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

PLAYS

FOURTH SERIES

BY

AUGUST STRINDBERG

**THE BRIDAL CROWN
THE SPOOK SONATA
THE FIRST WARNING
GUSTAVUS VASA**

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

AUTHORIZED EDITION

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1916

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INTRODUCTION

The province of Dalecarlia has often been called the heart of Sweden. It is a centrally located inland province, said to contain a sample of everything the country can offer in the way of natural beauty. For centuries it played a remarkable part in Swedish history, taking the leadership time

and again in the long struggle to rid the nation of a perverted and abused union with Denmark and Norway. It has preserved the original stock, the original language, and the original customs of the race as no other province. The dialects used in Dalecarlia are among the most difficult to understand for outsiders and have an air of antiquity that irresistibly leads the thought back to old Norse. The picturesque costumes characteristic of the different parishes are still in use, and one of these—that of Rättvik—has almost become *the* national costume of Sweden.

The people are simple and shrewd, stem and kindly, energetic and obstinate, loyal and independent. They have much in common with the old New England stock, but possess, in spite of their unmistakably Puritanical outlook, a great store of spontaneous and pleasant joy in life. They are thinkers in their own humble way, but not morbid. In their attitude toward each other and toward the family they are distinctly and quaintly patriarchal, and in this respect, too, they preserve a quality that used to be characteristic of the whole Scandinavian north. It is impossible to read "The Bridal Crown," with its typical Dalecarlian atmosphere and setting, without being struck at once by the extent to which the individual plays the part of a link in the unbroken chain of generations rather than of an isolated, all-important point of personality. And the same impression is obtained from Selma Lagerlöf's contemporaneous novel, "Jerusalem."

Always a very religious race, though not always good church-goers, the Dalecarlians have long had and still have the Puritanical closeness to the Bible as *the* book, and they talk naturally in quotations from that source. At the same time the old Norse stores of legend and homely wisdom survive among them to an extent that is perhaps paralleled only in Iceland. And when Strindberg in this play makes his characters quote the old poetic Edda he violates no law of probability, although it is doubtful whether the expression in question would actually come in just such a form from living lips. I mean that the sentiment of such a phrase as "Vagrant women make bread of mould for their men as only food" survives among the people, while it is likely to have gradually changed into a form more wholly their own.

No matter from where the inspiration of their utterances may come, the Dalecarlians are apt to express themselves picturesquely, and this inclination to lapse into rhyme and alliteration is noticeable—sometimes in quoting old saws dating back to heathen times and sometimes in improvising. Strindberg has used this tendency in both ways. When the old grandfather says to the bride that she is "comely as he is homely," he is merely repeating a phrase dear to the heart of a people strongly bound up in traditions. When, on the other hand, he lets the fisherman in the last scene answer, "Krummedikke's castle and Krummedikke's lake, Krummedikke's church, and soon it will break," he is probably illustrating the tendency toward roughly rhymed improvisations.

A typical feature of Dalecarlian life has always been the sending of the cattle to upland pastures during the summer months in care of young men and women, who, in communication among themselves as well as with the people at the home farm, have availed themselves of the ancient alpenhorn, or *lur*, made out of wood and birch bark, as well as of the horn made out of the natural horn of the ox. And instinctively they have realised that melodious utterance carries farther than ordinary speech, and so they have come to sing or hum their communications. Furthermore, they have grown accustomed to use some song already familiar to the listener rather than what they might improvise, and have thus learned to pass on simple pieces of news, or a mere mood, perhaps, in what might be called a code.

Throughout Sweden such songs and snatches and tunes, made up in olden days by some more than usually audacious village genius, survived until far into the past century, and in Dalecarlia and a few neighbouring provinces they have survived to the present day in actual use. With the flaring up of a true historical interest that followed the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century came a recognition of the beauty and value of those old songs and tunes. The first man in Sweden to make a systematic collection of them was Richard Dybeck, who, during the years 1842-50 published a periodical for lovers of the old which he called *Runa*—"The Rune." In 1846 the same man published a separate collection of the folk-material just referred to under the name of *Svenska Vallvisor och Hornlåtar*—"Swedish Herd-Songs and Horn-Melodies."

Both this little volume and the issues of "The Rune" must have come under the attention of Strindberg at an early period, and to both he remained strongly attached throughout life. In the pages of those two Dybeck publications he found almost everything that makes "The Bridal Crown" what it is—a remarkable picture of the external life and internal spirit of the Dalecarlian people. The musical duet between *Kersti* and *Mats* in the first scene is the basis of the whole play. It is found in Dybeck's work just as Strindberg has used it—both the music and the words. The legend has it that a young man and a young woman, herding cattle in adjoining pastures, fell in love with each other. The girl bore a child, which they nursed together as they best could, having tried to legitimise it by going through a simple wedding ceremony of their own improvisation. Once, when the girl could not get back to the pasture at night, she used her alpenhorn to communicate that fact to her lover and ask him to look after the baby. This legend is found all over Sweden in very slightly modified form.

To the old legend Strindberg has added the still more ancient Montecchi and Capuletti theme from "Romeo and Juliet," making the two lovers the offspring of mutually jealous and hostile families, and thereby giving the play the tragical twist which his mood required. How he was turned in this direction I don't know, but his work on the historical play, "Gustavus Vasa"—it was written in 1899, and "The Bridal Crown" seems to have been completed in the winter of 1900-1—had taken his mind to Dalecarlia, where its first act is laid. And the idea of a play built on Swedish folk-themes seems to have been long present in his mind.

For folk-colour as well as for local verisimilitude, he drew freely both on Dybeck and on other repositories of old Swedish lore and legend and superstition. One of the beauties of the play is that so many of the extranatural figures and elements introduced are common to the whole country. The Neck, or the Man of the Rapids, or the Brookman (*Necken, Forskarlen, or Bäckamannen*) exists in popular fancy wherever a peasant has put his plough into Swedish soil. He is a creature of the thousand rivers and brooks that beribbon the land from the arctic circle down to the fertile planes of Scania, and always he is associated with an unusual gift of music and with the fallen angel's longing for the lost Paradise. From Norrland to Scania is told the anecdote of the tot who heard the Neck sing the song used by Strindberg—"I am hoping, I am hoping that my Redeemer still liveth"—and who called out to him: "There is no Redeemer for you." On returning home, the child told his parents of what had happened and was ordered to go back with a less discouraging message to the wailing spirit of the waters.

The *Midwife*, half human, half extranatural, is another familiar figure, mostly called the Wood-Imp (*Skogsrå*). The queer snatches uttered by her from time to time are old Swedish riddles or "guess-rhymes," which Strindberg also found in Dybeck's work, and which he has employed very effectively as spells or incantations. That quaint dualistic revenant, which is called the *Mewler* as an apparition, and the *Mocker* as a bodiless voice, exists in the imagination of the people all over Sweden. It is a creation of the moral instinct, designed for the discouragement of poor maidens who have born a child "in hiding," as the old phrase puts it, and who may be tempted into ridding themselves of such a burden—a crime that has figured too frequently in the criminal annals of the country.

The word *Myling*, which I have had to translate as *Mewler*, is said to come from a verb meaning to kill, to choke, to bury, or to cover up. It is related to *mylla*, mould, however, and when we find the same term, *mylingar, Mewlings*, applied to the relatives of *Kersti*, this characterises them not as "murderlings," as Strindberg's German translator would have it, but as "mouldings," as people delving in the soil. In the original text, the name applied both to the apparition of *Kersti's* dead baby and to her relatives is the same. I have thought this too confusing for English-speaking readers, and have made two terms to get the needed dearness and distinction.

It remains finally to say a word about the keystone to the whole dramatic conflict in the play—the desire of *Kersti* to wear a crown at her wedding—to be a "crown-bride," as the Swedish phrase and the name of the original text both have it. The chief ornaments of a Swedish bride have always been the crown, the wreath, and the veil—and so they are to this very day. The wreath is generally made out of myrtle. The crown is nowadays almost invariably made out of the same material. But it used to be of metal, richly ornamented, and kept ready for use in every country church throughout the land. It was another device meant to encourage morality, the convention being that only a chaste young woman could wear the crown at her wedding—only one "worthy" of it, as the old phrase had it. To go to church without that ornament was, of course, a most humiliating confession, and tended to detract largely from the riotous joy of the festivity which the Swedish peasants have always placed above all others—the wedding. Originally the crown also served another purpose, however. It was, as I have already said, kept in the church and lent only with the sanction of the clergy. In other words, it was reserved for the bride whose relatives consented to have a church wedding at a time when the sacramental character of the ceremony had not yet become popularly recognised. For ages the Swedish wedding was wholly a secular ceremony based on the old custom of bride-barter, and it took the Catholic Church many centuries to turn it into a religious rite.

There are a few minor points that need some clearing up, too. The position of *Kersti's* father, the *Soldier*, must be a puzzle to non-Swedish readers. The presence of the picture of King Charles XV on the wall of the *Soldier's* cottage indicates that the action takes place in the eighteen-sixties, before the reorganisation of the Swedish army on the basis of universal conscription had been carried out. At that time each province had to furnish one or more regiments. The maintenance of this soldiery fell directly on the small landholders, and from two to ten of these formed a *rote* or "file" having to employ, equip, and maintain one soldier. Each soldier had a cottage and a small patch of soil furnished him by the men responsible for his up-keep. Under such circumstances the soldier would seem likely to fall into the position of a servant living under his masters, but that was not at all the case. The warlike qualities and traditions of the nation probably counteracted tendencies in that direction. Instead the soldier became one of the recognised honoratiors of his district, ranking next to the sexton and often filling the place of that functionary when the office was vacant.

The use of the name of Krummedikke in connection with the lake is a mystery I have not been able to clear up. The noble family of Krummedige or Krummedike belonged originally in the duchy of Holstein, but moved from there into Denmark and spread gradually into southern Sweden and Norway. During the period of Sweden's union with Denmark and Norway two members of that family held the famous old fortress of Baahus (now Bohus) on behalf of the Danish king. Other members controlled fortified places in Småland and the province of Halland along the west coast of present Sweden. But there is no record of any Krummedike having a "castle" in the northern part of Sweden. Whether legends connected with this family have actually spread from southern Sweden to Dalecarlia or the name, simply happened to catch Strindberg's fancy I cannot tell.

The play in its entirety is one of the most impersonal Strindberg ever wrote. Echoes of his private life are very rare—which is remarkable, considering how plentiful they are in such a work as the historical drama "Gustavus Vasa." In this respect "The Bridal Crown" connects logically with Strindberg's novels and stories from the islands outside of Stockholm: "The People at Hemsö,"

"Fisher Folks," and "At the Edge of the Sea." It seems that nothing helped more to take him out of himself and his morbid introspection than a study of the life of the common people.

How successful he was in that study is indicated by the wide popularity of the novels and stories in question as well as by the stage history of "The Bridal Crown." This play has been one of the most frequently produced of all his dramatic works. The first performance took place on September 14, 1907, at the Swedish Theatre, Stockholm, and since that time it has been played more than one hundred times in Stockholm alone—which is a great deal in Sweden.

The list of characters will suffice to indicate what a weird thing "The Spook Sonata" is. Rarely has Strindberg's peculiar fancy carried him further without bringing him to outright disaster. Mingling extreme realism of portrayal with a symbolism that frequently borders on the extravagant and the impossible, he has nevertheless produced a work that bites into the consciousness of the reader and challenges his thought to an unusual degree. The best characterisation of the play as a whole might be to call it a symbolistic mosaic pieced together with fragments of real life.

Reminiscences of the author's own life in all its periods recur constantly, and yet the play cannot be called autobiographical in any narrow sense. Not even its general tendency—if it can be said to have one—is particularly tied up with Strindberg's view of his own fate. No, the play is in all its aspects a generalisation along the lines of "The Dream Play," but brought nearer to the level and superficial appearance of every-day life.

One of its purposes is to illustrate the mysterious relationship between seemingly disconnected things and events which Strindberg during his latest period was so prone to discover everywhere. —When in this super-Swedenborgian mood, he was inclined to regard the slightest incident of daily life as a mere symbol meant to shadow or foreshadow vaster incidents on higher levels. It would be dangerous to accept his readings of life in this mood as so many formulations of truth, but, on the other hand, it would be unwise to discard them as meaningless. What must be remembered first and last in the study of Strindberg's work is that he was primarily, if not wholly, a bearer of suggestions rather than of final truths. We cannot go to him for knowledge of what life actually is, but we may be sure of never reading one of his pages without finding some new angle of approach, the use of which will help our own thought to enlarge our knowledge of actual life. Those who demand predigested thought will always be lost in the mazes of his irresponsible fancy. Those who ask nothing more of literature than to be set thinking will always find him one of the most fruitful writers produced by modern times.

For this very reason it would be futile to attempt any explanatory analysis of "The Spook Sonata." There must, in fact, be a separate analysis of that kind for every thinking reader. One may say, of course, that its name as well as the strange function which forms its central scene, points to an interpretation of all human life as a ghostly reflection of wasted and buried possibilities. But there is charity as well as bitterness in the play, and it seems to preach the lesson that we owe tolerance to every man but him who thinks himself better than the rest. It warns, too, against that interference with other lives which seems to have been one of the haunting spectres of Strindberg's own existence. In other words, the play may be regarded as a final passionate expression of his will to live his own life in his own way and of his resentment against real or fancied efforts to balk I that will.

Dramatically this play is well worthy of study, It contains some points that, whether successful or no in this particular connection, should not be passed over by future playwrights. Such a point, for instance, is the continued presence on the stage of several dumb characters during almost the entire first scene. I do not know whether it will come home to readers of the play that, while the conversation is going on between the *Student* and *Old Hummel*, for example, the *Janitress* and the *Dark Lady* are all the time present in the background as living reminders of the secret threads of human life underlying the conflict between the two men that do the talking. And the idea of trying to render simultaneous portrayal of life within and without a human habitation has again been tried by Strindberg in this play with very remarkable and suggestive results.

There are several signs which indicate that Strindberg changed his plan of the play while he was writing it. There is one character present on the list of characters in the Swedish text that never appears—the *Janitor*. On the other hand, that list does not contain the name of the *Cook*, who plays such a strange part in the final scene—a sort of infernalised Greek chorus with a Japanese soy bottle for its Dionysian emblem. The arrangement of the stage directions in the Swedish original indicates, too, that he intended a single setting to serve for the whole play. He hoped probably to be able to let the action laid within the house be seen from the outside, but, warned by his strong sense of theatrical feasibility, he changed his plans unhesitatingly, and with them his scenery.

Several of the minor themes running through the play may to the reader seem not only minor but hopelessly trivial. I am thinking principally of the constantly recurring charge against servants that they take the nourishment out of food before serving it to their masters. This suspicion seems to have been one of Strindberg's fixed ideas, occurring in almost every work where the relationship between masters and servants is at all mentioned. I think he has harped too much on this theme, both in "The Spook Sonata" and elsewhere. I think, too, that he is wrong in placing the responsibility with the servants. On the other hand, I think one of his services is that he works with modern science to bring us a better realisation of the dose interrelation between the

material basis of our existences and the more important spiritual overtones.

"The Spook Sonata" was written and published in 1907. It was played for the first time on January 27, 1908, at the Intimate Theatre, Stockholm, reaching a total of twelve performances.

The little scene named "The First Warning" is frankly autobiographical. It relates an actual incident from Strindberg's first marriage, to which, I think, he makes reference in "A Fool's Confession"—a work, by the bye, which should really be named "A Fool's Plea" in English.

In spite of sinister undertones, "The First Warning" is distinctly a comedy, and practically the only short thing in a lighter vein written by Strindberg. At first he named it "The First Tooth," but he had adopted the present title before the original publication—with three other one-act plays—occurred, in 1893. In Germany the play is known under the name "Signs of Autumn" (*Herbstzeichen*). Beginning on September 10, 1910, it was given eight times in all at the Intimate Theatre, Stockholm, but long before that time it had been played a number of times on various German stages.

King Gustavus I, founder of the Vasa dynasty, which reigned over Sweden until 1818, has rightly been called the "father" of his country and the builder of modern Sweden. He finished the war of liberation, by which the hampering and unsatisfactory union between Sweden and the other two Scandinavian kingdoms was finally severed. But he did much more. He reorganised the whole country, in all its departments, on such a basis of efficiency that it became able to play the part of a great European power for more than a century. Some have pictured him as a sort of superman. Others have called him a mere country squire, applying the methods of stable and barn to a whole country. Both those views of him are probably correct as well as incorrect. He was undoubtedly first of all an able and conscientious peasant on a large scale, but as such he was very much in place at a time when agriculture was the only source of income that could be called national. And his cares on behalf of commerce and mining show him to have had a very broad and foresighted view of husbandry.

The figure of the first Vasa took an early hold of Strindberg's imagination. He introduced it in the first version of his first great play, "Master Olov." But there the king was a subordinate character—so much so, in fact, that he did not appear at all in the final metrical version of the play, completed in 1877. At that time Strindberg was more interested in *Master Olov*, the dreaming idealist who placed religious reform above political and economical reorganisation. When, in 1899, he returned to "old King Gustav," his interest had shifted, and in this play, said to be his greatest historical drama—and one of the greatest of its kind in the annals of modern literature—the royal figure dominates absolute.

When I first contemplated a translation of this play I feared it would be necessary to preface it with a condensed history of Sweden during the early sixteenth century. Having finished my task, I find that an elaborate historical introduction would merely be a duplication of the work done by the playwright. Barring a few minor points that have been illuminated by notes, all the history needed for the understanding of the play will be found within the play itself. The truth of the matter is that Strindberg was not writing history but poetry, and that he was more anxious to portray human character than to set forth all too familiar historical events.

He portrayed his main character in more than one way and sense, however. The *King*, as we find him in the drama, is a wonderfully vivid and faithful reconstruction of a great man that has writ himself in large letters on the map of his country. But he is also a symbolisation of a type that will always remain one of the most fascinating of all that people the earth: that of the ruler who is conscious both his mission and of the price that must be paid for its fulfilment. The problem of Strindberg's play might be said to be this: granted such a mission, how much has a man the right to pay for its proper fulfilment? And as behoves a poet Strindberg has brought this problem to no triumphant "Q.E.D." His ambiguous, yet tremendously significant, answer seems to be: "Such a man has the right to do whatever his mission demands, even though it may go against his grain as an individual, but he must be humble about it and not confuse himself with Providence." *Gustavus* is humbled and made to suffer, not because of this or that act, but because of an inclination to consider his own mission the only one in sight.

A few words need to be said about the chronology of the play. In accordance with his theories in regard to historical playwriting Strindberg has dealt very freely with dates and facts. The play occupies a period of about two years, which length of time separates the first act from the four last. These take place within a few days. The historical events that enter as material into the play were spread over nearly twenty years, and Strindberg has not hesitated to introduce them in reversed order either. This license must be considered in the light of what I have already said about his intentions. His main concern was to show how the principal character would act under certain given circumstances, and to use those circumstances in the manner most apt to throw light on the character in question. And in this respect he has undoubtedly been successful.

The Swedes think so, at least. "Gustavus Vasa" has drawn grudging approval from Strindberg's worst enemies among his own countrymen. The first performance of the play, which took place on October 17, 1899, at the Swedish Theatre, Stockholm, turned at the time into a national event. The play has since then been revived several times, particularly in connection with the

celebration of its author's sixtieth and sixty-third birthday anniversaries, in 1909 and 1912. In all, the play has been performed about one hundred times in Stockholm alone, and it has been given on several German stages with striking success.

A word should be said concerning the spelling of Swedish names used in this volume. It can hardly be called a system at all. It is neither Swedish nor English. It is a frank compromise, designed exclusively to make the reading of the plays as easy as possible to English-speaking readers. Some time in the future, when the knowledge of the Scandinavian literatures and languages has reached a more advanced stage in this country, I should like to see a revised edition with the original Swedish spelling of all names preserved throughout.

THE BRIDAL CROWN

(KRONBRUDEN)

A FOLK-PLAY IN SIX SCENES

1902

CHARACTERS

MATS

KERSTI

The MOTHER of KERSTI

The SOLDIER, her father

The VERGER, her grandfather

BRITA, *the grown-up sister of MATS*

The GRANDFATHER }

The GRANDMOTHER }

The FATHER } *of MATS*

The MOTHER }

ANNA }

LIT-KAREN } *younger sisters of MATS*

LIT-MATS, *the small brother of MATS*

The SHERIFF

The PASTOR

The FISHERMAN

The MIDWIFE

The NECK

The CHILD IN WHITE

The MEWLER (Mylingen), an apparition

The MOCKER (Skratten), a voice

The HEADSMAN

MATS'S RELATIVES, *called the MILL-FOLK*

KERSTI'S RELATIVES, *called the MEWLINGS (Mylingarne)*

FOUR BRIDESMAIDS

SIX SERVANT-GIRLS

TWO FIDDLERS

TWO SOLDIERS

SCENARIO

SCENE I. THE HILL PASTURE

SCENE II. THE FAMILY COUNCIL AT THE MILL

SCENE III. THE SOLDIER'S HOUSE ON THE EVE OF THE WEDDING

SCENE IV. THE WEDDING AT THE MILL

SCENE V. AT THE CHURCH: THE PENANCE OF KERSTI

SCENE VI. ON THE ICE OF THE LAKE

FIRST SCENE

A hill pasture in Dalecarlia. A hut of rough-hewn boards, painted red, stands at the left. Beside it grow two birches with trunks that are white clear down to the ground.

On the right-hand side appears a sloping hillside covered with spruces. The hillside is cut by a large brook forming a waterfall. At the foot of it is a tarn covered by water-

lilies. The background shows a big lake bordered by blue hills. A church is visible across the lake.

A grindstone set in a wooden frame stands in the foreground by the corner of the hut. It is Sunday evening, about sunset time.

KERSTI'S MOTHER *sits on a wooden block outside the hut, smoking her pipe.*

KERSTI *enters with an alpenhorn in her hand. She stops in front of her MOTHER.*

MOTHER. Where have you been all this time, daughter?

KERSTI. In the woods, mother.

MOTHER. Picking strawberries, I suppose. Your lips are so red.

KERSTI. Why did you call me, mother?

MOTHER. The woods were full of noises, child, and of stealthy footfalls. Could it be the bear?

KERSTI. Can't tell.

MOTHER. I thought I heard the strokes of an axe, but maybe I was mistaken.

KERSTI. The bear uses no axe, mother.

MOTHER. Why dressed up in your best, daughter?

KERSTI. It's Sunday, mother.

MOTHER. There is milk on your tucker, child. Have you been milking May-dew or Starbright?

KERSTI. Could I but milk the stars—and the moon, O!

MOTHER. While it's night, O!

KERSTI. Day and night!

MOTHER. Night and day!—Yes, I know! Beware of the bear!

KERSTI. Do you think he would tear my pet cow?

MOTHER. Have you lost her?

KERSTI. Shall I ask Anna?

MOTHER. You had better!

KERSTI. [*Picks up her alpenhorn and sounds a melody; see musical appendix, Melody No. 1. Then she sings; see Melody No. 2*]

"Too-la-loo, Ann at Boorness!
Do you see my cosset cow
Over there at your place?"

MATS. [*Answering from a distance in a dear tenor voice; see musical appendix, Melody No. 3*]

"Too-la-loo, so I do.
Come at once:
Cosset cow is here now!"

MOTHER. What a deep voice Anna has got!

KERSTI. She has been calling her cows since the sun began to set.

MOTHER. What do you hear down there in the valley, child?

KERSTI. The big bell of the cow, the low bell of the goat....

MOTHER. Oh, no!

KERSTI. I can hear the cock crowing and the dog barking, the gun banging and the cart clanking, and the oars saying "duck-duck" in the rowlocks.

MOTHER. Whose cock do you mean, and whose dog?

KERSTI. The miller's.

MOTHER. What's his name? Is it Anna?

KERSTI *looks embarrassed and does not answer.*

MOTHER. What do you see down there in the valley?

KERSTI. The water-wheel in the mill-race, the smoke from the chimney....

MOTHER. Whose chimney? The mill-folk's, I suppose?

KERSTI. It's growing dark, mother.

MOTHER. I *am* going—before it grows still darker! [*She rises to her feet*] This has been the longest Sunday in all my life!—What kind of a smell is that?

KERSTI. I smell the woods; I smell the cattle; I smell the hay.

MOTHER. No, it was tattle-berries you were picking! [*For a while she stands still, lost in thought; then she sings; see musical appendix, Melody No. 4*]

"The joy that was mine
Has been turned into woe!"

KERSTI. It is growing dark, mother!

MOTHER. So I see, daughter mine. The darkness is coming down on us heavy as a pall, and downward goes my path now—ever downward! But you must stay to watch the curds. And trust me to see if you let the fire go out.

KERSTI. Trust me to see that the fire won't go out, mother.

MOTHER. Good night, then. And don't forget your evening prayers!

KERSTI. Good night, mother.

MOTHER. "The joy that was mine has been turned into woe!" Don't forget your evening prayers!

[She goes out to the left.]

KERSTI *opens the door of the hut. A big pot is seen hanging over the fire, on which she puts more wood; coming out again, she looks around to make sure that her mother is gone; then she picks up the alpenhorn and sounds another wordless melody on it. [See musical appendix, Melody No. 5.]*

MATS. *[Is heard singing outside, on the right-hand side; see musical appendix, Melody No. 6]*

"Kersti dearest,
Kersti dearest,
Baby sleeps in the forest."

KERSTI. *[Answers in the same way; see Melody No. 7]*

"Dillery-dell!
Fareth he well,
Fareth he well
Far in the forest?"

MATS. *[Answers as before; see Melody No. 8]*

"Nothing to fear!
Nothing to fear!
Baby sleeps in his cradle here,
Far, far, in the forest!"

KERSTI. *[Singing; see Melody No. 9]*

"Haste to the house and milk the cows,
And see that baby lacks nothing.
I cannot come, must stay at home,
Helping my folks with the baking."

MATS. *[Answers as before; see Melody No. 10]*

"Birches nod in the blowing breeze,
But baby slumbers in perfect peace,
Kersti, Kersti, dearest!"

A strong wind springs up. The centre of the stage grows dark, but the sun is still shining on the tops of spruces on the hillside.

Very faintly at first, then more and more clearly, the yells and cries of a gang of game beaters are heard. These are followed by the snapping of branches, the baying of hounds, the trampling of horses in trot and gallop, the cracking of guns, the snarling of rattles, the crashing of trees that fall, and, above all, the constantly rising roar of the waterfall.

Finally a canon is sounded by ten hunting-horns, the first horn repeating its theme while the rest join in one by one. [See musical appendix, Melody No. 11.]

Badly frightened, KERSTI stands staring in every direction while the noise lasts. When it has died away in the distance and the woods are silent again, she brings bunches of spruce branches and spreads them on the ground, covering them at last with a brightly coloured rag carpet. Next she fetches two young spruce-trees that have been stripped of branches and bark, so that only their tops remain green. These she places beside the door of the hut, one on either side. Then she goes to the tarn and picks a number of white water-lilies, which she binds into a wreath.

MATS enters from the left, carrying a baby in a cradle of leather with straps attached to it.

KERSTI. Baby, baby darling! Is he still asleep?

MATS. Indeed he is!

KERSTI. Bring him here, and we'll let the trees rock him.

They hang the cradle between the two birches that are swayed gently by the wind.

KERSTI. [*Humming*] "Birches nod in the blowing breeze, but baby slumbers in perfect peace.".... Did you hear the hunt, Mats?

MATS. No hunt at this time of day, girl!

KERSTI. But I heard it!

MATS. Hardly!—What did your mother have to say?

KERSTI. She bothered me until I thought she would bother the life out of me.

MATS. Yes, dear, there can be no peace or happiness for us until our union has been hallowed and our baby baptised.

KERSTI. As long as the old folk resist there can be no wedding. But we must pray the Lord to bless our union before we give baby a name.

MATS. So we have agreed, and now it may as well be done.

KERSTI. Everything is ready, as you see.

MATS. It's well done, but—we're a sorry couple for all that, and a sorry wedding we're having.

KERSTI. Let the Lord look into our minds and hearts, and if they hold no evil—what matters the rest? Have you brought the Book?

MATS. I have. But are you sure, dear, that what we mean to do is not sinful?

KERSTI. Why should it be? Don't you know that the midwife can baptise in case of need?

MATS. Well, that's the midwife!

KERSTI. [*Putting the wreath on her head*] Let us begin!

MATS. In the name of the Lord! And may we never come to regret it! [*They kneel on the carpet, facing each other; MATS takes out a ring, which they hold between them while he is reading out of the prayer-book*] "I, Mats Anders Larsson, take you, Kersti Margaret Hansdaughter, to be my wedded wife, whom I will love in good days and bad, and in token thereof I give you this ring."

KERSTI. "I, Kersti Margaret Hansdaughter, take you, Mats Anders Larsson, to be my wedded husband, whom I will love in good days and bad, and in token thereof I give you this ring."

They pray in silence for a while; then they rise and take hold of each other's hands, but they do not kiss each other.

MATS. Now you are mine in the sight of God, dear, and after this we won't mind what people may say.

KERSTI. That remains to be seen.

MATS. And what have we to eat, dear.

KERSTI. Nothing at all, Mats.

MATS. Then there is nothing left but to smoke.

They seat themselves on two small, three-legged stools and we flint and steel to light their pipes.

MATS. [*When they have smoked a while in silence*] What was that you said about the hunt just now?

KERSTI. I haven't the heart to tell, Mats. I haven't the heart since I guessed what folk they were.

MATS. Better not, maybe!... Look at the cradle—going as if it could rock itself.

KERSTI. That's the wind, Mats; the wind in the birches.

MATS. But there is no wind in the spruces over there.

KERSTI. So I see. Surely the evil ones are abroad to-night.

MATS. Don't talk of them!

KERSTI. Do you see my smoke going northward?

MATS. And mine southward!

KERSTI. The gnats are dancing....

MATS. Which means a wedding....

KERSTI. Do you think we are happier now?

MATS. Hardly!

KERSTI. Do you hear the cry of the blackcock?

MATS. A sure sign of wedding....

KERSTI. But not a single church bell to be heard MATS. It's Sunday, and the ringing during the day has made them tired What shall we call the little one?

KERSTI. [*In wild rebellion*] Burden and Ill-luck and Un-asked and crown-thief....

MATS. Why crown-thief?

KERSTI. Because and because and because Even if we get a real wedding, I can wear no crown! What should he be called? Bride-spoil, Mother-woe, Forest-find!

MATS. Badly fares who badly does!

KERSTI. Yes, that's for you to say!

The MOTHER of KERSTI appears on the hillside among the spruces and stands looking at MATS and her daughter.

MATS. There are evil eyes about!

KERSTI. And evil thoughts.... What you brew I have to drink. What you grind I have to bake.

The MOTHER disappears.

MATS. Can you tell what made our families hate each other so fiercely?

KERSTI. It had to do with land—with bought favours, and ill-gotten gains, and corrupt judges, and—everything that's bad, bad, bad!

MATS. And then the hatred turned into liking, love, lust....

KERSTI. All of it poisoned....

MATS. How dark it turns when the hatred breaks through!

KERSTI. [*Throwing her wreath into the tarn*] Well may you say so! The devil take the wreath, as I can't have a crown....

MATS. Don't say that!

KERSTI. We hold wedding like beggars, and rascals, and roving folk.... What is it you cannot eat or drink, but that tastes good for all that? It's tobacco—and that's all you get for a wedding-feast! The fire under the kettle is going out, Mats. Go and fetch some wood. It's all the dancing there will be.

MATS. If tokens tell the truth, you were born to be a queen!

KERSTI. Maybe! Surely not to milk the cows!

MATS. And the baby, the baby, the dear little thing!

KERSTI. The poor dear! Oh, what will become of us? What can be in store for us? Get some wood, Mats! Mother will beat me if the milk doesn't curdle. Go, Mats!

MATS. There was a time when you served my father, KERSTI, and now it's my turn to serve you. Because he was harsh to you, I'll be good to you!

KERSTI. Yes, Mats, you are good, but I am not. If I only were!

MATS. Try to be!

KERSTI. Try to be bad, Mats, and we'll see if you can.

MATS. You don't mean it!

KERSTI. Who can tell?—Get away from here, Mats, and hurry up! Somebody is coming. I know her steps. It's mother!

MATS. Your mother?—And how about the baby?

KERSTI. [*Picks up the carpet and throws it across the cradle; then she takes her sheepskin coat that has been hanging on the outside wall of the hut and spreads it on top of the carpet*] Go, go, go!

MATS. Be careful about baby—be careful now!

[He goes out.]

KERSTI. Of course, of course!

MOTHER. [*Entering from the left*] Was it Anna that was here?

KERSTI. It was.

MOTHER. [*Looking hard at KERSTI*] And she left when I came?—What a voice she has!

KERSTI. Yes, has she not?

MOTHER. And she cut the wedding poles, too, and spread the spruce?

KERSTI. What is strange about that?

MOTHER. [*Pulling KERSTI by the hair*] Storyteller, hussy, strumpet....

KERSTI. [*Raising her hand against her MOTHER*] Take care!

MOTHER. Will you lay hand on your own mother, you trull? Is that what Mats has been teaching you? His father drove us from house and home, and now you take the son in your arms, daughter mine.... O!

KERSTI. That such things can be said.... O!

MOTHER. [*Pointing to the cradle*] What have you there?

KERSTI. Clothes to be aired.

MOTHER. Small ones, I guess.

KERSTI. Not so very.

MOTHER. And inside the cradle?

KERSTI. Small wash—not for small ones.

MOTHER. The child is there!

KERSTI. What child?

MOTHER. Yours!

KERSTI. There is no such thing!

MOTHER. Will you swear?

KERSTI. I swear! May the Neck get me if I lie!

MOTHER. You shouldn't swear by the evil one.

KERSTI. I will swear by no one else!

MOTHER. [*Seating herself*] There is talk in the village.

KERSTI. Indeed?

MOTHER. A queer sort of talk.

KERSTI. No, really?

MOTHER. They say that Mats is to have the mill.

KERSTI [*Rising*] Is it true?

MOTHER. As true as it is that rashness always gets into trouble.

KERSTI. So Mats gets the mill? Then he will marry, I guess?

MOTHER. They talk of that, too.

KERSTI. Whom do you think?

MOTHER. Whoever it be that his fancy will take—the crown she must surely be able to wear.

KERSTI. Oh!

MOTHER. Oh, indeed!—There is gold on your finger.

KERSTI. There is.

MOTHER. Are you pledged?

KERSTI. I am.

MOTHER. And the crown? [KERSTI *does not reply*] Have you lost it?

KERSTI. [*Walking back and forth restlessly*] You know, it was foretold that I should wear a crown.

MOTHER. Stuff and nonsense! A virgin's crown is more beautiful than a queen's. And happy is she who wears it with honour!

KERSTI. Oh!

MOTHER. And oh, indeed!—Little we had. Wrong we suffered. Badly we fared. Alas the day!

KERSTI. Little we had, but shall have plenty! Luck is near!

MOTHER. Race against race, hating and hated; fire and water: now it's coming to a boil.

KERSTI. Water may cool what the fire has heated. All will be well!

MOTHER. [*Rising to leave*] "The joy that was mine has been turned into woe." [*She goes toward the right*] There is a wreath floating on the water—where's the crown?

[*She goes out.*]

KERSTI. It will come, it will come!

NECK. [*Appears at the foot of the falls surrounded by a bright, white light; he wears a red cap, and a silvery tunic fastened about the waist with a green sash; he is young and fair, with blond hair that is falling down his back; he has a fiddle of gold with a bow of silver, and plays to his own singing; see musical appendix, Melody No. 12*] "I am hoping, I am hoping that my Redeemer still liveth."

KERSTI. [*Who has been lost in thought, becomes aware of the Neck; when he has repeated his song twice, she remarks sneeringly*] There is no redeemer for you, I can tell you!

The NECK pauses for a while and looks sadly at her; then he repeats the same song twice again.

KERSTI. If you'll keep quiet I'll let you play at my wedding.

The NECK nods assent and vanishes into the rock behind the falls.

MIDWIFE. [*Enters from behind the hut wearing a wide Hack cloak and a close-fitting black hood; she carries a bag under her cloak, and she is very careful never to let her back be seen*] Good evening, my dear. I hope my visit is not inconvenient.

KERSTI. You are the midwife—Mrs. Larsson—are you not?

MIDWIFE. Of course, I am. It was I that helped you, my dear....

KERSTI. Oh, yes; but you promised never to speak of it.

MIDWIFE. And we won't! How—is the little one doing?

KERSTI. [*Impatiently*] Oh, well enough!

MIDWIFE. Better not be too impatient, dear....

KERSTI. Who says I am?

MIDWIFE. The snappy voice and the tap of the little foot! But now there is gold on your finger, I see. Then I shall be asked to a wedding shortly, I think.

KERSTI. You?

MIDWIFE. I am always at the baptism, but can never get to a wedding—and I think it would be such fun!

KERSTI. No doubt it would!

MIDWIFE. Of all human virtues, there is one I value above the rest....

KERSTI. I don't suppose it is chastity.

MIDWIFE. What no one has, is beyond value. That which I put value on is gratitude.

KERSTI. You were paid, were you not?

MIDWIFE. There are services that money can't pay.

KERSTI. And people you cannot get rid of.

MIDWIFE. Exactly, my dear, and of those I am one....

KERSTI. So I find.

MIDWIFE. And there is another,

KERSTI. Who can that be?

MIDWIFE. The Sheriff!

KERSTI. [*Startled*] The Sheriff?

MIDWIFE. Yes, the Sheriff. He is a very remarkable man, and I have heard of no one who knows the law as he does, from cover to cover.... You and I could never get all that into our heads, but—there is one chapter I have to know by heart, being a midwife.... And a most remarkable chapter it is, with a most remarkable number of paragraphs.... What's the matter?

KERSTI. [*Agitated*] Tell me what you know.

MIDWIFE. Nothing at all I am nothing but a poor old woman who has come here to get lodging for the night....

KERSTI. Lodging here?

MIDWIFE. Right here.

KERSTI. Begone!

MIDWIFE. I can't be walking the woods in the dark of the night.

KERSTI. [*Threatening her with a stick*] If you won't walk, I'll make you run.

MIDWIFE. [*Moving back a couple of steps without turning about*] Have we got that far now? You had better leave the stick alone, or....

KERSTI. Or what?

MIDWIFE. The Sheriff, of course, and that chapter I spoke of....

KERSTI [*With the stick raised for a blow*] Go to the devil, you cursed witch! [*The stick breaks into small pieces.*]

MIDWIFE. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!

KERSTI. [*Picks up the flint and steel, and strikes fire*] In the name of Christ and His Passion, get thee gone!

MIDWIFE. [*Turns and runs out with the galloping movement of a wild thing; her back, which then becomes visible, looks like that of a fox and ends in a sweeping, bushy tail; she hisses rather than speaks*] We'll meet at the wedding, bid or unbid! And the Sheriff, too! Ad-zee! Ad-zee! Ad-zee!

KERSTI takes a few faltering steps in direction of the tarn, as if she meant to throw herself into the water.

Then she begins to walk up and down in front of the cradle. After a while she takes off the round Dalecarlian jacket she is wearing and puts it on top of the clothing already covering the cradle. Finally she sits down on one of the stools by the corner of the hut

and buries her face in her hands.

The grindstone begins to whirl with a hissing sound. Little bells, like those worn by goats, are heard ringing in the woods. Little white flames appear among the spruces on the hillside. Cow-bells are heard dose by. The NECK appears as before and sings the same song.

KERSTI *rises horror-stricken and stands like a statue.*

Tones like those produced by a harmonica are heard from the tarn. Unseen by KERSTI, the CHILD IN WHITE emerges from among the water-lilies and goes to the cradle. Then all sounds die out. The grindstone comes to a stop. The NECK disappears. All the will-o'-the-wisps but one go out.

Still unseen by KERSTI, the CHILD IN WHITE rocks the cradle gently, puts his ear dose to it, and draws back with an expression of great sadness. At last he bursts into tears and covers his face with one arm. During this scene the beltlike tones from the tarn continue.

The CHILD IN WHITE picks several water-lilies to pieces and strews them on the cradle, which he finally kisses before he descends into the tarn again. Then the last will-o'-the-wisp disappears and the harmonica can no longer be heard.

MIDWIFE. [*Enters again, carrying her bag so that it can be seen*] Perhaps I shall be more welcome this time. Does the fair maiden care to see the midwife now?

KERSTI. What do you bring?

MIDWIFE. [*Taking a bridal crown from her bag*] This!

KERSTI. What do you take?

MIDWIFE. [*Pointing toward the cradle*] "You see it, I see it, the whole world sees it, and yet it is not there."^[1]

KERSTI. Take it, then!

MIDWIFE. [*Goes to the cradle*] I have it. [*She takes stealthily something from the cradle and drops it into her bag, which she then hides under her cloak again*] Can I come to the wedding now?

KERSTI. Yes, come.

MIDWIFE. You must say that I'll be welcome.

KERSTI. That would be a lie.

MIDWIFE. You must practise....

KERSTI. Welcome, then—if you'll only leave me now!

MIDWIFE. [*Withdrawing backwards*]

"Four that whirl and twirl;
Eight that hurl and purl;
Four that flip-flap in a row;
Four that question where to go."^[2]

[*She disappears.*]

MATS. [*Is heard singing triumphantly outside; see musical appendix, Melody No. 13*] "Come, cosset, cosset, cosset; come, cosset, cosset!"

As KERSTI hears him a happy look comes into her face, and she seems to swell with pride and new courage. MATS enters, with an armful of wood, looking joyful.

KERSTI. [*Going to meet him*] Did you see anybody?

MATS. I did!—Now for the wedding! [*He dumps the wood into the hut*] Let the kettle boil over—I am boiling, too.

KERSTI. Was it your father?

MATS. Father and mother. And I get the mill!

KERSTI. [*Showing her crown*] Do you see what I...?

MATS. Where did you get it?

KERSTI. Mother brought it for me.

MATS. Has she been here?

KERSTI. Happy as anything!

MATS. But the baby, the baby!

KERSTI. Sit down, Mats! Sit down! You know I can always find a way!

MATS. [*Seating himself*] But the baby!

KERSTI. There now!—Listen! Now, when trouble is on the wane and life is smiling, don't you think a little patience might carry us very far....

MATS. If only the course be straight....

KERSTI. Of course, straight and short.

MATS. What are you after?

KERSTI. If the big fish is to be hooked, the small ones must be overlooked.

MATS. Can't you talk plainly?

KERSTI. Wait a little!

MATS. I am waiting.

KERSTI. The old folks make conditions.

MATS. Yes, I know.

KERSTI. They want a croton bride. What does that mean if not a bride that wears a crown?

MATS. And wears it with honour!

KERSTI. With or without! What no one sees and no one knows does not exist.

MATS. Let me think. [*He sits silent for a few moments*] All right! And furthermore?

KERSTI. To hook what's big, you must overlook what's less.

MATS. Which does not mean the little one!

KERSTI. Do you mean to prove false?

MATS. I don't! Not to you, Kersti!

