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by Maurice Maeterlinck

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BURGOMASTER OF STILEMONDE: A  
PLAY IN THREE ACTS \*\*\*

The Burgomaster  
of Stilemonde

*A Play in Three Acts*

BY  
MAURICE MAETERLINCK

*Translated by*  
ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS



NEW YORK  
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1918

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## CHARACTERS

	<i>Age</i>
CYRILLE VAN BELLE, <i>Burgomaster of Stilemonde</i>	60
ISABELLE, <i>his daughter</i>	25
FLORIS, <i>his son</i>	14
MAJOR BARON VON ROCHOW	45
LIEUTENANT OTTO HILMER, <i>the Burgomaster's son-in-law</i>	30
LIEUTENANT KARL VON SCHAUNBERG	28
THE MUNICIPAL SECRETARY	30
CLAUS, <i>the Burgomaster's head-gardener</i>	62
JEAN GILSON	30
THE BURGOMASTER'S FOOTMAN	
A GERMAN SERGEANT	
A GERMAN SOLDIER	



## SCENE OF THE PLAY

*The Scene is laid at the end of August, 1914, at Stilemonde, a small town in Belgian Flanders.*

*The first Act begins at 10 A.M. and ends at 12 noon; the second begins at 2 P.M. and ends at 4 P.M.; the third begins at 5:30 P.M. and ends at 7 P.M. on the same day.*

THE BURGOMASTER OF  
STILEMONDE

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ACT I

*The BURGOMASTER'S study, a large and very comfortably furnished room on the first floor of the house, used partly as an office, and partly as a horticultural laboratory. Leather easy-chairs, a glass book-case. A large table laden with papers and with vases, dishes and baskets full of flowers and fruit: orchids, peaches, plums and magnificent bunches of grapes. In the various corners, a grandfather's clock, garden-tools, pulverizers, retorts, test-tubes, bee-hives, etc. At the back, a French window opening on a balcony. On the right a heavy door.*

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*As the CURTAIN rises, the MUNICIPAL SECRETARY is writing at a corner of the table. ENTER, on the right, JEAN GILSON. He is dressed in ill-fitting peasant's clothes, and carries his arm in a sling.*

JEAN GILSON

Good-morning, Mr. Secretary.

THE SECRETARY

Good-morning. What can I do for you?

JEAN GILSON

*(Going nearer.)* Don't you know me, old friend?

THE SECRETARY

Why, it's you, Jean! The last man I expected to see! Where have you come from? I say, you're wounded!

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JEAN GILSON

Yes, a bullet in the arm.... I got it outside Aerschot. They put me into hospital at Winkel, but the Germans entered the town yesterday and, as I could walk, I didn't wait for them to take me prisoner. I got into these clothes, cleared out, spent part of the night in a ditch, tramped three hours across country and here I am at Stilemonde. I must be off at once, though, and try and catch up my carabineers, who ought to be somewhere near Overloop.

THE SECRETARY

You look tired. Does the arm hurt? And you're soaked through!

JEAN GILSON

Yes. The arm's not much, or rather it wasn't. To-day, somehow, I seem to feel it more.

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THE SECRETARY

That's because you're tired. You must rest a little and have your wound seen to. We'll find you a bed somewhere, either at my place or here, which is God's own house.

JEAN GILSON

It's not a question of resting, it's not a question of bed; they'll be here before the morning's over.

THE SECRETARY

Who?

JEAN GILSON

The Germans! There are Uhlands everywhere along the roads; and I expect the main body isn't far behind.

THE SECRETARY

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Impossible! We've heard nothing of that here; but of course the communications have all been cut.

JEAN GILSON



Where's the Burgomaster?

THE SECRETARY

I'm waiting for him. He's in one of the glass-houses. The storm last night seems to have done some damage. He'll be here in a minute: the man has gone to find him. Would you like to speak to him?

JEAN GILSON

I've a message from the Burgomaster of Winkel, advising him to be very careful and, above all, to see that no arms are found in the town.

THE SECRETARY

We've seen to all that; we've done everything. All the arms, even the trophies and curios, have been put away in the Town-hall and locked up in a room of which I've got the key.... So they're at Winkel, are they?

JEAN GILSON

Yes, three or four hundred. I was told that the master's son-in-law was at the head of them.

THE SECRETARY

The master? Who?

JEAN GILSON

Yours, the Burgomaster of Stilemonde.

THE SECRETARY

Otto Hilmer? Impossible!

JEAN GILSON

Yes, that was the name: Lieutenant Hilmer. So it's true then? I wouldn't believe it. Did the Burgomaster's daughter marry a German?

THE SECRETARY

Of course she did; why not? We were not very fond of the Germans here; but, after all, they did us no harm; on the contrary.... It was before the war, when nobody thought of these things. As luck would have it, poor Madame van Belle, the master's wife, died a year before the wedding. It would never have happened had she been alive, for she loathed the Prussians; and if she could see what they are doing to-day! But what a blow it will be to the master! Is Lieutenant Otto likely to be coming here?

JEAN GILSON

Sure to. At least, so he told the Burgomaster at Winkel.... But how did that marriage come about?

THE SECRETARY

In the most natural way. How was one to know that some fine day the Germans would come and massacre us and do all the dreadful things that people are talking about ... if they're true?

JEAN GILSON

They're true enough; and what you've heard isn't the worst.

THE SECRETARY

Dreadful! But who could have thought it!... You see, Monsieur van Belle, our Burgomaster, went to Germany now and again on business. They made a great fuss of him there and treated him royally. At Cologne they made him the president of all the local horticultural societies. He had known the Hilmer family a long time and used to stay with Otto's parents whenever he went to Cologne.

JEAN GILSON

Are they well off, the Hil—what did you say the name was?

THE SECRETARY

The Hilmers. They've got a factory in the Rhine Province: electrical machinery; it's the biggest factory in the place. Well, young Hilmer, who's now Lieutenant Otto, wanted to learn about cultivation of orchids and hot-house grapes, which happens to be the specialty of Van Belle and Co. And Monsieur van Belle's son was keen on electricity only. So they paired off: young Van Belle went to Cologne and Otto came here.

How long ago was that?

THE SECRETARY

Nearly two years.

JEAN GILSON

And where is young Van Belle now?

THE SECRETARY

He was at Cologne when war was declared; but there's a rumour that he managed to escape. We've heard nothing definite, though, and are very uneasy.

JEAN GILSON

And the other? How did he get back to Germany?

THE SECRETARY

I don't know. He must have got wind of it somehow. He left us suddenly, at the end of July, gave out that his mother was ill.

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JEAN GILSON

That shows again that they knew what was going to happen and were preparing for it. And, as *he* had been warned, he might at least have done the same by his father-in-law and still more by his wife's brother.

THE SECRETARY

You see, those people aren't like us.

JEAN GILSON

Or rather we're not like them, thank Heaven!... Have they been married long?

THE SECRETARY

Close on six months.

JEAN GILSON

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Are they happy?

THE SECRETARY

They worshipped each other. And one's got to be fair. Otto is a very pleasant, good-hearted fellow, very kind, and liked doing people a good turn. Worked very hard. Polite to everybody. Clever too, very. Nothing really to be said against him.

JEAN GILSON

Except that he's a German; and that's quite enough.... And how does his wife take it all?

THE SECRETARY

She's very much upset, of course; and that's bad, because, as I hear, she is at this moment—you understand. However, it's not certain yet.... She is very restless, very depressed, but she doesn't say anything: she was never one to talk much.

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JEAN GILSON

But he must surely have told her, have prepared her?... She must have known what was going on?

THE SECRETARY

I know nothing about that. I'm not in her confidence.

JEAN GILSON

And what does the master say?

THE SECRETARY

He's dreadfully worried. At first, he was quite bowled over. He simply refused to believe it. Then he was furious, wild, beside himself. But he calmed down after a bit: you see, he was always something

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of an optimist; and now he's beginning to think that things will be settled very soon. But here he is.

*(Enter the BURGOMASTER, carrying a basket filled with prize grapes.)*

THE SECRETARY

*(Rising.)* Good-morning, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

Good-morning, Pierre. How are you?

THE SECRETARY

As well as can be, after working all night.

THE BURGOMASTER

Is everything settled at the Town-hall?

THE SECRETARY

Yes, Mr. Burgomaster. All the arms have been stored there; I drew up a list myself and gave the receipts.... But let me introduce my old friend Jean Gilson, who's been wounded at Aerschot. He was in hospital at Winkel when the Germans entered the town yesterday; he managed to escape last night.

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THE BURGOMASTER

*(Shaking hands with GILSON.)* So you were at Aerschot?

JEAN GILSON

Yes, I was a sergeant in the battalion of carabineers which covered the retreat.

THE BURGOMASTER

Was it much of a fight?

JEAN GILSON

Yes. Two-thirds of the battalion were killed or wounded. There are always three of them to one of us; and we had no guns. We held our ground as long as we could; then we were obliged to fall back.

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THE BURGOMASTER

You look dreadfully tired and must be starving! Pierre, my dear fellow, why on earth didn't you...? *(He rings.)* I'll tell him myself. *(Enter the FOOTMAN.)* Firmin, bring up some cold meat; bring anything you've got downstairs: bread, butter, eggs, cheese. What cold meat is there?

THE FOOTMAN

Veal and chicken, sir; ham, tongue.

