student has been arrested. Do you know him?

STRANGER. Very little—his mother more, for she was a maid in our house. She was both pretty and good, and I was making up to her—until she had a child.

ERICSON. And were you not its father?

STRANGER. I was not. But as a denial of fatherhood is not allowed, I suppose I must be regarded as a sort of stepfather.

ERICSON. Then they have lied about you.

STRANGER. Of course. But that's a very common thing.

ERICSON. And I was among those who testified against you—under oath!

STRANGER. I have no doubt about it, but what does it matter? Nothing matters at all! But now we had better quit pulling—or we'll get the whole web unravelled.

ERICSON. But think of me, who have perjured myself—

STRANGER. Yes, it isn't pleasant, but such things will happen.

ERICSON. It's horrible—don't you find life horrible?

STRANGER. [*Covering his eyes with his hand*] Yes, horrible beyond all description!

ERICSON. I don't want to live any longer!

STRANGER. Must! [*Pause*] Must! [*Pause*] Tell me—the student is arrested, you say—can he get out of it?

ERICSON. Hardly!—And now, as we are talking nicely, I'll tell you something: he is innocent, but he cannot clear himself. For the only witness that can prove him innocent would, by doing so, prove him guilty—in another way.

STRANGER. She with the hairpins, isn't it?

ERICSON. Yes.

STRANGER. The old one or the young one?

ERICSON. You have to figure that out yourself. But it isn't the cook.

STRANGER. What a web this is!—But who put the lamp there?

ERICSON. His worst enemy.

STRANGER. And did his worst enemy also start the fire?

ERICSON. That's beyond me! Only Anderson, the mason, knows that.

STRANGER. Who is he?

ERICSON. The oldest one in the place—some kind of relative of Mrs. Westerlund—knows all the secrets of the house—but he and the dyer have got some secrets together, so he won't tell anything.

STRANGER. And the lady—my sister-in-law—who is she?

ERICSON. Well—she was in the house as governess when the first wife cleared out.

STRANGER. What sort of character has she got?

ERICSON. Hm! Character? I don't quite know what that is. Do you mean trade? The old assessment blanks used to call for your name and "character"—but that meant occupation instead of character.

STRANGER. I mean her temper.

ERICSON. Well, it changes, you know. In me it depends on the person with whom I am talking. With decent people I am decent, and with the cruel ones I become like a beast of prey.

STRANGER. But I was talking of her temper under ordinary circumstances.

ERICSON. Well, nothing in particular. Gets angry if you tease her, but comes around after a while. One cannot always have the same temper, of course.

STRANGER. I mean, is she merry or melancholy?

ERICSON. When things go right, she is happy, and when they go wrong, she gets sorry or angry—just like the rest of us.

STRANGER. Yes, but how does she behave?

ERICSON. Oh, what does it matter?—Of course, being an educated person, she behaves politely, but nevertheless, you know, she can get nasty, too, when her blood gets to boiling.

STRANGER. But that doesn't make me much wiser.

ERICSON. [*Patting him on the shoulder*] No, sir, we never get much wiser when it's a question of human beings.

STRANGER. Oh, you're a marvel!—And how do you like my brother, the dyer? [*Pause*].

ERICSON. Oh, his manners are pretty decent. And more than that I don't know, for what he keeps hidden I can't find out, of course.

STRANGER. Excellent! But—his hands are always blue, and yet you know that they are white beneath the dye.

ERICSON. But to make them so they should be scraped, and that's something he won't permit.

STRANGER. Good!—Who are the young couple coming over there?

ERICSON. That's the gardener's son and my daughter, who were to have been married to-night, but who have had to postpone it on account of the fire—Now I shall leave, for I don't want to embarrass them. You understand—I ain't much as a father-in-law. Good-bye! [*He goes out*].

The STRANGER withdraws behind the inn, but so that he remains visible to the spectators.

ALFRED and MATHILDA *enter hand in hand*.

ALFRED. I had to have a look at this place—I had to—

MATHILDA. Why did you have to look at it?

ALFRED. Because I have suffered so much in this house that more than once I wished it on fire.

MATHILDA. Yes, I know, it kept the sun out of the garden, and now everything will grow much better—provided they don't put up a still higher house—

ALFRED. Now it's open and pleasant, with plenty of air and sunlight, and I hear they are going to lay out a street—

MATHILDA. Won't you have to move then?

ALFRED. Yes, all of us will have to move, and that's what I like—I like new things—I should like to emigrate—

MATHILDA. Mercy, no! Do you know, our pigeons were nesting on the roof. And when the fire broke out last night they kept circling around the place at first, but when the roof fell in they plunged right into the flames—They couldn't part from their old home!

ALFRED. But we must get out of here—must! My father says that the soil has been sucked dry.

