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POETRY AND
THE DRAMA

IBSEN'S LADY INGER OF
OSTRAAT; LOVE'S COMEDY;
AND THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH
TRANS. BY R. FARQUHARSON SHARP

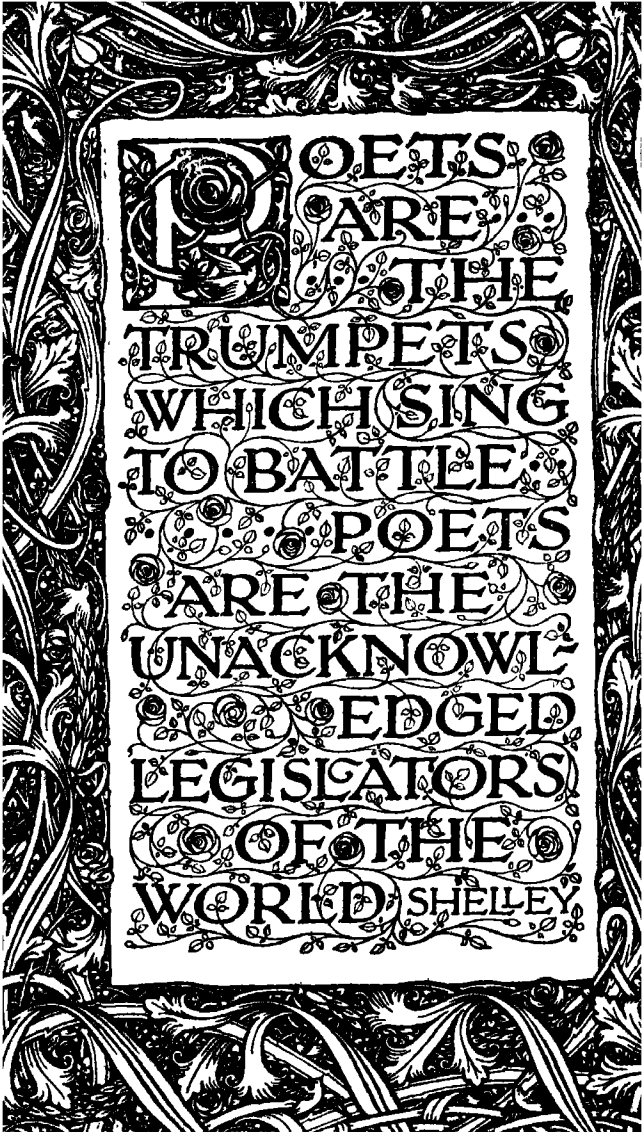
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POETS
ARE
THE
TRUMPETS
WHICH SING
TO BATTLE
POETS
ARE THE
UNACKNOWLEDGED
LEGISLATORS
OF THE
WORLD SHELLEY

LADY INGER
OF OSTRAT;
LOVE'S COMEDY;
& THE LEAGUE
OF YOUTH &
& BY HENRIK
IBSEN &



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INTRODUCTION

THE three plays here translated are representative, in widely differing fashions, of an early stage in the development of Ibsen's genius. *Lady Inger of Ostraat* was written at Bergen in 1854,¹ when Ibsen was twenty-six and, like most young authors, attracted by big themes and full of big projects. To create "saga-dramas" based on Norway's history was his ambition at this time; and *Lady Inger*, which deals with one of the blackest periods in the fortunes of Norway, was the outcome. The chief characters in the play bear names that are historic; and if history is outraged in one or two points by the plot, this is not more than has been readily forgiven to many a dramatist in return for a moving situation. There is a considerable sense of bigness about the treatment of the subject, and a considerable sense of character shown in the delineation of the protagonists of the drama, Lady Inger and Nils Lykke. The weakness of the play lies in the complexity of its plot, a weakness very common in the work of young playwrights. The intrigue is skilfully devised, but would inevitably be puzzling in representation except to one who had previously read the play. *Lady Inger of Ostraat* was produced at the Bergen theatre, under Ibsen's direction, in January 1855, but the public was bewildered by its complexity and did not take very kindly to it. Two years later the play was printed in Christiania and offered to the theatre there; but it was not produced there at the time, owing to a disagreement between the author and the director of the theatre as to some alterations which the latter wished to make and the author would not agree to. In 1874 Ibsen published a revised edition of the play; it was eventually performed at Christiania in 1875, and remained in the repertory there till 1882. A Swedish

¹ For further details respecting Ibsen's life and writings, see the introductions to the three preceding volumes of Ibsen's plays in *Everyman's Library*.

version of it was performed at Stockholm in 1877 and at Helsingfors in 1880, and a German version in Berlin in 1880. The play has also been translated into French. In January 1906 two performances of it were given at the Scala Theatre, London, by the Stage Society. The part of Lady Inger was played by Miss Edyth Olive, and that of Nils Lykke by Mr. Henry Ainley.

In *Love's Comedy* we see a very different Ibsen, but still the young Ibsen. This piece of high-spirited satire took some time to incubate. It was planned in 1858, but not completed till 1862. The author's eager personality was by this time in revolt against the narrowness of Norwegian life; and the revolt, as is so often the case, expressed itself in a fondness for just such paradox as would most annoy his audience. The play was first planned and begun in prose, but Ibsen very soon abandoned that medium of expression in favour of the light rhymed verse which forms one of the chief charms of *Love's Comedy* as it was eventually given to the world. So much of the vivacity of the play in the original depends upon the sparkling quality of the verse and its often laughably ingenious rhyme-devices, that any attempt at a reproduction of it in English verse is foredoomed to at least comparative failure; the present translator felt, therefore, that he might perhaps succeed in robbing the original of less of its savour if he confined himself to an attempt at light prose. The paradox of the play—that, to keep the sacred fire of love alive, you must renounce it when it has reached its very culmination—that only a loveless marriage or a marriageless love can be really successful and happy—was perhaps not so novel as Ibsen no doubt imagined it to be when he wrote the play. But, anyway, it served as inspiration for a wittily satirical attack on the stupid convention and soul-deadening ceremony that seemed to the author to surround and stifle love when love was leading to marriage. Naturally its production raised a storm of indignation, and Ibsen came in for some rough handling in consequence; it was not until some ten years later that his audiences at home had become sufficiently educated to his point of view to enjoy his wit even though it were pointed at themselves. The play ultimately became particularly popular at

Christiania. It was first produced there in 1873 and remained in the repertory of the theatre till 1898. It has never yet been performed in this country; but a performance of it was given at the Hudson Theatre, New York, in 1908. Swedish, French, and German translations of it exist.

With *The League of Youth* Ibsen broke entirely fresh ground. This satirical comedy was more than a tilt at conventions; it had behind it a political animus which sprang from Ibsen's distrust of the group then known as the "Young Party." In this play the author for the first time found his proper medium of expression in prose dialogue of an easy naturalness that marked an astonishing advance on anything of his day in his own country. The play was, in fact, the first modern prose comedy from Norway. In the planning and development of the plot it smacks strongly of the French drama of intrigue—the drama of the school of Scribe—but in the matters of close observation and naturalness of dialogue it is a long way ahead of that school. Ibsen was in Italy while the comedy was planned, and in Dresden while he wrote it (in the winter of 1868-69); and it was undoubtedly this voluntary exile that enabled him to see Norwegian social life and politics in a new perspective.

The play was printed in September 1869, and was first performed, at the Christiania theatre, in the following month. As was to be expected, it caused a great fluttering in the dovecotes of a society quite unused to satirical comedy. It also produced a practically universal impression of being an essay in political pamphleteering disguised as a play. The "Young Party," with whom Björnson was intimately connected, resented the obvious attack on them, and the first few performances were disturbed by violent demonstrations on the part of both opponents and supporters. The character of Stensgaard was taken to be a direct caricature of, and attack on, Björnson, who in consequence was estranged from Ibsen for a number of years afterwards, until Björnson's magnanimity led him to make an advance towards reconciliation which Ibsen as generously welcomed. The political controversy gradually wore itself out, and

the play became a favourite in the repertories of the Scandinavian theatres. It was still in the Christiania repertory as late as the year 1899. Its first performance in Stockholm was in 1869, and in Copenhagen in 1870. German and French translations of it also exist. Artificial as the comedy may in some ways appear in the light of Ibsen's subsequent work, one has only to glance at contemporary comedies to see what an advance it marked. The character of the "charlatan and adventurer" Stensgaard is developed with great skill; indeed it seems rather to have run away with its creator, who apparently began the play with the fortunes of the League of Youth before him as its main theme, but speedily became absorbed in the personal fortunes of Stensgaard. The League, however, is dutifully dragged in again towards the end. The whole play is as full of life as anything Ibsen wrote. With the delightful cocksureness of youth it combines a thoughtfulness that presages the later Ibsen; and though the technique is clearly based on that of the French school, it improves on the methods of that school in almost every respect.

R. FARQUHARSON SHARP.

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LADY INGER OF OSTRAT
A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

The Lady Inger Gyldenlöve, widow of Nils Gyldenlöve, High
Steward of Norway.

Eline, her daughter.

Nils Lykke, a Danish knight.

Olaf Skavtavl, a Norwegian nobleman, outlawed.

Nils Stensson.

Jens Bjelke, a Swedish officer.

Björn } servants at Ostraat.
Finn }

Ejnar Huk, steward at Ostraat.

Retainers, Peasants, and Swedish Warriors.

*(The action passes at the Castle of Ostraat, on the Trondhjem Fjord,
in the year 1528.)*

LADY INGER OF OSTRAT

ACT I

(SCENE.—*A room at Ostraat. Through open doors at the back the Great Hall is seen by the light of the moon which shines in fitfully through a deep bay-window. On the right is a door ; and further forward, a curtained window. On the left there is a door, leading to the inner rooms. Further forward, a great open hearth, the fire in which lights the room. It is a stormy evening. BJÖRN and FINN are sitting by the hearth. FINN is busy polishing a helmet. A sword, a shield and various other weapons are lying beside them.*)

Finn. Who was Knut Alfsön?

Björn. Our mistress says he was the last knight left in Norway.

Finn. And the Danes slew him at Oslo Fjord, didn't they?

Björn. If you don't know things like that, you had better go and ask five-year-old children.

Finn. So Knut Alfsön was the last of our knights, was he? And now he is dead and gone! (*Holds up the helmet he is polishing.*) Well, *you* must be content with hanging in the Great Hall, clean and shining, for you are nothing more than an empty nut-shell now; the worms have eaten the kernel out of you many a long year since. Björn! Don't you think our Norway is just as like an empty nut-shell as this helmet is—bright and shining outside, but all worm-eaten inside?

Björn. Hold your tongue, and get on with your work! Is the helmet done?

Finn. It gleams like silver in the moonlight.

Björn. Put it down, then. Here, scrape the rust off this sword.

Finn (*turning it over*). Is it worth while?

Björn. What do you mean?

4. Lady Inger of Ostraat [ACT I.]

Finn. The edge is gone.

Björn. That has nothing to do with you. Give it to me! The shield is lying there.

Finn (taking up the shield). Why, it has no handle!

Björn (muttering). I would like to handle you. (*FINN goes on with his work, then begins humming to himself.*) What have you got in your head now?

Finn. An empty helmet, a sword with a blunted edge, a shield that has lost its handle—that's all it comes to. I don't think any one will blame the Lady Inger for hanging arms like these, cleaned and burnished, on her walls, instead of letting them be rusted with the blood of Danes.

Björn. Nonsense! Don't you understand that we are at peace now?

Finn. At peace? Yes, when the peasant has shot away his last arrow and the wolf has stolen the last lamb from the fold, there is peace between *them*, too. But it's a queer sort of friendship. Ah, well, we can't alter facts. It is quite right and proper, as I said, for this armour to hang, spick and span, in the Hall; for you know the old saying: "The man-at-arms is the only man"; and, as we have no men-at-arms left in Norway, we have no men either; and where there are no men, women command; and that, I tell you, is why——

Björn. That is why? That is why I advise you to keep your filthy ideas to yourself! (*Gets up.*) It is getting late. There—you can hang the helmet and arms up in the Hall again.

Finn (lowering his voice). I would rather do it in the morning.

Björn. What? Are you afraid of a dark room?

Finn. Not in the daytime. And if I do happen to be so in the evening, I am not the only one that is. Yes, you may look at me; but I can tell you there are all sorts of stories going about in the household. (*Lowering his voice.*) Some folk say that a tall figure, dressed in black, wanders about in there (*pointing to the Great Hall*) every blessed night.

Björn. Silly tales!

Finn. Yes, but all the same they swear it is true.

Björn. I have no doubt they do.

Finn. The strangest part of it is that the Lady Inger believes it too——

Björn (starting). The Lady Inger? What does she think of it?

Finn. What does she think of it? Ah, there are very few that can tell that. But what is certain is that she seems to know no rest. Can't you see that she is growing paler and thinner every day? (*With a searching look at him.*) Folk say that she never sleeps—and that it is because of that ghost. (*During his last words ELINE has appeared at the half-open door on the left. She stands and listens, unobserved by the two men.*)

Björn. And you believe such nonsense as that?

Finn. Yes, more or less. And, mind you, there are some that explain it in another way; but that is only spiteful talk, I am sure. Björn, have you heard the song they are singing all over the place?

Björn. A song?

Finn. Yes, every one is singing it. It is a wicked shame, of course—but I must say it runs prettily. Listen to this. (*Sings in subdued tones.*)

“ Ostraat's lady sits apart,
Dressed in robes so fine—
Fur and velvet, soft and rare—
Gold is gleaming in her hair;
But the peace that should be there,
Is not in her heart.

Denmark's king her soul has bought;
On her people's necks
She has set a stranger's heel,
As the price of——”

(*BJÖRN catches him angrily by the throat. ELINE draws back unperceived.*)

Björn. I will let you feel the weight of my fist, without any price, if you utter a single unseemly word about the Lady Inger!

Finn (shaking him off). Gently, gently! Did I make the song? (*A horn is heard without.*)

Björn. Hush! What is that?

Finn. A horn. We are to have guests this evening, then?

Björn (going to the window). They are opening the gate. I hear the sound of hoofs in the courtyard. It must be a knight.

Finn. But you said just now that the last of our knights was dead and gone. *(Goes out to the right.)*

Björn. Curse the rogue! He has eyes all round his head! So much for all my attempts to cover up the truth. They are making ballads about her now; it won't be long before they will all be shouting that—— *(ELINE comes in by the door on the left; looks round her; then questions BJÖRN with repressed anxiety.)*

Eline. Are you alone, Björn?

Björn. Is that you, Lady Eline?

Eline. Björn—tell me a story. I know you have a better store of them than those who——

Björn. Tell you a story? Now? As late as this?

Eline. If you reckon nightfall from the time everything began to grow black here, it is late indeed.

Björn. What ails you? Has anything happened? You look so uneasy.

Eline. Perhaps I am.

Björn. Something is wrong. For the last six months I would scarce have known you for yourself.

Eline. Remember that six months ago Lucia, my darling sister, was laid in her tomb.

Björn. That is not the reason, Lady Eline. It is not for that reason alone that you go about sometimes full of thought, pale and quiet, and sometimes looking distracted and perplexed, as you do to-night.

Eline. Do you think so? Why not? Was she not gentle, mild and fair as a summer's night? Björn, I tell you I loved Lucia as dearly as my own life. Have you forgotten how, many a time, as children we sat on your knee in the winter evenings? You used to sing songs to us, and tell us tales——

Björn. Ah, yes—you used to be gay and happy then.

Eline. Yes, then. Then I used to live a joyous life, a life of fairy tales and happy thoughts. Is it possible that our shores were as desolate then as they are now? If it

was so, I never marked it. I used to love to wander on them then, telling wonderful tales to myself. My heroes came from afar and journeyed over seas again. I used to live in their company and followed them when they went afar. (*Sinks on to a chair.*) Now I feel so lifeless and weary. My fairy tales no longer give me comfort. They are naught but—fairy tales. (*Gets up impetuously.*) Björn, do you know the cause of my sickness? A truth!—a hideous, hideous truth, that torments me night and day.

Björn. What do you mean?

Eline. Do you remember how wisely you used sometimes to advise and counsel us? My sister Lucia followed your counsels; but I——! God help me!

Björn (soothingly). Come, come!

Eline. I know it—I was proud, arrogant! In our games together, I always wanted to be queen, because I was the tallest, the fairest, the wittiest—I know it!

Björn. That is true.

Eline. Once you took me by the hand, and looked so seriously at me, and said: “Do not be so proud of your beauty and your wit; but be proud as the eagle on the mountain-side every time you realise that you are the daughter of Inger Gyldenlöve!”

Björn. And you had good reason to be proud of it.

Eline. Yes, you told me that often enough, Björn! Ah, what a lot of wonderful tales you told me then! (*Presses his hand.*) Thank you for them all.—Still, tell me just one more; it might perhaps make me light-hearted again, as I used to be.

Björn. But you are not a child any longer, you know.

Eline. True; but let me make believe that I am. Now, a story! Begin, please! (*Sits down. BJÖRN sits on the edge of the hearth.*)

Björn. Once upon a time there was a knight of high degree——

Eline (who has been listening restlessly in the direction of the Great Hall, grips him by the arm and says in an eager whisper). Hush! not so loud! I am not deaf!

Björn (lowering his voice). Once upon a time there was a knight of high degree, of whom a strange tale used to be told——(*Eline gets half up, and listens with tense*

anxiety in the direction of the Hall.) Lady Eline, what ails you?

Eline (sitting down again). Me? Nothing. Go on with your story.

Björn. Well, the story goes that if ever he looked a woman straight in the eyes, she never forgot it afterwards—but followed him in her thoughts, wherever he went, and fell sick of her sorrow.

Eline. I have heard that. And, what is more, it is no mere tale that you are telling; for the knight you are speaking of is Nils Lykke, who in Denmark this day sits in the Council of the Kingdom——

Björn. Perhaps it is so.

Eline. Oh, well—it doesn't matter. But go on!

Björn. And one day it happened that——

Eline (getting up suddenly). Hush! Be quiet!

Björn. What now? What is it?

Eline (listening). Do you hear?

Björn. What?

Eline. It is there! As God is above me, it is there!

Björn (getting up). What is there? Where?

Eline. The ghost!—in the Great Hall. (*Hurries to the background.*)

Björn (following her). Surely you don't believe——? Lady Eline—go to your room!

Eline. Hush! Stand still! Don't stir—don't let yourself be seen! Wait—now the moonlight is bright again——can't you see the black figure——?

Björn. By all the Saints——!

Eline. Look, she is turning Knut Alfsön's picture with its face to the wall. Ha, ha! I expect it looked her too straight in the eyes!

Björn. Lady Eline, listen to me!

Eline (crossing over to the hearth). Now I know what I know!

Björn (to himself). So it is true, then!

Eline. Who was it, Björn? Who was it?

Björn. You saw that as plainly as I did.

Eline. Well? Whom did I see?

Björn. You saw your mother.

Eline (half to herself). Night after night I have heard

her step in there. I have heard her whisper and moan like a soul in torments. And the song says that she—
Ah, now I know! Now I know that she——

Björn. Hush! (*LADY INGER comes hurriedly out of the Hall without perceiving them, goes to the window, draws the curtain, and gazes out for a while, as if she were watching for some one on the road; at last she turns and goes slowly back in to the Hall.*)

Eline. So deadly white, like a corpse——! (*An uproar and a sound of voices is heard outside the door on the right.*)

Björn. What is that?

Eline. Go out and see what it means! (*EJNAR HUK and a number of retainers and peasants appear in the doorway.*)

Ejnar Huk. Straight in to her! Courage, all of you!

Björn. What do you want?

Ejnar Huk. To see the Lady Inger.

Björn. The Lady Inger? So late at night?

Ejnar Huk. 'Tis late, but still time enough, I'll swear.

Peasants. Yes, yes—this time she must hear us! (*They all advance into the room. At the same time LADY INGER appears at the door of the Great Hall. All are suddenly silent.*)

Lady Inger. What do you want with me?

Ejnar Huk. We sought you, my lady, to——

Lady Inger. Well—speak on!

Ejnar Huk. Well, after all, we have nothing to be ashamed of. This is it, my lady—we have come to crave leave of absence, and weapons——

Lady Inger. Leave of absence, and weapons? What for?

Ejnar Huk. Rumour has come from Sweden that the Dalarne folk have risen, and are marching against King Gustav——

Lady Inger. The Dalarne folk risen?

Ejnar Huk. So they are saying—and it appears to be true.

Lady Inger. And, if it were, what have you to do with the Dalarne folk's rising?

The Peasants. We want to join them! To help them! To free ourselves!

Lady Inger (to herself). Has the time come, I wonder?

Ejnar Huk. Everywhere on the frontier our people are

marching into Dalarne. Even the outlaws, who have wandered hither and thither over the hills year after year, are now venturing down to the homesteads, calling out the men and putting an edge to their rusty weapons.

Lady Inger (after a pause). Listen to me! Have you taken thought over this? Have you reckoned what the cost will be, should King Gustav's men be victorious?

Björn (in a low, supplicating voice, to LADY INGER). Reckon what the cost will be to the Danes, if King Gustav's men are beaten.

Lady Inger (decidedly). Such a reckoning is no affair of mine. *(Turns to the crowd.)* You know that King Gustav can hope for firm support from Denmark. King Frederick is his friend, and certainly will not leave him on the lurch——

Ejnar Huk. But if our people rose over the whole of Norway? If we all rose as one man—nobles and peasants alike? Indeed, Lady Inger, I believe the opportunity we have waited for has come. Let but the rising take place, and we shall drive the stranger out of our land.

The Peasants. Yes, away with these Danish bailiffs! Away with the foreign lords! Away with our alien rulers!

Lady Inger (to herself). There is the right stuff in them; and yet—and yet——!

Björn (to himself). She is undecided. *(To ELINE.)* I will wager, Lady Eline, that you have done your mother an injustice in your thoughts.

Eline. Björn—if my eyes have lied to me, I could pluck them out of my head!

Ejnar Huk (to LADY INGER). Take this into account, gracious lady—the first thing to be considered is King Gustav. If he can be made powerless, then the Danes will no longer be able to keep their footing in Norway——

Lady Inger. And then?

Ejnar Huk. Then we shall be free. Then we shall have no foreigners lording it here, and can choose a king for ourselves, as the Swedes have done before us.

Lady Inger. A king—even! Have you the race of Sture in mind?

Ejnar Huk. King Christian, and others after him, have laid waste our oldest domains. The noblest of our leaders

are wandering over the mountains, outlawed—if, indeed, they be still alive. But it might well hap, nevertheless, that there might be some scion of an old race who—

Lady Inger (abruptly). Enough, Ejnar Huk! Enough! *(To herself.)* Ah, my dearest hope! *(Turns to the crowd.)* I have warned you as well as I can. I have told you how great a risk it is that you would run. But since you are so determined, it would in truth be idle for me to forbid you what, after all, you could do without my bidding.

Ejnar Huk. Then we have your consent—?

Lady Inger. Your minds are firmly set; you need no counsel from me. If it be as you say, that you are harassed and oppressed—I know so little of these things—and seek to know no more! What can I, a lonely woman, do? Suppose you determined to plunder my halls—and there are many good stout weapons hanging on their walls—you are masters at Ostraat to-night. Do what you will. Good-night! *(The crowd breaks into noisy shouts of joy. Lights are brought, and retainers bring all kinds of weapons in from the Great Hall.)*

Björn (grasping LADY INGER's hand as she turns to go). Thanks, my noble, great-hearted lady! I, who have known you from your childhood, never doubted you.

Lady Inger. Peace, Björn! It is a dangerous throw I have risked to-night. These folk have only their lives at stake; I have more—a thousand times more—believe me!

Björn. How so? Are you afraid for your power over them, or for the good terms on which—

Lady Inger. My power? God in heaven!

A Retainer (coming from the Hall with a great sword). Here is a fine sharp wolf's fang! I shall worry the crowd of bloodsuckers with this!

Ejnar Huk (to another Retainer). What have you got there?

Second Retainer. A breastplate that they say was Herlof Hytted's.

Ejnar Huk. It is too good for you. See, here is Sten Sture's spear; hang the breastplate on it, and we shall have the finest harness man could desire. *(FINN comes in from the door on the left, bearing a letter. He goes up to LADY INGER.)*

Finn. I have been seeking your ladyship in all the rooms——

Lady Inger. What is it?

Finn (giving her the letter). A swain from Trondhjem has brought this letter.

Lady Inger. Let me see it! (*As she opens the letter.*) From Trondhjem? What can that mean? (*Reads the letter.*) God help me! From him! And here in Norway——. (*Reads on, obviously much moved, while the crowd continues to bring weapons in from the Hall.*) Coming here! Coming here to-night! Ah, we shall have to fight with our wits, and not our swords.

Ejnar Huk. Enough, enough, good people! We are surely well armed now. Now let us away!

Lady Inger (turning to them quickly). Not a man must stir from Ostraat to-night!

Ejnar Huk. But, gracious mistress, the wind is favourable to cross the fjord, and——

Lady Inger. It shall be as I say.

Ejnar Huk. Must we wait till to-morrow?

Lady Inger. Till to-morrow, and longer than that. No man may leave Ostraat under arms for the present. (*Murmurs of displeasure in the crowd.*)

Some Peasants. We will go without your leave, Lady Inger!

Others. Yes, yes, we will go without leave!

Lady Inger (going nearer to them). Who dares do that? (*All are silent. After a moment's pause, she continues.*) I have to think for you. What does a crowd of peasants like you know of affairs of state? How can you presume to judge of them? You must bear the burden of oppression yet awhile. And it will be less hard for you if you realise that even we, your lords and masters, suffer no easier lot than you nowadays. Carry all the weapons into the Hall again. Later on, I will let you know my will. Go! (*The Retainers carry back the weapons, after which the crowd withdraws by the door on the right.*)

Eline (aside to BJÖRN). Do you still think that I have misjudged the Lady of Ostraat?

Lady Inger (beckoning BJÖRN to her). Prepare a guest-chamber.

Björn. It shall be done, my lady.

Lady Inger. And open the gates to whoever knocks.

Björn. But——?

Lady Inger. Open the gates!

Björn. It shall be done. (*Goes out to the right.*)

Lady Inger (*to ELINE, who has gone to the door on the left*). Stay here! Eline, my child—I have something to say.

Eline. I am listening.

Lady Inger. Eline—you are thinking ill of your mother.

Eline. I think what your actions painfully force me to think.

Lady Inger. And you answer me from a hard heart.

Eline. Whose fault is it that my heart has hardened? From my childhood I have been used to look up to you as to a great, high-souled woman. I used to compare you in my mind to the women I read of in the sagas and the books of battles. It seemed to me as if God Himself had set His sign upon your forehead and marked you out as one who should lead the feeble and irresolute. In the Great Hall knights and nobles used to sing your praise, and even the common folk, far and near, called you the hope and pillar of their country. All believed that through you a new day should dawn upon us. But it is still night with us; and indeed I scarce know whether I dare now believe that you will bring us any dawn.

Lady Inger. It is easy to guess where you have learnt such venomous words. Your ears have marked what this thankless herd whispers and mutters about things of which it understands nothing.

Eline. "Truth is in the mouths of the people," you used to say in the days when your praises were sounded in song and story.

Lady Inger. Maybe I did. But if, nevertheless, I chose to sit inactive when I might have acted, do you think it was not a heavy enough burden to me to be forced to such a choice, without your making it heavier for me?

Eline. If I am making your burden heavier, I am doing the same to myself. I was happy, and lived the life of a free woman, as long as I could have faith in you. If my pride goes, I no longer care to live; and I should have had

the right to be proud if you had remained what you once were.

Lady Inger. And what reason have you for thinking that I am not? Eline—what makes you certain that you are not wronging your mother?

Eline (turning away from her). If only I could think I were!

Lady Inger. Peace! You have no right to think you may judge your mother. With a single word I could——; but it would not be good for you to hear it. You must await what time may bring with it. Perhaps——

Eline (turning to go). Good-night, mother!

Lady Inger (restraining her). No, stay with me. There is something more that I——. Come nearer. You must listen to me, Eline! (*Sits down by the table before the window.*)

Eline. I am listening.

Lady Inger. Though you have said nothing, I know well enough that more than once you have wished yourself away from here. It is too lonely and desolate for you at Ostraat.

Eline. Can you be surprised at that, mother?

Lady Inger. It rests with you whether things shall be different here in future.

Eline. How?

Lady Inger. Listen. To-night I expect a guest in the castle.

Eline. A guest?

Lady Inger. A guest, who must remain a stranger and unknown. No one must know whence he comes or whither he goes.

Eline (throws herself at her mother's feet with a glad cry and grasps her hands). Mother! mother! Forgive me for wronging you as I have done, if you can!

Lady Inger. What do you mean? Eline, I don't understand you.

Eline. They were all of them wrong! You are faithful at heart still!

Lady Inger. Get up, and tell me——

Eline. Oh, do you think I do not know who the guest is?

Lady Inger. You know? And nevertheless——?

Eline. Do you think that our castle gates have been

shut so tight that no rumours of the sorrow in the world outside could slip in? Do you think I do not know that there is many a scion of our old families that is naught but a wandering outlaw, without bed or shelter, while the Danish lords rule it in his father's house?

Lady Inger. Well? And what more?

Eline. I know that many a high-born knight is being hunted like a hungry wolf in the woods—with no hearth to rest by—no bread to eat——

Lady Inger (coldly). That is enough! I understand you now.

Eline (continuing). And that is why you are opening the gates of Ostraat at night-time—because he must remain a stranger and unknown, this guest of whom no one must know whence he comes or whither he goes! You are bidding defiance to the strict command that forbids you to house the hunted man, or to offer him bed or shelter——

Lady Inger. That is enough, I say! (*She is silent for a moment; then continues with an effort.*) You are mistaken, Eline. It is no outlawed man that I am awaiting.

Eline (getting up). Then there is no doubt that I have misunderstood you.

Lady Inger. Listen to me, my child! But listen calmly—if you can manage to tame that wild heart of yours.

Eline. I will be tame till you have finished.

Lady Inger. Then pay heed to what I have to say. I have, as far as lay in my power, sought to keep from you the knowledge of the distress and perplexities with which we are beset. What good would it have done for me to bring sorrow and evil into your young life? It is not tears or women's laments that will deliver us from our bondage. It needs men's courage and strength to do that.

Eline. Who has told you that I would not have courage and strength if there were need of it?

Lady Inger. Hush, child! I might take you at your word.

Eline. How, mother?

Lady Inger. I might demand both from you; I might—But first let me finish what I have to say. You must know, then, that the day, for which the Danish Council of State

has been working for many a year, is drawing near—the day, I mean, when they can deal the final blow to our rights and our freedom. That is why we must——

Eline (eagerly). Strike a blow?

Lady Inger. No. We must work to gain time. Even now the Council is assembled at Copenhagen to deliberate as to how they can best attain their end. Most of them, without a doubt, are of opinion that the differences between us can never be made up until Norway and Denmark are one; because, if we retain our rights as an independent kingdom, as soon as it is a question of electing a new king the feud between us would break out openly. That is what these Danish lords wish to prevent——

Eline. Yes, they wish to prevent it, no doubt! But are we going to endure that? Are we going to look quietly on, while——

Lady Inger. No, we are not going to endure it. But if we were to arm our people and go out openly to battle, what would that lead to, so long as we are as disunited among ourselves as we are now? And has our country ever been in such a bad state in that respect as it is now? No, if we are to accomplish anything, it is by patience and by keeping our own counsel. We must, as I said, gain time. In the south of Norway a large proportion of our nobles are on the side of the Danes; but here, in the north, feeling is still uncertain. That is why King Frederick has sent one of his most trusted knights here, to ascertain for himself how our sympathies run.

Eline (anxiously). Well—and what then?

Lady Inger. That knight comes to Ostraat to-night.

Eline. Here? To-night?

Lady Inger. A trading ship brought him to Trondhjem yesterday. I have just received the message that he intends to visit me. We may expect him within an hour.

Eline. But have you thought, mother, how you will risk your good name with your people if you receive a Danish envoy in such a way? Are not your people here already mistrustful of you? How can you expect them to submit to your guidance and advice, when they hear that——

Lady Inger. Make your mind easy. I have given thought

to all these things; but there was no need. His mission to our country is a secret one. To keep it so, he has come as a stranger to Trondhjem; and as a stranger, and unknown, he will visit Ostraat.

Eline. And his name?

Lady Inger. It is a famous one, Eline! Among Denmark's nobles you will scarcely find one more famous.

Eline. But what have you in your mind to do? I have not understood your meaning yet.

Lady Inger. You will not find it difficult to do that. When we cannot tread a snake underfoot, we have to capture it.

Eline. Take good care that it does not escape you.

Lady Inger. It will depend on you how tightly he is caught in the toils.

Eline. On me?

Lady Inger. I have seen for a long time that you felt imprisoned here at Ostraat. A young falcon should not be shut in behind iron bars.

Eline. My wings have been clipped. Even if you gave me my freedom, it would avail me but little.

Lady Inger. It is your own doing if your wings have been clipped.

Eline. Mine? My will is in your hands. Only continue to be the woman you were, and I too will——

Lady Inger. Enough. Listen to what I have to say. You would not be very unwilling to leave Ostraat?

Eline. Perhaps, mother.

Lady Inger. You once told me that the happiest moments in your life were when you were living in the sagas and chronicles of old days. You might repeat those moments.

Eline. What do you mean?

Lady Inger. Eline—suppose a noble knight were to come and carry you off to his castle, where you found handmaidens and retainers, silken gowns and lofty halls——

Eline. A knight, you say?

Lady Inger. A knight.

Eline (in lower tones). And the Danish envoy comes here to-night.

Lady Inger. To-night!

Eline. If that is so, I am afraid of understanding your words.

Lady Inger. There is nothing to be afraid of, if—at least—you do not *wish* to misunderstand them. I certainly have no thought of forcing you. You shall make your own choice, and follow your own counsel, in the matter.

Eline (going up to her). Have you heard tell of the mother who was journeying over the hills in a sledge with her little children. A pack of wolves were on their trail; it was a matter of life and death—and she threw her little ones to the wolves behind her, so as to gain time to save herself.

Lady Inger. That is naught but a tale. A mother would tear the heart out of her breast before she would throw her children to the wolves.

Eline. If I were not my mother's daughter, I would say you were right. But you are like that mother; and you have thrown your daughters to the wolves, one by one. The eldest was sacrificed first. It is five years since Merete left Ostraat. Now she is in Bergen as the wife of Vinzent Lunge. But do you believe that she is happy as the wife of that Danish knight? Vinzent Lunge is powerful—almost as powerful as a king; Merete has handmaidens and retainers, silken gowns and lofty halls; but the day holds no sunshine for her, and the night no rest, because she has never loved him. He came here and courted her, because she was the richest heiress in Norway, and because he needed just then to establish himself securely in our country. I know it! I know it absolutely! Merete obeyed you, and followed the stranger lord. But what has it cost her? More tears than a mother should wish to answer for at the Day of Judgment!

Lady Inger. I know what I shall have to account for, and it does not frighten me.

Eline. Your reckoning does not end with her. Where is Lucia, your second child?

Lady Inger. Ask God, Who took her.

Eline. I ask you, because it is you that will have to answer for her having sacrificed her young life. She was as happy as a bird in the springtime when she sailed from Ostraat to visit Merete in Bergen. A year later she stood

in this room again; but her cheeks were pale, and death had eaten its way into her bosom. Ah, you seem surprised, mother! I suppose you thought that hideous secret was buried with her; but she told me everything. A knight of high degree had won her heart; he would have married her, and you knew that her honour depended on it. But you were inflexible—and your child had to die. You see, I know the whole story.

Lady Inger. The whole? Did she tell you his name as well, then?

Eline. His name? No, she never told me his name. She seemed to have a burning dread of speaking his name. She never spoke it.

Lady Inger (to herself, in relieved tones). Ah, then you don't know the whole story. (*Aloud.*) Eline, the events you have recalled were known to me entirely. But there is one point in connection with them that you perhaps are not aware of. The noble lord whom Lucia met in Bergen was a Dane——

Eline. I know that too.

Lady Inger. And his love was a lie. He had ensnared her with cunning and with smooth words.

Eline. I know that. But she loved him, all the same; and if you had had a mother's heart you would have set your child's honour before everything else.

Lady Inger. Not before her happiness. Do you suppose that, with Merete's fate before my eyes, I would consent to sacrifice my second child to a man who did not love her?

Eline. Clever words may deceive many; but they will not deceive me. Do not imagine that I am such a complete stranger to what is going on in our country. I see through your behaviour completely. I know quite well that the Danish nobles have no real friend in you. Possibly you hate them; but you are just as much afraid of them. At the moment when you gave Merete to Vinzent Lunge, the Danish lords had the upper hand in every part of the land. Three years later, when you forbade Lucia to marry the man to whom she had bound her life—although he had seduced her—the situation was quite different. The King's Danish envoys had treated the people with infamous cruelty, and you did not consider it advisable to bind

yourself closer to the foreign ravishers than you were already bound. And what have you done to avenge that poor child's untimely death? I have not heard of anything that you have done. Well, now I mean to act for you. I mean to take my revenge for all the ignominy that has been cast upon my country and my race!