KERSTI. Suppose now—the banns have been read, the wedding is under way, but the little one sleeps in the forest. Who will haste to the house, and milk the cows, and see that baby lacks nothing? Who, I ask?

MATS. Well may you ask! [*He broods a while*] If we only dared.... What was that you said?

KERSTI. Not a word.

MATS. It seems to me If we only dared....

KERSTI. What? Say it!

MATS. Say it yourself!

KERSTI. No, it's for you!

MATS. Somebody must take care of the little one.

KERSTI. Who?

MATS. There is only one.

KERSTI. Then it's easy to guess who!

MATS. Tell whom you mean.

KERSTI. No, you must tell.

MATS. Beside ourselves, there is only one who knows about the baby.

KERSTI. Who is that?

MATS. If you know, why don't you tell?

KERSTI. Because I want you to tell.

MATS. It's the midwife. Was that what you said?

KERSTI. I said nothing, but you did—and, as you know, I do what you say.

MATS. I have my doubts.

KERSTI. But what you said I have done already. The baby can't stay in the woods. It must have shelter when the nights grow cold. And if anything should happen, then comes—the Sheriff!

MATS. The Sheriff, you say? Yes, so he does!

KERSTI. [*Leaping to her feet*] Is he coming, you say?

MATS. Yes, if something should happen.... Well, where's the midwife to be found?

KERSTI. Would you like to call her?

MATS. I wish she were here!

KERSTI. And what do you want her to do?

MATS. Give the baby a home.

KERSTI. With whom?

MATS. With herself.

KERSTI. For how long?

MATS. Till the wedding is over.

KERSTI. But if he were taken sick while with her?

MATS. Better than have him freeze in the woods—better than have him freeze to death! Take a look at the cradle. I think I heard him!

KERSTI. No, he's asleep....

MATS. Hush—I heard him.

KERSTI. No, you didn't!

MATS. Yes, I did. [*He rises.*]

KERSTI. [*Placing herself in front of the cradle*] Don't you wake him! If he should cry, somebody might hear.

MATS. Oh.... Do you think any one has—that your mother may have heard him? Oh, Kersti, we should never have done what we have!

KERSTI. Undone were better!

MATS. [*Dejectedly*] We must take him to the midwife to-night. I must go to the village.

KERSTI. I'll take him!

MATS. [*Going to the cradle*] Do!

KERSTI. But don't wake him!

MATS. Can't I bid him good night?

KERSTI. Don't touch him!

MATS. Think if I should never see him again!

KERSTI. Then it would be the will of Him whose will we cannot change.

MATS. His will be done!

KERSTI. Now you have said it!

MATS. What have I said that could please you like that?

KERSTI. That—that—you submit to the will of Him that performeth all things.

MATS. [*Simply*] Yes, whatever may happen is His will, of course.

KERSTI. Of course!

MATS. Good night, then, Kersti dear, and good night, baby! [*He goes out.*]

KERSTI. Good night, Mats.

KERSTI loosens the empty cradle from its fastenings and drops it into the tarn, from the waters of which the CHILD IN WHITE rises to threaten her with raised forefinger. At the sight of him KERSTI shrinks back.

NECK. [*Appears in the same spot as before, but now bareheaded and carrying a golden harp, on which he accompanies himself; he has a threatening look as he sings; see musical appendix, Melody No. 20*]

"Stilled are the waters, dark grows the sky:
Dark grows the sky.
Once in the world of the ages I lived,
Blessed by the sun.
Gone is the light,
Conquered by night.
Deep is my sin,
Black as the tarn.
Joy there is none;
Plenty of woe.
Torture and Shame must I name my abode:
O!"

While the NECK is singing, KERSTI hides the bridal crown in the hid. Then she puts out the fire under the pot. As she does so, the smoke pours in large quantities from the chimney, forming a dark background against which appear fantastically shaped and vividly coloured snakes, dragons, birds, etc.

When KERSTI comes out of the hut again, she has on a short Dalecarlian jacket and is carrying a bag and the alpenhorn. She locks the door of the hut and walks across the stage with proud bearing and firm steps just as the NECK is singing the last line.

Curtain.

[1] Old Swedish folk-riddle, the real solution of which is: the horizon.

[2] An old Swedish folk-riddle, the answer of which is: a carriage. The four lines describe respectively: (1) the wheels; (2) the hoofs of the horses; (3) their ears; (4) their eyes.

SECOND SCENE

The living-room of the mill. Everything is covered by white dust. In the background, on the right-hand side, is an open trap-door, showing part of the water-wheel. The end of the flour chute, with a bag attached to it, is protruding from the right wall not far from the trap-door. Near it appears a lever used for starting and stopping the water-wheel.

Large gates occupy the centre of the rear wall. Heavy wooden shutters dose another opening farther to the left and half-way from the floor.

In the foreground, at the right, is a huge open fireplace, in which a coal-fire is burning. An iron pot is hanging over the fire. On the left-hand side appear a bedstead, a hand-loom, a bobbin, a red, and a spinning-wheel. There is a door in the right wall.

The following members of the family are seated in a circle in front of the fireplace: the GRANDFATHER; the GRANDMOTHER; the FATHER and MOTHER of MATS; his sisters, BRITA, who is full-grown, ANNA, who is half-grown, and LIT-KAREN, who is still a child; and his brother, LIT-MATS, who is also a mere boy. All are smoking out of small pipes with iron bowls and looking very serious. BRITA is plaiting a chain out of human hair. LIT-KAREN and LIT-MATS are playing with two dolls.

BRITA. [*To LIT-KAREN*] Where did you get the doll?

LIT-KAREN. Kersti gave it to me.

BRITA. [*Taking the doll from her*] Away with it! [*To Lit-Mats*] Where did you get your doll?

LIT-MATS. Kersti gave it to me.

BRITA. [*Taking the doll*] Out with it!

FATHER. Hush! Hush! Grandfather is thinking. [*Silence.*

MOTHER. [*To BRITA*] What are you doing?

BRITA. A watch-chain, but there is hardly hair enough.

MOTHER. Where can you get any?

BRITA. I know where it ought to be pulled.

MOTHER. Horses pull.

BRITA. Hens are picked, pigs give bristles, and maidens are combed.—Combed hair is good, but cut is better.

FATHER. Hush, hush, grandfather is thinking. [*Silence.*

ANNA. [*In a low voice to BRITA*] What is he thinking of?

BRITA. You'll hear by and by. And all will have to swallow.

ANNA. Is it about Mats? [*BRITA makes no answer*] And Kersti? Will there be a wedding?

FATHER. Hush, hush, grandfather is thinking. [*Silence.*

ANNA. [*To BRITA*] I'll give you some of my hair.

BRITA. Not the right colour.

ANNA. Who's got it? [*BRITA does not answer*] Is it Kersti you mean?

BRITA. Don't mention her. [*Silence.*

GRANDMOTHER. [*To GRANDFATHER*] Have you thought it out?

GRANDFATHER. [*Who has been sitting with the Bible and the hymn-book in his lap, lost in thought, wakes up*] I have! [*He opens the hymn-book at haphazard and says to the others*] It is No. 278, the fourth verse: "All at birth and death." Let us have it!

ALL. [*Read in unison like children at school*]

"All at birth and death are equals,
As the graveyard bones proclaim,
Poor and rich and low and mighty
In the end appear the same;
And the naked new-born baby
Brings no evidence to prove
Whether poverty or fortune
Will attend its fated groove."

GRANDFATHER. It is settled! "He that hath an ear, let him hear."—Is it settled?

GRANDMOTHER. Not yet.

FATHER. Not quite.

MOTHER. The Lord beholdeth!

BRITA. What does the Scripture, say?

ANNA. "Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?"

LIT-KAREN. What do you want me to say?

GRANDFATHER. You must give us your advice, child, although we may not take it. Out of the mouth of babes may come the truth.... Shall Kersti have Mats?

LIT-KAREN. If they want each other.

GRANDFATHER. Well spoken! [*To LIT-MATS*] And you, Lit-Mats?

LIT-MATS. [*With his fingers in his mouth*] I want my doll!

GRANDFATHER. And Mats wants his. Shall he have her?

LIT-MATS. If it is Kersti, he may, for she gave me the doll.

BRITA. Listen to him!

GRANDFATHER. Let us search the Scripture. [*He opens the Bible and reads*] Genesis, thirty-fourth chapter and eighth verse. "And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife." Is that enough?

GRANDMOTHER. Enough and to spare!

FATHER. There wasn't anything about the mill.

MOTHER. Let His will be done!

BRITA. [*Abruptly*] Amen.

ANNA. Verily, it shall be done!

LIT-KAREN. I like Kersti because she's nice.

LIT-MATS. Me, too!

FATHER. Hush, hush, grandfather is thinking. [*Silence*].

GRANDFATHER. [*To FATHER*] Ask your brother-in-law to come in.

The FATHER goes to the door in the background, where he stops.

GRANDFATHER. [*Goes to the bed, pulls a box from under it, takes a bundle of papers from the box, and turns to the FATHER again*] Let him come!

FATHER. [*Opening the door in the background*] Come in, Stig Matsson.

SHERIFF. [*Enters, dressed in uniform*] The peace of God be with you!

ALL. [*Rising*] And his blessing on you!

GRANDFATHER. It is I who have called you, Stig Matsson, and you know the reason. Kersti Margaret Hansdaughter—[*He sighs*—] is to become the wife of Mats Anders Larsson, my grandson. The two families have fought and fumed at each other for a long time—all too long! At this late hour I have come to feel that an end should be put to all strife and ill will before my eyes are closed and I am carried to my last rest. Take a look at these papers. [*He hands the bundle to the SHERIFF, who opens it and glances at some of the papers*] They are legal documents, deeds, wills, receipts, authorisations—belonging to suits that have been settled or are still unsettled. Have you looked them over?

SHERIFF. I have.

GRANDFATHER. [*Takes back the bundle*] All right! Then I shall throw them into the fire. There is a time to hate and a time to love. The time of hatred must come to an end I am longing for peace. Therefore, I beg you, my next of kin, to regard all that has happened in the past as if it had not happened at all—and I ask you: Will you forget everything, and will you meet your new relatives without grudge or guile, and greet them as friends? Answer me!

ALL. We will!

GRANDFATHER. Then I shall let the fire consume what is left of past evils. [*He throws the bundle of papers into the fire, pulls the iron lid in front of the grate, and opens three small ventilators in the lid*] Let us be seated!

All seat themselves in front of the fireplace, staring at the red glare from the three ventilators.

ANNA. [*To BRITA, in a low voice*] Do you hear it sing?

BRITA. No, it moans. And within me it's aching!

The GRANDFATHER rises. Then all the rest follow his example.

GRANDFATHER. [*To the FATHER*] Bring them in!

The FATHER goes to the door at the right and brings in MATS.

The MOTHER goes to the door in the rear and opens it. KERSTI enters, accompanied by her MOTHER, her FATHER, the SOLDIER, who is wearing the old full-dress uniform of the Swedish infantry of the line, and her GRANDFATHER, the VERGER.

GRANDFATHER. May God bless you! And be seated, please!

All seat themselves except MATS, KERSTI, and the SHERIFF. MATS has taken hold of KERSTI

by both hands. Long silence.

GRANDFATHER. When is the wedding to be?

MATS. In a fortnight, as soon as the banns have been read the third time.

GRANDFATHER. What is the hurry?

KERSTI shows evidence of being offended.

MATS. Haven't we waited long enough?

GRANDFATHER. Maybe you have!

MATS. [*To his relatives*] Have you no word to say to Kersti? [*Pause*] Not one of you?

SHERIFF. [*Goes to KERSTI and takes her by the hands with evident friendliness*] Let us welcome the new child!

Panic-stricken, KERSTI tries to tear herself loose.

SHERIFF. You are not afraid of me, are you?—Oh, no!—Look me in the face, Kersti. I have dandled you on my knees when you were a little child, and I have held your pretty head in my hands.... Yes, you have a very pretty head, and a forehead that makes me think of a bull. That's why you are having your own way now, I suppose.

[He lets go of her.

GRANDFATHER. Let us leave the young ones alone!

Alt rise, walk past MATS and KERSTI, and disappear through the door in the rear.

BRITA. [*Who is the last to leave, spits scornfully as she passes KERSTI*] Fie!

MATS. [*Spitting in the same way*] Fie yourself!

KERSTI and MATS are left alone.

MATS. I hope you will feel at home with me, Kersti!

KERSTI. With you, yes!

MATS. What have you to do with the others?

KERSTI. That's the question.

MATS. You are not marrying the family.

KERSTI. But into it.

MATS. Of course, we are not very soft or cuddlesome.

KERSTI. That's plain.... Is this the place where we are to live?

MATS. Yes, what do you think of it?

KERSTI. Everything is white....

MATS. It's the flour, you see. Do you object?

KERSTI. And damp....

MATS. It's the mill-race....

KERSTI. And cold, too....

MATS. It's the water....

KERSTI. Shall we have new furniture?

MATS. There will be nothing new. Everything is handed down from one generation to another.

KERSTI. But we can sweep, can't we?

MATS. No, we can't! The dust in a mill is like the coating in a pipe. Mustn't be touched!

KERSTI. Is that the wheel?

MATS. That's the wheel.

He pulls the lever, whereupon the rushing of the water through the race is heard, and the wheel begins to turn.

KERSTI. Ugh! Have we to listen to that noise?

MATS. It's ours! And we should be thankful as long as we hear it, because that means we have grist for the mill.

KERSTI. And the sun never gets here?

MATS. Never! How could it?

KERSTI. And nothing grows here—except that green stuff on the wheel.

MATS. But we catch eels here and lampreys.

KERSTI. Ugh! I like it better in the pasture, where the wind is blowing....

MATS. And the birches rock....

KERSTI. [*Covering her face with the apron and weeping*] Must I live in a place like this, beneath the water, at the bottom of the sea?

MATS. I was born here.

KERSTI. And here we are to die—O!

MATS. Why "O"?

KERSTI. Stop the wheel at least.

MATS. Well, if you can't get along with the wheel, then....

KERSTI. [*Opening a trap-door in the floor*] What's down here?

MATS. The river.

KERSTI. Please stop that wheel!

MATS. [*Labours with the lever, but is unable to stop the wheel*] Well! There must be mischief abroad!—It won't stop!

KERSTI. I shall die here!

MATS. I must go outside to stop it! There is mischief abroad, I tell you!

KERSTI. And at home?

MATS. Oh, dear!

KERSTI. "Meow, said the cat."[1]

MATS. What is the matter?

KERSTI. Merely that I have got what I wanted.

MATS. And it was not worth having? [*The noise made by the wheel has become, deafening, and the wheel itself has begun to turn in the opposite direction*] Christ Jesus, help! The wheel is turning backward!

[He runs out through the rear door.]

KERSTI remains alone.

The handloom starts. The bobbin, the reel, and the spinning-wheel begin to turn, each one in its own manner. The stage becomes brightly illumined as if with sunlight. Then the room turns very dark. The fireplace swings around so that the glare from the ventilators confronts KERSTI like three burning eyes. It looks as if the fireplace were chasing her. Then it drops back into its accustomed place. The roar of the water-wheel increases again. The NECK appears in the wheel with the red cap on his head, and the golden fiddle in his hand. He sings and plays as before, repeating the brief tune several times.

NECK. "I am hoping, I am hoping, that my Redeemer still liveth!"

KERSTI. [*Running out through the rear door*] Mats, Mats!

The NECK disappears, but his song is still heard for a while, as it gradually dies away in the distance.

MIDWIFE. [*Enters, opens the small trap-door in the floor, and drops her leather bag through it*] "If you come back, it's all off, and if you don't, it's all on!" Now that's done! And I shall dance at the wedding!

She takes some dance steps, but without letting her back be seen. The hand-loom begins to rap in waltz time, accompanied by the bobbin, the reel, and the spinning-wheel. Then the MIDWIFE disappears through the rear door, showing her back with the fox tail for a brief moment. The handloom, the bobbin, the reel, and the spinning-wheel keep right on as before.

KERSTI enters, and at once everything stops. A moment later the VERGER enters.

KERSTI. Is that you, grandfather?

VERGER. Yes, girl, I forgot something.

He picks up a large leather bag which he dropped on the bed at his first entrance.

KERSTI. What have you there?

VERGER. I come from the sacristy, and I am taking home the numbers to be polished.

KERSTI. What numbers?

VERGER. Those that show the hymns you are to sing, don't you know?

KERSTI. Let me see!

VERGER. [*Takes out of his bag a small black board, such as is found in every Swedish church; it has a number of nails on which are hung numbers made of brass*] Here you can see.... What's the matter, sweetheart?

KERSTI. I don't know, grandfather, but I think I should never have come here....

VERGER. What talk is that, child?

KERSTI. There is mischief astir in this house....

VERGER. Oh, mercy, no...; No, my dear....

KERSTI. Oh, oh, oh! Everything has grown so strange all of a sudden....

VERGER. But how is this going to end, Kersti?

KERSTI. Yes, tell me, tell me!

VERGER. I must go now, child. I must go back to the church and get the crown so I can send it to a goldsmith. It has to be cleaned with cream of tartar....

KERSTI. All right, grandfather....

VERGER. It is for your sake the crown is to be cleaned—for your own sake, don't you know?...

[He goes out by the rear door.

The SOLDIER enters immediately afterward.

KERSTI. Is that you, father?

SOLDIER. Yes, it's only me. I want my chaco, which I left in here.

[He picks up the chaco.

KERSTI. Oh, father, father, I am so unhappy....

SOLDIER. [*Drily*] What has happened?

KERSTI. Nothing!

SOLDIER. Why should you be unhappy, then?

KERSTI. You don't understand!

SOLDIER. [*Brusquely, as he adjusts the chin-strap of the chaco*] Come to your senses, child!

KERSTI. Don't go, father!

SOLDIER. The sorrows of love pass quickly—Come to your senses is my advice. Do come to your senses! [*He goes out.*

BRITA *enters.*

KERSTI. And what have *you* forgotten?

BRITA. I never forget anything.

KERSTI. What are you looking for?

BRITA. You!

KERSTI. How kindly!

BRITA. Yes, is it not?

KERSTI. You hateful thing!

BRITA. You hussy!

KERSTI. You—sister-in-law!

BRITA. Who knows?

KERSTI. Are you telling my fortune, you witch?

BRITA. Yes—a rope!

KERSTI. Should not be mentioned in the house of a hanged man!

BRITA. [*Goes to the bag attached to the end of the flour chute*] Now I shall tell your fortune! You get the mill, and the grist will be accordingly. [*She takes from the bag a handful of black mould out of which she forms a small mound on the floor; then she says*]

"Vagrant women
Grind for their men
Meal out of mould
As only food."^[1]

KERSTI. A witch you are, indeed!

BRITA. Yes, and one who can find buried treasures! Perhaps you will let me find a little treasure for you?

KERSTI. Take care, you witch! Have you no shame? It's mortal sin you are practising now! You should be burned by fire, for I am sure you would float if thrown in the water!

BRITA. [*Taking a pinch of mould from the bag and pouring it on KERSTI'S head*] To the dust I wed you, and a crown of dirt shall you wear, so that your shame may find you out!

KERSTI. Fie on you! Fie!

VOICE. [*Like that of a small child, repeats after her*] Fie!

KERSTI. Who was that?

VOICE. Who was that?

BRITA. Guess!—That was the Mocker!

KERSTI. Who is the Mocker?

VOICE. The Mocker!

BRITA. The Mocker is the Mocker. Don't you know the Mewler?

KERSTI. The Mewler, you say? What have I got to do with that one?

VOICE. With that one!

BRITA. The wages of sin is death!

KERSTI. [*Calling through the door*] Mats!

VOICE. Mats!

KERSTI. [*In despair*] Oh! Oh! [*She unfastens one of her red garters and ties it about her own neck*] Let me die! Let me die!

BRITA. You shall have your wish!

KERSTI. Hang me to a tree!

VOICE. To a tree!

BRITA. Not I!

MATS. [*Is heard singing outside*] "Kersti dear, is baby asleep?"

BRITA. "Far in the forest!" Fie on you! [*She goes out.*]

MATS. [*Enters, looking very happy*] "Far, far, in the forest!" [*He comes up behind KERSTI and puts his hands over her eyes*] Guess who it is!

KERSTI. Oh, you hurt me!

MATS. [*Taking hold of the garter which is still about the neck of KERSTI*] What kind of necklace is this?

KERSTI. Let go!

MATS. [*Pulling playfully at the garter*] Now I have you! Now you are my prisoner, my dove, my goat that I bought for a groat! [*He leads her about by the garter*] My little white kid! My little pet cow! [*Singing*] "Come, cosset, cosset, cosset! Come, cosset, cosset!"

KERSTI. Yes, you can be happy, Mats!

MATS. I am, and guess why?

KERSTI. Can't any longer!

MATS. Because I met the midwife, and she brought word of the little one.

KERSTI. Did she?

MATS. She did! He's sleeping, she said, so quietly, so quietly.

KERSTI. Oh!

MATS. Far in the forest!—What's that in your hair?

KERSTI. Mould.

MATS. Have you been buried?

KERSTI. Yes, already!

MATS. [*Brushing the mould out of her hair*] Ugh! Who did that?

KERSTI. Can't you tell?

MATS. Brita with the evil eye?

KERSTI. Can't you blind it?

MATS. Not I! The only one who can is Jesus Christ!

A church-bell sounds the call to even-song.

KERSTI. Fray for me!

MATS. One must do that for oneself.

KERSTI. But suppose you can't?

MATS. You can if your conscience is clear.

KERSTI. But when *is* it?

MATS. Do you hear the even-song bell?

KERSTI. No!

MATS. But I do; so you must hear it, too.

KERSTI. I don't, I don't! Alas the day!

MATS. Can you hear the rapids?

KERSTI. The roar of the rapids, the beat of the flail, the tinkle of cowbells—but of holy bells not a sound!

MATS. That's a bad sign! I remember when the bells were rung at the burial of our former sheriff—we could see them move, but not a sound was heard. A bad sign!

KERSTI. Brita put a spell on me!

MATS. It will be worst for herself.

KERSTI. Come to the pasture! I must see the sun!

MATS. I will—Kersti dear!

KERSTI. Oh!

MATS. [*Putting his arms about her and pressing her head to his breast*] Oh!

Curtain.

[1] Part of an old saw, the rest of which reads as follows: "when it was spanked for licking up the cream."

THIRD SCENE

The eve of the wedding. The house of KERSTI'S parents.

Above the door in the rear hangs a small tin plate on which are painted the SOLDIER'S regimental number and the coat-of-arms of Dalecarlia. There is a window on either side of the door, both filled with potted plants. The floor is of pine boards, full of knot-holes and nail-heads, but scrubbed immaculately dean.

Half-way down the left wall is an open fireplace with a hood. On the same side, nearer the footlights, stands a wooden seat covered with brightly coloured home-made draperies.

Against the opposite wall stands a chest of drawers surmounted by a mirror, over which a white veil has been draped. A pair of candlesticks and a few simple ornaments are arranged in front of the mirror. A table and a wooden seat are placed between the chest and the footlights. On the wall above this seat hangs the SOLDIER'S old-fashioned musket, with stock of birch wood, stained yellow, red leather sling, and percussion-lock. His chaco, cartridge-case, and white bandoleer with bayonet are grouped around the musket. Below appears a portrait of King Charles XV of Sweden in full uniform.

A landscape with stacks of sheaves in the fields can be seen through the windows and the open door in the rear.

When the curtain rises, a maid servant is at work by the fireplace scouring and polishing copper pans, iron pots, and coffee-kettles.

The VERGER is seated at the table on the right-hand side engaged in polishing the brass numbers of the hymn-board, which is lying on the table beside him. There lies also the collection-bag of red velvet with embroideries in silver and a small bell attached to the bottom of it for the rousing of sleeping worshippers.

The SOLDIER, in undress uniform and forage-cap, is seated at the same table, looking over some papers on which he is making notes with a pencil, the point of which he wets from time to time.

LIT-KAREN and LIT-MATS stand beside the table, with their chins resting on the edge of it, watching the VERGER. Their eyes are agog, and their fingers in their mouths. The VERGER smiles at them and strokes their hair from time to time. The MOTHER is standing by the fireplace drying a couple of towels. As the curtain rises, the merry singing of girls is heard from the outside, but the atmosphere in the room is oppressive, and everybody is trying to lose himself in what he has at hand, forgetful of the rest.

GIRLS. [*Singing outside; see musical appendix, Melody No. 14*]

"When I was a little lassie, herding on the hill,
One day I lost the bell-cow and Gossamer, too.
I stood upon a rock and called and cried with a will,
Till I heard Gossamer begin to moo
In a pasture far, far away.

'Hush,' said Pine-tree,
'She will surely find thee,'
Hemlock told me not to stumble;
Willow asked me not to grumble;
Birch-tree said I could not hope to miss a spanking."

SOLDIER. [*Looks up from his work and remarks phlegmatically to the MOTHER*] Say, Mother!

MOTHER. We-ell?

SOLDIER. Was it three quarters we got off the place last year?

MOTHER. Yes, that's right.

VERGER. Haven't the girls come out of the bath yet?

MOTHER. No.... This business of the wedding takes a lot of people.... We should be bringing in the oats.... And it will soon be time to pick berries....

VERGER. Yes, the dog-days are most over. You can see it on the flies; they're kind of drowsy.... Will there be a lot of berries this year?

MOTHER. Yes. [*Silence.*]

SOLDIER. Will those girls never come back?

MOTHER. I don't know what can be keeping them so long.

SOLDIER. It's hot.

VERGER. It must be bad in camp.

SOLDIER. Well, it isn't so very hard on the infantry....

VERGER. You were lucky to get leave.

SOLDIER. I guess I was!

MOTHER. Now they are coming.

SOLDIER. Did you see that they had something to eat and drink?

MOTHER. Yes, right in the bath, and plenty of it. [*Silence.*]

The girls are heard outside, talking and laughing. KERSTI enters first, white-faced, with her wet hair streaming down her back. She is followed by BRITA, ANNA, and the four bridesmaids, ELSA, RICKA, GRETA, and LISA. The maids are carrying jars and wine-glasses which they put down by the fireplace. KERSTI, BRITA, and ANNA carry long bath-towels with coloured borders, which they hang up by the door.

The MOTHER puts a chair in the middle of the floor and makes KERSTI sit on it. KERSTI'S hair having first been carefully dried with towels, the MOTHER begins to comb it. The maids duster on the bench at the left. BRITA seats herself so that she can stare at KERSTI. No greetings are exchanged, and no emotion of any kind is shown.

MOTHER. Give me the mirror.

KERSTI. Don't! I don't want any mirror.

BRITA. You ought to look at yourself, as you won't let anybody else see you.

KERSTI. What do you mean?

BRITA. Hard to tell, isn't it?—Nice hair you've got. Can I have it, if it should come off?

KERSTI. No, you can't!

MOTHER. What would you do with it?

BRITA. Watch-chain for Mats.

MOTHER. [*To her daughter*] Won't you let Mats have it?

KERSTI. No, I won't!

BRITA. [*Taking from her skirt-bag the same piece of work on which she was employed in the previous scene*] I'll never be able to match the colour.

KERSTI. You can have it when I am dead.

BRITA. That's a promise, but will you keep it?

KERSTI. I will! [*Silence.*]

SOLDIER. Say, Mother.... Please keep quiet a while, children.... Do you know if the sergeant has been asked?

MOTHER. Vesterlund? Of course!

SOLDIER. It's to be at four o'clock in the church, isn't it?

MOTHER. That's right.

SOLDIER. [*Putting his papers together*] Then I'll go and see the Pastor now.... And I'll go right on to the sexton.... [*To himself*] Hm-hm! That was that! Hm-hm!

[He goes out pensively without greeting anybody. Silence.]

VERGER. Now, my dears, I hope you won't touch anything.

LIT-KAREN. I'll look after Lit-Mats and see that he doesn't.

VERGER. So you're going to look after him, are you?

MOTHER. Where are you going, father?

VERGER. To the store to get the crown, which should be back from the city by this time.

BRITA. [*Sneeringly*] Oh—the crown!

VERGER. [*Rising*] The goldsmith has had it, you know—to clean it with cream of tartar. That's what you do with silver: you boil it in cream of tartar.

BRITA. [*As before*] Ha-ha!

MOTHER. [*To the Verger*] Wait a moment, and I'll go along to the store.

VERGER. Is it safe to leave the children alone?

BRITA. What do you fear might happen?

MOTHER. Why, they are grown-up people!

BRITA. And Kersti likes to be alone for that matter. She can't stand having anybody look at her....

MOTHER. Now, now!

BRITA. When she is bathing, she doesn't want any company at all. But, of course, she's grown-up, so she doesn't have to be afraid....

KERSTI is turning and twisting to escape the stare of BRITA.

MOTHER. Keep still, girl!

BRITA. No, she's no longer any child. She's outgrown that, and a lot more. Perhaps the crown won't fit her even? Have you tried it on?

VERGER. [*Quietly*] That's what we are going to do in a little while.

He goes out accompanied by the MOTHER. Silence.

KERSTI seats herself at the table on the right-hand side and begins to play with the brass numbers.

BRITA. [*Pursuing KERSTI with her stare*] A merry wedding eve, isn't it?

KERSTI. Do you want to play games?

BRITA. We might play "papa and mamma and the children."

KERSTI. Would you like to guess riddles?

BRITA. I have already guessed....

KERSTI. Or sing?

BRITA. "Hush-a-bye, baby," I suppose you mean?... No, let us read the Bible.

KERSTI. The Bible, you say?

BRITA. Yes—Genesis, thirty-fourth and eight.

KERSTI. About Shechem, you mean?

BRITA. Exactly, and about Dinah, for whom his heart was longing.... Do you know who Dinah was?

KERSTI. She was the daughter of Jacob and Leah.

BRITA. That's right. And do you know what she was?

KERSTI. Is that a riddle?

BRITA. Not at all. Do you know what she was?

KERSTI. No.

BRITA. She was a little—spoiled!

KERSTI. Is that a play on words?

BRITA. More than that!

KERSTI lets her head fall forward as if wishing to hide her face.

BRITA. Do you understand? [*Pause*] Is Mrs. Larsson the only one you have asked?

KERSTI. Have I asked?... The midwife, you say?

BRITA. Well, so she says.

KERSTI. Then she is lying!

BRITA. As midwife she has been sworn, although I couldn't tell whether her oath be false or fair. Just now she swears that she doesn't lie.

KERSTI *lets her head droop again.*

BRITA. Hold up your head! Can't you look people in the face?

KERSTI. [*To the other girls*] Say something, girls! [*Silence.*]

BRITA. It's hard to say anything when one has seen nothing. But nevertheless—one knows what one knows!

SHERIFF. [*Appearing in the doorway*] I am making free. It won't matter if an old fellow like me gets in to the girls—although the boys have to keep out!

BRITA. [*Shaking her fist in the face of KERSTI*] But you'll never wear the crown!

KERSTI. You don't say!

BRITA *goes out.*

The SHERIFF pulls up a chair and sits down beside KERSTI.

The girls sneak out of the room one by one. LIT-MATS stays behind, clinging to the skirt of KERSTI.

It is plain that the intentions of the SHERIFF are kindly, and so are his words, but the more discreet he tries to be, the more awkward he becomes, and so all his words assume an ambiguous meaning.

SHERIFF. [*Taking one of KERSTI'S hands and looking her straight in the eyes*] What sort of a bride is this, looking so sad when she is getting her heart's desire? What is the matter?

KERSTI. With what?

SHERIFF. Is that the way to answer an old friend who will be a kinsman by this hour to-morrow? There is more than one lass who envies you, and who would like to get to the altar ahead of you to-morrow.

KERSTI. Maybe there is.

SHERIFF. And there is the new life ahead of you, in mill and kitchen. No more running about in the woods, where "birches nod in the blowing breeze." No more dancing in the barns on Saturday nights. You'll be busy 'tending your pots, and watching the cradle, and having the meals on the table when Mats comes home, and—keeping an even temper when the dark days arrive—for after sunshine there is sure to be a little rain. Does it scare you to find life so serious, dear? It isn't as bad as it looks. It merely helps to make life kind of solemn.

KERSTI. Oh!

SHERIFF. What are you oh-ing about, girl?—There seems to be something in the air that has no place in the thoughts of a young girl—something amiss. Now, my dear, let me see if I can't straighten it out. [*Jestingly*] The guardian of the law knows how to get the truth out of all sorts of people. What's on your mind, dear? Has Mats been nasty to you?

KERSTI. Oh, mercy!

SHERIFF. Has the family been playing the high-and-mighty? What have you to do with the family anyhow?

LIT-MATS climbs into the lap of KERSTI, puts his arms about her, nestles up to her as close as he can get, and falls asleep.

SHERIFF. Look at that little chap now! He likes his sister-in-law, and that's a good sign. Children always know their real friends. Are you fond of children, Kersti?

KERSTI. [*Suspiciously*] Why do you ask?

SHERIFF. That's not the right kind of an answer!... Don't you think it's nice to have a little thing like that—to hold it on your lap and feel how it trusts you—just as if there could never be any harm or deceit in the bosom that shelters it.... I think he's falling asleep. Helpless as he is, he's not afraid of trusting his sleep to a stranger—who means nothing but well by him, I am sure.

KERSTI. Have you seen anything of Mats?

SHERIFF. He was busy with the boys making the mill ready for the dance to-morrow. [*Silence*] It's some time since we saw a crown bride in this place.

KERSTI. Is that so?

SHERIFF. Yes, indeed. The old ways are gone, and new ones have come in—from the cities and the camps....

KERSTI. [*Pertly*] They used to blame the fellows who came to buy the timber.

SHERIFF. Yes, but if it hadn't been for them, there would have been no mill....

KERSTI. They are always putting the blame on somebody else....

SHERIFF. You are getting a nice husband, Kersti....

KERSTI. Yes, he's fine—too fine for me!

SHERIFF. That's a bitter answer to a kind word!

KERSTI. There was nothing bitter about it—nothing but the truth....

SHERIFF. Why should it be so hard for us to understand each other? It looks almost as if you didn't want us to be friends?

KERSTI. Why do you think so?

SHERIFF. What is well meant, you take badly, and the other way around. Well—that happens frequently when there is something amiss.

KERSTI. What's amiss?

SHERIFF. I don't know.

KERSTI. Neither do I, but it isn't customary to say things like that to a young girl.

SHERIFF. Now, now!—Where there's no sick conscience, you don't have to walk in your stocking feet—but, but, but....

KERSTI. Has the examination begun already?

SHERIFF. I didn't mean....

KERSTI. The—"guardian of the law" doesn't know how to talk to ladies.

SHERIFF. [*Sharply*] Kersti!

KERSTI. What is it?

SHERIFF. [*Looking hard at her*] What do you mean? KERSTI. What do you mean yourself?

SHERIFF. Lo and behold! That's just the kind of questions asked by *my* ladies when they want to find out whether I know anything.

KERSTI. What could there be to know?

SHERIFF. Whew—is the wind in that corner? Well, well! [*Silence*] Well—I guess I'll be going! Yes, I had better be going!

He goes out by the rear door, stepping very softly and putting his forefinger across his lips as if meaning to enforce silence on himself.

KERSTI, *left alone, kisses the head of the sleeping LIT-MATS.*

MATS *appears at the right-hand window.*

The twilight has come, but it is the lingering, luminous twilight of the northern summer night.

MATS. Hey!

KERSTI. Mats! Oh, come here!

MATS. I mustn't come in—I have promised.

KERSTI. Yes, do!

MATS. No, no!—Is the little one asleep?

KERSTI. This one—yes!—Hush! Hush!

A bugle-call is faintly heard in the distance. It is the summons to evening service in the camp of the regiment to which KERSTI'S father belongs. (See the musical appendix, Melody No. 15.)

KERSTI. [*Scared*] Are they hunting again?

MATS. No, who would be hunting at this time of day?

KERSTI. What is it?

MATS. A soldier's daughter you are, and don't know!

KERSTI. Tell me!

MATS. That's at the camp, you know. They are calling them to evening prayers.

KERSTI. Of course—but everything seems strange and confused!

MATS. Come to the window, Kersti.

KERSTI. I think.... I'll just put the little one away.

MATS. The little one, you say?

KERSTI. [*Rises very carefully and carries LIT-MATS to the bench by the fireplace, where she pulls him down and covers him up*] Hushaby, hushaby!

The singing of a hymn in unison is heard from the camp. KERSTI kneels beside the bench and tries to pray, but merely wrings her hands in despair. At last she kisses the shoes of the sleeping child, struggles to her feet, and goes to window.

MATS. There is something nice about children, isn't there?

KERSTI. Yes—yes!

MATS. Are you alone?

KERSTI. Yes, they left! Hating me—all of them!

MATS. To-morrow is our wedding-day!

KERSTI. Yes—think of it!

MATS. Yes, think of it—to-morrow is our wedding-day!

KERSTI. And I shall be living in the mill!

MATS. In the mill with me!

KERSTI. Till death us do part!

MATS. Which won't be soon!

KERSTI. Oh!

Curtain.

FOURTH SCENE

The wedding. The living-room at the mill has been cleared for the occasion. The big doors in the rear stand wide open. Through the doorway is seen a large loft, where a number of tables have been spread for the impending feast, of which coffee is to form one of the principal features. The shutters covering the rectangular opening to the left of the main doorway are also open, disclosing a table with several candlesticks on it. On this table the fiddlers subsequently take up their position.

The opening to the water-wheel appears to the right of the main door. The hand-loom, the bobbin, the reel, and the spinning-wheel have disappeared.

On the floor, beneath the place reserved for the fiddlers, stands the "old men's table," with a full equipment of jugs, mugs, pipes, and playing-cards.

A number of chairs and benches occupy the middle of the floor, and on these are spread clean white sheets, pillow-cases, and towels for drying.

As the curtain rises, six servant-girls are busily grinding coffee on as many hand-mills, while from the outside are heard the ringing of church-bells and a bridal march played on violins. When the coffee is ground, the girls begin to gather up the linen and sing while they are doing so.

GIRLS. [*Singing; see musical appendix, Melody No. 16*]

"Dillery-deering!
Twelve in the clearing:
Twelve men glare at me,
Twelve swords flare at me.
Kine they are slaughtering;
Sheep they are quartering;
Naught but my life they're leaving:
Dillery-deering!"

The bridal procession is drawing near. The girls put the benches and chairs where they belong and go out with their burdens of linen.

The stage is left empty for a few moments, all the sounds previously heard having died out.

Then the song of the NECK is heard from the water-wheel, while he himself remains unseen.

NECK. [*Singing outside*] "I am hoping, I am hoping, that my Redeemer still liveth."

The trap-door in the floor is raised and the MEWLER ascends from the hole: a blurred mass of white veils beneath which the outlines of a small infant in long clothes are barely discernible. This apparition remains hovering above the opening in the floor.

Then the bridal march is again heard outside. The song of the NECK ceases, and the MEWLER disappears, the trap-door falling back into its wonted position.

The bridal procession enters the room. First come the fiddlers, then the bridesmaids and bridesmen. After these come the bride and the groom, and then follow the PASTOR, the parents of the couple, the members of both families, friends, and young people. Everybody seems depressed, and the entrance is made in gloomy silence.

The bride is led to a chair in the middle of the floor, placed so that she must face the trap-door in the floor. She is very pale and does not look up at all. The guests pass in front of her as in review. Now and then one stops and says a few words to her. Little by little they disappear into the loft in the rear.

MATS. [*To KERSTI*] Now the worst is over, Kersti.

[*He goes out.*]

BRITA. [*Heading the bridesmaids, to KERSTI*] You have got the crown—see that you keep it! [*She and the maids go out.*]

KERSTI'S MOTHER. [*Making sure that the crown is on straight*] Keep your back straight and your head high, girl!

[*She goes out.*]

SOLDIER. [*To KERSTI*] God bless you! [*Goes out.*]

VERGER. [*To KERSTI*] And protect you! [*Goes out.*]

MATS'S GRANDFATHER. [*To KERSTI*] Comely you are as I am homely! [*Goes out.*]

MATS'S MOTHER. [*To KERSTI*] Your new family bids you welcome! [*She goes out.*]

MATS 'S FATHER. [*To KERSTI*] My daughter now—the old ties have been loosed! [*He goes out.*]

SHERUT. [*To KERSTI*] Why so pale? What draws all the blood to your heart? What is weighing on it?

KERSTI. [*Raising her head at last to give the SHERIFF a furious look*] Nothing!

SHERIFF. So little is a lot!

KERSTI. Go!

SHERIFF. When you ride, I'll go ahead of you—but we won't be headed for the same place. When you kneel, I shall be standing, but the cold steel you'll taste won't be in my hands.

KERSTI. Oh, I wish you'd break your neck!

SHERIFF. [*Putting the palm of his hand on her neck*] Take care of your own! [*He goes out.*]

The rest of MATS'S relatives file past her, greeting her coldly.

The fiddlers have in the meantime taken their places, and several old men have sat down at the table reserved for them and begun to smoke. Now the fiddlers strike up an old Swedish polka. (See the musical appendix, Melody No. 17.)

At the same time the NECK begins to play the melody heard in the first scene, but so powerfully that it sounds like two violins. (See musical appendix, Melody No. 18.)

As soon as the dance music is heard, cries of "Off with the crown!" are raised, first in the loft, and then in the living-room.

KERSTI becomes alarmed.

The PASTOR goes up to her.

FIDDLERS. [*Crying, as they become aware of the playing of the NECK*] Who is cutting in?

ALL. [*Repeat without looking at the water-wheel or knowing from whence the strange music is heard*] Who is cutting in?

Then the NECK ceases playing, while the fiddlers continue. The PASTOR takes the bride by the hand and begins to lead her around the room in a stately and solemn manner. Just as he puts his arm about KERSTI'S waist in order to open the dance with her the NECK begins to play again.

KERSTI. [*Dropping the crown, which rolls into the mill-race*] Jesus Christ!

All the people in the living-room get on their feet and cry: "The crown's in the mill-race!"

Those in the rear room shout back: "What's up?"

Those in the living-room repeat: "The crown's in the mill-race!"

The fiddlers suddenly stop their playing. The whole place is in wild commotion.

MATS. [*Appearing in the doorway*] We must look for it!

ALL. We must look for it!

PASTOR. God help us and protect us!

ALL. God help us and protect us!

SHERIFF. Let us look for it!

ALL. Let us look for it!

MATS. Yes, let's look!

All disappear by the rear door, leaving KERSTI alone on the stage. She seats herself on the same chair as before. In the meantime the stage has gradually been darkened.

The water-wheel begins to turn.

NECK. [*Appears in the wheel with his harp, and sings*]

"Stilled are the waters, dark grows the sky:
Dark grows the sky.
Once in the world of the ages I lived,
Blessed by the sun.
Gone is the light,
Conquered by night.
Deep is my sin,
Black as the tarn.
Joy there is none;
Plenty of woe.
Torture and Shame must I name my abode:
O!"

When the NECK begins to sing, the trap-door flies open right at the feet of KERSTI, and the MEWLER appears as before.

At first KERSTI stares at the apparition with horror. Then she seizes it and presses it to her breast.