MATHILDA. I heard that the cinders left by the fire were to be spread over the ground in order to improve the soil.

ALFRED. You mean the ashes?

MATHILDA. Yes; they say it's good to sow in the ashes.

ALFRED. Better still on virgin soil.

MATHILDA. But your father is ruined?

ALFRED. Not at all. He has money in the bank. Of course he's complaining, but so does everybody.

MATHILDA. Has he—The fire hasn't ruined him?

ALFRED. Not a bit! He's a shrewd old guy, although he always calls himself a fool.

MATHILDA. What am I to believe?

ALFRED. He has loaned money to the mason here—and to others.

MATHILDA. I am entirely at sea! Am I dreaming?—The whole morning we have been weeping over your father's misfortune and over the postponement of the wedding—

ALFRED. Poor little thing! But the wedding is to take place to-night—

MATHILDA. Is it not postponed?

ALFRED. Only delayed for a couple of hours so that my father will have time to get his new coat.

MATHILDA. And we who have been weeping—

ALFRED. Useless tears—such a lot of tears!

MATHILDA. I am mad because they were useless—although—to think that my father-in-law could be such a sly one!

ALFRED. Yes, he is something of a joker, to put it mildly. He is always talking about how tired he is, but that's nothing but laziness—oh, he's lazy, I tell you—

MATHILDA. Don't say any more nasty things about him—but let us get away from here. I have to dress, you know, and put up my hair.—Just think, that my father-in-law isn't what I thought him—that he could be fooling us like that and not telling the truth! Perhaps you are like that, too? Oh, that I can't know what you really are!

ALFRED. You'll find out afterward.

MATHILDA. But then it's too late.

ALFRED. It's never too late—

MATHILDA. All you who lived in this house are bad—And now I am afraid of you—

ALFRED. Not of me, though?

MATHILDA. I don't know what to think. Why didn't you tell me before that your father was well off?

ALFRED. I wanted to try you and see if you would like me as a poor man.

MATHILDA. Yes, afterward they always say that they wanted to try you. But how can I ever believe a human being again?

ALFRED. Go and get dressed now. I'll order the carriages.

MATHILDA. Are we to have carriages?

ALFRED. Of course—regular coaches.

MATHILDA. Coaches? And to-night? What fun! Come—hurry up! We'll have carriages!

ALFRED. [*Gets hold of her hand and they dance out together*] Hey and ho! Here we go!

STRANGER. [*Coming forward*] Bravo!

The DETECTIVE enters and talks in a low tone to the STRANGER, who answers in the same way. This lasts for about half a minute, whereupon the DETECTIVE leaves again.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. [*Enters, dressed in black, and gazes long at the STRANGER*] Are you my brother-in-law?

STRANGER. I am. [*Pause*] Don't I look as I have been described—or painted?

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Frankly, no!

STRANGER. No, that is generally the case. And I must admit that the information I received about you a while ago does not tally with the original.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Oh, people do each other so much wrong, and they paint each other in accordance with some image within themselves.

STRANGER. And they go about like theatrical managers, distributing parts to each other. Some accept their parts; others hand them back and prefer to improvise.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. And what has been the part assigned to you?

STRANGER. That of a seducer. Not that I have ever been one! I have never seduced anybody, be she wife or maid, but once in my youth I was seduced, and that's why the part was given to me. Strange to say, it was forced on me so long that at last I accepted it. And for twenty years I carried the bad conscience of a seducer around with me.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. You were innocent then?

STRANGER. I was.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. How curious! And to this day my husband is still talking of the Nemesis that has pursued you because you seduced another man's wife.

STRANGER. I fully believe it. But your husband represents a still more interesting case. He has created a new character for himself out of lies. Tell me: isn't he a coward in facing the struggles of life?

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Of course he is a coward!

STRANGER. And yet he boasts of his courage, which is nothing but brutality.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. You know him pretty well.

STRANGER. Yes, and no!—And you have been living in the belief that you had married into a respected family which had never disgraced itself?

MRS. WALSTRÖM. So I believed until this morning.

STRANGER. When your faith crumbled! What a web of lies and mistakes and misunderstandings! And that kind of thing we are supposed to take seriously!

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Do you?

STRANGER. Sometimes. Very seldom nowadays. I walk like a somnambulist along the edge of a roof—knowing that I am asleep, and yet being awake—and the only thing I am waiting for is to be waked up.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. You are said to have been across to the other side?

STRANGER. I have been across the river, but the only thing I can recall is—that there everything *was* what it pretended to be. That's what makes the difference.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. When nothing stands the test of being touched, what are you then to hold on to?

STRANGER. Don't you know?

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Tell me! Tell me!

STRANGER. Sorrow brings patience; patience brings experience; experience brings hope; and hope will not bring us to shame.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Hope, yes!

STRANGER. Yes, hope!