THE BURGOMASTER

All right, bring them all. And as to drink... *(To JEAN GILSON.)* What wine do you like? I've a splendid Rudesheimer and an '82 white port which you won't quarrel with. Which would you like? *(To the FOOTMAN.)* Look here, bring both, that's simpler. *(To JEAN GILSON.)* You can manage a couple of bottles, I dare say. If necessary we'll lend you a hand, eh, Mr. Secretary? It will be so much less left for the Germans. There's fruit enough, as you see. These pears, these plums and peaches are of my own growing; look at the grapes I have just picked; did you ever see anything like them? They're my special achievement: a variety I got by slowly and patiently crossing the Black Alicante, which is magnificent to look at but hasn't much flavour, with a Sicilian muscat that's very small but delicious. I've secured what's best in both of them and kept out what's bad. Just taste them: aren't they wonderful? They're hard and yet they're juicy; they just melt as you crush them with your teeth. Each one is like a drop of wine with a touch of snow in it. I shall be putting over four thousand pounds of these grapes on the market every week in five years or so. You've been the first to have a taste of them.... So they're at Winkel, are they?

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JEAN GILSON

Yes, Mr. Burgomaster; and they'll be here this morning. I'm just a bit ahead of them.

THE SECRETARY

Jean tells me that they're led by Mr. Otto, your son-in-law.

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THE BURGOMASTER

What, Otto? Impossible! Were you told that? Did you see him?

JEAN GILSON

25

I didn't see him, but that's what I was told. There were three officers at Winkel, a major and two lieutenants; Otto Hilmer was one. I hear that he said he was coming to occupy Stilemonde with a detachment of the 62nd Foot.

THE BURGOMASTER

Yes, he was a lieutenant in the reserve. It's odd that he should have dared.... But no, in point of fact he's right. He has done the right thing, he will arrange matters and we shall have nothing to fear. All the same, it's rather extraordinary. My own son-in-law comes into my town as a conqueror, booted and helmeted, with his sword drawn, after violating the frontier of his adopted country.... However, it's war; and he can't help it. He's not responsible and he can't do what he likes. Besides, it's all the better for us: as long as he's here, we've nothing to be afraid of.... How are they behaving at Winkel? I hope they haven't done much harm?

26

JEAN GILSON

They hadn't when I left. They took the burgomaster, the priest and the notary as hostages and declared that they would kill them if a single shot was fired in the village.

THE BURGOMASTER

They won't do that, thanks to Otto. Otto is a kind-hearted chap, who wouldn't hurt a soul. Besides, I feel certain that their massacres and atrocities have been greatly exaggerated; after all, they're not savages.

JEAN GILSON

I beg your pardon, Mr. Burgomaster, there has been no exaggeration at all; on the contrary, we haven't heard everything yet. What they did at Andenne, at Dinant, at Louvain, at Aerschot and at every town they came to is simply appalling. As for the massacres at Dinant and Louvain, I've got that at first hand: two of my men saw it with their own eyes. At Louvain, they executed two hundred and ten innocent people, including twenty-four women and fourteen children; at Dinant, six hundred and six, including thirty-nine children and seventy-one women; at Aerschot, they shot the burgomaster and his son of fifteen, with many other entirely harmless and defenceless citizens.

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THE BURGOMASTER

Then it's true that there have been military executions? I didn't believe it.... And what excuse did they make?

JEAN GILSON

28

Their colonel had been killed by a stray bullet, fired by one of their own men.

THE BURGOMASTER

The devil! They're dangerous then! But we must have none of that here. (*Enter the FOOTMAN.*) Here's Firmin with the tray: sandwiches and the two bottles. (*Filling the glasses.*) This is my '95 Rudesheimer. Tell me what you think of it.

JEAN GILSON

(*Tasting the wine.*) It's remarkably good.

THE BURGOMASTER

You're right. (*Exit the FOOTMAN.*) This is one of a lot of fifty dozen, which I bought at the sale of Von Hulthem the notary, who had the best cellar in these parts.... But what do you mean to do now? You can't go off like this, you know. You must have a few days' rest here; and we'll dress your wound properly; it doesn't do to trifle with a thing like that.

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JEAN GILSON

You see, if they catch me here, they'll send me to Germany, unless they shoot me as a franc-tireur.

THE BURGOMASTER

Have no fear of that. I'll hide you in the house; I'll tell Otto and he'll arrange things.

JEAN GILSON

Nothing would suit me better. I'm very tired and I feel I haven't the strength to go very far. But I'm afraid of compromising you if they find me under your roof.

THE BURGOMASTER

30

I assure you, you have nothing to fear. Leave it all to me. Otto can refuse me nothing; and you'll see, we'll settle all this among ourselves.

*(Enter the FOOTMAN.)*

THE FOOTMAN

They're at the gate, sir.

THE BURGOMASTER

Who?

THE FOOTMAN

The Germans, sir: some officers and a dozen Uhlans. Shall I let them in?

THE BURGOMASTER

Certainly, let them in at once. Show the officers up; I'll wait here. *(Exit the FOOTMAN.)*

THE SECRETARY

Shall I leave you, Mr. Burgomaster?

THE BURGOMASTER

No, stay. But first see to your friend's safety. Take him into the next room; then, when Firmin comes back, we'll find him a bed. Good-bye for the present, Monsieur Gilson. Take the food and wine with you; you have nothing to fear. *(JEAN GILSON goes into the next room.)* And now let us prepare to face the enemy. I hear their swords clattering on the stairs.

*(Enter the FOOTMAN, with MAJOR BARON VON ROCHOW, LIEUTENANT OTTO HILMER and LIEUTENANT KARL VON SCHAUNBERG.)*

THE BURGOMASTER

It's you, Otto! *(Mechanically puts out his hand and then withdraws it.)*

OTTO

Yes. *(Presenting the BURGOMASTER to the MAJOR.)* Major, this is the Burgomaster of Stilemonde, my father-in-law. Major Baron von Rochow. Lieutenant Karl von Schaunberg.

THE MAJOR

Mr. Burgomaster, we shall occupy the town until further orders. You will have to find billets for two hundred and fifty men. For the present you will not be called upon to feed them. My two officers and I will ask leave to take up our quarters in your house. I know the ties that unite you to one of them. I hope that, thanks to these good relations, there will be no difficulties between us. Nevertheless, as is customary, considering the bad spirit which the civil population have hitherto displayed and in accordance with the formal instructions which I have received, I am obliged to look upon you as a hostage. If unfortunately—which Heaven forbid—an attempt were made upon the life of one of my officers or men, your own life would answer for it. But we need not, I trust, contemplate any such deplorable contingencies. If the civilians behave properly, they have nothing to fear. Whatever people may say, we are not barbarians. We are, above all things, just; but the necessities of war oblige us to be sometimes severe and always on our guard. In an hour from now I will send for you to the Town-hall to discuss the question of supplies and to fix the war-levy.

THE BURGOMASTER

The war-levy? I cannot see that, so far, we have done anything to justify a levy.

THE MAJOR

I beg your pardon. I may permit you to discuss the amount but not the principle.

OTTO

*(To the BURGOMASTER.)* Please give the Major the large bedroom on the first floor, the one with a balcony overlooking the square, and the sitting-room leading into it. Lieutenant von Schaunberg and I will take the other two spare-rooms. Firmin, show the Major and the Lieutenant to their rooms.

THE MAJOR

I must beg you, Mr. Burgomaster, to put forward your luncheon hour by thirty minutes. We shall have the honour of taking our seats at your table at twelve o'clock precisely.

THE BURGOMASTER

Certainly, sir.

*(Exeunt the MAJOR and LIEUTENANT VON SCHAUNBERG, with the Footman leading the way.)*

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THE BURGOMASTER

My poor Otto!

OTTO

Where is Isabelle?

THE BURGOMASTER

Upstairs in her room. She can't have heard you.

OTTO

How is she? Not ill, I hope?

THE BURGOMASTER

Not exactly, but dreadfully depressed, extremely tired and very much affected by all these happenings.... I expect she is still asleep; and it is better not to wake her.

OTTO

36

How does she take the war?

THE BURGOMASTER

As we all do, with the utmost amazement, indignation and consternation. But she is naturally more upset than we, who can't believe our eyes. My poor Otto, this is an ugly business they've let you in for!

OTTO

You need not think that we do it with a light heart. We are acting as you see, only because we are forced and constrained to do so by the incredible attitude of your fellow-countrymen.

THE BURGOMASTER

Of course it was Belgium that began.

OTTO

That's truer than you think. She began by playing the game of our enemies; and, if we had not struck the first blow, we should have been the victims of our confidence in her loyalty.

37

THE BURGOMASTER

Look here, Otto, I know you for an intelligent, conscientious and thoroughly honest man. You have lived among us and you know what sort of people we are. How can you stand there and seriously utter such—I don't know what word to use, or, if I did, it wouldn't be a pleasant one. Let them tell that sort of humbug to your wretched soldiers, or to a pack of Junkers fuddled with pride and stupidity, but not to a man like yourself! You know the plain, terrible truth as well as I do, just as you know what to think of the hideous massacres at Vise, Andenne, Dinant, Aerschot, Louvain and other places.

OTTO

38

Excuse me, it is not the same thing. I admit that the violation of Belgium was a regrettable incident; in my opinion it was a mistake, necessary perhaps, from certain points of view, but one which will cost us dear. But I do not admit the massacres. There have been executions of hostages and reprisals necessitated by incessant acts of treachery committed by the civil population. Here and there, perhaps, there has been some excess of zeal; that, unfortunately, is inevitable. But I know the German army better than you do, because I belong to it; and it is the most highly disciplined army in the world. It is extremely rare, not to say impossible, for the army to act without orders, or to overstep the orders which it receives.

THE BURGOMASTER

That's just what I blame it for. To judge by the effects, those orders are execrable!

39

OTTO

It's lucky that we're alone. Don't use words like that: with the best will in the world, I might not always be able to save you from the unpleasant consequences.

