

Twelve Major Plays

A black and white portrait of August Strindberg, a Swedish dramatist, writer, and philosopher. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket and a white bow tie. His hair is dark and slightly wavy, and he has a serious expression, looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is dark and indistinct.

August
Strindberg

Translated from the Swedish by
Elizabeth Sprigge

Twelve Major Plays



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INTRODUCTION

Johan August Strindberg was born in Stockholm on January 22, 1849. He was the fourth child, and the first born in wedlock, of Carl Oscar Strindberg, a shipping agent of good education, and Ulrica Eleanora Norling, who had been a servant girl. At the time of his birth—he was a seven months' child—his father was bankrupt and his mother worn down by poverty. After their twelfth child, when August Strindberg was thirteen, she died at the age of thirty-nine and his father married the housekeeper.

The conflicts bred of the bourgeois-proletarian union of his parents and the miseries of an over-sensitive childhood made a lasting impression on Strindberg and are described in his first autobiographical novel. While he despised the hypocrisy of bourgeois respectability and espoused the cause of the oppressed, he also deplored the ignorance and gullibility of the working classes and felt that he never properly belonged to any class himself. It is hardly surprising that these obsessions, coupled with a frustrated mother-love, coloured so much of his work.

He went to a number of schools of different social status and was an ambitious if erratic pupil. His favourite subjects were languages and science, and he developed a love of nature which remained throughout his life. With difficulty he got to Uppsala University and lived there in dire poverty, leaving without taking a degree. He was by turn tutor, journalist, art critic, actor and telegraph clerk, and he taught himself enough Chinese to catalogue the Chinese manuscripts in the Royal Library at Stockholm, which last position improved his social standing.

In 1875, when Strindberg was twenty-six, the actress Siri von Essen divorced her husband, Baron Wrangel, to marry

him. They had three children, and the first years of this marriage, spent mainly in Switzerland, France and Denmark, were the happiest of his life.

In his university days Strindberg had begun to write plays, chiefly in verse, one of which, *The Outlaw*, earned him a temporary stipend from the King. His first masterpiece, begun soon after this, was *Master Olof*, an historical drama with the Swedish reformer, Olaus Petri, as its central figure and its theme the relativity of truth. Public recognition, however, was slow in coming. It was nine years after he wrote the first prose version of *Master Olof* that this was at last staged. Then Strindberg, with the added incentive of providing parts for his young actress wife, returned to writing for the theatre and produced *Herr Bengt's Wife*, an historical play with a mediæval setting, the first of his works to treat of marriage. This was Strindberg's reaction to Ibsen's recently-produced *A Doll's House*, a play which he considered "sick like its author." In *Herr Bengt's Wife* the sanctity of marriage and parenthood is finally saved, and Strindberg followed it by one of his happiest fantasies, *Lucky Peter's Journey*.

Fame, however, eluded him until his dark side was uppermost again. In 1879 his novel, *The Red Room*, a satire of Stockholm society, earned him the name of "the Swedish Zola," although he had not then read the French master. At the same time it roused fury against him, soon to be exacerbated by *Married*, two volumes of ironic short stories in which, most daringly for the day, he analysed marital relations and for the first time reviled women.

Having read Darwin, Kirkegaard and Brandes, Strindberg was ripe for the agnosticism and new radicalism of the day; but the question of the emancipation of women, now sweeping Scandinavia largely as a result of *A Doll's House*, confounded him. Although he believed in individual rights, he feared and distrusted feminine nature. All the same, he never acknowledged the term "mysogonist," which has stuck to him so persistently that it blinds many people to anything else in his life or his work. It was Strindberg's deep love of women, not hatred, he declared, which made him rail against them—

and indeed it was his love of life itself which made him rage against the mess mankind had made of it.

For *Married* Strindberg was prosecuted, not for his attack on women or society but for blasphemy, on account of his denunciation of the Communion Service as humbug. He was finally acquitted, but the opprobrium remained.

Strindberg's religious life was as eccentric as his domestic one. He had been brought up in the narrow path of Pietism and in his adolescence had gone through a variety of hysterical, religious and erotic experiences. Now he swung from atheism to faith, vainly seeking a creed in eastern and western religions, until in the nineties he discovered the teaching of Swedenborg which spoke to his condition, although even then he was not entirely converted.

In 1887, while his first marriage was breaking up, he produced *The People of Hemsö*. This novel about life in the Swedish skerries, in which he gave rein to his love of nature, was written at the same period as the autobiographical novels, *The Son of a Maid-servant* and *A Fool's Defence*, and the so-called "naturalist" dramas which established his European reputation. Here he acknowledged the brothers de Goncourt, besides Zola and Nietzsche, as influences. The most widely known of these plays are *The Father*, *Miss Julie*, *Creditors* and the one-act monologue, *The Stronger*. *The Father* was at once published in Sweden and translated into French (with an introduction by Zola), German and Danish. Sponsored by Georg Brandes, it was first produced and acclaimed in Copenhagen and then even more successfully presented in Paris by Antoine at his *Théâtre Libre*, for whom Strindberg thereupon wrote *Miss Julie* and *Creditors*. In Berlin, too, these plays were soon to be famous, but in Stockholm *The Father* was viewed with unmitigated horror and only ran for a few nights. Strindberg made little money from these early productions, but he had now, at the age of forty, made his name as an avant-garde dramatist. He might be loathed, but he would never again be ignored. He was no longer overshadowed by Ibsen.

In 1891, Strindberg and Siri von Essen were divorced on

grounds of incompatibility. How impossible marriage was for him! He expected each young woman he fell in love with to be not only his wife, his mistress and the mother of his children, but his own mother too. To his grief, for his paternal affection was deep, Siri von Essen was given the custody of the children, and Strindberg satirized the proceedings in the excellent short play, *The Bond*. The following year he married Frida Uhl, an ambitious young Austrian journalist. He lived for long periods now in Germany, Austria and Moravia and made his only visit to England, finding a champion of his plays in the theatrical manager, J. T. Grein.

The marriage to Frida Uhl, by whom he had one daughter, only lasted a year and passed in a kind of materialised nightmare. Scientific studies had always fascinated Strindberg—he was a considerable botanist—and he now began to make chemical experiments and wrote *Antibarbarus*, a treatise concerned with the nature of sulphur and the belief that “all is in all.” Living alone in Paris in small hotels on the left bank, almost penniless, Strindberg now proceeded from chemistry to alchemy (always, one way or another, he was trying to make gold) and consorted with the celebrated Parisian occultists of the day. This brought about the crisis that marked the climax of his psychosis, which he minutely describes in his novel, *Inferno*, “the diary of a soul in hell.” This is a strange indeed but remarkably lucid account of the psychic phenomena he experienced during the crisis and for which he could find no explanation except that he was being pursued by what he called “The Powers.” And only, he came to believe, by admitting his guilt and doing penance could he escape from his torments.

Thus he emerged with a belief in God, and in 1898 expressed the rebirth of faith in his impressive pilgrimage drama, *To Damascus*. Far from his creative powers being impaired, after this crisis Strindberg produced much of his finest work, including his boulevard play, *Crime and Crime* (a psychological thriller produced by the young Reinhardt), and the great historical cycle begun with *Master Olof*—

Gustavus Vasa, Erik XLV, etc.—besides his little play of redemption, *Easter*.

In 1901 Strindberg married the young Norwegian actress, Harriet Bosse, who created the parts of the Lady in *To Damascus* and Eleanora in *Easter*. Harriet Bosse, too, gave him a daughter, but the marriage soon ended, although this time in an amicable separation.

In spite of the new religious note in his work, Strindberg now returned to the old theme of married misery and wrote the powerful drama, *The Dance of Death*. Two fairy plays, strongly influenced by Reinhardt, followed, and then came the wonderful symbolic *Dream Play*, one of Reinhardt's most famous productions.

In his last years Strindberg lived as a recluse in Stockholm and his enormous output of plays continued, besides such works of philosophic reflection as *The Blue Books* and *Alone*. In 1907 he realised his life-long wish for an Intimate Theatre of his own and wrote for it a series of very effective Chamber Plays, of which the best is the macabre *Ghost Sonata*. His last work for the theatre was another pilgrimage play, *The Great Highway*, written chiefly in unrhymed verse, in which he sums up his strange life's journey. It ends with a prayer:

Bless me, whose deepest suffering,
deepest of human suffering, was this—
I could not be the one I longed to be.

What he longed to be was a whole and happy traveller on life's highway, but introvert and schizophrenic (his first biographers speak of "paranoia simplex chronica" and "melancholia dæmomaniaca"), he was split from reality, split in himself, and divided against himself. His attacks on women are, for example, attacks on himself, on the femininity of his own nature with which he was unable to come to terms.

His work is the key to his complexities, since all of it is in some measure autobiographical. This is true not only of his writings but of his paintings—mostly turbulent seascapes, executed with a knife—and it is impossible to consider his work

apart from his life, for his schizophrenia prevented him from knowing himself where reality began or imagination ended. "I don't know if *The Father* is an invention or if my life has been like this. . . ." All his writing was intensely subjective:

Could I but sit among the audience
and watch the play!
But I must mount the stage, take
part and act,
And once I play a part, I'm lost,
forgetting who I am.*

He was impelled to write, his mind and his emotions were in a state of seething ferment until he had expressed his vision. He worked against time, with a shadow over his shoulder, and completion left him in a state of physical collapse. But if he had not been able to write, surely he would have quite succumbed to his illness; his work was his outlet, his therapy. He wrote on the ascent and descent of his attacks, and between the giddy slopes lay the unforbidding plateau of reality, where he was never at home. He let his plays develop of their own accord, in later days scarcely correcting a word, but in life he could never let any relationship alone. Whether with his wife, friend or foe, he was forever "digging the plant up to examine its growth." "The personality of the author is just as much a stranger to me as to the reader," he declared shortly before he died, "and just as unsympathetic." He invites us to dislike him, but at the same time provokes us into trying to understand his complicated and tortured nature.

Strindberg was ahead of his time, but at last we have begun to catch him up. Or, rather, it is truer to say that we have now begun to accept him, for as Gertrude Stein points out, "no one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating time is the one his contemporaries who are also creating their own time refuse to accept."

Without any doubt Strindberg has exerted a strong influ-

* *The Great Highway.*

ence on twentieth-century writers. The productions of his plays in Munich in 1915 "almost, yes almost, reconciled" Rilke with the theatre; Thomas Mann described his "aggressive worth" as "an indisputable asset" to the youth of his generation, and Eugene O'Neill hailed him in the twenties as "the precursor of all modernity in our present theatre, just as Ibsen, a lesser man as he himself surmised, was the father of the modernity of twenty years or so ago." J. B. Priestley agrees with this view and declares that "no sound critic of the drama doubts his genius," while Sean O'Casey is lyrical in his appreciation. One can trace Strindberg's mark on many American dramatists, including O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, while the French playwright Arthur Adamov has always acknowledged him as his first great influence—*A Dream Play* particularly being a source of inspiration. To Jean Cocteau, Strindberg's enchantment lies in the fact that he cannot be "coined": "*Il tombe de la lune. Ne le ramasse pas qui veut.*" And yet, different as are the styles of these two writers, it is not difficult to see, for instance, *Les Parents Terribles* as a Strindbergian tragic-comedy or *A Dream Play* as a fantasy by Cocteau. Nor can Anouilh's *Waltz of the Toreadors* fail to remind one of *The Dance of Death*, and when I see a production of one of Strindberg's domestic satires, such as *Playing with Fire*, I am haunted by Ionesco. This is partly because the fashion now is to burlesque these Strindberg plays.