The NECK stops his song and disappears. Instead the voice of a child (the MOCKER) is heard from the opening in the floor.

MOCKER. Cold is the river; warm is my mother's bosom. Nothing you gave me in life: in death I take what is mine!

KERSTI. [*Who has been rocking the MEWLER on her arm, puts a hand to her breast as if feeling acute pain*] Oh, help! Save me!

MIDWIFE. [*Trips in fustily*] Here I am! Here I am! Mustn't take on like that! [*She takes the MEWLER from KERSTI and drops it through the hole in the floor*] I know how to handle little ones! I help them into the world and out of it.... And I got to the wedding after all!

BRITA has in the meantime appeared where the fiddlers were seated before, and she has seen the MIDWIFE hide something under the floor.

MIDWIFE. The Neck was also asked, I understand. Did he come?

KERSTI. What will you take to get out of here?

MIDWIFE. What you have lost!

KERSTI. You mean the crown?

MIDWIFE. Not exactly.... Hush! I think I heard somebody!... Then I'll hide in the fireplace for a while.... I got here after all, as you see!

She steps into the fireplace and closes the iron shutters behind her.

BRITA. [*Enters and goes up to KERSTI*] Now it's you or me!

KERSTI. You, then!

BRITA. A present is waiting for you.

KERSTI. Let's see!

BRITA. Bracelets—but not from me! [*Silence*] Bracelets of steel! [*She places herself on the trap-door*] Now my foot is on your head and on your heart! Now I shall stamp your secret out of the earth, or the water, or the fire—wherever it may be! [*Silence*] Now I shall have your hair for my watch-chain, which is not what it seems. Where is the Midwife? Where is the guest of honour at this virginal wedding? You stole the crown, and the Neck stole it from you. You have stolen the mill, but it will be returned. Shechem's Dinah has proved not only spoiled, but soiled! The little one is asleep, not in the forest, but in the river! You have put my brother to shame, and our whole family, and the name that we bear! And now you shall die!

KERSTI. [*Submissively*] I am dead! I have been dying for days.... Are you satisfied now?

BRITA. No, you shall go on dying for days to come! You shall die for perjury, falsehood, murder, theft, slander, deceit! You shall die six times over! And when you really die the seventh time, it will seem so only! You shall not rest in consecrated ground! You shall have no black coffin with stars of silver on it! You shall have no spruce strewn and no bells rung....

KERSTI. I suppose not!

BRITA. Therefore [*Heavy steps are heard outside*] Do you hear those steps? Count them! [*She counts in time with the approaching steps of the SHERIFF*] One, two, three, four, five, six....

The SHERIFF enters from the rear. BRITA goes to him and whispers something in his ear.

SHERIFF. It's here, you say?

BRITA. Not the crown, I guess!

SHERIFF. Something else, then! [*He raises the trap-door and looks down*] No, it is not the crown! Poor Kersti! Did you put it there?

KERSTI. I did not!

SHERIFF. No?—Tell the truth!

KERSTI. I did not put it there!

BRITA. [*Striking her on the mouth*] The truth!

KERSTI. I did not put it there!

BRITA. [*Putting her hand in the Sheriff's pocket and taking out a pair of handcuffs*] On with the bracelets!

SHERIFF. [*To BRITA*] Born executioner—that's what *you* are! [*He puts his hands to his face and weeps*] God have mercy on us!

PASTOR. [*Entering from the rear*] Has it been found?

SHERIFF. Not that, but....

PASTOR. Say no more! I know.... [*Putting his hands to his face and weeping*] God have mercy on us!

SOLDIER. [*Entering from the rear*] Have you found the crown?

SHERIFF. Not that, but....

SOLDIER. Enough! I know....

[Begins to weep, with his hands to his face.

KERSTI'S MOTHER. [*Entering from the rear*] Have you found the crown?

SHERIFF. No, no!

MOTHER. Oh!

She looks hard at KERSTI, who is holding out her hands to meet the handcuffs, which BRITA puts on her.

MOTHER. [*Screaming*] Oh!

Snatching up a pair of shears, she cuts off KERSTI'S hair and throws it to BRITA, who catches it and sniffs at it as if enjoying its odour. The MOTHER then strips her daughter of the veil and other bridal ornaments. At last she throws a shawl over her head.

MATS. [*Entering from the rear, stops in front of KERSTI and looks at her in surprise*] Who is that?

BRITA. Look well!

MATS. [*Looking more closely at KERSTI*] She reminds me of somebody!

BRITA. Look well!

MATS. I don't know her.

BRITA. Grant God you never had!

MATS. The eyes are different.... But the mouth—that sweet mouth—and the little chin.... No, it is not she! [*He turns away from KERSTI and catches sight of the open trap-door*] What's that? You are standing here as if it were a grave....

BRITA. It is a grave!

MATS. Of what?

BRITA. Of everything—everything that made your life worth while!

MATS. That means the little one!—Who did it?

BRITA. [*Pointing to KERSTI*] She, and she, and she!

MATS. It is not true!

All who were in the room at the beginning and who left to look for the crown, have gradually returned, and are now crowded together in the background, no one saying a word or making the least noise.

BRITA. It is true!

MATS. You liar!

SOLDIER. [*To BRITA*] You liar born of liars!

MATS'S RELATIVES. [*Gathering on the left side of KERSTI*] You liar born of thieves and liars! That's you!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES [*Gathering on her right side*] No, that's you!

PASTOR. Peace! Peace! In the name of the Lord!

ALL. Peace.

SHERIFF. No one must be condemned untried!

ALL. Let us hear!

SHERIFF. Who brings the charge?

ALL. Who brings the charge?

BRITA. I, Brita Lisa Larsson.

ALL. Brita Lisa Larsson brings the charge. Against whom?

BRITA. Against Kersti Margaret Hansdaughter.

ALL. Against Kersti Margaret Hansdaughter!—What is the charge?

BRITA. If bride be spoiled, the crown is forfeit!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. And your evidence?

BRITA. Two witnesses make valid evidence.

MATS'S RELATIVES. Two witnesses make valid evidence!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. We challenge them!

SHERIFF. No challenging without good cause!

BRITA. "If unmarried woman puts away child that comes to its death, the life of the mother shall be forfeit!"

MATS'S RELATIVES. Her life is forfeit!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. [*Drawing closer with menacing gestures*] "Empty-headed men and meanly tempered never know that they are far from faultless."^[1]—The fault is Mats's!

MATS'S RELATIVES. The fault is not Mats's!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. The fault is his who did the deed!

MATS'S RELATIVES. [*With raised fists*] What deed? You had better ask Kersti!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. Ask her!

SHERIFF. [*To KERSTI*] Did you kill the child?

KERSTI. I did!

MATS'S RELATIVES. There you hear!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. God have mercy!

MATS'S RELATIVES. Now you can hear!

MATS has been standing at the fireplace lost in thought, with his back to the rest. Suddenly he tears off everything that indicates his character of bridegroom. After a brief moment of hesitation, he leaps like mad on the table in the rear and disappears through the opening where the fiddlers were seated before.

PASTOR. [*Who has been weeping silently, with his hands covering his face, goes to the open trap-door and says*]

"To the dead
Give peace, O Lord,
And console
The living!"^[2]

All bend their heads, shade their faces with one hand, and pray in silence, as the custom is when the Lord's Prayer is read in a Swedish church or at a grave.

PASTOR. May the Lord bless you and protect you!

ALL. [*With their faces buried in their hands*] Amen!

Everybody leaves silently and sadly. When KERSTI alone remains, the SHERIFF locks the doors in the rear. Then he fastens the shutters covering the opening where the fiddlers were seated.

From the fireplace is heard a loud noise as of thunder.

NECK. [*Appears in the water-wheel with his fiddle and plays and sings as before*] "I am hoping, I am hoping that thy Redeemer still liveth."

This he repeats several times, while KERSTI is kneeling on the floor with her handcuffed arms raised toward heaven.

The CHILD IN WHITE enters from behind the fireplace with a basket full of spruce branches and flowers.

The NECK stops singing and disappears.

The CHILD IN WHITE strews the spruce branches on the floor so that a green path is formed to the edge of the trap-door. When he has reached this, he drops flowers into the hole, from which the bell-like notes of the harmonica are heard.

Unseen by KERSTI, he goes up to her, places his hands on her head and stands still with upturned face as if in prayer.

The face of KERSTI, which until then has shown deep despair, assumes an expression of quiet happiness.

Curtain.

[1] From the Poetic Edda: "The Song of the High One." See introduction.

[2] From the Poetic Edda: "The Song of the Sun." See introduction.

FIFTH SCENE

The porch of a country church appears at the right in the foreground. It is brilliantly white, with a roof of black shingle. Near the entrance is a sort of pillory, at the foot of which KERSTI lies in penitential garb, with the hood pulled forward to cover her face.

A big lake, surrounded by a typical Dalecarlian landscape, forms the background. At the foot of the open place before the church is a boat-landing. A point of land projects into the lake at the right, and there stands the scaffold, consisting of a simple wooden platform with a block on it. Two soldiers, fully armed, stand "at ease" by the entrance to the porch, from within which an organ prelude is heard when the curtain rises.

Two large "church-boats" (of the kind used on Lake Siljan in Dalecarlia) gliding slowly forward from opposite directions, arrive at the landing simultaneously. The rowers have raised their oars and appear to be disputing about the right of landing.

MATS'S RELATIVES *are in the boat at the left; KERSTI'S RELATIVES in the boat at the right.*

MATS'S RELATIVES. Look out, Mewlings!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. Look out, millers!

MATS'S RELATIVES. [*Raising their oars in menace*] Look out!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. [*In the same way*] Look out!

MATS'S RELATIVES. Can you match us with eight pairs?

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. With sixteen, if needs be! Come on!

MATS'S RELATIVES. At 'em! At 'em!

They begin to fight with the oars.

PASTOR. [*Standing bareheaded in prow of the boat at the left*] Peace! Peace in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

KERSTI'S RELATIVES. Peace!

MATS'S RELATIVES. War! War on life and death!

PASTOR. Peace!

MATS'S RELATIVES. War!

The VERGER comes running from the porch, seizes the bell-rope and begins to toll the bell.

At the first stroke, all oars are lowered, the boats are brought to the landing and tied up side by side. The PASTOR is the first one to leave the boat at the left. He is followed by MATS, who carries a small white coffin trimmed with lace. Then the relatives and friends of MATS gradually step on shore.

The SOLDIER leaves the other boat ahead of all the rest and is followed by his wife. Then come the relatives and friends of KERSTI.

The people on both sides adjust their clothing while throwing angry glances at their opponents.

At last MATS with the coffin leads the way up to the church, followed by the PASTOR.

MATS. [*Whose face shows intense despair, stops in front of KERSTI*] Here is the little one now. He's so light—as light as the mind of a bad woman. He's asleep—and soon you will be sleeping, too.

KERSTI. [*Raising her head so that the hood falls back*] O!

Mats. "O," indeed! It's the end, while A is the beginning. Between those two lie many letters, but the last one of all is O. Cry "O" again—the last time of all—so that the little one may hear it. He will tell the Lord and the Saviour, and ask them to forgive you! No? Well, kiss his white coffin then—kiss it where his small feet are resting—the small, small feet that never had a chance to tread this sinful earth! [*KERSTI kisses the coffin*] That's right! Now we'll take him into the church and play and sing and toll the bells over him—but no clergyman can read him into his grave—because of you! I will speak the words myself when we get to the grave. We'll plant him in the

sod like a seed in order that he may sprout and grow into a winged blossom. Some day, perhaps, he will spread his wings and fly to heaven—lifted by the wind when the midsummer sun is shining!

PASTOR. [*Taking MATS by the arm and drawing him toward the church*] That's enough, Mats! Come now!

MATS. I am coming.

They disappear into the porch, followed gradually by the rest.

SOLDIER. [*Stops in front of KERSTI, shakes his head sadly and tries to find words*] Well.... Well....

[He goes into the church.

KERSTI'S MOTHER. [*Speaking drily, with a vain attempt to show emotion*] Yes, here we are now!—Was it bad in the Castle?

KERSTI *shakes her head.*

MOTHER. Is there anything you want? To eat or drink—you can have it now, you know.... Did they give you any tobacco while you were in the Castle?

KERSTI *shakes her head.*

MOTHER. Keep your head high, Kersti, and don't let the mill-folk put us to shame. Don't weep so much either. Your father is a man of war, you know, and he can't stand that kind of thing. [*Handing her daughter a hymn-book*] Take this book—and read where I have put the mark. And look at the mark—I got it from some one—some one who is thinking of you in your moment of need. And it is a sure cure against the shakes Farther than this I won't keep you company, Kersti.... I can't—I really can't, being as old as I am....

KERSTI. Do what you feel like, mother. I have found my comforter! I know that my Redeemer still liveth!

MOTHER. It's all right, then, child. That's all I wanted to know.... And you don't want me to go with you?

KERSTI. No, mother, you must spare yourself.... You have had enough trouble on my account as it is.

MOTHER. Then I'll take your word for it, so that the mill-folk won't have anything to talk about. I take your word for it, so that I can tell them: "Kersti didn't want it—it was her own will, and of course her last will was as good as law to me!" And that's just what it is!

[She goes into the church.

BRITA. [*Stops in front of KERSTI and points toward the scaffold*] A queen you were, and a crown you wore: there's your throne now, with heaven above and hell beneath!—Now you would be glad enough to be milking cows! Now you wouldn't mind picking wood, and scouring pots, and cleaning shoes, and rocking the cradle—now, when you have brought shame on my family and your own, on our parish and our province, so that the whole country is talking of it! Fie on you!

KERSTI *bends lower and lower over the hymn-book.*

BRITA. My brother must carry your brat to the grave—*my* brother! But I shall keep you company to the block when you get spanked! I shall be your bridesmaid when you're wedded to the axe! "There's a corpse that isn't dead, and a babe that wasn't bred, and a bride without a wedding!"

LIT-MATS. Hush up, Brita! Kersti is nice!

BRITA. Indeed!

LIT-MATS. Yes, she is! But I don't like her to have on that ugly cloak.... That would be right for you, Brita! Oh, Kersti, why are you lying here? Are you waiting for Communion? And why did you run away from the wedding? Who is lying in the white box? Is all this a fairy-tale? Do you know that I lost my doll—the one you gave me?... Oh, Kersti dear, why are you so sorry?

[He throws his arms about her neck.

KERSTI. [*Taking him on her lap and kissing his shoes*] Oh, Lit-Mats, Lit-Mats!

BRITA. [*To the soldiers*] Is that allowed?

The soldiers stand at attention, but make no reply.

BRITA. [*Taking LIT-MATS away from KERSTI*] Come on now!

KERSTI. [*To LIT-MATS*] Go with your sister, Lit-Mats! And you had better keep away from me!

[She begins to read in a low voice out of the hymn-book.

BRITA. [*To KERSTI*] Shall I tell him?

KERSTI. For God's sake, don't tell the child!

BRITA. For the child's sake, I won't!

KERSTI. Thank you, Brita—for the child's sake!

BRITA *goes into the church with LIT-MATS. The only ones that remain outside are KERSTI and the two soldiers.*

The HEADSMAN *enters from the right, carrying a black box. He keeps in the background and does not look in the direction of KERSTI.*

KERSTI. [*Catching sight of him*] Christ Jesus, Saviour of the world, help me for the sake of Thy passion and death!

MIDWIFE. [*Enters from the left and goes up to the HEADSMAN*] Listen, my dear man.... If it comes off, would you mind my getting quite close to it?... I need a little of that red stuff, you know—for a sick person—one who has the falling sickness....

The HEADSMAN *goes out to the left without answering.*

MIDWIFE. Oh, he is of the kind that won't listen. [*Going to KERSTI*] Ah, there you are, my dear....

KERSTI. [*With a deprecatory gesture*] Begone!

MIDWIFE. [*Keeping behind the pillory so that she cannot be seen by the soldiers*] Wait a little! Wait a little! Listen now, my dear! I can do what others can't! The hour is near, and the black one is waiting!

KERSTI. In the name of Christ Jesus, begone!

MIDWIFE. Listen! I can do what others can't! I can set you free!

KERSTI. I have found my Saviour! His name is Christ Jesus!

MIDWIFE. I can make the judge as soft as wax....

KERSTI. He who shall judge the quick and the dead; He who is the resurrection and the life: He has sentenced me to death in the flesh, and to—life everlasting.

MIDWIFE. Look at the soldiers! They have gone to sleep! Take my cloak and run!

KERSTI. Are the soldiers asleep?

MIDWIFE. Their eyes are closed!—Run, run, run!

KERSTI *rises and looks at the soldiers, who have closed their eyes.*

MIDWIFE. Run, run, run!

KERSTI. [*Lying down again*] No, much better is it to fall into the hands of the living God!—Depart from me!

She *raises the hymn-book so that the golden cross on its front cover faces the MIDWIFE.*

MIDWIFE. [*Shrinking back*] Shall we meet a Thursday night at the crossroads?

KERSTI. On the path to the cross I shall meet with my Redeemer, but not with you! Depart!

MIDWIFE. [*Drawing away*] There is a boat down at the shore—horse and carriage are waiting on the other side Mats is there, but the Sheriff not.... Run, run, run!

KERSTI [*Struggling with herself*] O Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!

MIDWIFE. Shash-ash-ash-ash! Horse and carriage!

KERSTI *seizes the bell-rope and pulls it three times. At the third stroke of the bell, the MIDWIFE takes flight.*

MIDWIFE. Ad-zee! Ad-zee! Ad-zee! [*She disappears.*

The CHILD IN WHITE *comes forward from behind one of the pillars of the porch. His dress is that worn by girls at Rättvik, Dalecarlia (the one with liberty cap, white waist and striped apron, which is probably more familiar to foreigners than any other Swedish peasant costume), but all its parts are white, including the shoes.*

KERSTI. [*As if blinded by his appearance*] Who are you, child—you who come when the evil one departs?

The CHILD IN WHITE *puts a finger across his lips.*

KERSTI. White as snow, and white as linen.... Why are you so white?

CHILD IN WHITE [*In a low voice*] Thy faith has saved thee! Out of faith has sprung hope! [*He goes toward KERSTI.*

KERSTI. Please, dear, don't step on the ant!

CHILD IN WHITE. [*Stoops and picks up something on a leaf*] But the greatest of these be love—love of all living things, great or small! Now I shall send this ant into the woods to tell the king of all the ants, so that the little people may come here and gnaw the ropes to pieces, and you will be set free.

KERSTI. No, no! Don't talk like that!

CHILD IN WHITE. Doubt not—but believe! Believe, Kersti!—Believe!

KERSTI. How can I?

CHILD IN WHITE. Believe!

He steps behind the pillar again and disappears.

The stage grows darker.

NECK. [*Appears with his harp in the middle of the lake and sings to the same melody as before*] "I am hoping, I am hoping, that thy Redeemer still liveth!"

KERSTI. He sings of *my* Redeemer! He brings hope to me, who denied it to him!

The NECK sinks beneath the waters.

SHERIFF. [*Enters reading a document; he approaches a few steps at a time, now looking at the ground, and now at the paper in his hand*] Kersti!

KERSTI *looks up, only to drop her head at once.*

SHERIFF. [*Slowly and with frequent pauses*] Behold the Sheriff!—You are only scared by him!—Do you think everybody feels like that? Suppose that the Sheriff has been summoned to help some one in a moment of dire need. Do you think he will be welcome then? Of course, he will!... Did you ever see such a lot of ants, Kersti?

KERSTI *raises her head again and becomes attentive.*

SHERIFF. Look at them! Files of them, and whole hosts! Look!—Do you know what that means? It is a good omen! But, of course, you never expect anything good to come from me. You wouldn't believe it *that* time either—and that's what led to your exposure! Look at those ants! Look at them! They are making straight for you, Kersti. Are you not afraid of them?

KERSTI. I used to be, but I am not.

SHERIFF. Big wood-ants, and I think the ant-king himself is with them. Do you know what can be done by the King, and by no other authority? Do you know that? All other authorities can pass judgment—all of them can do that—harshly or mercifully; but there is only one that can grant pardon. That's the King!—Shall we ask the antking if he will grant pardon? [*He puts his hand to his ear as if to hear better*] Would your Majesty be willing to pardon her—that is, in regard to the worst part?... Did you hear what he answered? I thought he said yes. But I may have been mistaken.... And being the Sheriff, I can't go by hearsays, but must have everything in writing. Let us ask the ant-king to write it down. He has plenty of pens—sharp as needles—and he has ink of his own, that burns. If we could only find a piece of paper! [*He pretends to search his pockets, and finally he brings out the paper he was reading when he entered*] Oh, here we are! Look at this! The King has written it with his own hand. Do you see? C-A-R-L, which makes Carl. [*He raises his cap for a moment in salute*] You haven't seen such big letters since you went to school, Kersti. And look at the red seal—that smelled like resin in the woods when the sealing-wax still was warm. And look at the silken cords, yellow and blue—and all these lions and crowns.... That's royal, every bit of it!... Read it yourself, Kersti, while I give my orders to the soldiers.

KERSTI *takes the paper from his hand and reads.*

The SHERIFF turns to the soldiers and says something that cannot be heard by the public.

The soldiers leave.

When KERSTI has finished reading she hands the document back to the SHERIFF in a quiet, dignified manner.

SHERIFF. Are you glad, Kersti?

KERSTI. I am thankful that my family and yours will be spared the greatest shame of all. I cannot be glad, for eternal life is better than a life in fetters.

SHERIFF. Regard it as a time of preparation.

KERSTI. I will!

SHERIFF. Are you still afraid of me?

KERSTI. Having looked death in the face, I fear nothing else.

SHERIFF. Come with me, then.

KERSTI. You must set me free first.

The SHERIFF unties the ropes with which she has been bound.

An organ prelude is heard from the church.

KERSTI *stretches her arms toward heaven.*

Curtain.

SIXTH SCENE

The stage represents the frozen surface of a big lake, the shores of which form the background. Deep snow covers the ice. Tall pine branches stuck into the snow serve to mark the tracks used in crossing the lake.

In the centre of the stage, toward the background, a large rectangular opening has been cut in the ice. A number of small spruce-trees have been set along the edges of it to warn against danger.

Long-tailed ducks (Heralda glacialis or Clangula glacialis) are floating on the open water. Now and then one of them utters its peculiarly melodious cry. (See musical appendix, Melody No. 19.)

A number of short fishing-rods are placed along the edges of the open water, with their lines out.

A gloomy old structure with turrets and battlements appears on the shore in the background. It is known as the "Castle", but is in reality a penitentiary.

It is about daybreak.

The FISHERMAN enters from the right dressed in a sheepskin coat and hauling a sledge on which lies an ice-hook. All the ducks dive when he comes in sight. He begins to examine his fishlines.

MIDWIFE. [*Entering from the left*] How dare you fish on Easter Sunday?

FISHERMAN. I am not fishing—I'm just looking.

MIDWIFE. Perhaps you, who are so clever, can also tell a poor, strayed old woman where she is?

FISHERMAN. If you give me a light.

MIDWIFE. If you have flint and steel.

FISHERMAN. [*Handing her two pieces of ice*] Here they are.

MIDWIFE. Ice? Well, water is fire, and fire is water!

She tears off a piece of her cloak to serve as tinder; then, she strikes the two pieces of ice against each other; having set the tinder on fire in that way, she hands it to the FISHERMAN, who lights his pipe with it.

FISHERMAN. Oh, you are that kind? Then I know where I am.

MIDWIFE. But where am I?

FISHERMAN. In the middle of Krummedikke's lake, and over there you see his castle. He was a king who lived long, long ago, and, like Herod, he caused all male babes to be slain because he was afraid for his crown. But now his castle holds all the girls who have not been afraid for theirs.

MIDWIFE. What are they doing in there?

FISHERMAN. Spinning flax.

MIDWIFE. That's the jail, then?

FISHERMAN. That's what it is.

MIDWIFE. And the lake?

FISHERMAN. Oh, it's a good one! There used to be dry land where the lake is now, and on that piece of land stood a church, and that church started a feud. It was a question of pews, you see. The mill-folk, who thought themselves above the rest, wanted to sit next to the altar, but the Mewlings were the stronger. One Easter Sunday it broke loose, right in the nave, and blood was shed. The church was profaned so that it could never be cleansed again. Instead it was closed up and deserted, and by and by it sank into the earth, and now there are fifty feet of water above the weathercock on the spire. By this time the lake has been washing it and washing it these many hundred years, but as long as mill-folk and Mewlings keep on fighting, the temple will never be cleansed.

MIDWIFE. Why are they called Mewlings?

FISHERMAN. Because they are descended from Krummedikke, who slew the infants.

MIDWIFE. And they are still fighting?

FISHERMAN. Still fighting, and still slaying.... You remember, don't you, Kersti, the soldier's daughter?

MIDWIFE. Of course, I do.

FISHERMAN. She is in the Castle, but to-day she will be out to do her yearly public penance at the church.

MIDWIFE. Is that so?

FISHERMAN. The Mewlings are coming to bring her over, and the mill-folk are coming to look on.

MIDWIFE. Do you hear the ice tuning up?

FISHERMAN. I do.

MIDWIFE. Does it mean thaw?

FISHERMAN. Maybe.

MIDWIFE. Then the ice will begin to break from the shore?

FISHERMAN. Quite likely. But if the water should rise, the rapids down there will carry it off.

MIDWIFE. Are the rapids far from here?

FISHERMAN. Naw! You can hear the Neck quite plainly. To-day he will be up betimes, as he is expecting something.

MIDWIFE. What can he be expecting?

FISHERMAN. Oh, you know!

MIDWIFE. No, I don't. Please tell me.

FISHERMAN. This is what they tell: Every Easter Sunday morning, at the hour when the Saviour ascended from his grave, the church of Krummedikke rises out of the lake. And he who gets a look at it has peace in his soul for the rest of the year.

MIDWIFE. [*Gallops out toward the right*] Ad-zee! Ad-zee! Ad-zee!

FISHERMAN. That was a bad meeting.... [*He lands a fish and takes it from the hook*] I got you!

The fish slips out of his hand and leaps into the water. The FISHERMAN tries to catch it with his dip-net. Then a whole row of fish-heads appear above the water.

FISHERMAN. Dumb, but not deaf! "What roars more loudly than a crane? What is whiter by far than a swan?"^[1]

CHILD IN WHITE. [*Dressed as in the preceding scene, enters on skis, carrying a torch;*] The thunder of heaven roars more loudly than the crane, and he who does no evil is whiter than the swan.

The fish-heads disappear.

FISHERMAN. Who read my riddle?

CHILD IN WHITE. Who can free the prisoner from his bonds and set the tongue of the fish talking?

FISHERMAN. No one!

CHILD IN WHITE. No man by man begotten, but one born of the all-creative God.... He who has built the bridge of glass can break it, too!... Beware!

[He goes out to the right.

The FISHERMAN begins to gather up his implements.

The MILL-FOLK (MATS'S relatives) enter from the left; all are on skis and carry long staffs.

MATS carries a torch.

MATS. Where is the winter road?

FISHERMAN. Do you mean the road of the fish in the water?

MATS. No, the road of the horse on the snow.

FISHERMAN. Does it lead to court or church?

MILL-FOLK. To church.

FISHERMAN. For the man who has lost his way, all roads lead to the rapids. [*A rumbling noise is made by the ice*] The roof is cracking!

MILL-FOLK. Where is the road to the church?

FISHERMAN. Everywhere!

MILL-FOLK. Where is the church?

FISHERMAN. You are standing on it, and walking over it, and soon it will be here.

MILL-FOLK. Is this Krummedikke's lake?

FISHERMAN. It's Krummedikke's castle and Krummedikke's lake; it's Krummedikke's church, and soon it will break.

MILL-FOLK. Lord have mercy! [*They go out to the right.*

The MEWLINGS (KERSTI'S relatives) enter from the left, on skis and carrying staffs. The SOLDIER carries a torch.

MEWLINGS. Is this the road to the church?

FISHERMAN. This is the road to the rapids! Turn back!

MEWLINGS. Ridges and open water everywhere! The floe is breaking loose!

FISHERMAN. Go eastward! The sun is tarrying.

MEWLINGS. Let's go eastward! [*They go out to the right.*]

The MILL-FOLK return from the right.

FISHERMAN. Turn back! The floe has broken loose down that way!

MILL-FOLK. And eastward, too! Let's turn northward!

FISHERMAN. There's the river!

MILL-FOLK. Southward, then!

FISHERMAN. There are the rapids!

MILL-FOLK. [*Leaning dejectedly on their staffs*] God have mercy on us!

MATS. The Mewlings put us on the wrong track.

BRITA. As they have always done!

FATHER. And they'll be first at church!

GRANDFATHER. Never mind! But I can't help regretting the day when I burned the papers.

MOTHER. Will there ever be peace?

GRANDMOTHER. "Men who are mild and gentle live in peace and know but little sorrow."^[2]

MILL-FOLK. [*Raising their staffs*] The Mewlings!

MEWLINGS. [*Entering from the right, with raised staffs*] Will you bide now, mill-folk? You put us on the wrong track!

MILL-FOLK. You liars!

MEWLINGS. The same to you!

MILL-FOLK. Quibblers!

MEWLINGS. And what are you?

The ice begins to crash and rumble.

FISHERMAN. Peace in the name of Christ Jesus! The water is rising!

ALL. [*Crying aloud*] The water is rising!

MATS'S GRANDFATHER. The ice is sinking. Stay where you are!

MATS'S GRANDMOTHER. To-day we must die, and then comes the day of judgment!

The MILL-FOLK embrace each other. The women pick up the children into their arms. The MEWLINGS do likewise.

MATS'S MOTHER. [*To Mats*] For the sake of your foolish fondness, we must die!

KERSTI'S MOTHER. "Another's love should by no one be blamed: wise men are often snared by beauty, but fools never."^[2]

SOLDIER. "This fault of his should by no one be blamed: love, in its might, will often turn the sons of men from wisdom to folly."^[3]

MATS. [*Holding out his hand to the SOLDIER*] Thank you for those words! You are the man I named father for a brief while!

SOLDIER. "All at birth and death are equals."

MATS'S FATHER. There you took the word away from me! Your hand!

SOLDIER. [*Giving his hand after a little hesitation*] Here it is! We are all Christians, and this is the great day of atonement. Let not the sun rise on our wrath!

MEWLINGS. Let us have peace!

MILL-FOLK. Yes, let us have peace!

The two parties are approaching each other with hands stretched out, when a terrific crash is heard, and the ice opens at their feet, separating them from each other.

MATS'S GRANDFATHER. Parted in life and parted in death!

MATS'S GRANDMOTHER. The bridge has broken under the burden of crime.

MATS'S MOTHER. Where is Kersti?

MILL-FOLK. Where is Kersti?

MEWLINGS. Where is Kersti?

SOLDIER. "And lo, it was expedient that one should die for the people."

MATS'S GRANDFATHER. "Then said they unto him: What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?"

KERSTI'S MOTHER. "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."

MATS'S GRANDMOTHER. Is it settled?

ALL. It is settled!

KERSTI'S MOTHER. "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

MEWLINGS. Where is Kersti?

MILL-FOLK. Where is Kersti?

The PASTOR enters, followed by the VERGER.

PASTOR. [*To the Soldier*] "And the Lord said: Lay not thine hand upon the child, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thine only child from me."

ALL. [*To the Minister*] Save us!

PASTOR. "There is but one God, the Saviour!" Let us pray!

All kneel on the ice.

PASTOR. "Out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord!"

ALL. "Lord, hear my voice!"

PASTOR. O Lord, have mercy!

ALL. Christ, have mercy!

The SHERIFF enters from the rear with a torch in his hand. He is followed by four soldiers, carrying the dead body of KERSTI between them.

All get on their feet.

PASTOR. Whom are you bringing with you?

SHERIFF. We are bringing the crown bride—Kersti!

PASTOR. Is she alive?

SHERIFF. She is dead. The waters took her!

PASTOR. May the Lord take her soul!

SOLDIER. O Lord, have respect unto our offering, as thou hast given thyself for us an offering.

PASTOR. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son!"

BRITA. The water is falling!

ALL. The water is falling!

The gap in the ice is closed up again.

MATS and BRITA walk over to the MEWLINGS, break branches from the spruces set in the snow, and spread these over the body of KERSTI.

PASTOR. Will there be peace after this?

ALL. Peace and reconciliation!

PASTOR. [*Beside the body of KERSTI*]

"To the dead
Give peace, O Lord,
And console
The living!"

In the background a church is seen rising out of the lake: first the gilded weathercock; then the cross resting on a globe; and finally the spire, the roof covered with black shingles, and the white walls of the round-arched church.

NECK. [*Is heard playing and singing in the distance, but now his melody has been transposed into D minor*] "I am hoping, I am hoping, that my Redeemer still liveth."

PASTOR. Let us give praise and thanks unto the Lord!

ALL. We thank and praise thee, O Lord!

MATS and BRITA kneel beside the body of KERSTI. All the rest kneel around them and sing No. 6 from the "Old" Swedish Hymn-Book (which is a free rendering of Luther's "Herr Gott, dich loben

wir," and practically identical with the Ambrosian "Te Deum laudamus").

ALL. [*Singing*]

"O God, we give thee praise! O Lord, we give thee thanks! Eternal Father, whom the whole world worships!

Thy praise is sung by angels and all the heavenly powers; By Cherubim and Seraphim thy praise is sung incessantly: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth!"

Curtain.

- [1] Old Swedish folk-riddle, the expected answers to the questions being respectively: the thunder and an angel.
[2] From the Poetic Edda: "The Song of the High One." See Introduction.
[3] id. note 2.
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THE SPOOK SONATA

(SPÖK-SONATEN)

CHAMBER PLAYS: OPUS III

1907

CHARACTERS

OLD HUMMEL

The STUDENT, named Arkenholtz

The MILKMAID, an apparition

The JANITRESS

The GHOST of the Consul

The DARK LADY, daughter of the Consul and the JANITRESS

The COLONEL

The MUMMY, wife of the COLONEL

*The YOUNG LADY, supposedly the COLONEL'S daughter,
but in reality the daughter of OLD HUMMEL*

*The DANDY, called Baron Skansenkorge and engaged to
the DARK LADY*

JOHANSSON, *in the service of HUMMEL*

BENGTSSON, *the valet of the COLONEL*

*The FIANCÉE, a white-haired old woman, formerly engaged
to HUMMEL*

The COOK

A SERVANT-GIRL

BEGGARS

FIRST SCENE

The stage shows the first and second stories of a modern corner home. At the left, the house continues into the wings; at the right, it faces on a street supposed to be running at right angle to the footlights.

The apartment on the ground floor ends at the corner in a round room, above which is a balcony belonging to the apartment on the second floor. A flagstaff is fixed to the balcony.

When the shades are raised in the windows of the Round Room, a statue of a young woman in white marble becomes visible inside, strongly illumined by sunlight. It is surrounded by palms. The windows on the left side of the Round Room contain a number of flower-pots, in which grow blue, white, and red hyacinths.

A bedquilt of blue silk and two pillows in white cases are hung over the railing of the balcony on the second floor. The windows at the left of the balcony are covered with white sheets on the inside.

A green bench stands on the sidewalk in front of the house. The right corner of the foreground is occupied by a drinking fountain; the corner at the left, by an advertising column.

The main entrance to the house is near the left wing. Through the open doorway

appears the foot of the stairway, with steps of white marble and a banister of mahogany with brass trimmings. On the sidewalk, flanking the entrance, stand two laurel-trees in wooden tubs.

At the left of the entrance, there is a window on the ground floor, with a window-mirror outside.

It is a bright Sunday morning.

When the curtain rises, the bells of several churches are heard ringing in the distance.

The doors of the entrance are wide open, and on the lowest step of the stairway stands the DARK LADY. She does not make the slightest movement.

The JANITRESS is sweeping the hallway. Then she polishes the brass knobs on the doors. Finally she waters the laurel-trees.

Near the advertising column, OLD HUMMEL is reading his paper, seated in an invalid's chair on wheels. His hair and beard are white, and he wears spectacles.

The MILKMAID enters from the side street, carrying milk-bottles in a crate of wire-work. She wears a light dress, brown shoes, black stockings, and a white cap.

She takes off her cap and hangs it on the fountain; wipes the perspiration from her forehead; drinks out of the cup; washes her hands in the basin, and arranges her hair, using the water in the basin as a mirror.

A steamship-bell is heard outside. Then the silence is broken fitfully by a few bass notes from the organ in the nearest church.

When silence reigns again, and the MILKMAID has finished her toilet, the STUDENT enters from the left, unshaved and showing plainly that he has spent a sleepless night. He goes straight to the fountain. A pause ensues.

STUDENT. Can I have the cup?

The MILKMAID draws back with the cup.

STUDENT. Are you not almost done?

The MILKMAID stares at him with horror.

HUMMEL. [*To himself*] With whom is he talking? I don't see anybody. Wonder if he's crazy?

[He continues to look at them with evident surprise.

STUDENT. Why do you stare at me? Do I look so terrible—It is true that I haven't slept at all, and I suppose you think I have been making a night of it....

The MILKMAID remains as before.

STUDENT. You think I have been drinking, do you? Do I smell of liquor?

The MILKMAID remains as before.

STUDENT. I haven't shaved, of course.... Oh, give me a drink of water, girl. I have earned it. [*Pause*] Well? Must I then tell you myself that I have spent the night dressing wounds and nursing the injured? You see, I was present when that house collapsed last night.... Now you know all about it.

The MILKMAID rinses the cup, fills it with water, and hands it to him.

STUDENT. Thanks!

The Milkmaid stands immovable.

STUDENT. [*Hesitatingly*] Would you do me a favour? [*Pause*] My eyes are inflamed, as you can see, and my hands have touched wounds and corpses. To touch my eyes with them would be dangerous.... Will you take my handkerchief, which is clean, dip it in the fresh water, and bathe my poor eyes with it?—Will you do that?—Won't you play the good Samaritan?

The MILKMAID hesitates at first, but does finally what he has asked.

STUDENT. Thank you! [*He takes out his purse.*

The MILKMAID makes a deprecatory gesture.

STUDENT. Pardon my absent-mindedness. I am not awake, you see....

The MILKMAID disappears.

Hummel. [*To the STUDENT*] Excuse a stranger, but I heard you mention last night's accident.... I was just reading about it in the paper....

STUDENT. Is it already in the papers?

HUMMEL. All about it. Even your portrait. They are sorry, though, that they have not been able to learn the name of the young student who did such splendid work....

STUDENT. [*Glancing at the paper*] Oh, is that me? Well!

HUMMEL. Whom were you talking to a while ago?

STUDENT. Didn't you see? [*Pause*].

HUMMEL. Would it be impertinent—to ask—your estimable name?

STUDENT. What does it matter? I don't care for publicity. Blame is always mixed into any praise you may get. The art of belittling is so highly developed. And besides, I ask no reward....

HUMMEL. Wealthy, I suppose?

STUDENT. Not at all—on the contrary—poor as a durmouse!

HUMMEL. Look here.... It seems to me as if I recognised your voice. When I was young, I had a friend who always said "dur" instead of door. Until now he was the one person I had ever heard using that pronunciation. You are the only other one.... Could you possibly be a relative of the late Mr. Arkenholtz, the merchant?

STUDENT. He was my father.

HUMMEL. Wonderful are the ways of life.... I have seen you when you were a small child, under very trying circumstances....

STUDENT. Yes, I have been told that I was born just after my father had gone bankrupt.

HUMMEL. So you were.

STUDENT. May I ask your name?

HUMMEL. I am Mr. Hummel.

STUDENT. You are? Then I remember....

HUMMEL. Have you often heard my name mentioned at home?

STUDENT. I have.

HUMMEL. And not in a pleasant way, I suppose?

The STUDENT remains silent.

HUMMEL. That's what I expected.—You were told, I suppose, that I had ruined your father?—All who are ruined by ill-advised speculations think themselves ruined by those whom they couldn't fool. [*Pause*] The fact of it is, however, that your father robbed me of seventeen thousand crowns, which represented all my savings at that time.

STUDENT. It is queer how the same story can be told in quite different ways.

HUMMEL. You don't think that I am telling the truth?

STUDENT. How can I tell what to think? My father was not in the habit of lying.

HUMMEL. No, that's right, a father never lies.... But I am also a father, and for that reason....

STUDENT. What are you aiming at?

HUMMEL. I saved your father from misery, and he repaid me with the ruthless hatred that is born out of obligation.... He taught his family to speak ill of me.

STUDENT. Perhaps you made him ungrateful by poisoning your assistance with needless humiliation.

HUMMEL. All assistance is humiliating, sir.

STUDENT. And what do you ask of me now?

HUMMEL. Not the money back. But if you will render me a small service now and then, I shall consider myself well paid. I am a cripple, as you see. Some people say it is my own fault. Others lay it to my parents. I prefer to blame life itself, with its snares. To escape one of these snares is to walk headlong into another. As it is, I cannot climb stairways or ring door-bells, and for that reason I ask you: will you help me a little?

STUDENT. What can I do for you?

HUMMEL. Give my chair a push, to begin with, so that I can read the bills on that column. I wish to see what they are playing to-night.

STUDENT. [*Pushing the chair as directed*] Have you no attendant?

HUMMEL. Yes, but he is doing an errand. He'll be back soon. Are you a medical student?

STUDENT. No, I am studying philology, but I don't know what profession to choose....

HUMMEL. Well, well! Are you good at mathematics?

STUDENT. Reasonably so.

HUMMEL. That's good! Would you care to accept a position?

STUDENT. Yes, why not?

HUMMEL. Fine! [*Studying the playbills*] They are playing "The Valkyr" at the matinee.... Then the Colonel will be there with his daughter, and as he always has the end seat in the sixth row, I'll put you next to him.... Will you please go over to that telephone kiosk and order a ticket for seat eighty-two, in the sixth row?

STUDENT. Must I go to the opera in the middle of the day?

HUMMEL. Yes. Obey me, and you'll prosper. I wish to see you happy, rich, and honoured. Your début last night in the part of the brave rescuer will have made you famous by to-morrow, and then your name will be worth a great deal.

STUDENT. [*On his way out to telephone*] What a ludicrous adventure!

HUMMEL. Are you a sportsman?

STUDENT. Yes, that has been my misfortune.

HUMMEL. Then we'll turn it into good fortune.—Go and telephone now.

The STUDENT goes out. HUMMEL begins to read his paper again. In the meantime the DARK LADY has come out on the sidewalk and stands talking to the JANITRESS. HUMMEL is taking in their conversation, of which, however, nothing is audible to the public. After a while the STUDENT returns.

HUMMEL. Ready?

STUDENT. It's done.

HUMMEL. Have you noticed this house?

STUDENT. Yes, I have been watching it.... I happened to pass by yesterday, when the sun was making every window-pane glitter.... And thinking of all the beauty and luxury that must be found within, I said to my companion: "Wouldn't it be nice to have an apartment on the fifth floor, a beautiful young wife, two pretty little children, and an income of twenty thousand crowns?"...

HUMMEL. So you said that? Did you really? Well, well! I am very fond of this house, too....

STUDENT. Do you speculate in houses?