THE BURGOMASTER

Very well, we won't argue about it. We shall never agree on these points nor on a good many others. I know what I know; and I stick to it.

OTTO

I also know what I know; and history will judge between us.... Let us try rather to get back to the feeling that united us before this cataclysm, for which we are not responsible.

THE BURGOMASTER

40

It's a good thing that you at least do not hold us to be responsible for the disaster which your people have brought on us. I thank you for that.

OTTO

Why do you say such things to me? I have absolutely nothing to do with what has happened. Like the rest of us, I am compelled to obey an authority which no one can resist. I am a wheel in the machine. I cannot act otherwise than I do. But my feelings, my affections are just the same as they were before the war! I persuaded my superiors to send me here, so that I might prove how grateful I am to you....

THE BURGOMASTER

And because you know the country so well!

OTTO

41

Please don't continue in that tone: it is not fair and it is extremely painful to me. I simply wished, as I have told you, to prove my gratitude by doing all I could to save you, and the town of which you are the chief authority, from the inconveniences and dangers of an occupation which I was unable to prevent.

THE BURGOMASTER

Very well, we won't talk about it. How long do you reckon to stay here with your men?

OTTO

We don't know: perhaps two hours, perhaps two months. It all depends on events and on the orders which we receive.

THE BURGOMASTER

And the Major, what sort of a man is he? He does not look easy to deal with.

42

OTTO

He is severe, rather hard, rather dictatorial, rather domineering, a strict disciplinarian, but absolutely just; taken all round, a good sort. I repeat, you have nothing to fear, if your people behave themselves. Besides, in the case of any conflict or misunderstanding, I hope to use my influence and to smooth matters down. And now let us be friends, if you will, and allow me to embrace you as I used to.

THE BURGOMASTER

*(Stepping back.)* Forgive me.... Excuse me.... I can't just now.

OTTO

That's strange; I simply can't understand it. After all, this war is no business of ours; it's over our heads; it's beyond us. However, I mustn't take it ill of you; and I can only say, like Antigone, "I take part in love and not in hatred." But what's the time? Eleven o'clock? Perhaps we might let Isabelle know, if she really isn't ill? You can imagine how eager I am to see her after this long separation and after all that has happened.

43

THE BURGOMASTER

I will send the maid up to her. *(He rings. Enter the FOOTMAN, who takes the BURGOMASTER'S orders and exit.)* Have you any news of my son?

OTTO

Of Odilon? No, isn't he here?

THE BURGOMASTER

No, they did not let us know of their plans, as they did you; we weren't told what they were going to do; and so he stopped at Cologne. We are rather uneasy about him.

44

OTTO

He is in no danger if he keeps quiet. He will be interned in a concentration-camp. I'll write to my people and ask them to see that he is well treated.... I say, I see on your table one of those Cattleyas which were rather sickly before I left. How are they doing?

THE BURGOMASTER

I believe they're saved. I found out under the microscope what it was that was making them wither. It's a tiny fungus which no orchid-grower had located before and against which all the ordinary methods of vaporizing and fumigation are quite useless. I've contrived a new blend; I'll give you the prescription; it has done wonderfully well so far. I'm worried about my poor hot-houses, on which I've spent the best part of my life and nearly half my fortune. If only this war doesn't turn them into broken glass and scrap-iron! As you know, they contain nearly half a million valuable flowers; and their destruction would be an irretrievable disaster, for it would take a whole lifetime to build up a collection that could compare with mine.

45

OTTO

Have no fear, there will be no battle or bombardment in this direction; and while the occupation lasts I shall be able to protect the house of my wife and my father-in-law, or at least to see that it is protected.

THE BURGOMASTER

Here is Isabelle.

(*Enter ISABELLE.*)

ISABELLE

(*Pausing for one moment on the threshold and then rushing into OTTO's arms.*) You! Is that you? You here; and I did not know!

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OTTO

(*Embracing her.*) Isabelle!

ISABELLE

You're not wounded? You haven't been ill?

OTTO

No; and you? I heard you were not very well.

ISABELLE

It's nothing; it was the horror of everything that has happened and the anxiety of knowing you to be constantly in danger from the enemy....

THE BURGOMASTER

What enemy? It's he and his friends that are the enemy; and he runs no danger in the midst of them. But I will leave you to yourselves. Call me when you want me. (*Exit.*)

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ISABELLE

It's true. I no longer know where I am. I call enemies all who wish you ill; and that means all the people I love. It is too much for a woman's heart to bear. But it is over now, I hope; and the worst is ended.

OTTO

No, the worst is beginning. But I was sure of you and that you at least would not condemn me unheard.

ISABELLE

I condemn the others, but I know that you are no more to blame than I am. Besides, what does it all matter, when I find you the same as you were? But shall I have you with me for a few days? That will be something to set against this awful war!

48

OTTO

I have no idea. I may have to go away to-morrow.

ISABELLE

Are you in the firing-line?



OTTO

It's all firing-line at the moment. We are advancing like a torrent. I did not dare tell your father, but the whole of Belgium is invaded. Antwerp will fall to-morrow and Paris in a week.

ISABELLE

And after that?

OTTO

After that, victory; and we shall settle down here, unless you would rather go with me to Germany.

ISABELLE

I shall go where you go.

*(Enter FLORIS.)*

FLORIS

Isn't dad here?

OTTO

Good-morning, Floris! Come and shake hands.

FLORIS

*(Recoiling in horror.)* Shake hands with you!

ISABELLE

Floris!

FLORIS

Where's dad?

ISABELLE

In the next room. But you might at least be civil and shake hands with Otto, who wishes us no harm and who has come here to protect us.

FLORIS

I don't want his protection, thank you!

*(Exit, slamming the door behind him.)*

OTTO

You see the hatred! Amazing! It's the same everywhere, all the time, wherever we go. They simply will not listen, they will not understand. I was conscious of its existence even in the heart of your father, who is the best-natured, fairest and most tranquil-minded man I know. What can we do, when they treat us like that?... But we must keep an eye on the boy. So long as he confines his offensive remarks to me, there's no great harm done, but it would be a bad look out for him if he took it into his head to treat the Major or Lieutenant von Schaunberg in this way, for they are neither of them very patient. *(A shot is fired in the distance.)* That's a shot!

ISABELLE

Yes, at the bottom of the garden, near the wood.

*(Enter hurriedly the BURGOMASTER and FLORIS.)*

THE BURGOMASTER

Did you hear? A rifle-shot!

FLORIS

*(Between his teeth.)* One less.

OTTO

What do you say?

FLORIS

Nothing. I can say what I like.

(*Anxiously.*) But who fired the shot? It can only have been one of your men. There's not a fire-arm left in this house, or anywhere in the town.

OTTO

It's probably my brother-officer, Lieutenant von Schaunberg, taking a stroll in the wood. He's very fond of shooting; and I told him he'd find rabbits there.

THE BURGOMASTER

Yes, the shot came from that side; but there wasn't a single gun in the house.

OTTO

He always carries his own among his kit. In any case, if all the arms are at the Town-hall, you have no cause for alarm. Do you answer for your servants? Are there no disaffected ones among them?

THE BURGOMASTER

What do you call disaffected? They are irritated, incensed, indignant, exasperated, that's natural enough; but they know how to restrain themselves and are not such fools as to attempt a useless murder, which would entail the destruction of the town and the death of hundreds of innocent victims, as at Dinant, Andenne, Louvain and Aerschot. I know them; they will be patient and bide their time.

OTTO

What time?

THE BURGOMASTER

The time that will come later.

OTTO

I don't understand you. Here you are talking like our worst enemies!

THE BURGOMASTER

Do you expect me to be one of your friends? Would you insult me by numbering me among those who.... But I won't say what I was going to say, it's better not.... This incident has unnerved me. For I know that I am responsible and that if any unpleasantness occurs, it will be on my head.

OTTO

I hear footsteps outside the house. (*Going to the balcony-window and opening it.*) Is that you, Sergeant Hartung? What is it?

THE SERGEANT

(*In the garden below, unseen.*) I don't know, sir. I saw Lieutenant von Schaunberg go that way.

OTTO

When?

THE SERGEANT

A quarter of an hour ago.

OTTO

(*To the BURGOMASTER.*) It's what I told you: he has gone shooting in the wood.

THE SERGEANT

Beg pardon, sir, he had no gun with him.

OTTO

Are you sure? That's odd. Well, run and see what it is, instead of standing there gaping!

THE SERGEANT

Very good, sir. I was just going when you stopped me. But a lot of my men are there already.

OTTO

I hear shouts. There's something I don't like about this. But here's one of your men coming back; he'll tell us what has happened.

THE SERGEANT

Hurry up, there! What was it?

THE SOLDIER

*(Also in the garden, unseen.)* The Lieutenant? Where's the Lieutenant?

OTTO

Here. What's the matter? Why don't you speak?

THE SOLDIER

Sir! Lieutenant von Schaunberg! He's been murdered.

OTTO

What? Who? Come nearer! What are you saying?

THE SOLDIER

He's dead.

OTTO

When? How? Send for a doctor. I'll come down. Perhaps he's only wounded.

THE SOLDIER

No, sir, he has a bullet through his head. They found him lying in the bracken.

OTTO

Have they arrested the murderer?

THE SOLDIER

They're hunting in the wood. They've seen nobody.

OTTO

*(To the SERGEANT.)* Have sentries posted at all the gates. Quick! quick! Shoot any one at sight who attempts to leave the grounds. He can't escape. Where's the Major?

THE SERGEANT

I don't know, sir.

THE BURGOMASTER

He's probably in his room, on the other side of the house. He won't have heard.

OTTO

Send and tell him.