Strindberg does not seem to have directly influenced English dramatists, which is not surprising as so few of his works have been produced in England. Although he wrote more than fifty plays, to most English theatre-goers he is known only for *The Father* and *Miss Julie*. But indirectly, as a pioneer of Expressionism and through his outspoken insight before Freud, Jung and D. H. Lawrence led the next generation into sexual and psychological exploration, he is a source in England as elsewhere of twentieth-century literature and drama.

Strindberg's works present many difficulties to his translators. His style varies from the terse to the lyrical—he was a poet, which should never be forgotten—and it is not always

easy even for his compatriots. Also, he sometimes slips quotations—from the Bible or Shakespeare, for instance—into his text without comment. One has to know what he was doing and reading at the time of writing in order to follow his thought. At times, too, Strindberg is slapdash in his stage directions, and I have therefore occasionally edited these to help production of the plays.

ELIZABETH SPRIGGE.

THE FATHER
A Tragedy in Three Acts



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INTRODUCTION

In the last half-century Strindberg has enjoyed a growing reputation both on the continent and, latterly, in England, for the simple reason that of all nineteenth-century dramatists, he is the least dated. He developed at a time when theatre had begun to be a contemporary affair, a platform for moral debate, an organ of modern thought which influenced public opinion, thus changing customs and even laws, and so the playwright had become an important international figure.

Until Zola, in the 'seventies, made his dramatic assault on the theatre, demanding the whole of life, by which he meant the most crude and violent aspects of life upon the stage, drama had, as usual, lagged behind the times. Now, stripped of romanticism, refinement and rhetoric, led by that pioneer of little theatre clubs, Antoine's Théâtre Libre, it exploded into so-called Naturalism. In came Ibsen with *GHOSTS* and the stage was set for *THE FATHER*.

Yet to call *THE FATHER* a naturalist play is absurd. As the Swedish authority Martin Lamm points out, Strindberg intended it to be the modern equivalent of *AGAMEMNON*, the Swedish captain like the Greek king victim of woman's sex hatred and lust for power. *OTHELLO*, *MACBETH* and *KING LEAR* were also in Strindberg's mind as he conceived *THE FATHER*, and he deliberately drew his hero larger than life. The strength of the play can thus be said to be due partly to the influence of Aeschylus; the plot is stark, the construction economic, the pace swift and the movement towards fatality inevitable. The Captain is a giant who, like Strindberg himself, impresses us with his size and shocks us with his clumsy weakness. In fact, in this play Strindberg gives a penetrating diagnosis of his state of mind at its most unhappy and it is his own hysteria which prevents *THE FATHER* from being wholly great.

While the play grips us with its dramatic force, shatters us with its brutality and leaves us admiring its craftsman-

ship, there is no aftermath of imagination, no echo of beauty. In spite of the Captain's good points, the play is consistently black, particularly when played, for it is usually produced with unrelieved violence. This, to do the author justice, was not his intention. In a letter to Lundegård, the Swedish critic, at the time of the first production in Copenhagen in 1887, Strindberg stated that the Captain should be presented "as a normally robust man with a taste for irony and self-mockery, and the lightly sceptical tone of a man of the world." He also directed that the part should be played "subtly, calmly, resignedly," and described the Captain—here we see the Greek influence—as "going to meet his fate almost lightly, wrapping himself in his winding-sheet of spiders' webs, which the laws of nature will not permit him to destroy." True, Strindberg declares elsewhere that the protagonists in *THE FATHER* should be acted with complete abandon—consistency was not his bugbear—but certainly one cannot afford to miss one spark of the Captain's humour. "By and large," Strindberg said, "he symbolises a masculinity which society is trying to invalidate and hand over to the third sex."

Laura is a more difficult character to analyse. Certainly she symbolises a terrible femininity, and is Strindberg's answer to Ibsen and women's emancipation. But she is neither a blue-stocking nor a virago. It is her lack of common-sense, not her lack of morals, that the Captain criticises when he upbraids her for ruining his life. It is only her brother who sees her as clever because of her stubbornness in getting her own way. Her husband's attitude so riles her that her parting shot, before he throws the lamp at her, is: ". . . now you have seen my wits are as strong as my will."

The play falls to pieces if we cannot see Laura as an ordinary, rather stupid, middle-class girl, brought up in ignorance, and the Captain as an intelligent, ambitious young man, walking in the springtime woods and falling in love. Later, through sex difficulties and the sex conflict, both of them are caught in a trap of domesticity and debt and doubt—all of which were Strindberg's own unending problems.

A further problem for the producer is the child Bertha. We are told that she is seventeen, but she behaves as if

she is seven—about the age of Strindberg's eldest daughter when he wrote the play after the frenzied break-up of his own marriage. Laura is a silly featureless little girl and the other minor characters, too, are merely sketches. "Ordinary people," Strindberg calls them in his preface to *MISS JULIE*, "as country pastors and provincial doctors usually are," but to us they seem extraordinary, and he mocks both church and medicine. Indeed, with his characteristic economy of words and the lack of stage directions—it is a matter of chance whether he even remembers to bring a character on or take him off again—Strindberg sets his readers and translators, producers and players, a hard task. Much is asked of an audience too, but the dramatic reward is unique and justifies the toil.

E. S.



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Characters

THE CAPTAIN
LAURA, *his wife*
BERTHA, *their daughter*
DOCTOR ÖSTERMARK
THE PASTOR
THE NURSE
NÖJD
THE ORDERLY

The whole play takes place in the central living-room of the Captain's home. He is a cavalry officer in a remote country district of Sweden.

It is about 1886, shortly before Christmas.

At the back of the room, towards the right, a door leads to the hall. In the left wall there is a door to other rooms, and in the right-hand corner another, smaller door, covered in the same wall-paper as the walls, opens on to a staircase leading to the Captain's room above.

In the centre of the room stands a large round table on which are newspapers, magazines, a big photograph album and a lamp. On the right are a leather-covered sofa, arm chairs and a smaller table. On the left is a writing-bureau with a pendulum clock upon it. Arms, guns and gun-bags hang on the walls, and military coats on pegs by the door to the hall.

ACT ONE

Early evening. The lamp on the table is lighted. The Captain and the Pastor are sitting on the sofa talking. The Captain is in undress uniform with riding-boots and spurs; the Pastor wears black, with a white cravat in place of his clerical collar, and is smoking a pipe.

The Captain rises and rings a bell. The Orderly enters from the hall.

ORDERLY. Yes, sir?

CAPTAIN. Is Nöjd there?

ORDERLY. Nöjd's in the kitchen, sir, waiting for orders.

CAPTAIN. In the kitchen again, is he? Send him here at once.

ORDERLY. Yes, sir.

Exit.

PASTOR. Why, what's the trouble?

CAPTAIN. Oh, the ruffian's been at his tricks again with one of the servant girls! He's a damn nuisance, that fellow!

PASTOR. Was it Nöjd you said? Didn't he give some trouble back in the spring?

CAPTAIN. Ah, you remember that, do you? Look here, you give him a bit of a talking to, there's a good chap. That might have some effect. I've sworn at him and thrashed him, without making the least impression.

PASTOR. So now you want me to preach to him. How much impression do you think God's word is likely to make on a trooper?

CAPTAIN. Well, my dear brother-in-law, it makes none at all on me, as you know, but . . .

PASTOR. As I know only too well.

CAPTAIN. But on him? Worth trying anyhow.

Enter NÖJD.

What have you been up to now, Nöjd?

NÖJD. God bless you, sir, I can't talk about that—not with Pastor here.

PASTOR. Don't mind me, my lad.

NÖJD. Well you see, sir, it was like this. We was at a dance at Gabriel's, and then, well then Ludwig said as . . .

CAPTAIN. What's Ludwig got to do with it? Stick to the point.

NÖJD. Well then Emma said as we should go in the barn.

CAPTAIN. I see. I suppose it was Emma who led you astray.

NÖJD. Well, not far from it. What I mean is if the girl's not game, nothing don't happen.

CAPTAIN. Once and for all—are you the child's father or are you not?

NÖJD. How's one to know?

CAPTAIN. What on earth do you mean? Don't you know?

NÖJD. No, you see, sir, that's what you never can know.

CAPTAIN. You mean you weren't the only man?

NÖJD. That time I was. But you can't tell if you've always been the only one.

CAPTAIN. Are you trying to put the blame on Ludwig? Is that the idea?

NÖJD. It's not easy to know who to put the blame on.

CAPTAIN. But, look here, you told Emma you would marry her.

NÖJD. Oh well, you always have to say that, you know.

CAPTAIN, *to the PASTOR.* This is atrocious.

PASTOR. It's the old story. Come now, Nöjd, surely you are man enough to know if you are the father.

NÖJD. Well, sir, it's true, I did go with her, but you know yourself, Pastor, that don't always lead to nothing.

PASTOR. Look here, my lad, it's you we are talking about. And you are not going to leave that girl destitute with a child.

You can't be forced to marry her, but you must make provision for the child. That you must do.

NÖJD. So must Ludwig then.

CAPTAIN. If that's how it is, the case will have to go before the Magistrate. I can't settle it, and it's really nothing to do with me. Dismiss!

PASTOR. One moment, Nöjd. Ahem. Don't you think it's rather a dirty trick to leave a girl destitute with a child like that? Don't you think so—eh?

NÖJD. Yes, if I knew I was the father, it would be, but I tell you, Pastor, you never can know that. And it wouldn't be much fun slaving all your life for another chap's brat. You and the Captain must see that for yourselves.

CAPTAIN. That will do, Nöjd.

NÖJD. Yes, sir, thank you, sir.

CAPTAIN. And keep out of the kitchen, you scoundrell

Exit NÖJD.

Why didn't you haul him over the coals?

PASTOR. What do you mean? Didn't I?

CAPTAIN. No, you just sat there muttering to yourself.

PASTOR. As a matter of fact, I scarcely knew what to say to him. It's hard on the girl, of course, but it's hard on the boy too. Supposing he's not the father? The girl can nurse the baby for four months at the orphanage, and after that it will be taken care of for good. But the boy can't nurse the child, can he? Later on, the girl will get a good place in some respectable family, but if the boy is cashiered, his future may be ruined.

CAPTAIN. Upon my soul, I'd like to be the magistrate and judge this case! Maybe the boy is responsible—that's what you can't know. But one thing you *can* know—if anybody's guilty, the girl is.

PASTOR. Well, I never sit in judgment. Now what was it we were talking about when this blessed business interrupted us? Yes, Bertha and her confirmation, wasn't it?

CAPTAIN. It's not just a question of confirmation, but of her

whole future. The house is full of women, all trying to mould this child of mine. My mother-in-law wants to turn her into a spiritualist; Laura wants her to be an artist; the governess would have her a Methodist, old Margaret a Baptist, and the servant girls a Salvation Army lass. You can't make a character out of patchwork. Meanwhile I . . . I, who have more right than all the rest to guide her, am opposed at every turn. So I must send her away.

PASTOR. You have too many women running your house.

CAPTAIN. You're right there. It's like going into a cage of tigers. They'd soon tear me to pieces, if I didn't hold a red-hot poker under their noses. It's all very well for you to laugh, you blackguard. It wasn't enough that I married your sister; you had to palm off your old stepmother on me too.

PASTOR. Well, good Lord, one can't have stepmothers in one's house!

CAPTAIN. No, you prefer mothers-in-law—in someone else's house, of course.

PASTOR. Well, well, we all have our burdens to bear.

CAPTAIN. I daresay, but I have more than my share. There's my old nurse too, who treats me as if I still wore a bib. She's a good old soul, to be sure, but she shouldn't be here.