HUMMEL. Mm-yah! But not in the way you mean.

STUDENT. Do you know the people who live here?

HUMMEL. All of them. A man of my age knows everybody, including their parents and grandparents, and in some manner he always finds himself related to every one else. I am just eighty—but nobody knows *me*—not through and through. I am very much interested in human destinies.

At that moment the shades are raised in the Round Room on the ground floor, and the COLONEL becomes visible, dressed in civilian clothes. He goes to one of the windows to study the thermometer outside. Then he turns back into the room and stops in front of the marble statue.

HUMMEL. There's the Colonel now, who will sit next to you at the opera this afternoon.

STUDENT. Is *he*—the Colonel? I don't understand this at all, but it's like a fairy-tale.

HUMMEL. All my life has been like a collection of fairy-tales, my dear sir. Although the tales read differently, they are all strung on a common thread, and the dominant theme recurs constantly.

STUDENT. Whom does that statue represent?

HUMMEL. His wife, of course.

STUDENT. Was she very lovely?

HUMMEL. Mm-yah—well....

STUDENT. Speak out.

HUMMEL. Oh, we can't form any judgment about people, my dear boy. And if I told you that she left him, that he beat her, that she returned to him, that she married him a second time, and that she is living there now in the shape of a mummy, worshipping her own statue—then you would think me crazy.

STUDENT. I don't understand at all.

HUMMEL. I didn't expect you would. Then there is the window with the hyacinths. That's where his daughter lives? She is out for a ride now, but she will be home in a few moments.

STUDENT. And who is the dark lady talking to the janitress?

HUMMEL. The answer is rather complicated, but it is connected with the dead man on the second floor, where you see the white sheets.

STUDENT. Who was he?

HUMMEL. A human being like you or me, but the most conspicuous thing about him was his vanity.... If you were born on a Sunday, you might soon see him come down the stairway and go out on the sidewalk to make sure that the flag of the consulate is half-masted. You see, he was a consul, and he revelled in coronets and lions and plumed hats and coloured ribbons.

STUDENT. You spoke of being born on a Sunday.... So was I, I understand.

HUMMEL. No! Really?... Oh, I should have known.... The colour of your eyes shows it.... Then you can see what other people can't. Have you noticed anything of that kind?

STUDENT. Of course, I can't tell what other people see or don't see, but at times.... Oh, such things you don't talk of!

HUMMEL. I was sure of it! And you can talk to me, because I—I understand—things of that kind....

STUDENT. Yesterday, for instance.... I was drawn to that little side street where the house fell down afterward.... When I got there, I stopped in front of the house, which I had never seen before.... Then I noticed a crack in the wall.... I could hear the floor beams snapping.... I rushed forward and picked up a child that was walking in front of the house at the time.... In another moment the house came tumbling down.... I was saved, but in my arms, which I thought held the child, there was nothing at all....

HUMMEL. Well, I must say!... Much as I have heard.... Please tell me one thing: what made you act as you did by the fountain a while ago? Why were you talking to yourself?

STUDENT. Didn't you see the Milkmaid to whom I was talking?

HUMMEL. [*Horried*] A milkmaid?

STUDENT. Yes, the girl who handed me the cup.

HUMMEL. Oh, that's what it was.... Well, I haven't that kind of sight, but there are other things....

A white-haired old woman is seen at the window beside the entrance, looking into the window-mirror.

HUMMEL. Look at that old woman in the window. Do you see her?—Well, she was my fiancée once upon a time, sixty years ago.... I was twenty at that time.... Never mind, she does not recognise me. We see each other every day, and I hardly notice her—although once we vowed to love each other eternally.... Eternally!

STUDENT. How senseless you were in those days! We don't talk to our girls like that.

HUMMEL. Forgive us, young man! We didn't know better.—Can you see that she was young and pretty once?

STUDENT. It doesn't show.... Oh, yes, she has a beautiful way of looking at things, although I can't see her eyes clearly.

The JANITRESS comes out with a basket on her arm and begins to cover the sidewalk with chopped hemlock branches, as is usual in Sweden when a funeral is to be held.

HUMMEL. And the Janitress—hm! That Dark Lady is her daughter and the dead man's, and that's why her husband was made janitor.... But the Dark Lady has a lover, who is a dandy with great expectations. He is now getting a divorce from his present wife, who is giving him an apartment-house to get rid of him. This elegant lover is the son-in-law of the dead man, and you can see his bedclothes being aired on the balcony up there.... That's a bit complicated, I should say!

STUDENT. Yes, it's fearfully complicated.

HUMMEL. It certainly is, inside and outside, no matter how simple it may look.

STUDENT. But who was the dead man?

HUMMEL. So you asked me a while ago, and I answered you. If you could look around the corner, where the servants' entrance is, you would see a lot of poor people whom he used to help—when he was in the mood....

STUDENT. He was a kindly man, then?

HUMMEL. Yes—at times.

STUDENT. Not always?

HUMMEL. No-o.... People are like that!—Will you please move the chair a little, so that I get into the sunlight? I am always cold. You see, the blood congeals when you can't move about.... Death isn't far away from me, I know, but I have a few things to do before it comes.... Just take hold of my hand and feel how cold I am.

STUDENT. [*Taking his hand*] I should say so!

[He shrinks back.

HUMMEL. Don't leave me! I am tired now, and lonely, but I haven't always been like this, you know. I have an endlessly long life back of—enormously long.... I have made people unhappy, and other people have made me unhappy, and one thing has to be put against the other, but before I die, I wish to see you happy.... Our destinies have become intertwined, thanks to your father—and many other things....

STUDENT. Let go my hand! You are taking all my strength! You are freezing me! What do you want of me?

HUMMEL. Patience, and you'll see, and understand.... There comes the Young Lady now....

STUDENT. The Colonel's daughter?

HUMMEL. His daughter—yes! Look at her!—Did you ever see such a masterpiece?

STUDENT. She resembles the marble statue in there.

HUMMEL. It's her mother.

STUDENT. You are right.... Never did I see such a woman of woman born!—Happy the man who may lead her to the altar and to his home!

HUMMEL. You see it, then? Her beauty is not discovered by everybody.... Then it is written in the book of life!

The YOUNG LADY enters from the left, wearing a close-fitting English riding-suit. Without looking at any one, she walks slowly to the entrance, where she stops and exchanges a few words with the JANITRESS. Then she disappears into the house. The STUDENT covers his eyes with his hand.

HUMMEL. Are you crying?

STUDENT. Can you meet what is hopeless with anything but despair?

HUMMEL. I have the power of opening doors and hearts, if I can only find an arm to do my will.... Serve me, and you shall also have power....

STUDENT. Is it to be a bargain? Do you want me to sell my soul?

HUMMEL. Don't sell anything!... You see, all my life I have been used to *take*. Now I have a craving to give—to give! But no one will accept.... I am rich, very rich, but have no heirs except a scamp who is tormenting the life out of me.... Become my son! Inherit me while I am still alive! Enjoy life, and let me look on—from a distance, at least!

STUDENT. What am I to do?

HUMMEL. Go and hear "The Valkyr" first of all.

STUDENT. That's settled—but what more?

HUMMEL. This evening you shall be in the Round Room.

STUDENT. How am I to get there?

HUMMEL. Through "The Valkyr."

STUDENT. Why have you picked me to be your instrument? Did you know me before?

HUMMEL. Of course, I did! I have had my eyes on you for a long time.... Look at the balcony now, where the Maid is raising the flag at half-mast in honour of the consul.... And then she turns the bedclothes.... Do you notice that blue quilt? It was made to cover two, and now it is only covering one.... [*The YOUNG LADY appears at her window, having changed dress in the meantime; she waters the hyacinths*] There is my little girl now. Look at her—look! She is talking to her flowers, and she herself looks like a blue hyacinth. She slakes their thirst—with pure water only—and they transform the water into colour and fragrance.... There comes the Colonel with the newspaper! He shows her the story about the house that fell down—and he points at your portrait! She is not indifferent—she reads of your deeds.... It's clouding up, I think.... I wonder if it's going to rain? Then I shall be in a nice fix, unless Johansson comes back soon [*The sun has disappeared, and now the stage is growing darker; the white-haired old woman closes her window*] Now my fiancée is closing her window.... She is seventy-nine—and the only mirror she uses is the window-mirror, because there she sees not herself, but the world around her—and she sees it from two sides—but it has not occurred to her that she can be seen by the world, too.... A handsome old lady, after all....

Now the GHOST, wrapped in winding sheets, comes out of the entrance.

STUDENT. Good God, what is that I see?

HUMMEL. What *do* you see?

STUDENT. Don't *you* see?... There, at the entrance.... The dead man?

HUMMEL. I see nothing at all, but that was what I expected. Tell me....

STUDENT. He comes out in the street.... [*Pause*] Now he turns his head to look at the flag.

HUMMEL. What did I tell you? And you may be sure that he will count the wreaths and study the visiting-cards attached to them.... And I pity anybody that is missing!

STUDENT. Now he goes around the corner....

HUMMEL. He wants to count the poor at the other entrance.... The poor are so decorative, you know.... "Followed by the blessings of many".... But he won't get any blessing from me!—Between us, he was a big rascal!

STUDENT. But charitable....

HUMMEL. A charitable rascal, who always had in mind the splendid funeral he expected to get.... When he knew that his end was near, he cheated the state out of fifty thousand crowns.... And now his daughter goes about with ... another woman's husband, and wonders what is in his will.... Yes, the rascal can hear every word we say, and he is welcome to it!—There comes Johansson

now.

JOHANSSON *enters from the left.*

HUMMEL. Report!

JOHANSSON *can be seen speaking, but not a word of what he says is heard.*

HUMMEL. Not at home, you say? Oh, you are no good!—Any telegram?—Not a thing.... Go on!—Six o'clock to-night?—That's fine!—An extra, you say?—With his full name?—Arkenholtz, a student, yes.... Born.... Parents.... That's splendid! I think it's beginning to rain.... What did he say?—Is that so?—He won't?—Well, then he must!—Here comes the Dandy.... Push me around the corner, Johansson, so I can hear what the poor people have to say.... [*To the STUDENT*] And you had better wait for me here, Arkenholtz.... Do you understand?—[*To JOHANSSON*] Hurry up now, hurry up!

JOHANSSON *pushes the chair into the side street and out of sight. The STUDENT remains on the same spot, looking at the YOUNG LADY, who is using a small rake to loosen up the earth in her pots. The DANDY enters and joins the DARK LADY, who has been walking back and forth on the sidewalk. He is in mourning.*

DANDY. Well, what is there to do about it? We simply have to wait.

DARK LADY. But I can't wait!

DANDY. Is that so? Then you'll have to go to the country.

DARK LADY. I don't want to!

DANDY. Come this way, or they'll hear what we are saying.

They go toward the advertising column and continue their talk inaudibly.

JOHANSSON. [*Entering from the right; to the STUDENT*] My master asks you not to forget that other thing.

STUDENT. [*Dragging his words*] Look here.... Tell me, please.... Who *is* your master?

JOHANSSON. Oh, he's so many things, and he has been everything....

STUDENT. Is he in his right mind?

JOHANSSON. Who can tell?—All his life he has been looking for one born on Sunday, he says—which does not mean that it must be true....

STUDENT. What is he after? Is he a miser?

JOHANSSON. He wants to rule.... The whole day long he travels about in his chair like the god of thunder himself He looks at houses, tears them down, opens up new streets, fills the squares with buildings.... At the same time he breaks into houses, sneaks through open windows, plays havoc with human destinies, kills his enemies, and refuses to forgive anything.... Can you imagine that a cripple like him has been a Don Juan—but one who has always lost the women he loved?

STUDENT. How can you make those things go together?

JOHANSSON. He is so full of guile that he can make the women leave him when he is tired of them.... Just now he is like a horse thief practising at a slave-market.... He steals human beings, and in all sorts of ways.... He has literally stolen me out of the hands of the law.... Hm.... yes.... I had been guilty of a slip. And no one but he knew of it. Instead of putting me in jail, he made a slave of me. All I get for my slavery is the food I eat, which might be better at that....

STUDENT. And what does he wish to do in this house here?

JOHANSSON. No, I don't want to tell! It's too complicated....

STUDENT. I think I'll run away from the whole story....

The YOUNG LADY drops a bracelet out of the window so that it falls on the sidewalk.

JOHANSSON. Did you see the Young Lady drop her bracelet out of the window?

Without haste, the STUDENT picks up the bracelet and hands it to the YOUNG LADY, who thanks him rather stiffly; then he returns to JOHANSSON.

JOHANSSON. So you want to run away? That is more easily said than done when *he* has got you in his net.... And he fears nothing between heaven and earth except one thing or one person rather....

STUDENT. Wait—I think I know!

JOHANSSON. How could you?

STUDENT. I can guess! Is it not—a little milkmaid that he fears?

JOHANSSON. He turns his head away whenever he meets a milk wagon.... And at times he talks in his sleep.... He must have been in Hamburg at one time, I think....

STUDENT. Is this man to be trusted?

JOHANSSON. You may trust him—to do anything!

STUDENT. What is he doing around the corner now?

JOHANSSON. Watching the poor dropping a word here and a word there.... loosening a stone at a time ... until the whole house comes tumbling down, metaphorically speaking.... You see, I am an educated man, and I used to be a book dealer.... Are you going now?

STUDENT. I find it hard to be ungrateful.... Once upon a time he saved my father, and now he asks a small service in return....

JOHANSSON. What is it?

STUDENT. To go and see "The Valkyr"....

JOHANSSON. That's beyond me.... But he is always up to new tricks.... Look at him now, talking to the police-man! He is always thick with the police. He uses them. He snares them in their own interests. He ties their hands by arousing their expectations with false promises—while all the time he is pumping them.... You'll see that he is received in the Round Room before the day is over!

STUDENT. What does he want there? What has he to do with the Colonel?

JOHANSSON. I think I can guess, but know nothing with certainty. But you'll see for yourself when you get there!

STUDENT. I'll never get there.

JOHANSSON. That depends on yourself!—Go to "The Valkyr."

STUDENT. Is that the road?

JOHANSSON. Yes, if he has said so—Look at him there—look at him in his war chariot, drawn in triumph by the Beggars, who get nothing for their pains but a hint of a great treat to be had at his funeral.

OLD HUMMEL appears standing in his invalid's chair, which is drawn by one of the BEGGARS, and followed by the rest.

HUMMEL. Give honour to the noble youth who, at the risk of his own, saved so many lives in yesterday's accident! Three cheers for Arkenholtz!

The BEGGARS bare their heads, but do not cheer. The YOUNG LADY appears at her window, waving her handkerchief. The COLONEL gazes at the scene from a window in the Round Room. The FIANCÉE rises at her window. The MAID appears on the balcony and hoists the flag to the top.

HUMMEL. Applaud, citizens! It is Sunday, of course, but the ass in the pit and the ear in the field will absolve us. Although I was not born on a Sunday, I have the gift of prophecy and of healing, and on one occasion I brought a drowned person back to life.... That happened in Hamburg on a Sunday morning just like this....

The MILKMAID enters, seen only by the STUDENT and HUMMEL. She raises her arms with the movement of a drowning person, while gazing fixedly at HUMMEL.

HUMMEL. [*Sits down; then he crumbles in a heap, stricken with horror*] Get me out of here, Johansson! Quick!—Arkenholtz, don't forget "The Valkyr!"

STUDENT. What is the meaning of all this?

JOHANSSON. We'll see! We'll see!

Curtain.

SECOND SCENE

In the Round Room. An oven of white, glazed bricks occupies the centre of the background. The mantelpiece is covered by a large mirror. An ornamental clock and candelabra stand on the mantelshelf.

At the right of the mantelpiece is a door leading into a hallway, back of which may be seen a room papered in green, with mahogany furniture. The COLONEL is seated at a writing-desk, so that only his back is visible to the public.

The statue stands at the left, surrounded by palms and with draperies arranged so that it can be hidden entirely.

A door at the left of the mantelpiece opens on the Hyacinth Room, where the YOUNG LADY is seen reading a book.

BENGTSSON, the valet, enters from the hallway, dressed in livery. He is followed by JOHANSSON in evening dress with white tie.

BENGTSSON. Now you'll have to do the waiting, Johansson, while I take the overclothes. Do you

know how to do it?

JOHANSSON. Although I am pushing a war chariot in the daytime, as you know, I wait in private houses at night, and I have always dreamt of getting into this place.... Queer sort of people, hm?

BENGTSSON. Yes, a little out of the ordinary, one might say.

JOHANSSON. Is it a musicale, or what is it?

BENGTSSON. The usual spook supper, as we call it. They drink tea and don't say a word, or else the Colonel does all the talking. And then they munch their biscuits, all at the same time, so that it sounds like the gnawing of a lot of rats in an attic.

JOHANSSON. Why do you call it a spook supper?

BENGTSSON. Because they look like spooks.... And they have kept this up for twenty years—always the same people, saying the same things or keeping silent entirely, lest they be put to shame.

JOHANSSON. Is there not a lady in the house, too?

BENGTSSON. Yes, but she is a little cracked. She sits all the time in a closet, because her eyes can't bear the light. [*He points at a papered door*] She is in there now.

JOHANSSON. In there, you say?

BENGTSSON. I told you they were a little out of the ordinary....

JOHANSSON. How does she look?

BENGTSSON. Like a mummy.... Would you care to look at her? [*He opens the papered door*] There she is now!

JOHANSSON. Mercy!

MUMMY. [*Talking baby talk*] Why does he open the door? Haven't I told him to keep it closed?

BENGTSSON. [*In the same way*] Ta-ta-ta-ta! Polly must be nice now. Then she'll get something good. Pretty polly!

MUMMY. [*Imitating a parrot*] Pretty polly! Are you there, Jacob? Currrrr!

BENGTSSON. She thinks herself a parrot, and maybe she's right [*To the MUMMY*] Whistle for us, Polly.

The MUMMY whistles.

JOHANSSON. Much I have seen, but never the like of it!

BENGTSSON. Well, you see, a house gets mouldy when it grows old, and when people are too much together, tormenting each other all the time, they lose their reason. The lady of this house.... Shut up, Polly!... That mummy has been living here forty years—with the same husband, the same furniture, the same relatives, the same friends.... [*He closes the papered door*] And the happenings this house has witnessed! Well, it's beyond me.... Look at that statue. That's the selfsame lady in her youth.

JOHANSSON. Good Lord! Can that be the Mummy?

BENGTSSON. Yes, it's enough to make you weep!—And somehow, carried away by her own imagination, perhaps, she has developed some of the traits of the talkative parrot.... She can't stand cripples or sick people, for instance.... She can't bear the sight of her own daughter, because she is sick....

JOHANSSON. Is the Young Lady sick?

BENGTSSON. Don't you know that?

JOHANSSON. No.—And the Colonel—who is he?

BENGTSSON. That remains to be seen!

JOHANSSON. [*Looking at the statue*] It's horrible to think that.... How old is she now?

BENGTSSON. Nobody knows. But at thirty-five she is said to have looked like nineteen, and that's the age she gave to the Colonel.... In this house.... Do you know what that Japanese screen by the couch is used for? They call it the Death Screen, and it is placed in front of the bed when somebody is dying, just as they do in hospitals....

JOHANSSON. This must be an awful house! And the Student was longing for it as for paradise....

BENGTSSON. What student? Oh, I know! The young chap who is coming here to-night.... The Colonel and the Young Lady met him at the opera and took a great fancy to him at once.... Hm!... But now it's my turn to ask questions. Who's your master? The man in the invalid's chair?...

JOHANSSON. Well, well! Is he coming here, too?

BENGTSSON. He has not been invited.

JOHANSSON. He'll come without invitation—if necessary.

OLD HUMMEL appears in the hallway, dressed in frock coat and high hat. He uses crutches, but moves without a noise, so that he is able to listen to the two servants.

BENGTSSON. He's a sly old guy, isn't he?

JOHANSSON. Yes, he's a good one!

BENGTSSON. He looks like the very devil.

JOHANSSON. He's a regular wizard, I think because he can pass through locked doors....

HUMMEL. [*Comes forward and pinches the ear of JOHANSSON*] Look out, you scoundrel! [*To BENGTSSON*] Tell the Colonel I am here.

BENGTSSON. We expect company....

HUMMEL. I know, but my visit is as good as expected, too, although not exactly desired, perhaps....

BENGTSSON. I see! What's the name? Mr. Hummel?

HUMMEL. That's right.

BENGTSSON *crosses the hallway to the Green Room, the door of which he closes behind him.*

HUMMEL. [*To JOHANSSON*] Vanish!

JOHANSSON *hesitates.*

HUMMEL. Vanish, I say!

JOHANSSON *disappears through the hallway.*

HUMMEL. [*Looking around and finally stopping in front of the statue, evidently much surprised*] Amelia!—It is she!—She!

He takes another turn about the room, picking up various objects to look at them; then he stops in front of the mirror to arrange his wig; finally he returns to the statue.

MUMMY. [*In the closet*] Prrretty Polly!

HUMMEL. [*Startled*] What was that? Is there a parrot in the room? I don't see it!

MUMMY. Are you there, Jacob?

HUMMEL. The place is haunted!

MUMMY. Jacob!

HUMMEL. Now I am scared!... So that's the kind of secrets they have been keeping in this house! [*He stops in front of a picture with his back turned to the closet*] And that's he.... He!

MUMMY. [*Comes out of the closet and pulls the wig of HUMMEL*] Currrrr! Is that Currrrr?

HUMMEL. [*Almost lifted off his feet by fright*] Good Lord in heaven!... Who are you?

MUMMY. [*Speaking in a normal voice*] Is that you, Jacob?

HUMMEL. Yes, my name is Jacob....

MUMMY. [*Deeply moved*] And my name is Amelia!

HUMMEL. Oh, no, no, no!—Merciful heavens!...

MUMMY. How I look! That's right!—And *have* looked like that! [*Pointing to the statue*] Life is a pleasant thing, is it not?... I live mostly in the closet, both in order to see nothing and not to be seen.... But, Jacob, what do you want here?

HUMMEL. My child our child....

MUMMY. There she sits.

HUMMEL. Where?

MUMMY. There—in the Hyacinth Room.

HUMMEL. [*Looking at the YOUNG LADY*] Yes, that is she! [*Pause*] And what does her father say.... I mean the Colonel.... your husband?

MUMMY. Once, when I was angry with him, I told him everything....

HUMMEL. And?...

MUMMY. He didn't believe me. All he said was: "That's what all women say when they wish to kill their husbands."—It is a dreadful crime, nevertheless. His whole life has been turned into a lie—his family tree, too. Sometimes I take a look in the peerage, and then I say to myself: "Here she is going about with a false birth certificate, just like any runaway servant-girl, and for such things people are sent to the reformatory."

HUMMEL. Well, it's quite common. I think I recall a certain incorrectness in regard to the date of your own birth.

MUMMY. It was my mother who started that.... I was not to blame for it.... And it was you, after all, who had the greater share in our guilt....

HUMMEL. No, what wrong we did was provoked by your husband when he took my fiancée away from me! I was born a man who cannot forgive until he has punished. To punish has always seemed an imperative duty to me—and so it seems still!

MUMMY. What are you looking for in this house? What do you want? How did you get in?—Does it concern my daughter? If you touch her, you must die!

HUMMEL. I mean well by her!

MUMMY. And you have to spare her father!

HUMMEL. No!

MUMMY. Then you must die ... in this very room ... back of that screen....

HUMMEL. Perhaps.... but I can't let go when I have got my teeth in a thing....

MUMMY. You wish to marry her to the Student? Why? He is nothing and has nothing.

HUMMEL. He will be rich, thanks to me.

MUMMY. Have you been invited for to-night?

HUMMEL. No, but I intend to get an invitation for your spook supper.

MUMMY. Do you know who will be here?

HUMMEL. Not quite.

MUMMY. The Baron—he who lives above us, and whose father-in-law was buried this afternoon....

HUMMEL. The man who is getting a divorce to marry the daughter of the Janitress.... The man who used to be—your lover!

MUMMY. Another guest will be your former fiancée, who was seduced by my husband....

HUMMEL. Very select company!

MUMMY. If the Lord would let us die! Oh, that we might only die!

HUMMEL. But why do you continue to associate?

MUMMY. Crime and guilt and secrets bind us together, don't you know? Our ties have snapped so that we have slipped apart innumerable times, but we are always drawn together again....

HUMMEL. I think the Colonel is coming.

MUMMY. I'll go in to Adèle, then.... [*Pause*] Consider what you do, Jacob! Spare him....

[Pause; then she goes out.]

COLONEL. [*Enters, haughty and reserved*] Won't you be seated, please?

HUMMEL *seats himself with great deliberation; pause.*

COLONEL. [*Staring at his visitor*] You wrote this letter, sir?

HUMMEL. I did.

COLONEL. Your name is Hummel?

HUMMEL. It is. [*Pause.*]

COLONEL. As I learn that you have bought up all my unpaid and overdue notes, I conclude that I am at your mercy. What do you want?

HUMMEL. Payment—in one way or another.

COLONEL. In what way?

HUMMEL. A very simple one. Let us not talk of the money. All you have to do is to admit me as a guest....

COLONEL. If a little thing like that will satisfy you....

HUMMEL. I thank you.

COLONEL. Anything more?

HUMMEL. Discharge Bengtsson.

COLONEL. Why should I do so? My devoted servant, who has been with me a lifetime, and who has the medal for long and faithful service.... Why should I discharge him?

HUMMEL. Those wonderful merits exist only in your imagination. He is not the man he seems to be.

COLONEL. *Who is?*

HUMMEL. [*Taken back*] True!—But Bengtsson must go!

COLONEL. Do you mean to order my household?

HUMMEL. I do ... as everything visible here belongs to me ... furniture, draperies, dinner ware, linen and other things!

COLONEL. What other things?

HUMMEL. Everything! All that is to be seen is mine! I own it!

COLONEL. Granted! But for all that, my coat of arms and my unspotted name belong to myself.

HUMMEL. No—not even that much! [*Pause*] You are not a nobleman!

COLONEL. Take care!

HUMMEL. [*Producing a document*] If you'll read this extract from the armorial, you will see that the family whose name you are using has been extinct for a century.

COLONEL. [*Reading the document*] I have heard rumours to that effect, but the name was my father's before it was mine.... [*Reading again*] That's right! Yes, you are right—I am not a nobleman! Not even that!—Then I may as well take off my signet-ring.... Oh, I remember now.... It belongs to you.... If you please!

HUMMEL. [*Accepting the ring and putting it into his pocket*] We had better continue. You are no colonel, either.

COLONEL. Am I not?

HUMMEL. No, you have simply held the title of colonel in the American volunteer service by special appointment. After the war in Cuba and the reorganisation of the army, all titles of that kind were abolished....

COLONEL. Is that true?

HUMMEL. [*With a gesture toward his pocket*] Do you wish to see for yourself?

COLONEL. No, it won't be necessary.—Who are you, anyhow, and with what right are you stripping me naked in this fashion?

HUMMEL. You'll see by and by. As to stripping you naked—do you know who you are in reality?

COLONEL. How dare you?

HUMMEL. Take off that wig, and have a look at yourself in the mirror. Take out that set of false teeth and shave off your moustache, too. Let Bengtsson remove the iron stays—and perhaps a certain X Y Z, a lackey, may begin to recognise himself—the man who used to visit the maid's chamber in a certain house for a bite of something good....

The COLONEL makes a movement toward a table on which stands a bell, but is checked by HUMMEL.

HUMMEL. Don't touch that bell, and don't call Bengtsson! If you do, I'll have him arrested.... Now the guests are beginning to arrive.... Keep your composure, and let us continue to play our old parts for a while.

COLONEL. Who are you? Your eyes and your voice remind me of somebody....

HUMMEL. Don't try to find out! Keep silent and obey!

STUDENT. [*Enters and bows to the COLONEL*] Colonel!

COLONEL. I bid you welcome to my house, young man. Your splendid behaviour in connection with that great disaster has brought your name to everybody's lips, and I count it an honour to receive you here....

STUDENT. Being a man of humble birth, Colonel and considering your name and position....

COLONEL. May I introduce?—Mr. Arkenholtz—Mr. Hummel. The ladies are in there, Mr. Arkenholtz—if you please—I have a few more things to talk over with Mr. Hummel....

Guided by the COLONEL, the STUDENT goes into the Hyacinth Room, where he remains visible, standing beside the YOUNG LADY and talking very timidly to her.

COLONEL. A splendid young chap—very musical—sings, and writes poetry.... If he were only a nobleman—if he belonged to our class, I don't think I should object....

HUMMEL. To what?

COLONEL. Oh, my daughter....

HUMMEL. *Your* daughter, you say?—But apropos of that, why is she always sitting in that room?

COLONEL. She has to spend all her time in the Hyacinth Room when she is not out. That is a peculiarity of hers.... Here comes Miss Betty von Holstein-Kron—a charming woman—a Secular Canoness, with just enough money of her own to suit her birth and position....

Hummel. [*To himself*] My fiancée!

The FIANCÉE enters. She is white-haired, and her looks indicate a slightly unbalanced mind.

COLONEL. Miss von Holstein-Kron—Mr. Hummel.

The FIANCÉE curtseys in old-fashioned manner and takes a seat. The DANDY enters and seats himself; he is in mourning and has a very mysterious look.

COLONEL. Baron Skansenkorge....

HUMMEL. [*Aside, without rising*] That's the jewelry thief, I think.... [*To the COLONEL*] If you bring in the Mummy, our gathering will be complete.

COLONEL. [*Going to the door of the Hyacinth Room*] Polly!

MUMMY. [*Enters*] Currrrr!

COLONEL. How about the young people?

HUMMEL. No, not the young people! They must be spared.

The company is seated in a circle, no one saying a word for a while.

COLONEL. Shall we order the tea now?

HUMMEL. What's the use? No one cares for tea, and I can't see the need of pretending. [*Pause*].

COLONEL. Shall we make conversation?

HUMMEL. [*Speaking slowly and with frequent pauses.*] Talk of the weather, which we know all about? Ask one another's state of health, which we know just as well? I prefer silence. Then thoughts become audible, and we can see the past. Silence can hide nothing—but words can. I read the other day that the differentiation of languages had its origin in the desire among savage peoples to keep their tribal secrets hidden from outsiders. This means that every language is a code, and he who finds the universal key can understand every language in the world—which does not prevent the secret from becoming revealed without any key at times, and especially when the fact of paternity is to be proved—but, of course, legal proof is a different matter. Two false witnesses suffice to prove, anything on which they agree, but you don't bring any witnesses along on the kind of expedition I have in mind. Nature herself has planted in man a sense of modesty, which tends to hide that which should be hidden. But we slip into situations unawares, and now and then a favourable chance will reveal the most cherished secret, stripping the impostor of his mask, and exposing the villain....

Long pause during which everybody is subject to silent scrutiny by all the rest.

HUMMEL. How silent everybody is! [*Long silence*] Here, for instance, in this respectable house, this attractive home, where beauty and erudition and wealth have joined hands.... [*Long silence*] All of us sitting here now—we know who we are, don't we? I don't need to tell.... And all of you know me, although you pretend ignorance.... In the next room is my daughter—*mine*, as you know perfectly well. She has lost the desire to live without knowing why.... The fact is that she has been pining away in this air charged with crime and deceit and falsehood of every kind.... That is the reason why I have looked for a friend in whose company she may enjoy the light and heat radiated by noble deeds [*Long silence*] Here is my mission in this house: to tear up the weeds, to expose the crimes, to settle all accounts, so that those young people may start life with a clean slate in a home that is my gift to them. [*Long silence*] Now I grant you safe retreat. Everybody may leave in his due turn. Whoever stays will be arrested. [*Long silence*] Do you hear that clock ticking like the deathwatch hidden in a wall? Can you hear what it says?—"It's time! It's time!"—When it strikes in a few seconds, your time will be up, and then you can go, but not before. You may notice, too, that the clock shakes its fist at you before it strikes. Listen! There it is! "Better beware," it says.... And I can strike, too [*He raps the top of a table with one of his crutches*] Do you hear?

For a while everybody remains silent.

MUMMY. [*Goes up to the dock and stops it; then she speaks in a normal and dignified tone*] But I can stop time in its course. I can wipe out the past and undo what is done. Bribes won't do that, nor will threats—but suffering and repentance will [*She goes to HUMMEL*] We are miserable human creatures, and we know it. We have erred and we have sinned—we, like everybody else. We are not what we seem, but at bottom we are better than ourselves because we disapprove of our own misdeeds. And when you, Jacob Hummel, with your assumed name, propose to sit in judgment on us, you merely prove yourself worse than all the rest. You are not the one you seem to be—no more than we! You are a thief of human souls! You stole mine once upon a time by means of false promises. You killed the Consul, whom they buried this afternoon—strangling him with debts. You are now trying to steal the soul of the Student with the help of an imaginary claim against his father, who never owed you a farthing....

Having vainly tried to rise and say something, HUMMEL sinks back into his chair; as the MUMMY continues her speech he seems to shrink and lose volume more and more.

MUMMY. There is one dark spot in your life concerning which I am not certain, although I have my suspicions.... I believe Bengtsson can throw light on it.

[She rings the table-bell.

HUMMEL. No! Not Bengtsson! Not him!

MUMMY. So he *does* know? [*She rings again.*

The MILKMAID appears in the hallway, but is only seen by HUMMEL, who shrinks back in horror. Then BENGTSOON enters, and the MILKMAID disappears.

MUMMY. Do you know this man, Bengtsson?

BENGTSOON. Oh yes, I know him, and he knows me. Life has its ups and downs, as you know. I have been in his service, and he has been in mine. For two years he came regularly to our kitchen

to be fed by our cook. Because he had to be at work at a certain hour, she made the dinner far ahead of time, and we had to be satisfied with the warmed-up leavings of that beast. He drank the soup-stock, so that we got nothing but water. Like a vampire, he sucked the house of all nourishment, until we became reduced to mere skeletons—and he nearly got us into jail when we dared to call the cook a thief. Later I met that man in Hamburg, where he had another name. Then he was a money-lender, a regular leech. While there, he was accused of having lured a young girl out on the ice in order to drown her, because she had seen him commit a crime, and he was afraid of being exposed....

MUMMY. [*Making a pass with her hand over the face of HUMMEL as if removing a mask*] That's you! And now, give up the notes and the will!

JOHANSSON *appears in the hallway and watches the scene with great interest, knowing that his slavery will now come to an end.*

HUMMEL *produces a bundle of papers and throws them on the table.*

MUMMY. [*Stroking the back of HUMMEL*] Polly! Are you there, Jacob?

HUMMEL. [*Talking like a parrot*] Here is Jacob!—Pretty Polly! Currrrr!

MUMMY. May the clock strike?

HUMMEL. [*With a clucking noise like that of a clock preparing to strike*] The dock may strike! [*Imitating a cuckoo-clock*] Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo....

MUMMY. [*Opening the closet door*] Now the clock has struck! Rise and enter the closet where I have spent twenty years bewailing our evil deed. There you will find a rope that may represent the one with which you strangled the Consul as well as the one with which you meant to strangle your benefactor.... Go!

HUMMEL *enters the closet.*

MUMMY. [*Closes the door after him*] Put up the screen, Bengtsson.... The Death Screen!

BENGTSSON *places the screen in front of the door.*

MUMMY. It is finished! God have mercy on his soul!

ALL. Amen!

Long silence. Then the YOUNG LADY appears in the Hyacinth Room with the STUDENT. She seats herself at a harp and begins a prelude, which changes into an accompaniment to the following recitative:

STUDENT. [*Singing*]

"Seeing the sun, it seemed to my fancy
That I beheld the Spirit that's hidden.
Man must for ever reap what he planted:
Happy is he who has done no evil.
Wrong that was wrought in moments of anger
Never by added wrong can be righted.
Kindness shown to the man whose sorrow
Sprang from your deed, will serve you better.
Fear and guilt have their home together:
Happy indeed is the guiltless man!"

Curtain.

THIRD SCENE

A room furnished in rather bizarre fashion. The general effect of it is Oriental. Hyacinths of different colours are scattered everywhere. On the mantelshelf of the fireplace is seen a huge, seated Buddha, in whose lap rests a bulb. From that bulb rises the stalk of a shallot (Allium Ascalonicum), spreading aloft its almost globular cluster of white, starlike flowers.

An open door in the rear wall, toward the right-hand side, leads to the Round Room, where the COLONEL and the MUMMY are seated. They don't stir and don't utter a word. A part of the Death Screen is also visible.

Another door, at the left, leads to the pantry and the kitchen. The YOUNG LADY [Adèle] and the STUDENT are discovered near a table. She is seated at her harp, and he stands beside her.

YOUNG LADY. Sing to my flowers.

STUDENT. Is this the flower of your soul?

YOUNG LADY. The one and only.—Are you fond of the hyacinth?

STUDENT. I love it above all other flowers. I love its virginal shape rising straight and slender out of the bulb that rests on the water and sends its pure white rootlets down into the colourless fluid. I love the colour of it, whether innocently white as snow or sweetly yellow as honey; whether youthfully pink or maturely red; but above all if blue—with the deep-eyed, faith-inspiring blue of the morning sky. I love these flowers, one and all; love them more than pearls or gold, and have loved them ever since I was a child. I have always admired them, too, because they possess every handsome quality that I lack.... And yet....

YOUNG LADY. What?

STUDENT. My love is unrequited. These beautiful blossoms hate me.

YOUNG LADY. How do you mean?

STUDENT. Their fragrance, powerful and pure as the winds of early spring, which have passed over melting snow—it seems to confuse my senses, to make me deaf and blind, to crowd me out of the room, to bombard me with poisoned arrows that hurt my heart and set my head on fire. Do you know the legend of that flower?

YOUNG LADY. Tell me about it.

STUDENT. Let us first interpret its symbolism; The bulb is the earth, resting on the water or buried in the soil. From that the stalk rises, straight as the axis of the universe. At its upper end appear the six-pointed, starlike flowers.

YOUNG LADY. Above the earth—the stars! What lofty thought! Where did you find it? How did you discover it?

STUDENT. Let me think.... In your eyes!—It is, therefore, an image of the Cosmos. And that is the reason why Buddha is holding the earth-bulb in his lap, brooding on it with a steady gaze, in order that he may behold it spread outward and upward as it becomes transformed into a heaven.... This poor earth must turn into a heaven! That is what Buddha is waiting for!

YOUNG LADY. I see now.... Are not the snow crystals six-pointed, too, like the hyacinth-lily?

STUDENT. You are right! Thus the snow crystal is a falling star....

YOUNG LADY. And the snowdrop is a star of snow—grown out of the snow.

STUDENT. But the largest and most beautiful of all the stars in the firmament, the red and yellow Sirius, is the narcissus, with its yellow-and-red cup and its six white rays....

YOUNG LADY. Have you seen the shallot bloom?

STUDENT. Indeed, I have! It hides its flowers within a ball, a globe resembling the celestial one, and strewn, like that, with white stars....

YOUNG LADY. What a tremendous thought! Whose was it?

STUDENT. Yours!

YOUNG LADY. No, yours!

STUDENT. Ours, then! We have jointly given birth to something; we are wedded....

YOUNG LADY. Not yet.

STUDENT. What more remains?

YOUNG LADY. To await the coming ordeal in patience!

STUDENT. I am ready for it. [*Pause*] Tell me! Why do your parents sit there so silently, without saying a single word?

YOUNG LADY. Because they have nothing to say to each other, and because neither one believes what the other says. This is the way my father puts it: "What is the use of talking, when you can't fool each other anyhow?"

STUDENT. That's horrible....

YOUNG LADY. Here comes the Cook.... Look! how big and fat she is!

STUDENT. What does she want?

YOUNG LADY. Ask me about the dinner.... You see, I am looking after the house during my mother's illness.

STUDENT. Have we to bother about the kitchen, too?

YOUNG LADY. We must eat.... Look at that Cook.... I can't bear the sight of her....

STUDENT. What kind of a monster is she?

Young Lady. She belongs to the Hummel family of vampires. She is eating us alive.

STUDENT. Why don't you discharge her?

YOUNG LADY. Because she won't leave. We can do nothing with her, and we have got her for the sake of our sins.... Don't you see that we are pining and wasting away?

STUDENT. Don't you get enough to eat?

YOUNG LADY. Plenty of dishes, but with all the nourishment gone from the food. She boils the life

out of the beef, and drinks the stock herself, while we get nothing but fibres and water. In the same way, when we have roast, she squeezes it dry. Then she eats the gravy and drinks the juice herself. She takes the strength and savour out of everything she touches. It is as if her eyes were leeches. When she has had coffee, we get the grounds. She drinks the wine and puts water into the bottles....

STUDENT. Kick her out!

YOUNG LADY. We can't!

STUDENT. Why not?

YOUNG LADY. We don't know! But she won't leave! And nobody can do anything with her. She has taken all our strength away from us.

STUDENT. Will you let me dispose of her?

YOUNG LADY. No! It has to be as it is, I suppose.—Here she is now. She will ask me what I wish for dinner, and I tell her, and then she will make objections, and in the end she has her own way.

STUDENT. Why don't you leave it to her entirely?

YOUNG LADY. She won't let me.

STUDENT. What a strange house! It seems to be bewitched!

YOUNG LADY. It is!—Now she turned back on seeing you here.

COOK. [*Appearing suddenly in the doorway at that very moment*] Naw, that was not the reason.

[She grins so that every tooth can be seen.]

STUDENT. Get out of here!

COOK. When it suits me! [*Pause*] Now it does suit me!

[She disappears.]

YOUNG LADY. Don't lose your temper! You must practise patience. She is part of the ordeal we have to face in this house. We have a chambermaid, too, after whom we have to put everything back where it belongs.

STUDENT. Now I am sinking! *Cor in aethere!* Music!

YOUNG LADY. Wait!

STUDENT. Music!

YOUNG LADY. Patience!—This is named the Room of Ordeal.... It is beautiful to look at, but is full of imperfections.

STUDENT. Incredible! Yet such things have to be borne. It is very beautiful, although a little cold. Why don't you have a fire?

YOUNG LADY. Because the smoke comes into the room.

STUDENT. Have the chimney swept!

YOUNG LADY. It doesn't help.—Do you see that writing-table?

STUDENT. Remarkably handsome!

YOUNG LADY. But one leg is too short. Every day I put a piece of cork under that leg. Every day the chambermaid takes it away when she sweeps the room. Every day I have to cut a new piece. Both my penholder and my inkstand are covered with ink every morning, and I have to clean them after that woman—as sure as the sun rises. [*Pause*] What is the worst thing you can think of?

STUDENT. To count the wash. Ugh!

YOUNG LADY. That's what I have to do. Ugh!

STUDENT. Anything else?

YOUNG LADY. To be waked out of your sleep and have to get up and dose the window—which the chambermaid has left unlatched.

STUDENT. Anything else?

YOUNG LADY. To get up on a ladder and tie on the cord which the chambermaid has torn from the window-shade.

STUDENT. Anything else?