Lady Inger. You? How? What have you in your mind?

Eline. I mean to go *my* way as you go *yours*. What I have in my mind I do not yet know myself; but I feel the strength in me to venture anything for our just cause.

Lady Inger. Then you will have a hard fight before you. I made the same resolution as you, once—and my hair has whitened under the burden of my vow.

Eline. Good-night! Your guest may be here at any moment, and I should be one too many at your meeting. Perhaps there is still time for you to——. Well, God guide you and give you strength! Do not forget that the eyes of your people are turned to you in expectation. Think of Merete, weeping day and night over her spoilt life. Think of Lucia, sleeping in her dark tomb. And one thing more; do not forget that to-night it is your youngest child that is the stake in your game. (*Goes out to the left.*)

Lady Inger (*after looking after her in silence for some moments*). My youngest child! There you spoke truer than you knew. But it is not only my child; God help me, it is the whole of Norway that is at stake to-night. Hark! is that not some one riding through the castle gate? (*Listens at the window.*) No, not yet. It was only the wind. It is blowing as cold as death. Is there any justice in God? To create me a woman, and then lay a man's work upon my shoulders! For I *do* hold the welfare of my country in my hands. It *is* in my power to raise them all as one man; it is from *me* that they are waiting for the signal—and if I do not give it now, perhaps I never shall. Shall I hesitate? or shall I sacrifice the many for the sake of one? Were it not better, perhaps, if I could——? No, no, no! I *will* not do that! I *cannot* do it! (*Casts a furtive glance towards the Great Hall, then turns away from it as if in terror, and says in a whisper:*) They are in there again! Pale ghosts—my dead ancestors—my fallen kinsmen!

Oh, these questioning eyes in every corner of the Hall!
(*Makes a gesture as if warding them off, and cries out:*)
Sten Sture! Knut Alfsön! Olaf Skavtavl! Let me be!
let me be! I cannot do it!

(*A STRANGER,¹ of powerful build, with greying hair and beard, clad in sheepskins and carrying rusty weapons, steps in from the Great Hall.*)

The Stranger (in a low voice, as he stands in the doorway).
Hail to you, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve!

Lady Inger (turning round with a cry). Ah, God in heaven,
help me! (*Sinks on to a seat. The STRANGER stands motionless, leaning on his sword, gazing at her. Curtain.*)

ACT II

(*SCENE.—Same as in Act I. LADY INGER is sitting at a table by the window on the right. OLAF SKAVTAVL is standing a little way from her. From the demeanour of both, it is evident that a very serious conversation has been taking place.*)

Olaf Skavtavl. For the last time, Lady Inger—are you unshakable in your resolve?

Lady Inger. I cannot be otherwise. And my advice to you is: do as I do. If it be Heaven's will that Norway is to perish utterly, it will perish whether we try to save it or no.

Olaf Skavtavl. And do you suppose that I can sit down patiently under such a belief as that?—sit quietly down and look on, now that the moment has come? Have you forgotten what I have to avenge? They have robbed me of my worldly goods and divided them among themselves. My son—my only child—the last of my race—they slew before my eyes like a dog. Myself they have outlawed and hunted through the forests and over the hills these twenty years. Rumour has had me dead more than once; but I believe now that I shall not be laid in the ground before I have taken my revenge.

¹ Olaf Skavtavl.

Lady Inger. Then you have the prospect of living a long time. What is it you want to do?

Olaf Skavtavl. Do? How can I tell? I have never been one for plotting. That is just where you must help me; you have wits for that, and to spare. I have nothing but my two arms and my sword.

Lady Inger. Your sword is rusted, Olaf Skavtavl! All the swords in Norway are rusted.

Olaf Skavtavl. And that, no doubt, is why some folks fight only with their tongues. Lady Inger, you are strangely changed. There was a time when a man's heart beat in your bosom.

Lady Inger. Do not remind me of what *was*.

Olaf Skavtavl. And that is why I have come here. You *shall* hear me, even if——

Lady Inger. Very well; but be brief, because—it is no use my concealing it—this place is not safe for you.

Olaf Skavtavl. Ostraat not safe for an outlaw? I have long known that. But surely you forget that an outlawed man is in danger wherever he wanders.

Lady Inger. Speak then; I will not forbid you that.

Olaf Skavtavl. It is nearly thirty years since I saw you for the first time. It was at Akershus in Knut Alfson's house. You were little more than a child then; but, for all that, you were as bold as a falcon, and wild and unruly at times as well! You had no lack of wooers; and I loved you too—I loved you as I have never loved woman before or since. But your life had but one object, and your mind held but one thought—the thought of your country's ill fortune and sore need.

Lady Inger. I was fifteen—remember that! Besides, did it not seem as if some madness seized upon us all in those days?

Olaf Skavtavl. Call it what you like. But *this* I know: the older and more experienced of us believed that it was written in Heaven's decree that you should be the one to break the bonds of our thralldom and win us back all our rights. And *this* I know further: you yourself thought the same then.

Lady Inger. It was a sinful thought, Olaf Skavtavl!

It was pride, and not a call from Heaven, that spoke through me.

Olaf Skavtavl. You might have been the chosen one; if you had wished. You were a descendant of the oldest race in Norway; you could look forward to a position of power and wealth; and your ears were quick to hear a people's cries—then. Do you remember the evening when Hendrik Krummedike, with the Danish fleet, anchored off Akershus? Their captains pretended friendship, and offered us peace; so, trusting in their promise of safe conduct, Knut Alfsön boarded one of their vessels. Three hours later we carried him in through the castle gates—

Lady Inger. —a dead man!

Olaf Skavtavl. The bravest heart in Norway was stilled when Krummedike's hirelings slew him. Even now I can see the long line of men filing through the Great Hall, two and two, and heavily bowed with grief. There he lay on his bier, pale as a spring cloud, with the murderous axe's wound in his forehead. The noblest men in Norway were gathered there that night. Lady Margrete stood at her dead husband's head, and one and all we swore to devote our strength and our lives to avenge this last outrage and all that had gone before. Inger Gyldenlöve, who was it that broke her way through the crowd of men? A young maiden—little more than a child—with fire in her eyes and a voice trembling with tears. What was the oath she swore? Shall I repeat your words to you?

Lady Inger. I swore what the rest of you swore. No more or less.

Olaf Skavtavl. You remember your oath—and yet, you have forgotten it.

Lady Inger. And how did the others hold to their promise? I do not mean you, Olaf Skavtavl, but your friends—all the nobles of Norway. There is not one of them, in all these years, that has had the courage to be a man; and yet they lay it as a reproach on me that I am a woman.

Olaf Skavtavl. I know what you would say. Why have they submitted to the yoke, instead of defying these butchers to the last? It is true enough; it is but base metal that our race is made of nowadays. But had they

only been united, who knows what might have happened? And you might have united them; for they would all have bowed to your word.

Lady Inger. It would be easy to answer you, but you would scarcely believe my answer. So let us speak no more of what cannot be altered. Tell me rather what it is that has brought you to Ostraat. Are you in need of a hiding place? Well, I will seek to hide you. If you need aught else, tell me. You will find me ready.

Olaf Skavtavl. For twenty years I have been homeless. My hair has grown grey on the mountain-sides of Jämtland. I have shared the homes of the wolves and the bears. You see, Lady Inger, that *I* do not need you; but our people—noble and simple alike—have need of you.

Lady Inger. Always the same refrain!

Olaf Skavtavl. Yes, it has an ill sound in your ears—I know that well enough; but you must listen, nevertheless. To be brief, I have come from Sweden. That country is in revolt; it is on the point of breaking out in Dalarna.

Lady Inger. I know that.

Olaf Skavtavl. Peter the Chancellor is with us—but in secret, you understand.

Lady Inger (with a start). Is that so?

Olaf Skavtavl. It is he that has sent me to Ostraat.

Lady Inger (getting up). Peter the Chancellor, you say?

Olaf Skavtavl. Himself. But perhaps you remember him no longer?

Lady Inger (half to herself). Only too well! But tell me, I beg you, what message do you bring?

Olaf Skavtavl. When rumours of the revolt reached me up on the mountains of the frontier, where I was, I made my way at once over into Sweden. I had a shrewd idea that Peter the Chancellor was taking a hand in the game. I sought him out and offered him my assistance. He had known me in earlier days, as you are aware. He knew that I was to be trusted; and so he sent me here.

Lady Inger (impatiently). Yes, yes—he sent you here to—?

Olaf Skavtavl (with an air of mystery). Lady Inger, a stranger is coming to Ostraat to-night.

Lady Inger (in surprise). What? Do you know that?

Olaf Skavtavl. I do. I know everything. It was to meet him that Peter the Chancellor sent me here.

Lady Inger. To meet *him*? Impossible, Olaf Skavtavl—impossible!

Olaf Skavtavl. It is as I say. If he is not yet come, it will not be long before he does——

Lady Inger. No, that is certain; but——

Olaf Skavtavl. You were prepared for his coming, then?

Lady Inger. Certainly. He has sent word to me. That was how you were allowed to slip in as soon as you knocked at the gate.

Olaf Skavtavl (*listening*). Hush! some one is coming down the road on horseback. (*Goes to the window.*) The gate is being opened.

Lady Inger (*looking out*). It is a knight and his squire. They are dismounting in the courtyard.

Olaf Skavtavl. Then it is he. What is his name?

Lady Inger. Do you not know his name?

Olaf Skavtavl. Peter the Chancellor refused to tell me his name. He only said that the messenger would meet me at Ostraat on the third night after Martinmas——

Lady Inger. Yes, that is to-night.

Olaf Skavtavl. He was to bring letters with him. From them, and from your lips, I was to learn who he is.

Lady Inger. Then let me take you to your guest chamber. You need refreshment and rest. You shall have speech with the stranger before long.

Olaf Skavtavl. As you will. (*Both go out to the left. After a moment's interval FINN comes cautiously in through the door on the right, looks round the room, peeps into the Great Hall, then goes back to the door and beckons to some one outside. Thereupon NILS LYKKE and JENS BJELKE come into the room.*)

Nils Lykke (*in a low voice*). No one?

Finn (*likewise*). No, my lord!

Nils Lykke. Can we trust you absolutely?

Finn. The commandant at Trondhjem has always given me the character of a trustworthy man.

Nils Lykke. Yes—he has said as much to me. Well then, tell me this first of all; has any stranger come to Ostraat before us this evening?

Finn. Yes; an hour ago a stranger came here.

Nils Lykke (in a low voice to JENS BJELKE). He is here. (*Turns to FINN.*) Do you know who it is? Have you seen him?

Finn. No; no one has seen him except the keeper of the gate, so far as I know. He was taken at once to Lady Inger, and she——

Nils Lykke. Well? What did she do? He is not away again already, is he?

Finn. No; my lady seems to be keeping him in hiding in one of the private apartments, so as to——

Nils Lykke. Good.

Jens Bjelke (whispering). See at once that the gate is watched, and then we shall have him.

Nils Lykke (with a smile). Here! (*To FINN.*) Tell me, is there no other way out of the castle, except by the gate? Don't look so stupidly at me! I mean, would it be possible for any one to escape from Ostraat unseen although the gates be locked?

Finn. Indeed I don't know. I have heard talk of secret passages through the vaults down below; but there is no one that knows of them unless it be Lady Inger herself—or perhaps Lady Eline.

Jens Bjelke. Devil take it!

Nils Lykke (to FINN). Very well. You may go.

Finn. As you please. If you need me later, you have but to knock on the second door on the right in the Great Hall there. I shall be at hand.

Nils Lykke. Good. (*FINN goes out.*)

Jens Bjelke. It seems to me, my dear friend, that our plan of campaign is rather a failure.

Nils Lykke (with a smile). Not for me, I hope.

Jens Bjelke. Indeed? To begin with, there is very little glory in hunting down an overgrown boy like this Nils Sture. Are we to count him as a clever fellow or a fool, after the way he has behaved? He first of all stirs up bad blood among all the country folk—promises them help and money and land—and then, when it comes to the point, runs off and hides behind a woman's petticoats! To tell you the truth, I regret having followed your counsel and not having gone my own way as my wits prompted.

Nils Lykke (gently). Your regret comes a little too late, my friend.

Jens Bjelke. Lying low to dig out badgers has never been much to my taste. I expected something different altogether. Here have I come all the way from Jämteland with my men—with the Trondhjem commandant's letter to authorise me to hunt out this instigator of rebellion wherever I pleased. Everything tended to show that he was making for Ostraat—

Nils Lykke. He is here! He is here, I tell you.

Jens Bjelke. Yes, but if so what would have been more likely than that we should find the gates barred against us and closely guarded? Would that we had! In that case I might have used my warriors—

Nils Lykke. But on the contrary the gates are opened most politely for us. Trust me, if Lady Inger is true to her reputation she will not let her guests lack for food and drink.

Jens Bjelke. To talk us away from our errand, yes! What can have induced you to persuade me to leave my men behind, half a mile from the castle? If we had come here with our troops, then—

Nils Lykke. Then she would have received us as welcome guests all the same. But, mark this; in that case our visit would have aroused attention. The folk about here would have taken it as an outrage against Lady Inger; it would have increased her popularity with them; and that is not what we desire.

Jens Bjelke. May be. But what am I to do now? Count Sture is at Ostraat, you say. Well—what good is that to me? Lady Inger without doubt has, like the foxes, many a lair here and more than one way out. And we two men alone may sniff about as long as we please, in vain. Devil take the whole affair!

Nils Lykke. Very well, my dear friend—if the turn your mission has taken is not to your liking, leave the field to me.

Jens Bjelke. To you? What do you mean to do?

Nils Lykke. I fancy that shrewdness and cunning will be able to accomplish here what the force of arms would never do. To be frank with you, I have had such an

idea in my mind ever since we met at Trondhjem yesterday.

Jens Bjelke. Was that why you persuaded me to leave my men behind?

Nils Lykke. Because both your errand at Ostraat and mine would be best served without them. And so——

Jens Bjelke. I wish the devil would fly away with you—and with me too! I ought to have known that you would be sure to have some cunning trick up your sleeve.

Nils Lykke. But bear in mind that cunning will be needed here, if we are to match these people with equal weapons. Let me tell you that it is of the highest importance to me that I should come well out of this mission, and secretly. My lord the king was barely gracious to me when I came away; he imagined he had reasons for the way he treated me; though I believe I have served him as usefully as a man could do, on more than one difficult mission.

Jens Bjelke. Yes, I will give you credit for that. Every one knows you are the craftiest devil in all the three kingdoms.

Nils Lykke. Thank you! I don't know that it means so much, after all. But I consider the task that confronts me here as a crowning test, for here it is a question of entrapping a woman——

Jens Bjelke. Ha! ha! You have been a past-master in that sort of crowning test for a long time, my dear friend! Do you expect me to believe you don't know the jingle that is current, even in Sweden:

“ Every maiden's sighing seems to say,
Would that within my arms Nils Lykke lay! ”

Nils Lykke. Oh, that rhyme only refers to maidens of twenty or thereabouts. But Lady Inger Gyldenlöve is near her fifties, and craftier than any other woman to boot. It will be no easy task to master her. But it must be done—at any cost! If I can gain, for the king, certain advantages over her that he has long aimed at, I may reckon on being sent to France as his ambassador next spring. You know that I spent three years at Paris University; and I desire nothing so much as to return to

Paris—especially if I can go there in so dignified a capacity as a king's ambassador. So you will leave Lady Inger to me, won't you? Remember, when you last visited the Court at Copenhagen, how I more than once retired in your favour and left you a clear field with the ladies——

Jens Bjelke. I don't know that it was so very magnanimous of you—since you had them all at your beck and call. However, as I seem to have come on a fool's errand, I am just as well pleased that you should take the whole thing on your shoulders. But I make one condition; if young Count Sture *is* at Ostraat, you must produce him—dead or alive!

Nils Lykke. You shall have him alive. I have no intention of killing him, at all events. But now you must ride back to your men. Hold the road securely with them. If I notice anything suspicious, you shall have word from me at once.

Jens Bjelke. Good. But how am I to get away from here?

Nils Lykke. The fellow who brought us in will show you. But see that you make no noise——

Jens Bjelke. Of course. Well—good luck to you!

Nils Lykke. My luck has never deserted me yet when I was pitted against a woman. Hasten away! (*JENS BJELKE goes out to the right. NILS LYKKE stands for a moment in thought; then walks up and down, looking around him; then says in a low voice:*) So here I am, at last, at Ostraat—that old castle of which a child told me so much two years ago—Lucia!—yes, two years ago she was still a child. (*Hums to himself with a half smile.*) “Flowers are gathered, flowers fade.” (*Looks round him again.*) Ostraat! It is just as if I had seen it all before—as if it were my own home. That is the Great Hall in there. And below it are the vaults. Lucia lies there now, doubtless. (*Lowers his voice, and continues in a tone half serious and half constrainedly mocking.*) If I were a man to be easily frightened, I could make myself believe that when I set foot within the gates of Ostraat she turned in her coffin; that as I crossed the courtyard she lifted her coffin-lid; and that as I spoke her name, my voice conjured her up out of her grave. Perhaps even now she is groping up the

steps from the vaults; her grave-clothes are in her way, but she stumbles along nevertheless. She has made her way up to the Great Hall! She stands looking at me from the doorway! (*Turns his head over his shoulder, nods, and says aloud:*) Come nearer, Lucia! Come and talk to me! Your mother is keeping me waiting. Waiting is dull work, and you have helped me to while away so many dull hours. (*Passes his hand over his face and takes a few steps up and down.*) Yes—there it is! That is the deep window with the curtains. That is where Lady Inger is wont to stand, gazing out over the landscape, as if she were waiting for some one who never comes. In there—(*looks towards the door on the left*) somewhere in there is sister Eline's room. Eline? Yes, Eline is her name. Am I really to believe that she is so wonderful—as clever and as daring as Lucia said? And beautiful, too. But—as a wife——? I ought not to have written so straightforwardly. (*Half sits down at the table in thought, but gets up again.*) How will Lady Inger receive me? She will not burn down the castle over our heads—nor decoy me down a trap-door. Nor will she have me stabbed from behind——. (*Listens.*) Aha! (*LADY INGER comes in and greets him coldly.*)

Lady Inger. Greeting to you, my lord!

Nils Lykke (*bowing low*). Ah—the lady of Ostraat!

Lady Inger. And my thanks to you for having sent me word of your coming.

Nils Lykke. It was no more than my duty. I had reason to suppose that my arrival might surprise you.

Lady Inger. Indeed, my lord, you are not mistaken in that. Certainly Nils Lykke is the last man I expected to see as a guest at Ostraat.

Nils Lykke. Still less did you expect that he would come as a friend.

Lady Inger. As a friend? You add your mockery to all the pain and disgrace you have heaped upon my house? You have brought one of my children to her grave, and yet you dare——

Nils Lykke. Forgive me, Lady Inger, but on that point we can never understand one another—because you will not take into account what *I* lost by the same unhappy

turn of fate. My intentions were honourable. I was tired of a life of licence—I was more than thirty years old, too—and I was longing to find a good and gentle wife. And, in addition, there was the honour of becoming *your* son-in-law——

Lady Inger. Take care, my lord! What befell my child, I have concealed to the best of my powers. But do not think that I have forgotten it, though I have concealed it. There might easily come a time when——

Nils Lykke. Are you threatening me, Lady Inger? I have offered you my hand in reconciliation. You refuse to take it. Is it to be open war between us in future, then?

Lady Inger. I did not know that it had been anything else in the past.

Nils Lykke. On your side, perhaps. But I have never been your enemy—although, as a subject of the king of Denmark, I had reasonable grounds for being so.

Lady Inger. I understand you. I have not been complaisant enough. It has not proved so easy as you hoped, to entice me over into your camp. It seems to me that you have nothing to complain of. My daughter Merete's husband is a fellow-countryman of yours. Farther than that I cannot go. My position is a difficult one, Nils Lykke.

Nils Lykke. I admit that fully. Both noble and simple alike, here in Norway, believe they have an old claim upon you—a claim that they say you have only half fulfilled.

Lady Inger. Pardon me, my lord—but I hold myself responsible for my conduct to no one but God and myself. And therefore, if it please you, inform me as to what it is has brought you hither.

Nils Lykke. By all means—although surely the object of my mission here cannot very well be so unknown to you?

Lady Inger. I know what is generally assumed to be your mission. It is of importance to the king to know how he stands with the nobles of Norway.

Nils Lykke. Exactly.

Lady Inger. And that is your reason for visiting Ostraat?

Nils Lykke. Partly. At all events I have not come to demand any personal assurance from you——

Lady Inger. What do you mean?

Nils Lykke. Listen to me, Lady Inger! You said yourself just now that your position is a difficult one. You stand midway between two opposed forces, neither of which feel justified in trusting you beyond a certain point. Your own interests must necessarily bind you to us. Unfortunately, on the other hand, you are bound to the people here; and who knows but what there may be also another secret tie binding you.

Lady Inger (to herself). A secret tie? Good Heavens, can he——?

Nils Lykke (notices her emotion, but shows her no sign of having done so, and continues in an unrestrained manner). You, no doubt, see for yourself that you cannot maintain such a position indefinitely. Now suppose that it lay in my power to get you out of a difficulty, which——

Lady Inger. In your power, did you say?

Nils Lykke. In the first place, Lady Inger, let me beg you to attach no importance to the heedless words I may have used in speaking of the relations between us. Believe me when I say that the wrong I have done you is never absent from my thoughts. Suppose that for long my purpose has been to make reparation, as far as is possible, for the wrong I did. Suppose that it was for that reason that I obtained this mission here.

Lady Inger. Explain yourself more exactly, my lord. I do not understand you.

Nils Lykke. Probably I am not wrong in supposing that you are as well informed as I, as to the revolt that threatens to break out in Sweden. You know—or at all events you suspect—that the aim of this revolt reaches much farther than is generally admitted; and therefore you can understand that our king cannot sit quietly and watch events taking their course. Is that not so?

Lady Inger. Continue!

Nils Lykke (searchingly, after a short pause). There is one conceivable possibility that might put Gustav Vasa's throne in danger——

Lady Inger (aside). What does he mean?

Nils Lykke. The possibility that there should be found in Sweden a man whose birth should give him a claim to be elected as the nation's head.

Lady Inger (evasively). Sweden's nobility has been as terribly mutilated as ours, my lord! Where do you propose to look for——?

Nils Lykke (smiling). Look for him? The man is found already.

Lady Inger (with a start). Found? Found?

Nils Lykke. And he is too nearly related to you, Lady Inger, for you not to guess whom I mean. (*Looks hard at her.*) The late Count Sture left a son——

Lady Inger (with a cry). Merciful heavens, how do you come to know——?

Nils Lykke. Control yourself, Lady Inger, and let me finish what I have to say. This young man has hitherto lived quietly with his mother, Sten Sture's widow.

Lady Inger (breathing more freely). With——? Ah, yes—of course!

Nils Lykke. But now he has come openly forward. In Dalarne he has proclaimed himself the people's champion. The number of his followers increases every day; and, as perhaps you know, they find friends among the people on this side of the frontier.

Lady Inger (who has regained her self-control). My lord, you speak of all these events as if you were satisfied that I am aware of them. What ground have I given you for holding any such opinion? I know nothing of them, and wish to know nothing. My desire is to live peaceably within my own borders. I give no support to these breakers of the peace; but, equally, you must not count upon my help if it is your design to subjugate them.

Nils Lykke (lowering his voice). Would you also remain inactive if my design were to support them?

Lady Inger. How am I to understand you?

Nils Lykke. Then I see you have not grasped the meaning of what I have been saying all this time. Well, I will tell you everything, honestly and straightforwardly. You must know, then, that the king and his council are well aware that we can, in the long run, hope for no secure footing in Norway as long as noble and simple alike continue to consider themselves unjustly treated and oppressed, as they do now. We understand perfectly well that willing allies are of more value than forced subjects;

and therefore we wish for nothing more heartily than to loosen the bonds which, as a matter of fact, irk us as sorely as they do you. But of course you can also understand that the temper of the Norwegians towards us makes such a step altogether visionary, so long as we have no reliable support at our backs.

Lady Inger. And that support——?

Nils Lykke. That support is easiest to find in Sweden. But—mark this well—not so long as Gustav Vasa is at the helm there; for *his* reckoning with Denmark has not yet been made, nor will it ever be. On the other hand, a new Swedish king who had his people on his side and owed his crown to the support of Denmark——. Well, are you beginning to understand me? *Then* we could say confidently to you Norwegians: “Take back your old ancestral rights; choose yourselves a king at your own pleasure; be our friends in time of need, as we will be yours!” And, mark this well also, Lady Inger; this magnanimity would not in reality be as great as it might appear, for you can see for yourself that we, so far from being weakened, would rather be strengthened by it. And now, as I have spoken without reserve, put away any mistrust that you had. (*Firmly.*) So the Swedish knight who came here an hour before I did——

Lady Inger. You know that already?

Nils Lykke. Of course. It is him that I seek.

Lady Inger (to herself). It is amazing. It is just as Olaf Skavtavl said, then. (*To NILS LYKKE.*) I will ask you to wait here, my lord. I will go and bring him to you. (*Goes out through the Great Hall. NILS LYKKE looks after her with exulting surprise.*)

Nils Lykke. She has gone to fetch him! It is really true—she has gone to fetch him! The fight is half won. I little thought it would go so easily. She is deeply involved with these rebels—she started and gave a cry when I mentioned Sten Sture’s son. What next? Hm! If Lady Inger has walked trustfully into the trap, Nils Sture will not make many difficulties. Young blood, with but little caution and foresight—my promise of support will draw him out of his concealment here. Unfortunately Jens Bjelke will snap him up on the road—and the whole

movement will be strangled. And then? Then we shall be a step nearer to advantage for ourselves. The news will spread that young Count Sture has been at Ostraat—that a Danish envoy has had a parley with Lady Inger—and that, as a result, the young Count was snapped up by King Gustav's men-at-arms a quarter of a mile from the Castle. However great Inger Gyldenlöve's prestige may be among her people, it will scarcely stand up against such a blow as that. (*Starts, as if suddenly uneasy.*) Devil take it! Suppose she has scented danger! Suppose at this very moment he is slipping out of our hands! (*Listens towards the Great Hall.*) I need not have been anxious; here they come. (*LADY INGER comes in from the Great Hall, accompanied by OLAF SKAVTAVL.*)

Lady Inger (to NILS LYKKE). I have brought you him for whom you were waiting.

Nils Lykke (*aside*). Perdition seize her—what does this mean?

Lady Inger. I have told this knight your name, and what you have told me——

Nils Lykke (*hesitatingly*). You have? Yes? Well——

Lady Inger. And I will not conceal from you that he does not place any great confidence in your support.

Nils Lykke. Does he not?

Lady Inger. Can you wonder at it? Surely you know what his sympathies are, and what his cruel lot has been——

Nils Lykke. This man's——? Well—yes—of course——

Olaf Skavtavl (to NILS LYKKE). But since it is Peter the Chancellor himself who has appointed this meeting for us here——

Nils Lykke. Peter the Chancellor——? (*Recovers himself hastily*). Yes, exactly—I have a mission from Peter the Chancellor——

Olaf Skavtavl. And he must know best whom he can trust. Therefore I am not going to trouble my head to find out how——

Nils Lykke. No, that is quite right, my good sir. Above all, let us not do that.

Olaf Skavtavl. Rather let us come at once to the point.

Nils Lykke. At once to the point, without beating about the bush. That is always my way

Olaf Skavtavl. Then will you tell me what message you bring?

Nils Lykke. I imagine you can pretty nearly guess my message——

Olaf Skavtavl. Peter the Chancellor mentioned some papers that——

Nils Lykke. Papers? Oh, yes, of course—the papers!

Olaf Skavtavl. You have them on you, I suppose?

Nils Lykke. Of course—and well concealed—almost too well for me to find them in a hurry——. (*Pretends to be searching his pockets and says to himself :*) Who the devil is he? What am I in for? There is certainly some big discovery to be made here. (*He notices that Servants have been spreading the table and lighting lamps in the Great Hall, and says to OLAF SKAVTAVL :*) Ah, I see that Lady Inger is having supper laid for us. We can talk more at ease about our affairs at table.

Olaf Skavtavl. Very good. As you please.

Nils Lykke (aside). Time gained means the fight won! (*To LADY INGER, with great friendliness.*) And meantime may we not hear what part Lady Inger intends to take in our conclave?

Lady Inger. I? None.

Olaf Skavtavl and Nils Lykke. None!

Lady Inger. Can you be surprised, my lords, that I dare not trust myself to take a hand in a game where everything is staked upon the result?—and, all the more, when neither of my allies dare trust themselves confidently to me?

Nils Lykke. That reproach does not touch me. I trust you blindly—and I beg you to be sure of that.

Olaf Skavtavl. Who should trust you, if not your own fellow-countryman?

Lady Inger. Really — such confidence delights me. (*Goes to a table at the back, and fills two beakers with wine.*)

Nils Lykke (aside). Deuce take it, is she going to escape from my net?

Lady Inger (holding out a beaker to each of them). And, since that is so, I offer you this welcome to Ostraat. Drink, my lords! Drink deep! (*Looks at them, one after the other, when they have drunk ; then says seriously :*)

But now I must tell you—the one beaker held a drink of welcome to my ally; the other, death for my enemy!

Nils Lykke (throwing away his beaker). Ah, I am poisoned!

Olaf Skavtavl (at the same time, grasping his sword). Death and damnation, have you murdered me?

Lady Inger (laughingly to OLAF SKAVTAVL, while she points at NILS LYKKE). Look at Denmark's trust in Inger Gyldenlöve—(to NILS LYKKE, pointing at OLAF SKAVTAVL) and my fellow-countryman's trust in me, likewise. (To them both.) And you thought I was going to put myself in your power? Gently, my lords—gently! The Lady of Ostraat has not lost her senses yet. (ELINE comes in by the door on the left.)

Eline. What was that noise? What has happened?

Lady Inger (to NILS LYKKE). My daughter Eline.

Nils Lykke (softly). Eline! I had not imagined her like that. (ELINE looks towards him, and stands gazing at him in surprise.)

Lady Inger (touching her on the arm). My child—that knight is—

Eline (shakes her mother's hand from her arm, still gazing involuntarily at NILS LYKKE). You need not tell me! I know his name. That is Nils Lykke.

Nils Lykke (in a low voice, to LADY INGER). How is this? She recognises me? Did Lucia——? Does she know——?

Lady Inger. Hush! She knows nothing.

Eline (to herself). I knew it—Nils Lykke must look like that.

Nils Lykke (approaching her). Well, Eline Gyldenlöve, you have guessed right. And, since I am so known to you and am your mother's guest, you will not refuse me the knot of flowers you are wearing on your breast. As long as they last fresh and fragrant, I shall possess a picture of yourself.

Eline (proudly, but still gazing at him). Pardon me, my lord—I took them from my own room, and no flowers bloom there for you.

Nils Lykke (detaching a posy of flowers which he is wearing on his doublet). Then you will not refuse this little offering. A noble lady gave them to me as a parting gift

when I left Trondhjem this morning. For believe me, noble maiden, if I were to offer you a gift that should be fully worthy of you, it would need to be a princess's coronet.

Eline (who has involuntarily taken the flowers). And even if it were the crown of Denmark you offered me, before I would share it with *you*, I would tear it asunder in my hands and hurl the fragments at your feet! *(Throws the flowers at his feet and goes into the Great Hall.)*

Olaf Skavtavl (muttering to himself). Brave!—like Inger Ottisdalter at Knut Alfsön's bier!

Lady Inger (in a low voice, after looking at ELINE and NILS LYKKE). The wolf can be tamed. We must forge his chain.

Nils Lykke (taking up the flowers and looking in a fascinated way after ELINE). Ye Gods, how proud and how fair she is!

ACT III

SCENE.—*The Great Hall. A lofty bay-window at the back; a smaller window in the foreground on the left. Doors on both sides. The roof is supported on massive wooden pillars which are all hung with various weapons, as are the walls also. Pictures of saints, knights and ladies hang round the Hall. From the roof hangs a branched candelabrum, brightly lit. In the foreground to the right an old carved seat-of-honour. In the middle of the Hall is a table on which are the remains of an evening meal. ELINE comes in slowly and thoughtfully from the left. Her expression betrays the fact that her thoughts are dwelling on her interview with NILS LYKKE. At last she makes the same gesture as she did when she threw down the flowers, and says in a low voice :)*

Eline. And then he picked up the fragments of the crown of Denmark—no, it was his flowers—and, “Ye Gods, how proud and how fair she is!” he said. Had he only whispered these words in the remotest spot, miles from Ostraat, I should have heard them all the same! How I hate him! How I have always hated him—this

Nils Lykke! There is no one else like him, they say. He plays with women—and tramples them underfoot. And it is to *him* that my mother would offer me! How I hate him! They say Nils Lykke is different from all other men. It is not true! There is nothing remarkable about him. There are many, many like him. When Björn used to tell me tales, all the Princes were like Nils Lykke. When I used to sit here alone, and people the Hall with imaginary knights, every one of them looked like Nils Lykke. What a strange thing it is to hate—and how sweet! Never did I know how sweet, till to-night. I would not exchange a thousand years of life for the moments I have lived since I saw him. “Ye Gods, how proud——” (*Goes slowly to the background, opens the window and stands looking out.* NILS LYKKE *comes in through a door on the right.*)

Nils Lykke (to himself). “A sound sleep to you, my lord,” said Inger Gyldenlöve as she left me. Sound sleep? It is easy to say that, but——. Out there, sky and sea in an uproar; in the vaults below, that young girl in her coffin; the destinies of two kingdoms in my hands; and on my breast a knot of flowers that a woman has thrown at my feet. Indeed, I fear it will be late before sleep comes to me. (*Sees ELINE, who has left the window and is going out on the left.*) There she is. Her proud eyes look thoughtful. If only I dared——. (*Aloud.*) Lady Eline!

Eline (stopping by the door). What do you want? Why are you pursuing me?

Nils Lykke. You are mistaken; I am not pursuing you. It is I that am pursued.

Eline. Are you?

Nils Lykke. By a crowd of different thoughts. That is why sleep has treated me as you have done—fled from me.

Eline. Go to the window, and you will find something to distract you—a stormy sea——

Nils Lykke (smiling). A stormy sea? I can find that in you too.

Eline. In me?

Nils Lykke. Our first encounter made me certain of it.

Eline. And are you complaining of it?

Nils Lykke. By no means. But I could wish to see you more gently disposed.

Eline (proudly). Do you think your wish will be gratified?

Nils Lykke. I am sure of it; because I bring you a welcome announcement.

Eline. And that is?

Nils Lykke. My farewell.

Eline (taking a step near him). Your farewell? Are you leaving Ostraat—so soon?

Nils Lykke. This very night.

Eline (struggles for a moment with her feelings ; then says coldly :) Then I bid you farewell, my lord. (Bows, and turns to go.)

Nils Lykke. Eline Gyldenløve—I have no right to detain you; but it would ill become your nobility to refuse to hear what I have to say to you.

Eline. I am listening, my lord!

Nils Lykke. I see that you hate me.

Eline. You have good eyes, my lord!

Nils Lykke. But I know also that I have fully deserved your hatred. They were unseemly and insulting words that I used of you when I wrote to Lady Inger.

Eline. It is possible enough; but I have not read them.

Nils Lykke. But at least the import of my letter is not unknown to you. I know your mother has not left you in ignorance of that. She must at all events have told you how lucky I thought the man would be who—. Ah, you know what hope I have been cherishing!

Eline. My lord, if it is of that you wish to speak, I must—

Nils Lykke. I wish to speak of it, simply to excuse my behaviour; for no other reason, I swear to you. If my reputation has preceded me to Ostraat, as I have unfortunately reason to believe it has, then you know enough about my life not to be surprised at my going somewhat enterprisingly to work in matters of this kind. I have met many women, Lady Eline—and I have never found them inflexible. That sort of experience tends to make a man easy-going. Heloses the habit of beating about the bush—

Eline. That may be. I do not know what stuff such women are made of. Moreover, you are mistaken if you suppose it was your letter to my mother that has stirred

my heart to such bitterness against you. I have reasons of longer standing than that.

Nils Lykke (uneasily). Of longer standing? What do you mean?

Eline. As you supposed, your reputation preceded you to Ostraat as it has everywhere else. Nils Lykke's name is never mentioned without being coupled with the name of some woman that he has ensnared and then cast off. Some mention your name with anger; others with a laugh and with heartless mockery of those weak creatures. But through the anger and the laughter and the mockery sounds the refrain of that song about you—persistent and maddening—like an enemy's chant of victory. It is all that put together which has bred my hatred of you. You were perpetually in my thoughts; and there grew in me the longing to stand face to face with you, so that you should learn that there are women on whom your seductive words are wasted, however craftily employed.