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Do you ever think it pleasant to live?

STRANGER. Of course. But that is also a delusion. I tell you, my dear sister-in-law, that when you happen to be born without a film over your eyes, then you see life and your fellow creatures as they are—and you have to be a pig to feel at home in such a mess.—But when you have been looking long enough at blue mists, then you turn your eyes the other way and begin to look into your own soul? There you find something really worth looking at.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. And what is it you see?

STRANGER. Your own self. But when you have looked at that you must die.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. [*Covers her eyes with her hands; after a pause she says*] Do you want to help me?

STRANGER. If I can.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Try.

STRANGER. Wait a moment!—No, I cannot. He is innocently accused. Only you can set him free again. But that you cannot do. It's a net that has not been tied by men—

MRS. WALSTRÖM. But he is not guilty.

STRANGER. Who is guilty? [*Pause.*]

MRS. WALSTRÖM. No one! It was an accident!

STRANGER. I know it.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. What am I to do?

STRANGER. Suffer. It will pass. For that, too, is vanity.

MRS. WALSTRÖM. Suffer?

STRANGER. Yes, suffer! But with hope!

MRS. WALSTRÖM. [*Holding out her hand to him*] Thank you!

STRANGER. And let it be your consolation

MRS. WALSTRÖM. What?

STRANGER. That you don't suffer innocently.

MRS. WALSTRÖM *walks out with her head bent low.*

The STRANGER climbs the pile of debris marking the site of the burned house.

RUDOLPH. [*Comes in, looking happy*] Are you playing the ghost among the ruins?

STRANGER. Ghosts feel at home among ruins—And now you are happy?

RUDOLPH. Now I am happy.

STRANGER. And brave?

RUDOLPH. Whom have I got to fear, or what?

STRANGER. I conclude from your happiness that you are ignorant of one important fact—Have you the courage to bear a piece of misfortune?

RUDOLPH. What is it?

STRANGER. You turn pale?

RUDOLPH. I?

STRANGER. A serious misfortune!

RUDOLPH. Speak out!

STRANGER. The detective was here a moment ago, and he told me—in confidence——

RUDOLPH. What?

STRANGER. That the premium on your insurance was paid up two hours too late.

RUDOLPH. Great S——! what are you talking of? I sent my wife to pay the premium.

STRANGER. And she sent the bookkeeper—and he got there too late.

RUDOLPH. Then I am ruined? [*Pause.*]

STRANGER. Are you crying?

RUDOLPH. I am ruined!

STRANGER. Well, is that something that cannot be borne?

RUDOLPH. How am I to live? What am I to do?

STRANGER. Work!

RUDOLPH. I am too old—I have no friends——

STRANGER. Perhaps you'll get some now. A man in misfortune always seems sympathetic. I had some of my best hours while fortune went against me.

RUDOLPH. [*Wildly*] I am ruined!

STRANGER. But in my days of success and fortune I was left alone. Envy was more than friendship could stand.

RUDOLPH. Then I'll sue the bookkeeper.

STRANGER. Don't!

RUDOLPH. He'll have to pay——

STRANGER. How little you have changed! What's the use of living, when you learn so little from it?

RUDOLPH. I'll sue him, the villain!—He hates me because I gave him a cuff on the ear once.

STRANGER. Forgive him—as I forgave you when I didn't demand my inheritance.

RUDOLPH. What inheritance?

STRANGER. Always the same! Merciless! Cowardly! Disingenuous!—Depart in peace, brother!

RUDOLPH. What inheritance is that you are talking of?

STRANGER. Now listen, Rudolph—my brother after all: my own mother's son! You put the stone-cutter in jail because he did some erasing—all right! But how about your own erasures from my book, "Christopher Columbus, or the Discovery of America"?

RUDOLPH. [*Taken aback*] What's that? Columbus?

STRANGER. Yes, *my* book that became yours!

RUDOLPH *remains silent.*

STRANGER. Yes, and I understand now that it was you who put the student's lamp in the closet—I understand everything. But do *you* know that the dinner-table was not of ebony?

RUDOLPH. It wasn't?

STRANGER. It was nothing but maple.

RUDOLPH. Maple!

STRANGER. The pride and glory of the house—valued at two thousand crowns!

RUDOLPH. That, too? So that was also humbug!

STRANGER. Yes!

RUDOLPH. Ugh!

STRANGER. Thus the debt is settled. The case is dropped—the issue is beyond the court—the parties can withdraw——

RUDOLPH. [*Rushing out*] I am ruined!

STRANGER. [*Takes his wreath from the table*] I meant to take this wreath to the cemetery—to my parents' grave—but I will place it here instead—on the ruins of what was once their home—my childhood's home! [*He bends his head in silent prayer*] And now, wanderer, resume thy pilgrimage!

Curtain.

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