THE BURGOMASTER

This forebodes no good.

OTTO

Don't be afraid. The criminal can't escape; and, when we've caught him, he shall serve as an example that will make them think twice before they do it again. Stay here, all of you. Let no one leave the room, or I won't answer for the consequences. It's a serious matter, a very serious matter.

*(Exit)*

CURTAIN



## ACT II

*Scene: The same.*

*The curtain rises on the the MAJOR, the BURGOMASTER, OTTO, the SECRETARY and ISABELLE.*

THE MAJOR

Mr. Burgomaster, Lieutenant Karl von Schaunberg has been murdered on your premises, in your grounds. One of your gardeners has been arrested near the spot where the crime was committed. We may therefore presume him to be the culprit. In any case, I shall consider him such, until I have proof to the contrary; and that is enough. We must make an example; our safety demands it; and our safety outweighs all other considerations. In war-time, the best form of justice is the promptest. Your gardener, therefore, will be shot at seven o'clock precisely, unless between now and then you hand over the person who, in your opinion, is the criminal. You know the character and disposition of your servants better than I do; and you are therefore better able to discover the malefactor. I have it in my power to command the most terrible reprisals. Any one else, in my place, would have ordered the town to be pillaged and set on fire and sentenced a third or a half of the inhabitants to death. It would have been more regular. Yielding to the wishes of Lieutenant Otto Hilmer, I will be satisfied with a single victim. Let me have no cause to regret my clemency and my moderation.

THE BURGOMASTER

I repeat what I said to the men who arrested him: it is quite impossible for old Claus, my head-gardener, to have committed the crime. He has been in my service for over forty years; and I can answer for him as I would for myself. He is the gentlest of men, the most patient, the most harmless. The reason why he was found in the little wood where the Lieutenant was killed is that the wood contains a nursery-garden where I myself sent him, this morning, to bud the rose-trees. He had no weapons on him except his pruning-shears and his grafting-knife. Besides, I am convinced that, of all my servants and workmen, Claus is perhaps the only one who has never handled a gun or a revolver in his life.

THE MAJOR

Mr. Burgomaster, you do not seem to perceive that, by exonerating your head-gardener, you are accusing and condemning yourself. But I will not argue with you; the enquiry is not my affair. Manage it as you please; what I have said I have said. I need a culprit; and that culprit has to be shot at seven o'clock. It shall be whichever of your men you choose to name; it shall be yourself, if you give me no one else. Meanwhile, please consider yourself under arrest in your own house. It is guarded; and any attempt at escape will be pitilessly suppressed. I will let you know at four o'clock the amount of the fine, over and above the war-levy, which the town will have to pay before twelve o'clock to-morrow morning. (*Exit.*)

THE BURGOMASTER

This is sheer lunacy! To expect me to name the criminal among my servants, when I know that it is physically impossible for any of them to be guilty! And, if I do not hand him over before this evening, it means delivering myself to the firing-party!... You must admit that this Major of yours, with his "clemency" and his "moderation," has a very unpleasant sense of humour. I would rather deal with a brute who runs amuck and destroys everything with fire and sword: then at least I should know where I am.

OTTO

What would you have him do? As things are, he can hardly act differently.

ISABELLE

Otto!

OTTO

But, after all, it's true! You can see for yourself, we are surrounded by enemies and traitors; we are surrounded by hatred on every side; we live in a perpetual trap; our lives hang by a thread; and every one of us can expect a bullet through his head at any moment. It is only natural that we should protect ourselves, when we are treated like this! I think the Major's decision most reasonable, most fair, most humane. He had the right, it was almost his duty, in fact, to put the whole town to death; and he is contented with a single victim. Surely you can't ask that a crime of this sort should remain unpunished! It would be the end of us! Besides, you will easily find the criminal; you have only to confirm the evidence that points to him. The mere fact of his presence in the wood implies so grave a presumption that you will never destroy it, however hard you try. All you have to do is to leave things alone and not interfere. Then, if the Major is wrong, the mistake will be on his head!

THE BURGOMASTER

I can hardly believe my ears, Otto! The war has altered you completely. You know old Claus as well as I do. You know that, of all men in my employment, he alone most likely is absolutely incapable of an act of this kind. If it were any one else, I might have a doubt, I might say: "Very well, perhaps. In war-time, you can never tell." But Claus! It's as much out of the question as though you suggested that the shot had been fired by the child which Isabelle is about to bring into the world!... "A grave presumption!" How dare you say that? You know why the poor fellow was in the nursery-garden: I sent him there myself, when he came to take my orders at six o'clock this morning. If I don't do all that can be done to prove his innocence, it is as though I myself were commanding the firing-party....

67

OTTO

And, if you do prove his innocence, you will be putting yourself in his place, in front of the firing-party.

THE BURGOMASTER

Very well, I'd rather have it that way!... But surely that isn't possible.

OTTO

It won't be, unless you want it yourself. We have ample time before us. It is almost certain that the real criminal will be discovered between now and this evening.

THE BURGOMASTER

The real criminal? Do you know where you've got to look for him? Among your own men! It is simply one of your soldiers who has taken the opportunity to rid himself of an officer who ill-treated him. You yourself told me, before the Major came in, that Lieutenant von Schaunberg was an insufferable lout and that he was generally hated and loathed.

68

OTTO

I dare say; but it's a far cry from that to murder. In any case, I will myself make enquiries on that side; you, on yours, had better question Claus; he may give us a clue that will prove useful.

THE BURGOMASTER

I don't mind, but I don't expect much: the poor man evidently knows nothing, or he would have told me already. Between ourselves, do you think the Major was speaking seriously? Does he really mean to place me in this awful dilemma and condemn me to death if I refuse to surrender an innocent man?

69

OTTO

You stand no chance whatever that way. I have never known him to go back upon a decision which he has once taken. There is no hope of that at all; but there is every hope elsewhere. We will all of us set to work. You begin by questioning Claus; I'll go and see my men.

ISABELLE

And may I go out?

OTTO

What for?

ISABELLE

You can't expect me to sit quiet while my father's life is at stake! I want to go into the town, to see people, talk to them, ask them questions, to do something!... Surely our united efforts....

70

OTTO

Very well, come with me, I'll get the permit.

THE BURGOMASTER

Is Claus there?

OTTO

He's under arrest and guarded by my men; I'll send him to you. (*Exit with ISABELLE.*)

THE SECRETARY

I will leave you also, Mr. Burgomaster. I must go and see the sheriffs and councillors. Perhaps they can take steps or interfere in some way....

Yes, my dear Pierre, go. (*Shakes hands with him.*) There are bad moments in a man's life.... But here is Claus. Leave me with him. 71

(*Exit the SECRETARY. Enter CLAUS, with his clothes torn and his head covered with bruises and scratches.*)

CLAUS

Good-morning, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

Well, my poor Claus? Why, what have they been doing to you? You're bleeding at the mouth and forehead.

CLAUS

There's no great harm done, Mr. Burgomaster. They knocked me about a bit, because I didn't at once understand what they wanted with me; but there's no great harm done. Luckily I had on an old shirt and my third-best trousers. 72

THE BURGOMASTER

You know what you're accused of?

CLAUS

Yes, Mr. Burgomaster; I didn't understand at first, but Mr. Otto has explained.

THE BURGOMASTER

You and I have worked together for over forty years, my dear old Claus, and neither of us has anything to say against the other. Do you trust me?

CLAUS

Yes, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

Then tell me all you know. Speak without fear. I give you my word that whatever you say will remain between ourselves.

CLAUS 73

I don't know much, Mr. Burgomaster. I was in the nursery-garden where you told me to go this morning; I was trimming the rose-trees. They needed it, Mr. Burgomaster, I can tell you, especially the Paul Nerons, which had suckers as high as that. And the Malmaisons and Marshal Neils are getting the blight, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

The blight? I'm surprised at that; I didn't notice any two days ago. How much of the insecticide have we left?

CLAUS

Only a gallon or so, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

That's not enough. I'll order some more to-morrow.... And then what happened?

CLAUS 74

Then, Mr. Burgomaster, I heard a shot.

THE BURGOMASTER

From which side? At what distance?

CLAUS

Not very far, Mr. Burgomaster. Perhaps forty or fifty yards from where I was working.

THE BURGOMASTER

And then?

CLAUS

I went on with my work, Mr. Burgomaster, saying to myself that a shot more or less in war-time was no reason to make me desert my rose-trees. Then I heard shouts; I came out of the nursery, to see what was happening; some German soldiers saw me, fell upon me, shook me, struck me and kept shouting, "Kaput! Kaput!" Then they dragged me to the house; and Mr. Otto rescued me from them and locked me up in the seed-house.

75

THE BURGOMASTER

After the shot was fired, did you see no one near you, no one running away under the trees? Did you hear nothing, notice nothing?

CLAUS

As you know, Mr. Burgomaster, there's a thick hedge all the way round the nursery and you can't see what happens in the woods.

THE BURGOMASTER

Now is there any one whom you suspect among the workmen and gardeners? Is there any one who has let himself go at all and who has said things that may put us on the right track? Once more, I give you my word that all this will remain strictly between ourselves.

76

CLAUS

The young men, Mr. Burgomaster, the hot-headed ones, are gone: they have all joined the army. There's none left here but old men like you and me, who know that you can't fight against God's will and that any show of violence only makes things worse for us.

THE BURGOMASTER

Well, in the town or outside, don't you know of some reckless fellow who might have committed the murder?

CLAUS

That's not so easy to answer, Mr. Burgomaster. But I've thought and thought; and, since the young men are gone, there's no one I can think of.

77

THE BURGOMASTER

You're a Christian, Claus, you're a religious man; and I've always respected you for it. Do you swear that what you have told me is the exact truth and that you are keeping nothing from me?