Nils Lykke. You judge me unjustly if you judge me by what rumour has told you. It is possible that all you have heard may be true; but of the cause of it you have no knowledge. At seventeen I began a life of pleasure—and that is fifteen years ago. Light women gave me what I asked, even before the asking; and what I offered them, they grasped with eager hands. You are the first woman who has thrown back my gifts contemptuously at my feet. Do not think that I am complaining. On the contrary, I honour you for it as I have never honoured woman before. But what I do regret, and what makes me suffer to the bottom of my heart, is that fate did not permit me to meet you sooner. Your mother has talked of you to me. While the life of the world has been running its restless course far away from here, you have been roaming about lonely Ostraat, quiet and alone with your poems and your dreams. And so you will understand what I have to say to you. Let me tell you that I once lived just such a life as you live here. I used to imagine that when I went out into the great wide world, I should meet with some noble, glorious woman who would beckon to me and show me the path to a splendid goal. I deceived myself, Eline. I met with women, it is true; but *she* was

not amongst them. Even before I had grown into a man, I had learnt to mistrust them all. Am I to blame, then? Why were those others not like you? I know your country's destiny lies heavy on your soul. You know how far I am responsible for the present condition of things. They say of me that I am as unstable as the sea-foam. Perhaps that is true enough; but, if I am, it is women that have taught me to be so. If I had found earlier what I sought; if I had found a woman as proud, as noble and as high-minded as you, I am certain I should have trodden quite another path. I might at this moment have been standing by your side as champion of all the wronged men in Norway. For *this* I know: women are the mightiest force in the world, and they hold in their hands the power of leading men in the way God would have them walk in.

Eline (to herself). Can it possibly be as he says? No, no—there is a lie in his eyes and deceit on his lips. And yet—I never heard music sweeter than his voice.

Nils Lykke (coming nearer to her, and speaking in lower and more confidential tones). How often have you sat here, alone with your changing thoughts; your heart was oppressed, and it seemed as if the roof and walls were closing in upon your soul and crushing it. You have longed to escape—to fly far away from here—and yet you could not tell whither. How often have you wandered alone along the shores of the fjord, and seen some gallant ship, with knights and ladies on board, sailing past, away out there, with a sound of song and music—you have heard a vague echo of great happenings—you have felt a craving in your breast, an irrepressible longing to know what lay beyond the sea. But you have not understood what it was you lacked. Sometimes you have believed it was your country's lot that filled you with all these disturbing thoughts. You deceived yourself. A maiden's thoughts, at your age, spring from another cause. Eline, have you never imagined that there may be secret forces at work in the world—strong, mysterious forces that knit destiny to destiny? When you used to dream of the brilliant life out in the wide world—when you used to dream of tourneys and merry feasts—did you never in your dream

see a knight that stood, amidst all the noise and revelry, with a smile on his lips but anguish in his heart—a knight who once had dreamed as fair dreams as you—dreams of a noble, high-minded woman whom he sought in vain amongst all those that surrounded him?

Eline. Who are you, who are able to put my most secret thoughts into words? How is it that you can tell me what lies hidden deep in my heart—even thoughts that I scarcely knew were there? Where have you learnt——?

Nils Lykke. What I have said to you, I read in your eyes.

Eline. Never has any man talked to me so. I have but dimly understood you; and yet—everything, everything seems changed since——. (*To herself.*) Now I understand why they said Nils Lykke was unlike all other men.

Nils Lykke. There is one thing in the world that can always stir our thoughts if we let ourselves ponder on it—the thought of what might have been, if events had shaped themselves in such and such a way. If I had met you while the tree of my life was still young and vigorous, perhaps at this moment you might have been sitting——. But forgive me, gracious lady! Our few minutes' talk together has made me forget our respective positions. But it seemed as if a secret voice said to me from the first that I could speak to you freely, without flattery and without dissimulation.

Eline. You can.

Nils Lykke. Well, then—perhaps my very sincerity has half reconciled us. Indeed my hopes are even bolder. Perhaps the time may yet come when you will remember the stranger knight without hate and without anger in your heart. Oh, do not misunderstand me—I do not mean at once, but some day much later on. And, to make that less difficult—and since I have begun to speak sincerely and straightforwardly with you—let me tell you that——

Eline. My lord——!

Nils Lykke (with a smile). Ah, I see you are still frightened at my letter. But you may be quite easy in your mind. I would give any sum to have it unwritten, because

—yes, now that I know that it will cause you no particular pain to hear it, I may just as well tell you plainly—I do not love you and never should love you. So, as I said, be quite easy in your mind. I shall never seek to——. But what is the matter?

Eline. Nothing, nothing!—Tell me one thing. Why are you still wearing these flowers? What are you going to do with them?

Nils Lykke. These? Are they not the gauntlet that you have thrown down to the wicked Nils Lykke in championship of all your sex? Did you expect me not to take it up? What am I going to do with them, you ask. (*Lowers his voice.*) When I stand once more among the fair women of Denmark—when the music has ceased and there is silence in the hall—then I will bring out these flowers and tell a tale about a maiden who sits alone in a dark hall far away up in the North——. (*Breaks off, and bows respectfully to her.*) But I fear I am detaining you too long. We shall not meet again, for I shall be away before daybreak. So I bid you farewell.

Eline. Farewell, my lord. (*A short silence.*)

Nils Lykke. You look thoughtful again, Lady Eline! Is it still your country's destiny that weighs on your mind?

Eline (*shaking her head, as she gazes abstractedly in front of her*). My country? I am not thinking of my country.

Nils Lykke. Then it is all the turmoil and perplexity of these times that distresses you.

Eline. The times? I had forgotten all about them.—Are you going to Denmark? Was not that what you said?

Nils Lykke. I am going to Denmark.

Eline. Can I see Denmark from here?

Nils Lykke (*pointing to the window on the left*). Yes, from that window. Denmark lies away there, to the South.

Eline. Far from here? More than a hundred miles?

Nils Lykke. Much more. The sea lies between you and Denmark.

Eline (*to herself*). The sea? Thoughts have wings. The sea cannot stop them. (*Goes out to the left.*)

Nils Lykke (*after standing for a while looking after her*). If I could give up two days to it—or only one—she would

fall into my arms like all the others. She is made of rare stuff, that young woman. She is proud. Suppose, after all, I were to——. No. I prefer to humiliate her. (*Walks about the room.*) As I live, I believe she has set my blood on fire. Who would have thought such a thing possible nowadays?—But no more of that! I have got to unravel this tangle I am involved in. (*Sits down in a chair on the right.*) How am I to understand it? Both Olaf Skavtavl and Lady Inger seem blind to the suspicion with which they will be regarded if it gets about that I am in their councils. Is it possible that Lady Inger can have guessed my design? Can she be aware that all my promises had but one object—to fish Nils Sture out of his hiding-place? (*Springs up.*) Damnation! Can I have been fooled? It is very probable that Count Sture is not at Ostraat at all. The rumour of his flight may very well have been nothing but a stratagem. Perhaps at this moment he is safe and sound among his friends in Sweden, while I——. (*Walks uneasily up and down.*) And I was so certain of myself and of my plans! Suppose they all come to nothing? Suppose Lady Inger discovers my design, and makes no secret of what I have been doing——? I should be the laughing-stock of every one, both here and in Denmark! To have tried to catch Lady Inger in a trap—and only to end in helping her cause and strengthening her hold on her people. Oh, I should be tempted to sell my soul to the Devil, if he would put Count Sture into my hands——. (*A window at the back is pushed open. NILS STENSSON is seen standing outside.*)

Nils Lykke (*grasping his sword*). How now!

Nils Stensson (*jumping down on to the floor*). Ah! Here at last!

Nils Lykke (*aside*). What can this mean?

Nils Stensson. Good-day to you, my lord!

Nils Lykke. And to you, my lord! You have chosen to use a strange entrance.

Nils Stensson. Well, what the devil was I to do? The gates were locked, you know. Every one in the house must be as sound asleep as a bear in the winter.

Nils Lykke. Thank heaven, yes! A quiet conscience is the best pillow, they say.

Nils Stensson. It must be so; I hammered and banged at the gate till I was tired, but——

Nils Lykke. —but you couldn't get in?

Nils Stensson. That's it. So I said to myself: "Well, as you must get into Ostraat to-night, even if you have to go through fire and water to do it, you may just as well creep in through the window.

Nils Lykke (aside). If this should be he? (*Takes a step nearer to him.*) Then it was of great importance to you to get into Ostraat to-night?

Nils Stensson. Important? I should think so! I don't like keeping people waiting, let me tell you.

Nils Lykke. Ah!—and so I suppose Lady Inger Gyldenlöve is waiting for you.

Nils Stensson. Lady Inger Gyldenlöve? I cannot tell you that for certain; but (*with a cunning smile*) there should be some one else here who——

Nils Lykke (smiling back at him). Oh, so there should be some one else——?

Nils Stensson. Tell me—are you one of the household here?

Nils Lykke. I? Yes, in so far as I am Lady Inger's guest to-night.

Nils Stensson. Indeed? I believe this is the third night after Martinmas.

Nils Lykke. The third night after——? Yes, that is right enough. Perhaps you are anxious to see the lady of the house at once? As far as I know she has not yet gone to bed. But will you not sit down and rest in the meantime, my dear young sir? See, there is still some wine in the flagons here—and something to eat still on the table. Help yourself; I expect you need refreshment.

Nils Stensson. You are right, my lord; it will not be unwelcome. (*Sits down at the table and eats and drinks during the following dialogue.*) Roast meats and sweet cakes! You certainly live well here, sir! When a man has slept on the bare ground and lived on bread and water for four or five days as I have——

Nils Lykke (watching him with a smile). Yes, that must come hard on a man who is accustomed to the high table in a noble house.

Nils Stensson. A noble house——?

Nils Lykke. But now you can rest at Ostraat as long as it pleases you.

Nils Stensson (joyfully). May I? May I really? I need not go away again at once?

Nils Lykke. I do not know. You ought to be able to answer that question best yourself.

Nils Stensson (to himself). The deuce! (*Sits at ease in his chair.*) Well, you see it is not definitely settled yet. As far as I am concerned, I should have no objection to settle down here for a bit, but——

Nils Lykke. —but you are not absolutely your own master? There are other duties, other matters——?

Nils Stensson. Yes, that's just the difficulty. If it rested with me, I would at all events stay out the winter at Ostraat; most of my life has been spent in camp, and so——. (*Breaks off abruptly, pours out wine, and drinks.*) Your health, my lord!

Nils Lykke. In camp? Hm!

Nils Stensson. What I mean is this. I have long been anxious to see Lady Inger Gyldenlöve, whom folk talk so much about. She must be a splendid woman, isn't she? The only thing I can't understand is that she seems so confoundedly unwilling to strike a blow.

Nils Lykke. Strike a blow?

Nils Stensson. You don't understand, I see. I mean that she is so unwilling to take a hand in driving the alien nobles out of our country.

Nils Lykke. You are right there. But if you get a chance to show your mettle, it will soon be done.

Nils Stensson. I? Good Lord! A lot of help I should be!

Nils Lykke. I am surprised at your visiting her, then, if you have no better hope of her than that.

Nils Stensson. What do you mean? Do you know Lady Inger?

Nils Lykke. Of course I do. I am her guest, and therefore——

Nils Stensson. Therefore it does not in the least follow that you know her. I am her guest too, yet I have never seen even as much as her shadow yet.

Nils Lykke. But you have been saying——

Nils Stensson.—what everybody says of her? Yes, naturally. Besides, I have heard Peter the Chancellor talk of her——. (*Breaks off in confusion, and begins to eat hurriedly.*)

Nils Lykke. You were going to say something more.

Nils Stensson. I? Oh, it was nothing that mattered. (*NILS LYKKE laughs.*) Why do you laugh, my lord?

Nils Lykke. At nothing, my lord!

Nils Stensson (drinking). Excellent wine you have here!

Nils Lykke (approaching him familiarly). My friend—don't you think it is about time we dropped our masks?

Nils Stensson (smiling). Our masks? Oh, you may do as you please.

Nils Lykke. Then let us drop all disguise. You are recognised, Count Sture!

Nils Stensson (laughing). Count Sture? Do you think I am Count Sture, too? (*Gets up from the table.*) You are mistaken, my lord. I am not Count Sture.

Nils Lykke. Do you mean it? Who are you, then?

Nils Stensson. My name is Nils Stensson.

Nils Lykke (looking at him with a smile). Hm! Nils Stensson? Are you not Sten Sture's son Nils? One would think so from the name.

Nils Stensson. That is quite true—but Heaven alone knows what right I have to it. I never knew my father. My mother was a poor peasant woman, who was robbed and murdered in one of the wars. It happened that Peter the Chancellor was at hand; he took a fancy to me, brought me up, and taught me the use of arms. As you know, he has been persecuted by King Gustav for many a year, and I have faithfully accompanied him wherever he went.

Nils Lykke. Peter the Chancellor has taught you more than the use of arms, it seems to me. Very well—then you are not Nils Sture. But you have come from Sweden. Peter the Chancellor has sent you here to find a stranger who——

Nils Stensson (nodding his head cunningly). Who is found.

Nils Lykke (with a little hesitation). And you do not know who he is?

Nils Stensson. No more than I know who I am; for I swear to you, by all I hold holy—I am not Count Sture!

Nils Lykke. Seriously, my lord!

Nils Stensson. As true as I am alive! Why should I deny it if it were so?

Nils Lykke. But where is Count Sture?

Nils Stensson (in a low voice). Ah, that is just the secret.

Nils Lykke (in a whisper). Which is known to you—eh?

Nils Stensson (nodding). And which I have to make known to you.

Nils Lykke. To me? Well, where is he? (*NILS STENSSON points upwards.*) Up there? Has Lady Inger concealed him in the roof?

Nils Stensson. No, certainly not. You misunderstand me. (*Looks cautiously around him.*) Nils Sture is in heaven.

Nils Lykke. Dead? Where?

Nils Stensson. At his mother's castle—three weeks ago.

Nils Lykke. You are lying! Five or six days ago he crossed the frontier into Norway.

Nils Stensson. Oh, that was me.

Nils Lykke. But, a little while before that, the Count appeared in Dalarna. The people, who already were discontented, openly started a rebellion and wanted to elect him king.

Nils Stensson. Ha, ha, ha! That was me, too!

Nils Lykke. You?

Nils Stensson. I will tell you how it came about. One day Peter the Chancellor summoned me and disclosed to me the fact that great events were brewing. He bade me make my way into Norway, and to Ostraat—and I was to be at the latter on a certain day——

Nils Lykke (nodding). The third evening after Martinmas.

Nils Stensson. There I was to meet a stranger——

Nils Lykke. Quite right. I am he.

Nils Stensson. From him I should learn what I was to do later. Moreover, I was to inform him that the Count had died suddenly, but that the fact was not yet known to any one except his mother, Peter the Chancellor, and certain old retainers of the Count's.

Nils Lykke. I understand. The Count was the peasant folk's leader. If news of his death got about, they would all scatter again—and the whole thing would come to nothing.

Nils Stensson. Possibly. I know very little about it.

Nils Lykke. But what led you to pass yourself off as the Count?

Nils Stensson. What led me to do it? I can scarcely say. I have been led into doing so many foolish things in my time. But as a matter of fact it was not my own idea. Wherever I went in Dalarne the people all collected and greeted me as Count Sture. Nothing I could say would convince them. The Count had been there two years ago, they said—and the youngest child could recognise me. Well, so be it, I thought; you won't have another chance of being a count as long as you live; you may as well try what it is like, for once, any way!

Nils Lykke. Well—and what did you do then?

Nils Stensson. I? I ate and drank and lived well. I was only sorry I had to leave so soon. But when I crossed the frontier—ha! ha!—I promised them that I would soon come back with three or four thousand men—or some number of that sort—and then we would set to work in earnest.

Nils Lykke. And it didn't occur to you that you were acting imprudently?

Nils Stensson. Yes—afterwards; but it was much too late then.

Nils Lykke. I am sorry for you, my young friend; but it will not be long before you feel the consequences of your folly. Let me tell you that you have been followed; a detachment of Swedish horsemen are after you.

Nils Stensson. After me? Ha, ha, ha! That's splendid! And when they come and think they have got hold of Count Sture—ha, ha, ha!

Nils Lykke (seriously). Then it will be all up with you.

Nils Stensson. All up with me? I am not Count Sture!

Nils Lykke. But you have called the people to arms—you have made rebellious promises and stirred up unrest in the country.

Nils Stensson. But only as a jest.

Nils Lykke. King Gustav will see it in another light.

Nils Stensson. Certainly there is something in what you say. How could I have been such a madman——? Well, we shall get out of it somehow! You will help me, of course; and, moreover, the horsemen cannot be on my heels yet.

Nils Lykke. But what else had you to tell me?

Nils Stensson. I? Nothing. As soon as I have given you the packet——

Nils Lykke (incautiously). The packet?

Nils Stensson. Of course; don't you know——?

Nils Lykke. Yes, quite right—the papers from Peter the Chancellor——

Nils Stensson. Look, here they are. (*Hands him a packet which he has taken from under his doublet.*)

Nils Lykke (aside). Letters and documents addressed to Olaf Skavtavl. (*To NILS STENSSON.*) The packet is open, I see—so I suppose you know its contents?

Nils Stensson. No, my lord—I am not good at reading; there is a reason for that.

Nils Lykke. I understand. You have had more to do with learning the use of arms. (*Sits down at the table to the right and looks through the papers.*) Aha! Here is information more than enough to enlighten me as to all that is brewing. This little letter with a silken string—. (*Looks at the address.*) For Olaf Skavtavl, too. (*Opens the letter and looks hurriedly at the contents.*) From Peter the Chancellor. I might have guessed it (*Reads.*) “I am in great straits, because——.” Yes, it is quite right—here it is. “Young Count Sture has joined his fathers at the very moment arranged for the outbreak of the revolt”——“but at last everything can be put right.” What is this? (*Starts, and reads on.*) “You must know, that the young man who brings you this letter is the son of——” Heavens above, am I seeing aright? As I live, there are the words! (*Glances at NILS STENSSON.*) Then he would be——? If only it were true! (*Reads on.*) “I have brought him up since he was a year old; but until now I have always refused to give him up, because I thought that I had in him a sure hostage for Inger Gyldenløve's good faith towards us and our friends. It is true that as far as that is concerned, he

has been but of little benefit to us. I daresay you will wonder why I did not entrust you with this secret when you were here lately, and I will honestly confess that I was afraid of your regarding him in the same light as I used to. Now, on the contrary, as you are about to meet Lady Inger, and probably have convinced yourself how little willing she is to join her fortunes to ours, you will understand that the wisest thing is to give her back what is her own, as quickly as possible. It may very well turn out that happiness, confidence and gratitude may induce her to——.” “This is now our last hope.” (*Sits for a moment as if overwhelmed by surprise.*) Aha!—What a letter! It is worth untold gold!

Nils Stensson. I have brought you some important news, I can see. Ah, yes—Peter the Chancellor has many irons in the fire, they say.

Nils Lykke (aside). What ought I to do? There are a thousand courses possible. Suppose I were to——? No, that would be too risky. But suppose—suppose I——? I will risk it. (*Tears the letter across, crumples up the pieces and hides them in his doublet; puts the other papers into the packet again, sticks it in his belt, gets up and says :*) A word with you, my young friend.

Nils Stensson. Well, it seems as if the game were going well.

Nils Lykke. I should think so. You have given me nothing but court cards for my hand—queens and knaves and——

Nils Stensson. But have I, who have brought you all these good news, nothing more to do with it?

Nils Lykke. You? I should think so! You shall take a hand in the game—the king—and, what is more, the king of trumps.

Nils Stensson. Shall I? Oh, I understand—you are thinking of my lofty position——

Nils Lykke. Your lofty position?

Nils Stensson. Yes; you warned me that if King Gustav's men got hold of me, you know——! (*Makes a gesture, as of hanging a man.*)

Nils Lykke. That is true enough—but do not let it disturb you any longer. It depends on yourself now

whether within a month you will wear a hempen rope or a golden chain round your neck.

Nils Stensson. A golden chain? Depends on me? (*NILS LYKKE nods.*) Well, it doesn't take me long to choose! But you must tell me how I am to act.

Nils Lykke. I will. But first of all you must swear to me that no living soul in the world shall know what I am about to reveal to you.

Nils Stensson. Is that all? I will swear ten times as much, if you like.

Nils Lykke. Be serious, young sir. I am not jesting with you.

Nils Stensson. Yes, yes—I *am* serious.

Nils Lykke. In Dalarne you called yourself Count Sture's son, did you not?

Nils Stensson. Oh, are you beginning about *that* again? I have confessed to you frankly——

Nils Lykke. You do not understand me. What you said then, was the *truth*.

Nils Stensson. The truth? What do you mean? Tell me——

Nils Lykke. You must give me your oath first—the most solemn and inviolable that you know.

Nils Stensson. I will. On the wall yonder is a picture of the Virgin Mary——

Nils Lykke. The Virgin Mary is a little out of fashion nowadays. Have you not heard what the Wittenberg monk declares?

Nils Stensson. For shame! Are you going to care what the Wittenberg monk thinks? He is a heretic, Peter the Chancellor says.

Nils Lykke. Well, we won't quarrel about that. Look here, and I will show you an excellent saint to take your oath by. (*Points to a portrait that is hanging on the wall.*) Come here—and swear to me that you will be silent until I loose your tongue—silent, as you hope for heaven's mercy on yourself and on him whose picture hangs there.

Nils Stensson (*coming near to the picture*). I swear it—so help me God! (*Starts back in astonishment.*) But, great heavens——!

Nils Lykke. What is it?

Nils Stensson. That picture! It is my very self!

Nils Lykke. It is old Count Sture as he was in his young days.

Nils Stensson. Sten Sture! And so like me! And—I spoke the truth when I called myself the Count's son, you said?—did you not?

Nils Lykke. It was so.

Nils Stensson. Ah, I see—I see! I am——

Nils Lykke. You are Sten Sture's son, my lord!

Nils Stensson (in amazement). I, Sten Sture's son?

Nils Lykke. And you are nobly born on your mother's side, too. Peter the Chancellor lied if he said a poor peasant woman was your mother.

Nils Stensson. It is extraordinary—amazing! But can I believe you?

Nils Lykke. You may believe all that I have said. But remember that the punishment will be upon your own head if you forget the oath you swore to me on your father's sacred memory!

Nils Stensson. Forget it! No, you may be certain I shall not do that. But you—to whom I have given my word—tell me, who are you?

Nils Lykke. My name is Nils Lykke.

Nils Stensson (in amazement). Nils Lykke? Surely not the Danish envoy?

Nils Lykke. He.

Nils Stensson. And I was to meet you? It is very strange. How did you come to——

Nils Lykke. —to be receiving messages from Peter the Chancellor? Does that surprise you?

Nils Stensson. Yes, I cannot deny that it does. He has always spoken of you as our bitterest enemy——

Nils Lykke. And therefore you mistrust me?

Nils Stensson. No; not exactly that, but——. Devil take me if I can understand it all!

Nils Lykke. You are right there. If you follow your own counsel, the hempen rope is as sure a certainty for you, as a noble name and the golden chain are if you trust yourself to me.

Nils Stensson. I will absolutely. Here is my hand on it,

my lord! Help me with good advice, as long as I need it. But when it comes to fighting, I can look after myself.

Nils Lykke. Good. Follow me now into that room yonder, and I will explain the whole thing to you and tell you what you have further to do. (*Goes out to the right.*)

Nils Stensson (looking at the picture). I Sten Sture's son! It is like a wonderful dream! (*Follows NILS LYKKE.*)

ACT IV

(SCENE.—*The Great Hall, as before. The supper table has been removed. BJÖRN comes in from the left, carrying a branch candlestick, preceding LADY INGER and OLAF SKAVTAVL. LADY INGER has some papers in her hand.*)

Lady Inger (to BJÖRN). You are certain that my daughter was talking to this knight here—in this hall?

Björn (putting down the candlestick on the table on the left). Quite certain. I met her just as she was coming away.

Lady Inger. And looked as if she were distressed in mind? Is that not so?

Björn. She looked pale and distracted. I asked her if she were ill; but instead of answering my question she said: "Go to my mother and tell her that her knightly guest is leaving here before daybreak; if she has a letter or a message to give him beg her not to cause him unnecessary delay." And she added something that I could not rightly hear.

Lady Inger. Did you not hear at all what it was?

Björn. I thought she said: "I almost think he has been too long at Ostraat already."

Lady Inger. And the knight? Where is he?

Björn. In his room over the gateway, I think.

Lady Inger. Good. I have everything ready that I wish to give him. Go and tell him that I am awaiting him here. (*BJÖRN goes out to the right.*)

Olaf Skavtavl. Lady Inger, I know I am about as blind

as a mole in such matters—but it really seems to me as though—hm!

Lady Inger. Well?

Olaf Skavtavl. —as though Nils Lykke were sweet on your daughter.

Lady Inger. I don't think you are so blind in that; because, if I am not greatly mistaken, you are quite right. Did you not notice, at supper, how greedily he listened to the least thing I said about Eline?

Olaf Skavtavl. Yes, he forgot all about food and drink.

Lady Inger. And about our secret business too.

Olaf Skavtavl. Yes, and what is more, about the papers from Peter the Chancellor.

Lady Inger. What does all that lead you to think?

Olaf Skavtavl. First of all it leads me to think that, as you know Nils Lykke and know his reputation—especially with regard to women—

Lady Inger. You think I ought to be glad to see him safely outside my gates?

Olaf Skavtavl. Yes, and the sooner the better.

Lady Inger (smiling). No—quite the contrary, Olaf Skavtavl!

Olaf Skavtavl. What do you mean?

Lady Inger. Because if it is as we both think, Nils Lykke must not on any account be allowed to leave Ostraat at once.

Olaf Skavtavl (with a look of disapproval at her). Are you going in for intrigue again, Lady Inger? What plan are you hatching now? Some scheme to increase your own influence at the expense of the rest of us——?

Lady Inger. Ah, this short-sightedness, that makes you all so suspicious of me! I see what you think—that I mean to choose Nils Lykke as my son-in-law. If that had been my intention, why should I have refused to take part in the movement that is now on foot in Sweden—the movement that Nils Lykke and the whole Danish party seem to be willing to support?

Olaf Skavtavl. But if it is not your wish to make him a captive, what is your design with regard to him?

Lady Inger. I can tell you that in few words. In a letter to me, Nils Lykke wrote that he would consider it an honour

to become one of our family; and I will honestly confess to you that for a moment I really thought seriously of his proposal.

Olaf Skavtavl. Ah, you see!

Lady Inger. An alliance between Nils Lykke and my family would of course do a great deal to reconcile opposing factions here.

Olaf Skavtavl. Your daughter Merete's marriage with Vinzent Lunge ought, it seems to me, to show you how much such schemes are worth. The moment Vinzent Lunge felt securely established here, he began to seize upon the people's goods and destroy their rights—

Lady Inger. I know that, Olaf Skavtavl. But at times such crowds of thoughts pass through my mind, I cannot give my entire confidence either to you or to any one. Sometimes I hardly know what is best for me to do. But nevertheless—to take a Dane for a son-in-law a second time is a solution of the difficulty that I should only have recourse to in my uttermost need—and I have not yet come to that!

Olaf Skavtavl. I know just as much as I did, Lady Inger, of the reason of your wishing to delay Nils Lykke at Ostraat.

Lady Inger (in a low voice). It is because I bear him the deepest of grudges. Nils Lykke has wounded me more deeply than any other man—I cannot tell you in what way it was. But I shall know no rest until I have taken my revenge on him. Do you not understand? Suppose Nils Lykke is in love with my daughter—not an unlikely thing, I can well believe. I shall prevail on him to remain here. He shall learn to know Eline better—she is as clever as she is fair. Then, let him but come with his heart full of passionate love and ask me for her hand! I will spurn him as I would a dog—reject him with derision, with scorn, with contempt—spread abroad over the whole country the news that Nils Lykke has tried in vain to ingratiate himself at Ostraat! I tell you, I would give ten years of my life to experience one hour of that triumph.

Olaf Skavtavl. Honour bright, Lady Inger—is that really what you mean to do with him?

Lady Inger. That and nothing else, as God lives! You

must believe, Olaf Skavtavl, that I mean honourably by my people. But I am so little my own mistress. There are certain things that must be concealed if I value my life. If only I were secure in that quarter, you would see whether I had forgotten what I swore over Knut Alfson's dead body.

Olaf Skavtavl (grasping her hand). Thank you for what you have told me. I did not want to think ill of you. But, as regards your plan of dealing with Nils Lykke, I am afraid you are risking a dangerous game. Suppose you were out in your calculations? Suppose your daughter——? Because you know they say that no woman can withstand that sneaking devil.

Lady Inger. My daughter? Do you believe that she——? No, make your mind easy; I know Eline better than that. All that she has heard about him has only made her the more bitter against him. You have had opportunity of seeing for yourself——

Olaf Skavtavl. Yes, yes—but women's hearts are tricky things to depend upon. You must take the responsibility.

Lady Inger. I will. I shall watch them carefully. But if, in spite of that, he succeeds in entangling her in his toils, it will only be necessary for me to whisper two words in her ear, and then——

Olaf Skavtavl. What then?

Lady Inger. Then she will shun him as if he were an envoy from the foul Fiend himself!—Hush, here he comes. Be discreet. (*NILS LYKKE comes in from the right, and approaches LADY INGER with a bow.*)

Nils Lykke. You have sent for me, Lady Inger?

Lady Inger. I hear, from my daughter, that you think of deserting us to-night.

Nils Lykke. Unfortunately, yes. My task at Ostraat is accomplished, you see.

Olaf Skavtavl. Not until I have received my papers.

Nils Lykke. Quite true. I had almost forgotten the most important part of my errand. But you must lay it at the door of our noble hostess—she entertained us at table with so much wit and spirit——

Lady Inger. —that you no longer remembered what brought you here? I am glad of that, for it was just what

I intended, I thought that if my guest Nils Lykke could be made to feel at home at Ostraat, perhaps he might—

Nils Lykke. Might what, Lady Inger?

Lady Inger. Forget his errand, to begin with—and all that had taken place before he came, as well.

Nils Lykke (taking out the packet of papers and handing them to OLAF SKAVTAVL). Papers from Peter the Chancellor. In them you will find complete information about our adherents in Sweden.

Olaf Skavtavl. Good. (*Sits down at the table on the left, opens the packet, and looks through the papers.*)

Nils Lykke. And now, Lady Inger, I know that there is nothing more for me to do here.

Lady Inger. If it has merely been matters of state that have brought us together, perhaps you are right. But I should be unwilling to believe that.

Nils Lykke. You mean—?

Lady Inger. I mean that it was not only as a Danish Councillor of State, or as Peter the Chancellor's ally, that Nils Lykke set out to visit me. Should I be mistaken if I imagined that you had heard something or other in Denmark which made you curious to know the lady of Ostraat better?

Nils Lykke. Far be it from me to deny—

Olaf Skavtavl (searching among the papers). It is extraordinary—no sign of a letter.

Nils Lykke.—that Lady Inger Gyldenlöve's fame is too widespread for me not to have been anxious, for a long time past, to meet her face to face.

Lady Inger. So I imagined. But surely an hour's jesting talk at the supper-table does not suffice you? As for what has passed between us before—we will try and wipe that out of our memories. It might very well turn out that the Nils Lykke I now know might blot out of my mind the rancour I feel towards the Nils Lykke I used to know. Prolong your stay here for a few days, my lord. Olaf Skavtavl I dare not try to persuade, for he has his secret mission in Sweden. But in your case I have little doubt that you have previously ordered your affairs so carefully that your presence at home is scarcely indispensable. Believe me, you shall not find the time hang heavily on

you here; at all events both my daughter and I will use our best efforts to make your stay agreeable to you.

Nils Lykke. I have no doubt of either your daughter's good-will towards me or of your own—indeed, I have already had ample proof of it. But you cannot fail to recognise that my presence elsewhere is absolutely necessary when, in spite of what you say, I am obliged to repeat that it is impossible for me to prolong my stay at Ostraat.

Lady Inger. Indeed? Do you know, my lord, that if I were a malicious woman, I might even imagine that you came to Ostraat to try a fall with me. It seems to me that you have been worsted in the encounter, and that this is the reason of your unwillingness to remain any longer on the field of battle amongst the witnesses of your defeat.

Nils Lykke (smiling). There might be plausible ground for such an interpretation of my actions; but one thing is certain—that I do not consider myself defeated yet.

Lady Inger. Let that be as it may; at any rate, if you stay a few days longer with us, you will have a chance of retrieving your fortunes. You can see for yourself how irresolutely I stand hesitating at the parting of the ways—trying to persuade my dangerous adversary not to quit the field. To be quite frank with you, your connection with the disaffected folk in Sweden still appears to me to be a little—what shall I say?—a little astonishing, my lord! I am speaking, as you see, without any disguise. The idea which has led the king's council to take this secret step seems to me a very clever one; but it also seems to me strangely out of keeping with the proceedings of your fellow-countrymen during recent years. So you must not take it amiss if I feel that my reliance on your fair promises needs to be more securely grounded before I can entrust my fortunes and my possessions into your hands.

Nils Lykke. I scarcely think that my prolonging my visit at Ostraat can help that in any way, because I mean to take no further steps to try and shake your resolution.

Lady Inger. Then I pity you, from the bottom of my heart. Yes, my lord—I know I am nothing more than a much-perplexed woman; but you may believe me when

I prophesy that you will find thorns growing in your path as the result of your journey to Ostraat.

Nils Lykke (with a smile). Do you prophesy that, Lady Inger?

Lady Inger. Confidently! Think of this, my lord. People are very malicious nowadays; there will be more than one mocking spirit busy writing scurrilous ballads about you. In six months your name will be in every one's mouth; people will turn and stare at you on the highways, and say: "Look there! That is Nils Lykke, who went up to Ostraat to entrap the Lady Inger but got caught in his own snare." Oh, keep your patience, my Lord!—that is not what *I* think; but it is the verdict that lots of evil-minded malicious people will pronounce on you. And there are plenty of *them* about, unhappily! It seems a wicked shame, but it certainly will be so; ridicule will be your reward—ridicule because a woman has outwitted you. "He crept into Ostraat like a fox," they will say, "but slunk out of it again like a beaten hound." And, one thing more, do you not think that Peter the Chancellor and his friends will seek to be rid of your assistance when the rumour reaches them that I am not inclined to venture upon fighting under your banner?

Nils Lykke. You speak words of wisdom, Lady Inger! And, so as not to expose myself to ridicule—and, moreover, so as not to break off my association with all my dear friends in Sweden—I feel constrained to——

Lady Inger (eagerly). —to prolong your stay at Ostraat?

Olaf Skavtavl (who has been listening). Now he is done for!

Nils Lykke. No, Lady Inger. I feel constrained to come to terms with you, here and now.

Lady Inger. But suppose you don't succeed?

Nils Lykke. I *shall* succeed.

Lady Inger. You are very sure of your ground, apparently.

Nils Lykke. What will you wager me that you will not fall in with my views and Peter the Chancellor's?

Lady Inger. Ostraat!—against your knee-buckles!

Nils Lykke (strikes his chest and calls out). Olaf Skavtavl! Behold the new master of Ostraat!

Lady Inger. My lord——!

Olaf Skavtavl (rising from his seat). What is this?

Nils Lykke (to LADY INGER). I will not accept the wager; because in a few moments you will gladly offer me Ostraat—and more than that—to escape from the snare in which not I but you yourself are entrapped.

Lady Inger. Your jest begins to be very merry, my lord!

Nils Lykke. And it will be merrier yet—at least for me. You are pluming yourself on having outwitted me. You threaten to heap scorn and ridicule upon me. Well, I advise you to beware of stirring up feelings of revenge in me; because with two words I can bring you to your knees at my feet.

Lady Inger. Ha, ha——! (*Stops laughing suddenly, as if struck by a misgiving.*) And those two words, Nils Lykke? Those two words are——?

Nils Lykke. The secret of the son who is yours—and Sten Sture's.

Lady Inger (with a cry). Merciful heavens——!

Olaf Skavtavl. Inger Gyldenlöve's son! What are you saying?

Lady Inger (almost on her knees before NILS LYKKE). Pity! Oh, be merciful!

Nils Lykke (raising her up). Compose yourself, and let us talk calmly together.

Lady Inger (in a weak voice, and half distracted). Did you hear it, Olaf Skavtavl? Or was it a dream? Did you hear what he said?

Nils Lykke. It was no dream, Lady Inger.

Lady Inger. And you know that secret? You—you? Where have you got him, then? Where is he? What do you mean to do with him? (*With a scream.*) Do not kill him, Nils Lykke! Give him back to me! Do not kill him!

Olaf Skavtavl. Ah, I begin to understand——

Lady Inger. Oh, this dread! This fear that chokes me! I have carried my secret with me for so many years—and now to think that everything is disclosed and that I must suffer such distress and agony!—My God, is this justice at Thy hands? Was it for this Thou gavest me the child? (*Collects herself, and continues with forced composure.*) Nils Lykke, tell me one thing. Where have you got him? Where is he?