PASTOR. You should keep your women-folk in order, Adolf. You give them too much rope.

CAPTAIN. My dear fellow, can you tell me how to keep women in order?

PASTOR. To tell the truth, although she's my sister, Laura was always a bit of a handful.

CAPTAIN. Laura has her faults, of course, but they are not very serious ones.

PASTOR. Oh come now, I know her!

CAPTAIN. She was brought up with romantic ideas and has always found it a little difficult to come to terms with life. But she is my wife and . . .

PASTOR. And because she is your wife she must be the best of

women. No, brother-in-law, it's she not you who wears the trousers.

CAPTAIN. In any case, the whole household has gone mad. Laura's determined Bertha shan't leave her, and I won't let her stay in this lunatic asylum.

PASTOR. So Laura's determined, is she? Then there's bound to be trouble, I'm afraid. As a child she used to lie down and sham dead until they gave in to her. Then she would calmly hand back whatever she'd set her mind on, explaining it wasn't the thing she wanted, but simply to get her own way.

CAPTAIN. So she was like that even then, was she? Hm. As a matter of fact, she does sometimes get so overwrought I'm frightened for her and think she must be ill.

PASTOR. What is it you want Bertha to do that's such a bone of contention? Can't you come to some agreement?

CAPTAIN. Don't think I want to turn her into a prodigy—or into some image of myself. But I will not play pander and have my daughter fitted for nothing but the marriage market. For then, if she didn't marry after all, she'd have a wretched time of it. On the other hand, I don't want to start her off in some man's career with a long training that would be entirely wasted if she did marry.

PASTOR. Well, what do you want then?

CAPTAIN. I want her to be a teacher. Then, if she doesn't marry she'll be able to support herself, and at least be no worse off than those unfortunate schoolmasters who have to support families on their earnings. And if she does marry, she can educate her own children. Isn't that reasonable?

PASTOR. Reasonable, yes—but what about her artistic talent? Wouldn't it be against the grain to repress that?

CAPTAIN. No. I showed her attempts to a well-known painter who told me they were nothing but the usual sort of thing learnt at school. Then, during the summer, some young jackanapes came along who knew better and said she was a genius—whereupon the matter was settled in Laura's favour.

PASTOR. Was he in love with Bertha?

CAPTAIN. I take that for granted.

PASTOR. Well, God help you, old boy, I don't see any solution.

But it's a tiresome business, and I suppose Laura has supporters . . . *indicates other rooms* in there.

CAPTAIN. You may be sure of that. The whole household is in an uproar, and between ourselves the method of attack from that quarter is not exactly chivalrous.

PASTOR, *rising*. Do you think I haven't been through it?

CAPTAIN. You too?

PASTOR. Yes, indeed.

CAPTAIN. But to me the worst thing about it is that Bertha's future should be decided in there from motives of sheer hate. They do nothing but talk about men being made to see that women can do this and do that. It's man versus woman the whole day long . . . Must you go? Won't you stay to supper? I don't know what there is, but do stay. I'm expecting the new doctor, you know. Have you seen him yet?

PASTOR. I caught a glimpse of him on my way here. He looks a decent, reliable sort of man.

CAPTAIN. That's good. Do you think he may be my ally?

PASTOR. Maybe. It depends how well he knows women.

CAPTAIN. But won't you stay?

PASTOR. Thank you, my dear fellow, but I promised to be home this evening, and my wife gets anxious if I'm late.

CAPTAIN. Anxious! Furious, you mean. Well, as you please. Let me help you on with your coat.

PASTOR. It's certainly very cold to-night. Thank you. You must look after yourself, Adolf. You seem a bit on edge.

CAPTAIN. On edge? Do I?

PASTOR. Yes. You aren't very well, are you?

CAPTAIN. Did Laura put this into your head? For the last twenty years she's been treating me as if I had one foot in the grave.

PASTOR. Laura? No, it's just that I'm . . . I'm worried about

you. Take my advice and look after yourself. Goodbye, old man. By the way, didn't you want to talk about the confirmation?

CAPTAIN. By no means. But I give you my word this shall take its own course—and be chalked up to the official conscience. I am neither a witness to the truth, nor a martyr. We have got past that sort of thing. Goodbye. Remember me to your wife.

PASTOR. Goodbye, Adolf. Give my love to Laura.

Exit PASTOR. The CAPTAIN opens the bureau and settles down to his accounts.

CAPTAIN. Thirty-four—nine, forty-three—seven, eight, fifty-six.

LAURA, *entering from the next room*. Will you please . . .

CAPTAIN. One moment!—Sixty-six, seventy-one, eighty-four, eighty-nine, ninety-two, a hundred. What is it?

LAURA. Am I disturbing you?

CAPTAIN. Not in the least. Housekeeping money, I suppose?

LAURA. Yes, housekeeping money.

CAPTAIN. If you put the accounts down there, I will go through them.

LAURA. Accounts?

CAPTAIN. Yes.

LAURA. Do you expect me to keep accounts now?

CAPTAIN. Of course you must keep accounts. Our position's most precarious, and if we go bankrupt, we must have accounts to show. Otherwise we could be accused of negligence.

LAURA. It's not my fault if we're in debt.

CAPTAIN. That's what the accounts will show.

LAURA. It's not my fault the tenant farmer doesn't pay.

CAPTAIN. Who was it recommended him so strongly? You. Why did you recommend such a—shall we call him a scatterbrain?

LAURA. Why did you take on such a scatterbrain?

CAPTAIN. Because I wasn't allowed to eat in peace, sleep in

peace or work in peace till you got him here. You wanted him because your brother wanted to get rid of him; my mother-in-law wanted him because I didn't; the governess wanted him because he was a Methodist, and old Margaret because she had known his grandmother as a child. That's why, and if I hadn't taken him I should be in a lunatic asylum by now, or else in the family vault. However, here's the housekeeping allowance and your pin money. You can give me the accounts later.

LAURA, *with an ironic bob*. Thank you so much.—By the way, do you keep accounts yourself—of what you spend outside the household?

CAPTAIN. That's none of your business.

LAURA. True. As little my business as the future of my own child. Did you gentlemen come to any decision at this evening's conference?

CAPTAIN. I had already made my decision, so I merely had to communicate it to the only friend I have in the family. Bertha is going to live in town. She will leave in a fortnight's time.

LAURA. Where, if I may ask, is she going to stay?

CAPTAIN. At Sävberg's—the solicitor's.

LAURA. That Freethinker!

CAPTAIN. According to the law as it now stands, children are brought up in their father's faith.

LAURA. And the mother has no say in the matter?

CAPTAIN. None whatever. She sells her birthright by legal contract and surrenders all her rights. In return the husband supports her and her children.

LAURA. So she has no rights over her own child?

CAPTAIN. None at all. When you have sold something, you don't expect to get it back and keep the money too.

LAURA. But supposing the father and mother were to decide things together . . . ?

CAPTAIN. How would that work out? I want her to live in town; you want her to live at home. The mathematical mean would be for her to stop at the railway station,

midway between home and town. You see? It's a deadlock.

LAURA. Then the lock must be forced. . . . What was Nöjd doing here?

CAPTAIN. That's a professional secret.

LAURA. Which the whole kitchen knows.

CAPTAIN. Then doubtless you know it too.

LAURA. I do.

CAPTAIN. And are ready to sit in judgment?

LAURA. The law does that.

CAPTAIN. The law doesn't say who the child's father is.

LAURA. Well, people know that for themselves.

CAPTAIN. Discerning people say that's what one never can know.

LAURA. How extraordinary! Can't one tell who a child's father is?

CAPTAIN. Apparently not.

LAURA. How perfectly extraordinary! Then how can the father have those rights over the mother's child?

CAPTAIN. He only has them when he takes on the responsibility—or has it forced on him. But of course in marriage there is no doubt about the paternity.

LAURA. No doubt?

CAPTAIN. I should hope not.

LAURA. But supposing the wife has been unfaithful?

CAPTAIN. Well, such a supposition has no bearing on our problem. Is there anything else you want to ask me about?

LAURA. No, nothing.

CAPTAIN. Then I shall go up to my room. Please let me know when the doctor comes. *Closes the bureau and rises.*

LAURA. I will.

CAPTAIN, *going out by the wall-papered door.* As soon as he comes, mind. I don't want to be discourteous, you understand.

Exit.

LAURA. I understand. *She looks at the bank-notes she is holding.*

MOTHER-IN-LAW, *off*. Laura!

LAURA. Yes, Mother?

MOTHER-IN-LAW. Is my tea ready?

LAURA, *at the door to the next room*. It's coming in a moment.

The ORDERLY opens the hall door.

ORDERLY. Dr. Östermark.

Enter DOCTOR. Exit ORDERLY, closing the door.

LAURA, *shaking hands*. How do you do, Dr. Östermark. Let me welcome you to our home. The Captain is out, but he will be back directly.

DOCTOR. I must apologize for calling so late, but I have already had to pay some professional visits.

LAURA. Won't you sit down?

DOCTOR. Thank you.

LAURA. Yes, there is a lot of illness about just now, but I hope all the same that you will find this place suits you. It is so important for people in a lonely country district like this to have a doctor who takes a real interest in his patients. I have heard you so warmly spoken of, Dr. Östermark, I hope we shall be on the best of terms.

DOCTOR. You are too kind, dear lady. I hope, however, for your sake that my visits here will not often be of a professional nature. I take it that the health of your family is, on the whole, good, and that . . .

LAURA. Yes, we have been fortunate enough not to have any serious illnesses, but all the same things are not quite as they should be.

DOCTOR. Indeed?

LAURA. No, I'm afraid not really at all as one would wish.

DOCTOR. Dear, dear, you quite alarm me!

LAURA. In a family there are sometimes things which honour and duty compel one to keep hidden from the world.

DOCTOR. But not from one's doctor.

LAURA. No. That is why it is my painful duty to tell you the whole truth from the start.

DOCTOR. May we not postpone this conversation until I have had the honour of meeting the Captain?

LAURA. No. You must hear what I have to say before you see him.

DOCTOR. Does it concern him then?

LAURA. Yes, him. My poor, dear husband.

DOCTOR. You are making me most uneasy. Whatever your trouble, Madam, you can confide in me.

LAURA, *taking out her handkerchief*. My husband's mind is affected. Now you know, and later on you will be able to judge for yourself.

DOCTOR. You astound me. The Captain's learned treatise on mineralogy, for which I have the greatest admiration, shows a clear and powerful intellect.

LAURA. Does it? I shall be overjoyed if we—his relatives—are mistaken.

DOCTOR. It is possible, of course, that his mind is disturbed in other ways. Tell me . . .

LAURA. That is exactly what we fear. You see, at times he has the most peculiar ideas, which wouldn't matter much for a scientist, if they weren't such a burden on his family. For instance, he has an absolute mania for buying things.

DOCTOR. That is significant. What kind of things?

LAURA. Books. Whole cases of them, which he never reads.

DOCTOR. Well, that a scholar should buy books isn't so alarming.

LAURA. You don't believe what I am telling you?

DOCTOR. I am convinced, Madam, that you believe what you are telling me.

LAURA. Well, then, is it possible for anyone to see in a microscope what's happening on another planet?

DOCTOR. Does he say he can do that?

LAURA. Yes, that's what he says.

DOCTOR. In a microscope?

LAURA. In a microscope. Yes.

DOCTOR. That is significant, if it is so.

LAURA. If it is so! You don't believe me, Doctor. And here have I let you in to the family secret.

DOCTOR. My dear lady, I am honoured by your confidence, but as a physician I must observe and examine before giving an opinion. Has the Captain shown any symptoms of instability, any lack of will power?