YOUNG LADY. To sweep after her; to dust after her; to start the fire again, after she has merely thrown some wood into the fireplace! To watch the damper in the fireplace; to wipe every glass; to set the table over again; to open the wine-bottles; to see that the rooms are aired; to make over your bed; to rinse the water-bottle that is green with sediment; to buy matches and soap, which are always lacking; to wipe the chimneys and cut the wicks in order to keep the lamps from smoking and in order to keep them from going out when we have company, I have to fill them myself....

STUDENT. Music!

YOUNG LADY. Wait! The labour comes first—the labour of keeping the filth of life at a distance.

STUDENT. But you are wealthy, and you have two servants?

YOUNG LADY. What does that help? What would it help to have three? It is troublesome to live, and at times I get tired.... Think, then, of adding a nursery!

STUDENT. The greatest of joys....

YOUNG LADY. And the costliest.... Is life really worth so much trouble?

STUDENT. It depends on the reward you expect for your labours.... To win your hand I would face anything.

YOUNG LADY. Don't talk like that. You can never get me.

STUDENT. Why?

YOUNG LADY. You mustn't ask.

[*Pause.*

STUDENT. You dropped your bracelet out of the window....

YOUNG LADY. Yes, because my hand has grown too small....

[*Pause.*

The COOK appears with a bottle of Japanese soy in her hand.

YOUNG LADY. There is the one that eats me and all the rest alive.

STUDENT. What has she in her hand?

COOK. This is my colouring bottle that has letters on it looking like scorpions. It's the soy that turns water into bouillon, and that takes the place of gravy. You can make cabbage soup out of it, or mock-turtle soup, if you prefer.

STUDENT. Out with you!

COOK. You take the sap out of us, and we out of you. We keep the blood for ourselves and leave you the water—with the colouring. It's the colour that counts! Now I shall leave, but I stay just the same—as long as I please!

[*She goes out.*

STUDENT. Why has Bengtsson got a medal?

YOUNG LADY. On account of his great merits.

STUDENT. Has he no faults?

YOUNG LADY. Yes, great ones, but faults bring you no medals, you know.

[*Both smile.*

STUDENT. You have a lot of secrets in this house....

YOUNG LADY. As in all houses.... Permit us to keep ours! [*Pause.*

STUDENT. Do you care for frankness?

YOUNG LADY. Within reason.

STUDENT. At times I am seized with a passionate craving to say all I think.... Yet I know that the world would go to pieces if perfect frankness were the rule. [*Pause* I attended a funeral the other day—in one of the churches—and it was very solemn and beautiful.

YOUNG LADY. That of Mr. Hummel?

STUDENT. Yes, that of my pretended benefactor. An elderly friend of the deceased acted as mace-bearer and stood at the head of the coffin. I was particularly impressed by the dignified manner and moving words of the minister. I had to cry—everybody cried.... A number of us went to a restaurant afterward, and there I learned that the man with the mace had been rather too friendly with the dead man's son....

The YOUNG LADY stares at him, trying to make out the meaning of his words.

STUDENT. I learned, too, that the dead man had borrowed money of his son's devoted friend.... [*Pause*] And the next day the minister was arrested for embezzling the church funds.—Nice, isn't it?

YOUNG LADY. Oh! [*Pause.*

STUDENT. Do you know what I am thinking of you now?

YOUNG LADY. Don't tell, or I'll die!

STUDENT. I must, lest *I* die!

YOUNG LADY. It is only in the asylum you say all that you think....

STUDENT. Exactly! My father died in a madhouse....

YOUNG LADY. Was he sick?

STUDENT. No, perfectly well, and yet mad. It broke out at last, and these were the circumstances. Like all of us, he was surrounded by a circle of acquaintances whom he called friends for the sake of convenience, and they were a lot of scoundrels, of course, as most people are. He had to have some society, however, as he couldn't sit all alone. As you know, no one tells people what he thinks of them under ordinary circumstances, and my father didn't do so either. He knew that they were false, and he knew the full extent of their perfidy, but, being a wise man and well brought up, he remained always polite. One day he gave a big party.... It was in the evening, naturally, and he was tired out by a hard day's work. Then the strain of keeping his thoughts to himself while talking a lot of damned rot to his guests.... [*The YOUNG LADY is visibly shocked*] Well, while they were still at the table, he rapped for silence, raised his glass, and began to speak.... Then something loosed the trigger, and in a long speech he stripped the whole company naked, one by one, telling them all he knew about their treacheries. At last, when utterly tired out, he sat down on the table itself and told them all to go to hell!

YOUNG LADY. Oh!

STUDENT. I was present, and I shall never forget what happened after that. My parents had a fight, the guests rushed for the doors—and my father was taken to a madhouse, where he died! [*Pause*] To keep silent too long is like letting water stagnate so that it rots. That is what has happened in this house. There is something rotten here. And yet I thought it paradise itself when I saw you enter here the first time.... It was a Sunday morning, and I stood gazing into these rooms. Here I saw a Colonel who was no colonel. I had a generous benefactor who was a robber and had to hang himself. I saw a Mummy who was not a mummy, and a maiden—how about the maidenhood, by the by?... Where is beauty to be found? In nature, and in my own mind when it has donned its Sunday clothes. Where do we find honour and faith? In fairy-tales and childish fancies. Where can I find anything that keeps its promise? Only in my own imagination!... Your flowers have poisoned me and now I am squirting their poison back at you.... I asked you to become my wife in a home full of poetry, and song, and music; and then the Cook appeared.... *Sursum corda!* Try once more to strike fire and purple out of the golden harp.... Try, I ask you, I implore you on my knees.... [*As she does not move*] Then I must do it myself! [*He picks up the harp, but is unable to make its strings sound*] It has grown deaf and dumb! Only think that the most beautiful flower of all can be so poisonous—that it can be more poisonous than any other one.... There must be a curse on all creation and on life itself.... Why did you not want to become my bride? Because the very well-spring of life within you has been sickened.... Now I can feel how that vampire in the kitchen is sucking my life juices.... She must be a Lamia, one of those that suck the blood of children. It is always in the servants' quarters that the seed-leaves of the children are nipped, if it has not already happened in the bedroom.... There are poisons that blind you, and others that open your eyes more widely. I must have been born with that second kind of poison, I fear, for I cannot regard what is ugly as beautiful, or call evil good—I cannot! They say that Jesus Christ descended into hell. It refers merely to his wanderings on this earth—his descent into that madhouse, that jail, that morgue, the earth. The madmen killed him when he wished to liberate them, but the robber was set free. It is always the robber who gets sympathy! Woe! Woe is all of us! Saviour of the World, save us—we are perishing!

Toward the end of the STUDENT'S speech, the YOUNG LADY has drooped more and more. She seems to be dying. At last she manages to reach a bell and rings for BENGTSOON, who enters shortly afterward.

YOUNG LADY. Bring the screen! Quick! I am dying!

BENGTSOON fetches the screen, opens it and places it so that the YOUNG LADY is completely hidden behind.

STUDENT. The liberator is approaching! Be welcome, thou pale and gentle one!—Sleep, you beautiful, unhappy and innocent creature, who have done nothing to deserve your own sufferings! Sleep without dreaming, and when you wake again—may you be greeted by a sun that does not burn, by a home without dust, by friends without stain, by a love without flaw! Thou wise and gentle Buddha, who sitst waiting there to see a heaven sprout from this earth, endow us with patience in the hour of trial, and with purity of will, so that thy hope be not put to shame!

The strings of the harp begin to hum softly, and a white light pours into the room.

STUDENT. [*Singing*]

"Seeing the sun, it seemed to my fancy
That I beheld the Spirit that's hidden.
Man must for ever reap what he planted:
Happy is he who has done no evil.
Wrong that was wrought in moments of anger
Never by added wrong can be righted.
Kindness shown to the man whose sorrow
Sprang from your deed, will serve you better.
Fear and guilt have their home together:
Happy indeed is the guiltless man!"^[1]

A faint moaning sound is heard from behind the screen.

STUDENT. You poor little child—you child of a world of illusion, guilt, suffering, and death—a world of eternal change, disappointment, and pain—may the Lord of Heaven deal mercifully with you on your journey!

*The whole room disappears, and in its place appears Boecklin's "The Island of Death...."
Soft music, very quiet and pleasantly wistful, is heard from without.*

Curtain.

- [1] The lines recited by the *STUDENT* are a paraphrase of several passages from "The Song of the Sun" in the Poetic Edda. It is characteristic of Strindberg's attitude during his final period that this Eddic poem, which apparently has occupied his mind great deal, as he has used it a number of times in "The Bridal Crown" also, is the only one of that ancient collection which is unmistakably Christian in its colouring. It has a certain apocryphal reputation and is not regarded on a par with the other contents of the Poetic Edda.
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THE FIRST WARNING

(FÖRSTA VARNINGEN)

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

1893

CHARACTERS

The HUSBAND, thirty-seven (Axel Brunner)

The WIFE, thirty-six (Olga Brunner)

ROSE, fifteen

The BARONESS, her mother, forty-seven

A MAID

The scene is laid in Germany, about 1890.

A German dining-room, with a rectangular dinner-table occupying the middle of the floor. A huge wardrobe stands at the right. There is an oven of glazed bricks.

The door in the background stands open, disclosing a landscape with vineyards, above which appears a church spire.

At the left is a door papered like the rest of the wall. A travelling-bag is placed on a chair by the wardrobe.

The WIFE is writing at the table, on which lie a bunch of flowers and a pair of gloves.

HUSBAND. [*Entering*] Good morning—although it's noon already. Did you sleep well?

WIFE. Splendidly, considering the circumstances.

HUSBAND. Yes, we might have broken away a little earlier from that party last night....

WIFE. I seem to remember that you made the same remark a number of times during the night....

HUSBAND. [*Playing with the flowers*] Do you really remember that much?

WIFE. I remember also that you got mad because I sang too much.... Please don't spoil my flowers!

HUSBAND. Which previously belonged to the Captain, I suppose?

WIFE. Yes, and which probably belonged to the gardener before the florist got them. But now they are mine.

HUSBAND. [*Throwing away the flowers*] It's a nice habit they have in this place—of sending flowers to other people's wives.

WIFE. I think it would have been well for you to go to bed a little earlier.

HUSBAND. I am perfectly convinced that the Captain was of the same opinion. But as my one choice was to stay and be made ridiculous, or go home alone and be made equally ridiculous, I preferred to stay....

WIFE. ... And make yourself ridiculous.

HUSBAND. Can you explain why you care to be the wife of a ridiculous man? I should never care to be the husband of a ridiculous woman.

WIFE. You are to be pitied!

HUSBAND. Right you are. Frequently I have thought so myself. But do you know what is the most tragical feature of my ridiculousness?

WIFE. I am sure your own answer will be much cleverer than any one I could give.

HUSBAND. It is—that I am in love with my wife after fifteen years of marriage....

WIFE. Fifteen years! Have you begun to use a pedometer?

HUSBAND. For the measurement of my thorny path, you mean? No. But you, who are dancing on roses, might do well in counting your steps To me you are still as young as ever—unfortunately—while my own hair is turning grey. But as we are of the same age, my looks should tell you that you must be growing old yourself....

WIFE. And that is what you are waiting for?

HUSBAND. Exactly. How many times have I not wished that you were old and ugly, that you were pock-marked, that your teeth were gone, just to have you to myself and be rid of this worry which never leaves me!

WIFE. How charming! And once you had me old and ugly, then everything would be so very peaceful until you began to worry about somebody else, and I was left to enjoy all that peace alone, by myself.

HUSBAND. No!

WIFE. Yes! It has been well proved that your love loses its fervour the moment you have no reason to be jealous. Do you remember last summer, when there was not a soul on that island but we two? You were away all day, fishing, hunting, getting up an appetite, putting on flesh—and developing a self-assurance that was almost insulting.

HUSBAND. And yet I recall being jealous—of the hired man.

WIFE. Merciful Heavens!

HUSBAND. Yes, I noticed that you couldn't give him an order without making conversation; that you couldn't send him out to cut some wood without first having inquired about the state of his health, his future prospects, and his love-affairs.... You are blushing, I think?

WIFE. Because I am ashamed of you....

HUSBAND ... Who....

WIFE. ... Have no sense of shame whatever.

HUSBAND. Yes, so you say. But will you please tell me why you hate me?

WIFE. I don't hate you. I simply despise you! Why? Probably for the same reason that makes me despise all men as soon as they—what do you call it?—are in love with me. I am like that, and I can't tell why.

HUSBAND. So I have observed, and my warmest wish has been that I might hate you, so that you might love me. Woe is the man who loves his own wife!

WIFE. Yes, you are to be pitied, and so am I, but what can be done?

HUSBAND. Nothing. We have roved and roamed for seven years, hoping that some circumstance, some chance, might bring about a change. I have tried to fall in love with others, and have failed. In the meantime your eternal contempt and my own continued ridiculousness have stripped me of all courage, all faith in myself, all power to act. Six times I have run away from you—and now I shall make my seventh attempt. [*He rises and picks up the travelling-bag.*]

WIFE. So those little trips of yours were attempts to run away?

HUSBAND. Futile attempts! The last time I got as far as Genoa. I went to the galleries, but saw no pictures—only you. I went to the opera, but heard nobody—only your voice back of every note. I went to a Pompeian café, and the one woman that pleased me looked like you—or seemed to do so later.

WIFE. [*Revolting*] You have visited places of that kind?

HUSBAND. Yes, that far have I been carried by my love—and by my virtue, which has embarrassed me by making me ridiculous.

WIFE. That's the end of everything between us two!

HUSBAND. So I suppose, as I can't make you jealous.

WIFE. No, I don't know what it is to be jealous—not even of Rose, who loves you to distraction.

HUSBAND. How ungrateful of me not to notice it! On the other hand, I have had my suspicions of the old Baroness, who is all the time finding excuses for visiting that big wardrobe over there. But as she is our landlady, and the furniture belongs to her, I may be mistaken as to the motive that makes our rooms so attractive to her.... Now I'll get dressed, and in half an hour I shall be gone—without any farewells, if you please!

WIFE. You seem rather afraid of farewells.

HUSBAND. Particularly when you are concerned in them!

He goes out. The WIFE remains alone a few moments. Then ROSE enters. She is carelessly dressed, and her hair is down. A scarf wrapped about her head and covering

her cheeks and chin indicates toothache. There is a hole on the left sleeve of her dress, which ends half-way between her knees and her ankles.

WIFE. Well, Rose!—What's the matter, child?

ROSE. Good morning, Mrs. Brunner. I have such a toothache that I wish I were dead!

WIFE. Poor little thing!

ROSE. To-morrow is the Corpus Christi festival, and I was to walk in the procession—and to-day I should be binding my wreath of roses, and Mr. Axel has promised to help me with it.... Oh, those teeth!

WIFE. Let me see if there are any signs of decay—open your mouth now!—What wonderful teeth you have! Perfect pearls, my dear child! [*She kisses ROSE on the mouth.*]

ROSE. [*Annoyed*] You mustn't kiss me, Mrs. Olga! You mustn't! I don't want it! [*She climbs up on the table and puts her feet on one of the chairs*] Really, I don't know what I want! I should have liked to go to that party yesterday—but I was forced to stay at home all by myself in order to get my lessons done—just as if I were nothing but a child—and then I have to sit on the same bench with those kids! But all the same I won't let the Captain chuck me under the chin any longer, for I am no child! No, I am not! And if my mother tries to pull my hair again—I don't know what I'll do to her!

WIFE. What's the matter, my dear Rose? What has happened, anyhow?

ROSE. I don't know what is the matter, but I have shooting pains in my head and in my teeth, and I feel as if I had a red-hot iron in my back—and I am disgusted with life. I should like to drown myself. I should like to run away, and go from one fair to another, and sing, and be insulted by all sorts of impudent fellows....

WIFE. Listen, Rose! Listen to me now!

ROSE. I wish I had a baby! Oh, I wish it were not such an awful shame to have a baby! Oh, Mrs. Olga [*She catches sight of the travelling-bag*] Who is going away?

WIFE. My ... my husband.

ROSE. Then you have been nasty to him again, Mrs. Olga.—Where is he going? Is he going far away? When will he be back?

WIFE. I—I know nothing at all!

ROSE. Oh, you don't? Haven't you asked him even? [*She begins to ransack the bag*] But I—I can see that he is going far away, because here is his passport. Very far, I am sure! How far, do you think?—Oh, Mrs. Olga, why can't you be nice to him, when he is so kind to you?

[She throws herself weeping into the arms of Mrs. Brunner.]

WIFE. Now, now, my dear child! Poor little girl—is she crying? Poor, innocent heart!

ROSE. I like Mr. Axel so much!

WIFE. And you are not ashamed of saying so to his own wife? And you want me to console you—you, who are my little rival?—Well, have a good cry, my dear child. That helps a whole lot.

ROSE. [*Tearing herself away*] No! If I don't want to cry, I don't have to! And if it suits me to pick up what you are throwing away, I'll do so!—I don't ask any one's permission to like anybody or anything!

WIFE. Well, well, well! But are you so sure that he likes you?

ROSE. [*Throwing herself into the elder woman's arms again, weeping*] No, I am not.

WIFE. [*Tenderly, as if talking to a baby*] And now perhaps you want me to ask Mr. Axel to like you? Is that what Mrs. Olga has to do?

ROSE. [*Weeping*] Ye-es!—And he mustn't go away! He mustn't!—Please be nice to him, Mrs. Olga! Then he won't go away.

WIFE. What in the world am I going to do, you little silly?

ROSE. I don't know. But you might let him kiss you as much as he wishes.... I was watching you in the garden the other day, when he wanted, and you didn't—and then I thought....

BARONESS. [*Entering*] Sorry to disturb you, madam, but with your permission I should like to get into the wardrobe.

WIFE. [*Rising*] You're perfectly welcome, Baroness.

BARONESS. Oh, there is Rose.—So you are up again, and I thought you were in bed!—Go back to your lessons at once.

ROSE. But you know, mamma, we have no school to-morrow because of the festival.

BARONESS. You had better go anyhow, and don't bother Mr. and Mrs. Brunner all the time.

WIFE. [*Edging toward the door in the background*] Oh, Rose is not bothering us at all. We couldn't be better friends than we are.... We were just going into the garden to pick some flowers, and then we meant to try on the white dress Rose is to wear to-morrow.

ROSE. [*Disappears through the door in the background with a nod of secret understanding to the*

WIFE] Thank you!

BARONESS. You are spoiling Rose fearfully.

WIFE. A little kindness won't spoil anybody, and least of all a girl like Rose, who has a remarkable heart and a head to match it.

The BARONESS is digging around in the wardrobe for something. The WIFE stands in the doorway in the rear. Entering by the door at the left with a number of packages, the HUSBAND exchanges a glance of mutual understanding with his wife. Then hath watch the BARONESS smilingly for a moment. At last the WIFE goes out, and the HUSBAND begins to put his packages into the travelling-bag.

BARONESS. Pardon me for disturbing you.... I'll be through in a moment....

HUSBAND. Please don't mind me, Baroness.

BARONESS. [*Emerging from the wardrobe*] Are you going away again, Mr. Brunner?

HUSBAND. I am.

BARONESS. Far?

HUSBAND. Perhaps—and perhaps not.

BARONESS. Don't you know?

HUSBAND. I never know anything about my own fate after having placed it in the hands of another person.

BARONESS. Will you pardon me a momentary impertinence, Mr. Brunner?

HUSBAND. That depends.... You are very friendly with my wife, are you not?

BARONESS. As friendly as two women can be with each other. But my age, my experience of life, my temperament.... [*She checks herself abruptly*] However—I have seen that you are unhappy, and as I have suffered in the same way myself, I know that nothing but time will cure your disease.

HUSBAND. Is it really I who am diseased? Is not my behaviour quite normal? And is not my suffering caused by seeing other people behave abnormally or—pathologically?

BARONESS. I was married to a man whom I loved.... Yes, you smile! You think a woman cannot love because.... But I did love him, and he loved me, and yet—he loved others, too. I suffered from jealousy so that—so that—I made myself insufferable. He went into the war—being an officer, you know—and he has never returned. I was told that he had been killed, but his body was never found, and now I imagine that he is alive and bound to another woman.—Think of it! I am still jealous of my dead husband. At night I see him in my dreams together with that other woman.... Have you ever known torments like that, Mr. Brunner?

HUSBAND. You may be sure I have!—But what makes you think that he is still alive?

[He begins to arrange his things in the travelling-bag.

BARONESS. A number of circumstances combined to arouse my suspicions at one time, but for years nothing happened to revive them. Then you came here four months ago, and, as a strange fate would have it, I noticed at once a strong resemblance between you and my husband. It served me as a reminder. And as my dreams took on flesh and blood, so to speak, my old suspicions turned into certainty, and now I really believe that he is alive? I am in a constant torment of jealousy—and that has enabled me to understand you.

HUSBAND. [*Becoming attentive, after having listened for a while with apparent indifference*] You say that I resemble your husband.—Won't you be seated, Baroness?

BARONESS. [*Sits down at the table with her back to the public; the HUSBAND takes a chair beside her*] He looked like you, and—barring certain weaknesses—his character also....

HUSBAND. He was about ten years older than I.... And he had a scar on his right cheek that looked as if it had been made by a needle....

BARONESS. That's right!

HUSBAND. Then I met your husband one night in London.

BARONESS. Is he alive?

HUSBAND. I have to figure it out—for the moment I can't tell.... Let's see! That was five years ago—in London, as I told you. I had been to a party—men and women—and the atmosphere had been rather depressed. On leaving the place, I joined the first man who gave me a chance to unburden myself. We were *en rapport* at once, and our chat developed into one of those endless sidewalk conversations, during which he let me have his entire history—having first found out that I came from his own district.

BARONESS. Then he is alive?...

HUSBAND. He was not killed in the war—that much is certain—because he was taken prisoner. Then he fell in love with the mayor's daughter, ran away with her to England, was deserted by his fair lady, and began to gamble—with constant bad luck. When we separated in the morning hours, he gave me the impression of being doomed. He made me promise that if chance should

ever put you in my way after a year had gone by, and provided that he had not in the meantime communicated with me by advertisement in a newspaper I am always reading, I was to consider him dead. And when I met you, I was to kiss you on the hand, and your daughter on the brow, saying on his behalf: "Forgive!"

As he kisses the hand of the BARONESS, ROSE appears on the veranda, outside the open door, and watches them with evident excitement.

BARONESS. [*Agitated*] Then he is dead?

HUSBAND. Yes, and I should have given you his message a little more promptly, if I had not long ago forgotten the man's name as well as the man himself. [*The BARONESS is pulling at her handkerchief, apparently unable to decide what to say or do*] Do you feel better now?

BARONESS. Yes, in a way, but all hope is gone, too.

HUSBAND. The hope of suffering those sweet torments again....

BARONESS. Besides my girl, I had nothing to interest me but my anxiety.... How strange it is that even suffering can be missed!

HUSBAND. You'll have to pardon me, but I do think that you miss your jealousy more than your lost husband.

BARONESS. Perhaps—because my jealousy was the invisible tie connecting me with that image of my dreams.... And now, when I have nothing left [*She takes hold of his hand*] You, who have brought me his last message—you, who are a living reminder of him, and who have suffered like me....

HUSBAND. [*Becomes restless, rises and looks at his watch*] Pardon me, but I have to take the next train—really, I must!

BARONESS. I was going to ask you not to do so. Why should you go? Don't you feel at home here?

ROSE disappears from the veranda.

HUSBAND. Your house has brought me some of the best hours I have experienced during these stormy years, and I leave you with the greatest regret—but I must Baroness. On account of what happened last night?

HUSBAND. Not that alone—it was merely the last straw.... And now I must pack, if you'll pardon me.

[He turns his attention to the travelling-bag again.]

BARONESS. If your decision is irrevocable.... won't you let me help you, as no one else is doing so?

HUSBAND. I thank you ever so much, my dear Baroness, but I am almost done.... And I shall ask you to make our leave-taking less painful by making it short.... In the midst of all trouble, your tender cares have been a sweet consolation to me, and I find it almost as painful to part from you as—[*The BARONESS looks deeply moved*]—from a good mother. I have read compassion in your glances, even when discretion compelled you to remain silent, and I have thought at times that your presence tended to improve my domestic happiness—as your age permitted you to say things that a younger woman would not like to hear from one of her own generation....

BARONESS. [*With some hesitation*] You must forgive me for saying that your wife is no longer young....

HUSBAND. In my eyes she is.

BARONESS. But not in the eyes of the world.

HUSBAND. So much the better, although, on the other hand, I find her coquetry the more disgusting the less her attractions correspond to her pretensions—and if a moment comes when they begin to laugh at her....

BARONESS. They are doing so already.

HUSBAND. Really? Poor Olga! [*He looks thoughtful; then, as a single stroke of a bell is heard from the church tower outside, he pulls himself together*] The clock struck. I must leave in half an hour.

BARONESS. But you cannot leave without your breakfast.

HUSBAND. I am not hungry. As always, when starting on a journey, I am so excited that my nerves tremble like telephone wires in very cold weather....

BARONESS. Then I'll make you a cup of coffee. You'll let me do that, won't you? And I'll send up the maid to help you pack.

HUSBAND. Your kindness is so great, Baroness, that I fear being tempted into weaknesses that I should have to regret later on.

BARONESS. You would never regret following my advice—if you only would! [*She goes out.*]

The HUSBAND remains alone for a few moments. Then ROSE enters from the rear with a basketful of roses.

HUSBAND. Good morning, Miss Rose. What's the matter?

ROSE. Why?

HUSBAND. Why.... Because you have your head wrapped up like that.

ROSE. [*Tearing off the scarf and hiding it within her dress*] There is nothing the matter with me. I am perfectly well. Are you going away?

HUSBAND. Yes, I am.

The MAID enters.

ROSE. What do you want?

MAID. The Baroness said I should help Mr. Brunner to pack.

ROSE. It isn't necessary. You can go!

The MAID hesitates.

ROSE. Go, I tell you!

The MAID goes out.

HUSBAND. Isn't that rather impolite to me, Miss Rose?

ROSE. No, it is not. I wanted to help you myself. But you are impolite when you run away from your promise to help me with the flowers for to-morrow's festival. Not that I care a bit—as I am not going to the festival to-morrow, because—I don't know where I may be to-morrow.

HUSBAND. What does that mean?

ROSE. Can't I help you with something, Mr. Axel? Won't you let me brush your hat?

[She picks up his hat and begins to brush it.

HUSBAND. No, I can't let you do that, Miss Rose.

[He tries to take the hat away from her.

ROSE. Let me alone! [*She puts her fingers into the hole on her sleeve and tears it open*] There, now! You tore my dress!

HUSBAND. You are so peculiar to-day, Miss Rose, and I think your restiveness is troubling your mother.

ROSE. Well, what do I care? I am glad if it troubles her, although I suppose that will hurt *you*. But I don't care any more for you than I care for the cat in the kitchen or the rats in the cellar. And if I were your wife, I should despise you, and go so far away that you could never find me again!—You should be ashamed of kissing another woman! Shame on you!

HUSBAND. Oh, you saw me kissing your mother's hand, did you? Then I must tell you that it was nothing but a final greeting from your father, whom I met abroad after you had seen him for the last time. And I have a greeting for you, too....

He goes to ROSE and puts his hands about her head in order to kiss her brow, but ROSE throws her head back so that her lips meet his. At that moment the WIFE appears on the veranda, shrinks back at what she sees and disappears again.

HUSBAND. My dear child, I meant only to give you an innocent kiss on the brow.

ROSE. Innocent? Ha-ha! Yes, very innocent!—And you believe those fairy-tales mother tells about father, who died several years ago! That was a man, I tell you, who knew how to love, and who dared to make love! He didn't tremble at the thought of a kiss, and he didn't wait until he was asked! If you won't believe me, come with me into the attic, and I'll let you read the letters he wrote to his mistresses.... Come! [*She opens the papered door, so that the stairs leading to the attic become visible*] Ha-ha-ha! You're afraid that I am going to seduce you, and you look awfully surprised ... surprised because a girl like me, who has been a woman for three years, knows that there is nothing innocent about love! Do you imagine that I think children are born through the ear? Now I can see that you despise me, but you shouldn't do that, for I am neither worse nor better than anybody else.... I am like this!

HUSBAND. Go and change your dress before your mother comes, Miss Rose.

ROSE. Do you think I have such ugly arms? Or don't you dare to look at them?—Now I think I know why why your wife why you are so jealous of your wife!

HUSBAND. Well, if that isn't the limit!

ROSE. Look at him blush! On my behalf, or on your own? Do you know how many times I have been in love?

HUSBAND. Never!

ROSE. Never with a bashful fellow like you!—Tell me, does that make you despise me again?

HUSBAND. A little!—Take care of your heart, and don't put it where the birds can pick at it, and

where it gets—dirty. You call yourself a woman, but you are a very young woman—a girl, in other words....

ROSE. And for that reason just for that reason.... But I can become a woman....

HUSBAND. Until you have—I think we had better postpone conversations of this kind. Shake hands on that, Miss Rose!

ROSE. [*With tears of anger*] Never! Never! Oh, you!

HUSBAND. Are we not going to part as friends—we who have had so many pleasant days together during the gloomy winter and the slow spring?

WIFE. [*Enters, carrying a tray with the coffee things on it; she seems embarrassed and pretends not to notice ROSE*] I thought you might have time to drink a nice cup of coffee before you leave. [*ROSE tries to take the tray away from her*] No, my little girl, I can attend to this myself.

HUSBAND. [*Watching his wife in a questioning and somewhat ironic manner*] That was an excellent idea of yours....

WIFE. [*Evading his glance*] I am glad ... that....

ROSE. Perhaps I had better say good-bye now—to Mr. Brunner....

HUSBAND. So you mean to desert me now, Miss Rose....

ROSE. I suppose I must ... because ... your wife is angry with me.

WIFE. I? Why in the world....

ROSE. You promised to try on my dress....

WIFE. Not at this time, child. You can see that I have other things to do now. Or perhaps you wish to keep my husband company while I get the dress ready?

HUSBAND. Olga!

WIFE. What is it?

ROSE *puts her fingers into her mouth, looking at once embarrassed and angry.*

WIFE. You had better dress decently, my dear young lady, if you are to go with us to the train.

ROSE *remains as before.*

WIFE. And suppose you take your flowers with you, if there is to be any demonstration....

HUSBAND. That's cruel, Olga!

ROSE. [*Dropping a curtsey*] Good-bye, Mr. Brunner.

HUSBAND. [*Shaking hands with her*] Good-bye, Miss Rose. I hope you will be happy, and that you will be a big girl soon—a very big girl.

ROSE. [*Picking up her flowers*] Good-bye, Mrs. Brunner. [*As she gets no answer*] Good-bye! [*She runs out.*

HUSBAND *and WIFE look equally embarrassed; she tries to avoid looking him in the face.*

WIFE. Can I be of any help?

HUSBAND. No, thank you, I am practically done.

WIFE. And there are so many others to help you.

HUSBAND. Let me have a look at you!

[*He tries to take hold of her head.*

WIFE. [*Escaping him*] No, leave me alone.

HUSBAND. What is it?

WIFE. Perhaps you think that I am—that I am jealous?

HUSBAND. I think so when you say it, but I could never have believed it before.

WIFE. Of a schoolgirl like that—ugh!

HUSBAND. The character of the object seems immaterial in cases of this kind. I felt jealous of a hired man You saw, then, that....

WIFE. That you kissed her!

HUSBAND. No, it was she who kissed me.

WIFE. How shameless! But minxes like her are regular apes!

HUSBAND. Yes, they take after the grown-up people.

WIFE. You seem to be pleased by her attentions anyhow.

HUSBAND. Little used as I am to such attentions....

WIFE. On the part of young ladies, perhaps—but you seem less timid with the old ones....

HUSBAND. You saw that, too, did you?

WIFE. No, but Rose told me. Apparently you are quite a lady-killer.

HUSBAND. So it seems. It's too bad that I can't profit by it.

WIFE. You'll soon be free to choose a younger and prettier wife.

HUSBAND. I am not aware of any such freedom.

WIFE. Now when I am old and ugly!

HUSBAND. I can't make out what has happened. Let me have another look at you. [*He comes close to her.*]

WIFE. [*Hiding her face at his bosom*] You mustn't look at me!

HUSBAND. What in the world does this mean? You are not jealous of a little schoolgirl or an old widow....

WIFE. I have broken—one of my front teeth. Please don't look at me!

HUSBAND. Oh, you child!—With pain comes the first tooth, and with pain the first one goes.

WIFE. And now you'll leave me, of course?

HUSBAND. Not on your life! [*Closing the bag with a snap*] To-morrow we'll start for Augsburg to get you a new tooth of gold.

WIFE. But we'll never come back here.

HUSBAND. Not if you say so.

WIFE. And now your fears are gone?

HUSBAND. Yes—for another week.

BARONESS. [*Enters carrying a tray; looks very embarrassed at seeing them together*] Excuse me, but I thought....

HUSBAND. Thank you, Baroness, I have had coffee already, but for your sake I'll have another cup. And if you—[*ROSE, dressed in white, appears in the doorway at that moment*] and Miss Rose care to keep us company, we have no objection. On the contrary, nothing could please us better, as my wife and I are leaving on the first train to-morrow morning.

Curtain.

GUSTAVUS VASA

(GUSTAF VASA)

HISTORIC DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

1899

CHARACTERS

GUSTAVUS I, *King of Sweden*

MARGARET LEIJONHUFVUD (*Lion-Head*), *his second Queen*

PRINCE ERIC, *the only son of the King's first marriage*

PRINCE JOHAN, *eldest son of the King's second marriage*

EBBA CARLSDAUGHTER, *a nun at the convent of Vreta and
mother-in-law of the King*

MASTER OLAVUS PETRI, *commonly known as Master Olof*

CHRISTINE, *his wife*

REGINALD, *their son*

HERMAN ISRAEL, *a councillor of the free city of Luebeck*

JACOB ISRAEL, *his son*

MONS NILSSON OF ASPEBODA, *one of the*

ANDERS PERSSON OF RANKHYTTA, *free miners of Dalecarlia*

INGHEL HANSSON }
NILS OF SÖDERBY }

JORGHEN PERSSON, *secretary to PRINCE ERIC*

MASTER STIG, *pastor at Copperberg (Falun), Dalecarlia*

MONS NILSSON'S WIFE

BARBRO, *his daughter*

AGDA, *a barmaid*

KARIN MONSDAUGHTER, *a flower girl*

MARCUS }

DAVID } *Hanseatic clerks*

ENGELBRECHT, *a free miner who was one of the Dalecarlian*

ski-runners that overtook GUSTAVUS VASA on his flight to Norway and brought him back to head the Dalecarlian revolt against King Christian II of Denmark

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

A COURTIER

A MESSENGER

TWO BEGGARS

SCENARIO

ACT I. THE HOUSE OF MONS NILSSON AT COPPERBERG

ACT II. SCENE I. THE HANSEATIC OFFICE AT STOCKHOLM

SCENE II. THE BLUE DOVE INN

ACT III. THE KING'S STUDY

ACT IV. SCENE I. SQUARE IN FRONT OF THE HANSEATIC OFFICE

SCENE II. THE STUDY OF MASTER OLAVUS

ACT V. THE GARDEN TERRACE IN FRONT OF THE ROYAL PALACE
AT STOCKHOLM

ACT I

The main living-room in MONS NILSSON'S house at Copperberg (which is the old name of the present city of Falun in Dalecarlia).

There is a door in the rear, with a window on either side, through which are visible small city houses with snow-covered roofs and the flames belching from many blast-furnaces. A large open fireplace with mantelpiece occupies the center of the right wall. A fine log fire is going in the fireplace. On the same side, nearer the footlights, is a door.

A long tablefills the middle of the floor. At its farther end stands an armchair with cushions on the seat and bright textiles draped over the back and the arm supports. Wooden benches run along the two long sides of the table.

Wooden seats are placed along the left wall.

Above the wainscotting of the walls appear large, simple frescoes depicting the adventures of GUSTAVUS VASA in Dalecarlia (at the beginning of the war of liberation). The one at the left of the rear door shows him at the home of Master John at Svärdsjö; the one at the right pictures him threshing in the barn of ANDERS PERSSON OF RANKHYTTAN (while Danish soldiers are searching the place for him).

The ringing of a church-bell is heard from the outside as the curtain rises.

MONS NILSSON is seated at the table, writing. His WIFE is arranging tankards and beakers of silver on the mantelshelf.

MONS. That's four o'clock, is it not?

WIFE. Of course.

MONS. Sounds like fire.

WIFE. Is that any special sound?

MONS. Yes, it sounds like "help-help, help-help!"

WIFE. That's the way it has sounded ever since the King carried off our bells, it seems to me.

MONS. Be quiet! And don't talk behind anybody's back. The King will soon be here himself.

WIFE. Has the King sent word of his visit, as you have put everything in order to receive him?

MONS. Not exactly, but when he sends word that he is coming to Copperberg, it is not to be expected that he will pass by his friend Mons Nilsson, who helped him in the days of trial, and who has stood by him both against Master Knut and Peder the Chancellor, not to speak of the False Sture.^[1] And he acted as godfather for my girl besides.

WIFE. That was a good while ago; but when the King's bailiff came here to get the bells two years ago, you helped to kill him.

MONS. That was two years ago, and I guess he was set on having our heads at that time. But just then King Christian broke into the country from Norway. Our own King turned meek as a lamb at once, and when he asked us for help, we Dalecarlians stood by him like one man, and gave him all the help he wanted. So I think we can call it even.

WIFE. So *you* think, but the King never calls it even except when it is to his own advantage.

MONS. Perhaps not. But as long as Christian still is free, he will not dare to break with us.

WIFE. Well, is Christian still free?

MONS. I have heard nothing to the contrary. Anyhow, the King owes us such a lot of money that, leaving old friendship aside....

WIFE. God bless you! And I hope He will protect you from the friend that is always breaking his word and safe-conduct!

MONS. Don't open the old wounds, but let bygones be bygones.

WIFE. If you do that, and he won't, you can hardly call it a reconciliation. Take care!

MONS. The sound of that bell is really dreadful!

WIFE. So it is to my ears, because it always reminds me of the big Mary, which the bailiff took away. Do you remember when the Mary was cast out of the best refined copper and the whole town brought milk and cream to give the clay of the form more firmness—and then, when the melt was ready, we threw in one-half of our table silver to improve the tone? It was baptised at Candlemas and rung for the first time at the burial of my father.... And then it went to Herman Israel at Luebeck, who made coin out of it.

MONS. All that is perfectly true, but now it *must* be forgotten—or we shall never have peace.

BARBRO, *their daughter, enters with a basket full of finely chopped spruce branches; she is dressed in black and white, and so are several younger children who follow her, also carrying baskets. All of them begin to spread the chopped spruce over the floor.*

WIFE. [*To MONS*] Is there to be a funeral?

MONS. No, but not being the season, we couldn't get any leaves.

WIFE. I think the children might put off their mourning at least.

MONS. No, that's just what they should not do, because when the King asks whom they are mourning—well, what are you to answer, Barbros?

BARBRO. "We mourn our beloved teacher, Pastor John at Svärdsjö."

MONS. And what are you to say, if the King asks you why?

BARBRO. "Because he was an early friend of King Gustavus and saved his precious life for our country."

MONS. What year was that?

BARBRO. "The very year when Christian the Tyrant cut the head off the Swedish nobility."^[2]

MONS. That's right, children. And over there you see the picture of Master John when he is holding the towel for the outlaw who has been threshing in the barn. [*To his WIFE*] On the other hand, it is not necessary to tell the children that the King took his friend's head two years ago.

WIFE. Have you really that much sense left?—Do you think the King likes any reminder of a deed that has brought him so little honour?

MONS. Let him like it or dislike it, he'll have to swallow it. It was an ugly deed, and Master John was a saint and a martyr, who died for his faith—the faith of his childhood, which he would not forswear.

BARBRO. [*Standing by the armchair at the end of the table*] Is the King to sit here?

MONS. Yes, child, that's where the marvellous man of God is to sit when he visits his friend Mons Nilsson of Aspeboda. His whole life is like a miracle story, children: how the Lord guided him out of a Danish prison up to Dalecarlia, and how, after many hardships, he finally freed his country from oppression. Those pictures on the walls tell you the whole story, down to the moment when the ski-runner overtook him at Sälen, close by the Norwegian border-line.

BARBRO. [*Looking at the picture just indicated*] Is it true, father, that the ski-runner was named Engelbrecht, like the great chieftain we had in the past century?

MONS. Yes, it's true, child, and we used to speak of it as "the finger of God," but now we call it mere superstition.

WIFE. Don't put that sort of thing into the children's heads!

MONS. Oh, keep quiet! I teach the children nothing but what is right and proper.—And bear in mind, little girls, that, no matter what you may hear, you must never believe or say anything bad of the King. Earth bears no heavier burden than a thankless man. And for that reason you must sing the ballad of King Gustav when he comes here. Do you still remember it?

BARBRO. Oh, yes!

MONS. Let me hear you read it then.

BARBRO. [*Reciting*],

"King Gustav, he rode his trusty steed
Across the battle-field;
Have thanks, my brave Dalecarlians,
For your true loyalty."

CHILDREN. [*In chorus*],

"Have thanks, my brave Dalecarlians,
For your true loyalty!"

BARBRO.

"You have by my side been fighting
Like faithful Swedish men.
If God will spare my life-blood,
I'll do you good in stead."

CHILDREN.

"If God will spare my life-blood,
I'll do you good in stead!"

MONS. That's good, children. Go back to your own room now, and be ready when the time comes.

BARBRO *and the* CHILDREN. [*As they start to go out to the right*] But won't the King frighten us?

MONS. Oh, he is not at all dangerous, and he is very fond of children. Besides, he is your godfather, Barbro.

BARBRO *and the* CHILDREN *leave the room.*

WIFE. Do you know what you are doing?

MONS. Hope so! Of course, I know what you mean?

WIFE. What do I mean?

MONS. That I should take your advice. So I have done in the past, and it has ended badly every time.

WIFE. Try it once more!

MONS. No!

WIFE. Then—may the will of God be done! [*Pause,*

MONS. That's the longest afternoon I have ever lived through!—And my friends don't seem to be coming.

WIFE. Yes, I think I hear them outside.

MONS. Well, you were right that time!

The stamping of feet is heard from the hallway outside. Then enter: ANDERS PERSSON OF RANKHYTTAN, NILS SÖDERBY, INGHEL HANSSON, *and* MASTER STIG [*in clerical costume*]. *Each one says as he comes into the room:* "Good evening, everybody!"

MONS. [*Shaking hands with them*] God be with you, Anders Persson! God be with you, Nils Söderby! God be with you, Inghel Hansson! God be with you, Master Stig! Come forward and be seated.

All seat themselves at the long table.

ANDERS. You are getting ready, I see.

MONS. So we are.—And where's the King?

ANDERS. The other side of the hill, says the ski-runner that just returned.

MONS. As near as that?—And what errand is supposed to bring him here?

ANDERS. Ask Nils of Söderby.

NILS. They say he is headed for Norway to fight Christian.

Inghel. There are others who think that he is coming to thank us Dalecarlians for the good help rendered in his last fight.

STIG. That would not be like him.

ANDERS. To thank anybody—no, indeed!