Nils Lykke. With his foster-father.

Lady Inger. Still with his foster-father?—that hard, inexorable man! He has always refused to——. But things must not go on like that any longer. Help me, Olaf Skavtavl!

Olaf Skavtavl. I?

Nils Lykke. There is no necessity for that, if only you——

Lady Inger. Listen to me, my lord! As you know something, you shall know all. And you too, my old and trusty friend! A little while ago you put me in mind of that ill-starred day when Knut Alfsön was slain at Oslo. You put me in mind of the vow I took while I stood by the dead body of the bravest man in Norway. I was a mere girl then; but I felt God's might working through me, and believed—as so many have since believed—that the Almighty had set His seal upon me and chosen me to lead the fight for my country. Was this arrogance?—or was it a revelation from above? I have never been able to tell that rightly. But it has made me pity any one who has a great task upon his shoulders. I can say truthfully that for seven years I kept my vow faithfully. I stood by my fellow-countrymen in their tribulation and distress. All who had been my playfellows as girls were wives and mothers. I alone dared listen to no wooer—to *none*. You know that better than any one, Olaf Skavtavl! Then I saw Sten Sture for the first time—the goodliest man I had ever seen.

Nils Lykke. Ah, I begin to understand. Sten Sture was in Norway then on a secret mission. We in Denmark were not allowed to know that he was well-disposed towards your friends.

Lady Inger. Dressed in the garb of a humble swain, he lived for a whole winter under my roof. That winter I thought less and less of my country's welfare. So goodly a man I had never seen before—and I was nearly five and twenty.—The next autumn, Sten Sture came again; and when he left, he took with him an infant—in all *sécrecy*. It was not that I feared people's wicked tongues; but it would have injured our cause had the rumour got abroad that Sten Sture's fate had been so closely linked with mine.

The child was brought up in Peter the Chancellor's house. I waited for the happier times that were surely soon coming—but they never came. Sten Sture married two years later in Sweden, and, when he died, left a widow——

Olaf Skavtavl. And, with her, a legitimate heir to his name and honours.

Lady Inger. Time after time I wrote to Peter the Chancellor and entreated him to give me back my child. But he always refused. "Join our side irrevocably," he answered, "and I will send your son to Norway; not before." How could I venture to do that? We malcontents were at that time looked askance at by many of the more timorous spirits in this country. If they had got wind of the affair, to attack the mother they would—I know it only too well—have been only too ready to prepare for the child the fate that King Christian would have suffered if he had not found safety in flight. And, besides all this, the Danes were busy, and were unsparing in their threats and promises in their attempt to drive me over to their side.

Olaf Skavtavl. That is easily understood. Every one's eyes were turned to you, as a sailor's to the clouds to see what course he shall steer.

Lady Inger. Then came the revolt that Herluf Hydefad led. Do you remember that time, Olaf Skavtavl? Did it not seem as if the country were flooded with spring sunshine? Insistent voices conjured me to come forward—but I did not dare. I sat irresolute in my lonely castle, far from the strife. At times I felt as if God Himself were calling upon me; but then that terrible anxiety overwhelmed me again and paralysed my will. "Who will be victorious?" That was the question that rang perpetually in my ears. The spring that had dawned upon Norway proved but short-lived. Herluf Hydefad was broken on the wheel—and many others with him—but a few months later. No one could call me to account; and yet covert threats from Denmark were not wanting. Did they know my secret? I used to wonder; and, in the end, I was driven to believe that they did. It was in such troublous times as this that the High Steward Gyldenlöve came here and

asked my hand in marriage. Let any anxious mother put herself in my place and think whether she——. A month later I was his wife—and an exile from my people's hearts. Then came years of quiet. No more was heard of revolt. Our foreign masters could oppress us as deeply and as sorely as they pleased. There were times when I loathed myself. What was there for me to do, except to be tortured by anxiety, to be scoffed at—and to bring daughters into the world! My daughters! God must forgive me if I cannot feel towards them as a mother should. My duties as a wife were like slavery to me; how could I love my daughters? With my son, all was different. He was the child of my own heart. He was the only one that could bring back the hours when I was a woman and nothing but a woman—and they had taken him from me! He has grown up among strangers, who may perhaps have sown the seeds of corruption in his heart! Olaf Skavtavl—had I wandered like you, hunted and neglected, over the mountains midst the storms of winter, believe me that even then, had I but had my child in my arms, I should not have suffered such agony of mind as I have done from the hour of his birth until to-day!

Olaf Skavtavl. There is my hand. I have judged you too harshly, Lady Inger. Command me and advise me as you used to do; I will obey. Aye—by all the Saints!—I know what it is to sorrow for one's child.

Lady Inger. Cruel hands slew yours. But what is death, compared to a torturing anxiety all through the weary years!

Nils Lykke. Come now, it rests with yourself to put an end to that anxiety. Reconcile the opposing parties, and then none of them will think of keeping your child as a hostage for your good faith.

Lady Inger (to herself). This is heaven's vengeance. (To NILS LYKKE.) Well, once for all, what are your conditions?

Nils Lykke. The first is that you call the northern folk to arms, so that they may come to the support of the disaffected in Sweden.

Lady Inger. And next?

Nils Lykke. That you use your utmost efforts to ensure

young Count Sture's being established in his due position as King of Sweden.

Lady Inger. He? Do you insist that I shall——?

Olaf Skavtavl (gently). It is the wish of many in Sweden. And it would be very useful to us, too.

Nils Lykke. Have you reflected, Lady Inger? You tremble for your son's safety; how then, can you wish for anything better than to see his half-brother on the throne?

Lady Inger (thoughtfully). Very true—very true——

Nils Lykke (looking at her keenly). Unless by any chance there are other projects in the wind——

Lady Inger. What do you mean?

Nils Lykke. If, for instance, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve had a mind to be—a king's mother.

Lady Inger. No, no! Give me back my child, and you may give crowns to whom you will. But do you know, then, that Count Sture is willing——?

Nils Lykke. He can assure you of that himself.

Lady Inger. Himself? When?

Nils Lykke. Now.

Olaf Skavtavl. How so?

Lady Inger. What are you saying?

Nils Lykke. I am saying that Count Sture is at Ostraat.

Olaf Skavtavl. Here?

Nils Lykke (to LADY INGER). Perhaps you were not informed that I brought a companion with me through your gates. That companion was the Count.

Lady Inger (to herself). I am in his power. I have no longer any choice. *(To NILS LYKKE).* Very well, my lord—you shall have the assurance of my support.

Nils Lykke. In writing?

Lady Inger. If you wish. *(Goes to the table on the left, sits down, and takes up writing materials.)*

Nils Lykke (aside). At last I have won.

Lady Inger (after a moment's thought, turns suddenly on her chair towards OLAF SKAVTAVL and whispers to him:)

Olaf Skavtavl—I am certain now that Nils Lykke is a traitor!

Olaf Skavtavl. What do you mean? Do you believe——

Lady Inger. He is contriving some trap for us. *(Lays the paper before her, and dips a pen in ink.)*

Olaf Skavtavl. And you are going to give him a written assurance, such as may prove our undoing?

Lady Inger. Be quiet. Leave this to me. No, wait—listen to me. (*Whispers in his ear.*)

Nils Lykke (aside, as he eyes them). Aye, plot away as much as you please. All danger is over now. With her written testimony in my pocket I can lay information against her at any time. To-night I must send a secret message to Jens Bjelke. I shall not be breaking my word to him if I assure him that young Count Sture is not at Ostraat. And then to-morrow, when the coast is clear, I shall away to Trondhjem with the young man—and from there by sea to a prison in Copenhagen. Let him but be safely immured in the castle there, and we can dictate any terms we please to Lady Inger. And I? After this, I do not think the king will entrust the embassy to France to other hands than mine.

Lady Inger (in a whisper to OLAF SKAVTAVL). You understand, then?

Olaf Skavtavl. Perfectly. Let us try it, if you wish. (*NILS STENSSON comes in by the nearest door on the right, without noticing LADY INGER who is sitting writing.*)

Nils Stensson (to NILS LYKKE, in an undertone). My lord! my lord!

Nils Lykke (going up to him). Rash boy, what are you doing here? Did I not tell you to wait in there until I called you?

Nils Stensson. How could I? Now that you have revealed the fact to me that Lady Inger Gyldenlöve is my mother, I have a deeper craving than ever to see her face to face. Ah, that is she! How proud and noble she looks!—just as I have always imagined her to be. Do not be alarmed, my lord, I shall not lose control of myself. Since I learnt that secret from you, I have felt older and more sedate. I do not feel inclined for wild and reckless exploits any longer; I mean to live as a well-born youth should. But, tell me, does she know I am here? Have you prepared her?

Nils Lykke. Certainly I have, but——

Nils Stensson. Well?

Nils Lykke. She does not wish to acknowledge you as her son.

Nils Stensson. Does not wish to acknowledge me as her son? But she is my mother—there is no doubt of that! If that is all (*produces a ring which is hung round his neck on a ribbon*) show her this ring. I have worn it from babyhood. She must know about that.

Nils Lykke. Give me the ring, my boy! Give it to me, I say! You do not understand me. Lady Inger has not the slightest doubt that you are her son; but—look around here. Look at all this evidence of wealth; look at all these noble ancestors and kinsmen whose pictures hang on all the walls; look at that proud creature herself, who is accustomed to issue her commands as the noblest lady in the land. Do you suppose she could be pleased to bring forward a poor, ignorant peasant lad before the world's eyes and say: "See, this is my son!"

Nils Stensson. I feel that you are right. I am poor and ignorant. I have nothing to offer her in return for what I am claiming. Never before this hour have I felt my poverty a burden! But, tell me—what do you think I must do to win her heart? Tell me that, my lord—for you must know!

Nils Lykke. You must win a kingdom for yourself! But, until that may be, be careful not to offend her ears with any whispers of kinship, or anything of that sort. She will behave as if she took you to be the true Count Sture, until you have made yourself worthy to be called her son.*

Nils Stensson. Tell me, then——

Nils Lykke. Hush, hush!

Lady Inger (*getting up and handing NILS LYKKE a paper*). My lord, there is my undertaking.

Nils Lykke. I thank you.

Lady Inger (*noticing NILS STENSSON*). Ah! Is that young man——?

Nils Lykke. Yes, Lady Inger, that is Count Sture.

Lady Inger (*aside, as she glances at NILS STENSSON*). Feature for feature—yes, as God lives, he is Sten Sture's son! (*Goes nearer to him and speaks with cold courtesy*.) Welcome to my house, Count Sture. It lies in your hands

whether, within the year, we shall bless this meeting or not.

Nils Stensson. In my hands? Tell me what to do! Trust me, I have both courage and willingness to——

Nils Lykke (who has been listening uneasily). What is that noise and disturbance, Lady Inger? Some one is seeking to come in. What does it mean?

Lady Inger (in a loud voice). It is spirits that are awakening. (OLAF SKAVTAVL, EJNAR HUK, BJÖRN, FINN, and a number of Peasants and Retainers come in at the background from the right.)

The Crowd. Hail, Lady Inger!

Lady Inger (to OLAF SKAVTAVL). Have you told them what is afoot?

Olaf Skavtaul. I have told them all they need to know.

Lady Inger (to the crowd). My trusty retainers and friends, you may arm yourselves now as best you can. What I refused you a little time ago, I now grant you freely. And now I present to you the young Count Sture, Sweden's future king—and Norway's too, if God wills.

The Crowd. Hail, Count Sture! (*General movement and enthusiasm. The crowd arm themselves noisily.*)

Nils Lykke (in an uneasy aside). Spirits awakening, did she say? I have invoked the demon of revolution; 'twill be damnable if it grows too mighty for me!

Lady Inger (to NILS STENSSON). Here is the first good office I can do you—thirty mounted men to follow and guard you. And, believe me, before you reach the frontier many hundreds will have ranged themselves under your banner and mine. Go now, and God be with you!

Nils Stensson. Thanks, Lady Inger! Thanks! And be assured that you shall never have reason to be ashamed of—of Count Sture! If you see me again, I shall have won a kingdom!

Nils Lykke (to himself). Yes, if she sees you again.

Olaf Skavtaul. The horses are waiting, friends! Are you ready?

The Men. Yes, yes!

Nils Lykke (uneasily, to LADY INGER). What is this? Surely you don't intend to-night——?

Lady Inger. This moment, my lord!

Nils Lykke. No, no—impossible!

Lady Inger. It is as I say.

Nils Lykke (aside to NILS STENSSON). Do not obey her!

Nils Stensson. How can I do otherwise? I will! I must!

Nils Lykke. But it means certain ruin for you——

Nils Stensson. So be it. I am at her commands.

Nils Lykke (sternly). And not at mine?

Nils Stensson. I shall keep my word; you may rely on that. The secret shall not pass my lips until you give me your permission. But she is my mother!

Nils Lykke (aside). And Jens Bjelke is watching the road! Perdition! He will snatch my prey out of my grasp. (*To LADY INGER.*) Wait till to-morrow!

Lady Inger (to NILS STENSSON). Count Sture, are you going to obey me, or not?

Nils Stensson. To horse! (*Moves to the background.*)

Nils Lykke (aside). Unhappy boy! He does not know what he is doing. (*To LADY INGER.*) Well, since it must be so—farewell! (*Bows hurriedly and turns to go.*)

Lady Inger (restraining him). No, stop! Not that, my lord; not that!

Nils Lykke. What do you mean?

Lady Inger (in a low voice). Nils Lykke—you are a traitor! Be silent! Let no one perceive that there are dissensions in their leaders' camp. You have gained Peter the Chancellor's confidence by some devilish trick which I cannot fathom. You have forced me to start this revolt—not to support our cause, but to further your own ends, whatever they may be. I cannot now retreat from the position I have taken up. But do not think, on that account, that you have won! I shall know how to make you harmless——

Nils Lykke (unconsciously laying his hand on his sword). Lady Inger——!

Lady Inger. Make your mind easy, my lord! Your life is not in danger. But out of Ostraat's gate you shall not go until the victory is ours.

Nils Lykke. Damnation!

Lady Inger. Resistance is useless. You shall not escape from here. Therefore keep calm; it is the wisest thing you can do.

Nils Lykke (to himself). I am trapped. She has been the craftier of the two. (*A thought springs to his mind.*) Ah, suppose even yet——?

Lady Inger (in a low voice, to OLAF SKAVTAVL). Follow Count Sture's troop to the frontier. Then ride without drawing rein to Peter the Chancellor and bring me my child. He has now no longer any grounds for keeping from me what is mine. (*Adds, as OLAF SKAVTAVL turns to go :*) Wait—you will need some sign. The youth who wears Sten Sture's ring is the one.

Olaf Skavtavl. By all the Saints, you shall have him!

Lady Inger. Thanks, thanks—my trusty friend!

Nils Lykke (in a whisper to FINN, whom he has secretly beckoned to him). See here—try to slip out unobserved. Let no one see you. A quarter of a mile from here a body of Swedes are in ambush. Tell their leader that Count Sture is dead. This young man is not to be attacked. Tell their leader that. Tell him that this young man's life is worth a thousand men's lives to me.

Finn. It shall be done.

Lady Inger (who meantime has been watching NILS LYKKE). And now go forward all of you, and God go with you! (*Points to NILS LYKKE.*) This noble knight cannot bring himself to desert his friends at Ostraat so hurriedly. He will remain here with me until the news of your victory comes.

Nils Lykke (to himself). Devil!

Nils Stensson (grasping his hand). Trust me—you shall not have to wait long!

Nils Lykke. Good, good! (*Aside.*) All may yet be won if only my message reaches Jens Bjelke in time——

Lady Inger (to EJNAR HUK, pointing to FINN). And let that man be kept under close guard in the dungeons.

Finn. I?

Ejnar Huk and others. Finn?

Nils Lykke (in a low voice). My last anchor has broken away.

Lady Inger (imperiously). To the dungeons with him! (*EJNAR HUK, BJÖRN and some Retainers lead FINN out to the left.*)

The others (as they file out to the right). Away! To horse! To horse! Hail, Lady Inger!

Lady Inger (passing NILS LYKKE, as she follows them out). Well, who has won?

Nils Lykke (left alone). Who? Beware! Your victory will be dearly won. I wash my hands of it. It is not I that will be murdering him. But my prey will escape me, for all that. And the revolt will grow and spread! It was a foolhardy, mad game to take a hand in! (*Listens at the window.*) There they go, clattering through the gate. Now it is barred after them. And here am I, a prisoner. No chance of escape! Within half an hour the Swedes will have fallen upon him. He has thirty well-armed men with him. It will be a bloody fight. But suppose, nevertheless, they capture him alive? If only I were free, I might overtake the Swedes before they reach the frontier, and make them give him up. (*Goes to the window at the back, and looks out.*) Damnation! Guards everywhere. Is there no way out? (*Crosses the room hastily; then suddenly stops and listens.*) What is that? The sound of a song. It seems to come from Lady Eline's chamber. Yes, it is she singing. Then she is still up——. (*A thought seems to strike him.*) Eline! Ah, if I could compass that! If it were possible to——. And why should it not be possible? Am I not still Nils Lykke? What does the ballad say:

“Every maiden's sighing seems to say,
Would that within my arms Nils Lykke lay!”

And *she*——? Eline Gyldenlöve shall save me! (*Goes quickly and furtively towards the farthest door on the left.*)

ACT V

(SCENE.—*The Great Hall. It is still night. The Hall is feebly illumined by a branch-candlestick which stands on the table in the foreground to the right. LADY INGER is sitting by the table, deep in thought.*)

Lady Inger (after a moment's silence). They say I have the shrewdest head in the country. I believe it is true. The shrewdest head——? But not one of them knows what it is that has made it so. For more than twenty years I have fought for my son's release; *that* is the key to the riddle—*that* is the sort of thing to sharpen one's wits! Wits? What became of mine to-night? Where was my prudence? I seem to hear voices ringing in my ears—to see shapes before me so clearly that I could grasp them. (*Springs up.*) Merciful God, what is this? Can I no longer command my reason? Am I going to end in——? (*Presses her hands against her forehead: then sits down again and continues more calmly.*) It is nothing. It is passing away. I need not fear; it is passing away. How peaceful it is here to-night. Neither my ancestors nor my kinsmen look threateningly at me; no need, to-night, to turn their pictures to the wall. (*Gets up.*) Yes, it was well done of me to take courage at last. We shall win, and then I shall be in sight of my goal. I shall get back my child. (*Takes up a light, and turns to go: but stops, and says to herself:*) My goal? My goal? Is it to get back my child? Only *that*, and nothing more? (*Sits down at the table again.*) Those fleeting words that Nils Lykke let carelessly drop——. How could he see into my unborn thoughts? (*Lowers her voice.*) A king's mother—a king's mother, he said. And why not? Have not my ancestors before me ruled like kings, albeit they bore no such title? Has not my son as good a claim as the other to the rights of the Stures? In the eyes of heaven he has—as sure as there is any justice in heaven. And these rights I have signed away from him in a moment of terror—surrendered them with a spendthrift's hand as ransom for his freedom. What if I could still win them back? Would it offend heaven if

I——? Am I to believe that it would call down new affliction upon me if I were to——? Who knows, who knows! It may be safest to give up the idea. (*Takes up her light again.*) I shall get back my child; that must suffice. And I will sleep off all these rash thoughts. (*Goes to the back, but stops and says pensively :*) A king's mother! (*Goes slowly out to the left, in the background. After a short pause, NILS LYKKE and ELINE GYLDENLÖVE come in by the nearest door on the left. NILS LYKKE carries a small lamp in his hand.*)

Nils Lykke (looks carefully around, and whispers :) All is quiet, I must away.

Eline. Oh, let me once more look into your eyes, before you leave me.

Nils Lykke (embracing her). *Eline!*

Eline (after a short pause). Shall you never come back to Ostraat?

Nils Lykke. How can you have any doubt? Are you not, from this moment, my betrothed?—But will you, on your part, be true to me, *Eline*? Will you not have forgotten me, before we meet again?

Eline. Shall I be true to you, you ask? Have I any longer any will of my own? Could I be untrue to you, even if I wished? You came to me at night; you knocked at my door; and I opened it to you. You spoke to me. What was it you spoke about? You gazed into my eyes. What mysterious power was it that beguiled me—charmed me—bewitched me? (*Hurriedly hides her face on his shoulder.*) Oh, do not look at me, *Nils Lykke*! You must not look at me, after——. True to you, you say? But I am yours—all yours—and must be, to all eternity.

Nils Lykke. And, by my knightly oath, before the year is out you shall be sitting as my wife in my ancestral halls!

Eline. No vows, *Nils Lykke*! Swear no vows to me.

Nils Lykke. What is amiss? Why do you shake your head so sadly?

Eline. Because I know that the sweet words with which you beguiled my heart have been whispered by you to many a woman before me. No, no, beloved—do not be angry with me! I am not reproaching you, as I did when

I did not know you. I know now how far higher your aims are than those of other men. How can love be anything to you but an idle game, and women a toy?

Nils Lykke. Eline, listen to me!

Eline. I have grown up to the sound of your name. I hated it, because it seemed to bring to my mind a train of dishonoured women in your path. And yet—wonder of wonders—when, in my day-dreams I used to picture my future life, you were always my hero, although I scarcely knew it myself. Now I understand everything. What was it that I used to feel, if not an unconscious, mysterious longing for you—you wonderful man!—for you, who should come one day to teach me all the glory of life.

Nils Lykke (aside, as he puts down his lamp on the table). What has come to me? Some bewildering, compelling power is——. If it be love, then I have never known it before this hour. Perhaps it is now time——? Ah, those horrible thoughts of Lucia! (*Sinks into a chair.*)

Eline. What is it? So deep a sigh——

Nils Lykke. Nothing, nothing! Eline, I am going to confess to you freely. I have beguiled many a woman with my tongue and with my eyes, and have said to many a woman what I have whispered to you to-night. But, believe me——

Eline. Hush! Speak no more of that. My love is not something given in exchange for what you give me. No, no! I love you because every glance of your eyes is a royal command which compels it. (*Sinks down at his feet.*) Let me once more impress that royal command deep on my heart, although I know well enough that it is already graven there for all eternity. Dear God, how blind I have been to my own self! Only to-night I said to my mother: "If I am to live, I must keep my pride." What is my pride now? Is it to see my country free, or my race honoured far and wide? Oh, no! My love is my pride. A dog is proud, if it may lie at its master's feet and eat crusts from his hand. And that pride is mine—to be allowed to sit at your feet, while your tongue and your eyes feed me with the bread of life. And that is why I say to you, as I said but a little while ago to my mother: "If

I am to live I must keep my love"—for my love is my pride, now and always.

Nils Lykke (drawing her on to his knee). No, no—not at my feet, but by my side, is your place—however high destiny may set me. Yes, Eline—you have led me into a better way; and if ever it is granted me to atone, by some honourable deed, for the harm my wild youth has done, the glory shall be yours and mine together.

Eline. Ah, you speak as if I were still the Eline that threw your flowers back at your feet. In books I have read of the gaily coloured life of far-off lands. To the music of horns the knight stands forth on the greensward with a falcon on his wrist. So do you stand forth in your life—your fame precedes you wherever you go. All that I crave of your love is to be with you like the falcon on your wrist. Like the falcon's, my eyes were shrouded from light and life, until you loosed the hood from my eyes and set me free to soar above the tree-tops. But, believe me, however boldly I may spread my wings, I shall always return to my cage.

Nils Lykke (rising). Then I too will bid defiance to my past! See—take this ring, and be mine before God and man—mine, even though it should disturb the dead with uneasy dreams.

Eline. Your words trouble me. What is it that——?

Nils Lykke. It is nothing. Come, now; let me put the ring upon your finger. There! Now I have you fast!

Eline. I Nils Lykke's bride! All that has happened to-night seems to me like a dream—and what a beautiful dream! I feel so light at heart—there is no room for bitterness or hate in my mind any longer. I will atone for all the injustice I have done. I have been harsh to my mother—I will go to her in the morning, and ask her pardon for my lack of duty to her.

Nils Lykke. And she must look favourably on the compact between us.

Eline. She will, I am certain of it. She is good; every one is good! I can no longer think ill of any one—except one man.

Nils Lykke. Except one man?

Eline. It is a pitiful story. I had a sister——

Nils Lykke. Lucia?

Eline. Did you know Lucia?

Nils Lykke. No, no! I have only heard her name.

Eline. She gave her heart to a noble knight too. He betrayed her—and now she is in heaven.

Nils Lykke. And you——

Eline. I hate him.

Nils Lykke. Do not hate him. If there is any compassion in your heart, forgive him his sin. Believe me, he carries his punishment in his own breast.

Eline. I shall never forgive him! I cannot, even if I would, for I have sworn so solemn an oath——. (*Breaks off and listens.*) Hush! Do you hear——?

Nils Lykke. What? Where?

Eline. Outside—some way off—a troop of horsemen coming along the road.

Nils Lykke. Oh, it is they! And I was forgetting! They are coming here. I am in great danger! I must away!

Eline. But whither? Nils Lykke, what are you concealing from me?

Nils Lykke. To-morrow, Eline—for, as God lives, I will come back then. But now—quickly—where is the secret passage you spoke of?

Eline. Through the vaults. See, here is the trap-door.

Nils Lykke. The vaults! (*Aside.*) No matter; he must be saved!

Eline (*at the window*). The horsemen are at the gates. (*Hands him the lamp.*)

Nils Lykke. Well——! (*Begins to climb down.*)

Eline. Go straight along the passage till you come to a coffin with a death's head and a black cross on it; it is Lucia's——

Nils Lykke (*climbs up again hurriedly and shuts the trap-door*). Lucia's! Horror!

Eline. What are you saying?

Nils Lykke. Nothing. It was the death-scent that made me dizzy.

Eline. Listen!—They are hammering at the gate!

Nils Lykke (*letting the lamp fall*). It is too late——! (*BJÖRN rushes in from the right, with a torch in his hand.*)

* *Eline* (going to meet him). What is it, Björn? What is it?

Björn. An assault! Count Sture——

Eline. Count Sture? What of him?

Nils Lykke. Have they killed him?

Björn (to *ELINE*). Where is your mother?

Two Retainers (rushing in from the right). Lady Inger! Lady Inger! (*LADY INGER, with a lighted branch-candlestick in her hand, comes in from the left.*)

Lady Inger. I know everything. Down to the courtyard! Open the gates to our friends, but hold them closed against all others. (*Sits down by the table on the left. BJÖRN and the Retainers go out to the right. LADY INGER turns to NILS LYKKE.*) So that was the trap, my lord!

Nils Lykke. Lady Inger, believe me——

Lady Inger. An ambush to take him prisoner, as soon as you had gained that written promise and the power to ruin me!

Nils Lykke (taking the paper from his pocket and tearing it into pieces). There is your promise. I will keep nothing that can be evidence against you.

Lady Inger. What are you doing?

Nils Lykke. From this moment I mean to put you to shame. If I have sinned against you, by heaven I mean to try now to expiate my guilt. But I must get away from here now, if I have to cut my way through the gate. *Eline*—tell your mother everything! And you, *Lady Inger*, let us forget the reckoning between us! Be generous—and be silent! Believe me, you will have reason to be grateful to me before break of day. (*Goes hurriedly out to the right.*)

Lady Inger (looking exultingly after him). Quite so! I understand him! (*Turns to ELINE.*) Well? What of *Nils Lykke*?

Eline. He knocked at my door—and set this ring upon my finger.

Lady Inger. And loves you?

Eline. He said so, and I believe him.

Lady Inger. Cleverly done, *Eline*! Ha, ha, my lord, now my turn is coming!

Eline. Mother—you seem so strange. Though I know,

well enough, that it is my unloving behaviour that has offended you.

Lady Inger. No, no, my dear Eline! You are an obedient daughter. You have opened your door to him; you have listened to his fair words. I understand fully what it has cost you, for I know the hate you bear——

Eline. But, mother——

Lady Inger. Hush! We have worked together for my plan. How did you contrive it, you clever child? I saw the light of love in his eyes. Hold him fast now! Entangle him tighter and tighter in the net; and then——. Ah, Eline, if we could only tear his perjured heart in sunder!

Eline. Alas—what are you saying?

Lady Inger. Do not let your courage desert you. Listen to me. I know what to say to you to strengthen you. Nils Lykke——. (*Breaks off and listens.*) They are fighting outside the gate. I must be calm; the moment approaches. (*Turns to ELINE.*) Nils Lykke is the man who brought your sister to the grave.

Eline (with a shriek). Lucia!

Lady Inger. It was he, as sure as there is an avenging God!

Eline. Then heaven help me!

Lady Inger (alarmed). Eline——!

Eline. I am his betrothed before God.

Lady Inger. Unhappy child—what have you done?

Eline (in a dulled voice). Lost my heart's peace for ever! Good-night, my mother. (*Goes out to the left.*)

Lady Inger. Ha, ha, ha——! That is the end of Inger Gyldenlöve's race. The last of my daughters! Why could I not have kept silence? If she had not known, she might perhaps have been happy—after a fashion. But it was fated to be so. Fate's decree is written, up in the stars, that I must break off one branch after another, until the tree-trunk stands bare. Well, so be it—so be it! I shall get my son back again now—I will think no more of the others—no more of my daughters. And the reckoning? That will not come till the Last Day—and that is a long way off!

Nils Stensson (shouting outside, on the right). Shut the gate! Shut the gate!

Lady Inger. Count Sture's voice! (NILS STENSSON rushes in, weaponless and with his clothes in tatters, and shouts to LADY INGER with a despairing laugh.)

Nils Stensson. Well met again, Inger Gyldenlöve!

Lady Inger. How much have you lost?

Nils Stensson. My kingdom and my life!

Lady Inger. And the men?—my men? What of them?

Nils Stensson. You will find their carcasses along the road. What has become of the others, I cannot tell you.

Olaf Skavtavl (without, on the right). Count Sture, where are you?

Nils Stensson. Here! Here! (OLAF SKAVTAVL comes in, with a strip of linen bound round his right hand.)

Lady Inger. Ah, Olaf Skavtavl, you too——!

Olaf Skavtavl. It was impossible to slip through them.

Lady Inger. You are wounded, I see.

Olaf Skavtavl. Oh, a finger the less; that is all.

Nils Stensson. Where are the Swedes?

Olaf Skavtavl. At our heels. They are breaking open the gate.

Nils Stensson. Oh, God! No, no!—I cannot, I will not, die!

Olaf Skavtavl. A hiding-place, Lady Inger! Is there no corner here where we can hide him?

Lady Inger. But if they search the Castle——?

Nils Stensson. Yes, yes—then they will find me! I shall be made a prisoner, or hanged! No, no, Lady Inger, surely you will never allow that!

Olaf Skavtavl (listening). Now they have burst open the lock.

Lady Inger (at the window). Crowds of men are surging into the courtyard.

Nils Stensson. To die now!—now, when my first good fortune seemed to lie before me—now, when I have so newly learnt that I have something to live for! No, no, no! Do not think me a coward, Inger Gyldenlöve! If only I may be granted a long enough span of life to——

Lady Inger. I hear them below, in the common hall. (Decisively, to OLAF SKAVTAVL.) He must be saved, whatever it may cost.

Nils Stensson (grasping her hand). Ah, I knew it! You good, noble woman.

Olaf Skavtavl. But how is he to be saved? If we cannot hide him——

Nils Stensson. Ah, I have it! I have it! The secret——!

Lady Inger. The secret?

Nils Stensson. Of course, yours and mine!

Lady Inger. Merciful God—do you know it?

Nils Stensson. Perfectly. And now, when life itself is at stake——. Where is Nils Lykke?

Lady Inger. Fled.

Nils Stensson. Fled? Then, God help me; for only that knight can unlock my tongue. But life is of more value than a sworn oath! When the Swedish commander comes——

Lady Inger. Well? What will you do?

Nils Stensson. Buy my life and freedom—disclose everything to him.

Lady Inger. Oh, no, no! Have mercy!

Nils Stensson. There is no other way to save myself. When I have told him what I know——

Lady Inger (*looking at him with repressed emotion*). You will be saved?

Nils Stensson. Yes, yes! Nils Lykke will plead my cause. You see, it is my last chance.

Lady Inger (*calmly and meaningly*). Your last chance? You are right. It is a man's duty to try his last chance. (*Points to the left.*) See, you can hide in there for the present.

Nils Stensson (*in a low voice*). Believe me, you shall never have reason to repent what you are doing.

Lady Inger (*half to herself*). God grant you may be speaking the truth! (*NILS STENSSON goes quickly out through door LADY INGER has pointed at. OLAF SKAVTAVL is going to follow him, but LADY INGER holds him back and addresses him.*) Did you understand what he meant?

Olaf Skavtavl. The villain. He means to betray your secret—and to sacrifice your son to save himself.

Lady Inger. When a life is at stake, one ought to take the last chance, he said. Very well, Olaf Skavtavl—let it be as he said.

Olaf Skavtavl. What do you mean?

Lady Inger. A life for a life. One of them must perish.

Olaf Skavtavl. Ah!—you mean——?

Lady Inger. If that youth is not made dumb before the Swedish commander comes, then my son will be lost to me. On the other hand, if he is put out of the way, I shall in time lay claim to all his rights for the benefit of my own child. Then you shall see that there is still some stuff in Inger Gyldenlöve. You may rely on it that you shall not then have long to wait for the revenge that you have thirsted after for twenty years. Do you hear? There they come, up the stairs! Olaf Skavtavl, it depends on you whether to-morrow I shall be a childless woman or——

Olaf Skavtavl. It shall be done! I have still one sound hand left. (*Holds out his hand to her.*) Inger Gyldenlöve—if I can help it, your name shall not perish. (*Follows where NILS STENSSON had gone.*)

Lady Inger (*pale and trembling*). Have I the right to dare——? (*A noise is heard in the room where the two men are. She rushes with a scream to the door.*) No, no! It must not be! (*A heavy fall is heard within; she holds her hands over her ears and comes back with a distraught expression on her face. After a pause she takes her hands gradually away, listens again, and says in a low voice:*) It is over now. Everything is quiet in there. God, Thou sawest it—Thou sawest that I hesitated!—but Olaf Skavtavl was too quick with his hand. (*OLAF SKAVTAVL comes back, in silence. After a pause LADY INGER speaks without looking at him.*) Is it done?

Olaf Skavtavl. You may make your mind easy about him; he will betray no one.

Lady Inger (*as before*). Then he is silenced?

Olaf Skavtavl. Six inches of steel in his heart. I slew him with my left hand.

Lady Inger. Yes, yes—the right was too good for such a task.

Olaf Skavtavl. That is your affair. It was your idea. And now, I am off to Sweden! Peace be with you till I come again! When next we meet at Ostraat, I shall not come alone. (*Goes out to the right.*)

Lady Inger. Blood on my hands! So it had to come to that! My son will be dearly bought. (*BJÖRN comes in, with some Swedish Warriors, from the right.*)

One of the Warriors. Pardon me, but if you are the lady of the house——

Lady Inger. Is it Count Sture you are seeking?

The Warrior. It is.

Lady Inger. In that case, you are on the right scent. The Count has sought refuge in my house.

The Warrior. Refuge? Pardon me, noble lady—but it is not in your power to grant him that, because——

Lady Inger. The Count himself has understood the truth of what you say; and, for that reason he has—you shall see it for yourself—taken his own life.

The Warrior. Taken his own life?

Lady Inger. You shall see for yourself, as I said. You will find his dead body in there. And, as he is already standing before another Judge, I beg that his body may be conveyed from here with all the honour due to his noble birth. Björn, you know that in my private chamber my own coffin has stood prepared these many years. (*To the Warriors.*) I beg that you will convey Count Sture's body to Sweden in it.

The Warrior. It shall be as you direct. (*To one of his men.*) Run with this message to Jens Bjelke. He is stationed with the other horsemen on the road. The rest of us will go in here and——. (*One of the men goes out to the right; the rest go with BJÖRN into the room on the left.* LADY INGER walks up and down, silent and uneasy, for a while.)

Lady Inger. Even if Count Sture had not bid farewell to the world in such a hurry, within a month's time he would have been strung up on the gallows or immured in a dungeon for life. Would he have been any better off with such a lot? Or perhaps he might have bought his freedom, so as to deliver my child into the hands of my enemies. And, even if I have slain him—will not even a wolf defend its young? Then who dare pronounce judgment on me for having struck my claws into one who would have reft me of my own flesh and blood? It had to be. Any mother would have acted as I did. But this is no time for idle speculations. I must act. (*Sits down at the table on the left.*) I shall write to all my friends in the countryside. Every one of them must rise now in support of our great

cause. A new king—governor of the country at first, and then king—. (*She begins to write ; then pauses thoughtfully and says :*) Whom will they elect in the dead man's place? The king's mother—lovely name! There is but one flaw in it—the hateful likeness to another word. King's mother—and king's murderer.¹ King's murderer is one that takes a king's life; king's mother is the one that gives a king his life. (*Rises.*) Well—I will make restitution for what I have done. My son shall be king! (*Sits down again and begins to write, but soon lays her writing aside and leans back in her chair.*) There is always a sense of uneasiness as long as a corpse lies in a house. That is why I feel so strangely. (*Turns her head quickly, as if she were speaking to some one.*) That is so, isn't it? What other reason can there be? (*Ponders.*) Is there so great a difference between slaying an enemy and killing some one? Knut Alfsön had cleft many a forehead with his sword; and yet his own was as placid as a child's. Why do I always see before my eyes—(*makes a gesture as of some one stabbing another with a sword*)—the stroke through his heart, and the red blood gushing out? (*Rings a bell, and continues arranging her papers.*) After this I mean to have no more of such horrible visions. I will plunge myself into work, day and night. And in a month—in a month my son will come to me— (*BJÖRN enters.*)

Björn. Was it you that rang, my lady?