CLAUS

I swear it, Mr. Burgomaster, as I hope to be saved.

THE BURGOMASTER

I believe you, my dear old Claus, and there was no need for you to take that oath. But the fact is that all this is very important to me, for my life depends upon it....

CLAUS

78

Your life? How do you mean, Mr. Burgomaster?

THE BURGOMASTER

I may as well tell you that, if I declare you to be innocent and if I don't produce the criminal, it's I who will be shot in your place this evening.

CLAUS

You, Mr. Burgomaster? Why? You've done nothing! It's impossible; people don't do such things!

THE BURGOMASTER

Yes, they do, my dear Claus: it's what they did at Aerschot, what they've done everywhere and what they mean to do here as well. Otto himself told me that nothing could prevent it.

CLAUS

79

It can't be possible, Mr. Burgomaster, it would be too unjust!... We shall find the man who did it, or the man himself when he hears, will feel ashamed and will give himself up.... Or else you will be able to escape: Mr. Otto will help you. Something will happen; and I am sure that God will not permit....



He permits plenty of other things, my poor Claus; He is permitting everything to-day. The only thing that will happen is my death; and we may think ourselves lucky if nothing worse happens. You know as I do that escape is quite impossible. Otto might try and help me, as a last resort; but then he would be shot in my place; and that would not be fair either. But all hope is not lost. Otto is at this moment making enquiries among his men; that may lead to something. You, in your turn, must collect our labourers and speak to them. You have great influence with them; they will listen to you. Explain the position to them; and, if one of them knows the guilty man, you must arrange things among yourselves. I do not ask them to betray him or to surrender him. I will not mix myself up in it. They must settle among themselves what is the right thing to do.

CLAUS

I will speak to them, Mr. Burgomaster; and you may be sure that, if the man who did it is one of them, he will do his duty.

THE BURGOMASTER

Get them to come to the palm-house; say there's some urgent work to be done because of the damage last night. I will ask Otto to let you come and go freely. Ah, here he is!

(*Enter OTTO.*)

THE BURGOMASTER

Otto, I have questioned Claus; I told you that he was as innocent as you or I; as I thought, he has no information to give me. Can you take it upon yourself to let him move about freely, so that he may see the gardeners and workmen and make enquiries which may lead to the discovery of the murderer?

OTTO

By all means; I trust him fully. Come with me, Claus; I'll give the necessary orders. (*Exit with CLAU.*)

THE BURGOMASTER

(*Taking out his watch and looking at the clock.*) Three o'clock. There's not much time to lose. (*Enter OTTO.*) Well, what have you learnt on your side?

OTTO

I am feeling a little less uneasy; but everything depends on you. To begin with, Dr. van Cassel, of this town, has made a hurried post-mortem examination. It appears that the bullet entered by the back of the neck, passed through the brain and came out at the forehead. The bullet has not been found. The wound shows that it was of military calibre.

THE BURGOMASTER

That's something, at any rate, for it proves that there is no question of a sporting-gun.

OTTO

Yes, but it may have been a revolver-bullet. Also, I don't believe it is possible that one of our men committed the crime. At the time when the shot was fired, we had only a hundred and fifty men here, in addition to a dozen Uhlans. The soldiers stacked their rifles in the square and never left the square. Six men, with their arms, were posted in the little yard behind the stables and they never left the yard. These are the men who ran up after the shot was fired. As for the Uhlans, with the exception of two who were on sentry duty outside the house, they were grooming their horses in the stable of the Unicorn Hotel. I have personally examined the arms of those six men. They did not look as if they had been used this morning at all; the barrels were oiled and shiny, they might have just come from the gunsmith's.

THE BURGOMASTER

It is easy enough to polish up a rifle-barrel.

OTTO

Of course; but remember that the Major will never admit that one of his men committed the murder, unless we bring him a concrete and undeniable proof.

THE BURGOMASTER

So there is nothing more to be hoped for in that direction?

OTTO

I fear not.

THE BURGOMASTER

That closes one more door against us. Have you seen the Major since?

OTTO

Yes; and I came away with a very hopeful feeling. But, once more, everything will depend upon yourself... First of all, though, here is the proclamation which he handed me for you to sign. I may tell you, it is already in print and will soon be posted in the town.

85

THE BURGOMASTER

Show me the proclamation.

OTTO

I'll read it to you: "A dastardly attack having been committed on an officer of the German army, if the culprit is not delivered before seven o'clock this evening precisely, the Burgomaster of the town of Stilemonde, being responsible, will be publicly shot at the hour aforesaid. If any other attempt were made, the town will be looted and set on fire; and the tenth man of all the male inhabitants will be put to death."

THE BURGOMASTER

86

He wants me to sign that, does he?

OTTO

You must. Besides, he has taken your consent for granted, for your signature already appears at the foot of the sheet.

THE BURGOMASTER

Then it was scarcely worth while asking me to sign it.

OTTO

It was more regular and more correct.

THE BURGOMASTER

And suppose I refuse?

OTTO

You will be no better off; he will do without and will not forgive you for refusing.

THE BURGOMASTER

87

What more can he do than shoot me?

OTTO

You are not the only one whom he can order to be shot.

THE BURGOMASTER

That's true. After all, I am only signing my own death-warrant and am wronging nobody. (*Signing the paper.*) There, that's done. But wait: what about improving the grammar a bit?

OTTO

You had better not try. He is persuaded that it is above criticism.

THE BURGOMASTER

My poor Otto, I believe there's nothing left for me to do but make my will. It is made; but I should like to revise it and alter a few of the bequests.

88

OTTO

Don't say that and don't lose courage; you still have several chances of escape.

THE BURGOMASTER

Really? I don't see one.

OTTO

To begin with, there's this: the Major is so thoroughly convinced of Claus's guilt that he is quite capable of having him shot together with yourself, if you persist in proclaiming his innocence. He has taken it into his head that you are absolutely determined to save Claus from the punishment which he deserves. In reality, he is not at all keen on having you shot; I could see that; he bears you no ill-will....

THE BURGOMASTER

89

That's very good of him....

OTTO

But he must have an example at all costs; on this point his mind is fully made up; and I am bound to say that I agree with him. I gathered that, if need be, he will cease to demand that you should declare Claus guilty. It will be enough for you to keep quiet, to make no fuss and not to protest the man's innocence. You have only to know nothing of what happens.

THE BURGOMASTER

Indeed? And you, what would you do in my place?

OTTO

I should not hesitate. After all, as there are two innocent men, why should you, who are unquestionably the more innocent of the two, be the one to suffer? We are at war; war brings strokes of good and bad luck which have nothing in common with the chances of ordinary life. Those upon whom ill-luck falls can only accept their fate. The others are not responsible for an injustice in which they have no more share, in which they take no more part than, let me say, in the injustice of a bridge that breaks down or a factory-chimney that falls to the ground, burying a dozen victims in its ruins.

90

THE BURGOMASTER

All this is much too subtle for me. I see and understand one thing only: Claus is innocent. If I do not declare the fact aloud, by your Major's own decision my silence becomes tantamount to a formal accusation and, to save my own life, I shall be sending a man whom I know to be innocent to face the firing-party. Is there a name for that action in German?

91

OTTO

You refuse to understand. Whatever happens, from your point of view an injustice is bound to be committed. The question is who shall be the victim, you or Claus. Why should you die rather than he?

THE BURGOMASTER

And why he rather than I?

OTTO

Because he has been appointed by fate, chance, destiny, or whatever you like to call it. You are not responsible for his death; and there is no reason why you should shout, like Nisis, "I, I am here, I did it! Let me die in his stead!" This is not the time and place for theatrical display or inopportune heroism.

THE BURGOMASTER

92

You are quite right; and, if, in order to save Claus, I went and said to the Major, "You need look no further, it is I who killed the Lieutenant," I should, as you say, be making a display of inopportune heroism for which I am not at all fitted. There is nothing of the hero about me; I am just a poor, respectable man, like the other men of this town; like the other men, I fear death; and I am as much attached to life as any one else, indeed perhaps more, for my life hitherto has been happier than I deserved. I should like to end it as calmly as possible, but even so, I want to end it decently. It is all very well for you to say that Claus, innocent as he is, must die because he has been selected by fate and that I am not responsible for what happens to him. But I too am selected by fate! If an unlucky chance brought him on the scene of the murder, a similar and equally unlucky chance has placed me at the head of this town at a moment of terrible responsibility and danger. Our position, looked at from the point of view of ill-luck and of the excuse which you are trying to find in destiny, is absolutely the same. If Claus had in his hands the power which I have in mine, if my life or death depended on his evidence alone and if, knowing me to be innocent, he proclaimed me guilty, you would consider him a monster or the meanest of cowards; yet he would be doing exactly what you wish me to do. He and I are both marked down, to the same extent, by the same fatality and we stand an equal chance; but you are urging me to cheat and to take an unfair advantage against a decent man who cannot protect himself and who trusts me. I should be only too glad to be convinced by what you say, but that is out of the question; and I cannot understand how you yourself do not understand!

93

94

OTTO

Very well, let us drop argument, since you will not listen to reason. Let us admit that the position is the same in both cases; but, as a choice has to be made between two lives, would you consider your own, which is useful and necessary to all, of no more value than that of a poor devil who has no relations, no children, no one to regret him, who does no public service and who will soon be a burden to the community?

THE BURGOMASTER

Old Claus's life is worth just as much as mine; and my answer would be the same if, instead of being the respectable, God-fearing man that he is, he were the lowest of scoundrels. It is here a question not of weighing the value or the usefulness of a man's life, but of knowing whether or not I am to dishonour my own.