LAURA. Has he, indeed! We have been married twenty years, and he has never yet made a decision without going back on it.

DOCTOR. Is he dogmatic?

LAURA. He certainly lays down the law, but as soon as he gets his own way, he loses interest and leaves everything to me.

DOCTOR. That is significant and requires careful consideration. The will, you see, Madam, is the backbone of the mind. If it is injured, the mind falls to pieces.

LAURA. God knows how I have schooled myself to meet his every wish during these long hard years. Oh, if you knew what I have been through with him, if you only knew!

DOCTOR. I am profoundly distressed to learn of your trouble, Madam, and I promise I will do what I can. You have my deepest sympathy and I beg you to rely on me implicitly. But now you have told me this, I am going to ask one thing of you. Don't allow anything to prey on the patient's mind. In a case of instability, ideas can sometimes take hold and grow into an obsession—or even monomania. Do you follow me?

LAURA. . . . You mean don't let him get ideas into his head.

DOCTOR. Precisely. For a sick man can be made to believe anything. He is highly susceptible to suggestion.

LAURA. I see . . . I understand. Yes, indeed. *A bell rings within.* Excuse me. That's my mother ringing. I won't be a moment . . . Oh, here's Adolf!

As LAURA goes out, the CAPTAIN enters by the wall-papered door.

CAPTAIN. Ah, so you have arrived, Doctor! You are very welcome.

DOCTOR. How do you do, Captain. It's a great honour to meet such a distinguished scientist.

CAPTAIN. Oh please! Unfortunately, my military duties don't give me much time for research . . . All the same, I do believe I am now on the brink of a rather exciting discovery.

DOCTOR. Really?

CAPTAIN. You see, I have been subjecting meteoric stones to spectrum analysis, and I have found carbon—an indication of organic life. What do you say to that?

DOCTOR. Can you see that in a microscope?

CAPTAIN. No, in a spectroscope, for heaven's sake!

DOCTOR. Spectroscope! I beg your pardon. Then you will soon be telling us what is happening on Jupiter.

CAPTAIN. Not what is happening, what *has* happened. If only that blasted Paris bookseller would send my books. I really think the whole book-trade must be in league against me. Think of it, for two months I've not had one single answer to my orders, my letters or my abusive telegrams! It's driving me mad. I can't make out what's happened.

DOCTOR. Well, what could it be but ordinary carelessness? You shouldn't let it upset you.

CAPTAIN. Yes, but the devil of it is I shan't be able to get my article finished in time.—I know they're working on the same lines in Berlin . . . However, that's not what we should be talking about now, but about you. If you would care to live here, we can give you a small suite of rooms in that wing. Or would you prefer your predecessor's house?

DOCTOR. Whichever you please.

CAPTAIN. No, whichever *you* please. You have only to say.

DOCTOR. It's for you to decide, Captain.

CAPTAIN. Nothing of the kind. It's for you to say which you prefer. I don't care one way or the other.

DOCTOR. But I really can't . . .

CAPTAIN. For Christ's sake, man, say what you want! I haven't any opinion, any inclination, any choice, any preference at all. Are you such a milksop that you don't know what you want? Make up your mind, or I shall lose my temper.

DOCTOR. If I am to choose, I should like to live here.

CAPTAIN. Good!—Thank you. *Rings.* Oh dear me!—I apologise, Doctor, but nothing irritates me so much as to hear people say they don't care one way or the other.

The NURSE enters.

Ah, it's you, Margaret. Look here, my dear, do you know if the rooms in the wing are ready for the doctor?

NURSE. Yes, Captain, they're ready.

CAPTAIN. Good. Then I won't detain you, Doctor, for you must be tired. Goodnight, and once again—welcome. I look forward to seeing you in the morning.

DOCTOR. Thank you. Goodnight.

CAPTAIN. By the way, I wonder if my wife told you anything about us—if you know at all how the land lies?

DOCTOR. Your good lady did suggest one or two things it might be as well for a newcomer to know. Goodnight, Captain.

The NURSE shows the DOCTOR out and returns.

CAPTAIN. What is it, old girl? Anything the matter?

NURSE. Now listen, Mr. Adolf, dear.

CAPTAIN. Yes, go on, Margaret, talk. You're the only one whose talk doesn't get on my nerves.

NURSE. Then listen, Mr. Adolf. Couldn't you go halfway to meet the mistress in all this bother over the child? Think of a mother . . .

CAPTAIN. Think of a father, Margaret.

NURSE. Now, now, now! A father has many things besides his child, but a mother has nothing but her child.

CAPTAIN. Quite so, my friend. She has only one burden, while I have three and bear hers too. Do you think I'd

have been stuck in the army all my life if I hadn't had her and her child to support?

NURSE. I know, but that wasn't what I wanted to talk about.

CAPTAIN. Quite. What you want is to make out I'm in the wrong.

NURSE. Don't you believe I want what's best for you, Mr. Adolf?

CAPTAIN. I'm sure you do, my dear, but you don't know what is best for me. You see, it's not enough to have given the child life. I want to give her my very soul.

NURSE. Oh, that's beyond me, but I do think you two ought to come to terms.

CAPTAIN. Margaret, you are not my friend.

NURSE. Not your friend! Ah God, what are you saying, Mr. Adolf? Do you think I ever forget you were my baby when you were little?

CAPTAIN. Well, my dear, am I likely to forget it? You have been like a mother to me, and stood by me against all the others. But now that things have come to a head, you're deserting—going over to the enemy.

NURSE. Enemy?

CAPTAIN. Yes, enemy. You know perfectly well how things are here. You've seen it all from beginning to end.

NURSE. Aye, I've seen plenty. But, dear God, why must two people torment the lives out of each other? Two people who are so good and kind to everyone else. The mistress never treats me wrong or . . .

CAPTAIN. Only me. I know. And I tell you, Margaret, if you desert me now, you'll be doing a wicked thing. For a net is closing round me, and that doctor is no friend of mine.

NURSE. Oh, goodness, Mr. Adolf, you believe the worst of everyone! But that's what comes of not having the true faith. That's your trouble.

CAPTAIN. While you and the Baptists have found the one true faith, eh? You're lucky.

NURSE. Aye, luckier than you, Mr. Adolf. Humble your heart

and you will see how happy God will make you in your love for your neighbour.

CAPTAIN. Isn't it strange—as soon as you mention God and love, your voice grows hard and your eyes fill with hate.

No, Margaret, I'm sure you haven't found the true faith.

MARGARET. However proud you are and stuffed with book-learning, that won't get you anywhere when the pinch comes.

CAPTAIN. How arrogantly thou speakest, O humble heart! I'm well aware that learning means nothing to creatures like you.

NURSE. Shame on you! Still, old Margaret loves her great big boy best of all. And when the storm breaks, he'll come back to her, sure enough, like the good child he is.

CAPTAIN. Forgive me, Margaret. You see, you really are the only friend I have here. Help me, for something is going to happen. I don't know what, but I know it's evil, this thing that's on its way. *A scream from within.* What's that? Who's screaming?

BERTHA *runs in.*

BERTHA. Father, Father! Help me! Save me!

CAPTAIN. What is it? My darling, tell me.

BERTHA. Please protect me. I know she'll do something terrible to me.

CAPTAIN. Who? What do you mean? Tell me at once.

BERTHA. Grandmother. But it was my fault. I played a trick on her.

CAPTAIN. Go on.

BERTHA. Yes, but you mustn't tell anyone. Promise you won't.

CAPTAIN. Very well, but what happened?

Exit NURSE.

BERTHA. You see, sometimes in the evening she turns the lamp down and makes me sit at the table holding a pen over a piece of paper. And then she says the spirits write.

CAPTAIN. Well, I'll be damned! And you never told me.

BERTHA. I'm sorry, I didn't dare. Grandmother says spirits

revenge themselves on people who talk about them. And then the pen writes, but I don't know if it's me doing it or not. Sometimes it goes well, but sometimes it doesn't work at all. And when I get tired nothing happens, but I have to make something happen all the same. This evening I thought I was doing rather well, but then Grandmother said it was all out of Stagnelius* and I had been playing a trick on her. And she was simply furious.

CAPTAIN. Do you believe there are spirits?

BERTHA. I don't know.

CAPTAIN. But I know there are not.

BERTHA. Grandmother says you don't understand, and that you have worse things that can see into other planets.

CAPTAIN. She says that, does she? And what else does she say?

BERTHA. That you can't work miracles.

CAPTAIN. I never said I could. You know what meteorites are, don't you?—stones that fall from other heavenly bodies. Well, I examine these and see if they contain the same elements as the earth. That's all I do.

BERTHA. Grandmother says there are things she can see and you can't.

CAPTAIN. My dear, she is lying.

BERTHA. Grandmother doesn't lie.

CAPTAIN. How do you know?

BERTHA. Then Mother does too.

CAPTAIN. Hm!

BERTHA. If you say Mother is a liar, I'll never believe a word you say again.

CAPTAIN. I didn't say that, so now you must believe me. Listen. Your happiness, your whole future depends on your leaving home. Will you do this? Will you go and live in town and learn something useful?

BERTHA. Oh yes, I'd love to live in town—anywhere away from here! It's always so miserable in there, as gloomy

*Erik Johan Stagnelius, Swedish poet and dramatist. (1793–1823.)

as a winter night. But when you come home, Father, it's like a spring morning when they take the double windows down.

CAPTAIN. My darling, my beloved child!

BERTHA. But, Father, listen, you must be kind to Mother. She often cries.

CAPTAIN. Hm! . . . So you would like to live in town?

BERTHA. Oh yes!

CAPTAIN. But supposing your mother doesn't agree?

BERTHA. She must.

CAPTAIN. But supposing she doesn't?

BERTHA. Then I don't know what will happen. But she must, she must!

CAPTAIN. Will you ask her?

BERTHA. No, you must ask her—very nicely. She wouldn't pay any attention to me.

CAPTAIN. Hm! . . . Well now, if you want this and I want it and she doesn't want it, what are we to do then?

BERTHA. Oh, then the fuss will begin all over again! Why can't you both . . .

Enter LAURA.

LAURA. Ah, so you're here, Bertha! Well now, Adolf, as the question of her future is still to be decided, let's hear what she has to say herself.

CAPTAIN. The child can hardly have anything constructive to say about the development of young girls, but you and I ought to be able to sum up the pros and cons. We've watched a good number grow up.

LAURA. But as we don't agree, Bertha can give the casting vote.

CAPTAIN. No. I won't allow anyone to interfere with my rights—neither woman nor child. Bertha, you had better leave us.

Exit BERTHA.

LAURA. You were afraid to hear her opinion because you knew she would agree with me.

CAPTAIN. I know she wants to leave home, but I also know you have the power to make her change her mind.

LAURA. Oh, have I much power?

CAPTAIN. Yes, you have a fiendish power of getting your own way, like all people who are unscrupulous about the means they employ. How, for instance, did you get rid of Dr. Norling? And how did you get hold of the new doctor?

LAURA. Yes, how did I?

CAPTAIN. You ran the old doctor down until he had to leave, and then you got your brother to canvass for this one.

LAURA. Well, that was quite simple and perfectly legal. Then is Bertha to leave home?

CAPTAIN. Yes, in a fortnight's time.

LAURA. I warn you I shall do my best to prevent it.

CAPTAIN. You can't.

LAURA. Can't I? Do you expect me to give up my child to be taught by wicked people that all she has learnt from her mother is nonsense? So that I would be despised by my own daughter for the rest of my life.

CAPTAIN. Do you expect me to allow ignorant and bumptious women to teach my daughter that her father is a charlatan?

LAURA. That shouldn't matter so much to you—now.