Lady Inger (still writing). Fetch more light. In future let this room always be brightly lighted. (*BJÖRN goes out again, to the left. After a moment, LADY INGER rises suddenly.*) No, no—I cannot control my pen to-night! My head burns—my mind is in a whirl—. (*Gives a start, and listens.*) What is that? Ah—they are screwing down the lid of the coffin in there. When I was a child, they used to tell me the story of the knight Aage, whose ghost used to walk, carrying its coffin on its back. What if he in there should be impelled to visit me, with his coffin on his back, to thank me for the loan of it? (*Laughs quietly.*) Well, once we have grown up we should forget all those childish

¹ It is impossible in translation to convey the play on words in the original. The Norwegian for "king's mother" is *Kongemoder*, for "king's murderer," *Kongemorder*.

superstitions. (*Vehemently.*) Stories like that do great harm. They breed unquiet dreams. When my son is king they shall be forbidden. (*Walks up and down once or twice ; then opens the window.*) How long is it usually before a corpse begins to be corrupt? All our windows must be opened; if that be not done, it is unhealthy to live here. (*She resumes her writing.* BJÖRN comes in, carrying two lighted branch-candlesticks, which he places on the table.) That is right. Do not forget what I have said. Let the room be always brightly lit. What are they doing in there now?

Björn. They are screwing down the coffin lid.

Lady Inger (writing). Are they fastening it very securely?

Björn. As securely as is necessary.

Lady Inger. Yes, yes—but you cannot tell how securely may be necessary. See to it that it is done with the greatest care. (*Takes her papers in her hands, goes up to him and says mysteriously:*) Björn, you are an old man, but let me impress one thing upon you. Be on your guard against all men—both those that are dead and those that have yet to die. Go in now—go in and see that they fasten the coffin lid very securely.

Björn (to himself, shaking his head). I cannot make her out. (*Goes back into the room on the left.* LADY INGER begins to seal a letter, but throws it away from her half sealed, walks up and down and says vehemently:)

Lady Inger. If I had been a coward, I should never have done it! If I had been a coward, I should have cried out to my own soul: "Hold back, while you still have some hope of salvation!" (*Her eyes fall on STEN STURE'S portrait; she turns her eyes away.*) He looks as if he were alive and were mocking me! Oh! (*Turns the face of the picture to the wall, without looking at it.*) Why do you mock me? Is it because I have done your son this wrong? But what of the other?—is he not your son too? And he is mine as well—remember that! (*Looks furtively at the other pictures.*) I have never seen them look so menacing as they look to-night. Wherever I go, they seem to have their eyes fixed on me. (*Stamps her foot.*) But I will pay no heed to them! I will have peace in my house! (*Begins to turn*

them all face to the wall.) Yes, even if it were a picture of the Virgin Mary herself——. Do you suppose *this* is the time——? Why did you never hear my prayers when I prayed so feverishly to get my son back? Why? Because the Wittenberg monk is right——“There is no intermediary between God and man,” he says. *(Sighs heavily and, as she continues, obviously grows more and more distraught.)* It is a very good thing that I have my wits about me. No one saw what happened in there. No one can bear witness against me. *(Stretches out her arms and whispers:)* My son! My darling child! Come to me! I am here!—Hush, let me tell you something. They hate me up there—away up beyond the stars—because I brought you into the world. I was meant to be God’s standard-bearer through my country. But I went my own way. That is why I have had to suffer so long and so much. *(BJÖRN comes from the room on the left.)*

Björn. My lady, they have——. God have mercy on us, what does this mean?

Lady Inger (who has seated herself on the throne that stands by the wall on the right). Peace, peace! I am the king’s mother. They have chosen my son for king. The honour was hard to come by, for it was with the Almighty Himself that I had to contend. *(NILS LYKKE comes in from the right, breathless.)*

Nils Lykke. He is saved! I have Jens Bjelke’s promise. Lady Inger, I——

Lady Inger. Peace, I say! See how the people swarm. *(A funeral chant is heard from within the other room.)*

Nils Lykke. Good God—what has happened?

Lady Inger. My daughters—my fair daughters! I have no more. I had one, but I lost her just as she should have gone to her bridal bed. *(Whispering.)* Lucia lay in it, a corpse. There was not room for two.

Nils Lykke. Has it come to this! Heaven’s vengeance has stricken me.

Lady Inger. Can you see him? See, see! That is the king! That is Inger Gyldenlöve’s son! I know him by the crown, and by Sten Sture’s ring which he wears round his neck. Hark how merrily the bells are ringing! I shall soon have him in my arms. Ha, ha!—who is the victor,

GOD OR I? (*The Warriors come in with the coffin. LADY INGER puts her hands to her head and cries out :*) The body! (*Whispers :*) Fie! It is an ugly dream! (*Sinks down into the throne. JENS BJELKE comes in from the right, stops, and cries out in astonishment.*)

Jens Bjelke. Dead! So then——

A Warrior. By his own hand!

Jens Bjelke (with a glance at NILS LYKKE). By his own hand?

Nils Lykke. Hush!

Lady Inger (in a weak voice, but controlling herself). Yes, yes—now it all comes back to me.

Jens Bjelke (to the Warriors). Set down the body. That is not Count Sture.

A Warrior. Your pardon, my lord—but this ring, which he was wearing round his neck——

Nils Lykke (grasping his arm). Hush, hush!

Lady Inger (rising suddenly). The ring? The ring! (*Rushes across and snatches it.*) Sten Sture's ring! (*Shrieks.*) Oh, merciful God—my son! (*Throws herself upon the coffin.*)

The Warriors. Her son?

Jens Bjelke. Inger Gyldenlöve's son?

Nils Lykke. It is so.

Jens Bjelke. But why did you not tell me——?

Björn (trying to raise LADY INGER). Help, help! My lady—what can I do for you?

Lady Inger (in a weak voice, half raising herself). What can you do for me? Get me a coffin too—a grave beside my son——. (*She sinks powerless upon the coffin. NILS LYKKE goes hurriedly out. General commotion among the others.*)

LOVE'S COMEDY
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Mrs. Halm, widow of a public official.

Svanhild } her daughters.
Anna }

Falk, a young author }
Lind, a theological student } boarders in Mrs. Halm's house.

Guldstad, a merchant.

Styver, a clerk.

Miss Skære, his fiancée.

Straamand, a country clergyman.

Mrs. Straamand, his wife.

The Straamands' eight little girls.

Students, Guests, four Aunts, Servants, etc.

*(The action takes place in the garden of Mrs. Halm's villa on the
Drammensvej at Christiania)*

LOVE'S COMEDY

ACT I

(SCENE.—*A pretty garden irregularly but tastefully laid out ; at the back a view of the fjord and the islands. On the left, part of the house is visible, with a verandah ; above the verandah a dormer window, which is open. On the right, in the foreground, an open summer-house with table and chairs. The garden is flooded with late evening sunshine. It is early summer, and the fruit-trees are in blossom. MRS. HALM, ANNA and MISS SKÆRE are seated on the verandah ; the first two are sewing, MISS SKÆRE has a book. FALK, LIND, GULDSTAD and STYVER are sitting in the summer-house. Bottles and glasses are on the table. SVANHILD is sitting alone in the background, looking out at the fjord.*)

Falk (gets up, raises his glass, and sings):

Sunlit days in shady gardens
Naught but happiness should bring ;
Waste no thought on Autumn's keeping
Of the promise of the Spring !
What if blossoms soon be scattered
By the storm-wind's cruel blast,
White and fair they now hang o'er you,
Sip their sweetness while they last.

Let the blossom-laden branches
Lull you to forgetfulness,
Put away all sighs and sorrow
Wrung from you by toil and stress.
Why set up an ugly scarecrow
With its clatter and its jar ?
Surely, brothers mine, the voices
Of the birds are sweeter far ?

If you chase the hungry songsters
From your orchards, you are wrong;
Rather perish all you hoped for,
Than that you should lose their song.
Trust me, *you* will be the gainer,
Songs are worth far more than fruit;
Happiness, like time, is fleeting,
And the birds will soon be mute.

Let us live and sing for gladness
Till the blossoms all are dead,
Then, without a pang of sorrow,
Sweep them to the rubbish-shed.
Open gates! Let sheep and cattle
Browse and trample far and wide!
I have sipped the blossom's sweetness,
What care I for aught beside!

(Refrain, in which the others join :)

I have sipped the blossom's sweetness,
What care I for aught beside!

Falk (to the ladies). There! that was the song you asked for. Don't be too hard on it; my ideas seem to have run dry.

Guldstad. Ideas don't matter, so long as the rhymes are all right.

Miss Skære (looking about her). But where is Svanhild, who was so anxious to hear it? As soon as you began she moved away, and now she is gone.

Anna (pointing to the background). No, there she is.

Mrs. Halm (with a sigh). Oh, that child! How shall I ever make anything of her!

Miss Skære. But, you know, Mr. Falk, it seemed to me that the last part of your song was a little lacking in the—what shall I call it?—the poetical quality that distinguished the rest of it.

Styver. I agree with you; but of course it would be quite easy to add a poetic touch to the last part too.

Falk (raising his glass to STYVER'S). Yes; fill up the gaps, just as you stop up a cracked board with putty, and make it all nice and sleek and smooth and pretty.

Styver (imperturbably). Yes, it's quite easy. I know that from personal experience.

Guldstad. What, have you wooed the Muse too?

Miss Skære. Why, of course he has!

Styver. Oh, only to a trifling degree.

Miss Skære (to the ladies). He really has a most romantic soul.

Mrs. Halm. Of course, we know that!

Styver. Not nowadays. I was speaking of long ago.

Falk. Varnish and romance both wear off in time. But what do you mean by long ago?

Styver. Well, it was when I fell in love.

Falk. Is that all over, then? I didn't think you had woke up yet from love's young dream!

Styver. Well, now I am formally engaged, you see. Of course that is a far more beautiful thing than merely being in love, I know.

Falk. Quite so, old chap! I agree with you. You have advanced; you have sailed into port. You have been promoted from lover to fiancé.

Styver (with a gratified smile of reminiscence). Still, it is very singular—I certainly should not be so sure of my poetic powers now! (*Turns to FALK.*) Seven years ago—would you believe it?—I used to write verses on the sly at the office.

Falk. You wrote verses? Instead of working?

Styver. No, during meal times.

Guldstad (standing up). Silence, please, for Mr. Styver's reminiscences!

Styver. It was especially in the evening, when I had more time to myself, that inspiration came to me, and I used to throw off pages of poetry. Oh, I could do it then!

Falk. You just gave Pegasus a jog, and off he trotted.

Styver. Yes—plain paper, or office paper, it was all the same to me.

Falk. Poetry simply welled out of you? But, tell me, how did you gain an entrance to the temple of the Muses?

Styver. By the help of the crowbar of love, my friend! In other words, it was Miss Skære—my fiancée, as she afterwards became, for at that time she was only—

Falk. Only the woman you were in love with—nothing more.

Styver (continuing). It was a strange time; I forgot all about my Law, and never even stopped to mend my pen; indeed, the sound of its scratching over the office paper sang in my ears like a melody accompanying my verse. At last I sent a letter to the one—the one who—

Falk. —whose fiancé you became.

Styver. Just think of it—I had her answer the very same day! My petition was granted, and my way lay clear before me!

Falk. And you felt yourself swelling with importance at your desk, because your love was returned.

Styver. Of course I did.

Falk. And never wrote poetry any more?

Styver. No, I have never felt the impulse again since then. All at once my vein of poetry seemed to dry up; and now if I even try as much as to put together a few complimentary verses for a New Year's card, neither rhyme nor rhythm will go right; and—though I can't understand why—all I can write now is law, not poetry.

Guldstad (drinking his health). Which serves every bit as well, believe me! (*To FALK.*) You appear to think that you can float along heedlessly on the stream of pleasure; take care you don't get shipwrecked. As for your song, I don't know whether one end of it is as poetical as the other, or not; but, whatever other qualities it has, let me tell you that it has a bad moral. A nice sort of economy, to let every bird in the air peck at your blossoms before the fruit has had time to set!—to let sheep and cattle browse at will all over your garden!—in here, for instance! It would look pretty next spring, wouldn't it, Mrs. Halm!

Falk (getting up). Oh, "next, next"!—I hate everything that wretched word implies. It is a word that can make a man who is rich in happiness feel like a beggar! If only I could be autocrat of the language for an hour, I would abolish the word once for all, without mercy.

Styver. It is a word of hope—why do you dislike it?

Falk. Because it darkens God's beautiful world for us, "Our next love," "our next wife," "our next meal," "our next life"—its implied provision for the future is

what beggars a man who is one of the sons of joy! It spoils all the beauty of life—destroys pleasure in a moment. You are never satisfied until you have brought your boat, with toil and trouble, to the “next” shore; but, as soon as you get there, you dare not linger there! No! you have to hurry off to the “next” port again. And so it goes on—ceaselessly—all your life long. God knows whether there is any stopping-place in the next world!

Mrs. Halm. For shame, Mr. Falk, how can you say such things!

Anna (pensively). Oh, I can understand what he means, very well. There may be a bit of truth at the bottom of it.

Miss Skære (in a perturbed voice). I cannot allow my fiancé to listen to such things; he is quite eccentric enough already.—My dear! come here for a moment!

Styver (who is busy cleaning his pipe). I will come directly.

Guldstad (to FALK). Well, I am quite certain of one thing, and that is that you ought to have a little more respect for “provision for the future.” Suppose, for instance, that you were to write a poem to-day, and put your whole precious stock-in-trade into it—every poetical idea that you have—and then suppose that to-morrow, when you wanted to write your next poem, you found you had no ideas left; I think the critics would be rather down on you!

Falk. I doubt if they would even realise that I was bankrupt. They and I would go strolling along the same way, arm-in-arm. (*Changes his tone and turns to LIND.*) But, I say, Lind—what is the matter with you? You have been sitting there mum the whole time. Are you immersed in architectural study?

Lind (with a start). I? Why do you say that?

Falk. Well, you have never taken your eyes off that balcony all this time. Is it the architecture of the verandah with its imposing style, that you are studying so earnestly? Or the elegantly carved hinges of the door?—or the elaborately chased window-fastening? Something has captured your fancy.

Lind (with a rapt look in his eyes). No, you are wrong;

I am merely sitting here, *living*. I am intoxicated with the present, and want nothing more. I feel as if I were standing with all the riches of the world showered at my feet! Thank you for your song of life's joyousness in the spring! It was like a revelation of my own soul. (*Raises his glass and exchanges a glance with ANNA, unperceived by the others.*) Here's to the blossoms with their sweet perfume! Do not let us waste a thought on the fruit! (*Drains his glass.*)

Falk (looks at him intently but hides his surprise under a mocking tone of voice). Ladies, listen to this! Here is something new! I have found an easy convert! Yesterday he went about with his hymn-book in his pocket; to-day he is bravely beating the poetic drum. The general opinion is that a poet is born a poet; but sometimes a quite prosaic person gets so mercilessly stuffed, like a Strasburg goose, with poetic food of all sorts, that his entire inside—liver, heart and crop—if you were to cut him open, would be found crammed with lyrical fat and oil of poetry. (*To LIND.*) But thanks, all the same, for your discipleship; we will strike the poetic lyre in unison for the future.

Miss Skære. What about yourself, Mr. Falk? Are you industrious in writing poetry—here in the peaceful country amidst the flowers, where you can be absorbed in your own daydreams——?

Mrs. Halm (smiling). No, he is lazy; it is dreadful.

Miss Skære. I should have thought that in this place of Mrs. Halm's, you would have had no excuse for not turning out reams of verse. (*Points to the right.*) That little summer-house, bowered in leaves, is just made for a poet! I should have thought that there you would have——.

Falk (going over to the verandah and leaning his arms on the balustrade). If you were to cast the veil of blindness over my eyes, I could write you poems on the glorious light of heaven. If you could possess me, but for a month, with some heart-breaking anguish, some agony of soul, I would sing aloud to you of the joy of life. Or, best of all, dear lady, find me a bride that shall be everything to me—my light, my sun, my deity! I have prayed to God for such a one, but He has proved deaf to my prayers so far, alas.

Miss Skære. For shame, that is wicked!

Mrs. Halm. Yes, you shouldn't say such things!

Falk. Ah, you mustn't think that what I meant was merely strolling arm-in-arm with her through the pleasant paths of courtship. No; she must be my comrade through the turmoil of life's chances to all eternity. My soul craves for spiritual gymnastics, and that is the way I should probably get what I need most effectually.

Svanhild (who has drawn near as he was speaking, stands close beside FALK, and says, whimsically and yet with evident sincerity): Very well, I will pray that such a destiny may be yours; but, when it comes, face it like a man.

Falk (turning round in surprise). Miss Svanhild! Yes, I shall be forearmed. But do you think I can rely on the efficacy of your prayers? One has to go warily to work with heaven, you know! I have no doubt of the intensity of your desire to rob me of my soul's peace, but the question is whether you have the necessary amount of faith as well.

Svanhild (halfway between jest and earnest). Wait till sorrow comes and overshadows the light of your life; wait till it pursues you, even in your dreams; then you will be able to judge of the strength of my faith. (*Joins the other ladies.*)

Mrs. Halm (in an undertone). Will you two never stop sparring? You have really annoyed Mr. Falk now. (*Goes on talking to her and scolding her.* MISS SKÆRE joins in their conversation. SVANHILD stands coldly silent. FALK, after standing for a moment lost in thought, crosses over to the summer-house, talking to himself.)

Falk. Confidence was shining in her eyes. But can I believe that, because her faith is so strong, heaven will——

Guldstad. Of course it won't! It would—I say it with all respect—be crazy if it carried out instructions like that. Look here, my dear poet—what you need is some exercise for your arms and legs, for your whole body. Don't lie on your back here, staring up at the trees all day long; find something else to do. And I will bet anything you like that in a fortnight you will be rid of all these mad whimsies of yours.

Falk. I am like the donkey in the fable, hesitating between two bales of hay—the flesh on one hand, my soul on the other. I wonder which I ought to choose!

Guldstad (filling their glasses). Have a glass of wine; it will cure your temper as well as your thirst.

Mrs. Halm (looking at her watch). It is nearly eight o'clock. I expect our reverend friend will be here directly. *(Gets up and begins to tidy the verandah.)*

Falk. What? Have you got a parson coming?

Miss Skære. You know we have!

Mrs. Halm. I mentioned quite recently that he was coming——

Anna. Mother, Mr. Falk wasn't there when you spoke about it.

Mrs. Halm. No more he was. But you needn't look so perturbed, Mr. Falk; you will find him a very agreeable visitor, I assure you.

Falk. But who is this parson, then, that is going to prove so agreeable?

Mrs. Halm. Mr. Straamand, of course.

Falk. Ah, yes. I believe I have heard of him, and saw in the paper that he was going to carry his good work into the field of politics, as member of parliament.

Styver. Yes, he is a good speaker.

Guldstad. Except for his abominable trick of clearing his throat.

Miss Skære. He is coming with his wife——

Mrs. Halm. And his children——

Falk. To give them a few days' enjoyment, before he has his hands full of the Swedish Question and affairs of state. I understand.

Mrs. Halm. There is a man for you, Mr. Falk!

Guldstad. Yes, he was a bit of a rogue when he was a young man.

Miss Skære (indignantly). How can you, Mr. Guldstad? Ever since I was a child I have heard him and his romantic story spoken of with the greatest respect, and that by people whose word carried weight.

Guldstad (laughing). His romantic story?

Miss Skære. Yes! I call it a romantic story. I daresay commonplace people cannot appreciate it.

Falk. You excite my curiosity enormously.

Miss Skære. Goodness knows, there will always be people ready to turn any touching story into ridicule! Why it is common knowledge that there was a man here—he was only a student at the time, too—who even had the audacity, the pitiful audacity, to pass criticisms on *William Russell*,¹ a play that is a masterpiece.

Falk. But, tell me—is this country parson a living poem, and his life a Christian drama, or something of that sort?

Miss Skære (*moved to tears*). No, Mr. Falk; but a big-hearted man. But when a spiritless creature is so malicious and lets his malice carry him to such lengths——

Falk. And depths——

Miss Skære. —you, with your clear insight, will easily understand that I——

Falk. Of course—obviously. But what I understand less clearly is the nature of this romance of his. I see plainly enough that it is something beautiful; if you could only give me some hint as to——

Styver. I can give you the salient points of it.

Miss Skære. No, I am more familiar with the story than you; I can give you the whole details——

Mrs. Halm. And so can I!

Miss Skære. Excuse me, Mrs. Halm—I am telling Mr. Falk! Listen, Mr. Falk. When he was still a student he had the reputation of being one of the most promising men in the town; he had a gift of criticism, and was in touch with all the new movements——

Mrs. Halm. And played delightfully in private theatricals.

Miss Skære. Please wait a moment! He was a musician, a painter——

Mrs. Halm. And remember how well he used to tell a story!

Miss Skære. Give me time!—I know all about it. He wrote the words and music for a set of songs that were published. They were called *Seven Sonnets to my Maren*.

¹ *William Russell*, a tragedy by a forgotten dramatist, Andreas Munch, on the subject of the career of Lord William Russell, "the Patriot." It was produced at Christiania in 1857.

You should have heard how beautifully he sang them to his guitar!

Mrs. Halm. He was a most delightful person!

Guldstad (in an undertone). Hm!—some people thought he was cracked.

Falk. An old stager,¹ whose wisdom is by no means solely derived from musty parchments, has given it as his opinion that love will produce Petrarchs with just as much certainty as a life of pastoral ease produced Patriarchs. But who was this Maren?

Miss Skære. Maren? The girl he was in love with, of course. I will tell you all about it. She was the daughter of a merchant——

Guldstad. A timber merchant.

Miss Skære (coldly). No doubt Mr. Guldstad knows all about it.

Guldstad. Yes, and their trade was principally with Holland.

Falk. A merchant, you were saying, Miss Skære?

Miss Skære (resuming). A merchant who had heaps of money. You can well imagine how many suitors she had—from among the first families in the town.

Mrs. Halm. One of her admirers was gentleman-of-the-bedchamber to the king.

Miss Skære. But Maren defended her heart bravely. She had met Mr. Straamand at the "Dramatic Society"; and to see him was to love him!

Falk. So I suppose the other suitors were all left on the lurch?

Mrs. Halm. Yes; wasn't it romantic?

Miss Skære. And her father was a horrible old man, who did his utmost to separate them. But they remained true to one another, and indulged together in day-dreams of a thatched cottage, with a lamb as white as snow——

Mrs. Halm. Or at most a calf——

Miss Skære. In a word, all they wanted, as they often declared to me, was a little cot beside a stream—and each other's love!

Falk. Quite so! And then——?

Miss Skære. Then she broke with her family.

¹ Ibsen's friend, P. Botten-Hansen, in his *Hyldebryllupet*.

Falk. Broke with them?

Mrs. Halm. Broke with them.

Falk. That was plucky, at any rate.

Miss Skære. And fled to her lover's garret.

Falk. Fled to——? Without—without the blessing of the Church?

Miss Skære. For shame!

Mrs. Halm. For shame, Mr. Falk! My dear husband signed the marriage register as a witness!

Styver (to Miss SKÆRE). Well, it was your silence on the point that caused the misunderstanding. In reporting anything, it is most important to get things in their proper chronological order. I never can understand how they managed to face it——

Falk. Especially as I suppose the lamb and the calf didn't share their garret with them?

Miss Skære (to STYVER). Ah, you must remember one thing, my friend—that, where true love is, very little else is needed. Two loving hearts will pull through troubles wonderfully. *(To FALK.)* He used to sing love-songs to her on his guitar—and she used to give lessons on the piano——

Mrs. Halm. And, of course, they lived on credit——

Guldstad. For the first year, until her father's business went to smash.

Mrs. Halm. But then Mr. Straamand got a living in the north.

Miss Skære. And in a letter of his from there, that I saw, he vowed that he would live for his duty and for her.

Falk. And that was the end of his romance.

Mrs. Halm (getting up). Now I think we had better walk down the garden, and see if there are any signs of them.

Miss Skære (putting on a mantilla). It is turning cool already.

Mrs. Halm. Yes; Svanhild, will you fetch me my woollen shawl?

Lind (to ANNA, unobserved by the others). Go on ahead of them.

Mrs. Halm. Come along! *(SVANHILD goes into the house; the others, except FALK, go to the back of the scene or out to*

the left. LIND, *who was going with them, stops and comes back.*)

Lind. My friend!

Falk. The same to you!

Lind. Let me grasp you by the hand! I am so happy that I feel as if my heart would burst if I don't tell some one——

Falk. Gently, gently! You shall be interrogated first, and then sentenced, and then hanged. What does this behaviour mean? Concealing from me, your old friend, the treasure you have found?—for you must admit I have grounds for the suspicion. You have drawn a prize in the lottery of happiness!

Lind. Yes, I have captured happiness, that shy bird, itself!

Falk. What, alive?—and not mangled in a trap?

Lind. Have patience for a moment; it won't take long to tell you. I am engaged!— Just think of it——!

Falk (*quickly*). Engaged!

Lind. Yes—to-day! Goodness knows how I had the courage to do it. I said to her—no, such things won't bear repeating; but, just imagine—she, that lovely girl, was only covered with blushes—wasn't a bit angry! I was risking everything on one throw, I can tell you, Falk! She listened to me—and I think she was crying. That was a good sign, wasn't it?

Falk. Of course. Go on!

Lind. And so—and so—we are engaged, aren't we?

Falk. I suppose so; but, to be quite certain, you had better take Miss Skære's opinion.

Lind. No, no! I feel so certain about it—so absolutely safe—I am not the least afraid. (*With an air of mystery.*) Listen! She allowed me to squeeze her hand when she was taking away the coffee-cups this afternoon!

Falk (*draining his glass*). Well, may the flowers of Spring deck your wedding!

Lind (*drinking*). And here I swear, from the bottom of my heart, to love her all my life as passionately as I do now—the darling!

Falk. Engaged! So that was why you threw over the law and the prophets?

Lind (laughing). Yes, and you thought it was your song——!

Falk. My friend, there are moments when a poet will believe anything.

Lind (seriously). Don't think, however, Falk, that the theologian in me is dead because I am so happy. There is only this difference now, that the Book alone is not enough to act as a Jacob's Ladder to give me access to my God. I feel now that I must go out and seek the way to Him through Life! I feel more human kindness in my heart. I love the very grass that my foot treads on; it has its share in life's happiness too.

Falk. But, tell me——

Lind. I have told you everything—my splendid secret, which we three shall share.

Falk. Yes; but, I mean, have you thought about the future at all?

Lind. I? Thought about the future? No! From this moment I mean to live only in the glorious present. I fix my eyes on the happiness that is in my grasp. She and I hold the reins of destiny! I defy you, or Guldstad, or even Mrs. Halm herself, to suggest that the fair flower of my life can ever fade! *I* have strength of will; *she* has eyes full of love; between the two we shall scale the heights!

Falk. Quite so, my friend; you are bound to be happy!

Lind. My heart is glowing with delirious happiness! I feel as strong as a giant! If I saw a chasm yawning at my feet, no matter how wide it was, I could leap across it!

Falk. Or, to put it more prosaically, love has turned you into a reindeer.

Lind. If you like! But even were I scouring the hills with the reindeer, I know where my longing thoughts would be all the time!

Falk. Well, your thoughts will have an opportunity to try to-morrow. You are going climbing with the other three, aren't you? *You* won't need furs to keep you warm, though—I dare swear!

Lind. Climbing with the others? Pooh! let them go climbing alone. For me, the finest mountain air is down here at the bottom of the valley. Here there are flowers and the gleaming waters of the fjord; here there is song,

and the melody of the birds, and the very spirit of happiness—for *she* is here!

Falk. Well, the spirit of happiness is a shy bird hereabouts; hold fast to it when you have got it. (*Glances towards the house.*) Hush, here comes Svanhild!

Lind (grasping his hand). Yes, I am off! Let no one guess the secret you and I and *she* share! Thanks for letting me divulge it to you. Bury it deep in your heart—and keep it warm, as I gave it to you. (*Joins the others in the background. FALK looks after him for a moment, then takes two or three steps up and down, with an evident effort to conquer his agitation. A moment later SVANHILD comes out of the house, with a shawl over her arm, and walks towards the background. FALK goes up to her and looks intently at her. SVANHILD stops. A short pause.*)

Svanhild. Why are you looking so earnestly at me?

Falk (half to himself). Yes, I see it in your face. There is a new depth in your eyes, playing hide and seek with the mocking fairy that is lingering round your mouth. I see it there.

Svanhild. See *what*? You almost frighten me.

Falk. And your name is Svanhild?

Svanhild. You know it is.

Falk. But do you know, Miss Halm, that it is a ridiculous name for you? Oblige me by disowning it, once and for all!

Svanhild. For shame! That would be a most high-handed and undutiful proceeding!

Falk (laughing). Hm!—"Svanhild"—"Svanhild"—
(*Suddenly becomes serious.*) Why did they saddle you with such a *memento mori* when you were a child?

Svanhild. Is it such an ugly name, then?

Falk. No, it is as beautiful as a poem; but altogether too great and strong and austere for nowadays. How can a girl of the present day hope to live up to all that the name "Svanhild" implies? No, no—throw it away, like a dress that is out of date.

Svanhild. I suppose you are thinking of Svanhild the king's daughter in the Saga—?

Falk. Who, though she was innocent, was trampled to death under the horse's hoofs.

Svanhild. But such things as that would not be permitted nowadays. No, I should be in the saddle! I have often, in my daydreams, imagined myself riding out into the wide world, safe and confident on my steed's back, while its mane flew in the wind like a flag of freedom!

Falk. I know, I know. In our daydreams none of us pay any heed to bars and barriers, or are shy of using the spur; but in real life we keep pretty carefully to level ground. Because, after all, life is dear to every one, and no one willingly risks a fatal leap.

Svanhild (spiritedly). You are wrong! Show me the goal, and I will risk the leap. But then the end must be worth the risk. There must be a land of golden promise beyond the desert; if not, the adventurer will not take a step.

Falk (teasingly). Oh, I know all about that. That is the pose of to-day.

Svanhild (warmly). Quite so. What would be the use of hoisting your sails if there were no breath of wind in the fjord?

Falk (ironically). Exactly. Why trouble to use whip and spur if there are no handsome stakes to be won—no solid reward for the adventurer who tears himself from bed and board to spend uneasy hours in the saddle in pursuit of his ideal? To go on such a quest for the quest's sake is a knight-errant's job, and knight-errantry is rather blown upon nowadays. I suppose that was what you meant?

Svanhild. Yes, it is quite true. Look at that pear-tree by the hedge, how barren of blossom it is. You should have seen last year what a brave show it made, with its branches bending under the weight of fruit.

Falk (a little perplexed). Very likely; but what moral are you pointing from that?

Svanhild. Well, amongst other things, that it would be unreasonable for even a modern Zachariah to expect pears from it this year. If the tree has been overladen with blossom one year, you mustn't expect as much of it the next.

Falk. I might have known you would have taken refuge in romance—prehistoric romance!

Svanhild. Yes; valour nowadays is of quite another colour. Who takes up arms in defence of the truth now-

adays?. Who is willing to stake his existence on it? Where are we to look for a hero?

Falk (looking keenly at her). And where for a Valkyrie?

Svanhild (shaking her head). Oh, we have no use for Valkyries in this country! When, last year, the Christians in Syria were in danger, did you go off there like a Crusader? No; you were very eloquent—on paper, and sent a subscription of half-a-crown to the *Church Times*. *(A pause. FALK appears as if about to answer her, but restrains himself and walks away from her.)* Mr. Falk, have I offended you?

Falk. Of course not. I am a sulky beggar—that's all.

Svanhild (thoughtfully and sympathetically). There seem to be two different—quite different—natures in you.

Falk. Yes, I know that well enough.

Svanhild (eagerly). But why?

Falk (impetuously). Why? Because I cannot endure wearing my heart on my sleeve for every one to gape at—going about with my deepest feelings laid as bare as a young girl's bare arms! You were the only one—you, Svanhild, at least, so I thought—who—. Oh, well, it's all over now. *(Turns back to her, but she crosses over to the summer-house and looks away from him.)* What are you listening to?

Svanhild. To another voice that is speaking! Hush! Listen! Every evening at sunset a little bird comes flying down here—look, there it is!—out from amongst the shade of the leaves. Do you know what I really and truly believe? That to every one, to whom on earth the gift of song is denied, God gives a little bird as a friend—created for that person alone and for that person's garden.

Falk. Yes, but the bird has to find its affinity, otherwise its song will be wasted on a stranger's garden.

Svanhild. That is true; but mine has found me. I have neither the gift of eloquence nor of song; but, when this little songster twitters in his leafy bower, it is as if a poem were being graven on my heart. But, see, he won't stay—he has flown away. *(FALK picks up a stone and throws it suddenly. SVANHILD screams.)* Heavens, you have hit it! What have you done! *(Rushes out to the right; then comes back.)* Oh, that was wicked—wicked!

Falk (passionately). No! It is only an eye for an eye, Svanhild! Only a tooth for a tooth! Now you will get no more greeting from the skies—no more gifts from the land of song. That is my revenge for what you have done!

Svanhild. For what I have done?

Falk. Yes! Till just now, a song-bird used to sing in my heart, bravely and courageously. Now the bell may toll for both their deaths. You murdered it.

Svanhild. I?

Falk. Yes, when you killed my glad young dream of victory. (*Contemptuously.*) When you became betrothed.

Svanhild. What do you mean?

Falk. Oh, I daresay it is all in order. He will take his degree, get a living at once—very likely in America——

Svanhild (in the same tone). And fall heir to a considerable property, no doubt! For I suppose it is Mr. Lind you mean?

Falk. You should know best about that.

Svanhild (repressing a smile). I ought to, as his fiancée's sister——

Falk. What! Then it isn't you——

Svanhild. —who is reaping such a harvest of good fortune? Unfortunately, no!

Falk (with almost childish delight). It is not you? Oh, thank God for that! God is still good and kind! I am not to be doomed to see you the bride of another! He only wished to light the fire of pain in my heart! (*Tries to take her hand.*) Oh, Svanhild—listen to me!

Svanhild (pointing to the background). Look there! (*She goes towards the house. At the same time MRS. HALM, ANNA, MISS SKÆRE, GULDSTAD, STYVER and LIND come forward. The sun has set, and dusk is setting in.*)

Mrs. Halm (to SVANHILD). The Straamands may be here any minute. Where have you been?

Miss Skære (after a glance at FALK). You look rather upset, my dear.

Svanhild. Only a slight headache. It will soon pass off.

Mrs. Halm. And yet you are going about with nothing on your head. Go and get the tea ready, and tidy up the room. We must have everything as nice as possible; I know Mrs. Straamand——

Styver (to FALK). Do you know what the parson's politics are?

Falk. I don't think he is in favour of any increase in the salaries of public officials.

Styver. But suppose he had an opportunity of running his eye over the poems I have locked up in my desk?

Falk. That might help, possibly.

Styver. Indeed, I hope so; because, believe me, we are both feeling it a pretty severe pinch, now that we have to provide ourselves with a home. The responsibilities of a lover are by no means light.

Falk. Quite so; but what are you doing in that galley?

Styver. Is love a galley?

Falk. No, but marriage is; a galley with its chains and its slavery.

Styver (noticing that MISS SKÆRE is approaching them). Ah, you don't know what treasures lie hidden in a woman's thoughts, a woman's counsel.

Miss Skære (in an undertone to STYVER). Do you think you will get Mr. Guldstad to back your bill?

Styver (irritably). I am sure I don't know. I will try. (They move off together, talking. LIND comes up to FALK, with ANNA.)

Lind (in an undertone, to FALK). I can't keep it in any longer! I feel I must tell every one——

Falk. You must hold your tongue, and let no outsider into the secret that you——

Lind. What an idea! Would you have had me keep my new-born happiness a secret from a comrade like yourself! No, no; I feel as if wings were sprouting from my shoulders——

Falk. And you want to have the feathers curled, do you? Oh, well, my dear friend, if that is your state of mind, you ought to be quick and make your public announcement!

Lind. That is just what I think, for several reasons—— for one reason, especially. Suppose, for instance, that there were some amorous fellow lurking about here; suppose he obviously declared himself as a rival suitor. That would be extremely unpleasant.