95

OTTO

You really amaze me! You scarcely seem to be the same man, the wise, prudent person, the man of tact and discretion, who did me the honour to entrust me with his daughter!

THE BURGOMASTER

I certainly did not realize to what sort of man I was giving her.

OTTO

I will be fairer and more reasonable than you are; and I do not abandon the hope of saving you in spite of yourself. You have time for reflection; you have three hours before you; and I shall see that you are free to make your choice until the very last minute.

96

THE BURGOMASTER

My choice is made. The longer I reflect, the more clearly I shall see that any decent man in my place would do as I am doing and that I cannot do otherwise. (*Enter CLAUS.*) But here comes Claus, bringing us news, which perhaps will show how futile all this discussion has been. Well, Claus, what have you heard?

CLAUS

I'll tell you, Mr. Burgomaster. I called my gardeners into the palm-house. They were all there except old Decoster, who is ill in bed, and the young men who left a fortnight ago. I told them what had happened and what was going to happen. They understood and they were wild with indignation. I saw quite plainly that they knew nothing and could do nothing. And I also know that, if the guilty man was among them, they would have no need to accuse him and to hand him over. He would have handed himself over. They all had tears in their eyes, Mr. Burgomaster, and in their hearts something of which I won't speak, in Mr. Otto's presence.

97

THE BURGOMASTER

I was sure of it.

CLAUS

And now, Mr. Burgomaster, may I make a suggestion? I will say this in Mr. Otto's presence, for there is no harm in his repeating it to the Major.

THE BURGOMASTER

What is it, Claus?

CLAUS

It's like this, Mr. Burgomaster; I've been thinking things over. I'm an old man, I shall be sixty-three by the end of next month. I'm a widower, Mr. Burgomaster, and I have no children. I suffer a good deal; and my life, which is nearly finished, isn't worth much, Mr. Burgomaster. So I said to myself, Mr. Burgomaster, "Claus, old man, seeing that you were found near the Lieutenant who was killed, it would perhaps be better if you did not say that it wasn't you who killed him."

98

OTTO

Then you admit that you killed him?

CLAUS

No, Mr. Otto, I can't admit that I killed him, because I didn't. I have only to say nothing next time they accuse me. Or else I will ask the Major to have me shot instead of the Burgomaster. The Burgomaster's life is necessary to everybody here, especially at this time, whereas mine is no longer of much use to anybody.

99

OTTO

You see? It's exactly what I said. There's no more ground for hesitation. This good man understands his duty and yours better than you do. Claus, old fellow, give me your hand.

CLAUS

(*Withdrawing his hand.*) No, Mr. Otto, excuse me. I have been digging up the ground and I should soil your white gloves.

THE BURGOMASTER

I not only want to shake both your hands, though they be covered with earth, but I want to take you in my arms as I would a brother, my dear old Claus. (*Clasps him in his arms.*) And now let there be no more question of all this. What you propose to do is very beautiful and, coming from you, does not astonish me at all; but it is not practicable. To begin with, I have no right to accept your sacrifice. It is very fine of you to offer it, but it would be mean and hateful of me to accept it. Besides, if I did accept it, unless you formally declared yourself guilty, it is pretty nearly certain that the Major on his side would refuse it. What he wants, in order to make a striking example, is not your life, but mine, or the murderer's.

100

CLAUS

I will say anything that I have to, so as to die in your place, Mr. Burgomaster.

OTTO

(*To the BURGOMASTER.*) In that case, the Major will accept; I'll answer for him. Leave it to me and look upon yourself as saved.

101

THE BURGOMASTER

But don't you see that it's the same thing as before, that it means handing over an innocent man to execution and that, the more you try to obscure it, the clearer my duty becomes? If I will not permit Claus to die voluntarily in my stead while declaring himself innocent, still less can I allow him to do so by declaring himself guilty, when I know that he is not. That would be committing two mean actions instead of one.

OTTO

(*Trying to drag CLAUS away.*) Come, Claus, we will save him in spite of himself. Come along to the Major.

102

THE BURGOMASTER

Claus, stay here. You love me, my dear old Claus: you have just given me the most beautiful and positive proof that one man can give to another. I will ask you for yet another proof, perhaps even more trying; it shall be the last. Promise me that, whatever happens, you will not go to the Major.

CLAUS

Mr. Burgomaster, Mr. Burgomaster, you know what is right better than I do.... (*Sobbing.*) But I meant it with all my heart, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

(*Embracing him.*) Good-bye, my dear Claus.

CLAUS

Good-bye, Mr. Burgomaster.

103

OTTO

I can't understand a syllable of all this. It's simply a mad craving for martyrdom.

THE BURGOMASTER

No, my dear fellow, it's only the way decent folk behave in this country. (*A knock at the door.*) Come in! (*Enter the FOOTMAN.*) What is it?

THE FOOTMAN

Mr. Burgomaster, the Major has sent to ask you and Lieutenant Otto to go with him to the Town-hall.

THE BURGOMASTER

Of course, I was forgetting the war-levy and the fine. We shall have a tough discussion. I'm reckoning on you, Otto.

I will do my best, but I can't promise much: the Major seldom allows any one to differ from him.

THE BURGOMASTER

What's the time? Past four? And here was I quietly attending to private matters, as though I were all alone in the world! It is time that we were thinking of others.

CURTAIN



### ACT III

*Scene: The same.*

*The curtain rises on the* BURGOMASTER, *the* SECRETARY, ISABELLE *and* FLORIS.

THE BURGOMASTER

As you were not present at the meeting, Mr. Secretary, I will tell you what was decided. The question of the war-levy and of the fine inflicted on the town for the death of Lieutenant von Schauberg is settled. The Major demanded five hundred thousand francs for the levy and two millions for the fine....

FLORIS

Two hundred thousand times what he was worth!

THE BURGOMASTER

There's no doubt about that.... I persuaded the Major, not without difficulty, to agree to a lump sum of a million, which must be paid before midday to-morrow. I have in my safe fifty thousand francs in cash, which I place at the disposal of the town. De Cuyper's Bank will pay us two hundred and fifty thousand francs, Sheriff van den Bulke fifty thousand and Councillor de Rudder seventy-five thousand francs. That makes nearly half a million certain. Sheriff Vermandel will try to get the rest of the money from the town-councillors and the leading inhabitants. You will assist him in his efforts. Everything therefore is more or less settled; and I can go without too much anxiety. The conditions are hard, but, taken all round, they are better than I hoped; and Stilemonde will not suffer unduly from the occupation. In any case, its fate is almost enviable, compared with that of many other towns. It owes this favour largely to Otto's presence. He really did all he could without dangerously compromising himself. I want to recognize this in your presence and to do him justice.... I have said good-bye to the sheriffs, the councillors and all my friends at the Town-hall. I was very much touched; I had no idea that they cared so much for me. Sheriff Vermandel was really quite distressing: I've never seen a man look so sad. He clung to me, wanted to die in my place. I had the greatest difficulty in making him understand that it was not his turn and that his sacrifice would be impossible and useless. Father de Coninck, the Rector of St. John the Baptist's, arrived at the end of the meeting and asked the Major why he had not taken him for a hostage as well as myself. He said that it was an honour to which he was entitled. Splendid of him, the way he demanded his share. The Major replied that he would lose nothing by waiting. Say what you will, there are good men left in the world. (*Looking at the clock.*) Half-past five. We have an hour and a half before us. But you have no time to lose, my dear Pierre; go and see to your affairs. I will wait here with my children until Otto returns. By the way, what has become of our wounded soldier, your friend Gilson? We have been forgetting him.

THE SECRETARY

Firmin put him in the chauffeur's room. I looked in there a moment ago. He was sleeping soundly, like a child, and he knows nothing.

THE BURGOMASTER

So much the better. Be sure and keep an eye on him when I am gone, for he might commit some imprudence.

THE SECRETARY

Make your mind easy; I'll see to it. *Au revoir*, Mr. Burgomaster.

THE BURGOMASTER

(*Shaking hands with him.*) *Au revoir*. Yes, perhaps we shall see each other again. (*Exit the SECRETARY.*) Otto has gone to make a last appeal to the Major. I have no great hope of his succeeding. I shall be leaving you soon, my dears, and I want to give you my last injunctions.

(ISABELLE *and* FLORIS *fling themselves into their father's arms.*)

ISABELLE

Father!

FLORIS

Dad!

THE BURGOMASTER

(*Caressing them tenderly.*) Don't cry, dears; the time has not yet come. But we must provide for everything. My will is with Van Overloop, the solicitor. I have added certain safeguards against



Otto, who, after all, is not a member of the family. You will find in the safe, over and above the fifty thousand francs put aside for the payment of the fine, ten thousand francs in ready money, which will enable you to live till better times come. Here, Isabelle, is the key. Don't mention those ten thousand francs, either of you, to Otto. Isabelle's position will be very difficult after the war. Flemish people have long memories and the national hatred will be so great that Otto will not be able to show his face here again.

111

FLORIS

I should hope not!

THE BURGOMASTER

Hold your tongue, Floris; show some pity for your sister; and, whatever happens, always remember that she is your sister.... But here comes Otto; he will tell us the latest.

(Enter OTTO.)

ISABELLE

(Running towards him.) Well? Did you succeed? Have you done it? Did you make him understand?

OTTO

112

Not a thing! I begged, entreated, dragged myself at his feet, did and said what not another German officer would have done. Not a thing, not a thing! He ended by commanding my silence in such a tone that it was impossible to insist.

ISABELLE

You must try again! You give in too soon: that's not the way to obtain what one wants! If you had let me go with you, as I implored you, he would have ended by yielding, I know he would! After all, he may be a German, but he's a man, for all that! Come along. I want to go with you. If you won't come, I'll go alone!