CAPTAIN. What on earth do you mean?

LAURA. Well, the mother's closer to the child, since the discovery that no one can tell who the father is.

CAPTAIN. What's that got to do with us?

LAURA. You don't know if you are Bertha's father.

CAPTAIN. Don't know?

LAURA. How can you know what nobody knows?

CAPTAIN. Are you joking?

LAURA. No, I'm simply applying your own theory. How do you know I haven't been unfaithful to you?

CAPTAIN. I can believe a good deal of you, but not that. And if it were so, you wouldn't talk about it.

LAURA. Supposing I were prepared for anything, for being turned out and ostracised, anything to keep my child under my own control. Supposing I am telling the truth now when I say: Bertha is my child but not yours. Supposing . . .

CAPTAIN. Stop it!

LAURA. Just supposing . . . then your power would be over.

CAPTAIN. Not till you had proved I wasn't the father.

LAURA. That wouldn't be difficult. Do you want me to?

CAPTAIN. Stop.

LAURA. I should only have to give the name of the real father—with particulars of place and time, of course. For that matter—when was Bertha born? In the third year of our marriage . . .

CAPTAIN. Will you stop it now, or . . .

LAURA. Or what? Very well, let's stop. All the same, I should think twice before you decide anything. And, above all, don't make yourself ridiculous.

CAPTAIN. I find the whole thing tragic.

LAURA. Which makes you still more ridiculous.

CAPTAIN. But not you?

LAURA. No, we're in such a strong position.

CAPTAIN. That's why we can't fight you.

LAURA. Why try to fight a superior enemy?

CAPTAIN. Superior?

LAURA. Yes. It's odd, but I have never been able to look at a man without feeling myself his superior.

CAPTAIN. One day you may meet your master—and you'll never forget it.

LAURA. That will be fascinating.

Enter NURSE.

NURSE. Supper's ready. Come along now, please.

LAURA. Yes, of course. *The* CAPTAIN *lingers and sits down in an armchair near the sofa.* Aren't you coming?

CAPTAIN. No, thank you, I don't want any supper.

LAURA. Why not? Has anything upset you?

CAPTAIN. No, but I'm not hungry.

LAURA. Do come, or they'll start asking questions, and that's not necessary. Do be sensible. You won't? Well, stay where you are then!

Exit.

NURSE. Mr. Adolf, whatever is it now?

CAPTAIN. I don't know yet. Tell me—why do you women treat a grown man as if he were a child?

NURSE. Well, goodness me, you're all some woman's child, aren't you?—All you men, big or small . . .

CAPTAIN. While no woman is born of man, you mean. True. But I must be Bertha's father. You believe that, Margaret, don't you? Don't you?

NURSE. Lord, what a silly boy you are! Of course you're your own child's father. Come along and eat now. Don't sit here sulking. There now, come along, do.

CAPTAIN, *rising*. Get out, woman! To hell with the hags! *At the hall door.* Svärd! Svärd!

ORDERLY, *entering*. Yes, sir?

CAPTAIN. Have the small sleigh got ready at once.

Exit ORDERLY.

NURSE. Now listen, Captain . . .

CAPTAIN. Get out, woman! Get out, I say!

NURSE. God preserve us, whatever's going to happen now?

CAPTAIN, *putting on his cap*. Don't expect me home before midnight.

Exit.

NURSE. Lord Jesus! What is going to happen?

ACT TWO

The same as before, late that night. The DOCTOR and LAURA are sitting talking.

DOCTOR. My conversation with him has led me to the conclusion that your suspicions are by no means proved. To begin with, you were mistaken in saying that he had made these important astronomical discoveries by using a microscope. Now I have learnt that it was a spectroscope. Not only is there no sign in this of mental derangement—the contrary, he has rendered a great service to science.

LAURA. But I never said that.

DOCTOR. I made a memorandum of our conversation, Madam, and I remember questioning you on this vital point, because I thought I must have misheard. One must be scrupulously accurate when bringing charges which might lead to a man being certified.

LAURA. Certified?

DOCTOR. I presume you are aware that if a person is certified insane, he loses both his civil and his family rights.

LAURA. No, I didn't know that.

DOCTOR. There is one other point I should like to be clear about. He spoke of not getting any replies from his booksellers. May I ask whether—from the best of intentions, of course—you have been intercepting his correspondence?

LAURA. Yes, I have. It is my duty to protect the family. I couldn't let him ruin us all and do nothing about it.

DOCTOR. Excuse me, I do not think you understand the possible consequences of your action. If he realises you have been interfering with his affairs behind his back, his suspicions will be aroused and might even develop into a persecution mania. Particularly, as by thwarting his will, you have already driven him to the end of his tether.

Surely you know how enraging it is to have your will opposed and your dearest wishes frustrated.

LAURA. Do I not!

DOCTOR. Then think what this means to him.

LAURA, *rising*. It's midnight and he's not back yet. Now we can expect the worst.

DOCTOR. Tell me what happened this evening after I saw him. I must know everything.

LAURA. He talked in the wildest way and said the most fantastic things. Can you believe it—he even suggested he wasn't the father of his own child!

DOCTOR. How extraordinary! What can have put that into his head?

LAURA. Goodness knows, unless it was an interview he had with one of his men about maintenance for a child. When I took the girl's part, he got very excited and said no one could ever tell who a child's father was. God knows I did everything I could to calm him, but I don't believe anything can help him now. *Weeps*.

DOCTOR. This can't go on. Something must be done—without rousing his suspicions. Tell me, has he had any such delusions before?

LAURA. As a matter of fact, he was much the same six years ago, and then he actually admitted—in a letter to his doctor—that he feared for his reason.

DOCTOR. I see, I see. A deep-seated trouble. But . . . er . . . the sanctity of family life . . . and so forth . . . I mustn't probe too far . . . must keep to the surface. Unfortunately what is done cannot be undone, yet the remedy should have been applied to what is done . . . Where do you think he is now?

LAURA. I can't imagine. He has such wild notions these days . . .

DOCTOR. Would you like me to stay until he comes in? I could explain my presence by saying—well, that your mother is ill and I came to see her.

LAURA. That's a very good idea. Please stand by us, Doctor.

If you only knew how worried I am! . . . But wouldn't it be better to tell him straight out what you think of his condition?

DOCTOR. We never do that with mental patients, unless they bring the subject up themselves, and rarely even then. Everything depends on how the case develops. But we had better not stay here. May I go into some other room, to make it more convincing?

LAURA. Yes, that will be best, and Margaret can come in here. She always waits up for him. *At the door.* Margaret! Margaret! She is the only one who can manage him.

NURSE, *entering.* Did you call, Madam? Is Master back?

LAURA. No, but you are to wait here for him. And when he comes, tell him that my mother is unwell and the doctor is with her.

NURSE. Aye, aye. Leave all that to me.

LAURA, *opening the door.* If you will be so good as to come in here, Doctor . . .

DOCTOR. Thank you.

They go out. The NURSE sits at the table, puts on her glasses and picks up her hymn-book.

NURSE. Ah me! Ah me! *Reads softly:*

*A sorrowful and grievous thing
Is life, so swiftly passing by,
Death shadows with his angel's wing
The whole earth, and this his cry:
'Tis Vanity, all Vanity!*

Ah me! Ah me!

*All that on earth has life and breath,
Falls low before his awful might,
Sorrow alone is spared by Death,
Upon the yawning grave to write:
'Tis Vanity, all Vanity!*

Ah me! Ah me!

During the last lines, BERTHA enters, carrying a tray with a coffee-pot and a piece of embroidery.

BERTHA, *softly*. Margaret, may I sit in here with you? It's so dismal up there.

NURSE. Saints alive! Bertha, are you still up?

BERTHA. Well, you see, I simply must get on with Father's Christmas present. And here's something nice for you.

NURSE. But, sweetheart, this won't do. You have to be up bright and early, and it's past twelve now.

BERTHA. Oh, that doesn't matter! I daren't stay up there all alone. I'm sure there are ghosts.

NURSE. There now! What did I tell you? Mark my words, there's no good fairy in this house. What was it? Did you hear something, Bertha?

BERTHA. Oh Margaret, someone was singing in the attic!

NURSE. In the attic? At this time of night?

BERTHA. Yes. It was such a sad song; the saddest I ever heard. And it seemed to come from the attic—you know, the one on the left where the cradle is.

NURSE. Oh dear, dear, dear! And such a fearful night too. I'm sure the chimneys will blow down. "Alas, what is this earthly life? Sorrow, trouble, grief and strife. Even when it seems most fair, Nought but tribulation there."—Ah, dear child, God grant us a happy Christmas!

BERTHA. Margaret, is it true Father's ill?

NURSE. Aye, that's true enough.

BERTHA. Then I don't expect we shall have a Christmas party. But why isn't he in bed if he's ill?

NURSE. Well, dearie, staying in bed doesn't help his kind of illness. Hush! I hear someone in the porch. Go to bed now—take the tray with you, or the Master will be cross.

BERTHA, *going out with the tray*. Goodnight, Margaret.

NURSE. Goodnight, love. God bless you.

Enter the CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN, *taking off his overcoat*. Are you still up? Go to bed.

NURSE. Oh, I was only bidding till . . .

The CAPTAIN *lights a candle, opens the bureau, sits down at it and takes letters and newspapers from his pocket.*

Mr. Adolf . . .

CAPTAIN. What is it?

NURSE. The old mistress is ill. Doctor's here.

CAPTAIN. Anything serious?

NURSE. No, I don't think so. Just a chill.

CAPTAIN, *rising*. Who was the father of your child, Margaret?

NURSE. I've told you often enough, it was that heedless fellow Johansson.

CAPTAIN. Are you sure it was he?

NURSE. Don't talk so silly. Of course I'm sure, seeing he was the only one.

CAPTAIN. Yes, but was he sure he was the only one? No, he couldn't be sure, only you could be. See? That's the difference.

NURSE. I don't see any difference.

CAPTAIN. No, you don't see it, but it's there all the same.

Turns the pages of the photograph album on the table.

Do you think Bertha's like me?

NURSE. You're as like as two peas in a pod.

CAPTAIN. Did Johansson admit he was the father?

NURSE. Well, he was forced to.

CAPTAIN. How dreadful—Here's the doctor.

Enter DOCTOR.

Good evening, Doctor. How is my mother-in-law?

DOCTOR. Oh, it's nothing much. Just a slight sprain of the left ankle.

CAPTAIN. I thought Margaret said it was a chill. There appear to be different diagnoses of the case. Margaret, go to bed.

Exit NURSE. Pause.

Won't you sit down, Dr. Östermark?

DOCTOR, *sitting*. Thank you.

CAPTAIN. Is it true that if you cross a mare with a zebra you get striped foals?

DOCTOR, *astonished*. Perfectly true.

CAPTAIN. And that if breeding is then continued with a stallion, the foals may still be striped?

DOCTOR. That is also true.

CAPTAIN. So, in certain circumstances, a stallion can sire striped foals, and vice versa.

DOCTOR. That would appear to be the case.

CAPTAIN. So the offspring's resemblance to the father proves nothing.

DOCTOR. Oh . . .

CAPTAIN. You're a widower, aren't you? Any children?

DOCTOR. Ye-es.

CAPTAIN. Didn't you sometimes feel rather ridiculous as a father? I myself don't know anything more ludicrous than the sight of a man holding his child's hand in the street, or hearing a father say: "My child." "My wife's child," he ought to say. Didn't you ever see what a false position you were in? Weren't you ever haunted by doubts—I won't say suspicions, as a gentleman I assume your wife was above suspicion?