Falk. That is quite true. I had forgotten that you

wanted to be promoted to be something higher than a lover. You are an unacknowledged high-priest of love; sooner or later you will be officially gazetted. But the matter will proceed decently and in order; you are ordained already.

Lind. Yes, if only Mr. Guldstad——

Falk. What about him?

Anna (blushing). Oh, it is only a stupid fancy of Mr. Lind's.

Lind. Don't say that. I have a presentiment that he may rob me of my happiness. The fellow is here every day, you know; he is rich and a bachelor, and is always hanging about you. To tell you the truth, dearest one, there are a thousand ways that unhappiness may threaten us.

Anna (with a sigh). Oh, don't say that! Everything has turned out so happily to-day.

Falk (to LIND, sympathetically). Don't spoil your happiness by any such groundless fancies. Wait as long as you can before you fly your colours openly.

Anna. Good gracious, Miss Skære is looking at us. Be quiet! (*She and LIND go off in different directions.*)

Falk (looking after LIND). There goes another poor chap dealing the death-blow to his youth. (*GULDSTAD, who meanwhile has been standing by the verandah steps talking to MRS. HALM and MISS SKÆRE, comes up to FALK and taps him on the shoulder.*)

Guldstad. Meditating over a poem, eh?

Falk. No, over a drama.

Guldstad. The deuce you are! I didn't think you dabbled in such things.

Falk. Oh, it is some one else's drama. He is a friend of mine—a friend of yours as well, by the way—and a rapid worker too, let me tell you. Do you know that to-day, between midday and evening, he has composed a complete idyll in verse?

Guldstad (slyly). With a happy ending?

Falk. Of course the curtain can't fall until the loving couple are in each other's arms. But that is only one portion of the trilogy. The real throes of authorship come on after that, when the second portion—the comedy of The Engaged Couple—has to be composed in five long

acts; and, after all that, this scanty material has to be drawn out to furnish the drama of Marriage, which is the third part of the trilogy.

Guldstad (smiling). I really believe the itch of writing is infectious.

Falk. Do you? Why?

Guldstad. Because I too am thinking of producing a poem; but (*mysteriously*) one founded on fact—not a make-believe one, by any means.

Falk. And who is the hero of it, if one may ask?

Guldstad. I will tell you that to-morrow; not before.

Falk. It is yourself!

Guldstad. Do you think the part would fit me?

Falk. I can't imagine its fitting any one better. But what about the heroine? I take it that she is going to be found in the fresh air of the country, not amidst the turmoil of the town?

Guldstad (holding up a threatening finger). Hush—that is the crucial point, and you must have patience! (*Changes his tone.*) Tell me, what is your opinion of Miss Halm?

Falk. Oh, you certainly know her better than I do; my opinion can neither better her nor harm her in your eyes. (*Smiles.*) But you had better look out, in case this poem of yours all comes to nothing. What would you say if I were to abuse your confidence and upset the whole apple-cart?

Guldstad (good-naturedly). Oh, in that case I should say my *Nunc dimittis*.

Falk. Is that a promise?

Guldstad. You are a professional, you see; it would obviously be absurd for a mere amateur to reject your help. (*Moves towards the background.*)

Falk (going up to LIND). You were quite right. Guldstad has murderous designs on your new-born happiness.

Lind (in a low voice, to ANNA). You see, my fears were not groundless. We must come out with our announcement at once. (*They go up to MRS. HALM, who is standing talking to MISS SKÆRE.*)

Guldstad (to STYVER). Beautiful weather this evening.

Styver. Oh, yes, if one were in the mood to enjoy it.

Guldstad (*teasingly*). Is anything going wrong with your love-affair?

Styver. No, not exactly with that——

Falk (*who has joined them*). But with your engagement, perhaps?

Styver. Possibly.

Falk. Bravo! You are not the man to put up with poetic small change, evidently!

Styver (*in a hurt voice*). I really don't see what poetry has got to do with my engagement.

Falk. No more you should. It means good-bye to love if once you begin to examine its origin.

Guldstad (*to STYVER*). If it is any matter in which we can help you, out with it.

Styver. Well, to tell the truth, I have had it in my mind all day to approach the subject, but have never got any nearer doing so.

Falk. I will help you to put it into words. Ever since you arrived at the pinnacle of bliss you have felt yourself, so to speak, in difficulties——

Styver. Yes, confoundedly so, at times.

Falk. And have felt yourself burdened with obligations that you would willingly have sent to the devil, if only they would go. Isn't that so?

Styver. What do you mean by that? I have renewed them punctually and honourably. (*Turns to GULDSTAD.*) But next month they will be heavier still. When a man marries, and has a wife to keep——

Falk (*triumphantly*). Ah, that clears the clouds from the skies of your young life! That was an echo of the days when you used to sing! I knew it was bound to be so; you only needed wings and scissors!

Styver. Scissors?

Falk. Yes, scissors of the will—to cut through every tie that prevented you from escaping and taking flight——

Styver (*incensed*). Really, that is a little too much! To accuse me of wishing to break the law! Do you suppose I would ever contemplate absconding? To say such a thing is only an attempt to disgrace me!—a libel!

Falk. You are mad! What do you want? Speak, man! —speak!

Guldstad (to STYVER, with a laugh). Yes, you really should explain! What is it all about?

Styver (pulling himself together). An advance from the bank.

Falk. An advance!

Styver (hurriedly to GULDSTAD). Yes, I want some one to be security for me for some ten or fifteen pounds.

Miss Skære (who meanwhile has been talking to MRS. HALM, LIND and ANNA). My best congratulations! This is really delightful!

Guldstad. What is? (*Goes up to the ladies.*) That was an unfortunate interruption!

Falk (putting his arm gaily round STYVER's shoulders). Hurrah! I hear the glad sound of trumpets announcing that a brother has been born to you in the family of Love! (*Pulls him towards the others.*)

Miss Skære (overcome). Just think of it!—Mr. Lind and Anna! Just think of it—he has won her! They are betrothed!

Mrs. Halm (weeping with emotion, as the others congratulate the happy pair). She will be the eighth that has gone away from this house well married. (*To FALK.*) Yes, seven nieces before her—all married to my boarders——. (*Is quite overcome, and holds her handkerchief to her eyes.*)

Miss Skære (to ANNA). You will have plenty of congratulations, my dear! (*Careses her affectionately.*)

Lind (grasping FALK's hand). My friend, I feel drunk with happiness!

Falk. Hush! As an engaged man you are *ipso facto* a member of love's Temperance Society. You must obey its laws—no orgies here! (*Turns to GULDSTAD, with a mischievously sympathetic expression.*) Well, Mr. Guldstad, what do you think of it?

Guldstad (happily). As far as I can see it promises happiness for them both.

Falk (looking at him in surprise). You accept misfortune with a praiseworthy calmness. I am glad to see it.

Guldstad. What do you mean, my dear friend?

Falk. I only mean that after coming so near the hope of this happiness for yourself——

Guldstad. I? Did I?

Falk. Yes, at all events you were on the high road to it. You mentioned Miss Halm to me; you stood here and asked me——

Guldstad (with a smile). Yes, but aren't there two Miss Halms?

Falk. Then it was the *other* you meant?—her sister?

Guldstad. Yes, the other one—her sister. Precisely. Consider her a little more closely, and judge for yourself if she does not deserve a little more attention than she has received in this house so far.

Falk (coldly). She certainly has every good quality that one could desire.

Guldstad. Not quite every one; she hasn't quite caught the tone of society. She is a trifle lacking in that.

Falk. Yes, that is a pity.

Guldstad. But if only Mrs. Halm will take her in hand for a single winter, I will wager she becomes a match for any one in that.

Falk. That is obvious.

Guldstad (laughing). Yes, young girls are queer creatures.

Falk (gaily). They are like the seeds of winter-rye; they develop imperceptibly amidst frost and snow.

Guldstad. From Christmas - time they live in ball-rooms——

Falk. Freely watered with gossip and scandal—

Guldstad. And when the warm days of spring come—

Falk. They sprout up into little green shoots of ladies.

Lind (comes across to FALK and grasps his hand). How wise I was to do it! I can't believe it! I feel so happy and so secure!

Guldstad. So now you are an engaged man. Well, tell us what it feels like to be a newly-betrothed lover!

Lind (with obvious distaste). I don't think I care to discuss it with a third person.

Guldstad (mockingly). What, in a bad temper? I shall complain to Anna. (*Goes over to the ladies.*)

Lind (looking after him). How can any one put up with such a fellow!

Falk. All the same, you were mistaken about him.

Lind. Indeed?

Falk. It wasn't Anna he had designs on.

Lind. What? Was it Svanhild?

Falk. I am sure I don't know. (*Whimsically.*) Forgive me, you martyr for another's sake!

Lind. What do you mean?

Falk. Did you read the paper to-day?

Lind. No.

Falk. I will send it you. There is a paragraph in it about a man who, by a freak of fortune, had a fine, healthy tooth extracted because a cousin of his had the toothache.

Miss Skære (*looking out to the left*). Here come the Straamands.

Mrs. Halm. How many of them are there?

Styver. Five, six, seven, eight children——

Falk. Prodigious!

Miss Skære. I should almost call it indecent! (*Meanwhile the wheels of a carriage have been heard.* MR. STRAAMAND, his wife and eight children, all in travelling clothes, come in one after the other.)

Mrs. Halm (*hurrying forward to greet them.*) Here you are! I am delighted to see you.

Straamand. Thank you.

Mrs. Straamand. But you are entertaining a party——

Mrs. Halm. Not at all!

Mrs. Straamand. If we are at all in the way——

Mrs. Halm. By no means. On the contrary, you have come at a most opportune moment. My daughter Anna has just become engaged.

Straamand (*grasping ANNA'S hand with unction*). My dear young lady, let me assure you that love—true affection—is a treasure which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, if it be sincere.

Mrs. Halm. How charming of you to bring your little ones with you!

Straamand. We have four tender little birds besides these.

Mrs. Halm. You don't say so!

Straamand. Three of them are yet too young to realise that they are losing a fond father in the vortex of politics.

Miss Skære (*bidding MRS. HALM good-bye*). I must leave you now.

Mrs. Halm. Oh, why are you going so soon?

Miss Skære. I am going into town to spread the news. I know the Jensens are late of going to bed; I am sure the dear aunts will be overjoyed! Darling Anna, you must get over your shyness now. To-morrow is Sunday, and congratulations will be pouring in on you from all sides!

Mrs. Halm. Good-night, then. (*To the others.*) I dare say you would like a cup of tea? Mrs. Straamand, will you come into the house? (*MRS. HALM, the STRAAMAND family, GULDSTAD, LIND and ANNA go into the house.*)

Miss Skære (taking STYVER's arm). Now we will have a nice talk, dear! See how Chaste Diana is sitting on her throne!—Oh, but you aren't looking at the moon, dear!

Styver (grumpily). Oh, yes; only I was thinking of my debts. (*They go out to the left. FALK, who has been all the time eyeing STRAAMAND and his family, remains alone at the back of the garden. Dusk has come on, and the lights in the house are lit.*)

Falk. It is like the ashes of a dead world—a misery that is beyond comfort. And so they go through the world, two and two. It is like looking at rows of blackened tree-trunks after a fire on a lonely heath; nothing but a parched world, as far as the eye can reach. Is there no one who will bring back the fresh verdure of life? (*SVANHILD comes out on to the balcony, carrying a pot of growing roses, which she puts down on the balustrade.*) Yes, there is one! There is one!

Svanhild. Mr. Falk! Still out there in the dark?

Falk. And not afraid? No, the darkness is just to my taste. But, tell me, do you not feel afraid in there, where the lamplight gleams upon livid corpses——?

Svanhild. Oh, for shame!

Falk (looking at STRAAMAND, who is seen at the window). That man once was full of spirit. He wrestled with the world for the sake of a woman he loved; he flew in the face of all conventions; his love burst out into rapturous song! Look at him now! Look at him in his Sunday-best frock-coat—a tragedy on two legs! And that woman in her dragged skirt, with her shoes all down at heel—she is the angel-maiden that was to raise him up into communion with the spirit of beauty itself! What is left of that celestial

fire? Nothing but the smoke. *Sic transit gloria amoris*, Miss Svanhild!

Svanhild. Yes, the whole thing is pitiful enough. I am sure I know no one's lot that I would care to share.

Falk (eagerly). Let us two join our forces against an order of things that is not natural, but artificial!

Svanhild (shaking her head). If we did, we should only fail—as sure as we stand here.

Falk. No! If two souls march on together, that is already a victory won. We will take no more heed of the banalities of religion, which only lead to petty littleness. The aim of individuality should be to be self-sufficient, to take one's stand on the ground of truth and freedom. Neither you nor I are deceived as to that. Spirituality is pulsing in your veins; you know how to clothe great thoughts in burning words; you could never endure to have your heart repressed by the bonds of convention—it must beat free and unhampered; your voice was never given you merely to take part in the common chorus of the common herd.

Svanhild. Do you suppose that sorrow has not many a time darkened my soul and wrung my heart? At one time I wanted to carve out a path for myself——

Falk. In imagination, I dare say.

Svanhild. No, in reality. But then I was confronted by the good advice of my aunts; there they were—talking me over, asking questions, weighing the chances——. (*More earnestly.*) In imagination, you say; no, I made a brave attempt—I tried to become a painter.

Falk. Well, what then?

Svanhild. I failed. I had not the ability. But my craving for freedom was not to be stifled. When an artist's life was denied me, I tried the stage——

Falk. That plan was soon nipped in the bud, I imagine?

Svanhild. Yes, the oldest of my aunts put a stopper on that. She got me a post as a governess.

Falk. But no one ever told me anything of this before!

Svanhild. Of course not; they took good care not to. (*With a smile.*) They were so afraid it might injure my “prospects” if any of the young men got to hear of it.

Falk (with thoughtful sympathy, after looking earnestly

at her for a moment). I suspected something of the sort, long ago. I remember distinctly, the first time I saw you, how little like the others you seemed, and how little any one seemed able to understand you. The fine company used to sit round the table, sniffing the fragrance of infusing tea; the usual buzz of small-talk went on, maidens blushing and young men cooing, like tame pigeons on a hot summer's day; elderly spinsters and matrons discussing questions of religion and morals, and young wives glorifying the qualities of housewives. But you stood apart, like a bird upon the eaves. And when at last all the tittle-tattle resolved itself into an orgy of tea-drinking and a prosaic carouse, then you shone like a precious new-minted silver coin among a handful of dirty coppers—as if you belonged to a foreign coinage that had no part in this currency of poetry and butter and art and such-like humbug. Then, just as Miss Skære was holding forth—

Svanhild (with mock seriousness). With her beloved standing behind her like a brave knight of old, holding his hat under his arm like a buckler—

Falk. —then your mother nodded to you across the table: “Drink your tea, Svanhild, before it gets cold.” And you drank up your tea—your tepid, mawkish tea—like all the others, young and old. But your name took hold of me at that moment; I thought of the story of the Volsungs with all its terrors, its long line of dead heroes that seemed to me to stretch down to our own time. I saw in you a second Svanhild in another shape fashioned for the present day. We have fought under the banner of convention too long; peace and quiet is what people want now! But if the law is slighted or broken, some innocent soul has to bleed as a scapegoat.

Svanhild (with light irony). I should never have thought such violent fancies would have been bred in the steam from the tea-cups; but I expect it is only one of the least of your accomplishments to hear the voice of the soul, even when the soul is dumb.

Falk (moved). Don't laugh at me, Svanhild; for behind your jest I can see the glint of tears. Indeed, I can see more than that. I can see you trodden into the dust, kneaded into a formless lump of clay, then botched and bungled

at clumsily by every one that will try to shape you. The world will usurp God's privilege, and create you afresh—in its own image; it will alter you, add to you and take from you, fashion you altogether anew; and when they have done that, and stuck you up on a pedestal, people will say exultingly: "Now she is normal! See what statuesque calm, cool as marble! See how admirably, when she is well lit up, she fits into the scheme of the decorations!" (*Takes her hand passionately.*) If your soul is doomed to such a death, at least live for a little while first! Be mine in God's own springtime! Time enough, later, for you to go into your golden cage where the fine lady will be born and the woman in you will die—and with her the one I love. Belong to others in that new home, if you must; but here, where the first springtime of my life blossomed, where the tender plant of my poesy pushed forth its first shoots, where I first found my wings—if you do not fail me here, Svanhild, I shall become a poet!—I feel that in my soul!

Svanhild (reproachfully, as she draws her hand away). Ah, why did you say that to me now? Everything was so beautiful, while we both were free. You should not have spoken. Surely happiness has no need of vows to keep it from perishing! Now that you have spoken, it is all over.

Falk. No, I have only pointed out the way. Take the leap, my proud Svanhild—if you have the courage! Be brave; I know you have the courage to grasp your freedom!

Svanhild. Freedom?

Falk. Yes, surely it would be freedom to fulfil your destiny. You were consecrated by heaven, I know, to be my defence against all that is unlovely. Like a bird of the air, I must fly against the wind if I am to soar into the heights. You are the breeze upon which I must mount—upon which I must learn to use my wings. Be mine, be mine—until you must belong to the world; when the leaves fall, our ways may part again. Sing the riches of your soul into mine, and I will give you back song for song. Then some day you may grow old in the glare of the world's artificial light, as a tree fades, without pain or sorrow.

Svanhild (with suppressed bitterness). I cannot thank you for your kindly thought, though your real self shows only too clearly through it. You look on me as a child might on a reed that may some day be fashioned into a pipe for it to play upon.

Falk. Well, that is better than living in a marsh till you are choked with its dismal vapours. (*Eagerly.*) You must! You shall! It is your duty to share with me the riches with which God has dowered you. Your very dreams I will turn into poems! Look at that bird; I slew it thoughtlessly. It seemed to you to embody the songs that were in your heart. Do not be dumb to me; sing to me as it did to you, and my life shall give you poems in exchange for your song!

Svanhild. And when you have learnt all I have to give you—when my soul is empty of its treasure and I have sung my last song—what then?

Falk (looking at her). What then? Well—remember! (*Points towards the garden.*)

Svanhild. Oh, yes; I remember that you can throw stones.

Falk (with a mocking laugh). So that is all that comes of the craving for freedom that you paraded to me!—you were going to risk everything if only you had an aim in life! (*Passionately.*) I have shown you an aim; give me an answer, once for all!

Svanhild. This is my answer. I can never help you on your way.

Falk (abruptly and coldly). Then there is no more to say. Let the world claim you for its own. (*SVANHILD turns away from him without speaking, and leans upon the balcony with her head buried in her hands. FALK takes a few steps backwards and forwards; then, after a pause, stops near her and speaks again.*) I suppose you think that all I have been saying to you to-night is very ridiculous? (*Seems to expect an answer, but SVANHILD is silent.*) I have put my foot in it, I can see. You have no feelings, except perhaps a sister's or a daughter's. I shall walk very warily with you in future; we shall understand one another best that way. (*Pauses; but, as SVANHILD still stands motionless, presently turns and crosses over to the right. After a*

little while SVANHILD raises her head and looks fixedly at him.)

Svanhild. I want to say something seriously to you, in return for your having wanted to hold out a helping hand to me. You used a metaphor just now which opened my eyes to the real nature of your proposed high flights. You compared yourself to a bird of the air that had to fly against the wind so as to be able to soar into the heights. I was to be the breeze upon which you were to mount; without me you would be powerless, you said. How pitiable! How altogether petty!—indeed, how ridiculous—as you yourself suspected at the end. All the same, your seed of metaphor fell on fruitful ground, for it evoked another in my mind, and one with more truth to recommend it than yours. You appeared to me, not as a bird of the air, but as a kite—a paper poet-kite—which of itself was of but secondary importance, while the string attached to it was everything. Its wide head was inscribed in gold letters with all sorts of poetic promises; its wings were bundles of epigrams which beat against the air, but produced no result; its long tail was an epic, meant to scourge the weaknesses of humanity, but only ending in a tiny whisper about this or that failure of some one to do their duty. And then, a helpless thing like that, you entreated me to put you up into the sky!—to enable you to soar up into heaven on the wings of song, no matter how much my mother or my sister might scold me for it!

Falk (wringing his hands in distress). God in heaven knows——*

Svanhild. No, believe me, I am too big for such child's play as that. But you, who were meant to do great things with your mind—you were going to be content with being flown in the sky; content to let your poetic destiny hang upon a thread which I might turn and twist as suited my fancy!

Falk (resolutely). What day of the month is this?

Svanhild (more gently). Ah, that is better! Let this be a red-letter day to you; be content to soar upon your own wings, whether they bear you up or let you fall. Leave written poems to your desk; poems that are lived are the only ones worth having. They are the only ones

that have the right of way in the heights. So choose between the two. (*Goes a little nearer to him.*) Now I have done what you once asked me. I have sung my last song—my swan-song; I am voiceless now, and you may throw your stone at me if you wish! (*Goes into the house.* FALK stands motionless, looking after her. A boat is seen passing, far out upon the fjord, and from it is heard the following song:)

“Over the sea of life we sail,
Flitting like birds upon the wing;
The gulls are wheeling in our trail;
Why should we care for anything?
What matter if we sink to-morrow,
So long as to-day we may sail and sing!”

Falk (*rousing himself from his thoughts*). What is that? Some one singing? Ah, of course—Lind and his friends making merry. That's the way! (*GULDSTAD comes out of the house with an overcoat over his arm.*) Well, Mr. Guldstad? Slipping away?

Guldstad. Yes. I must put my coat on first, though. We prosaic folk can't stand the night air; it is apt to catch us in the small of the back. Good-night!

Falk. Mr. Guldstad, a word before you go! Point out some task for me to do! A great one! One quite apart from every-day life!

Guldstad (*ironically*). Apart from every-day life! If you cut yourself off from that, it will cut itself off from you.

Falk (*slowly, as he looks thoughtfully at him*). You have put it in a nutshell. (*Impetuously.*) I am really awake now. I have made my throw with fortune's dice. You shall see me now—I swear by all the—

Guldstad. Oh, don't swear! Hard words break no bones!

Falk. No, not words—but a task! A task to perform! I am going to reverse the Almighty's plan. I have yawned idly for six days and made no progress with my creation; to-morrow—on Sunday—I mean to work!

Guldstad (*laughing*). Yes, let me see you set to it in earnest! But now go in and get a night's sleep first! Good-night! (*Goes out to the left.* SVANHILD is seen at her window; she shuts it, and pulls down the blind.)

Falk. No, now to work! I have been asleep too long. (*Looks up to SVANHILD'S window, and exclaims as if seized with a fixed resolution :*) Good-night! Good-night! Sweet dreams to you to-night! To-morrow, Svanhild, you shall be mine! (*Goes quickly out to the right. The refrain of the song is heard again across the water :*)

“What matter if we sink to-morrow,
So long as to-day we may sail and sing!”

ACT II

(SCENE.—*The same. It is Sunday afternoon. Some of the household and their guests, dressed in their Sunday best, are drinking coffee on the verandah ; through the open glass doors which lead to it, others can be seen in the room within, from which the following song is heard :*)

Welcome, welcome, happy pair
That need no longer hide your bliss!
You can sport in dalliance rare,
Nor fear to spy a prying eye
When you would steal a kiss!

Your feelings now can riot free,
At home—abroad—it's all the same;
Cherish the tender plant of love,
And let its pretty sprouting prove
How well you play the game!

Miss Skære (from within the room). To think that I never guessed anything about it, Mr. Lind! How I should have teased you!

A Lady Guest (on the verandah). Yes, what a shame!

Another Guest. He wrote his proposal to you, I suppose, Anna?

One of the Aunts. No, he didn't.

Miss Skære. My fiancé did!

First Guest. Anna, dear, how long have you been secretly engaged? (*Runs into the room.*)

Miss Skære. To-morrow you must go out and buy his ring, dear.¹

Several Ladies. We'll measure his finger for you!

Miss Skære. Nonsense! She must do that.

Mrs. Straamand (on the verandah, to a lady who is sewing).
Is that cross-stitch, my dear?

A Servant (coming to the door with a tray). Another cup of coffee, ma'am?

A Lady. Thank you, just a little.

Miss Skære (to ANNA). How lucky that your new frock will be ready next week, when you have to pay your calls!

An Old Lady (by the window). When are we to go and buy the trousseau?

Mrs. Straamand. Is cambric dear just now?

A Gentleman (to some ladies on the verandah). Look at Lind with Anna's gloves!

Some Ladies (in delighted tones). Oh, he's kissing them! How sweet!

Others (getting up to see). No, is he really?

Lind (starts, blushing and embarrassed). What nonsense!

Miss Skære. I saw him distinctly!

Styver (coming to the door with a cup in one hand and a biscuit in the other). You mustn't distort facts in this manner! I declare the witnesses to be mistaken.

Miss Skære (from within the room). Come along, Anna; stand in front of this mirror.

Some Ladies. You too, Mr. Lind.

Miss Skære. Stand back to back! A little closer!

The Ladies on the verandah. Let us see which is the taller!

Falk (who during the foregoing has been walking about the garden, comes forward and stands looking towards the house till the noise of tongues has grown quieter). Another murder of a love romance! If a butcher slaughtered an ox in such a barbarous way he would get a week in gaol; but these—these creatures—go unpunished. (*Wrings his hands.*) I feel inclined to——! But, hush, no more words; nothing but deeds from to-day onward—I have sworn it!

Lind (slipping cautiously out of the house). Thank God,

¹ In Norway it is the custom for each fiancé to present the other with a ring.

they have begun to talk fashions! I shall have a chance to escape.

Falk. Well, you're in luck, old chap—swarms of good wishes buzzing about you all day long as thick as gnats.

Lind. They mean very kindly, the whole lot of them; but I could do with a bit less of it. Their attentions are a trifle wearing, and it will be rather a relief to escape from them for a little while. (*Moves off to the right.*)

Falk. Where are you off to?

Lind. Up to our den, I think. Knock, if you find the door bolted.

Falk. But shan't I call Anna to join you?

Lind. No. If she wants anything, she can send up to me. We talked till quite late last night, about a most important matter. Besides, I think it is wisest not to draw too extravagantly upon one's stock of happiness.

Falk. You are quite right. Be moderate in your daily demands upon it!

Lind. Shut up, and let me pass. I am going away to smoke a discreet pipe. It is three days since I tasted tobacco. My nerves have been in such a state, I was in a panic in case she should refuse me——

Falk. Yes, you can do with a little rest and refreshment now.

Lind. The baccy will taste good, I can tell you! (*Goes out to the right. MISS SKÆRE and some of the other ladies come down from the house.*)

Miss Skære (*to FALK*). Was that he that went away just now?

Falk. Yes, your prey has escaped you.

Some Ladies. To think of his running away from us!

Others. Yes, what a shame!

Falk. He's a trifle shy yet, but when he has had a week or so of it he will be quite tame.

Miss Skære (*looking about*). Where has he gone to?

Falk. Up to the little sitting-room we share together. (*Entreatingly.*) You mustn't harry the poor man, you know. Give him time to breathe!

Miss Skære. Very well; but it mustn't be for long.

Falk. Oh, give him a quarter of an hour, and then you

can begin the game again. He is busy reading an English sermon——

Miss Skære. An English sermon——?

The Others. Oh, you're teasing us! You are laughing!

Falk. I am perfectly serious. He has quite decided to emigrate to America as a parson; and so——

Miss Skære (in alarm). Good gracious, he never told us a word of any such mad idea! (*To the others.*) Call out the Aunts—and bring out Anna and Mrs. Straamand and Mrs. Halm!

Some of the Ladies (much perturbed). Yes, we must put a stop to that!

Others. Yes, we must act! (*They run in, and return followed by ANNA, STRAAMAND with his wife and children, STYVER, GULDSTAD and MRS. HALM.*)

Miss Skære. Here they are, thank goodness. (*To ANNA.*) Do you know what Mr. Lind has made up his mind to do without saying anything about it? To emigrate as a clergyman——

Anna. Yes, I know.

Mrs. Halm. And have you said you would——

Anna (embarrassed). Go with him? Yes.

Miss Skære (indignantly). You have let him talk you over?

The Other Ladies (clasping their hands). How deceitful of him!

Falk. But remember that he has an inward call——!

Miss Skære. I dare say; and a man is at liberty to follow his call, if he is single; but a man who is engaged should think of his future wife first! My dear Anna, do think it over while there is time. You were born and bred in this city——

Falk. Still, it is a beautiful thing to suffer for one's ideals!

Miss Skære. But not for a wife to suffer for her husband's ideals! That is a little too much! (*To the ladies.*) Come along with me! (*Takes ANNA by the arm.*) Wait a bit, till we have talked it over with you, dear; and then we will show him where his duty lies. (*They go out to the right, all talking eagerly at once; the other guests split up into little groups about the garden. FALK stops STRAAMAND*

whose wife and children never leave his side. GULDSTAD walks up and down during the following conversation.)

Falk. Mr. Straamand, won't you back up Miss Anna's young faith in him, before they succeed in influencing her?

Straamand (in his pulpit manner). Certainly a wife ought to give in to her husband, but—*(thoughtfully)* if I rightly understood what he said at dinner, he does not feel quite certain of the call yet, and the stipend that goes with it is a still more uncertain quantity?

Falk. Ah, please don't judge too hastily! I can give you my word that it is a strong and irresistible call——

Straamand (in a relieved tone). Oh, well—if he is assured some reliable yearly income, then it is quite another matter altogether.

Falk (impatiently). You are laying stress on the very point that means nothing to me. I am talking of a vocation—a compelling impulse—not an income!

Straamand (with a tolerant smile). But without an income no one can spread the Gospel either in America, Europe or Asia—nowhere, in fact. Of course, if he were free, my dear young friend—if he had no ties—were a single man—well, then he might try it. But in the case of a man who has just become engaged, such an attitude is unjustifiable. Just consider. He is a robust man; in time there is little doubt he will have a family—a thing, moreover, which I imagine he heartily desires. But how is he to provide for them, my friend? “Build not thy house upon the sand,” the Scripture says. It would be quite another thing if what were offered——

Falk. It will be offering a good deal,¹ I know.

Straamand. Well, then—that is what helps! If people are willing to give liberally——

Falk. No one is more willing than he.

Straamand. He? I don't understand you. By virtue of his position, it will not be for him to *provide* the means, but to *receive* them——

Mrs. Straamand (looking towards the background). They are coming back.

¹ The play on words in this passage cannot be reproduced in translation. The Norwegian word *offer* has both the sense of an “offering” and a “sacrifice.” Straamand uses it in the one sense, Falk in the other.

Falk (looks at STRAAMAND for a moment in amazement, then suddenly takes his meaning and bursts out laughing). Oh, I see! You meant Easter offerings—offerings of that sort—in nice crackly bank-notes, eh?

Straamand. Well, if the parson has to pinch and starve all the rest of the year, his congregation make it up to him at Christmas and Easter.

Falk (gaily). And so a "call" may be obeyed—even by a family man—if it is sufficiently well backed up!

Straamand. Certainly. If a man is guaranteed a sufficient income, he is justified in undertaking missionary work in the Cannibal Islands if he chooses. (*Lowers his voice.*) I mean to give *her* some good advice, too. (*To one of his children.*) Dear child, run and fetch me my pipe. (*Feels in his tail coat pocket.*) Ah, no, wait a moment—I have it in my pocket. (*Moves off, filling his pipe, and followed by his wife and children. GULDSTAD comes up to FALK.*)

Guldstad. You seem to me to be playing the part of the serpent in this Paradise!

Falk. Oh, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is too green to tempt any one. (*To LIND, who has come in from the right.*) Hullo! Back again already?

Lind. What, in heaven's name, has been going on in our room? The lamp is smashed, the curtains torn down, our penholders broken in two and the ink poured all over the stove—

Falk (*patting him on the shoulder*). That havoc is the first effect of a new life that is budding within me! I have sat too long behind curtains, writing poems by lamplight. No more lifeless indoor poems for me! I am going to walk in God's sunshine! The springtime of my life has come, and I am going to *live* poems—not write them!

Lind. Do your poems any way you like, as far as I am concerned; but you can scarcely expect my future mother-in-law to be pleased at having her curtains ruined.

Falk. What? Do you mean to say that she, who is ready to make any sacrifices for her boarders—even to the extent of giving them her nieces and daughters as wives—is going to cut up rough about a pair of curtains?

Lind (*angrily*). It is most unsuitable behaviour on your part, and puts me in a very awkward position as well.

However, that part of it rests between you and her. But the lamp was *my* property—

Falk. Pooh! That doesn't weigh on my conscience in the least. You have got God's own summer sunshine to revel in; what do you want with a lamp?

Lind. You are impossible! Don't you realise that summer doesn't last for ever? It seems to me that if I am to be ready for my ordination by the end of the year, I can't afford to waste any time.

Falk (*opening his eyes wide*). Do you mean to say you are thinking of the future?

Lind. Of course I am. The examination is quite stiff enough—

Falk. Remember what you said last night! You were going to *live*. You were intoxicated with the *present*, and asked for nothing more—did not even care whether you passed your examination or not! You had captured the bright-plumaged bird of Happiness! You felt as if all the riches of the world had dropped at your feet!

Lind. I may have said so; but of course, such sentiments are to be taken with a grain of salt—

Falk. Well!

Lind. I mean to devote the mornings to my new-found happiness; that is what I have arranged.

Falk. Brave lad!

Lind. I shall have to waste a lot of my time calling on all my new relations. Any further deviation from my time-table would be most injudicious.

Falk. And yet last week you were all for going out into the great-world with a song on your lips!

Lind. Yes, but I realise that it would take up too much time. I can make better use of my fortnight's holiday.

Falk. No, no!—you gave quite another reason for staying at home. You talked some nonsense about finding all the mountain air and melody of bird's song that you wanted, down in this valley.

Lind. Quite true. The air here is remarkably healthy; and I can enjoy it just as keenly sitting quietly working at my books.

Falk. But it was just your books that you said would not serve as a Jacob's Ladder to the heights above—

Lind. How aggravating you are! Of course it is all very well for a man to talk like that if he has no ties——

Falk (looking at him and folding his hands in quiet amazement). Et tu, Brute?

Lind (with a touch of angry embarrassment). You must remember that I have duties now that you have not. I have my fiancée to consider. Look at other engaged couples—people, some of them, with lots of experience, whom even you can take no exception to; they all insist that if two people are going to spend their lives together——

Falk. Spare me your explanation. Whose mouth did you get it from?

Lind. Well—from Styver, and he is a conscientious fellow. And Miss Skære, who has plenty of experience, says that——

Falk. Well, but what about the parson and his wife?

Lind. They are an unusual couple, certainly. A strange sort of peace seems to brood over their souls. Do you know that she can't remember anything about her engagement, and he has entirely forgotten what love means?

Falk. Yes, that is always the result of oversleeping one's self—memory flies away on rebellious wings. (*Puts his hand on LIND'S shoulder and looks ironically at him.*) What about yourself, my friend? I expect you slept very sound last night.

Lind. Yes, till quite late this morning. I was so exhausted when I went to bed, and at the same time so excited, that I was almost afraid I was going mad.

Falk. I know. You felt as if you had been bewitched.

Lind. But, thank heaven, I was all right again when I woke up. (*During this conversation STRAAMAND has been walking up and down in the background, talking earnestly to ANNA, with MRS. STRAAMAND and the children always following him. MISS SKÆRE comes forward with MRS. HALM and some of the other ladies. She calls to LIND.*)

Miss Skære. Mr. Lind!

Lind (to FALK). Here they are, after me again! Let us escape.

Miss Skære. Oh, don't go! Where are you going? You must come along and let us make up this difference of opinion between you and our dearest Anna.

Lind. Difference of opinion?

Miss Skære (pointing to ANNA). Yes, see how her eyes reproach you—they are full of tears. And all about that call from a congregation in America.

Lind. But, good Lord, she said she was quite willing to——

Miss Skære (mockingly). It looks like it, doesn't it! No, my dear friend; you will alter your opinion when we have gone into the matter quietly.

Lind. But one of my finest dreams for the future was this of the fight that we would make for our faith's sake!

Miss Skære. Oh, no one believes in dreams in these days. Why, Mr. Styver told me he dreamt the other night that he received a letter in a strange sort of envelope——

Mrs. Straamand. That means a fortune coming to one!

Miss Skære (nodding). Yes, and the next morning he was served with a distraint notice because he hadn't paid his rates. (*The ladies surround LIND and carry him off to the background, all talking at him at once.*)

Straamand (deep in a homily to ANNA, who is evidently trying to escape from him). For these reasons, my dear child—reasons that are prompted by good sense, morals, and indeed by the Scriptures themselves, I am sure you understand that to alter your determination now would be most unpraiseworthy.

Anna (half crying). Oh, dear, oh, dear!—I have so little experience——

Straamand. Oh, it is natural enough for us to be afraid of the dangers and pitfalls that may await us; but do not let doubt entangle you in its toils. Be of good courage: Take example by my wife and me!

Mrs. Straamand. Your dear mother was reminding me to-day that I was just as faint-hearted as you, when our call came——

Straamand. Yes, my wife was very unwilling to leave Christiania; but as soon as we had saved a little money, and were blessed with the birth of our first twins, everything seemed easy.