OTTO

It's no use, he won't see us.

ISABELLE

113

Did you say all there was to say? You have influence in Germany; your family is rich and powerful; you've told me so again and again. You must frighten him, make him feel uneasy, threaten him, anything!

OTTO

Threaten him! You don't realize; you don't know what things are. I saw that his patience was exhausted.... But I haven't told you everything. There's something else, something worse.

ISABELLE

Something worse? Worse than what? What can be worse than death?

OTTO

Yes, he has discovered something worse; and perhaps it is not his fault. He is, as we all are, the slave of discipline and of the military regulations. He does not like me as much, perhaps, as he liked von Schaunberg, for I don't belong to his class. But I do not believe that he wishes me any ill. He was always a little distant to me, perhaps, but on the whole, up to now, he has been very just. He is not a bad sort of man; he is one of our most humane officers; but what he wants to make me do is terrible.

114

ISABELLE

But what is it, what? There is nothing more for us to fear. Nothing worse can happen than what has happened already. He is not going to revive torture, I suppose? Does he want more victims? There are no lives more precious than our father's. Does he want you and me? I would rather have that. We will all die together. Of what good will life be, after this?

115

OTTO

He does not ask for other victims, but his orders are.... No, I can't say it, I daren't say it, to you!

ISABELLE

But what is it that he wants? Do speak, speak, tell us! Why all this mystery? What can you say, worse than already is? If I lose my father, I shall have nothing left to lose.

She is right; it is cruel of you to keep her on tenterhooks like this. You see how upset she is. Say what you have to say; tell us. You cannot add much to what we know already.

OTTO

You are right. Very well, he orders, he demands that I myself shall command the firing-party.

116

ISABELLE

The firing-party, the men who are to shoot my father?

OTTO

Yes.

FLORIS

The scoundrel, the villain!

ISABELLE

You, Otto, you? It's not true! He can't have dared! It's impossible! And you didn't rebel, you didn't lash him across the face, you didn't cut him down with your sword, your eyes said nothing of what was passing in your soul? I refuse to believe it! There has been nothing like this in any war in history! Why, it's not possible! It's only a test! He wanted to find out how far he could go; but he knows quite well that no man, no man in the world, not even a German, could agree to that!... Well, what did you answer? I hope that by this time he knows what to expect and that, though you have had the misfortune to be born in Germany, you are still different from the rest of them!

117

OTTO

The worst of it is that he is obliged to do what he is doing. I am the only officer he has with him. It's the regulation: he can't act differently.

ISABELLE

He can't act differently!... And you dare tell me that, just as though you approved!... But you, you, what did you say, what did you do and what do you intend to do?

OTTO

118

I told him it was impossible.

ISABELLE

That's something, at last! It's the first word which was worthy of you, which was worthy of the man I married!... And what did he reply? He didn't insist, of course?

OTTO

He told me that he would give me till seven o'clock to think it over. If at seven o'clock precisely I am not at the head of my men in the little yard behind the stables, he will have me arrested, place me against the wall beside your father and will himself command the party which will execute both sentences.

ISABELLE

Good! I shall go and stand between the two of you. He will order three volleys and it will be finished. After all, life has become impossible.

119

FLORIS

I shall go too.

ISABELLE

And "the man is not a bad sort," you say! "He's one of your most humane officers!"

OTTO

It's war!

ISABELLE

And who started the war?

OTTO

As far as you Belgians were concerned, you did! And many of us were sore at heart when we found that we had to march against you. But you wanted it! Ah, that beloved king of yours did a fine stroke of work, on the day when he blocked the way to a peaceful army of men, who merely asked to pass through the country as friends.

120

THE BURGOMASTER

Silence! Our king's wishes were the wishes of every one of us; and if to-morrow we had to do once more what we have done to-day, you would find us in the same place, among our ruins, our martyrs and our dead, ready to begin all over again.

FLORIS

Tell your horrible Kaiser to put that in his pipe and smoke it!

OTTO

*(Suddenly drawing himself up, in a threatening attitude.)* Mind what you're saying!

121

THE BURGOMASTER

Come, come, stop this fooling and let us talk sense. We must not lose our self-control. The Major is a monster, a brute, anything you please; but, placed as he is, he's right. He's obeying the regulations; and, again in his position, he can't act differently.... I will ask Otto once again, is it quite certain that he will not reconsider his decision? People often change their minds at the last moment; and even the most obstinate man will let himself think.

OTTO

As I know him—and I have known him for more than ten years—he will have everything carried out exactly as he has decided.

THE BURGOMASTER

122

Can't he have the firing-party commanded by a sergeant?

OTTO

He won't do it. In anything relating to the army orders, he is inflexible. Besides, on second thoughts, I am not sure that I did not go too far just now when I said that he had nothing against me. I have sometimes observed a certain ill-will, almost a certain animosity, where I was concerned. I don't quite know to what to ascribe it. It may be that the plebeian prosperity of my family offends his patrician poverty. It may be that, as I took my wife from this country, he suspects me of being too fond of its inhabitants. Or, more likely still, he may have other reasons into which I do not care to enter. The fact remains that he would not be sorry to find me at fault or at least to put me to the test and to make that test a striking example, which will teach our soldiers once more what German discipline can do.

123

THE BURGOMASTER

And if I asked him to grant me the favour of giving the word to fire?

OTTO

I thought of that. He refused peremptorily, refused as a matter of course, said that it was an honour which could not be shown to a rebel and a traitor.

FLORIS

A traitor?

THE BURGOMASTER

Yes, Floris, they call traitors all those who do not betray their country for Germany's benefit.

OTTO

124

He added that it was also against all the regulations, so it became useless for me to insist.

THE BURGOMASTER

Very good. What do you intend to do?

OTTO

Whatever Isabelle decides.

THE BURGOMASTER

And what will you have him do, Isabelle?

ISABELLE

Refuse to obey.

FLORIS

Why, of course!

THE BURGOMASTER

And, if you refuse to obey, Otto, do you think that your refusal will alter my fate at all?

125

OTTO

I am convinced—I am sorry to say it—that nothing could alter it in any way whatever.

THE BURGOMASTER

On the other hand, if he refuses to obey, do you, Isabelle, fully realize the consequences? He will at once be arrested and shot by my side. That is so, Otto, is it not?

OTTO

There is not the least doubt of it.

THE BURGOMASTER

Is that what you wish, Isabelle? He will die at the same time that I do.

ISABELLE

And at the same time that I do.

THE BURGOMASTER

126

It is not sure that they will permit you to die with us.

ISABELLE

It would certainly be the first time that they had spared a woman. You need have no fear on that score. In any case, this is my affair; and we need say no more about that.

THE BURGOMASTER

Do you accept, Otto?

OTTO

I accept, in so far as I am concerned, that is to say, I shall refuse to obey; but I do not agree to letting my death involve Isabelle's.

THE BURGOMASTER

Therefore, by ordering you to disobey, Isabelle is sending you to face the firing-party. She has no right to do that, unless she is absolutely determined not to survive you. If a woman deliberately and of her own free will—for that is what you are doing, Isabelle—sends a man to his death and does not go with him, after explicitly promising to share his fate, then she is guilty of one of the most odious and cowardly acts of treachery which she could possibly commit. Reflect, both of you. It is a question of taking, in my presence, a solemn and irrevocable pledge.

127

ISABELLE

I have thought it all out. The pledge is taken.

THE BURGOMASTER

Then Otto will die in an hour's time and you with him? Is that exactly what you wish?

ISABELLE

128

It is exactly what I wish and all that I wish.

THE BURGOMASTER

Do you accept, Otto?

OTTO

I accept, since Isabelle wishes it.

(*A pause.*)

THE BURGOMASTER

Good. Each of you is worthy of the other. You have proved to me that you love me and that you love each other better than life.... Now that the proof is established and your sacrifice fulfilled as much as though death had come to you, we have nothing more to fear and we can speak freely. In all this nightmare there is only one death which is necessary and inevitable; and that is mine. Your own deaths depend only upon ourselves, that is to say, they must not take place.... Isabelle, my darling, if I were lying on my death-bed at this moment, you would not refuse to hear and carry out my last wishes. I am before you now, standing on my feet, but as near to my end as though I were stretched upon a bed of sickness. (*The clock strikes six.*) Hark! Six o'clock! You see how close it is. Besides, I have what dying men, whose minds are often dulled, do not always have, the full possession of my mental faculties. The wish which I am about to express, the request which I am about to make of both of you, must therefore be all the more sacred. Do you promise me, Isabelle, as you would promise a dying man, to perform piously what I am going to ask of you?

129

ISABELLE

130

I know beforehand what you are going to ask; and I cannot promise you to order the man I married to become the murderer of his father and mine.

THE BURGOMASTER

Isabelle, at a moment like this we must not juggle with words which do not express what they say and which distort the truth most dreadfully. Otto has revealed to us the only truth that counts, by proving that he is ready to sacrifice his life not only to save mine, if that were possible, but even to spare you the pain of seeing him become the instrument—to some extent the accidental, involuntary, irresponsible instrument—of my death. It is for you and me to show ourselves worthy of that sacrifice by not accepting it.

ISABELLE

131

If I did not accept it, I should not be worthy of being your daughter.