DOCTOR. No, I certainly wasn't. There it is, Captain, a man—as I think Goethe says—must take his children on trust.

CAPTAIN. Trust, where a woman's concerned? A bit of a risk.

DOCTOR. Ah, but there are many kinds of women!

CAPTAIN. The latest research shows there is only one kind . . . when I was a young fellow and not, if I may say so, a bad specimen, I had two little experiences which afterwards gave me to think. The first was on a steamer. I was in the saloon with some friends, and the young stewardess told us—with tears running down her cheeks—how her sweetheart had been drowned at sea. We consoled with her and I ordered champagne. After the second glass I touched her foot, after the fourth her knee, and before morning I had consoled her.

DOCTOR. One swallow doesn't make a summer.

CAPTAIN. My second experience was a summer swallow. I was staying at Lysekil and got to know a young married

woman who was there with her children—her husband was in town. She was religious and high-minded, kept preaching at me and was—or so I thought—the soul of virtue. I lent her a book or two which, strange to relate, she returned. Three months later, I found her card in one of those books with a pretty outspoken declaration of love. It was innocent—as innocent, that's to say, as such a declaration from a married woman could be—to a stranger who had never made her any advances. Moral: don't believe in anyone too much.

DOCTOR. Don't believe too little either.

CAPTAIN. The happy mean, eh? But you see, Doctor, that woman was so unaware of her motives she actually told her husband of her infatuation for me. That's where the danger lies, in the fact that women are unconscious of their instinctive wickedness. An extenuating circumstance, perhaps, but that can only mitigate the judgment, not revoke it.

DOCTOR. You have a morbid turn of mind, Captain. You should be on your guard against this.

CAPTAIN. There's nothing morbid about it. Look here. All steam-boilers explode when the pressure-gauge reaches the limit, but the limit isn't the same for all boilers. Got that? After all, you're here to observe me. Now if I were not a man I could sniff and snivel and explain the case to you, with all its past history. But as unfortunately I am a man, like the ancient Roman I must cross my arms upon my breast and hold my breath until I die. Goodnight.

DOCTOR. If you are ill, Captain, there's no reflection on your manhood in telling me about it. Indeed, it is essential for me to hear both sides of the case.

CAPTAIN. I thought you were quite satisfied with one side.

DOCTOR. You're wrong. And I should like you to know, Captain, that when I heard that Mrs. Alving* blackening her late husband's memory, I thought what a damned shame it was that the fellow should be dead.

CAPTAIN. Do you think if he'd been alive he'd have said any-

*Reference to Mrs. Alving in Ibsen's GHOSTS.

thing? Do you think if any husband rose from the dead he'd be believed? Goodnight, Doctor. Look how calm I am. It's quite safe for you to go to bed.

DOCTOR. Then I will bid you goodnight. I wash my hands of the whole business.

CAPTAIN. So we're enemies?

DOCTOR. By no means. It's just a pity we can't be friends. Goodnight.

The CAPTAIN shows the DOCTOR out by the hall door, then crosses to the other and slightly opens it.

CAPTAIN. Come in and let's talk. I knew you were eaves-dropping.

Enter LAURA, embarrassed. The CAPTAIN sits at the bureau.

It's very late, but we'd better have things out now. Sit down. *She sits. Pause.* This evening it was I who went to the post office and fetched the mail, and from my letters it is clear to me that you have been intercepting my correspondence—both in and out. The result of this has been a loss of time which has pretty well shattered the expectations I had for my work.

LAURA. I acted from the best of intentions. You were neglecting your military duties for this other work.

CAPTAIN. Scarcely the best of intentions. You knew very well that one day I should win more distinction in this field than in the Army, but what you wanted was to stop me winning laurels of any kind, because this would stress your own inferiority. Now, for a change, I have intercepted letters addressed to you.

LAURA. How chivalrous!

CAPTAIN. In keeping with the high opinion you have of me. From these letters it appears that for a long time now you've been setting my old friends against me, by spreading rumours about my mental condition. So successful have your efforts been that now scarcely one person from Colonel to kitchen-maid believes I am sane. The actual facts about my condition are these. My reason is, as you know, unaffected, and I am able to discharge my duties

both as soldier and father. My emotions are still pretty well under control, but only so long as my will-power remains intact. And you have so gnawed and gnawed at my will that at any moment it may slip its cogs, and then the whole bag of tricks will go to pieces. I won't appeal to your feelings, because you haven't any—that is your strength. I appeal to your own interests.

LAURA. Go on.

CAPTAIN. By behaving in this way you have made me so full of suspicion that my judgment is fogged and my mind is beginning to stray. This means that the insanity you have been waiting for is on its way and may come at any moment. The question you now have to decide is whether it is more to your advantage for me to be well or ill. Consider. If I go to pieces, I shall have to leave the Service, and where will you be then? If I die, you get my life-insurance. But if I take my own life, you get nothing. It is therefore to your advantage that I should live my life out.

LAURA. Is this a trap?

CAPTAIN. Certainly. You can avoid it or stick your head in it.

LAURA. You say you'd kill yourself, but you never would.

CAPTAIN. Are you so sure? Do you think a man can go on living when he has nothing and nobody to live for?

LAURA. Then you give in?

CAPTAIN. No, I offer peace.

LAURA. On what terms?

CAPTAIN. That I may keep my reason. Free me from doubt and I will give up the fight.

LAURA. Doubt about what?

CAPTAIN. Bertha's parentage.

LAURA. Are there doubts about that?

CAPTAIN. Yes, for me there are, and it was you who roused them.

LAURA. I?

CAPTAIN. Yes. You dropped them like henbane in my ear, and

circumstances encouraged them to grow. Free me from uncertainty. Tell me straight out it is so, and I will forgive you in advance.

LAURA. I can scarcely admit to guilt that isn't mine.

CAPTAIN. What can it matter to you, when you know I won't reveal it? Do you think any man would proclaim his shame from the housetops?

LAURA. If I say it isn't so, you still won't be certain, but if I say it is, you will believe me. You must want it to be true.

CAPTAIN. Strangely enough I do. Perhaps because the first supposition can't be proved, while the second can.

LAURA. Have you any grounds for suspicion?

CAPTAIN. Yes and no.

LAURA. I believe you want to make out I'm guilty, so you can get rid of me and have absolute control of the child. But you won't catch me in any such trap.

CAPTAIN. Do you think, if I were convinced of your guilt, I should want to take on another man's child?

LAURA. No, I'm sure you wouldn't. So evidently you were lying when you said you'd forgive me in advance.

CAPTAIN, *rising*. Laura, save me and my reason! You can't have understood what I was saying. If the child's not mine, I have no rights over her, nor do I want any. And that's how you'd like it, isn't it? But that's not all. You want complete power over the child, don't you, with me still there to support you both?

LAURA. Power, that's it. What's this whole life and death struggle for if not power?

CAPTAIN. For me, as I don't believe in a life to come, this child was my life after death, my conception of immortality—the only one, perhaps, that's valid. If you take her away, you cut my life short.

LAURA. Why didn't we separate sooner?

CAPTAIN. Because the child bound us together, but the bond became a chain. How was that? I never thought of this before, but now memories return, accusing, perhaps condemning. After two years of marriage we were still child-

less—you know best why. Then I was ill and almost died. One day, between bouts of fever, I heard voices in the next room. You and the lawyer were discussing the property I still owned then. He was explaining that as there were no children, you could not inherit, and he asked if by any chance you were pregnant. I did not hear your reply. I recovered and we had a child. Who is the father?

LAURA. You are.

CAPTAIN. No, I am not. There's a crime buried here that's beginning to stink. And what a fiendish crime! You women, who were so tender-hearted about freeing black slaves, kept the white ones. I have slaved for you, your child, your mother, your servants. I have sacrificed career and promotion. Tortured, beaten, sleepless—my hair has gone grey through the agony of mind you have inflicted on me. All this I have suffered in order that you might enjoy a care-free life and, when you were old, relive it in your child. This is the lowest form of theft, the cruellest slavery. I have had seventeen years of penal servitude—and I was innocent. How can you make up to me for this?

LAURA. Now you really are mad.

CAPTAIN, *sitting*. So you hope. I have watched you trying to conceal your crime, but because I didn't understand I pitied you. I've soothed your conscience, thinking I was chasing away some nightmare. I've heard you crying out in your sleep without giving your words a second thought. But now . . . now! The other night—Bertha's birthday—comes back to me. I was still up in the early hours, reading, and you suddenly screamed as if someone were trying to strangle you. "Don't! Don't!" you cried. I knocked on the wall—I didn't want to hear any more. For a long time I have had vague suspicions. I did not want them confirmed. This is what I have suffered for you. What will you do for me?

LAURA. What can I do? Swear before God and all that I hold sacred that you are Bertha's father?

CAPTAIN. What good would that do? You have already said

that a mother can and ought to commit any crime for her child. I implore you by the memory of the past, I implore you as a wounded man begs to be put out of his misery, tell me the truth. Can't you see I'm helpless as a child? Can't you hear me crying to my mother that I'm hurt? Forget I'm a man, a soldier whose word men—and even beasts—obey. I am nothing but a sick creature in need of pity. I renounce every vestige of power and only beg for mercy on my life.

LAURA, *laying her hand on his forehead.* What? You, a man, in tears?

CAPTAIN. Yes, a man in tears. Has not a man eyes? Has not a man hands, limbs, senses, opinions, passions? Is he not nourished by the same food as a woman, wounded by the same weapons, warmed and chilled by the same winter and summer? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? Why should a man suffer in silence or a soldier hide his tears? Because it's not manly? Why isn't it manly?

LAURA. Weep, then, my child, and you shall have your mother again. Remember, it was as your second mother that I came into your life. You were big and strong, yet not fully a man. You were a giant child who had come into the world too soon, or perhaps an unwanted child.

CAPTAIN. That's true. My father and mother had me against their will, and therefore I was born without a will. That is why, when you and I became one, I felt I was completing myself—and that is why you dominated. I—in the army the one to command—became at home the one to obey. I grew up at your side, looked up to you as a superior being and listened to you as if I were your foolish little boy.

LAURA. Yes, that's how it was, and I loved you as if you were my little boy. But didn't you see how, when your feelings changed and you came to me as a lover, I was ashamed? The joy I felt in your embraces was followed by such a sense of guilt my very blood seemed tainted. The mother became the mistress—horrible!

CAPTAIN. I saw, but I didn't understand. I thought you despised my lack of virility, so I tried to win you as a woman by proving myself as a man.

LAURA. That was your mistake. The mother was your friend, you see, but the woman was your enemy. Sexual love is conflict. And don't imagine I gave myself. I didn't give. I only took what I meant to take. Yet you did dominate me . . . I felt it and wanted you to feel it.

CAPTAIN. You always dominated me. You could hypnotise me when I was wide awake, so that I neither saw nor heard, but simply obeyed. You could give me a raw potato and make me think it was a peach; you could make me take your ridiculous ideas for flashes of genius. You could corrupt me—yes, make me do the shabbiest things. You never had any real intelligence, yet, instead of being guided by me, you would take the reins into your own hands. And when at last I woke to the realisation that I had lost my integrity, I wanted to blot out my humiliation by some heroic action—some feat, some discovery—even by committing *hara-kiri*. I wanted to go to war, but I couldn't. It was then that I gave all my energies to science. And now—now when I should be stretching out my hand to gather the fruit, you chop off my arm. I'm robbed of my laurels; I'm finished. A man cannot live without repute.

LAURA. Can a woman?