Falk (aside, to STRAAMAND). Bravo! You're a splendid advocate!

Straamand (nods to him and turns again to ANNA). So

keep your word to him! Don't be faint-hearted! Mr. Falk assures me that the call is substantially backed; isn't it so?

Falk. No, Mr. Straamand——

Straamand. Yes, of course you did! (*To ANNA.*) So that you can rely on it with some degree of security. And if that is so, why be downhearted? Look at the people of old time—Adam and Eve, the animals in the Ark; consider the lilies of the field—the birds in the woods—the little birds—the dear little birds—the fishes——. (*Turns away with ANNA, and continues his harangue to her in an undertone.*)

Falk (*seeing MISS SKÆRE and the Aunts coming forward with LIND*). Hurrah! Here comes a fresh body of troops! All the Old Guard is up in arms!

Miss Skære. Ah, here she is! This is lucky! (*In an undertone, to FALK.*) We have won him over, Mr. Falk! Now for her! (*Moves towards ANNA.*)

Straamand (*waving her away*). She needs no worldly arguments. When the spirit moves, mundane considerations——. (*Modestly.*) If I have been able to do anything, it is One Above Who has given me the power——

Mrs. Halm. Come, my dears, be reconciled without any more ado!

The Aunts (*with emotion*). How beautiful!

Straamand. Yes, breathes there a soul so dead as not to be moved by such a scene! What can be more inspiring, more touching, more awakening to the soul, than to see a young girl of tender years making a sacrifice, and a heavy one, on the altar of duty!

Mrs. Halm. Yes, but she comes of a courageous family!

Miss Skære. Yes, I and her aunts have reason to know that! You, Mr. Lind, no doubt hold the key to her heart. But we, her friends of her own sex, have a master-key that can unlock what no ordinary key can move! (*Grasps his hand.*) And if, in time to come, you need our help, come to us! You can always rely on our good offices!

Mrs. Halm. Yes, we will stand by you, wherever you are——

Miss Skære. And will protect you from that poisonous reptile, discord!

Straamand. Ah, those twin powers—love and friendship! What a happy hour, and yet so charged with sadness! (*Turns to LIND.*) Take your bride apart—take her apart and kiss her!

Lind (*holding out his hand to ANNA*). I won't go!

Anna (*at the same moment*). I will go with you (*In amazement.*) You won't go?

Lind (*also amazed*). You will go with me?

Anna (*with a helpless look at the others*). Good heavens, we are just as far off an agreement as before!

Lind. What does it all mean?

The Ladies. What is this?

Miss Skære (*anxiously*). There is some misunderstanding under all this!

Straamand. She promised solemnly that she would go with him!

Miss Skære. And Mr. Lind declares he won't go!

Falk (*laughing*). They have both given in; what more do you want?

Straamand. The situation is too complicated for me! (*Goes to the background.*)

The Aunts (*all speaking at once*). Good gracious, who has caused all this trouble?

Mrs. Halm (*to GULDSTAD and STYVER, who have been walking about together and now draw near*). Everything is at sixes and sevens again! (*Talks to them in an undertone.*)

Mrs. Straamand (*to MISS SKÆRE, noticing that tea is being set out on a table*). Ah, here comes tea!

Miss Skære (*drily*). Thank heaven for that!

Falk. Three cheers for tea, friendship, love, and the aunts!

Styver. Well, if things have fallen out so, all's well that ends well. The decision of the suit rests on a section of the law which says: The wife shall cleave unto her husband. That is perfectly clear, and there can be no doubt as to its meaning——

Miss Skære. No doubt; but what about the reconciliation?

Straamand. She must obey a law which comes from above——

Styver. But Lind can evade the law. (*To LIND.*) Put off going, and never mind the consequences.

The Aunts (joyfully). Yes, that's it!

Mrs. Halm. Yes, that's the way out!

Miss Skære. Then everything is all right! (*SVANHILD and the servants, meantime, have set out a tea-table. At MRS. HALM'S invitation, the ladies take seats by it. The rest settle themselves on chairs and benches about the garden and on the verandah, and tea is handed. FALK is sitting on the verandah.*)

Mrs. Halm (with a smile). So that little storm has quite cleared away! Light summer showers leave the air clearer behind them and are generally followed by cloudless evenings.

Miss Skære. Yes, and the tender blossom of love thrives with watering, like any other.

Falk. And if deprived of water it dies; in which respect it resembles a fish——

Svanhild. No, love lives on air, you know——

Miss Skære. And a fish dies in the air——

Falk. That is true.

Miss Skære. So you see what a bad simile yours was, Mr. Falk!

Mrs. Straamand. One can always tell good tea by the scent of it.

Falk. Well, let us say love is like a flower, then. For it is a flower; and if the refreshing rains of heaven are denied it, and it is on the brink of withering——. (*Stops.*)

Miss Skære. Well, what then?

Falk (with a gallant bow). Then in come the Aunts with their watering-pot. The flower-simile is one that poets have used, and their readers swallowed, for generations; and yet to most people it offers this difficulty that there are countless varieties and sorts of flowers. Tell me, now, which special flower stands for love?—which really resembles it most?

Miss Skære. The Rose; every one knows that. Love makes one see everything *couleur de rose*.

A Young Lady. It is the Anemone, which grows under the snow and is invisible until it bursts into flower.

One of the Aunts. It is the Dandelion, which thrives best

when it is trodden underfoot. "Gathering fairness 'neath the oppressor's heel," as the poet so beautifully puts it.

Lind. It is the Snowdrop, whose tiny bells ring in the feast of Whitsuntide.

Mrs. Halm. No, it is the Evergreen, which is as fresh in December as in the heat of June.

Guldstad. No, it is Iceland Moss, which, if you gather it in dry weather, is good for young girls' heart complaints.

A Gentleman. It is the Horse-Chestnut, which makes excellent fuel for warming one, but is impossible as a diet.

Svanhild. No, it is the Camellia, which ladies prefer even to Lilies-of-the-Valley for wearing in their hair at a ball.

Mrs. Straamand. No, it is like that pretty little flower—bluish-grey, you know—no, it is violet—dear me, what is it called? Bless my soul, like a—like a——. Isn't it extraordinary how bad my memory is?

Styver. Every one of your comparisons is faulty. It is much more really like a flower-pot. You can only put one plant in it at a time; but it will harbour a succession of them, one after another!

Straamand (*standing surrounded by his children*). No, love is like a pear tree. In spring it is covered with white blossoms like snow; later in the year these blossoms turn into green fruits that swell and swell, and, by God's help, all turn later into ripe pears.

Falk. So many men, so many minds! But you are all on the wrong tack. Every one of your similes is faulty. Now listen to mine!—it is one you can twist and turn any way you like. (*Poses as if about to deliver an oration.*) In far Eastern climes there grows a plant. Its native soil is the garden of the Brother of the Sun and Moon——

The Ladies. Ah, he means the Tea-plant!

Falk. Precisely.

Mrs. Straamand. His voice sounds just like my husband's when he is——

Straamand. Don't interrupt him, please.

Falk. Its home is in a fabled land, thousands of miles across the deserts of golden sand——. Fill up my cup, please, Mr. Lind! Thank you. I will now deliver a discourse upon Love and Tea. (*They gather round him.*) The

home of this little plant is in the land of fairy-tales; is that not also the home of love? It is only the Children of the Sun, as we know, that have the secret of its cultivation, its care and nurture. It is just the same with love; we must have a drop of the sun's blood in our veins, before love can take root in our heart, there to sprout and grow and eventually to blossom.

Miss Skære. But China is a very ancient country; so that we may estimate tea to have been——

Straamand.—undoubtedly drunk before the days of Tyre or Jerusalem.

Falk. Yes, indeed!—when Methuselah was a little boy, sitting on his little stool looking at picture-books, tea was known——

Miss Skære (triumphantly). But the essence of love is youth! You will find it hard to establish your simile, Mr. Falk!

Falk. Not at all, for love is a very ancient thing, too. That is an axiom that is believed all the world over. Indeed, some people even declare love to be eternal; that is exaggeration, probably, but there is no doubt whatever that its antiquity is beyond calculation.

Miss Skære. But all love is the same, whereas teas differ. There is good tea and bad tea.

Mrs. Straamand. Yes, there are a number of different qualities of tea.

Anna. The tender green shoots of early spring——

Svanhild. Only the daughters of the Sun may quench their thirst with that.

A Young Lady. They say it is as intoxicating as a drug!

Another. And smells like the lotus and is as sweet as almond blossom!

Guldstad. That sort doesn't get into the market *here*.

Falk (coming down from the verandah). Believe me, dear ladies, we each of us have within our hearts a separate little Celestial Empire where thousands of such tender blooms have sprouted behind the crumbling Chinese Wall of bashfulness. But the first green shoots were culled for the little Chinese dolls of our imagination—little figures sitting in the shadow of pagodas, sighing and dreaming—dreaming so wistfully—dressed in wonderful silks, and

holding golden tulips in their hands. And it was all one to them if the rest of the crop was ruined. That is why it is only an aftermath that reaches us, full of dust and stalks—no more like the other than hemp is like silk—a harvest got by shaking the bushes violently——

Guldstad. He means black tea.

Falk (nodding). Yes, the market is full of it.

A Gentleman. Holberg speaks of a "beef-tea" also, I believe——

Miss Skære (acidly). I am sure we know nothing of that nowadays.

Falk. Oh, there is a beefy sort of love, too—the sort that hits you suddenly between the eyes. You will find it in novels, and occasionally you may find its traces among the army of carpet knights who march under the banner of marriage. In a word, my simile is perfect, down to the most unexpected details. And, let me tell you, there is an old saying that tea suffers—loses some of the delicate aroma that is in the plant—if it is brought to us oversea. It has to come over the desert and across the mountains, paying its duty on the way to the Russians and Cossacks; when it bears their official stamp, it can come on its way; and then, when it reaches us, we know it to be the genuine article. Now, isn't it just the same with love? Must it not cross the desert wastes of life? What do you think would be the consequence if you or I were bold enough to take our love sailing over the billows of freedom? Wouldn't there be a nice fuss, and nice things said of us by our friends? "Good gracious, their love has lost all the sweet aroma of morality! It doesn't smell properly legalised!"

Straamand (getting up). Yes, heaven be thanked, in a Christian country we should still consider such wares to be contraband!

Falk. Yes, if it is to pass duty-free it must come to us through dreary wastes of convention, where no breath of the sea-air of freedom can affect it. It must show its passport all sealed and signed by churchwardens, organists, bellringers, relations and friends, acquaintances and deuce knows whom all besides, in addition to the free pass granted to it by Eros. And that brings me to the last

important point in my simile. Consider how heavy a hand "civilisation" has laid on that far-eastern Celestial Empire. Its great wall is crumbling and no longer defends it; the last of the mandarins has been hanged; profane hands gather the sacred crop. The Celestial Empire has almost become a mere saga, a fairy tale that no one believes in any longer. The whole world is one uniform dull grey, and we have killed and buried Wonderland. And when all this is done, what has become of Love? Alas, it has flown away. (*Lifts his cup.*) Well, let it go, if we can no longer bear the sight of it—but first let me drink a last toast to the memory of the departed! (*Empties his cup. The others are obviously scandalised.*)

Miss Skære. That is a very odd way to talk, I must say!

A Lady. To speak of love as dead——!

Straamand. And when we have here so many hale and blooming proofs of love assembled round our tea-table! See, here is a widow in her weeds——

Miss Skære. A devoted couple of married folk——

Styver. Whose marriage compact is strengthened by a troop of sturdy pledges——

Guldstad. And look at what we may call the light cavalry of love—the engaged couples!

Straamand. And, best of all, the veterans in love, whose alliance has braved the ravages of time——

Miss Skære (interrupting him). And the young couple just embarking upon theirs—the two that are just engaged——

Straamand. In a word, here are the summer, the winter, the autumn and the spring of love. That is a truth that you can take hold of—that you can see with your own eyes, hear with your own ears——

Falk. Well, what more?

Miss Skære. And yet you propose to shut your eyes to it all!

Falk. You have misunderstood me sadly, Miss Skære. When did I ever deny that this is so? But you must admit this, that smoke is not always proof of the existence of fire. I know only too well the importance that attaches to marriage, the family circle, and all that sort of thing. I should be the last to deny the existence of cradles and

wedding-rings; of *billets-doux* written on pink paper and sealed with a device representing two turtle doves—quarrelling! I know how pairs of lovers go mooning about the streets; how our friends' congratulations on our engagements are repaid in cups of chocolate; in fact, that there are rules and precedents for every blessed thing that engaged couples do. But, bless my soul, I know also that we have got an army, great stores of ammunition, drums, swords, spurs—but what does all that signify? Merely that we can produce an army—it does not imply that there are heroes in its ranks. Suppose, even, our country were turned into an armed camp; that would not necessarily imply that the soldiers in them were brave men!

Straamand. Let us endeavour to be fair. As a matter of fact, it is not strictly in accordance with the truth to represent youthful love as the most compelling—or, indeed, the only—form of love. It is not substantial enough to build upon securely. No, it is upon the family life that marriage brings with it, that true love is founded, as upon a rock that nothing can shake or move.

Miss Skære. I don't at all agree with you. I should rather say that a free union of hearts, which may be broken any day but endures for all time, is the best pledge of true love.

Anna (warmly). Oh, no—love in its first days of eager happiness must be the best of all!

Lind (pensively). Perhaps the love we only dream of is the most fragrant of all—invisible, like the anemone's blossom, while it is under the snow.

Falk (impetuously). Poor fallen Adam! Regret for your lost Eden is making you wonder if you have left it for ever!

Lind. Rubbish!

Mrs. Halm (in an offended tone, to FALK, as she gets up). I think it was scarcely friendly of you, Mr. Falk, to stir up discord where we had just made peace. You need have no fear on the score of Mr. Lind's future happiness——

Some Ladies. No, indeed!

Others. I should think not!

Mrs. Halm. It is true she hasn't had time to learn any cooking while she was at school, but she shall have lessons in it this autumn.

Miss Skære. She is embroidering her wedding-dress herself.

One of the Aunts (patting ANNA on the head). And she is turning into as reasonable a little woman as any one would wish to see.

Falk (with a loud laugh). Oh, this bogey of "reasonableness," stuck up to scare away all passion! Do you think it was reasonableness Lind wanted?—or a professed cook? He came here like a happy child of the springtime, and chose the wild rosebud from the garden. Then you took her into *your* hands and developed her. He came back, and what did he find? No longer a rosebud, but a ripe berry.

Miss Skære. Are you making fun of us?

Falk. A very useful berry, no doubt—but scarcely the bride he dreamt of in the springtime.

Mrs. Halm. Certainly, if Mr. Lind was looking for a mere ball-room flirt, it is unfortunate that he came to this house—for he won't find one here!

Falk. Oh yes, I know it is the fashion just now to cry up housewifely qualities. It is a sucker thrown out by the great lie that grows apace like all ill weeds. Let me tell you, madam, that I take my hat off and bow low to the "ball-room flirt." She is a child of the Beautiful; the golden web of the ideal is spun in ball-rooms, not in nurseries.

Mrs. Halm (with restrained bitterness). Mr. Falk, there can only be one explanation of the way you are behaving. "A friend married is a friend lost," is what you think. That is the root of the whole matter; and I ought to know—I have had enough experience in that sort of thing.

Falk. Naturally, when you have married off seven nieces—

Mrs. Halm. —who are all very happily married.

Falk (meaningly). Are you so sure?

Guldstad. Hullo, hullo!

Miss Skære. Really, Mr. Falk!

Lind. Look here, Falk,—are you trying to make trouble?

Falk (impetuously). Yes, disagreements — quarrels — fights—and the more the better!

Styver. But you are a mere layman—you know nothing about the subject!

Falk. No matter; I am hoisting my colours now, at all events! I mean to fight with all my might and main—fight against these lies that have taken so firm a root—lies whose growth you have so carefully tended—lies that have been allowed to parade about so insolently that they almost look like the truth.

Styver (in his best legal manner). I wish to enter a formal protest, and to reserve to myself complete freedom of action——

Miss Skære (interrupting him). Hold your tongue, dear.

Falk. So I am to believe that the love that whispers to the widow of all that she has lost is the same unsullied love that blotted “want” and “care” out of the lovers’ vocabulary in their radiant days of happiness! That the love that pulses in the veins of married folk is the same triumphant love that once bravely defied all bounds of convention and laughed at the foolish wisdom of the world! That the fair flame of love which keeps alight through all the years is the love that once burned so fiercely in the breast of an office-clerk that he broke out into poetry! That the love of youthful hearts is the love that dreads a voyage overseas and stipulates for a monetary compensation, although its very offering of itself should be its own fairest reward! No, no—you prophets of the commonplace! For once in your lives, call things by their right names! Call the widow’s sentiment the consciousness of bitter privation, and the married couple’s feeling a mere habit of mind—as it is!

Straamand. My young friend, your impudence is really a little too much! Every word you have spoken is a blasphemy! (*Advances towards FALK.*) I am ready to venture my old bones in the fight for the faith of my fathers against modern wisdom!

Falk. I welcome the fight as if it were a holiday!

Straamand. Good! You shall see me defy the hail of bullets! (*Impressively.*) A married couple are as consecrated as the priest himself.

Styver (at FALK’S other side). And an engaged couple——

Falk. Half as consecrated, like a deacon.

Straamand. Look at these children. You see them—this little group—their very presence is a pæan of certain victory for me! How could they possibly—do you think it is conceivable that they—no, no, truth is all-powerful, inexorable! Only a fool could shut his ears to it! Look at them—every one of them a love-child—— (*stops, in confusion*) at least, I should say—of course they——

Miss Skære (*fanning herself with her handkerchief*). I really don't understand what you mean!

Falk. Why, you have furnished me with just the argument I wanted—a good, old-fashioned, national one! Your thoughts instinctively differentiate between pledges of marriage and pledges of love, and you are quite right. There is as much difference between them as between raw meat and cooked, as between the flowers of the fields and plants in pots. We have almost reduced love to a science; it has long ago ceased to be a passion. We have made love into a close corporation, with its own tests for admission, its own official seal. Lovers and married folk each have their allotted rank in it, where they perform their duties by rule of thumb; it all holds together like a tangle of sea-weed. The only thing it lacks is a band——

Guldstad. And an official journal!

Falk. Excellent! You shall have your official journal! An excellent idea! We already have papers for women, papers of children, religious papers, sporting papers. I hope no one will complain of the price I shall charge for it! It shall contain news of the love affairs of every Tom, Dick and Harry. Every rose-tinted love-letter that Edwin writes to his beloved Angelina shall be inserted. Each week's broken engagements shall appear in a column by themselves, like the police-news in other papers. The cheapest places to buy the necessary rings shall be advertised like the spring sales. Births of twins and triplets shall be specially announced. When a marriage takes place, the big drum shall be beaten to summon the whole crowd of you to the performance; and when any one gets the mitten, the fact shall be printed as a special item of news, somewhat in this fashion: "Once more the demon of rejected love has claimed a victim!" You'll see it will go like anything; for whenever the time comes for the

renewal of subscriptions, I shall prepare an irresistible bait for subscribers—I shall sacrifice some bachelor, quite in the style of the leading papers. You will see me fighting valiantly for the good of the community, like a tiger with his claws in his prey——

Guldstad. And what shall you call the paper?

Falk. *The Lovers' Sporting Times!*

Styver. You can't mean it seriously? You can't mean to risk your reputation in that way?

Falk. I am perfectly serious about it. People have been known to say that no one can live on love and kisses; I shall show them that they are wrong. For I shall live like a prince on the proceeds of it—especially if Miss Skære will, as I hope, contribute to my columns Mr. Straamand's life-romance to appear as a *feuilleton*.

Straamand (*aghast*). Good heavens, what is he talking about! My life romance? What has there been romantic about my life?

Miss Skære. I never said anything of the sort!

Styver. It is all a misunderstanding!

Straamand. Do you mean to suggest that I have ever offended against the proprieties in any way? It is an infamous lie!

Falk. All right. (*Slaps STYVER on the shoulder.*) Well, at any rate here is a friend who will not fail me. I shall begin my first number with "A Lawyer's Love Poems."

Styver (*after a terrified look at STRAAMAND*). You must be mad!—No, I insist on being heard!—Do you dare to accuse me of writing poetry——?

Miss Skære. I should hope not, indeed!

Falk. Some whisper of the sort did reach me from his office.

Styver (*very angry*). No such thing was ever heard of in our office!

Falk. Well, if you fail me too, I have at least one trusty friend who won't desert me. I shall expect Mr. Lind to contribute "The Saga of a Loving Heart,"—a heart whose love is too tender to be exposed to the stormy winds of the sea—a love to which a landsman's soul is being offered up as a sacrifice; his contribution will display this in all its splendour.

Mrs. Halm. Mr. Falk, my patience is quite at an end. You and I can no longer live under the same roof—and I hope you will make arrangements to leave my house to-day——

Falk (bowing to MRS. HALM, as she and most of the guests go into the house). I expected as much.

Straamand. It is war to the knife between us now, Mr. Falk. You have insulted me and all my family, from the oldest to the youngest. But crow away, Mr. Falk—crow to your heart's content! (*Goes in with his wife and children.*)

Falk. And you follow on in the footsteps of the Apostle, with your love which you have managed to deny before the cock has crowed thrice!

Miss Skære (ready to faint, to STYVER). Come here, dear—help me to unlace my corset—be quick—come here!

Styver (to FALK, as he hurries to MISS SKÆRE and leads her away). You are no longer a friend of mine!

Lind. Nor of mine.

Falk (seriously). You too, Lind?

Lind. Yes. Good-bye.

Falk. You were my best friend——

Lind. No matter. My fiancée wishes it. (*Goes in; SVANHILD alone remains, standing by the verandah steps.*)

Svanhild. Mr. Falk—one word!

Falk (bows and points to the house). That is the way, Miss Svanhild. That is the way your mother went, with all her friends and all the relations.

Svanhild (coming nearer). Let them go; their way is not mine. I am not going to join the ranks of the deserters.

Falk. You are not going?

Svanhild. No. If you are going to fight against falsehood, I mean to fight as a true comrade at your side.

Falk. You, Svanhild?—you who said——?

Svanhild. Yes, I who said, only yesterday——. But are you yourself the same man you were yesterday? You said my destiny was to be a reed for others to play on——

Falk. And the reed played of itself—the song of my shame! You were quite right. What I then thought was real work was only child's play; you have waked me to the knowledge of a better work. The place for the Church

is in the midst of the busy streets, where the voice of truth may be heard clear and strong. It is of no use to contemplate the turmoil of life from remote heights, as the pagan gods did; one should bear the blazon of the beautiful in one's heart, as St. Olaf bore the cross upon his coat of mail. The hero must be able to stand in the midst of the turmoil of battle and yet be able to plan his course of action calmly—be able to see the silver lining behind every dark cloud. That is the call of duty a man should obey!

Svanhild. And that is what you will obey, now that you are free and stand alone.

Falk. I never stood in the turmoil; and that is where the call of duty comes. No! The compact of isolation that I made with heaven is broken; my days of writing poetry within the four walls of my room are gone for ever. I mean to *live* my poems now under the fir-trees and amid the cherry-blossoms. My campaign shall be carried on in the clear light of day; and, Falsehood or I, one of us will have to yield!

Svanhild. Go forth, then—from words to deeds—and heaven's blessing go with you! I have misjudged you; you have a heart after all. Forgive me, and let us part friends——

Falk. No—the barque which is to carry me over the seas of the future has room for two. We must not part! Svanhild, if you have the courage, let us stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight.

Svanhild. You and I—shoulder to shoulder?

Falk. See, they have all deserted me. I have no friends; every one of them has declared against me—every one's hate, like the point of a sword, is turned against me. Could you dare to stand or fall with me? My path for the future will lead me into conflict with all the conventions, all the thousand prejudices that hamper our feet here; but in that path I can kneel, like any other lover, and place a ring on the hand of my beloved! (*Draws a ring from his finger and holds it up.*)

Svanhild (*almost voiceless with emotion*). Are you in earnest?

Falk. Yes!—and you and I will show the world that love has an immortal power that carries it unscathed

and unsullied through all the mud and mire of everyday life. Yesterday I pointed to the beacon of the Ideal burning on the highest mountain-top; you were afraid and trembled, because you were a woman. But now I point the way to what is a woman's true goal. A noble soul like yours will keep to its promise. See, Svanhild, the gulf lies before you! Leap over it!

Svanhild (almost inaudibly). If we were to fall——!

Falk (triumphantly). No, no!—I see a light in your eyes that assures our victory!

Svanhild. Then, such as I am, take me for your own! The springtime of my life has come! (*Throws herself bravely into his arms, as the curtain falls.*)

ACT III

(SCENE.—*The same. A bright moonlight night. The trees are illuminated with coloured lamps. In the background is a table laid with refreshments, wine, etc. From the house, whose windows are all lit up, piano-playing and singing are heard faintly during the following dialogue. SVANHILD is standing near the verandah. FALK comes in from the right, carrying some books and a writing-case. A SERVANT follows him with a trunk and travelling-bag.*)

Falk. Is that the lot?

Servant. Very nearly, sir. There is only your small hand-bag and light overcoat.

Falk. Very well. I will wear the coat when I leave. That will do, thank you. Oh, by the way, take this writing-case.

Servant. It is locked, isn't it, sir?

Falk. Yes, my friend, it is locked.

Servant. Thank you, sir.

Falk. Be so good as to burn it at once.

Servant. Burn it, sir?

Falk. Yes, to ashes. (*Smiles.*) And with it all my drafts on the Bank of Poetry. My books you can keep for yourself.

Servant. I am sure you are very kind, sir. If you are giving away all your books, I suppose you have learnt all there is to learn, sir?

Falk. All there is to learn from books—yes. And more besides.

Servant. More? That's saying a good deal, sir.

Falk. Yes. Now, make haste. The outside-porter is at the door; go and help him to load his barrow. (*The SERVANT goes out to the left. FALK goes up to SVANHILD, who comes to meet him.*) We have an hour to ourselves, Svanhild, by the light of God's heaven. See how the stars glitter between the leaves, like fruit upon the branches—fruit of the tree of the universe. I have broken the last bonds of my thralldom; the whip of bondage has lashed me for the last time. I stand, like the seed of Jacob before the Paschal Lamb, with my loins girded and my staff in my hand. And so let the miserable generation that I leave behind me—their eyes blind to the Land of Promise that lies beyond the desert, and their energies crippled by convention—let them go on building tombs in their pyramids. My face is set towards freedom, though I have to cross the desert of the world's contempt to reach it. Even the tides of the sea will open a path for me; but the hosts of the enemy, the vile armies of falsehood, shall find their grave in its depths! (*A short pause. He looks at SVANHILD and takes her hand.*) You are so silent, Svanhild!

Svanhild. And so happy! Oh, let me dream—let me go on dreaming! *You* speak! Your words bring my budding thoughts to life, like water-lilies lifting their heads above the surface of a lake.

Falk. No, let me once more hear your voice, full of pure faithfulness and truth, say that you are mine! Say it, Svanhild—say it!

Svanhild (*throwing herself into his arms*). Yes, I am all yours!

Falk. Dear song-bird, sent by God to me alone!

Svanhild. I was homeless in my mother's house, lonely in my inmost soul, an unbidden guest amidst all the riot of happiness—of no account there, sometimes of less than no account. And then *you* came! For the first time in my life I heard my innermost thoughts put into words by another;

what I had vaguely dreamt, you—with the courage of youth among all these old folk—seemed to realise. At one moment, your keen wit repelled me; at another, the sunshine of your nature irresistibly attracted me—just as the tides of the sea may seem to be attracted by leafy banks, but driven back shattered from a rocky shore. I have seen into the bottom of your heart now—and I am all yours, body and soul! You are like the shady tree that attracts the tide, sweetheart!—the tide of my heart, which shall always be at full tide and never at the ebb!

Falk. And now I can thank God that my love had its baptism of pain. I believe I scarcely realised how much my soul needed yours, until I had almost lost you and knew what a treasure it was that I had dearly bought. I can thank God for having ennobled my love by setting the seal of suffering upon it—and for having given us the right to go forward triumphantly towards our goal, borne up upon the wings of love!

Svanhild (*pointing towards the house*). They are making merry in every room there, in honour of the young couple; illuminations, songs, complimentary speeches, and all the rest of it. Any one looking in from the road would think that happiness must certainly be found there, amidst all that gaiety. (*Pityingly.*) Poor sister! Poor spoilt darling of fortune!

Falk. "Poor sister," did you say?

Svanhild. Yes. Hasn't she divided the priceless treasure of her soul between him and all her relations—entrusted her capital into a hundred different hands, so that she can reclaim the whole from no one? She can demand the return of her all-in-all from no one person, for no one person can lay sole claim to her. Ah, I am ten times richer than she—I who have only one in the world whom I can claim as my own! My heart was empty when you marched in to occupy it, with your flag of victory flying and a song upon your lips. My mind holds nothing but thoughts of you; you fill my soul as the scent of springtime fills the air. I can thank God now that I was lonely till you found me—that I was dead to everything, until I heard the hour strike that called me from the emptiness of life to a new world of glory!

Falk. Yes, it is we, a couple with no other friends, that are the rich ones; for the treasure of happiness is ours. Here are we, standing outside the windows, looking in at the fuss they are making. Let them sing and dance to their hearts' content; but let us look up, Svanhild—up into the blue sky! There are a myriad tiny lamps glowing there——

Svanhild. Hush—listen, dearest—there is a melody breathing through the branches in the cool night.

Falk. It is for us that the stars are twinkling on high——

Svanhild. It is for us that the wind goes singing through the valley.

Falk. I feel like God's prodigal son; I have grieved Him and been entangled in the toils of the world; but His kind hands have beckoned me home, and, now, that I have come, He has lit His lamps for me, prepared a feast for His new-found son, and gives me as reward the fairest creature He has ever made. And from this hour I swear I will no more grieve Him, but be like an armed sentinel guarding the camp of the Beautiful! We shall stand shoulder to shoulder, you and I, and our life shall be a living pæan of the victory of love!

Svanhild. See how easy it is for two to conquer, when one of them is a *man*——

Falk. And the other a true woman! For two such as that, failure is impossible!

Svanhild. Up, then, to the fight against all regrets and care! (*Holds up her finger with FALK's ring upon it.*) I must tell them all, this very minute!

Falk (*hastily*). No, Svanhild, not yet! Wait until to-morrow! To-night let us gather the red roses of love; it would be a sacrilege to do anything so prosaic to-night! (*The door of the verandah opens.*) Your mother is coming! Hide! No eye must see you as my bride to-night! (*They go amongst the trees by the summer-house. MRS. HALM and GULDSTAD come out on to the verandah.*)

Mrs. Halm. He is really going!

Guldstad. So it seems.

Styver (*coming out*). Is he going, Mrs. Halm?

Mrs. Halm. Yes, thank goodness there is no doubt of that!

Styver. It is a bad business altogether. He will keep

his word. I know how obstinate he is. He will have us all pilloried in his paper; my dear girl's name will be there, mixed up with announcements of births, rejected lovers and broken engagements. Look here—if it were not that I am almost ashamed to do it, I would propose to parley with him—to ask for a truce——

Mrs. Halm. Do you suppose he would consent?

Styver. I believe he would. I think everything goes to show that when he was haranguing us to-day, he was under the influence of drink. And another fact which, though it is not a conclusive proof, seems to me to weigh the balance of probability heavily in that direction, is that apparently after dinner he rushed up to the room that he and Mr. Lind share, and practically wrecked it; smashed things, and——

Guldstad (who has caught a glimpse of FALK and SVANHILD, who have just separated, FALK going to the background, and SVANHILD standing hidden by the summer-house). Hush, I have got on the right track at last! One moment, *Mrs. Halm.* Mr. Falk shall not leave you—or, if he does, you shall part good friends.

Styver. What? Do you really think you can——?

Mrs. Halm. What are you going to do?

Guldstad. Nothing the least unseemly, *Mrs. Halm,* I will settle the affair to your mutual satisfaction. Just let me have a minute alone with you first——

Mrs. Halm. By all means! (She and GULDSTAD come down into the garden. During the following dialogue they are seen walking up and down in the background, engaged in lively conversation. STYVER comes down into the garden and notices FALK, who is standing looking out over the water.)

Styver. These poets are nasty-tempered, revengeful chaps, but we civil servants are accustomed to deal with people diplomatically. I shall make my own terms with him——. (Breaks off on noticing STRAAMAND coming out of the house.) Oh, bother!

Straamand (on the verandah). Really going to leave the house? (Goes down to STYVER.) My dear fellow, do go in for a few minutes and keep my wife——

Styver. Keep your wife?

Straamand. Keep my wife company. We are so accus-

tomed to be always together, she and I and the children, and never——. (MRS. STRAAMAND *and the children appear at the door.*) Ah, there they are all at the door!

Mrs. Straamand. Where are you, dear?

Straamand (*in an undertone, to STYVER*). Think of something that will distract their minds—something amusing to tell them.

Styver (*going up on to the verandah*). Mrs. Straamand, have you read our last departmental petition? It is a model of good style. (*Takes a book out of his pocket.*) I will read you some longish extracts from it——. (*Drives them politely back into the room, and follows them in. FALK comes forward; he and STRAAMAND meet, and stand for a moment looking at one another.*)

Straamand. Well?

Falk. Well?

Straamand. Mr. Falk!

Falk. Mr. Straamand!

Straamand. Are you more reasonable now than when we last parted?

Falk. No. I have decided irrevocably upon the course I am going to take.

Straamand. Even if it means trampling your neighbour's happiness underfoot?

Falk. I will plant truth in its place, if I do. (*Smiles.*) I suppose you are thinking of my *Lovers' Sporting Times*?

Straamand. Oh, I dare say that was only your fun?

Falk. Yes, that will end in smoke; you may make your mind easy about that. I am going to fight real battles now—not paper ones.

Straamand. Still, even if you spare me, I know some one who will not let me off so easily—that fellow Styver. He will have his knife into me; and it will be all *your* doing, because you were malicious enough to stir up reminiscences of certain sentimental indiscretions of mine. You may be sure he will be ready enough to quote them if I breathe a word against this “call” of Lind's that they are all shouting about. I understand that government officials have considerable influence with the press nowadays. An article from Styver's pen might ruin me, if it were printed in one of our leading papers. They strike

pitilessly and cast their net wide for scandals—especially when the time for the renewal of subscriptions comes round—

Falk (as if conceding a point). Yes, if your story were scandalous enough, certainly—

Straamand (despondently). It would be all the same whether it were or no. These papers have a lot of columns to fill. Mark my words, that is where I shall be sacrificed on the altar of revenge.

Falk (maliciously). On the altar of retribution, you mean—and deservedly. There is such a thing as Nemesis, you know; it may be slow in striking, but it strikes surely—and no one can escape it. If any one has sinned against the Ideal, in steps that vigilant watchman the Press, and the culprit has to pay the penalty.

Straamand. But, good heavens, when did I even promise any allegiance to this Ideal that you are all so fond of prating about? I am a married man, the father of a family—remember that I have twelve little ones; I am absorbed in my every-day duties; I have chapels of ease to look after, all over an extensive parish, a huge flock of spiritual sheep to care for. I have to tend them, guide them, guard their footsteps; I have to look after my crops; I am wanted in the stable and the cow-houses; do you suppose I have any time to spare for Ideals?

Falk. Well then, get back home as quick as you can and make yourself snug for the winter under your thatch. This is the day of Young Norway! Its brave battalions number their warriors in thousands, and their flags are flying in the morning breeze!

Straamand. And, my young friend, suppose I do go home with all my flock, all those that yesterday composed my little kingdom, you know quite well that to-day things would not be the same with them as yesterday. Do you suppose I could take them back just as I brought them? (*Interrupts FALK as the latter tries to answer him.*) No, wait and listen to what I have to say. (*Comes nearer to him.*) There was a time when I was young, as you are now, and no less brave and fearless. I had to earn my bread, and the years went by; and that hardens the soul; just as it does the hands. I went up to the north; there my home

lay in a peaceful spot beyond the mountains, and my world was bounded by the four corners of my parish. My home, Mr. Falk! Do you even know what a home is?

Falk (curtly). No, I have never known that.

Straamand. I can well believe it. A home is a place where there is always room for friends, but where even two people who are not friends feel constrained; where one's thoughts have as free play as children on their father's knee; where one's voice is echoed back sweetly from the beloved one's heart; where one can grow grey-haired without realising that the years have passed over one's head; where life always has a background of happy memories, like the far line of blue hills behind a forest.

Falk (with forced gaiety). You are getting quite enthusiastic——

Straamand. Yes, and over things you can only laugh at!—so differently has our Maker made us. I know I lack what you have far more of; but I have won much that you have lost. There are many grains of truth on the paths of every-day life that seem like mere fancies when looked at from too great a height. You want to soar into the sky, while my ambitions scarcely rise above the height of my own roof-tree. Some birds are born eagles——

Falk. And others barn-door fowls.