MONS. Do you think there is any cause for fear?

NILS. Not while Christian is still free.

INGHEL. It's queer that we should have to look to Christian for safety.

STIG. We knew what we had, but not what we might get. Christian took the heads of the noble lords and left the people alone. This one leaves the lords alone and rides roughshod over the people. Who should be called a tyrant?

MONS. Be quiet now!

ANDERS. In other words, the last war of liberation was fought *against* our liberator. Did we know at all what we were doing at that time?

INGHEL. We were to clear the country of the Danes; and the first man to raise his hand for the King against the Danes in our parts was Rasmus Dane, who killed Nils Westgoth. That was a strange beginning....

NILS. A strange beginning, indeed, but just like the ending. [*To MONS'S WIFE*] Look out for the silver, goodwife!

She turns and looks inquiringly at him.

NILS. The King is coming.

MONS. In the name of the Lord, be quiet! That kind of talk will bring no peace.—All that you say is true, of course, but what has happened was the will of Providence—

STIG. Which let the children have their will in order that they should see their own folly.

ANDERS. Are you quite sure that the King will visit you, Mons Nilsson?

MONS. What a question!

ANDERS. Remember Master John!

MONS. Let us forget! Everything must be forgotten.

ANDERS. No wonder if you and NILS want to forget that you burned the King's house at Hedemora and looted Räfvelstad two years ago! But *he* will never forget it.

The roll of muffled drums is heard from the outside.

ALL. [*Leaping to their feet*] What's that?

MONS. Don't you know the hornet that buzzes before it stings?

ANDERS. That's the kind of noise he made that Ash Wednesday at Tuna Flat.

INGHEL. Don't mention that blood-bath, or I can't control myself. [*Passionately*] Don't talk of it!

NILS. Hear him spinning, spinning like a cat! No, don't trust him!

The roll of the drums comes nearer.

STIG. Might it not be wise for you, as personal friends of the King, to meet him and bid the stem master welcome?

MONS. I wonder. Then he might not come here afterward....

WIFE. Stay, Mons! Stay where you are!

MONS. Oh, the place smells of spruce, and the drums are flattened as for a funeral. [*Somebody raps three times at the door from the outside*] Who's that?

[He goes to the door and opens it.

WIFE. [*To MASTER STIG as she leaves the room by the door at the right*] Pray for us!

MASTER OLAVUS and HERMAN ISRAEL *enter*.

MONS. Who is doing me the honour?

OLAVUS. I am the acting secretary of his Highness, the King. And this is the venerable representative of the free city of Luebeck.

MONS. Come in, my good sirs, and—let us hear the news!

OLAVUS. The King is here and has pitched his camp on Falu Flat. Personally he has taken his abode at the Gildhall of Saint Jorghen.

MONS. What is the errand that has made the King cross Långhed Forest and Brunbeck Ford without permission and safe-conduct?^[3]

OLAVUS. He hasn't told.

MONS. Then I had better go and ask him.

OLAVUS. With your leave, this is the message our gracious lord, the King, sends you through us: "Greetings to the goodly miners of the Copperberg, and let every man stay in his own house." If he desires speech with any one, that one will be called.

MONS. What is the meaning of it?

OLAVUS. [*Seating himself*] I don't know. [*Pause*.

ANDERS. Has the Danish war come to an end, sir?

OLAVUS. I don't know.

ANDERS. Do you know with whom you are talking?

OLAVUS. No, I don't.

ANDERS. I am Anders Persson of Rankhyttan. Have you ever heard that name before?

OLAVUS. Yes—it's a good name.

HERMAN ISRAEL has in the meantime been studying the wall paintings and the silver on the mantelpiece. He wears a pair of large, horn-rimmed eye-glasses. At last he seats himself in the armchair at the end of the table.

MONS. [*Indicating ISRAEL to OLAVUS*] Is that chap from Luebeck a royal person, too?

OLAVUS. [*In a low voice*] No, he is not, but he is in charge of the national debt, and we must never forget that our gracious King was able to free our country of the Danes *only* with the help of Luebeck.

MONS. With the help of Luebeck *only*? And how about the Dalecarlians?

OLAVUS. Oh, of course, they helped, too.

MONS. Does he speak Swedish?

OLAVUS. I don't think so, but I am not sure of it.

MONS. Is that so?

OLAVUS. We happened to arrive together, but I have not yet spoken to him.

MONS. Very strange! I suppose the King has sent him?

OLAVUS. Probably.

MONS. Perhaps he is the fellow who buys up the bells?

OLAVUS. Perhaps.

MONS. And the church silver?

OLAVUS. And the church silver, too!

MONS. What was his name again?

OLAVUS. Herman Israel.

MONS. Oh, Israel!

He whispers to ANDERS PERSSON, who in turn whispers to the rest.

A rap at the door is heard. MASTER OLAVUS gets up quickly and opens the door.

A MESSENGER in full armour enters, whispers something to MASTER OLAVUS, and leaves again.

OLAVUS. Our gracious lord, the King, requests Inghel Hansson to meet him at Saint Jorghen's Gild.

INGHEL. [*Rising*] Well, well, am I to be the first?

NILS. The oldest first.

MONS. Stand up for yourself, Inghel, and tell the truth. The King is a gracious gentleman who won't mind a plain word in proper time.

INGHEL. Don't you worry. I have said my say to kings before now. [*He goes out.*]

OLAVUS. Well, Nils, how is the mining nowadays?

NILS. Not bad, thank you. The last fall flood left a little water in the mine, but otherwise we have nothing to complain of.

OLAVUS. Times are good, then?

NILS. Well, you might say so.... Hm! Good times will mean better taxes, I suppose?

OLAVUS. I know nothing about the taxes. [*Pause; then to ANDERS PERSSON*] And how about the crops? I hear you have plenty of tilled ground, too.

ANDERS. Oh, yes, and plenty of cattle in the pastures, too.

OLAVUS. Old Dalecarlia is a pretty good country, is it not?

MONS. [*Giving ANDERS a poke with his elbow*] Yes, everything is fat here—dripping with fat, so that one can eat the bark off the trees even.

OLAVUS. Yes, they have told me that you have to eat bark and chew resin now and then. Is that a common thing or does it happen only once in a while?

NILS. When the famine comes, you have to eat what you can get.

OLAVUS. [*To MASTER STIG, who has been keeping in the background*] There is something you should know, Master Stig. How was it during the last famine, when the King sent grain to be distributed here: did it go to those who needed it?

STIG. Yes, it did, although there was not enough of it.

OLAVUS. [*To ANDERS*] Was there not enough of it?

ANDERS. That depends on what you mean by "enough."

OLAVUS. [*To MONS*] Do you know what is meant by "enough," Mons Nilsson?

MONS. Oh, well, everybody knows that.

OLAVUS. [*To Stig*] As we now know what is meant by "enough," I ask you, Master Stig Larsson, if anybody perished from hunger during the last famine?

STIG. Man doth not live by bread only....

OLAVUS. There you spoke a true word, Master Stig, but....

A rap on the door is heard. MASTER OLAVUS opens. The same MESSENGER appears, whispers to him, and leaves again.

OLAVUS. The King requests Nils Söderby to meet him at Saint Jorghen's Gildhall.

NILS. Won't Inghel Hansson come back first?

OLAVUS. I don't know.

NILS. Well, nobody is afraid here, and....

OLAVUS. What have you to be afraid of?

NILS. Nothing! [*To his friends*] The big bell at Mora has not been taken out of Siljan valley yet, Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson. That's a devil of a bell, and when it begins to tinkle, they can hear it way over in Norway, and fourteen thousand men stand like one!

OLAVUS. I don't understand what you mean.

NILS. [*Shaking hands with ANDERS and MONS*] But you two understand! God bless you and defend you!

MONS. What do you mean?

ANDERS. What are you thinking of, Nils?

NILS. Oh, my thoughts are running so fast that I can't keep up with them. But one thing I am sure of: that it's going hard with Inghel Hansson. [*He goes out.*]

OLAVUS. Is this sulphur smoke always hanging over the place?

MONS. Mostly when the wind is in the east.

MONS and ANDERS withdraw to the left corner of the room and sit down there. Master Stig shows plainly that he is much alarmed.

OLAVUS. Is it the quartz or the pyrites that make the worst smoke?

ANDERS. Why do you ask?

OLAVUS. That's a poor answer!

MONS. May I ask you in return whether King Christian still is free?

OLAVUS. [*Looking hard at him*] Do you put your trust in the enemy? [*Pause*] What kind of a man is Nils of Söderby?

MONS. His friends think him better and his enemies worse than anybody else.

OLAVUS. What kind of a bell in the Siljan valley was that you spoke of?

MONS. It's the largest one in all Dalecarlia.

OLAVUS. Have you many bells of that kind?

ANDERS. Of the kind that calls the people to arms we have still a lot.

MONS pokes him warningly.

OLAVUS. I am glad to hear it, and I am sure it will please his Highness still more.—Are the people attending church diligently, Master Stig?

STIG. I can't say that they are.

OLAVUS. Are the priests bad, or is the pure word of God not preached here?

STIG. There are no bad priests here, and nothing but the pure word of God is preached!

OLAVUS. That's the best thing I have heard yet! Nothing but the pure word of God, you say! [*Pause*] Nils intimated a while ago that fourteen thousand men will take up arms when you ring the big bell at Mora. That was mere boasting, I suppose?

MONS. Oh, if you ring it the right way, I think sixteen thousand will come. What do you say, Anders Persson?

ANDERS. Sixteen, you say? I should say eighteen!

OLAVUS. Fine! Then we shall ring it the right way when the Dane comes next time. Only seven thousand answered the last call—to fight the *enemies* of our country.

MONS. [*To ANDERS*] That fellow is dangerous. We had better keep quiet after this.

STIG. [*To OLAVUS*] Why has Inghel Hansson not come back?

OLAVUS. I don't know.

STIG. Then I'll go and find out.

He goes to the door and opens it, but is stopped by the MESSENGER, who is now accompanied by several pike-men.

MASTER OLAVUS meets the MESSENGER, who whispers to him.

OLAVUS. Master Stig Larsson is commanded before the King at once!

STIG. Commanded? Who commands here?

OLAVUS. The King.

MONS. [*Leaping to his feet*] Treachery!

OLAVUS. Exactly: treachery and traitors!—If you don't go at once, Master Stig, you'll ride bareback!

STIG. To hell!

OLAVUS. Yes, *to hell!*—Away!

MONS *and* ANDERS *rise and start for the door.*

MONS. Do you know who I am—that I am a free miner and a friend of the King?

OLAVUS. Be seated then, and keep your peace. If you are a friend of the King, there has been a mistake. Sit down, Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson! No harm will befall you or anybody else who is innocent. Let Master Stig go, and don't get excited. Where does the thought of violence come from, if not from your own bad conscience?

STIG. That's true. We have done nothing wrong, and no one has threatened us.—Be quiet, friends. I shall soon be back. [*He goes out.*]

MONS. That's right!

OLAVUS. Throw a stick at the pack, and the one that is hit will yelp.

ANDERS. [*To MONS*] That was stupid of us! Let us keep calm! [*Aloud*] You see, doctor, one gets suspicious as one grows old, particularly after having seen so many broken words and promises....

OLAVUS. I understand. In these days, when people change masters as the snake changes its skin, a certain instability of mind is easily produced. In young men it may be pardonable, but it is absolutely unpardonable in old and experienced persons.

MONS. As far as age is concerned, there is nothing to say about the King, who still is in his best years....

OLAVUS. And for that reason pardonable....

MONS. [*To ANDERS*] I think he must be the devil himself!

ANDERS. [*To OLAVUS*] How long are we to wait here? And what are we to wait for?

OLAVUS. The King's commands, as you ought to know.

MONS. Are we regarded as prisoners, then?

OLAVUS. By no means, but it is not wise to venture out for a while yet.

MONS *and* ANDERS *move from one chair to another and give other evidence of agitation.*

MONS. Some great evil is afoot. I can feel it within me.

ANDERS. It must be very hot in here.... I am sweating. Would you like a glass of beer, doctor?

OLAVUS. No, thank you.

ANDERS. Or a glass of wine?

OLAVUS. Not for me, thanks!

MONS. But it's real hock.

MASTER OLAVUS *shakes his head. At that moment drum-beats are heard outside.*

ANDERS. [*Beyond himself*] In the name of Christ, will this never come to an end?

OLAVUS. [*Rising*] Yes, this is the end!

He goes to the door and opens it.

The MESSENGER enters and throws on the table the bloodstained coats of INGHEL HANSSON, NILS OF SÖDERBY, and MASTER STIG.

OLAVUS. Look!

MONS *and* ANDERS. Another blood-bath!

MONS. Without trial or hearing!

OLAVUS. The trial took place two years ago, and sentence was passed. But the King put mercy above justice and let the traitors remain at large to see whether their repentance was seriously meant. When he learned that they remained incorrigible and went on with their rebellious talk as before, he decided to execute the sentences. That's how the matter looks when presented truthfully.

MONS. And yet there was a lot of talk about everything being forgiven and forgotten....

OLAVUS. So it was, provided the same offence was not repeated. But it was repeated, and what might have been forgotten was again remembered. All that is clear as logic. [*To HERMAN ISRAEL*]

These two trustworthy men.... [*To MONS and ANDERS*] You are trustworthy, are you not?

MONS *and* ANDERS. Hope so!

OLAVUS. Answer yes or no! Are you trustworthy?

MONS *and* ANDERS. Yes!

OLAVUS. [*To ISRAEL*] In the presence of you as my witness, syndic, these two trustworthy men have given a true report of conditions in Dalecarlia. They have unanimously assured us that the mines are being worked profitably; that agriculture and cattle-breeding prosper no less than the mining; that famines occur but rarely, and that, during the last one, our gracious King distributed grain in quantities not insufficient, which went to those that really were in need. These trustworthy and upright miners have also confirmed the following facts: that bells to summon the congregations still remain in all the churches; that no bad priests are spreading devices of men, and that nothing is preached here but the pure word of God. You have likewise heard them say, syndic, that the province of Dalecarlia can raise from sixteen to eighteen thousand men capable of bearing arms—the figures vary as their courage falls or rises. Being in charge of the current debt, and for that reason entitled to know the actual *status* of the country, you have now heard the people declare with their own lips, that all the Dalecarlian grievances are unwarranted, and that those who have spread reports to the contrary are traitors and liars.

MONS. *Veto!*

ANDERS. I deny it!

OLAVUS. If you deny your own words, then you are liars twice over!

MONS. He is drawing the noose tighter! Better keep silent!

ANDERS. No, I most speak. [*To OLAVUS*] I want to know what our fate is to be.

OLAVUS. So you shall. Your fate is in your own hands. You are invited to Stockholm and given full safe-conduct. You can travel freely by yourselves. This is granted you as old friends of the King, to whom he acknowledges a great debt of gratitude.

MONS. More guile!

OLAVUS. No guile at all. Here is the King's safe-conduct, signed by his own hand.

ANDERS. We know all about his safe-conducts!

MONS. [*To ANDERS*] We must consent and submit in order to gain time! [*To OLAVUS*] Will you let us go into the next room and talk the matter over?

OLAVUS. You can now go wherever you want—except to the King.

MONS *and* ANDERS *go toward the left.*

MONS. [*As he opens the door*] We'll bring you an answer shortly.

OLAVUS. As you please, and when you please.

MONS *and* ANDERS *go out.*

OLAVUS. [*To ISRAEL*] A stiff-necked people, true as gold, but full of distrust.

ISRAEL. A very fine people.

OLAVUS. Rather stupid, however. Did you notice how I trapped them?

ISRAEL. That was good work. How did you learn to do it?

OLAVUS. By long observation of innumerable human beings I have been led to conclude at last that vanity the primal sin and mother of all the vices. To get the truth out of criminals, I have merely to set them boasting.

ISRAEL. What wisdom! What wisdom! And you are not yet an old man!—But there are modest people, too, and out of these you cannot get the truth, according to what you have just said.

OLAVUS. Modest people boast of their modesty, so that is all one.

ISRAEL. [*Looking attentively at him*] If you'll pardon me—Master Olavus was your name, I think? You cannot be Olavus Petri?

OLAVUS. I am.

ISRAEL. [*Surprised*] Who carried out the Reformation?

OLAVUS. I am that man.

ISRAEL. And who was subsequently tried for high treason on suspicion of having known about a plot against the King's life?

OLAVUS. Confidences given me under the seal of confession, so that I had no right to betray them.

ISRAEL. [*Gazing curiously at OLAVUS*] Hm-hm! [*Pause*] A mysterious story it was, nevertheless.

OLAVUS. No, I don't think so. Gorius Holst and Hans Bökman were found guilty. And it was so little of a secret, that the people of Hamburg heard of the King's murder as an accomplished fact long before the plot was exposed at Stockholm.

ISRAEL. That is just what I call mysterious, especially as we knew nothing about it at Luebeck.

OLAVUS. Yes, I call that mysterious, too, because the road to Hamburg goes through Luebeck as a rule. [ISRAEL *makes no reply*] And it was rumoured at the time, that Marcus Meyer and Juerghen Wollenweber were no strangers to the plot.

ISRAEL. I have never heard of it, and I don't believe it. [*Pause; then, pointing to the blood-stained coats*] Must those things stay here?

OLAVUS. Yes, for the present.

ISRAEL. It seems to me that these royal visits are rather sanguinary affairs.

OLAVUS. I don't allow myself to pass judgment on the actions of my King, partly because I am not capable of doing so, and partly because I know there is a judge above too, who guides his destiny.

ISRAEL. That is beautifully said and thought. Have you always been equally wise?

OLAVUS. No, but what you have not been you frequently become. [*Pause.*]

ISRAEL. Won't those people in there try to get away?

OLAVUS. That, too, has been foreseen, just as their desire to discuss the matter had been reckoned with. Do you know what they are talking of?

ISRAEL. No, I have not the slightest idea.

OLAVUS. They still imagine that King Christian is free, and they are planning to seek help from him.

ISRAEL. What a senseless thought!

OLAVUS. Especially as Christian is a prisoner.

ISRAEL. It sounds like madness, but when you hear how devoted these good men of the mining districts are to their King, it cannot surprise you that they may have in mind the oath binding them to their only lawful sovereign....

OLAVUS. Now, with your pardon, I *am* surprised....

ISRAEL. Oh, mercy, I am merely putting myself in their place.

OLAVUS. It is always dangerous to put oneself in the place of traitors. [*Pause.*]

BARBRO. [*Entering from the right, followed by the smaller children*] Is father here? [*She looks around and discovers ISRAEL seated in the armchair prepared for the King*] Goodness, here is the King!

[She kneels, the other children following her example.]

ISRAEL. No, no, dear children, I am not the King. I am only a poor merchant from Luebeck.

OLAVUS. A noble answer! [*To the children*] This is Herman Israel, the far-famed and influential councillor, who, with Cord König and Nils Bröms, saved our King out of Danish captivity and enabled him to carry out the war of liberation. You will find him on the picture in Saint Jorghen's Gildhall which represents Gustavus Vasa appearing before the City Council of Luebeck. Honour to the man who has honour deserved. Give homage to the friend of your country and your King.

BARBRO *and the CHILDREN* *clap their hands.*

ISRAEL. [*Rises, evidently touched*] My dear little friends.... All I can do is to thank you.... I have really not deserved this.... You see, a merchant does nothing except for payment, and I have been richly paid.

OLAVUS. Don't believe him! But bear in mind that there are services that can never be paid, and beautiful deeds that can never be wiped out by ingratitude or forgetfulness.—Go back to your own room now. Your father will come in a moment.

BARBRO *and the CHILDREN* *go out to the right.*

ISRAEL. I had never expected such a thing of you, doctor.

OLAVUS. I think I understand why. However, my dear syndic, don't ever compel us to become ungrateful. Ingratitude is such a heavy burden to carry.

ISRAEL. What is the use of talking of it? There is nothing of that kind to be feared.

MONS NILSSON *and* ANDERS PERSSON *enter from the left.*

MONS. After talking it over, we have decided to go to Stockholm with the King's good word and safe-conduct, so that we can quietly discuss the matter with him and the lords of the realm.

OLAVUS. Then my errand here is done, and both of us can leave. I wish you, Mons Nilsson, and you, Anders Persson, welcome to the capital.

MONS. Thank you, doctor.

MASTER OLAVUS *and* HERMAN ISRAEL *go out.*

MONS. [*Picking up the bloodstained coats as soon as they are out of sight*] These shall be our blood-stained banners! King Christian will furnish the staffs, and then—on to Stockholm!

ANDERS. And down with it!

OLAVUS. [*Returning unexpectedly*] There was one thing I forgot to tell you. Do you hear?

ANDERS. [*Angrily*] Well!

OLAVUS. King Christian has been captured and made a prisoner at Sonderborg Castle, in the island of Als.

MONS and ANDERS *show how deeply the news hits them; neither one has a word to say.*

OLAVUS. You understand, don't you?—Stinderborg Castle, in the island of Als?

Curtain.

- [1] Peder Jacobsson Sunnanväder, bishop at Vesterås, and his archdeacon, Master Knut, both members of the old Catholic clergy, tried to raise the Dalecarlians against the King in 1524-5, when his hold on the new throne was still very precarious. The False Sture was a young Dalecarlian named John Hansson, who had acquired gentle manners as a servant in noble houses and who posed as the natural son of Sten Sture the Younger, "National Director" of Sweden until 1520. This pretender, who headed another Dalecarlian uprising in 1527, figures also in Ibsen's early historical drama, "Lady Inger." The taking of the church-bells mentioned by Mons Nilsson's wife took place in 1531 and resulted in the killing of several of the King's representatives by the Dalecarlians.
- [2] In 1520 Christian II of Denmark made a temporarily successful effort to bring Sweden back into the union with the other two Scandinavian kingdoms. Having defeated the Swedish "National Director," Sten Sture the Younger, and been admitted to the city of Stockholm, he caused about eighty of the most influential members of the Swedish nobility to be beheaded in a single day. That was the "Blood-bath of Stockholm," by which King Gustavus lost his father and brother-in-law. On the same occasion his mother and sister were imprisoned, and both died before they could be set free.
- [3] Långheden is a wooded upland plain on the southern border of Dalecarlia. Brunbeck Ferry or Ford was for centuries the main crossing point of the Dal River for all who entered the province of Dalecarlia from the south. Rendered arrogant by the part they had played in the wars of liberation between 1434 and 1524, the Dalecarlians had established a claim that not even the King himself had the right to pass those two border points at the head of an armed force without first having obtained their permission.

ACT II

FIRST SCENE

The office of HERMAN ISRAEL. A large room, the walls of which are covered by cupboards. Door in the rear; doors in both side walls; few windows, and these very small. A fireplace on the left-hand side. A large table in the middle of the floor; armchairs about it. Above the rear door and the fireplace appears the coat of arms of Luebeck, in black, red, and silver.

At the right, a desk with writing material and a pair of scales. The room contains also several sets of shelves filled with goods in bundles.

One of the cupboard doors stands open, disclosing a number of altar vessels of gold and silver.

MARCUS is weighing some of the vessels at the desk, while DAVID is noting down the weights given him.

MARCUS. A crucifix of silver, gilded; weighs twelve ounces.

DAVID. [*Writing*] Twelve ounces....

MARCUS. Item: a monstrance of gold—a perfect thumper. Weighs.... Let me see now.... Oh, it's hollow—and the base is filled with lead.... Put down a question-mark.

DAVID. Question-mark it is.

MARCUS. A paten of silver—well, I don't know. [*He tests the vessel with his teeth*] It tastes like copper at least. Put it down as "white metallic substance."

DAVID. White metallic substance.—Do you think those rustics are cheating us?

MARCUS. Us? Nobody can cheat us!

DAVID. Don't be too certain. Niegels Bröms, the goldsmith, says that interlopers from Holland are going through the country selling church vessels full of coggery, probably meant to be exchanged for the genuine goods.

MARCUS. We'll have to get it back on the bells, which contain a lot of silver, according to old traditions.

DAVID. The bells—yes, they were to go to Luebeck, but instead they are going to the royal gun-

foundry to be cast into culverins and bombards.

MARCUS. So it is said. If only the Dalecarlians knew of it, they would come galloping across the border forests, I suppose.

DAVID. I think their galloping came to an end with the recent fall slaughter.

MARCUS. No, there will be no end to it while the two blackest rogues are still at leisure....

DAVID. You mean Mons Nilsson of Aspeboda and Anders Persson of Rankhyttan, who are still hanging about the town, hoping to get an audience with the King?

MARCUS. Those are the ones.

DAVID. Calling them rogues is rather an exaggeration, and our Principal seems to put great store on them.

MARCUS. Now, David, don't forget the first and last duty of a Hanseatic clerk—which is to keep his mouth closed. And bear in mind the number of talkative young fellows who have vanished for ever through water-gates and cellar holes. You had better remember!

DAVID. I'll try, although it seems about time for the Hansa itself to be thinking of the great silence. [*Pause.*]

MARCUS. Do you know where the Principal is?

DAVID. With the King, I suppose, taking an inventory of Eskil's Chamber.^[1]

JACOB ISRAEL. [*Enters; he is the son of HERMAN ISRAEL; a richly dressed young man, carrying a racket in his hand; his forehead is bandaged*] Is my father here?

MARCUS. No, he is not. I think the Principal is with the King.

JACOB. Then I'll sit down here and wait. Go on with your writing. I won't disturb you.

[He seats himself at the big table.]

PRINCE ERIC. [*Enters; he is somewhat older than JACOB*] Why did you leave me, Jacob?

JACOB. I was tired of playing.

ERIC. I don't think that was the reason. Some one offended you—some one who is not my friend.

JACOB. No one has offended me, Prince, but I have such a strong feeling that I ought not to appear at court.

ERIC. Oh, Jacob, my friend, why do you cease to call your old schoolmate by name? And why do you look at me like a stranger? Give me your hand You won't? And I, who have been lonely and deserted ever since my mother died; who am hated by my stepmother, by my father, and by my half-brother; I am begging for the friendship which you gave me once and which you are now taking back.

JACOB. I am not taking back anything, Eric, but we are not allowed to be friends. The fact that we two, as mere boys, formed ties of friendship that were nursed by common sufferings, has been ignored or tolerated by our fathers so far. Now, when you are about to marry a foreign princess and take possession of a duchy, it has been deemed politic to separate us.

ERIC. Your words are stilted, as if you meant to hide your own thoughts, but your feelings are not to be concealed....

JACOB. Pardon me, Eric, but this is not the place for a conversation like this....

ERIC. Because this is a place for trading, you mean—as if the parties to such a transaction were degraded by it? I don't object to it, although I am rather inclined to think the seller more broad-minded than the buyer.

JACOB indicates by a gesture the presence of the two clerks.

ERIC. Oh, let them hear. Marcus and I are old friends, and we met at the Blue Dove last night.

JACOB. Ugh! Why do you visit a vulgar place like that, Prince?

ERIC. Where can I go? I have no one to talk with at home; and it seems to me, for that matter, that people are equally good or bad everywhere—although I prefer what is generally called bad company.—Do you know John Andersson?

JACOB. [*Embarrassed*] I have never heard his name even. Who is he?

MARCUS and DAVID go quietly out to the left.

ERIC. A man from Småland who is full of sensible ideas.—Do you still need to have your forehead bandaged?

JACOB. Do you think I wear the bandage as an ornament, or as a souvenir of the city mob?

ERIC. You should not bear a grudge against the good folk because some scamp has misbehaved himself.

JACOB. I don't, my friend, and I know perfectly well what a stranger must expect in a hostile country. If you come to Luebeck, you will see how they stone Swedes.

ERIC. You talk just like Jorghen Persson. Do you know him?

JACOB. I don't.

ERIC. He looks at everything in the same way as you do.

JACOB. How do you mean?

ERIC. He thinks every one is right, and that whatever happens is *juste*. There is something sensible and enlightened in his view of life. That's why my father hates him....

JACOB. Don't talk badly of your father. It sounds dreadful—if you will pardon me!

ERIC. But if he acts badly, why shouldn't I say so? And I hate him, for that matter!

JACOB. Don't say that—don't! The greatness of your royal father is so boundless that you can't grasp it.

ERIC. It only looks that way—I know! Last night he came up to me and put his arm around my shoulders—for the first time in my life—and I, who have been living in the belief that I barely came up to his hip, found to my surprise that I am as tall as he. But as soon as I looked at him from a distance again, he grew taller and turned into a giant.

JACOB. That's what he is. And he resembles one of Buonarrotti's prophets—Isaiah, I think. And, verily, the Lord on high is with him.

ERIC. Do you really believe in God?

JACOB. Are you not ashamed of yourself?

ERIC. Well, what are you to believe in times like these, when kings and priests persecute the faithful and profane everything that used to be held sacred. And yet they call themselves "defenders of the faith."

JACOB. Can't we talk of something else? Please, let us!

ERIC. That's what the King always says when I go after him, and for that reason I hate him still more—as he hates me! Do you know that it was your father who brought my mother to him from Lauenburg?^[2]

JACOB. No, I didn't know that.

ERIC. Yes, but the marriage turned out badly. They hated each other beyond all bounds—and one day [*he rises in a state of great agitation*] I saw him raise his stick against her—[*roaring out the words*] against my mother—and he struck her! That day I lost my youth^[3]—and I can never forgive him—never!

JACOB. [*Leaps to his feet and put his arms about Eric*] Look at me, Eric! Look at me! I have a stepmother, too—who is always tormenting me when I am at home—but hush, hush! If it can help you to hear that I am worse off than you—very much worse—then—you know it now! Remember that it won't last for ever, as we are growing up to freedom....

ERIC. And you don't hate her?

JACOB. Such a feeling has no place beside the new one that is now filling my soul.

ERIC. That means—you are in love.

JACOB. That's what we may call it.... And when your own time comes, you, too, will see your hatred change form and vanish.

ERIC. I wonder!—Perhaps you are right. The lovelessness in which I was born and brought up has turned into a flame that is consuming my soul. My blood was poisoned at my birth, and I doubt the existence of an antidote.... Why do you leave me?

JACOB. Because ... because we are not allowed to be friends—because we cannot be friends.

ERIC. Do you think me so vile?

JACOB. No, no!—But I mustn't say anything more. Let us part. I shall always watch your fate with sympathy, for I think you were born to misfortune.

ERIC. What makes you utter what I have thought so many times?—Do you know that I was also born to be in the way? I stand in the way of my father's desire to see Johan on the throne. I stand in the way of his wish to forget the hated German woman. My mind has not the true Swedish quality, and the fault lies in my German blood. Although I am a Vasa, I am Saxony, too, and Lauenburg, and Brunswick. I am so little of a Swede that it gives me pleasure when the free city of Luebeck imposes a penal tax on my country—and keeps it humiliated.

JACOB. [*Looking hard at him*] Is that the truth, or do you merely talk like that out of politeness?

ERIC. [*Puts his hand to his sword, bid regains self-control immediately*] Do you notice how much I love you, seeing that I pardon such a question?—Yes, my friend, the first words taught me by my mother were German, and in German I learned to say my evening prayers—that old and beautiful "Heil dir, Maria, Mutter Gottes".... Oh, that time—that time.... [*He weeps*] Oh, damn it! I am crying, I think!—Come to the Blue Dove to-night, Jacob. There you'll find Rhine wine and merry maidens! Jorghen will be there, too. He's a man you should know.

JACOB. [*Coldly and shrewdly*] I—shall—come.

ERIC. Thank you, friend! [*Rising*] Really, the place has a look of pawn-shop.

JACOB. [*Sharply*] That was just what I had in mind before.

ERIC. Well, then we agree to that extent at least. Until to-night, then! Do you know Agda?

JACOB. [*Brusquely*] No!

ERIC. [*Haughtily, giving him two fingers to shake, JACOB pretending not to notice it*] Farewell!—What became of those two little pawnbrokers?

JACOB *does not answer.*

ERIC. [*Arrogantly*] Good-bye, then, Baruch!—Have you read the Book of Baruch?

Going toward the background, he jingles the altar vessels as he passes them.

"The ring of gold, and rattling dice,
And wine brings light to tipsy eyes.
But in the night that light must lack,
To wenches leads each crooked track."

That's a good one, isn't it? I made it myself!

[He goes out through the rear door.]

HERMAN ISRAEL. [*Enters from the right*] Are you alone?

JACOB. Yes, father.

ISRAEL. I heard somebody speaking.

JACOB. That was the Heir Apparent.

ISRAEL. What did he want?

JACOB. I don't think he has the slightest idea of what he wants.

ISRAEL. Is he your friend?

JACOB. Yes, so he calls himself, but I am not his. Because he thinks that he is honouring me with his friendship, he flatters himself with the belief that I return it.

ISRAEL. You are frightfully wise for a young man of your age.

JACOB. Why, it's an axiom in the art of living, that you must not be the friend of your enemy.

ISRAEL. Can he be made useful?

JACOB. Running errands, perhaps, provided you keep him wholesomely ignorant of the matter at stake. Otherwise I don't think I ever saw an heir apparent more useless than this one.

ISRAEL. Do you hate him?

JACOB. No, I pity him too much for that. He is more unfortunate than he deserves. That he will end badly, seems pretty certain. It seems clear to himself, too, and to such an extent that he appears anxious to hasten the catastrophe.

ISRAEL. Listen, my son. I have long noticed that I can keep no secrets from you, and so I think it is better for me to tell you everything. Sit down and give me your attention while I walk back and forth.... I can think only when I am walking....

JACOB. Talk away, father. I am thinking all the time.

ISRAEL. You have probably guessed that some great event is preparing under the surface. You have probably noticed that our free city of Luebeck is fighting for its rights here in the North. I speak of rights, because we have the right of the pioneer who has broken new roads—roads of trade in this case—to demand compensation and profit from the country on which he has spent his energy. We have taught these people to employ their natural products and to exchange them with profit; and we have set Sweden free. Having used us, they wish now to cast us aside. That's always the way: use—and cast aside! But there are greater and more powerful interests than those of trade that should compel the North to join hands with the free cities. The Emperor and the Pope are one. Our free cities made themselves independent first of the Emperor and then of the Pope. Now, when this country has been helped by us and its great King to do the same, we must, willy-nilly, remain allies against the common enemy. And until quite recently we did stick together. Then an evil spirit seemed to take possession of this Vasa. Whether misled by pride or fatigue, he wishes now to enter a path that must lead us all to disaster.

JACOB. Wait a little.—All of us, you say? You had better say "us of Luebeck," for the Swedes will gain by entering that path.

ISRAEL. Are you on their side?

JACOB. No, I am not. But I can perfectly well see where their advantage lies. And I beg you, father, don't try to fight against Vasa, for he is guided by the hand of the Lord! Have you not recognised that already?

ISRAEL. I wonder how I could be such a fool as to give my confidence to one still in his nonage!

JACOB. It won't hurt you to have your plans discussed from another point of view than your own while there is still time to correct them. And you know, of course, that you can rely on me. Go on, now!

ISRAEL. No, I can't now.

JACOB. The pen won't write when its point has been broken. If you will not get angry, I can tell you a little more myself.

MARCUS. [*Enters*] The one you have been waiting for is outside, sir.

JACOB. I suppose it is John Andersson.

ISRAEL. Let him wait. [*Motions MARCUS out of the room; then to Jacob*] Do you know him, too?

JACOB. I have never seen him, but now I can figure out who he is.

ISRAEL. [*Astounded*] You can figure it out, you say?

JACOB. I merely add one thing to another. Now, when the Dalecarlians have been squelched, a new beginning will have to be made with the good folk of Småland.

ISRAEL. Of Småland, you say?

JACOB. Yes, I understand that this John Andersson is from Småland. I don't think his name is John Andersson, however, but—[*in a lower voice*] Nils Dacke!^[4]

ISRAEL. Have you been spying?

JACOB. No, I merely listen, and look, and add together.

ISRAEL. Well, you have made a false calculation this time.

JACOB. Thus you tell me that there are two persons concerned in the matter, and that Nils Dacke is the silent partner who will not appear until the war has begun.

ISRAEL. I am afraid of you.

JACOB. You shouldn't be, father. I dare not do anything wrong, because then I am always made to suffer.

ISRAEL. Do you think I am doing anything wrong?

JACOB. You are more likely than I to do so, because, like Prince Eric, you believe in nothing.

ISRAEL. And such a thing I must hear from my own child!

JACOB. It is better than to hear it from other people's children—later on.

MARCUS. [*Enters*] Two Dalecarlians ask to see you.

ISRAEL. Tell them to wait.

MARCUS *goes out.*

JACOB. They'll pay for it with their heads.

ISRAEL. Who are they, then?

JACOB. Anders Persson of Rankhyttan and Mons Nilsson of Aspeboda, who have tried in vain to get an audience with the King, and who are now moved by their futile anger to turn to you for revenge.

ISRAEL. So you know that, too?

JACOB. Without wishing to show you any disrespect, father—how can a man of your age believe that secrets exist?

ISRAEL. Time has run away from me. I don't know any longer where I stand.

JACOB. Now you speak the truth! And I don't think that you estimate the results of your venture correctly.

ISRAEL. That will appear in due time. But now you must go, for even if you know of my venture, you must not become involved in it.

JACOB. I shall obey, but you must listen to me.

ISRAEL. No, you must listen to me! Tell Marcus that I shall expect my visitors in the hall of state. You stay here with David and pack all valuables into boxes ready to be sent southward.

JACOB. Father!

ISRAEL. Silence!

JACOB. One word: don't rely on me if you should do anything wrong!

ISRAEL. There is one thing *you* may rely on; that, having power of life and death in this house, I shall see that every traitor is tried and executed, whether he be my own son or no. First comes my country, then my family; but first and last—my Arty! [*He puts his hand on his sword*] And now—go!

Curtain.

A large room in the Blue Dove Inn. Wainscotted walls, with tankards and jugs ranged along the shelf above the panels. Benches fastened to the walls and covered with cushions and draperies. In the background, a corner-stand with potted flowers and bird-cages. Sconces containing wax candles are hung on the walls; candelabra stand on a table that also contains bowls of fruit, beakers, goblets, tumblers, dice, playing-cards, and a lute.

It is night. PRINCE ERIC and JORGHEN PERSSON are seated at the table. They are looking pale and tired, and have ceased drinking.

ERIC. You want to go to sleep, Jorghen, and I prefer to dream while still awake. To go to bed is to me like dying: to be swathed in linen sheets and stretch out in a long bed like a coffin. And then the corpse has the trouble of washing itself and reading its own burial service.

JORGHEN. Are you afraid of death, Prince?

ERIC. As the children are afraid of going to bed, and I am sure I'll cry like a child when my turn comes. If I only knew what death is!

JORGHEN. Some call it a sleep, and others an awakening, but no one knows anything with certainty.

ERIC. How could we possibly know anything of that other life, when we know so little of this one?

JORGHEN. Yes, what is life?

ERIC. One large madhouse, it seems to me! Think of my sane and shrewd and sensible father—doesn't he act like a madman? He rids the country of foreigners and takes the heads of those that helped him. He rids the country of foreigners only to drag in a lot of others, like Peutinger and Norman,^[5] whom he puts above the lords of the realm and all other authorities. He is mad, of course!—He rids the Church of human inventions only to demand the acceptance of new inventions at the penalty of death. This liberator is the greatest tyrant that ever lived, and yet this tyrant is the greatest liberator that ever lived! This evening, you know, he wanted to prohibit me from coming here; and when I insisted on going all the same, he threw his Hungarian war-hammer after me, as if he had been the god Thor chasing the trolls. He came within an inch of killing me, just as it is said—which you may not have heard—that he killed my mother.

JORGHEN. [*Becoming attentive*] No, I never heard of that.

ERIC. That's what they say. And I can understand it. There is greatness in it. To feel raised above all human considerations; to kill whatever stands in the way? and trample everything else.... Sometimes, you know, when I see him coming in his big, soft hat and his blue cloak, using his boar-spear in place of a stick, I think he is Odin himself. When he is angry, the people say that they can hear him from the top story down to the cellars, and that the sound of it is like thunder. But I am not afraid of him, and that's why he hates me. At the same time he has a great deal of respect for me. [JORGHEN *smiles sceptically*] Yes, you may smile! That's only because you have no respect for anything; not, even for yourself.

JORGHEN. That least of all.

ERIC. Are you really such a beast?

JORGHEN. That's what every one thinks me, so I suppose I must believe it.

ERIC. [*Returning to his previous idea*] And.... There is a thought that pursues me.... He looks like old Odin, I said: Odin who has returned to despoil the temples of the Christians just as they once robbed his temples.... You should have seen them weighing and counting church treasures at Herman Israel's yesterday. It was ghastly!... And do you know, he is lucky in everything he undertakes. There is favourable wind whenever he goes sailing; the fish bite whenever he goes fishing; he wins whenever he gambles. They say that he was born with a caul....

JORGHEN. A most unusual man.

ERIC. Do you know young Jacob, the son of Herman Israel? He promised to come here to-night. Rather precocious, perhaps, but with sensible ideas on certain subjects—and I think I admire some of his qualities because I lack them myself.

JORGHEN. Is that so?

ERIC. Otherwise he is probably a perfect rascal like his father.

JORGHEN. Then I shall be pleased to make his acquaintance.

ERIC. Because he is a rascal?—Ha-ha!

JORGHEN. In spite of it!

AGDA. [*Enters from the left*] Did you call me, Prince?

ERIC. No, but you are always welcome. Sit down here.

AGDA. The honour is too great for me.

ERIC. Of course, it is!

AGDA. And so I leave—to save my honour.

ERIC. Dare you sting, you gnat?

AGDA. That's your fancy only. I am too sensible and humble to hurt the feelings of a great lord like

yourself, my Prince.

ERIC. Very good! Very good, indeed! Come here and talk to me a little more.

AGDA. If your lordship commands, I must talk, of course, but....

ERIC. Give me the love that I have begged for so long!

AGDA. What one does not have one cannot give away.

ERIC. Alas!

AGDA. Not loving your lordship, I cannot give you any love.

ERIC. *Diantre!*—Give me your favour, then!

AGDA. Favours are not given away, but sold.

ERIC. Listen to that! It is as if I heard my wise Jacob himself philosophising. [*To JORGHEN*] Did you ever hear anything like it?

JORGHEN. All wenches learn that kind of patter from their lovers.

ERIC. Don't talk like that! This girl has won my heart.

JORGHEN. And some one else has won hers.

ERIC. How do you know?

JORGHEN. You can hear it at once, even though the proofs be not visible.

ERIC. Do you believe in love?

JORGHEN. In its existence, yes, but not in its duration.

ERIC. Do you know how a woman's love is to be won?

JORGHEN. All that's necessary is to be "the right one." If you are not, your case is hopeless.

ERIC. That's a riddle.

JORGHEN. One of the greatest.

ERIC. Who do you think can be my rival?

JORGHEN. Some clerk, or pikeman, or rich horsemonger.

ERIC. And I who am not afraid of tossing my handkerchief to the proud virgin-queen that rules Britannia!

JORGHEN. Yet it's true.

ERIC. Perhaps Agda is too modest—and does not dare to believe in the sincerity of my feelings?