CAPTAIN. Yes—she has her children, but he has not . . . Yet you and I and everyone else went on living, unconscious as children, full of fancies and ideals and illusions, until we woke up. Right—but we woke topsy-turvy, and what's more, we'd been woken by someone who was talking in his own sleep. When women are old and stop being women, they grow beards on their chins. What do men grow, I wonder, when they are old and stop being men? In this false dawn, the birds that crowed weren't cocks, they were capons, and the hens that answered their call were sexless, too. So when the sun should have risen for us, we found ourselves back among the ruins in the full

moonlight, just as in the good old times. Our light morning sleep had only been troubled by fantastic dreams—there had been no awakening.

LAURA. You should have been a writer, you know.

CAPTAIN. Perhaps.

LAURA. But I'm sleepy now, so if you have any more fantasies, keep them till to-morrow.

CAPTAIN. Just one thing more—a fact. Do you hate me?

LAURA. Sometimes—as a man.

CAPTAIN. It's like race-hatred. If it's true we are descended from the ape, it must have been from two different species. There's no likeness between us, is there?

LAURA. What are you getting at?

CAPTAIN. In this fight, one of us must go under.

LAURA. Which?

CAPTAIN. The weaker naturally.

LAURA. Then is the stronger in the right?

CAPTAIN. Bound to be as he has the power.

LAURA. Then I am in the right.

CAPTAIN. Why, what power have you?

LAURA. All I need. And it will be legal power to-morrow when I've put you under restraint.

CAPTAIN. Under restraint?

LAURA. Yes. Then I shall decide my child's future myself out of reach of your fantasies.

CAPTAIN. Who will pay for her if I'm not there?

LAURA. Your pension.

CAPTAIN, *moving towards her menacingly*. How can you have me put under restraint?

LAURA, *producing a letter*. By means of this letter, an attested copy of which is already in the hands of the authorities.

CAPTAIN. What letter?

LAURA, *retreating*. Your own. The one in which you told the doctor you were mad. *He stares at her in silence*. Now you have fulfilled the unfortunately necessary functions of

father and bread-winner. You are no longer needed, and you must go. You must go, now that you realise my wits are as strong as my will—you won't want to stay and acknowledge my superiority.

The CAPTAIN goes to the table, picks up the lighted lamp and throws it at LAURA, who escapes backward through the door.

ACT THREE

The same. The following evening. A new lamp, lighted, is on the table. The wall-papered door is barricaded with a chair. From the room above comes the sound of pacing footsteps. The NURSE stands listening, troubled. Enter LAURA from within.

LAURA. Did he give you the keys?

NURSE. Give? No, God help us, I took them from the coat Nöjd had out to brush.

LAURA. Then it's Nöjd who's on duty?

NURSE. Aye, it's Nöjd.

LAURA. Give me the keys.

NURSE. Here you are, but it's no better than stealing. Hark at him up there! To and fro, to and fro.

LAURA. Are you sure the door's safely bolted?

NURSE. It's bolted safe enough. *Weeps.*

LAURA, *opening the bureau and sitting down at it.* Pull yourself together, Margaret. The only way we can protect ourselves is by keeping calm. *A knock at the hall door.* See who that is.

NURSE, *opening door.* It's Nöjd.

LAURA. Tell him to come in.

NÖJD, *entering.* Despatch from the Colonel.

LAURA. Give it to me. *Reads.* I see . . . Nöjd, have you removed the cartridges from all the guns and pouches?

NÖJD. Yes, Ma'am, just as you said.

LAURA. Wait outside while I write to the Colonel.

Exit NÖJD. LAURA writes. Sound of sawing above.

NURSE. Listen, Madam. Whatever is he doing now?

LAURA. Do be quiet. I'm writing.

NURSE, *muttering*. Lord have mercy on us! What will be the end of all this?

LAURA, *holding out the note*. Here you are. Give it to Nöjd. And, remember, my mother's to know nothing of all this.

Exit NURSE with note. LAURA opens the bureau drawers and takes out papers. Enter PASTOR.

PASTOR. My dear Laura! As you probably gathered, I have been out all day and only just got back. I hear you've been having a terrible time.

LAURA. Yes, brother, I've never been through such a night and day in all my life!

PASTOR. Well, I see you're looking none the worse for it.

LAURA. No, thank heaven, I wasn't hurt. But just think what might have happened!

PASTOR. Tell me all about it. I've only heard rumours. How did it begin?

LAURA. It began by him raving about not being Bertha's father, and ended by him throwing the lighted lamp in my face.

PASTOR. But this is appalling. He must be quite out of his mind. What in heaven's name are we to do?

LAURA. We must try to prevent further violence. The doctor has sent to the hospital for a strait-jacket. I have just written a note to the Colonel, and now I'm trying to get some idea of the state of our affairs, which Adolf has so shockingly mismanaged. *Opens another drawer.*

PASTOR. It's a miserable business altogether, but I always feared something of the kind might happen. When fire and water meet, there's bound to be an explosion. *Looks in drawer.* Whatever's all this?

LAURA. Look! This is where he's kept everything hidden.

PASTOR. Good heavens! Here's your old doll! And there's your christening cap . . . and Bertha's rattle . . . and your letters . . . and that locket . . . *Wipes his eyes.* He must have loved you very dearly, Laura. I never kept this kind of thing.

LAURA. I believe he did love me once, but time changes everything.

PASTOR. What's this imposing document? *Examines it.* The purchase of a grave! Well, better a grave than the asylum! Laura, be frank with me. Aren't you at all to blame?

LAURA. How can I be to blame because someone goes out of his mind?

PASTOR. We—ell! I will say no more. After all, blood's thicker than water.

LAURA. Meaning what, if I may ask?

PASTOR, *gazing at her.* Oh come now!

LAURA. What?

PASTOR. Come, come! You can scarcely deny that it would suit you down to the ground to have complete control of your daughter.

LAURA. I don't understand.

PASTOR. I can't help admiring you.

LAURA. Really?

PASTOR. And as for me—I shall be appointed guardian to that Freethinker whom, as you know, I always regarded as a tare among our wheat.

LAURA *gives a quick laugh which she suppresses.*

LAURA. You dare say that to me, his wife?

PASTOR. How strong-willed you are, Laura, how amazingly strong-willed! Like a fox in a trap that would gnaw off its own leg rather than be caught. Like a master-thief working alone, without even a conscience for accomplice. Look in the mirror! You daren't.

LAURA. I never use a mirror.

PASTOR. No. You daren't look at yourself. Let me see your hand. Not one tell-tale spot of blood, not a trace of that

subtle poison. A little innocent murder that the law cannot touch. An unconscious crime. Unconscious? A stroke of genius that. Listen to him up there! Take care, Laura! If that man gets loose, he will saw you in pieces too.

LAURA. You must have a bad conscience to talk like that. Pin the guilt on me if you can.

PASTOR. I can't.

LAURA. You see? You can't, and so—I am innocent. And now, you look after your charge and I'll take care of mine.

Enter DOCTOR.

Ah, here is the Doctor! *Rises.* I'm so glad to see you, Doctor. I know I can count on you to help me, although I'm afraid not much can be done now. You hear him up there. Are you convinced at last?

DOCTOR. I am convinced there has been an act of violence. But the question is—should that act of violence be regarded as an outbreak of temper or insanity?

PASTOR. But apart from this actual outbreak, you must admit that he suffers from fixed ideas.

DOCTOR. I have a notion, Pastor, that *your* ideas are even more fixed.

PASTOR. My firmly rooted convictions of spiritual . . .

DOCTOR. Convictions apart, it rests with you, Madam, to decide if your husband is to be fined or imprisoned or sent to the asylum. How do you regard his conduct?

LAURA. I can't answer that now.

DOCTOR. Oh? Have you no—er—firmly rooted convictions of what would be best for the family? And you, Pastor?

PASTOR. There's bound to be a scandal either way. It's not easy to give an opinion.

LAURA. But if he were only fined for violence he could be violent again.

DOCTOR. And if he were sent to prison he would soon be out again. So it seems best for all parties that he should be treated as insane. Where is the nurse?

LAURA. Why?

DOCTOR. She must put the strait-jacket on the patient. Not at once, but after I have had a talk with him—and not then until I give the order. I have the—er—garment outside. *Goes out to hall and returns with a large parcel.* Kindly call the nurse.

LAURA *rings.* *The DOCTOR begins to unpack the strait-jacket.*

PASTOR. Dreadful! Dreadful!

Enter NURSE.

DOCTOR. Ah, Nurse! Now please pay attention. You see this jacket. When I give you the word I want you to slip it on the Captain from behind. So as to prevent any further violence, you understand. Now it has, you see, unusually long sleeves. That is to restrict his movements. These sleeves must be tied together behind his back. And now here are two straps with buckles, which afterwards you must fasten to the arm of a chair—or to whatever's easiest. Can you do this, do you think?

NURSE. No, Doctor, I can't. No, not that.

LAURA. Why not do it yourself, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Because the patient distrusts me. You, Madam, are the proper person, but I'm afraid he doesn't trust you either. LAURA *grimaces.* Perhaps you, Pastor . . .

PASTOR. I must beg to decline.

Enter NÖJD.

LAURA. Did you deliver my note?

NÖJD. Yes, Madam.

DOCTOR. Oh, it's you, Nöjd! You know the state of things here, don't you? You know the Captain has had a mental breakdown. You must help us look after the patient.

NÖJD. If there's aught I can do for Captain, he knows I'll do it.

DOCTOR. You are to put this jacket on him.

NURSE. He's not to touch him. Nöjd shan't hurt him. I'd rather do it myself, gently, gently. But Nöjd can wait outside and help me if need be—yes, that's what he'd best do. *A pounding on the paper-covered door.*

DOCTOR. Here he is! *To* NURSE. Put the jacket on that chair under your shawl. And now go away, all of you, while the Pastor and I talk to him. That door won't hold long. Hurry!

NURSE, *going out*. Lord Jesus, help us!

LAURA *shuts the bureau and follows the* NURSE. NÖJD *goes out to the hall. The paper-covered door bursts open, the lock broken and the chair hurled to the floor. The* CAPTAIN *comes out, carrying a pile of books.*

CAPTAIN, *putting the books on the table*. Here it all is. You can read it in every one of these volumes. So I wasn't mad after all. *Picks one up*. Here it is in the Odyssey, Book I, page 6, line 215 in the Uppsala translation. Telemachus speaking to Athene: "My mother says I am Odysseus' son; but for myself I cannot tell. It's a wise child that knows its own father."* And that's the suspicion Telemachus has about Penelope, the most virtuous of women. Fine state of affairs, eh? *Takes up another book*. And here we have the Prophet Ezekiel: "The fool saith, Lo, here is my father; but who can tell whose loins have engendered him?" That's clear enough. *Picks up another*. And what's this? A history of Russian literature by Merzlyakov. Alexander Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet, was mortally wounded—but more by the rumours of his wife's unfaithfulness than by the bullet he received in his breast at the duel. On his deathbed he swore she was innocent. Jack-ass! How could he swear any such thing? I *do* read my books, you see! Hullo, Jonas, are you here? And the Doctor, of course. Did I ever tell you what I said to the English lady who was deploring the habit Irishmen have of throwing lighted lamps in their wives' faces? "God, what women!" I said. "Women?" she stammered. "Of course," I replied. "When things get to such a pass that a man who has loved, has worshipped a woman, picks up a lighted lamp and flings it in her face, then you may be sure . . ."

PASTOR. Sure of what?

*English translation E. V. Rieu. Penguin Classics.

CAPTAIN. Nothing. You can never be sure of anything—you can only believe. That's right, isn't it, Jonas? One believes and so one is saved. Saved, indeed! No. One can be damned through believing. That's what I've learnt.

DOCTOR. But, Captain . . .