THE BURGOMASTER

Words, more words, Isabelle, which do not touch the truth. We have no time to waste on sentences which do not say the things that have to be said. The minutes are slipping by, there are very few left; and I should not like to die before convincing you. Otto—you know it as well as I do—is caught in the cogs of the machine and cannot extricate himself. This is enough to justify him. He is no more responsible for the harm which he will do me than the sword which he carries or the twelve rifles which will discharge their bullets at me. We must look at things as they are and rise above hackneyed phrases and theories which show things to us as they are not. If his refusal could delay my execution for a day, for an hour, I could in the last resort understand your decision; but it will not delay it for three minutes. Whether it be he or another who gives the word of command, the ten or twelve bullets that enter my body will do it the same hurt.

132

ISABELLE

Enough, enough!

THE BURGOMASTER

No, it is not enough: you have not yet promised me.

ISABELLE

I can't promise.

FLORIS

Isabelle!

ISABELLE

What is it?

FLORIS

133

(*Flinging himself into his sister's arms.*) I don't know!

THE BURGOMASTER

I have done my duty, Isabelle, and you have approved. I have made the sacrifice of my life; and I have made it much more easily than I dared hope, for I did not know that I had so much courage. But I am no hero; I am only a poor man who was quite unprepared to do what I am going to do to-

day. You must not ask too much of me. There are limits to my strength. I am not used to suffering, I have not been in the habit of braving misfortune. I can bear my own unhappiness, but not that of others; and I feel that I shall not hold out to the end without breaking down, if my death is to involve the loss of the most precious of the lives which I thought I had ransomed. You must spare me one intolerable sorrow that can still move me. You ought to understand this. You ought to help me. And, instead of helping me, you are both of you making it more difficult for me! Don't you want your father to hold up his head when he faces the enemy? I was not afraid of death for myself, but I am for you. Do not weaken the strength which I shall need very soon. I have made the sacrifice of my own life, but not of your two lives: that would mean a twofold death to me and threefold suffering; and the courage which I have called up will not be enough if I see you fall by my side.

134

ISABELLE

*(Sobbing and throwing herself into her father's arms.)* Father!

THE BURGOMASTER

135

I thought that there would be tears for me, Isabelle. They prove that you are becoming reasonable and will no longer resist me.

ISABELLE

I can't do it, I can't do it, I shall never be able to do it!

THE BURGOMASTER

But you must. Time presses; and you are making the last few minutes of my life seem even more cruel than death.

ISABELLE

There are chances still. There is flight.

THE BURGOMASTER

Flight?... Whither?... How?... The house is guarded.

ISABELLE

136

The men who guard it are under Otto's orders. He has only to give a command.

THE BURGOMASTER

Otto is answerable for my safe custody. If I run away, he will take my place against the wall.

ISABELLE

He can run away too.

THE BURGOMASTER

And both of us be caught before we have gone two hundred yards? The tragedy would be the same; only it would be less seemly. And, if I did succeed in escaping, too many others would pay the penalty. Of all the chances of safety, this obviously is the only one that must on no account be attempted. No, I am driven into a corner, I am marked down; it is all over; and you must look upon me as dead. I have come to the end of my days; those which were worth living are past. I am not dying too soon; I had nothing more to wait for. Instead of a lingering, troublesome death, a painful, miserable death on a bed, I am offered a quick and sudden end, an honourable end, free from thought or suffering, and one which perhaps will save half the town. I should be mad to hesitate or to regret not dying in my bed. I too have been afraid of death. If any one had ever told me that one evening I should have to face it as I am doing now, I should not have dared to go on living. Whereas now I hardly give it a thought; I have to make an effort, to force myself, to concentrate my mind upon it in order to realize that, after all, perhaps it is somewhat serious and not what we had expected. Looked at from a distance, death seems like some horrible mountain, which shuts out the horizon; but, as we draw near, it dwindles and sinks away; and, when we are face to face with it, it is nothing.

137

ISABELLE

Well, if it is nothing, let us die with you.

THE BURGOMASTER

It is nothing to me, because I was nearing my end; and, above all, it is nothing because it is necessary. But to you two it is everything, because it is purposeless and because your life is beginning.

138

ISABELLE

Our life is beginning. Ah, a beautiful life, a life that begins like this!

THE BURGOMASTER

It will be what you make of it. But enough! I have begged, entreated and argued. The seconds are flying and I am wasting the last of them in quarrelling with you instead of pressing you to my heart. Yes or no, will you do what I ask? I appeal to Otto: his silence shows that he understands. He sees things now as you will see them later, as I see them and as we are bound to see them. One day you will thank us both for not listening to you to-day. But we must have done with this; and there are certain precautions which we must take to protect you against yourself and the strain of the final moment. I am going to lock you in this room and I shall give the key of the door to Otto, who will let you out when all is over.

139

ISABELLE

Lock me in here, while...? I won't have it, I won't have it!

THE BURGOMASTER

You surely will not compel Otto and me to use violence, to push you back by force, to struggle with you? That would be too dreadful! Look at me! Can't you see that I am using up all my strength, my last atom of strength, that I am dying ten deaths, rather than one, because of you? Look! I can scarcely hold myself up! It is more than I can bear, it is too much for me: will you not understand?

140

ISABELLE

*(Falls sobbing into her father's arms.)* I too cannot bear it any more.... Do what you will!... I promise whatever you ask of me!

THE BURGOMASTER

At last my own daughter has come back to me! And now let me give you one long, long kiss, free from any thought of pain or sorrow. You will both of you live. I feel as I might if I had been reprieved. But remember that you have given your promise to a dying man. And, my dear one, I want something more. I am not asking you to forget: that does not depend on yourself. Nor to forgive Otto: there is nothing to forgive. I simply ask you not to shut him out from your heart. Is that a promise also?

141

ISABELLE

*(Faintly.)* Yes.

THE BURGOMASTER

Come and kiss her, Otto.

ISABELLE

*(Starting.)* No, no!... Not now!...

THE BURGOMASTER

He is more to be pitied than either of us two. He is bearing the chief burden of this dreadful ordeal; and I doubt if, in his place, I should have the strength to bear that burden. We must have pity. You will learn, slowly, to love him once more as you have loved him until this day.... Besides, you will probably soon become a mother. The child that is to be born must not become the last and most sorrowful victim of this tragedy. I know that, at first, life will be very sad for you and very difficult. Wait patiently. Listen humbly to what it says. Life is always right. It is full of indulgence and goodwill and very soon forgets what should be forgotten. *(The clock strikes seven.)* Seven o'clock. I hear some one knocking at the door. My time is up. They have come to fetch us, Otto. Let us embrace each other for the last time, Isabelle. Come to my arms, Floris. You're a man now. I entrust your sister to you. We have been very fond of one another.... Come, Otto, we must not keep them waiting. *(He turns to the door.)*

142

143

ISABELLE

*(Clinging to his clothes.)* No, no!... Not yet!... I can't bear it!... I want to go with you!...

THE BURGOMASTER

*(Releasing himself.)* Not a word!... Not a cry!... I could not endure more than I am doing.... Floris, look to your sister.

*(He pushes ISABELLE away and goes out with OTTO, locking the door behind him. A pause. ISABELLE falls to the floor, where she lies half-supported by FLORIS and sobbing.)*

FLORIS

144

*(Caressing her.)* Don't cry, dearest. We shall be revenged, we shall be revenged!... We shall be

revenged!

ISABELLE

*(Draws herself up, looks around her and suddenly rises and runs to the door.)* No, no, I can't have it!

FLORIS

*(Catching her up.)* What are you doing? What do you want to do?

ISABELLE

I want ... I want to call out, to cry, to throw myself at his feet, to kill myself in front of him.... One never knows.... There are things left to try.... *(She shakes the door.)* They've locked it!... *(She runs to the window, opens it, measures the height with her eyes and instinctively steps back.)* FLORIS, who has followed her, throws his arms round her waist and drags her into the room.

145

FLORIS

You see, it's too high.

ISABELLE

*(Returning to the door and shaking it violently.)* I can't open it!... I can't open it!... Ah, if I were only there!... One never knows until the last moment!... I must get to him, I must get to him!... *(A volley is fired. She steps back in horror.)* It's done, it's done, it's done!... They've killed him!... They've killed what was best in the wide world!... I shall never see him again, I shall never see him again!

*(Supported by FLORIS, she staggers to a chair, where she sits huddled, staring before her, dry-eyed. FLORIS puts his arms round her and, with his cheek against hers, rocks her to and fro, whispering, "Dearest, dearest, dearest!" A pause. The door opens and the MAJOR and OTTO appear on the threshold.)*

146

THE MAJOR

*(Ceremoniously.)* Madam, I have done your father the honour of myself taking command of the firing-party. All I wanted was that your husband should prove his respect for discipline to the end! I give him back to you; you have nothing to blame him for. Everything went off very well, in a most correct and satisfactory manner. Your father died like a hero.... And now, Lieutenant Hilmer, go and embrace your wife....

ISABELLE

147

*(Suddenly drawing herself to her full height.)* Go away!... Go away, both of you!...

OTTO

What, I too, Isabelle?... But you don't understand....

ISABELLE

I understand everything, I understand too much, it's you who will never understand anything!...

OTTO

*(Coming towards her.)* But, Isabelle!...

ISABELLE

*(Shrinking back.)* Don't touch me!... Go away!... Don't touch me!... Go! It's over ... for good!...

FLORIS

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*(Stamping his foot.)* She's right! She's right! She's right!... Kiss me, kiss me! Let me kiss you!... It's we two now, you and I!...

THE MAJOR

*(To OTTO.)* Let them be; I want you. I hear they're attacking on the Oostwinkel side.... You've done your duty, Hilmer. This is incomprehensible. But they're all more or less mad in this country....

CURTAIN



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## Transcriber's Note

Punctuation has been normalized.

Repeated titles in the front of the book have been deleted.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BURGOMASTER OF STILEMONDE: A PLAY  
IN THREE ACTS \*\*\*

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