JORGHEN. I don't believe anything of the kind.

A noise is heard outside the door in the rear.

PRINCE JOHAN [*Enters*] I hope my dear brother will pardon my intrusion at this late hour, but I have been sent by our father out of fond concern for my dear brother's....

ERIC. Be quick and brief, Jöns, or sit down and use a beaker as punctuation mark! The sum of it is: the old man wants me to come home and go to bed. Reply: the Heir Apparent decides for himself when he is to sleep.

JOHAN. I shall not convey such a reply, especially as my dear brother's disobedience may have serious results in this case.

ERIC. Won't you sit down and drink a goblet, Duke?

JOHAN. Thank you, Prince, but I don't wish to cause my father sorrow.

ERIC. How dreadfully serious that sounds!

JOHAN. It is serious. Our father has new and greater worries to face because disturbances have been reported from the southern provinces, especially from Småland.... And as it is possible that the King may have to leave his capital, he looks to the Heir Apparent for assistance in the administration of the government.

ERIC. Half of which is nothing but lies, of course—and then there are such a lot of people governing already. Go in peace, my brother. I shall come when I come.

JOHAN. My duty is done, and all I regret is being unable to gain more of my brother's ear; of his heart I possess no part at all! [*He goes out.*]

ERIC. [*To JORGHEN*] Can you make anything out of that boy?

JORGHEN. I can't.

ERIC. I wonder if he believes in his own preachings?

JORGHEN. That is just the worst of it. Ordinary rascals like you and me, who don't believe in anything, can't get words of that kind over their lips; and for that reason we can never deceive anybody.

ERIC. You *are* a beast, Jorghen.

JORGHEN. Of course, I am.

ERIC. Is there nothing good in you at all?

JORGHEN. Not a trace! And besides—what is good? [*Pause*] My mother was always saying that I should end on the gallows. Do you think one's destiny is predetermined?

ERIC. That's what Master Dionysius asserts—the Calvinist who uses Holy Writ to prove that the dispensation of grace is not at all dependent on man.

JORGHEN. Come on with the gallows then! That's the grace dispensed to me.

ERIC. That fellow Jacob says always that I was born to misfortune, and that's what father says, too, when he gets angry. What do you think my end will be?

JORGHEN. Was it not Saint Augustine who said that he who has been coined into a groat can never become a ducat?

ERIC. That's right. But I don't think we have drunk enough to make us start any theological disputes. Here we have been disputing for a lifetime now, and every prophet has been fighting all the rest. Luther has refuted Augustine, Calvin has refuted Luther, Zwingli has refuted Calvin, and John of Leyden has refuted all of them. So we know now just where we stand!

JORGHEN. Yes, it's nothing but humbug, and if it were not for that kind of humbug, I should never have been born.

ERIC. What do you mean?

JORGHEN. Oh, you know perfectly well that my father was a monk who went off and got married when they closed the monasteries. It means that I'm a product of perjury and incest, as my father broke his oath and established an illicit relationship like any unclean sheep.

ERIC. You *are* a beast, Jorghen!

JORGHEN. Have I ever denied it?

ERIC. No, but there are limits....

JORGHEN. Where?

ERIC. Here and there! A certain innate sense of propriety generally suggests the—approximate limits.

JORGHEN. Are you dreaming again, you dreamer?

ERIC. Take care! There are limits even to friendship....

JORGHEN. No, mine is limitless!

JACOB is shown into the room by AGDA, whose hand he presses.

ERIC. [*Rising*] There you are at last, Jacob! You have kept me waiting a long time, and just now I was longing for you.

JACOB. Pardon me, Prince, but my thoughts were so heavy that I did not wish to bring them into a merry gathering.

ERIC. Yes, we are devilishly merry, Jorghen and I! This is Jorghen Persson, you see—my secretary, and a very enlightened and clever man, but a perfect rascal otherwise, as you can judge from his horrible looks and treacherous eyes.

JORGHEN. At your service, my dear sir!

ERIC. Sit down and philosophise with us, Jacob. Of course, I promised you pretty maidens, but we have only one here, and she is engaged.

JACOB. [*Startled*] What do you mean by—engaged?

ERIC. That she has bestowed her heart on somebody, so that you may save yourself the trouble of searching her bosom for it.

JACOB. Are you talking of Agda?

ERIC. Do you know Agda the Chaste, who has told us that she would sell her favours, but never give them away?

AGDA. My God, I never, never meant anything of the kind!

JACOB. No, she cannot possibly have meant it that way.

ERIC. She has said it.

JACOB. It must be a lie.

ERIC. [*His hand on his sword-hilt*] The devil, you say!

JORGHEN. A tavern brawl of the finest water! The words have been given almost correctly, but they were not understood as they were meant.

ERIC. Do you dare to take sides against me, you rascal?

JORGHEN. Listen, friends....

ERIC. *With* a hussy *against* your master....

JACOB. She's no hussy!

AGDA. Thank you, Jacob! Please tell them everything....

ERIC. Oh, there is something to tell, then? Well, well! [*To JORGHEN*] And you must needs appear as the defender of innocence!

He makes a lunge at JORGHEN, who barely manages to get out of the way.

JORGHEN. Why the deuce must you always come poking after me when somebody else has made a fool of himself? Stop it, damn you!

ERIC. [*To JACOB*] So this is my rival! Ha-ha-ha! A fellow like you! *Ventre-saint-gris!*

He loses all control of himself and finally sinks on a chair, seized with an epileptic fit.

JACOB. Once you honoured me with your friendship, Prince, for which I could only give you pity in return. As I did not wish to be false, I asked you to let me go....

ERIC. [*Leaping to his feet*] Go to the devil!

JACOB. Yes, I am going, but first you must hear what I and Agda have in common—something you can never understand, as you understand nothing but hatred, and for that reason never can win love....

ERIC. *Diantre!* And I who can have the virgin-queen, the proud maiden of Britannia, at my feet any time I care ha-ha, ha-ha!

JACOB. King David had five hundred proud maidens, but for happiness he turned to his humble servant's only wife....

ERIC. Must I hear more of that sort of thing?

JACOB. A great deal more!

ERIC. [*Rushing at JACOB*] Die, then!

The guard enters by the rear door.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD [*An old, white-bearded man*]. Your sword, if you please, Prince Eric!

ERIC. What is this?

CAPTAIN. [*Handing ERIC a document*] The King's order. You are under arrest....

ERIC. Go to the devil, old Stenbock!

CAPTAIN. That's not a princely answer to a royal command!

ERIC. Yes, talk away!

CAPTAIN. [*Goes up to ERIC and forests the sword out of his hand; then he turns him over to the guard*] Away with him! And put him in the tower! That's order number one! [*ERIC is led toward the door*] Then comes number two—Mr. Secretary! [*To the guard*] Put on the handcuffs! And then—to the Green Vault with him! To-morrow at cockcrow—ten strokes of the rod!

JORGHEN. [*As he is seized by the guard*] Must I be spanked because *he* won't go to bed?

ERIC. Do you dare to lay hands on the Heir Apparent? 'Sdeath!

CAPTAIN. God is still alive, and so is the King!—March on!—

ERIC and JORGHEN are led out by the guard.

CAPTAIN. [*To AGDA*] And now you'll close your drink-shop. That's the final word. And as there is no question about it, you need not make any answer.

He goes out after the guard and the prisoners.

JACOB. Always this titanic hand that is never seen and always felt! Now it has been thrust out of a cloud to alter our humble fates. The liberator of the country has descended during the darkness of night to set my little bird free.—Will you take flight with me?

AGDA. Yes, with you—and far away!

JACOB. But where?

AGDA. The world is wide!

JACOB. Come, then!

Curtain.

[1] A subterranean vault in the Royal Palace at Stockholm used by the thrifty King Gustavus for the storing of gold and silver and other valuables. Compare the warning of Nils Söderby to Mons Nilsson's wife in the first act: "Look out for the silver—the King is coming."

[2] The first wife of Gustavus was the Princess Catherine of Saxe-Lauenburg, whom he married in 1531, and who died in 1535. She was of a very peculiar temperament and caused much trouble between the King and his relatives by her reckless talk. Prince Eric was born in 1533.

- [3] This is an excellent illustration of the freedom taken by Strindberg in regard to the actual chronology of the historical facts he is using. Eric was little more than a year old when his mother died. Strindberg knew perfectly well what he was doing, his reason being that the motive ascribed to Eric's hatred of his father strengthens the dramatic quality of the play in a very high degree.
- [4] A peasant chieftain, who headed the most dangerous rebellion Gustavus had to contend with during his entire reign. The southern province of Småland had for years been the scene of peasant disturbances when, in 1541, Dacke took command of the scattered flocks and merged them into an army which defied the King's troops for nearly two years. Dacke was as able as he was ambitious. He was in communication with the German Emperor and other foreign enemies of Gustavus, and on one occasion the latter had actually to enter into negotiations with the rebel. In accordance with his invariable custom, Gustavus did not rely on hired soldiery, but turned to the people of the other provinces, explaining and appealing to them with such success that a sufficient army was raised and Dacke beaten and killed in 1543.
- [5] In his effort to reorganise the country and its administration on a businesslike basis, Gustavus turned first to Swedes like Olavus Petri and Laurentius Andreae, his first chancellor. But these were as independent of mind as he was himself, and there was not a sufficient number of them. Then Gustavus turned to Germany, whence a host of adventurers as well as able, honest men swarmed into the country. The two best known and most trusted of these foreigners were Georg Norman, who rendered valuable services in organising the civil administration, and Conrad von Pyhy, said to be a plain charlatan named Peutingen, who was made Chancellor of the Realm.

ACT III

The King's study. The background consists almost wholly of large windows, some of which have panes of stained glass. Several of the windows are open, and through these may be seen trees in the first green of spring. Mast tops with flying flags, and church spires are visible above the tops of the trees.

Beneath the windows are benches set in the walls. Their seats are covered by many-coloured cushions.

At the right, a huge open fireplace, richly decorated. The recently adopted national coat of arms appears on the mantelpiece. A door on the same side leads to the waiting-room.

A chair of state with canopy occupies the centre of the left wall. In front of it stands a long oak table covered with green cloth. On the table are a folio Bible, an inkstand, candlesticks, a war-hammer, and a number of other things. A door on the same side, nearer the background, leads to the royal apartments.

The floor is covered with animal skins and rugs.

The walls display paintings of Old Testament subjects. The most conspicuous of these represents "The Lord appearing unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre." The picture of Abraham bears a strong resemblance to the King.

An Arabian water-bottle of clay and a silver cup stand on a small cabinet.

Near the door at the right hang a long and wide blue cloak and a big black felt hat. A short boar-spear is leaned against the wall.

The KING, lost in thought, stands by one of the open windows where the full sunlight pours over him. He has on a black dress of Spanish cut, with yellow linings that show in the seams and through a number of slits. Over his shoulders is thrown a short cloak trimmed with sable. His hair is blond, and his tremendous beard, reaching almost to his waist, is still lighter in colour.

The QUEEN enters from the left. She wears a yellow dress with black trimmings.

KING. [*Kissing her brow*] Good morrow, my rose!

QUEEN. A splendid morning!

KING. The first spring day after a long winter.

QUEEN. Is my King in a gracious mood to-day?

KING. My graciousness is not dependent on weather or wind.—Go on now! Is it a question of Eric?

QUEEN. It is.

KING. Well, he has my good grace once more after having slept himself sober in the tower. And Jorghen comes next, I suppose?

QUEEN. Yes.

KING. He, on the other hand, will not have my good grace until he reforms.

QUEEN. But....

KING. He is bad through and through, and he is spoiling Eric. Whatever may be the cause of his badness, I cannot dispose of it, but I can check the effects. Have you any more protégés of the same kind?

QUEEN. I won't say anything more now.

KING. Then we can talk of something else. How is my mother-in-law?

QUEEN. Oh, you know.

KING. And Johan? Where is Johan?

QUEEN. He is not far away.

KING. I wish he were still nearer—nearer to me—so near that he could succeed me when the time comes.

QUEEN. It is not right to think like that, and still less to talk like that, when a higher Providence has already decided in favour of Prince Eric.

KING. Well, I can't tell whether it was vanity that fooled me into looking for a foreign princess or wisdom that kept me away from the homes of our Swedish nobility—one hardly ever knows what one is doing.

QUEEN. That's true.

KING. But the fact that I became the brother-in-law of the Danish king helped the country to get peace, and so nobody has any right to complain.

QUEEN. The country first!

KING. The country first and last. That's why Eric must be married.

QUEEN. Do you really think he has any hopes with the English queen.

KING. I don't know, but we must find out—that is, without risking the honour of the country. It is not impossible. We have had a British princess on the throne before.

QUEEN. Who was that?

KING. Don't you know that Queen Philippa was a daughter of King Henry IV?^[1]

QUEEN. No, I didn't know that.

KING. Then I suppose you don't know, either, that the Folkungs were among your ancestors, and that you are also descended from King Waldemar, the Conqueror of Denmark?^[2]

QUEEN. No, no! I thought the bloody tale of the Folkungs was ended long ago.

KING. Let us hope it is! But your maternal ancestor was nevertheless a daughter of Eric Ploughpenny of Denmark and had a son with her brother-in-law, King Waldemar of Sweden, the son of Earl Birger....

QUEEN. Why do you tell me all these dreadful stories?

KING. I thought it might amuse you to know that you have royal blood in your veins, while I have peasant blood. You are too modest, Margaret, and I wish to see you exalted—so high that that fool Eric will be forced to respect you.

QUEEN. To have sprung from a crime should make one more modest.

KING. Well, that's enough about that. Was there anything else?

The QUEEN hesitates.

KING. You are thinking of Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson, but I won't let you talk of them.

The QUEEN kneels before him.

KING. Please, get up! [*As she remains on her knees*] Then I must leave you. [*He goes out to the left.*]

PRINCE ERIC enters from the right; he is pale and unkempt, and his face retains evidence of the night's carouse.

The QUEEN rises, frightened.

ERIC. Did I scare you?

QUEEN. Not exactly.

ERIC. I can take myself out of the way. I was only looking for a glass of water.

He goes to the water-bottle, fills a cup full of water and gulps it down; then another, and still another.

QUEEN. Are you sick?

ERIC. [*Impertinently*] Only a little leaky.

QUEEN. What do you mean?

ERIC. Well, dry, if you please. The more wine you drink, the dryer gets your throat. The wetter, the dryer—that's madness, like everything else.

QUEEN. Why do you hate me?

ERIC. [*Cynically*] Because I am not allowed to love you. [*In the meantime he continues to pour down one glass of water after the other*] You must not be in love with your step-mother and yet you must love her: that's madness, too.

QUEEN. Why do you call me stepmother?

ERIC. Because that's the word, and that's what you are. Is that clear? If it is, then that isn't madness at least.

QUEEN. You have the tongue of a viper.

ERIC. And the reason, too.

QUEEN, But no heart!

ERIC. What could I do with it? Throw it at the feet of the women to be defiled by them?—My heart lies buried in my mother's coffin in the vault of the Upsala cathedral. I was only four years old when it was put there, but there it lies with her, and they tell me there was a hole in her head as if she had been struck by the hammer of Thor—which I did not see, however. When I asked to see my mother for the last time at the burial, they had already screwed on the coffin lid. Well, there lies my heart—the only one I ever had What have you to do with my entrails, for that matter? Or with my feelings?—Look out for my reason; that's all! I grasp your thoughts before you have squeezed them out of yourself. I understand perfectly that you would like to see the crown placed on the red hair of that red devil whom you call son, and whom I must needs call brother. He insists that he has more ancestors than I, and that he is descended from Danish kings. If that's so, he has a lot of fine relatives. Eric Ploughpenny had his head cut off. Abel killed his brother and was killed in turn. Christoffer was poisoned. Eric the Blinking was stuck like a pig.—I have no elegant relatives like those, but if heredity counts, I must keep an eye on my dear brother.

QUEEN. Nobody can talk of anything but blood and poison to-day. The sun must have risen on the wrong side this fine morning!

ERIC. The sun is a deceiver; don't trust it. Blood will be shed in this place before nightfall. Eric and Abel were the names of those elegant relatives; not Cain and Abel! And that time it was Abel who killed Cain—no, Eric, I mean! That's a fine omen to start with! Eric was killed! Poor Eric!

QUEEN. Alas, alas!

ERIC. But it is of no use to take any stock in superstition, as I entered this vale of misery with my fist full of blood.

QUEEN. Now you do scare me!

ERIC. [*Laughing*] That's more than Jorghen would believe—that I could scare anybody.

QUEEN. What blood is to be shed here to-day?

ERIC. I am not sure, but it is said that those Dalecarlians will have their heads cut off.

QUEEN. Can it not be prevented?

ERIC. If it is to be, it cannot be prevented, but must come as thunder must come after lightning. And besides, what does it matter? Heads are dropping off here like ripe apples.

The KING enters reading a document. The QUEEN meets him with a supplicating look.

KING. [*Hotly*] If you have any faith in me at all, Margaret, cease your efforts to judge in matters of state. I have been investigating for two years without being able to make up my mind. How can you, then, hope to grasp this matter?—Go in to the children now. I have a word to say to Eric!

The QUEEN goes out.

KING. If you could see yourself as you are now, Eric, you would despise yourself!

ERIC. So I do anyhow!

KING. Nothing but talk! If you did despise yourself, you would change your ways.

ERIC. I cannot make myself over.

KING. Have you ever tried?

ERIC. I have.

KING. Then your bad company must counteract your good intentions.

ERIC. Jorghen is no worse than anybody else, but he has the merit of knowing himself no better than the rest.

KING. Do you bear in mind that you are to be king some time?

ERIC. Once I am king, the old slips will be forgotten.

KING. There you are mistaken again. I am still paying for old slips. However, if you are not willing to obey me as a son, you must obey me as a subordinate.

ERIC. The Heir Apparent is no subject!

KING. That's why I used the word "subordinate." And all are subordinate to the King.

ERIC. Must I obey blindly?

KING. As long as you are blind, you must obey blindly. When you get your sight, you will obey with open eyes. But obey you must!—Wait only till you have begun to command, and you will soon see how much more difficult that is, and how much more burdensome.

ERIC. [*Pertly*] Pooh!

KING. [*Angrily*] Idiot!—Go and wash the dirt off yourself, and see that your hair is combed. And rinse that filthy mouth of yours first of all, so that you don't stink up my rooms. Go now—or I'll give you a week in the tower to sober up. And if that should not be enough, I'll take off your ears, so that you can never wear a crown. Are those words plain enough?

ERIC. The law of succession....

KING. I make laws of that kind to suit myself! Do you understand now?—That's all!—Away!

PRINCE ERIC *goes out.*

COURTIER. [*Enters from the right*] Herman Israel, Councillor of Luebeck!

KING. Let him come.

The COURTIER goes out. HERMAN ISRAEL enters shortly afterward.

KING. [*Meets him and shakes his hand; then he puts his arm about his neck and leads him across the floor in that manner*] Good day, my dear old friend, and welcome! Sit down, sit down! [*He seats himself on the chair of state, and ISRAEL sits down across the table*] So you have just come from Dalecarlia?

ISRAEL. That's where I was lately.

KING. I was there, too, as you know, to straighten out the mess left after the False Sture and the fight about the bells, but you stayed on when I left.—Did you keep an eye on Master Olavus Petri? What sort of a man has he turned out? Can I trust him?

ISRAEL. Absolutely! He is not only the most faithful, but the cleverest negotiator I have seen.

KING. Really, Herman? I am glad to hear that. Do you really think so, Herman? Well, you know the old affair between him and me, and how that was settled. But it *was* settled!—So much for that. Let us talk of our affairs now.

ISRAEL. As you say. But let us keep our words as well as actions under control.

KING. [*Playing with the war-hammer*] All right! Control yours as much as you please.

ISRAEL. [*Pointing at the hammer*] For the sake of old friendship and good faith, can't we put that away?

KING. Ha-ha! With pleasure, if you are afraid of it, Herman!—Go on now! But cut it short!

ISRAEL. Then I'll start at the end. The country's debt to Luebeck has been paid, and we are about to part.

KING. That sounds like writing! However, we shall part as friends.

ISRAEL. As allies rather....

KING. So *that's* what you are aiming at, Israel?—No, I have had enough of dependence.

ISRAEL. Listen, your Highness, or Majesty, or whatever I am to call you....

KING. Call me Gustav, as you used to do when I called you father.

ISRAEL. Well, my son, there are many things that drive us apart—many, indeed—but there is one thing that keeps us together: our common, legitimate opposition to the Emperor....

KING. Right you are! And that's the reason why we can rely on each other without any written treaties.

ISRAEL. You forget one thing, my son: that I am a merchant....

KING. And I the customer. Have you been paid?

ISRAEL. Paid? Yes.... But there are things that cannot be paid in money....

KING. It is for me to speak of the gratitude I owe you and the free city of Luebeck ever since the day I first came to you—a young man who thought himself deserted by God, and who knew himself deserted by all humanity. Be satisfied to find my gratitude expressed in the friendly feelings I harbour and show toward you. A debt like that cannot be paid in money, and still less in treaties.—Why do you want any treaties? In order to tie me and the country for a future of uncertain duration?—Don't force me to become ungrateful, Herman! On my soul, I have enough as it is to burden me—far too much!

ISRAEL. What is weighing on you, my son?

KING. This.... Oh, will you believe me, Herman, old friend, that lawyer form a decision or pass a judgment without having turned to the Eternal and Almighty Lord for advice? When, after fasting, prayer, and meditation, I have got the answer from above that I was asking for, then I strike gladly, even if it be my own heart-roots that must be cut off. But you remember Master John.... John, the old friend of my youth, who assisted me in that first bout with Christian? He changed heart and incited the Dalecarlians to rise against me. His head had to fall, and it did fall! [*Rising*] Since that day my peace is gone. My nearest and dearest don't look at me in the same

way they used to do. My own wife, my beloved Margaret.... She turns away from me when I want to kiss her pure brow, and can you imagine? Yesterday, at the dinner-table, she kept looking at my hand as if she had seen blood on it!—I don't regret what I did. I have no right to regret it. I was right—by God, I was right! But nevertheless—my peace is gone!

ISRAEL. [*Pensively*] Those feelings are an honour to your heart, my son, and I must admit that I didn't think you quite as sensitive....

KING. Never mind! It was not meant as a boast. But now I find myself in the same situation again. Tell me, Herman, what you think of Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson.

ISRAEL. [*Disturbed*] Will my opinion have any influence on their fate, or have you already made up your mind?

KING. I am still in doubts, as you ought to know.

ISRAEL. Then I must ask permission to remain silent.

KING. Are you my friend?

ISRAEL. Yes, up to a certain point. But you must not trust me too far, as I am not my own master and have no right to give away what is not mine.

KING. Fie on such astuteness!

ISRAEL. You should get some of it yourself!

KING. I'll try.—First of all you must give me a final receipt for the country's paid-up debt.

ISRAEL. I don't carry such documents with me, and the receipt has to be signed by the Council in regular session.

KING. [*Smiting the table with the hammer*] Herman!

ISRAEL. Please put that thing away!

KING. I can see that you wish to lead me where I don't want to go. You have some purpose in mind that I can't make out. Speak out, old man, or you'll have me in a rage! You want to coax me into signing some kind of paper. What is it?

ISRAEL. Nothing but a treaty providing for mutual friendship and mutual trade. That's all!

KING. And that I will never sign! I know all about Luebeck's friendship as well as its trade. Talk of something else!

ISRAEL. I have nothing else to talk of. Why don't you believe me?

KING. Because you lie!

ISRAEL. Because you are unfortunate enough to think that I lie, you will never know the truth.

KING. Yes, unfortunate, indeed—as unfortunate as a man can be, for I have not a single friend.

ISRAEL. It hurts me to hear you talk like that, Gustav, and—and it makes me sad to see that your greatness and your exalted office have brought you so little true happiness. I shall say nothing more about gratitude, because the idea of it is too vague in human minds, but I have loved you like a son ever since that hour when the Lord of Hosts put your fate in my hands. I have followed your brilliant course as if it had been my own. I have joyed over your successes, and I have sorrowed over your sorrows.... Frequently my duties toward my own people have kept me from lending you a helping hand. Frequently, too, your own hardness has stood between us. But now, when I behold you so deeply crushed, and when you have treated me with a confidence that I may well call filial, I shall forget for a moment that I am your enemy—which I must be as a man of Luebeck, while as Herman Israel I am your friend. I shall forget that I am a merchant, and—*[Pause]* I hope that I may never regret it—*[Pause]* and—and.... Do you know John Andersson?

KING. I don't.

ISRAEL. But I do, and I know Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson, too! They called on me yesterday, and—to-morrow the southern provinces will rise in rebellion!

KING. So *that's* what was coming? Oh! Who is John Andersson?

ISRAEL. Hard to tell. But back of his face appears another one that looks like the devil's own. Have you heard the name of Dacke?

KING. Yes, but only in a sort of dream. Dacke?—Dacke?—It sounds like the cawing of a jackdaw.—Who is he?

ISRAEL. Nobody knows. It is the name of one invisible, whom all know and none have seen. But that name has been seen on a letter signed by—the Emperor.

KING. The Emperor?

ISRAEL. The Emperor of the Holy Roman and German Empire!

KING. Fairy-tales!

ISRAEL. You won't believe me? Investigate!

KING. I believe you and I thank you!—You say that Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson have been plotting with the rebels right here in my own city?

ISRAEL. As surely as I have ears to hear with.

KING. My God! My God!—Then I know what to do with them! Two years of struggle with myself and my conscience, and at last I know what to do with them! At last!

COURTIER. [*Bringing in* JACOB ISRAEL] Jacob Israel of Luebeck!

KING. Who dares to disturb me?

JACOB. [*Throwing himself at the KING'S feet without noticing his father*] My noble King, an humble youth has ventured to disturb you because your life is at stake!

KING. Speak up! What more? Who are you?

JACOB. I am Jacob Israel, your Highness.

KING, [*to ISRAEL*] It's your Jacob, is it not?

JACOB *is thunderstruck at the sight of his father.*

ISRAEL. It's my boy.

KING. What do you want? Speak quickly, or away with you!

JACOB *does not answer.*

KING. Who is after my life? If you mean John Andersson or Dacke, I know it already.—For the sake of your good intention and your youth, but particularly for the sake of your father, I shall forgive you.

ISRAEL. But I have no right to forgive so quickly.—You came here to accuse your father? Answer me yes or no.

JACOB. Yes!

ISRAEL. Go then, and take my curse with you!

JACOB. [*Kneeling before ISRAEL*] Forgive, father!

ISRAEL. No more your father! You silly, impudent youth, who think that you understand the art of statesmanship and the laws of honour better than he who brought you into the world! What you did not foresee was that I might change my mind.

KING. Oh, forgive him, Herman!

ISRAEL. I have forgiven him already, but our sacred laws will never do so. Take this ring, Jacob, and go to—you know whom!—But bid me good-bye first.

JACOB. [*Throwing himself into the arms of his father*] Take away your curse, father!

ISRAEL *wets one of his fingers, makes a sign with it on his son's forehead, and mutters a few inaudible words. Then he kisses JACOB on both cheeks and leads him to the door at the right, through which the young man disappears.*

KING. What are you two doing?

ISRAEL. [*Deeply stirred*] That is a family secret. Now we can go on.

KING. Or quit. You have given me proof of your unswerving friendship, Herman, and I thank you for the last time. Give me your hand!

ISRAEL. Not to promise anything that cannot be kept!

KING. No promises, then! Farewell, and peace be with you!

ISRAEL. [*Moved*] I thank you!

KING. What is that? You are crying?

ISRAEL. Perhaps, for now I am your equal in misfortune. I have lost my son!

KING. He'll come back to you.

ISRAEL. [*As he is leaving*] Never!—Good-bye!

KING. [*Escorting him to the door*] Good-bye, Herman, old friend!

HERMAN ISRAEL *goes out.*

The KING'S MOTHER-IN-LAW enters from the left in the white dress of a Cistercian nun.

KING. [*Greeting her kindly*] Good morning, mother-in-law.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Are you busy?

KING. Very much so.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. But not so much that you cannot hear the justified complaint of a subject.

KING. You are too modest. However, let me decide whether your complaint be justified or no. I must hear too many unjustified ones, God wot!

MOTHER-IN-LAW. If I condescend to make a complaint, you may be sure that I have reasons for it.

KING. But they must be good. Most reasons are no good at all.—Is it a question of Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson?

MOTHER-IN-LAW. No, of myself.

KING. Then you should be well informed at least.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Is there law and justice in this country?

KING. Both law and justice, but also a lot of wrong-doing.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Do you know that the Queen's mother—that is, I—has been insulted by the mob?

KING. No, I didn't know, but I have long expected it, as I have told you before this.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. You think it right, then?...

KING. No, I think it wrong of you to wear that dress in public, when it is forbidden. And it is only out of respect for yourself and your—hm!—sex, that I have not long ago ordered you to be stripped of it.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Ha-ha!

KING. And it has been wrong of me to leave the Convent of Vreta standing for you to live in, when the law demands that it be tom down.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Ha-ha!

KING. Since you, by persuading me into letting the convent remain, have placed me before the public in the awkward position of a perverter of justice, you should, at least, show me the consideration of not appearing on the streets in that dress. And as I have given you permission to come here *at your own risk*, you must bear that risk yourself. To show you that justice exists, however, I shall see that those who insulted you be found—they had no right to insult you, even if you had been the humblest woman of the people. Now that matter is settled! [*He goes to the door at the right and summons the COURTIER, who appears in the doorway*] Call four of the guards. Put two at that door [*indicating the door at the left*] and two at the other [*indicating the right-hand door*].

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Thus I am treated like a thief and a murderer by my own kinsman....

KING. No, you are not! But no one knows what may happen.... It depends on your own conduct.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. [*With a threat in her glance*] Do you call that freedom?

KING. It is freedom for me—to be free from unreasonable people.

Two guards enter from the right.

KING. [*Pointing at the left-hand door*] Outside that door. And no one can get in here; literally no one! [*As the guards hesitate*] If anybody should come, whoever it be—whoever it be, mind you—and try to force his way in here, cut him down—cut him down! [*To his MOTHER-IN-LAW*] I cannot show you the door, but I must warn you that two executions will take place in this room within a few minutes.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Here?

KING. Yes, here! Do you wish to look on?

MOTHER-IN-LAW. [*Approaching the door at the left*] I shall go in a moment, but first you must hear something for your own benefit....

KING. If it is for *my* benefit, I can guess the nature of it. Well, spit it out now!

MOTHER-IN-LAW. This man Herman Israel, whom you regard as a friend, is speaking ill of you on your back.

KING. When I do what's ill, he has the right to speak ill of me—has he not?

MOTHER-IN-LAW. [*Going out in a huff*] Oh, it's impossible to reason with you!

KING. Have you really discovered that at last?—At last! [*He goes to the door at the right*] Let Master Olavus Petri come in.

MASTER OLAVUS *enters*.

KING. Good day, Olof. I have read your report on the conditions at Copperberg, and I am pleased with you.—Have Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson been arrested?

OLAVUS. They have been locked up since last night.

KING. [*Goes to the door at the right*] Order Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson to be brought up here at once. [*To OLAVUS*] Have you any proof that the prisoners have been plotting with John Andersson?

OLAVUS. Proof and witnesses.

KING. Good!—Tell me something What do you think of Herman Israel—as a man, and more particularly in his relationship to me?

OLAVUS. He seems to me a good and faithful friend of your Highness. As a private person he is honest in every respect, big-minded, and straight in all his actions.

KING. I am glad to hear it just now, when I have all but lost my faith in friendship. So you think I can rely on him?

OLAVUS. Absolutely.

KING. Have you heard of the restlessness in the southern provinces?

OLAVUS. Yes, I am sorry to say.

KING. They say that it is pretty serious.

OLAVUS. So serious that nothing but quick and determined action can save the country.

KING. Have you heard the Emperor's name mentioned in this connection?

OLAVUS. I have.

KING. I want a piece of advice, although I may not take it. What would you, in my place, do with Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson?

OLAVUS. Have them executed before the sun has set.

KING. You are a stem man, Olof!

OLAVUS. Yes, why not?

KING. Do you think you could sleep nights—having shown that kind of—sternness?

OLAVUS. Only then should I be able to sleep in peace....

KING. Very well!—Have you anything to ask me about?

OLAVUS. I have—but it's a delicate question.

KING. Let's see!

OLAVUS. It concerns the mother of the Queen....

KING. The people are muttering?

OLAVUS. The people think that when the King has ordered the introduction of a new faith, he should not for family reasons overlook the violation of the established law....

KING. It's not the people, but you, who are saying that....

OLAVUS. Suppose I took the liberty of telling my King the truth....

KING. You're no court fool who needs to run about dropping truths wherever you go! [*Pause*] Now, I am willing to admit that the indiscretion of my gracious mother-in-law puts me in a false position toward the adherents of the new faith.... But this is not the bedchamber, and we'll let that question stay where it belongs; back of the bed curtains. Is there anything else?

OLAVUS. Nothing else. But this question....

KING. [*Hotly*] I'll solve myself!

OLAVUS. Can your Highness solve it?

KING. I think you ask too many questions!

OLAVUS. If it were a private matter, yes—but as it concerns the whole country....

KING. Which I am looking after! I am looking after the whole country. And if you must know, I have just settled that very question, so that your advice is a little belated. The Convent of Vreta will be closed before you have time to write another sermon. Do you realise now that I have a right to be angry with your needless and unsolicited questions?

OLAVUS. I stand corrected!

KING. I have got you on account of my sins, and I suppose I must take your faults with your merits, which are great. Now we are done with *that* I Go back and roar in your pulpit now. Here I do the roaring!

MASTER OLAVUS *goes out by the door at the right.*

KING. [*Standing in front of that door with folded hands and speaking in a barely audible voice*] Eternal Lord, who rules the destinies of princes and of peoples, illumine my mind and strengthen my will, so that I may not judge unrighteously! [*He makes the sign of the cross and mutters a brief prayer; then he opens the door*] Bring in the prisoners!

The door remains open while the KING seats himself in the chair of state.

ANDERS PERSSON *and* MONS NILSSON *are brought in. They look around the room uneasily at first; then they start toward the KING.*

KING. Stay where you are! [*Pause*] Once I called you my friends, Anders Persson and Mons Nilsson. You know why. But that was long ago. I let you keep life and goods when you had forfeited both, and thus Providence rid me mercifully of the debt of gratitude I had come to owe you. Two years ago you withdrew your oath of loyalty and opened war on me for the sake of those bells. Being victorious, I had a right to your heads, but I let you go. That's how my debt was paid. Your ingratitude wiped out my gratitude, and so *that* bill was settled. Now the time has come for a new settlement, and this time the balance is against you. To find out just where you stood, I invited you to my capital, and you might have guessed that I would keep my eyes on you. My ears have been open, too, and I have learned that you have begun plotting all over again. Do you know John Andersson?

ANDERS *and* MONS. No!

KING. [*Rising and approaching them angrily*] Do you know Dacke?

ANDERS *and* MONS. [*Falling on their knees*] Mercy!

KING. Yes, mercy! But there will be no more mercy. You have had it once, and twice is too much.

ANDERS *and* MONS *make movements to speak.*

KING. Silence! I am doing the speaking now! You were going to talk about friendship, of course. I cannot be the friend of my enemies, and having cancelled your acquaintance, I don't even know you. Were I to let old devotion influence my judgment, I should not be acting as an unbiassed judge. And he who has incurred the disfavour of the law cannot be helped by any favour of mine! That's enough words spent on this matter! [*Goes to the door at the right*] Take away these culprits, guard!

ANDERS. What is the sentence?

KING. That you lose life, honour, and property.

MONS *makes a gesture as if wishing to shake hands with the KING.*

KING. *My hand?* Oh, no! Shake hands with the heads-man, and kiss the block—that's good enough for you!

ANDERS. One word!

KING. Not one!

ANDERS PERSSON *and* MONS NILSSON *are led out.*

The KING turns his back on them and goes to the chair of state, where he sinks down, burying his face in his hands.

Curtain.

[1] Philippa of England, who died in 1430, was the queen of Eric of Pomerania, who succeeded the great Queen Margaret on the united thrones of the three Scandinavian kingdoms. She was as sweet and fine as he was stupid and worthless, and to this day her memory survives among the people.

[2] The Folkungs were the descendants of the puissant Earl Birger of Håtuna, who, as an uncrowned king, ruled Sweden in very much the same spirit as King Gustavus himself. The Folkung dynasty reigned from 1250 to 1389—and spent much of that time in fighting among themselves. King Waldemar II gained the name of "Conqueror" by adding Esthonia and other Baltic districts to Denmark.

ACT IV

FIRST SCENE

A square at the foot of Brunkeberg, A fountain stands in the centre. The Hansa House appears at the right. It is built of red bricks, with windows in Gothic style. The windows are barred outside and have shutters within. The gates are fastened with heavy wooden beams. Above the gateway appear the flag and coat of arms of Luebeck.

At the left is a tavern with a sign-board bearing the inscription: "The Golden Apple." There are trees in front of it, and under these tables and benches. Next the foreground is a bower with a table and benches within it.

The hillside of Brunkeberg forms the background. It contains a number of gallows, wheels, and similar paraphernalia.

There is a bench in front of the Hanseatic office.

AGDA and KARIN are standing at the fountain when the curtain rises. AGDA carries a water-jar, while KARIN has a basket full of flowers and wreaths.

AGDA. You ask what that big red house is? It used to be the Convent of St. Clara. Now it is the Hanseatic office.

KARIN. Do they ever buy any flowers there?

AGDA. Not now, I think. I used to bring flowers there when an image of the Virgin Mary stood at the corner.—I wish she were there still!

KARIN. What do they do in that house? They tell so many queer stories about it, and no one is ever admitted....

AGDA. Have you heard that, too? I suppose they buy and sell, like all that come from Luebeck.

KARIN. Of course, but they say that people have disappeared in that house and that those who live

there are heathens who sacrifice....

AGDA. You have heard that, too? But it can't be true! Do you think so?

KARIN. How could I tell? And why are you so disturbed by those stories? [AGDA *does not reply*] Gossip says that you used to have a friend in there. Is it true?

AGDA. Well, as you have heard about it But whether he still be there Oh, if I only knew!

KARIN. I'll ring and ask.

AGDA. No, no! You don't know what kind of people they are!

KARIN. Do you think they'll eat me? [*She goes up to the gateway and putts a string; a bell is heard ringing inside*] Listen! That's the old vesper bell! I know it! Bing-bong! Bing-bong!

AGDA. Stop it! Somebody might come.

KARIN. Isn't that what we want? But no one does come, my dear.—It's a gruesome place. And I shall leave it alone now.—Do you know Prince Eric, Agda?

AGDA. Yes, it was on his account they closed up the Blue Dove. Now I am working over there, at the Golden Apple.

KARIN. They say that he used to be very polite to you.

AGDA. No, he was most impolite, not to say nasty.

KARIN. He had been drinking then. Otherwise he is merely miserable, they say.

AGDA. Do you know him?

KARIN. No, I have only seen him, but I cannot forget his sad eyes and his long face. He looks so much like a doll I had once—I called it Blinkie Bloodless.... I suppose they are not kind to him at home, either.

AGDA. Probably not, but a man has no right to act like a brute because he is unhappy.

KARIN. Why do you talk like that? He drinks a lot of wine, like most young men and Hush! Somebody is coming....

AGDA. Good-bye, Karin. I have to run....

[She hurries into the tavern at the left.

KARIN. [*As she goes to the right*] I'll be back.

PRINCE ERIC *and* JORGHEN PERSSON *enter from the rear.*

ERIC. Here's my new well-spring of wine. Come quick to the bower here.

JORGHEN. And Agda is here, too!

ERIC. Well, what of it? [*Rapping on the table.*

AGDA *appears.*

ERIC. [*To AGDA*] Bring us some Rhine wine and then make yourself invisible. [*To JORGHEN*] You know, Jorghen, I am facing a crucial moment and must be ready to act at once. The King has lost his reason and is committing acts that cannot be defended! Yesterday he cut off the heads of those Dalecarlians. To-day comes the news that his troops have been beaten by the peasants of Småland, who are now crossing Holaved Forest.^[1] Now the Dalecarlians will rise, of course, and everything is lost.

JORGHEN. What does that concern us? Let the world perish, and I shall laugh at it.

ERIC. But this is what beats everything else for madness. Finding his treasury empty, the King, in his incredible simplicity, tries to borrow money from these Luebeckians, who are his enemies.

JORGHEN. Well, if you need money, your enemies are the best ones to take it from.

ERIC. If I am not crazy already, you'll make me so! Please be serious a moment!

JORGHEN. [*Recites*]

"The ring of gold, and rattling dice,
And wine brings light to tipsy eyes.
But in the night, that light must lack,
To wenches leads each crooked track."

At that moment AGDA *appears with the wine.*

ERIC. [*Laughing idiotically at JORGHEN'S recitation*] Ha-ha! That's a good one. But then, I made it myself.—Well, Agda, or Magda, or what it is, where's your pawnbroker to-day?

AGDA *does not reply.*

ERIC. Do you know that those Hanseatic people are in the habit of butchering little boys and selling them to the Turk?

AGDA. Is that true?

ERIC. There is some truth in it, I think.

JORGHEN. Let the maiden go before she begins to cry. I can't bear tears.

ERIC. I suppose you have never cried, Jorghen?

JORGHEN. Twice: when I was born, and once after that—out of rage.

ERIC. You are a beast, Jorghen.

AGDA goes back into the tavern.

JORGHEN. However—you wish to figure out what is to happen, and to form a decision on the basis of your false calculations. Have you not noticed how all our plans are foiled? That's the game of the gods. Sometimes we act wisely, and everything goes to the devil, and then we act like fools, and everything turns out right. It's nothing but humbug—all of it!

ERIC. I think so, too, and yet there must be some sort of sense in it.

JORGHEN. Not as far as I can see. It's just like dicing.

ERIC. Let the dice rattle, then!

JORGHEN. Let them rattle! That's the right word for it. Now it's a question of head or tail, however—whether the King is to be the tail, and the man from Småland the head.... Look, who comes here!

KARIN enters from the right.

ERIC. [*Staring at her*] Who—is—that?

JORGHEN. A flower girl.

ERIC. No—this is—something else! Do you see?

JORGHEN. What?

ERIC. What I see—but, of course, you can't.

KARIN comes forward, kneels before ERIC and offers him a wreath.

ERIC. [*Rises, takes the wreath and places it on the head of KARIN; then to JORGHEN*] Look! Now the wreath has been added to the crown.^[2]

JORGHEN. What crown?

ERIC. Didn't you see? [*To KARIN*] Get up, child! You should not be kneeling to me, but I to you. I don't want to ask your name, for I know who you are, although I have never seen you or heard of you before.—What do you ask of me? Speak!

KARIN. [*Unaffectedly*] That your Grace buy my flowers.

ERIC. Put your flowers there. [*He takes a ring from one of his fingers and gives it to her*] There!

KARIN. No, I cannot wear that ring, your Grace—it's much too grand for me. And if I try to sell it, I shall be seized as a thief.

ERIC. You are as wise as you are beautiful.