CAPTAIN. Hold your tongue! I don't want any chat from you. I don't want to hear you relaying all the gossip from in there like a telephone. In there—you know what I mean. Listen to me, Jonas. Do you imagine you're the father of your children? I seem to remember you had a tutor in the house, a pretty boy about whom there was quite a bit of gossip.

PASTOR. Take care, Adolf!

CAPTAIN. Feel under your wig and see if you don't find two little nobs. Upon my soul, he's turning pale! Well, well! It was only talk, of course, but my God, how they talked! But we married men are all figures of fun, every man Jack of us. Isn't that right, Doctor? What about your own marriage bed? Didn't you have a certain lieutenant in your house, eh? Wait now, let me guess. He was called . . . *Whispers in the* DOCTOR'S ear. By Jove, he's turned pale too! But don't worry. She's dead and buried, so what was done can't be done again. As a matter of fact, I knew him, and he's now—look at me, Doctor—no, straight in the eyes! He is now a major of Dragoons. Good Lord, I believe *he* has horns too!

DOCTOR, *angrily*. Be so good as to change the subject, Captain.

CAPTAIN. See! As soon as I mention horns he wants to change the subject.

PASTOR. I suppose you know, brother-in-law, that you're not in your right mind?

CAPTAIN. Yes, I do know. But if I had the handling of your decorated heads, I should soon have you shut up too. I am mad. But how did I become mad? Doesn't that interest you? No, it doesn't interest anyone. *Takes the photograph album from the table*. Christ Jesus, there is my daughter! Mine? That's what we can never know.

Shall I tell you what we should have to do so as to know? First marry, in order to be accepted by society, then immediately divorce; after that become lovers and finally adopt the children. That way one could at least be sure they were one's own adopted children. Eh? But what good's that to me? What good's anything now you have robbed me of my immortality? What can science or philosophy do for me when I have nothing left to live for? How can I live without honour? I grafted my right arm and half my brain and spinal cord on to another stem. I believed they would unite and grow into a single, more perfect tree. Then someone brought a knife and cut below the graft, so now I'm only half a tree. The other part, with my arm and half my brain, goes on growing. But I wither—I am dying, for it was the best part of myself I gave away. Let me die. Do what you like with me. I'm finished.

The DOCTOR and PASTOR whisper, then go out. The CAPTAIN sinks into a chair by the table. BERTHA enters.

BERTHA, *going to him*. Are you ill, Father?

CAPTAIN, *looking up stupidly at word "Father."* Me?

BERTHA. Do you know what you did? You threw a lamp at Mother.

CAPTAIN. Did I?

BERTHA. Yes. Supposing she'd been hurt!

CAPTAIN. Would that have mattered?

BERTHA. You're not my father if you talk like that.

CAPTAIN. What d'you say? Not your father? How d'you know? Who told you? Who is your father, then? Who?

BERTHA. Not you, anyway.

CAPTAIN. Anyone but me! Who then? Who? You seem well informed. Who told you? That I should live to hear my own child tell me to my face I am not her father! Do you realise you're insulting your mother by saying this? Don't you understand that, if it's true, *she* is disgraced?

BERTHA. You're not to say anything against Mother, I tell you!

CAPTAIN. Yes, all in league against me, just as you've always been.

BERTHA. Father!

CAPTAIN. Don't call me that again!

BERTHA. Father, Father!

CAPTAIN, *drawing her to him*. Bertha, my beloved child, yes, you *are* my child. Yes, yes, it must be so—it *is* so. All that was only a sick fancy—it came on the wind like an infection or a fever. Look at me! Let me see my soul in your eyes . . . But I see *her* soul as well. You have two souls. You love me with one and hate me with the other. You must love me and only me. You must have only one soul or you'll have no peace—neither shall I. You must have only one mind, fruit of my mind. You must have only one will—mine!

BERTHA. No, no! I want to be myself.

CAPTAIN. Never! I am a cannibal, you see, and I'm going to eat you. Your mother wanted to eat me, but she didn't succeed. I am Saturn who devoured his children because it was foretold that otherwise they would devour him. To eat or to be eaten—that is the question. If I don't eat you, you will eat me—you've shown your teeth already. *Goes to the rack*. Don't be afraid, my darling child. I shan't hurt you. *Takes down a revolver*.

BERTHA, *dodging away from him*. Help! Mother, help! He wants to kill me!

NURSE, *hurrying in*. What in heaven's name are you doing, Mr. Adolf?

CAPTAIN, *examining the revolver*. Did you remove the cartridges?

NURSE. Well, I did just tidy them away, but sit down here and take it easy and I'll soon fetch them back.

She takes the CAPTAIN by the arm and leads him to a chair. He slumps down. She picks up the strait-jacket and goes behind the chair. BERTHA creeps out.

Mr. Adolf, do you remember when you were my dear little boy, and I used to tuck you up at night and say your

prayers with you? And do you remember how I used to get up in the night to get you a drink when you were thirsty? And how, when you had bad dreams and couldn't go to sleep again, I'd light the candle and tell you pretty stories. Do you remember?

CAPTAIN. Go on talking, Margaret. It soothes my mind. Go on talking.

NURSE. Aye, that I will, but you listen carefully. D'you remember how once you took a great big kitchen knife to carve a boat with, and I came in and had to trick the knife away from you? You were such a silly little lad, one had to trick you, you never would believe what anyone did was for your own good . . . "Give me that snake," I said, "or else he'll bite you." And then, see, you let go of the knife. *Takes the revolver from his hand.* And then, too, when it was time for you to dress yourself, and you wouldn't. I had to coax you, and say you should have a golden coat and be dressed just like a prince. Then I took your little tunic, that was just made of green wool, and held it up in front of you and said: "In with your arms, now, both together." *Gets the jacket on.* And then I said: "Sit nice and still now, while I button it up behind." *Ties the sleeves behind him.* And then I said: "Up with you, and walk across the floor like a good boy, so Nurse can see how it fits." *Leads him to the sofa.* And then I said: "Now you must go to bed."

CAPTAIN. What's that? Go to bed, when I'd just been dressed? My God! What have you done to me? *Tries to get free.* Oh you fiendish woman, what devilish cunning! Who would have thought you had the brains for it? *Lies down on the sofa.* Bound, fleeced, outwitted and unable to die!

NURSE. Forgive me, Mr. Adolf, forgive me! I had to stop you killing the child.

CAPTAIN. Why didn't you let me kill her? If life's hell and death's heaven, and children belong to heaven?

NURSE. What do you know of the hereafter?

CAPTAIN. It's the only thing one does know. Of life one knows nothing. Oh, if one had known from the beginning!

NURSE. Humble your stubborn heart, Mr. Adolf, and cry to God for mercy! Even now it's not too late. It wasn't too late for the thief on the Cross, for Our Saviour said: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

CAPTAIN. Croaking for a corpse already, old crow? *She takes her hymn-book from her pocket. He calls.* Nöjd! Are you there, Nöjd?

Enter NÖJD.

Throw this woman out of the house or she'll choke me to death with her hymn-book. Throw her out of the window, stuff her up the chimney, do what you like only get rid of her!

NÖJD, *staring at the* NURSE. God save you, Captain—and that's from the bottom of my heart—but I can't do that, I just can't. If it were six men now, but a woman!

CAPTAIN. What? You can't manage one woman?

NÖJD. I could manage her all right, but there's something stops a man laying hands on a woman.

CAPTAIN. What is this something? Haven't they laid hands on me?

NÖJD. Yes, but I just can't do it, Sir. Same as if you was to tell me to hit Pastor. It's like religion, it's in your bones. I can't do it.

Enter LAURA. She signs to NÖJD, who goes out.

CAPTAIN. Omphale! Omphale! Playing with the club while Hercules spins your wool.

LAURA, *approaching the sofa.* Adolf, look at me! Do you believe I'm your enemy?

CAPTAIN. Yes, I do. I believe all you women are my enemies. My mother did not want me to come into the world because my birth would give her pain. She was my enemy. She robbed my embryo of nourishment, so I was born incomplete. My sister was my enemy when she made me knuckle under to her. The first woman I took in my arms was my enemy. She gave me ten years of sickness in return for the love I gave her. When my daughter had to choose between you and me, she became my enemy. And

you, you, my wife, have been my mortal enemy, for you have not let go your hold until there is no life left in me.

LAURA. But I didn't mean this to happen. I never really thought it out. I may have had some vague desire to get rid of you—you were in my way—and perhaps, if you see some plan in my actions, there was one, but I was unconscious of it. I have never given a thought to my actions—they simply ran along the rails you laid down. My conscience is clear, and before God I feel innocent, even if I'm not. You weighed me down like a stone, pressing and pressing till my heart tried to shake off its intolerable burden. That's how it's been, and if without meaning to I have brought you to this, I ask your forgiveness.

CAPTAIN. Very plausible, but how does that help me? And whose fault is it? Perhaps our cerebral marriage is to blame. In the old days one married a wife. Now one goes into partnership with a business woman or sets up house with a friend. Then one rapes the partner or violates the friend. What becomes of love, the healthy love of the senses? It dies of neglect. And what happens to the dividends from those love shares, payable to holder, when there's no joint account? Who is the holder when the crash comes? Who is the bodily father of the cerebral child?

LAURA. Your suspicions about our daughter are entirely unfounded.

CAPTAIN. That's the horror of it. If they had some foundation, there would at least be something to catch hold of, to cling to. Now there are only shadows, lurking in the undergrowth, peering out with grinning faces. It's like fighting with air, a mock battle with blank cartridges. Reality, however deadly, puts one on one's mettle, nerves body and soul for action, but as it is . . . my thoughts dissolve in fog, my brain grinds a void till it catches fire . . . Put a pillow under my head. Lay something over me. I'm cold. I'm terribly cold.

LAURA *takes off her shawl and spreads it over him. Exit*

NURSE.

LAURA. Give me your hand, my dear.

CAPTAIN. My hand! Which you have bound behind my back.

Omphale, Omphale! But I can feel your shawl soft against my mouth. It's warm and gentle like your arms and smells of vanilla like your hair when you were young. When you were young, Laura, and we used to walk in the birch woods. There were primroses and thrushes—lovely, lovely! Think how beautiful life was then—and what it has become! You did not want it to become like this, neither did I. Yet it has. Who then rules our lives?

LAURA. God.

CAPTAIN. The God of strife then—or nowadays the Goddess!

Enter NURSE with a pillow.

Take away this cat that's lying on me. Take it away! NURSE *removes the shawl and puts the pillow under his head.* Bring my uniform. Put my tunic over me. *The NURSE takes the tunic from a peg and spreads it over him.* To LAURA. Ah, my tough lion's-skin that you would take from me! Omphale! Omphale! You cunning woman, lover of peace and contriver of disarmament. Wake, Hercules, before they take away your club! You would trick us out of our armour, calling it tinsel. It was iron, I tell you, before it became tinsel. In the old days the smith forged the soldier's coat, now it is made by the needlewoman. Omphale! Omphale! Rude strength has fallen before treacherous weakness. Shame on you, woman of Satan, and a curse on all your sex! *He raises himself to spit at her, but sinks back again.* What sort of a pillow have you given me, Margaret? How hard and cold it is! So cold! Come and sit beside me on this chair. *She does so.* Yes, like that. Let me put my head on your lap. Ah, that's warmer! Lean over me so I can feel your breast. Oh how sweet it is to sleep upon a woman's breast, be she mother or mistress! But sweetest of all a mother's.

LAURA. Adolf, tell me, do you want to see your child?

CAPTAIN. My child? A man has no children. Only women have children. So the future is theirs, while we die childless. O God, who holds all children dear!