[He gives her money.]

KARIN. I thank your Grace, but it is too much.

ERIC. As you named no price, I can do so myself.

KARIN goes out. A long pause follows.

ERIC. Did you see?

JORGHEN. Not a thing.

ERIC. Didn't you hear, either? Didn't you notice her voice?

JORGHEN. A voice like that of any jade—rather pert.

ERIC. Stop your tongue, Jorghen! I love her!

JORGHEN. She is not the first.

ERIC. Yes, the first, and the only one!

JORGHEN. Well, seduce her if you must.

ERIC. [*Drawing his sword*] Take care, or by God!...

JORGHEN. Have we now got to the poking point again?

ERIC. I don't know what has happened, but this moment has made me despise you. The same city can't hold you and me. Your eyes defile me, and your whole being stinks. I shall leave you, and I don't want to see you face to face again.—It is as if an angel had come to take me away from the habitations of the damned. I despise my whole past, as I despise you and myself.

[*He goes out in the same direction as KARIN went before.*

JORGHEN. Seems to be serious this time. But I guess you'll come back. [*He raps on the table.*

AGDA *appears.*

JORGHEN. Do you know Karin, the flower girl?

AGDA. Yes, I do.

JORGHEN. What kind of a piece is she?

AGDA. A nice and decent girl, of whom I have never heard anything bad.

JORGHEN. Can you see anything beautiful about her?

AGDA. No, but she is rather pretty, and there is like a halo of sweetness about her.

JORGHEN. Oh, it was that he saw, then!

AGDA. Tell me, secretary, are you really as hard as people say?

JORGHEN. I am not hard to anybody, child, but the world has been hard to me ever since I was born.

AGDA. Why don't you always speak like that?

JORGHEN. However, the Prince is enamoured, bewitched.

AGDA. Poor fellow!—Tell me, secretary, is the Prince quite right?

JORGHEN. You and your questions are very amusing. Let me ask you one now. Hm! Do you think a woman could possibly—hm!—love me?

AGDA. No, I don't. [JORGHEN *looks offended*] Not unless you try to be good.

JORGHEN. How the devil is that to be done?

AGDA. Shame! Shame!

JORGHEN. If you never see anything good, how can you believe in it?

AGDA. Tell me, secretary, did the Prince mean what he said about the Hanseatic people and what they are doing in that house?

JORGHEN. No, child! That was only a cruel jest. But no Swedish authority can interfere with what they are doing in there. That much you should know, if you are worrying about your Jacob.

AGDA. Will you do me a favour? It won't cost you anything.

JORGHEN. With the greatest pleasure, my dear girl.

AGDA. Find Jacob for me! He had promised to meet me, and he never came. We have been ringing the bell at the door, but no one answers.

JORGHEN. I don't want to hurt you, Agda, but unfortunately I have reason to believe that all the Luebeck people have gone away on account of the new rebellion.

AGDA. And he won't come back, you think?

JORGHEN. I don't like to prophesy, because it generally turns out the other way, but I don't think he will be back soon.

AGDA. [*Sinking to the ground*] Lord Jesus!

JORGHEN. [*Rises and helps her to her feet*] What is it, girl?—Tell me! [*in a lower voice*] A child?

AGDA. He had given me his promise.

JORGHEN. [*Genuinely moved*] Poor woman!

AGDA *watches him closely.*

JORGHEN. Misery, always misery, wherever love gets in its work!

AGDA. And you don't despise me?

JORGHEN. I pity you, as I pity all of us.

AGDA. Can you see now that good exists?

JORGHEN. Where?

AGDA. Within yourself.

JORGHEN. Pooh!—Is there anything else I can do for you?

AGDA. Yes, secretary, if you would write to Luebeck and ask Jacob....

JORGHEN. I have not much use for love-affairs, but I'll write, nevertheless, provided we find that he really has gone away.

AGDA. [*Tries to kiss his hand, which he pulls away*] Thank you!

JORGHEN. What are you doing, woman? I am no bishop!—But hush! Here comes illustrious company. So I think I'll sneak off!

The stage has grown darker in the meantime.

AGDA. Please, secretary, don't forget me now!

JORGHEN. So you don't trust me? Well, there is not much to trust in! [*He goes out to the left.*]

The KING enters, wearing his big blue cloak and his soft black hat. He is using his boarspear as a staff.

PRINCE JOHAN *is with him, dressed very simply, as if to avoid recognition.*

KING. [*Looking about*] Do you think we have been recognised?

JOHAN. No, I don't think so, father.

KING. Bing, then.

JOHAN. [*Putts the bell-rope outside the Hanseatic office*] The bell does not ring.

KING. Knock.

JOHAN. [*Rapping on the door*] Nobody seems to answer.

KING. [*Seating himself on the bench outside*] I must get hold of Herman Israel this very evening—I must!

JOHAN. You are worried, father?

KING. I am certainly not at ease. [*Pause.*]

JOHAN. Money cares again?

KING. Oh, don't talk of it!—Knock again.

JOHAN. [*Rapping at the door*] There is no one there.

A crowd of beggars enter and kneel in front of the KING with hands held out in supplication.

KING. Are you mocking me?

FIRST BEGGAR. We are perishing, my noble lord!

KING. I am perishing, too!—Why are you begging, anyhow?

SECOND BEGGAR. I'll tell you. Because the King has seized the tithes that went to the poor before. And when he did so, he said: "You can beg!"

KING. And what is he doing with the tithes of the poor?

FIRST BEGGAR. Paying Prince Eric's le-lecherries!

KING. No, paying the country's debt, you knaves! [*To JOHAN*] Give them money, so we get rid of them.

JOHAN. [*Distributing coins*] You'll have to share it between you, and then away—at once!

The beggars leave.

KING. I wonder who sent them? Somebody must have sent them!—Knock again. [*JOHAN does so*] What unspeakable humiliation! You see, my son, that no matter how high up you get, new and then you have to climb down again. But of anything like this I never dreamt.

[He takes off his hat and wipes his forehead.

JOHAN. May I speak?

KING. No, you may not, for I know what you mean to say.

MONS NILSSON'S widow enters, led by BARBRO. Both are in mourning, and BARBRO carries a document in her hand.

BARBRO. [*To her mother*] That must be the Councillor himself.

WIDOW. Can that be Herman Israel who is sitting there? My eyes have grown blind with sorrow.

BARBRO. It must be him.

The two women approach the KING.

BARBRO. [*To the KING*] Are you the Councillor?

KING. What do you want of him?

BARBRO. Mr. Syndic, we are the bereaved dependents of Mons Nilsson, and we have come to pray that you put in a good word for us with the King.

KING. Why do you think the Councillor's word will be of any help?

BARBRO. We have been told that he is the King's only friend, and we thought he might help us to get back the property of which we have been unjustly deprived.

KING. Unjustly, you say? As a traitor, Mons Nilsson was judged forfeit of life *and* goods—which

was only just!

BARBRO. But the dower of the innocent widow should not have been taken with the rest.

KING. What is your name?

BARBRO. I was baptised with the name of Barbro, and the King himself acted as my godfather when he was in Dalecarlia at that time.

KING. [*Rises, but sits down again immediately*] Barbro?—Have you ever seen the King?

BARBRO. Not since I was too small to know him. But the last time he visited Copperberg, my father was expecting him, and we children were to greet him with a song.

KING. What song was that?

BARBRO. I cannot sing since my father came to his death so miserably, but it was a song about King Gustavus and the Dalecarlians, and this is the way it ended:

"You have by my side been fighting
Like sturdy Swedish men.
If God will spare my life-blood,
I'll do you good in stead."

KING. Say something really bad about the King!

BARBRO. No, father told us we must never do that, no matter what we might hear other people say.

KING. Did your father tell you that?

BARBRO. Yes, he did.

KING. Go in peace now. I shall speak to the King, and you shall have your rights, for he wants to do right, and he tries to do it.

BARBRO. [*Kneels and takes hold of the KING'S hand, which she kisses*] If the King were as gracious as you are, Councillor, there would be no cause for worry.

KING. [*Placing his hand on BARBRO'S head*] He is, my child, and I know that he won't refuse his goddaughter anything. Go in peace now!

The two women leave.

KING. [*To JOHAN*] Who can have sent them? Who?—Here I have to sit like a defendant—I, the highest judge of the land!

JOHAN. May I say a word?

KING. No, because I can tell myself what you want to say. I can tell that the hand of the Lord has been laid heavily upon me, although I cannot tell why. If the Lord speaks through conscience and prayer, then it is he who has made me act as I have acted. Why my obedience should be punished, I cannot grasp. But I submit to a higher wisdom that lies beyond my reason.—That girl was my goddaughter, and her father was my friend, and I had to take his head.... Oh, cruel life, that has to be lived nevertheless! [*Pause*] Knock again.

MARCUS. [*In travelling clothes, enters from the right*] Your Highness! [*He kneels.*

KING. Still more?

MARCUS. A message from Herman Israel.

KING. At last!—Speak!

MARCUS. Herman Israel has this afternoon set sail for Luebeck.

KING. [*Rising*] Then I am lost!—God help me!

JOHAN. And all of us!

The KING and JOHAN go out. MARCUS goes over to the tavern and raps on one of the tables.

AGDA. [*Appearing*] Is that you, Marcus?

MARCUS. Yes, Agda, it's me.

AGDA. Where is Jacob?

MARCUS. He has started on a journey—a very long one.

AGDA. Where?

MARCUS. I cannot tell. But he asked me to bring you his greeting and to give you this ring.

AGDA. As a keepsake only, or as a plight of his troth?

MARCUS. Read what it says.

AGDA. [*Studying the ring*] Yes, I can spell a little "For ever," it says. What does it mean?

MARCUS. I fear it means—farewell for ever.

AGDA. [*With a cry*] No, no, it means that he is dead!

MARCUS *does not answer.*

AGDA. Who killed him?

MARCUS. The law and his own crime. He rebelled against his father and his country.

AGDA. To save mine!—Oh, what is to become of me?

MARCUS. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] That's the way of the world. Nothing but deceit and uncertainty.

AGDA. Alas, he was like all the rest!

MARCUS. Yes, all human beings are pretty much alike. He who is no worse than the rest is no better, either. Good-bye!

Curtain.

SECOND SCENE

The study of MASTER OLAVUS PETRI. There is a door on either side of the room.

OLAVUS is writing at a table.

CHRISTINE is standing beside the table with a letter in her hand.

CHRISTINE. Do I disturb you?

OLAVUS. [*Quietly and coldly*] Naturally, as I am writing.

CHRISTINE. Are you sure that you are writing?

OLAVUS. Absolutely sure.

CHRISTINE. But I have not seen your pen move for a long while.

OLAVUS. That was because I was thinking.

CHRISTINE. Once....

OLAVUS. Yes, once upon a time!

CHRISTINE. Can Reginald come in and say good-bye?

OLAVUS. Are we that far already?

CHRISTINE. The carriage is waiting and all his things have been packed.

OLAVUS. Let him come, then.

CHRISTINE. Are you certain that he is going to Wittenberg to study?

OLAVUS. I have seen too much uncertainty, as you know, to be certain of anything. If you have reason to doubt the feasibility of his plans, you had better say so.

CHRISTINE. If I had any doubts, I would not disturb you with them.

OLAVUS. Always equally amiable! Will you please ask Reginald to come here?

CHRISTINE. I'll do whatever you command.

OLAVUS. And as I never command, but merely ask....

CHRISTINE. If you would command your precious son now and then, he might be a little more polite and obedient to his mother.

OLAVUS. Reginald is hard, I admit, but you do wrong in trying to educate him to suit your own high pleasure.

CHRISTINE. Do you side with the children against their parents?

OLAVUS. If I am not mistaken, I have always done so when the natural rights of the children were concerned.

CHRISTINE. Have the children any natural rights to anything?

OLAVUS. Of course, they have! You haven't forgotten how we....

CHRISTINE. Yes, I have forgotten every bit of that old tommy-rot! I have forgotten how you swore to love me. I have forgotten the noise made about the pope's beard, and the stealing of the church silver, and the humbug with the bells, and the *pure* faith, and roast ducks and cackling swans, and martyrs with a taste for fighting, and the following of Christ with wine and women, and the scratching of eyes and tearing of hair, until we now have twenty-five brand new faiths in place of a holy Catholic Church.... I have forgotten every bit of it!

OLAVUS. Perhaps that was the best thing you could do. And will you please ask Reginald to come here now?

CHRISTINE. Certainly, I'll ask him to come here, and it will be a great pleasure to do so. [*She goes out to the left.*]

OLAVUS. [*Alone, speaking to himself*] Happy she, who has been able to forget! I remember everything!

CHRISTINE *returns with* REGINALD.

REGINALD. I want mother to go out, because I can't talk when she is here.

OLAVUS. There won't be so very much to talk about.

CHRISTINE. I won't say a word; only listen—and look at you. [*She seats herself.*]

REGINALD. No, you mustn't look at us.

OLAVUS. Be quiet, boy, and be civil to your mother! When you go travelling, there is no telling whether you ever come back.

REGINALD. So much the better!

OLAVUS. [*Painfully impressed*] What's that?

REGINALD. I am tired of everything, and I just wish I were dead!

OLAVUS. Yes, that's the way youth talks nowadays!

REGINALD. And why? Because we don't know what to believe!

OLAVUS. Oh, you don't? And how about the articles of confession? Don't you believe in them?

REGINALD. Believe, you say? Don't you know that belief comes as a grace of God?

OLAVUS. Are you a Calvinist?

REGINALD. I don't know what I am. When I talk with Prince Johan, he says I am a papist, and when I meet Prince Eric, he tells me I am a follower of Zwingli.

OLAVUS. And now you wish to go to Wittenberg to learn the true faith from Doctor Martin Luther?

REGINALD. I know his teachings and don't believe in them,

OLAVUS. Is that so?

REGINALD. To him belief is everything, and deeds nothing. I have believed, but it didn't make my deeds any better at all, and so I felt like a perfect hypocrite in the end.

OLAVUS. Is Prince Johan a Catholic?

REGINALD. So he must be, as he sticks to deeds, which ought to be the main thing.

OLAVUS. And Prince Eric belongs to the Reformed Church, you say?

REGINALD. Yes, in so far as he believes in the dispensation of grace. And Jorghen Persson must be a Satanist, I think. And young Sture is absolutely an Anabaptist....

OLAVUS. Well, this is news to me! I thought the days of schism were past....

REGINALD. Schism, yes—that's the word Prince Johan is using always. We had a Catholic Church, and then....

OLAVUS. Oh, shut your mouth and go to Wittenberg!

REGINALD. As it is your wish, father—but I won't study any more theology.

OLAVUS. Why not?

REGINALD. I think it is device of the devil to make people hate each other.

CHRISTINE. Good for you, Reginald!

OLAVUS. And it had to come to this in my own house! *Pulchre, bene, rede!*—Who, Reginald, do you think has caused this dissension under which you young people are suffering now?

REGINALD. That's easily answered.

OLAVUS. Of course! We old ones, you mean? But we, too, were children of our time, and were stripped of our faith by our prophets. Who is, then, to blame?

REGINALD. No one.

OLAVUS. And what do you mean to do with your future?

REGINALD. My future? It appears to me like a grey mist without a ray of sunlight. And should a ray ever break through, it will at once be proved a will-o'-the-wisp leading us astray.

OLAVUS. That's just how I felt once! At your age I could see my whole future as in vision. I foresaw the bitter cup and the pillory. And yet I had to go on. I had to enter the mist, and I myself had to carry the will-o'-the-wisp that *must* lead the wanderers astray. I foretold this very moment, even, when my son would stand before me saying: "Thus I am, because thus you have made me!" You noticed, perhaps, that I was not surprised—and this is the reason.

REGINALD. What am I to do? Advise me!

OLAVUS. You, no more than I, will follow the advices given you.

REGINALD. Inform me, then! Tell me: what is life?

OLAVUS. That's more than I know. But I think it must be a punishment or an ordeal. At your years I thought I knew everything and understood everything. Now I know nothing and understand nothing. For that reason I rest satisfied with doing my duty and bearing what comes my way.

REGINALD. But I want to know!

OLAVUS. You want to know what is not allowed to be known. Try to know and you will perish!—

However, do you want to go or stay?

REGINALD. I am going to Wittenberg to pull Luther to pieces!

OLAVUS. [*Wholly without irony*] That's the way to speak! O thou splendid youth with thy Alexandrian regret that there are no more things to pull to pieces!

REGINALD. Are you not a Lutheran?

OLAVUS. I am a Protestant.

CHRISTINE. If you have finished now, I shall ask permission to tell in a single word what Luther is—just one word!

OLAVUS. Oh, do, before you burst!

CHRISTINE. Luther is dead!

OLAVUS. Dead?

CHRISTINE. That's what my brother-in-law writes me in this letter from Magdeburg.

OLAVUS. [*Rising*] Dead! [*To REGINALD*] My poor Alexander, what will you pull to pieces now?

REGINALD. First the universe, and then myself.

OLAVUS. [*Pushing him toward the door at the left*] Go ahead, then, but begin with yourself. The universe will always remain.

CHRISTINE. [*As she rises and is about to go out with REGINALD*] Will there be peace on earth now?

OLAVUS. That will never be!—Let me have that letter.

CHRISTINE and REGINALD go out to the left.

While OLAVUS is reading the letter, a hard knock is heard at the right-hand door.

OLAVUS. Come!

The knock is repeated. OLAVUS goes to the door and opens it. The KING enters, wearing his big hat and his cloak, which he throws of.

OLAVUS. The King!

KING. [*Very excited*] Yes, but for how long? Do you know who Dacke is?—A farm labourer who has killed a bailiff; a common thief and incendiary, who is now writing to me with a demand of answer. I am to take pen in hand and open correspondence with a scamp like him! Do you know that he has crossed the Kolmord Forests and stands with one foot in West Gothia and the other in East Gothia?—Who is back of him? The Emperor, the Elector Frederick of the Palatinate, Magnus Haraldsson, the runaway Bishop of Skara, the Duke of Mecklenburg. The Emperor wishes to put the children of Christian the Tyrant back on the throne.^[3] But what troubles me more than anything else is to find the Luebeckians and Herman Israel on the same side—my old friend Herman! I ask you how it can be possible. And who has done this to me? Who?—Have you not a word to say?

OLAVUS. What can I say, and what—*may* I say?

KING. Don't be hard on me, Olof, and don't be vengeful, I am nothing but an unfortunate human creature who has had to drink humiliation like water, and I come to you as my spiritual guide. I am in despair because I fear that the Lord has deserted me for ever.—What an infernal notion of mine that was to take the head of the Dalecarlians just now, when I am in such need of them! Do you think that deed was displeasing to the Lord? But if I have sinned like David, you must be my Nathan.

OLAVUS. I have lost the power of prophecy, and I am not the right man to inflict punishment.

KING. Console me, then, Olof.

OLAVUS. I cannot, because only those who repent can accept consolation.

KING. You mean that I have transgressed—that I have gone too far? Speak up! But do it like a servant of the Lord, and not like a conceited schoolmaster.... Have I gone too far?

OLAVUS. That is not the way to put the question. The proper way is to ask whether the others have any right on their side.

KING. Go ahead and ask!

OLAVUS. Dacke is the mouthpiece of warranted dissatisfaction. Being the brother-in-law of Christian II, the Emperor is the guardian of his children, and they have inherited a claim to the Swedish throne, as the constitution cannot be cancelled by a rebellion.^[4] Bishop Magnus Haraldsson is the spokesman of all the illegally exiled bishops.

KING. Illegally, you say?

OLAVUS. [*Raising his voice*] Yes, because the law of Sweden does not drive any man away on account of his faith.

KING. Take care!

OLAVUS. Too late now!—The dissatisfaction of the peasants is warranted, because the Riksdag at

Vesterås authorised the King to seize only the property of bishops and convents. When he took what belonged to parish churches and private persons, he became guilty of a crime.

KING. You are a daring man!

OLAVUS. Nothing compared with what I used to be!—As far as Herman Israel is concerned, he called recently on the King to offer a treaty of friendship, and it was stupid of the King to reject it.

KING. Stop!

OLAVUS. Not yet!—The gold and silver of the churches was meant to pay the debt to Luebeck, and much of it was used for that purpose, but a considerable part found its way to Eskil's Chamber under the Royal Palace, and has since been wasted on Prince Eric's silly courtships among other things....

KING. The devil you say!

OLAVUS. Well, Queen Elizabeth is merely making fun of him.

KING. Do you know that?

OLAVUS. I do.—The bells were also to be used in payment of the debt to Luebeck, but a part of them went to the foundry and were turned into cannon, which was not right.

KING. Is that so?

OLAVUS. Add also that the Convent of Vreta was left unmolested in violation of the ordinance concerning the closing of all such places—and for no other reason than that the King's mother-in-law happened to be a Catholic. This is a cowardly and mischievous omission that has caused much bad blood.

KING. The convent is to be closed.

OLAVUS. It should be closed *now*, and it is not!—If I were to sum up what is reprehensible in my great King, I should call it a lack of piety.

KING. That's the worst yet! What do you mean?

OLAVUS. Piety is the respect shown by the stronger even if he be a man of destiny—for the feelings of the weaker, when these spring from a childlike, and for that reason religious, mind.

KING. Oh, is that what it is?

OLAVUS. Now I have said my say.

KING. Yes, so you have—time and again.

OLAVUS. And if my King had been willing to listen now and then, he would have learned a great deal more. But it is a common fault of princes that they won't listen to anybody but themselves.

KING. Well, I never heard the like of it! I am astounded—most of all because I haven't killed you on the spot!

OLAVUS. Why don't you?

KING. [*Rises and goes toward OLAVUS, who remains standing unabashed, looking firmly at the approaching KING; the latter withdraws backward and sits down again; for a few moments the two men stare at each other in silence; then the KING says*] Who are you?

OLAVUS. A humble instrument of the Lord, shaped to serve what is really great—that marvellous man of God, to whom it was granted to unite all Swedish men and lands.

KING. That was granted Engelbrecht, too, and his reward was the axe that split his head.^[5] Is that to be my reward, too?

OLAVUS. I don't think so, your Highness, but it depends on yourself.

KING. What am I to do?

OLAVUS. What you advised me to do when I was carried away by the zeal of my youth.

KING. And you think it necessary to return that advice to me now?

OLAVUS. Why not? I have learned from life, and you have forgotten.

KING. What am I to do?

OLAVUS. Answer Dacke's letter.

KING. Never! Am I to bow down to a vagabond?

OLAVUS. The Lord sometimes uses mere vagabonds for our humiliation. Picture it to yourself as an ordeal by fire.

KING. [*Rising and walking the floor*] There is truth in what you say. I can feel it, but it does not fetch bottom in my mind. Say one word more.

OLAVUS. Dacke will be right as long as you are in the wrong, and God will be with him until you take your place on the side of right.

KING. I can't bend!

OLAVUS. Then you'll be broken by someone else.

KING. [*Walking back and forth*] Are you thinking of the Dalecarlians? Have you heard of a rising among them on account of the executions?

OLAVUS. Such a thing has been rumoured.

KING. I am lost.

OLAVUS. Write to Dacke!

KING. [*Without conviction*] I won't.

OLAVUS. The Emperor does.

KING. That's true! If the Emperor can write to him, why shouldn't I?—But it is perfectly senseless. Who is this mysterious man who never appears?

OLAVUS. Perhaps another marvellous man of God—in his own way.

KING. I must see him face to face. I'll write and offer him safe-conduct, so that I can talk with him. That's what I'll do.—Bring me pen and paper! Or you write, and I'll dictate.

OLAVUS *seats himself at the table.*

KING. How do we begin? What am I to call him?

OLAVUS. Let us merely put down "To Nils Dacke."

KING. Oh, his name is Nils? After St. Nicolaus, who comes with rods for children on the sixth of December?^[6] [*Pause*] Write now.... No, I'll go home and do the writing myself.... Have you heard that Luther is dead?

OLAVUS. I have, your Highness.

KING. He was a splendid man! May he rest in peace!—Yes, such as he was, he was a fine man, but we got rather too much of him.

OLAVUS. Too many dogmas and not enough of religion.

KING. He was an obstinate fellow and went too far. What he needed was a taskmaster like you to call him to terms now and then.

OLAVUS. I hope the time of schism and dissension will come to an end now.

KING. A time of dissension you may well call it!—Good-bye, Olof. [*As OLAVUS makes a mien of saying something*] Yes, yes, I *will* write!

Curtain.

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- [1] A rough and inaccessible forest region on the eastern shore of Lake Vettern, marking the border-line between the province of Småland in the south and Ostergötland (East Gothia) in the north.
 - [2] As far back as we know the two principal ornaments of a Swedish bride have been the crown—sometimes woven out of myrtle and sometimes made of metal and semi-precious stones—and the wreath, always made of myrtle.
 - [3] The Elector Frederick was a son-in-law of the deposed Christian II of Denmark, and also one of the trusted liegemen of Emperor Charles V, who hoped to see him the head of a reunited Scandinavia dominated by German influences.
 - [4] Christian II was married to Isabelle, sister of Charles V.
 - [5] Engelbrecht Engelbrechtsson, a free miner of Dalecarlia, was the first one of a series of notable chieftains who led the Swedish people in their determination to rid the country of the Danish kings after these had shown a growing inclination to treat Sweden as a Danish province, and not as an independent kingdom, united on equal terms with Denmark and Norway. At the head of the Dalecarlians, Engelbrecht began the work of liberation in 1434, and was remarkably successful in a short time. Unfortunately, he was treacherously and shamefully killed while crossing the Lake Maelaren only two years later. To the Swedes he has ever since been the symbol of their national independence and unity, and he, the simple country squire, remains to this day one of the most beloved and revered figures in Swedish history. It is to him Barbro refers in the opening scenes of the play, and his name is heard again in the closing scenes, with the appearance of his simpler namesake.
 - [6] An old Swedish custom and superstition, prescribing that every child must be spanked on the date mentioned in order to insure its obedience during the whole ensuing year. That custom still survived when the translator was a child, although for many decades the spanking had been a mere formality serving as an excuse for some little gift or treat.

ACT V

The terrace in front of the Royal Palace, with trimmed hedges, statuary, and a fountain. Chairs, benches, and tables are placed about. The near background shows a balustrade with Tuscan columns, on which are placed flowers in faïence pots. Beyond the balustrade appear tree tops, and over these tower the tops of masts, from which blue and yellow flags are flying. In the far background, a number of church spires.

The MOTHER-IN-LAW of the KING is on the terrace in her Cistercian dress.

QUEEN. [*Enters*] For the last time I beg you, mother, don't wear that dress!

MOTHER-IN-LAW. It is my festive garb, and I am as proud of it as you of your ermine robe.

QUEEN. What is the use of being proud? The day of disaster is upon us all, and we must hold together.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Let us do so then, and have peace.

QUEEN. Yes, so you say, but you won't even change dress for the sake of the country's peace.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. I don't change faith as you change clothes, and there is a solemn vow to God connected with this dress. The people are making threats against my life. Let them take it! I have my grave-clothes on.

QUEEN. Don't you know that we may have to flee this very day, if the news should prove as bad as yesterday?

MOTHER-IN-LAW. I will not flee.

QUEEN. Everything has already been packed by order of the King, and our sloop lies at the foot of the southern hills, ready to hoist sail.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. I have nothing to pack, because I own nothing. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." That's what I used to learn. But you have sold your birthright for a crown which soon will no longer be yours.

QUEEN. Go on and punish me; it feels like a relief.

PRINCE ERIC appears on the terrace; his dress and appearance are orderly, and his mien subdued.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Can you tell me what has come over Eric these last days? He looks quite submissive, and something new has come into his face that used to be so hard.

QUEEN. I don't know, but they say that he has changed his ways and cannot bear the company of Jorghen. I have heard whispers about a serious affection....

MOTHER-IN-LAW. No!

QUEEN. [*To ERIC*] What news do you bring?

ERIC. [*Gently and respectfully*] No news at all, mother.

QUEEN. [*To her mother*] He called me mother! [*To ERIC*] How fare you, Eric? Is life heavy?

ERIC. Heavier than it was the day before yesterday.

QUEEN. What happened yesterday?

ERIC. What happens to a human being only once in a lifetime.—Are you much wiser now?

QUEEN. [*To her mother*] How childlike he has grown! [*To Eric*] Have you heard anything of your friend Jacob?

ERIC. Yes, he was my real friend, and so they took his head.

QUEEN. Now you are unjust. There has been no attempt to take the head of Jorghen....

ERIC. He is no longer my friend. [*Peevishly*] But now I don't want to be questioned any longer, least of all about my secrets—that is, about the secrets of my heart.

QUEEN. [*To her mother*] He is quite charming in his childishness. Apparently he would love to talk of his secret.

PRINCE JOHAN enters.

ERIC. [*Going to meet him*] Soon we may have nothing left to fight over, brother Johan, and so—it seems to me we may as well be friends.

JOHAN. With a right good heart, brother! Nothing could give me greater pleasure.

ERIC. Give me your hand! [*They shake hands*] I don't want to be the enemy of any human being after this.

[He goes out, deeply moved.]

MOTHER-IN-LAW. [*To Johan*] What's the matter with Eric?

JOHAN. He has found a sweetheart, they say.

QUEEN. What did I say?

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Are you coming with me to the mass in the chapel, Johan? [*When JOHAN hesitates and does not answer, she says sharply*] Johan!

QUEEN. Mother!

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Is he free to follow his conscience, or is he not?

QUEEN. If you will leave his conscience alone, he will be free.

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Well, I am going, and you know where, Johan. [*She goes out.*]

QUEEN. Johan!

JOHAN. What do you wish?

QUEEN. That you do not desert your childhood faith.

JOHAN. My childhood faith, which I got from my nurse, and not from you, was also the childhood faith of my father. Why did you not give me yours?

QUEEN. Yes, punish me. You have a right to do so. Everything comes home to us now. I was young then. Life was nothing but a game. The King demanded my company at banquets and festivities, and so your cradle was left unattended and unguarded. Those were the days when we were drunk with victory and happiness. And now!—Go where you find it possible to worship, Johan, and pray for your mother!

JOHAN. If it hurts my gracious mother, I won't go.

QUEEN. Pray for us all! [*In a lowered voice*] I do not know the new prayers and must not use the old ones!—Hush now! The King is coming.

PRINCE JOHAN *goes in the direction previously taken by the KING'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.*

The KING enters, holding a letter in his hand. He is accompanied by MASTER OLAVUS PETRI.

KING. [*To the QUEEN*] Have everything ready for the start. We are lost!

QUEEN. The will of God be done!

KING. That's what seems to be happening. Go and look after your house, child.

The QUEEN goes out.

KING. [*To OLAVUS*] This is the situation. Dacke answers that he does not care to see "that rebel, and perjurer, and breaker of safe-conducts, Ericsson." He rails me Ericsson, mind you. His people have reached as far north as Södermanland—which means that they are right at our gates! Furthermore, two thousand Dalecarlians are encamped at the North Gate. Their intentions are not known, but can easily be guessed. A fine prophet you are, Olof!

OLAVUS. We have not seen the end yet.

KING. Where do you get your confidence from?

OLAVUS. That's more than I can tell, but I know that everything will end well.

KING. You say that you know? How do you know? I have ceased to believe anything—except in the wrath of God, which has been turned against me. I am now waiting for the axe. Good and well! I have done my service and am now to be discharged. That's why I wish to leave before I am kicked out.—Do you know what day it is to-day? Nobody has thought of it, and I didn't remember until just now.... It is Midsummer Day: *my* day, which no one celebrates. A generation ago I made my entry into the capital on this day. That was the greatest moment of my life. I thought the work of liberation was done, and I thanked God for it!—But it had not been done, and I am not done with it yet.—The Dalecarlians rose. I subdued them, and thought that I was done, which I was not. Twice more they rose, and each time I gave thanks to God, thinking I had done—which was not the case. The lords of West Gothia rose. I squelched them, and was happy, thinking that I surely must have done by that time—which I had not. And now, Olof?—We are never done until done for—and that's where I am now!

OLAVUS. Oh, no, there is a whole lot left.

KING. Where do you get your fixed ideas from? Have you heard some bird sing, or have you been dreaming?

OLAVUS. Neither.

KING. [*Listening*] Listen! That's the sound of birch-horns. Do they mean to give me a crown of birch, like the one I gave to Peder the Chancellor and Master Knut? Or is it the scaffold that.... that?...

OLAVUS. Oh, don't!

KING. What was it you called that thing—piety? Much it would have availed me to have piety at Larv Heath or Tuna Plain!^[1]—No, I have been right, right, right, so God help me, amen!

OLAVUS *makes no answer.*

KING. [*Listening*] They have drums, too.—Oh, everything comes home!—Do you think I can get out of this, Olof?

OLAVUS. I do! And let me give you a final piece of advice: don't leave!

KING. I don't see how it can be avoided. Do you think I'll let them take my head?—Do you know, I can actually hear the tramp-tramp of their feet as they come marching through the North Gate. And that's the Dalecarlians—my own Dalecarlians! Oh, life is cruel! Can you hear it? Tramp—tramp—tramp! Do you think I can get out of this?

OLAVUS. I do.

KING. When the sun rises to-morrow I shall know my fate. I wish I were that far already!—Now I hear something else! [*The reading of a litany in Latin is faintly heard from the outside*] What is that?

OLAVUS. [*Goes to the balustrade and looks over it*] The Queen's mother is reading the Romish litany.

KING. But I hear a male voice, too.

OLAVUS. That's Prince Johan.

KING. Johan?—So I must drink that cup, too! I wonder if the cup is full yet? Is everything that I have built to be torn down?

OLAVUS. Everything you have torn down must be built up again.

KING. Johan a papist, and Eric a Calvinist!—Do you remember the days when we were crying in the words of Von Hutten: "The souls are waking up, and it is a joy to live"? A joy to live, indeed—ha-ha! And the souls woke up to find their feet on the pillows! Was it you who said that the gods are playing with us?—Hush! I was mistaken a while ago! It's the North Bridge they are crossing! Can't you hear their heavy tread on the planking of the bridge? Let us fly! [*He puts a document on a table*] Here I place my resignation.

OLAVUS. [*Seizing the document*] I'll take care of that. I'll keep it—as a memento! And now we'll hoist a flag of truce.

He pulls a white cloth from one of the tables and ties it to the branch of a tree.

PRINCE ERIC. [*Enters*] Father!

KING. Croak away, raven!

ERIC. Our last hope is gone! The sloop has dragged its anchor and gone ashore.

KING. [*In desperation*] And lightning has struck the nursery, and the grasshoppers have eaten the crops, and the waters are rising, and....

ERIC. The Dalecarlians are negotiating with the palace guards, and they are awfully drunk.

KING. [*Sitting down*] Come on, death!

ERIC. [*Listening*] I can hear their wooden shoes on the garden stairs! [*He goes to the balustrade.*

KING. [*Counting on his fingers*] Anders Persson, Mons Nilsson, Master John.

ERIC. [*Drawing his sword*] Now he is here!

He can be seen following somebody on the other side of the balustrade with his eyes.

KING. [*As before*] Inghel Hansson, Master Stig, Nils of Söderby. God is just!

ENGELBRECHT. [*Enters; he is in the happy stage of intoxication, but in full control of his movements for all that; he looks about with a broad grin on his face, a little embarrassed, and yet pleased; then he says to ERIC*] Are you the King?

He puts his hat on the ground and takes off his wooden shoes.

KING. [*Rising and pushing ERIC aside*] No, I am the King!

ENGELBRECHT. Yes, so I see now!

KING. Who are you?

ENGELBRECHT. [*Faltering*] Don't you know me?...

KING. I don't.

ENGELBRECHT. [*Pulls a dagger with silver handle out of his long stocking and shows it to the KING, grinning more broadly than ever*] Well, don't you know this one?

KING. I don't understand at all. What is your name?

ENGELBRECHT. Well—it happens to be Engelbrecht!

KING. Eng-el-brecht?

ENGELBRECHT. It sounds mighty big, but I am not of *that* family.—You see, it was like this—once upon a time the King—who was no king at all then—oh, mercy, but I am drunk!... Well, it was me who followed you on skis to the border of Norway, and that time you gave me this here dagger and said: "If you ever need me, come on!" Now I've come, and here I am! And I wish only that I was not so frightfully drunk!

KING. And what do you want?

ENGELBRECHT. What I want?—I want to fight that man Dacke, of course, and that's what the rest of them want, too.

KING. You want to *fight* Dacke?

ENGELBRECHT. Why do you think we have come, anyhow?

KING. [*Raising his arms toward heaven*] Eternal God, now you have punished me!

ENGELBRECHT. Is it all right? You see, the rest are down there and they'd like to do something to celebrate the day.

KING. *Is it all right?*—Ask me for a favour!

ENGELBRECHT. [*After thinking hard*] I'd like to shake hands!

The KING holds out his hand.

ENGELBRECHT. [*Looking at the King's hand*] My, what a fist! Hard as nails, but clean! Yes, and a devil of a fellow you are, all in all!—I must say I was rather scared when I came here!

KING. Are all the rest of them as drunk as you are?

ENGELBRECHT. About the same! But they can toot the horns for all that. [*He goes to the balustrade, waves his hand and utters the yell used by the Dalecarlians in calling their cows*] Poo-ala! Poo-ala! Poo Oy-ala! Oy-ala! Oy!

The blowing of horns and beating of drums is heard from the outside.

The KING goes to the balustrade and waxes his hand.

The MOTHER-IN-LAW appears in court dress.

The QUEEN enters and goes to the KING, who folds her in his arms.

PRINCE JOHAN enters and goes to the balustrade.

KING. [*With raised arms*] You have punished me, O Lord, and I thank thee!

Curtain

- [1] Larv Heath was the place where the dissatisfied lords of West Gothia summoned the peasants to meet them in 1529, when they tried to raise the province against the King. Tuna Plain, to which Mons Nilsson and his friends refer a number of times in the first act, was the place where Gustav settled his first score with the obstreperous Dalecarlians.

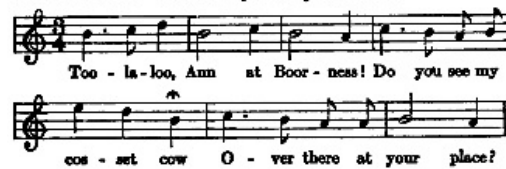
MUSICAL APPENDIX TO "THE BRIDAL CROWN"

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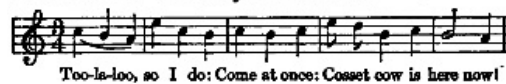
MELODY No. 1.—*Kersti plays on the alpenhorn:*



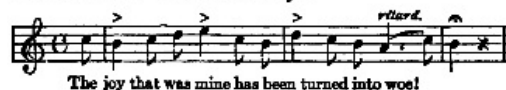
MELODY No. 2.—*Kersti sings through the horn:*



MELODY No. 3.—*Mats sings in the distance:*



MELODY No. 4.—*The Mother sings:*



MELODY No. 5.—*Kersti plays on the alpenhorn:*



MELODY No. 6.—*Mats sings in the distance:*

Ker - sti dear - est, Ker - sti dear - est, Ba - by sleeps in the
for - est.

MELODY No. 7.—*Kersti sings:*

Dil - ler - y - dell! Fa - reth he well,
Fa - reth he well Far in the for - est!

MELODY No. 8.—*Mats sings:*

Noth - ing to fear! Noth - ing to fear! Ba - by sleeps
in his cra - dle here Far, far, in the for - est.

MELODY No. 9.—*Kersti sings:*

Haste to the house, And milk the cows, And
see that ba - by lacks noth - ing. I can not come, must
stay at home, Help - ing my folks with the bak - ing.

MELODY No. 10.—*Mats sings:*

Birch - es nod in the blowing breeze, But ba - by slumbers in
per - fect peace. Ker - sti, Ker - sti, dear - est!

MELODY NO. 11.—Canon played by ten hunting-horns:

No. 1. 

No. 2. 

No. 3. 

No. 4. 

No. 5. 

No. 6. 

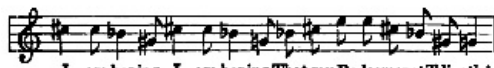
No. 7. 

No. 8. 

No. 9. 

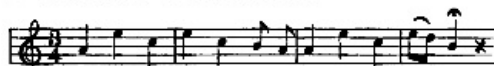
No. 10. 

MELODY NO. 12.—The Neck sings and plays:



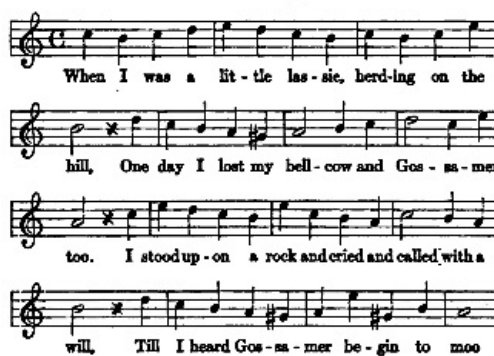
I am hoping, I am hoping That my Redeemer still liveth!

MELODY NO. 13.—Mats sings outside:



Come cos - set, cos - set, cosset; come cos - set, cos - set!

MELODY NO. 14.—Bridemaids sing outside:



When I was a lit - tle las - sic, herd - ing on the
hill, One day I lost my bell - cow and Gos - sa - mer
too. I stood up - on a rock and cried and called with a
will, Till I heard Gos - sa - mer be - gin to moo
in a pas - ture far, far a - way. "Hush," said Pine - tree,

"She will sure-ly find thee!" Hemlock told me
 not to stum-ble; Wil-low asked me not to grum-ble;
 Birch said I could not hope to miss a spank-ing

MELODY No. 15.—*Bugle-call in the distance:*

MELODY No. 16.—*Six girls sing:*

Dil-ler-y-dee-ring! Twelve in the clear-ing!
 Twelve men stare at me, Twelve swords flare at me, Kine they are
 slaugh-ter-ing; Sheep they're quar-ter-ing; Naught but my
 life they're lea-eav-ing: Dil-ler-y-dee-er-ing!

MELODY No. 17.—*Swedish dance played by fiddlers:*

MELODY No. 18.—*Neck plays (two violins):*

1:0
 2:0
ad libitum.

MELODY No. 19.—*Song of the long-tailed duck:*

MELODY No. 20.—*The Neck sings to the harp:*

Stilled are the wa - ters, dark grows the sky: dark grows
Once in the world of the ag - es I lived, blessed by
the sky.
the sun. Gone is the light,
Conquered by night. Deep is my sin, Black as the tarn.
Joy there is none; Plen - ty of woe.
Torture and shame must I name my abode: O!

NOTE TO THE MUSIC

The song of the long-tailed duck is given by Strindberg in the first part of his "The Swedish People in War and Peace."

Melody No. 20 does not appear in the Swedish edition of the play. It is given by Emil Schering in an appendix to his German version of it—apparently from a manuscript placed at his disposal by Strindberg himself.

Melodies Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17 have been taken by Strindberg—without any changes—from Richard Dybeck's "Svenska Vallvisor och Hornlåtar" ("Swedish Herd-Songs and Horn-Melodies"), Stockholm, 1846.

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