Straamand. Oh, laugh at me if you like. I dare say it is true enough that I am a barn-door fowl; but I have a flock of chickens under my wings, and you have none. I have that humble bird's courage and devotion; and I can fight for those that belong to me, if necessary. I know well enough that you think me stupid—perhaps even worse than stupid—I dare say you think I am too greedy for worldly goods. Well, I don't think that is worth our quarrelling about. (*Takes FALK'S arm, and continues in quiet tones, but with increasing earnestness.*) I will grant you that I am as greedy and stupid and dull as you like; but I am greedy for the sake of those that God has given to me, and I have grown stupid in fighting against want, and dull from living on the shores of the sea of loneliness. But, as my youth vanished like a ship disappearing bit by bit on the horizon, I saw another ship approaching over the surface of the sea towards my little narrow bit

of shore. For every youthful dream that I lost in my struggle, for every feather that I lost from my wings, God gave me a gift of wonderful beauty; and I accepted God's gifts with a thankful heart. It is for them I have struggled, for them I have endured everything, and for them that I have found my comfort in God's Word. They were my field of flowers—my cluster of little ones; and you have stained them with the poison of your mockery! You have shown me, with your gifts of mind and command of language, that what I thought was happiness was only a fool's paradise—that what I took seriously was only ludicrous. Now I beg you, give me back my peace of mind, only give it me untarnished and unhurt—

Falk. Are you appealing to *me* as an authority on happiness?

Straamand. Yes. You have put doubt like a stumbling-block in my path, and only you can remove it. Take away the barrier you have set up between me and mine—take the halter off my neck—

Falk. Do you think I keep on hand a tub of the tar of falsehood, to caulk up the seams of the vessel of happiness where she has sprung a leak?

Straamand. I believe that as you destroyed my peace of mind with a word, you can restore it with a word; that you can mend the links you have broken in the chain of my life. Give me a fresh verdict; think again, and speak the truth fully and frankly; so that I may be able to hold my head up again—

Falk (proudly). I am not going to hall-mark brass as gold.

Straamand (looking hard at him). Then remember some words that were spoken just now by a man who pretends that he follows nothing but the light of truth. (*Lifts a finger.*) "There is such a thing as Nemesis, you know, and no one can escape it." (*Goes towards the house. STYVER comes out of the house, wearing spectacles and carrying an open book in his hand.*)

Styver. Mr. Straamand, please come at once! The children are all crying—

The Children (appearing at the door). Daddy!

Styver. And your wife wants you! (*STRAAMAND goes*

into the house.) That woman has no appreciation of style. *(Puts the book and his glasses in his pocket, and comes down.)*
Falk!

Falk. Yes!

Styver. I hope you have changed your mind.

Falk. Why do you hope so?

Styver. I should have thought it was obvious. Surely you will admit that it is inexcusable to make use of information you have gained in confidence? That is never done.

Falk. I have heard that it is rather dangerous for the confider.

Styver. Good Lord, yes!

Falk. Oh, only for public men.

Styver *(hastily)*. No, indeed; it is dangerous for any one with an official position. You can surely imagine how it would damage my prospects if my chief thought I had a Pegasus of my own neighing during office hours, and in such an office as ours. You know how much poetic efforts are likely to be relished in a public department. And what would be worse than all, would be for it to come out that I had broken the most stringent of all official rules, and revealed important confidential secrets.

Falk. You would be punished for such an indiscretion, eh?

Styver *(mysteriously)*. The result might be that a man in a public position like mine would be obliged to send in his resignation at once. One of the strictest obligations on us public servants is to keep a padlock on our lips, even amongst the highest in the land.

Falk. But it is tyrannical of any master to muzzle the—clerk who is metaphorically treading out his corn.

Styver *(shrugging his shoulders)*. The regulations require it, and one must make the best of it. Moreover, at a time like the present, when a general revision of salaries is under discussion, it would be most imprudent to raise the question of the use made of official time, and so forth. That is why I want to ask you to keep silence. One word might rob me of—

Falk. Your despatch-box?

Styver. Oh, well—let us say my letter-book. Its lock is

like the brooch that fastens the kerchief over a maiden's bosom. Any attempt to pry into the secrets it conceals may cause trouble.

Falk. And yet it was you who invited my criticism, and asked me to cast an eye over the treasures of poesy that you keep in your desk.

Styver. How was I to know that the parson could sink so low in the mire—a man who has been as fortunate as he has, with his living, his wife and his children, and money enough to enable him to defy the buffets of life? If he can fall so low as to join the Philistines, who is going to blame a humble clerk like me, who have never had any promotion, who am engaged and about to be married—not to mention the probability of children, and so forth. (*More forcibly.*) If I were a prosperous well-to-do man, I should not be afraid to take up arms against the whole world. Even if I were a bachelor and free, like you, believe me I should shake the dust of this prosaic life off my banner, and unfurl it in defence of the Ideal!

Falk. Well, save yourself, man!

Styver. What?

Falk. You have still time! Don't pay any heed to the owl's wisdom of the world. Remember that a free caterpillar can develop into a butterfly!

Styver (retreating). Do you mean that I should break off my——?

Falk. Yes. When the pearl is gone, what is the use of the oyster-shell?

Styver. You might propose such a thing to a tyro in the law, but not to a man with some reputation for his knowledge of it! I am not thinking of what was laid down on the subject in the time of Christian V.; the situation is not touched by the breach-of-promise law of '42; as far as strict legality is concerned, there would be no infringement of the law in such a proceeding——

Falk. There, you see!

Styver (with decision). But nevertheless I wouldn't hear of such a thing. We have stuck to each other through some difficult times. She doesn't ask for many of the pleasures of life; and I am easily contented, and know quite well that I am just cut out for a life spent between

office work and domestic joys. Others may envy the wild birds' free flight, if they please; a humble life at home can mean happiness, too. Does not Goethe say somewhere that no one can skim the cream of happiness from the Milky Way and still less make butter from it?

Falk. Still, whatever your aim is, your intellect should have the upper hand in all your drudgery. A man should do his every-day duty as a citizen, but he should seek to ennoble that duty. Undoubtedly there is beauty to be found everywhere; but it needs an artist to see it and understand it. And because a man is fond of digging in his garden, he mustn't on that account think himself the equal of a skilled gardener.

Styver. Then let us go in peace along our tranquil way; *we* are setting no obstacles in *yours*! We are content to walk along the ground, while you want to soar into the heights. Ah, me!—she and I used to want to do that, once. But what every-day life demands is work, not songs; the desire to sing seems to die away as one grows older. Youth is like a lawsuit, and as fruitless as the most unnecessary of them. Compromise is the only way out; don't think of getting damages; because your suit is as good as lost in any court you may take it to.

Falk (*bravely and confidently, casting a glance towards the summer-house*). No, not even if I lose it in the final court of appeal! I know that even a convicted criminal may be recommended to mercy! I know that two people can *live* their life together, with happy enthusiasm and with unspoilt faith; you merely preach the miserable belief of the day, that the Ideal is only a secondary thing.

Styver. Not at all. It is the primary thing; but its function is discharged, like that of the flower, when life's fruit has set. (*From the house the sound of a piano is heard, and MISS SKÆRE'S voice singing a popular ballad. STYVER stands listening with quiet emotion.*) She was singing that very song the first time we met. (*Lays his hand on FALK'S arm and looks into his eyes.*) As often as she wakes that song to life I hear among the notes the assurance of her first promise to be mine. And when the fires of our first passion have burnt themselves out, and friendship has arisen from its ashes, that song will still be a link between

the two states. And even if my back becomes bent with stooping over my desk, and my work becomes no more than a daily fight against starvation, I shall still at the end of my day go happily back to my home, where I can hear the echoes of our vanished passion in the notes of that song. If only a short hour, but *all our own*, awaits me there, I shall have won the game without paying forfeit! (*He goes into the house. FALK turns towards the summer-house. SVANHILD comes forward, pale and evidently moved. They stand looking at one another in silence for a moment; then she throws herself passionately into his arms.*)

Falk. My Svanhild, let us have faith in one another and make a brave stand! Amongst these folk you are like a fresh spring flower in a graveyard—for that is what their life is like. There is a corpse-like flavour about these married folk; a corpse-like flavour about the couples one sees going along the streets—with a smile on their lips but the coldness of the tomb in their hearts, and their aspirations as dead as if they were in the grave. And that is what they call *living*! Good God, is such a life as that worth all the pains they give themselves? To bring up hordes of children for such a fate—cram them with ideas of rectitude and duty, give them one short summer's glimpse of love—only so as to have their souls plump and ready for the butcher's knife.

Svanhild. Dear, let us escape from it all!

Falk. Escape? But where to? Isn't it the same all over the world? Doesn't the same lie hang on the wall in every home, framed and glazed and labelled "The Truth"? No, we will stay here and watch this comedy—this tragic-comedy—this harlequinade—a whole nation believing the lie that they all live to be the truth! Look at the parson and his wife, look at Lind and Styver, like clowns in Love's Harlequinade, with a lie in their hearts and plenty of talk about truth in their mouths—and yet decent enough folk at bottom! They lie to themselves and to one another; yet not one of them can see what is at the root of their lies. Even when they have shipwrecked their lives, each one of them thinks himself a Croesus in happiness and a little tin god into the bargain! They have

driven themselves out of Paradise, and sunk up to the ears in the sulphury pit; but not one of them realises where he is, and each of them believes he is heaven's champion, and smiles through his sighs and groans; and when Beelzebub comes along, bellowing and gibing at them, with horns and cloven foot and all the rest of it, every man nudges his neighbour and says: "Hats off! Here comes the Lord of All Things!"

Svanhild (after a short pause of thought). How wonderful it is that your dear hand has shown my heart the way to yours in the springtime of our love! The life of which I used to get fleeting glimpses in my dreams is going to be my real life from to-day. I was stumbling along—ah, how blindly!—when you shed the light on me, and I found the way! (*Looks at FALK in quiet, loving wonder.*) Where do you get your strength, you great strong tree, that stand so straight and vigorous through all the havoc of the gale—that stand alone and shelter me——?

Falk. From God's truth, Svanhild—that is what gives one courage.

Svanhild (looking towards the house with an expression of disgust). Both of those men came to you like wicked tempters, each of them the mouthpiece of half his sex. The one of them asks how love can grow if the soul is bent under the weight of prosperity; the other, how love is to last, if life is nothing but a struggle against poverty. It is horrible—to be able to preach such doctrines as the word of truth, and yet endure to be alive!

Falk. And if we have to choose between the two?

Svanhild. We? Well, what of it if we do? Are we going to let outward circumstances affect us? I have told you already, if you mean to fight, I mean to stand or fall by your side. No command is so easy to follow as that of the Bible, which bids a woman leave her home and follow the man she loves, for better or for worse, on God's own path!

Falk (embracing her). Then let winter's storms do their worst! We shall stand upright in the midst of them; nothing can uproot our love! (*MRS. HALM and GULDSTAD come in at the back, from the right. FALK and SVANHILD are still standing by the summer-house.*)

Guldstad (softly). Look, Mrs. Halm!

Mrs. Halm (astonished). Those two together!

Guldstad. Do you still disbelieve me?

Mrs. Halm. It is amazing!

Guldstad. Oh, I have noticed how he was quietly hatching his plans.

Mrs. Halm (to herself). Who would have thought Svanhild was so sly? (*To GULDSTAD.*) Still, really, I can't believe that—

Guldstad. Very well; you shall have proof.

Mrs. Halm. Immediately?

Guldstad. Yes; and undoubted proof, too.

Mrs. Halm (holding out her hand to him). Good luck to you!

Guldstad (seriously). Thanks; I may need it.

Mrs. Halm (looking back over her shoulder as she goes). Whichever way things turn out, the child will be happy. (*Goes into the house.*)

Guldstad (going up to FALK). I suppose you haven't much time?

Falk. I leave in a quarter of an hour.

Guldstad. That will be enough.

Svanhild (moving away). Good-bye!

Guldstad. No, Miss Svanhild, please stay.

Svanhild. Shall I?

Guldstad. Yes, till you have answered me. Everything must be made quite clear between us; we three have got to have a heart-to-heart talk.

Falk (astonished). We three?

Guldstad. Yes, Falk. We have all got to take the mask off now.

Falk (repressing a smile). I am at your service.

Guldstad. Then listen. You and I have known each other for about six months; and we have squabbled—

Falk. We have.

Guldstad. We have scarcely ever agreed about anything, and occasionally we have pitched into one another nobly. You have always posed as the champion of great ideas; I have only been an ordinary, every-day man. And yet all the time there was a link between us, and it was through you that a thousand fading memories of my young days were revived and brought to light. Yes, yes—I see you

looking at me; but these grey hairs of mine were brown once, and were tossed about by the breezes of spring; and these cheeks hadn't always the wrinkles that the cares of every-day life have carved in them. But I mustn't get sentimental! I am a plain business man——

Falk (slightly mockingly). You are the embodiment of sound common sense.

Guldstad. And you are the joyous young poet of hope! *(Stands between FALK and SVANHILD).* And now—you two—here I am; and we have got to have a talk; because the hour is drawing near which is to mean happiness or remorse.

Falk (impatiently). Talk away, then!

Guldstad (with a smile). I told you yesterday that I was meditating a poem of sorts——

Falk. A concrete poem—that you were to live.

Guldstad (nodding slowly). Yes.

Falk. May one inquire where you got your subject?

Guldstad (glances at SVANHILD, then turns again to FALK). You and I have chosen the same subject.

Svanhild. I must go in.

Guldstad. No, wait and hear me out. I would not ask any other woman to do it; but I have learnt to know you thoroughly, Svanhild. You have too fine a nature to be prudish. I have watched you growing up and your character developing; I saw in you all the qualities I most prize in a woman; but for a long time I only thought of you in a fatherly way. Now I am going to ask you—will you be my wife? *(SVANHILD shrinks back.)*

Falk (gripping GULDSTAD by the arm). Not another word!

Guldstad. Be quiet. It is for her to answer. You ask her too—so that she can make a free choice.

Falk. I—ask her?

Guldstad (looking hard at him). The happiness of three lives is at stake—not only mine. Do not let us have any pretence. It will do you no good; because, although I live a humdrum business life, it has given me a certain amount of shrewdness. Yes, Falk—you love her. I was delighted to watch the beginning of love's young dream; but this violent, impetuous love of yours is just what may very well shatter her happiness.

Falk (angrily). What right have you to say that?

Guldstad (quietly). The right that experience gives me. Suppose you win her now——

Falk (defiantly). Well, what then?

Guldstad (slowly and impressively). Suppose she dared to build her life on that one foundation—to stake all she has on one throw—and suppose the storms of life sapped away that foundation, and the flower of love faded in the gloom of matter-of-fact existence?

Falk (impetuously). That is impossible!

Guldstad (looking at him meaningly). Hm! So I thought once. I was young myself once; and in the old days was all on fire with love for a girl. Then our ways parted. We met again for the first time yesterday—all the romance was gone.

Falk. Yesterday?

Guldstad (with a serious smile). Yesterday. You know Mrs. Straamand, don't you——?

Falk. What? Was it *she*, that——?

Guldstad. That lit the flame in my heart? Yes; I grieved over my loss of her for years; and all those years she remained in my memory as the fair young girl she was the first time we met on a beautiful spring day. And now you are lighting the same dangerous fire—risking the same hazard. That is why I say: "Be careful! Pause a moment and take time for thought. You are playing a risky game."

Falk. No. Over those tea-cups here, I made my declaration of faith, which no doubts can shake——

Guldstad (continuing FALK'S train of thought). It was, I believe, that love of itself is strong enough to defy convention, want, sorrow, old age? Well, perhaps you may be right; but consider the question from another point of view. No one can define exactly what *love* is, or what are the grounds for the delightful persuasion that bliss is only to be found in double-harness. Those are questions no one in the world can really answer. But *marriage* is something practical; and so is a formal engagement, my young friend; and sometimes it is quite easy to be wise *after the event*, and say that so-and-so was just made for so-and-so. Love, on the other hand, is always blind, you

know. Love chooses the woman, not the wife; and if it turns out afterwards that she is not the right wife for you—

Falk (impatiently). Well?

Guldstad (shrugging his shoulders). Well, then it is all up with you. A suitable engagement doesn't depend only on love, but on a great many other things besides—a liking for each other's family, for instance—or dispositions that will easily pull together. And marriage has to reckon with all sorts of obligations and duties that have nothing whatever to do with love; it means a taste for domesticity and the gentler virtues; it means housewifely accomplishments; it means unselfishness and a devotion to duty—and various other things that I can't very well mention before Miss Svanhild.

Falk. And therefore——?

Guldstad. Therefore listen to advice that is worth its weight in gold. Benefit by experience. Look at the facts of life. Every pair of lovers go about at first as if all the riches of the world had fallen into their laps. They want to go full gallop up to the altar; they set up house and nearly go silly with delight, and for a while are intoxicated with happiness and mutual devotion. But a day of reckoning has to come—oh, yes it does! And when it does, it means complete bankruptcy. It means the fading of the roses of youth from the bride's cheek, the fading of the flowers of hope in her heart; the fading of the triumphant courage in the man's breast; the fading of the last spark of the fire that used to glow so fiercely; failure, complete and disastrous. And yet that very couple started with every appearance of being a first-class firm in the love business!

Falk (impetuously). It is a lie!

Guldstad (imperturbably). And yet a few hours ago you thought it true enough. It is what you said yourself as you stood there pouring out heroics and confuting the whole tea-party. The others all protested then, just as you are doing now. It is natural enough; invalids naturally don't like to hear people talking about death. Look at Mr. Straamand—a man who used to be a musician and an artist of considerable skill and taste in his bachelor days; can you wonder at his having so degenerated since he and

his wife began their life together? She was meant to be his mistress; she was never in the least suited to be his wife. And Styver, who used to write quite decent verses? Ever since he has been formally engaged, his poetic gifts have absolutely dried up; his muse has been sent sound asleep by the monotonous drone of perpetual law-cases. Look at——. (*Looks at SVANHILD.*) Are you cold, my dear?

Svanhild (gently). No, I am not cold.

Falk (forcing himself to speak in a light and mocking manner). Well, if the account is always going to work out with the balance on the wrong side, why are *you* so anxious to risk your own capital in a lottery that offers such very small chances of winning? It almost looks as though you thought you were specially cut out for the rôle of bankrupt!

Guldstad (looks at him, smiles, and shakes his head). My dear boy, you may spare me your sarcasm. There are two ways of starting on married life. One way is to try and live on the credit of youthful illusions—on bills payable at the end of an interminable future of bliss—on the assumption that your age will permanently remain nineteen, and that there are no such things as rheumatism and gruel. You may try to live on the capital of pink cheeks, bright eyes and lovely hair, and the conviction that they will last for ever and that there are no such things in the world as wigs; or on the flowers of love that are to have the capacity of blossoming in the bleakest desert; or on the glowing warmth of two hearts that are to beat as one all through your lives, just as they did when she first said “yes” to you. What is the right name for ideas of that sort? You know quite well! Humbug, my dear friends—humbug!

Falk. I see now what a dangerous tempter you are—you, a man of means, perhaps a millionaire—while all I possess in the world has just been carried out by a couple of servants.

Guldstad (sharply). What do you mean?

Falk. It is obvious enough. Your *solid* foundation for married life is simply *money*, wonder-working money, which can transform a middle-aged widow into a beautiful girl—to some men's eyes.

Guldstad. Oh, no, it is something better than that. It is the peaceful, warm-hearted affection and friendly care that can achieve its end quite as well as the exuberances of passion; a sense of the happiness of doing one's duty, of caring for another's comfort, of peace in one's home, of mutual consideration, of watching that no stone shall bruise the loved one's foot on her journey through life; a gentle hand to heal all wounds; a manly strength that is glad to shoulder all the burdens that the years may bring; an arm strong to support and secure to guard. That is what I can contribute, Svanhild, towards building up a happy life for you. Now give me your answer. (*SVANHILD makes an effort to reply, but GULDSTAD lifts his hand to stop her.*) No, think well over it, so that you may not repent it! Make your choice between us calmly and deliberately.

Falk. But how did you know——

Guldstad. That you loved her? I have read it in your eyes. Tell her of *your* love too, now. (*Presses his hand.*) Now I am going in. Let us have no more misunderstanding. If you can swear to me, by all you hold sacred, that you will be such a friend to her all your life long, such a staff to support her steps, such a comfort in time of trouble, as I can be, then—(*turns to SVANHILD*) then, Svanhild, blot out of your mind all recollection of what I have offered. I shall none the less have had my quiet triumph; for you will be happy, and that is what I want. (*To FALK.*) Oh, by the way—you said something about money. Believe me, you may disregard that. I am a lonely man, with no one depending on me. All that is mine shall be yours. You shall be a son to me, and she my daughter. You know I have a place of business on the frontier. I will move out there, and you shall set up house here; and when a year is over, we will meet again. Now you know me, Falk. Search out your own heart; but do not forget that the journey down the stream of life is no child's play, no mere enjoyment or luxury. So, for God's sake—make your choice, you two! (*Goes into the house.* *FALK and SVANHILD look at one another in embarrassment.*)

Falk. You are so pale.

Svanhild. And you so silent.

Falk. Yes.

Svanhild. He was hard on us.

Falk (to himself). He has robbed me of all my strength.

Svanhild. He did not spare us.

Falk. No, he knows where to hit.

Svanhild. All our world seems to have crumbled away in a moment. (*Going nearer to him.*) We were so rich—rich in each other's love—when every one else had deserted us, when our thoughts soared on high like the crest of some great wave in the stillness of the night. We had triumphant courage in our hearts, and the faith that our love was imperishable. And then he came, with his hands full of this world's goods, and robbed us of our faith and planted doubt in our hearts—and so everything seemed to crumble away!

Falk (with fierce impetuosity). Tear such thoughts out of your mind! All that he said may be true for others, but it is false for us!

Svanhild (shaking her head quietly). The ear of wheat that has been laid low by a hailstorm can never rear its head again—nor can our faith.

Falk (with anxious fervour). Yes, yes, Svanhild! We two—

Svanhild. No, we must have done with delusive hopes. If we sow a crop of lies, we shall reap a harvest of life's tares. It may be true of others, but not of us, you say. But do you not suppose that every one of them has thought, as you and I did, that they could defy the lightning—that no storm could have the power to lay them low—that whatever black clouds there might be in their sky, no turn of life's weather could ever bring disaster to them?

Falk. Others have failed because they had no single purpose in their lives. I want your love, and nothing but your love. They took fright at the thunder of life's storms; I shall be a staff of strength to guide your steps in peace.

Svanhild. But what if that love, which should be strong enough to withstand everything, should nevertheless prove a broken reed—what can you offer me then to build my life's happiness upon?

Falk. Nothing. If my love fails, everything fails.

Svanhild. Then can you swear to me, by all you hold

sacred, that your love will never droop like a faded flower, but will be fresh and fragrant as it is now, all our lives long?

Falk (after a short pause). It will last for a long time.

Svanhild (bitterly). Oh, "a long time"—"a long time"—what poverty-stricken words! What does "a long time" mean, of love? That is its death-warrant, like mildew in a seed. "Love is a thing that can never die," the song says. Then that song is to become mute in time; and, instead, we shall be singing "I loved you last year"! (*As if filled with a sudden inspiration.*) No, no! That is not the way our day of happiness must end, not with a watery sun setting in a bank of grey cloud; our sun must be extinguished, as if by some miracle, at the height of noon, when it is shining brightest!

Falk (in a dismayed voice). Svanhild, what do you mean?

Svanhild. We are children of the Spring; there must be no autumn of our love, when the songbird in your heart is voiceless and forsakes the nest which has been its home. There shall be no winter to spread its snowy shroud over the dead bodies of our dreams of happiness; our love—our joyous love, so sure of triumph—must never be wasted by sickness or enfeebled by age; it shall die, as it lived, young and vigorous!

Falk (in deep grief). And if I lose you—what has life to offer me!

Svanhild. What has it to offer you *with* me—without love?

Falk. A home——!

Svanhild. —Haunted by the ghost of our lost happiness. (*Earnestly.*) I am not brave enough to be your wife. I see it now—I feel it—I know it. I could have taught you the happy game of love; but I am too weak to help your soul over the rough places of life. (*Going nearer to him and speaking with growing fervour.*) We have gloried in the sweet intoxication of our love; for us there must be no drowsing on the pillow of indifference! Love has wings; so let him soar into the sky on a song, to join the other gods of youth. And if the barque on which we were to sail into the future has foundered, be sure there is still a plank

left floating on the water! A brave swimmer may still reach the wished-for shore! If our happiness perish in a watery grave, our love, thank God, will escape from the wreck and come triumphantly to land!

Falk. I understand! But it is cruel to be parted so—just when all the world seemed to lie before us—to part here, in springtime, under the stars—the very day our young love has had its baptism of promises!

Svanhild. That is just why. We have touched the topmost height of our happiness to-day; after this it must have lessened. And, when the day of judgment came and God in His justice claimed of us the treasure He had trusted us to bring safely over the seas of life, our only answer would be one that would leave no room for His mercy, if we had to reply, “We have lost it on our journey to the grave.”

Falk (with sudden resolution). Throw away my ring!

Svanhild (with ardour). You wish it?

Falk. Throw it away! I understand! That is the only way by which I can truly win you! Just as the grave is the gate of everlasting life, so love can only be consecrated to an immortal birth when it is freed from all feverish longings and desire and wings its way to its spiritual home of fond memory. Svanhild, beloved—throw away the ring!

Svanhild (triumphantly). My duty is done!—I have filled your soul with light and song! You can soar on wings of freedom—for victory is in your grasp now that, like the Swan from whom I take my name, I have sung my swan-song to you! (*Takes off the ring and kisses it.*) And now, my dream, lie in the depths of the sea till the world crumbles! I offer you as a sacrifice to love! (*Goes to the back and throws the ring out into the fjord; then comes back to FALK with her face transfigured with joy.*) Now I have lost you, dearest, for this life—but I have won you for eternity!

Falk (resolutely). Now we have each our task before us! We shall never cross each other's paths on earth again. Each to our task!—and that without repining. Our souls were poisoned by our present longing; we would have grasped the fruits of victory without fighting for them—

reached the peace of sabbath without going through the toil of the workaday week; but we have heard the call to the fight and to renunciation!

Svanhild. But without bitterness.

Falk. And with the courage that truth gives. Now we need have no fear of punishment. The memory we two inherit for our lives will shine clearly through the murky skies, gleaming like a many-coloured rainbow—the sign of covenant between us and God! It will light you in peace on the path of duty——

Svanhild. And you will reach the goal of a poet's desire!

Falk. A poet's? Yes, but every man is that. In the schoolroom—the court—the church—wherever he be, he is a poet if he can glimpse the ideal behind his daily work. Yes, I shall soar upwards! My Pegasus is saddled! I feel my life's task ennobled for ever!—And now, farewell!

Svanhild. Farewell!

Falk (embracing her). One kiss!

Svanhild. The last! (*Looses his arms from around her.*) Now for this life I lose you with a glad heart.

Falk. If all the light of the world were to go out, we still should know what light was—for it is God!

Svanhild (moves to the background). Farewell! (*Moves further back.*)

Falk. Farewell! (*Brandishes his hat in the air.*) Now I can cry, with a glad heart: "Thank God for His wonderful gift of love!" (*The door of the house opens. FALK goes across to the right. A number of the young guests come out, laughing and talking.*)

A Young Girl. Let us dance in the garden!

Another. Life is all a dance!

Another. A dance of fresh spring flowers!

Others. Yes, a dance, a dance!

All. A dance that never ends! (*STYVER comes from the house, arm in arm with STRAAMAND. MRS. STRAAMAND and her children follow them.*)

Styver. Yes, you and I are friends from to-day.

Straamand. And we will fight together for a common end.

Styver. When two estates of the realm fight side by side——

Straamand. The result will be all——

Styver (hastily). Profit!

Straamand. And happiness. (MRS. HALM, LIND, ANNA, GULDSTAD, MISS SKÆRE and the other guests come out. Every one's eyes are looking for FALK and SVANHILD. There is a general movement of astonishment when those two are seen standing apart from one another.)

Miss Skære (clasping her hands together). What!—am I awake or dreaming?

Lind (who has noticed nothing). I must go and congratulate my new brother-in-law. (He with several of the others approaches FALK, but recoils involuntarily when he sees him and cries out :) Why, what is up? You look so changed!

Falk (with a smile). Like Montanus,¹ I assert that the earth is flat, my friends. My eyes deceived me; it is flat, flat as a pancake. Now are you satisfied? (Goes quickly out to the right.)

Miss Skære. She has refused him!

The Aunts. Refused him?

Mrs. Halm. Hush!—don't let her hear you! (Goes across to SVANHILD.)

Mrs. Straamand (to her husband). Just fancy, dear!—she refused him!

Straamand. Is it possible?

Miss Skære. Yes! (The ladies draw aside in groups, all eagerly discussing the situation.)

Styver (as if stupefied). Do you mean to say he proposed to her?

Straamand. Yes—just think of it! He was making fools of us——. (STYVER and he look at one another speechlessly.)

Anna (to LIND). I am so glad. He was a horrid man!

Lind (puts his arms round her and kisses her). Now you are altogether mine! (They go together to the background.)

Guldstad (looking at SVANHILD). There stands a wounded heart, but I mean to heal it.

Straamand (finds words at last and grasps STYVER by

¹ The hero of Holberg's comedy *Erasmus Montanus*. He returns to his native village after his travels with the astounding assertion that the world is round! But the indignation aroused by his assertion eventually leads him to proclaim that it is flat after all—"flat as a pancake, gentlemen! And now are you satisfied?"

the hand). Now you can remain in love with your dear Miss Skære, with an easy mind.

Styver. And you can rejoice in the yearly addition of little Straamands to your family circle.

Straamand (*rubbing his hands*). It serves him right—impudent fellow! I wish all our clever prophets could be served the same way! (*Moves off, talking to STYVER*. *MRS. HALM comes forward with SVANHILD*.)

Mrs. Halm (*in a low voice, eagerly*). And you are absolutely free?

Svanhild. Absolutely free.

Mrs. Halm. Good. And if you know your duty as a daughter—

Svanhild. Do what you like with me.

Mrs. Halm. Thank you, my child. (*Beckons to GULDSTAD*.) He is a good catch, you know; and since there are no obstacles—

Svanhild. I must make one condition—that we go away from here.

Mrs. Halm. That is just what he proposes.

Svanhild. And it mustn't be immediately.

Mrs. Halm. When, then? Remember, happiness is beckoning to you.

Svanhild (*with a quiet smile*). Oh, before very long. But not before the fall of the leaf. (*Moves towards the verandah*. *MRS. HALM looks for GULDSTAD*.)

Straamand (*to the guests*). There is one thing, my dear friends, that we have learnt to-day. When we are most sorely beset by doubt, the spirit of truth will conquer that slippery enemy, and the power of love will triumph.

The Guests. How true! (*A great deal of embracing goes on. Laughter and singing are heard from without*.)

Miss Skære. What is that?

Anna. It is some students!

Lind. It is the quartet that are going to serenade you from the hillside. And I have completely forgotten to send them word that I can't go—. (*The Students come in on the left and stand in a group*.)

A Student (*to LIND*). Here we are!

Mrs. Halm. Have you come to fetch Mr. Lind?

Miss Skære. That is too bad, just as he has got engaged

One of the Aunts. And doesn't want to go hill-climbing, you may be quite sure!

A Student. Engaged?

The other Students. Congratulations, old chap!

Lind. Thank you, thank you.

A Student (to his companions). This will ruin our quartet. What are we to do without our tenor?

Falk (coming in from the right, in holiday suit, wearing his student's cap, a knapsack on his back and a stick in his hand.) I will sing tenor in Young Norway's choir!

The Students. You, Falk! Hurrah!

Falk. Out into God's beautiful world!—like bees from their hive in springtime. I have two strings to my lyre—one high and joyous, the other deep-toned and serious. (*To the Students.*) You have brought your music with you? Good! Then let us be off like a flight of bees into the green world—to bring back a wealth of pollen to the queen of the hive, the great mother of us all. (*Turns to the others as the Students go out.*) Forgive me all my faults, big and little. I shall forget everything (*lowering his voice*) and yet remember everything.

Straaemand (evidently highly pleased). My cup of happiness is running over! My dear wife has a hope—a hope of sweet promise—(*takes FALK aside and whispers*) the dear soul told me just now—(*in a still lower whisper*) if all goes well—at Michaelmas—our thirteenth!

Styver (with MISS SKÆRE on his arm, turns to FALK with a triumphant smile, and says, pointing to STRAAMAND:) I am to have my loan, and be able to set up house—

Miss Skære (curtsies ironically). At Christmas I shall enter the ranks of married women!

Anna (curtsying also, as she takes LIND's arm). My fiancé is going to stay here, and take his chance—

Lind (concealing his embarrassment). Yes, and apply for an assistant mastership at a girls' school.

Mrs. Halm. I shall teach Anna all the secrets of house-keeping—

Guldstad (seriously). I shall start work upon a modest poem—a poem of one who lives only for duty.

Falk (looking over their heads with a smile). And I am for the heights!—for the unknown future! Farewell! (*In*

a low tone, to SVANHILD.) God bless you, bride of the springtime! Wherever I am, you will be my inspiration! *(Waves his hat in the air and follows the Students.)*

Svanhild (quietly, but firmly, after looking after him for a moment in silence). My summer's day is over, and the leaves are beginning to fall. The world may take me now! *(Some one begins to play a dance tune on a piano in the house; champagne corks are heard popping. GULDSTAD goes up to SVANHILD and bows to her. She shrinks for an instant; then collects herself and gives him her hand. MRS. HALM and the others, who have been anxiously watching them, surround them with delighted congratulations. From the hillside, through all the noise of talk and music is heard the chorus from FALK and the Students :)*

“What matter if we sink to-morrow,
So long as to-day we may sail and sing!”

The Guests. Hurrah! *(The curtain falls on a scene of dancing and enthusiasm.)*

THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH
A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- * Bratsberg, an ironmaster.
- † Erik, his son, a merchant and law student.
- † Thora, his daughter.
- † Selma, Erik's wife.
- Dr. Fjeldbo, medical officer at the ironworks.
- Stensgaard, a lawyer.
- Monsen, a landed proprietor.
- Bastian, his son.
- Ragna, his daughter.
- Helle, resident tutor at the Monsens'.
- Ringdal, manager at the ironworks.
- Lundestad, a farmer.
- Hejre.
- Madam Rundholmen, widow of a country tradesman.
- Aslaksen, a printer.
- A Servant of the Bratsbergs.
- A Servant of Madam Rundholmen.
- A waiter.
- Countryfolk, Guests, etc.

*(The action takes place in the suburbs of a town in the south of
* Norway.)*

THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH

ACT I

(SCENE.—An open place in BRATSBERG'S park. A fête in celebration of May 17¹ is in progress. It is evening. From the background the sound of dance-music is heard. The trees are hung with coloured lamps. In the middle of the stage a kind of rostrum has been erected. On the right, the entrance to a large marquee, outside of which is a table with benches. On the other side, in the foreground, is another table, decorated with flowers and set with comfortable chairs. A crowd is gathered round the rostrum, from which LUNDESTAD is delivering an oration. He wears a steward's rosette in his buttonhole. RINGDAL, also decorated with a rosette, is standing by the table on the left.)

Lundestad. So, my dear friends, we are celebrating the anniversary of our independence! As we have inherited it from our forefathers, so let us cherish it for ourselves and leave it as a precious legacy to our children! Three cheers for Independence Day!

The Crowd. Hip! Hip! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Ringdal (as LUNDESTAD steps down). And three cheers for our old friend Lundestad!

(A few hisses are heard, drowned by shouts of: "Three cheers for Lundestad!"—"Good old Lundestad!" The crowd gradually disperses. MONSEN, his son BASTIAN, STENSGAARD and ASLAKSEN come forward.)

Monsen. That chap is becoming a bit of a back-number!

Aslaksen. All about our local conditions, as usual! Ha, ha!

Monsen. He has made the same speech every year as long as I can remember! Come over here! (Moves towards the table on the left.)

¹ The anniversary of the declaration of the independent Norwegian Constitution.

Stensgaard. No, no! not that way, Mr. Monsen! We are leaving your daughter on the lurch.

Monsen. Oh, Ragna will find us.

Bastian. She is all right; Helle is looking after her.

Stensgaard. Helle?

Monsen (nudging him amicably). Yes, Helle. But you have got *me*, haven't you? Here we are, all together; so come and sit down. (*Sits down at the table.*) We are out of the rabble here, and can talk more comfortably about——

Ringdal. Excuse me, Mr. Monsen—this table is reserved.

Stensgaard. Reserved? For whom?

Ringdal. For Mr. Bratsberg's party.

Stensgaard. Mr. Bratsberg's party? Why, none of them have put in an appearance!

Ringdal. No, but they are expected every minute.

Stensgaard. Then let them take another table. (*Takes a chair.*)

Lundestad (putting his hand on the chair). No, we really must leave this table for them.

Monsen (getting up). Come along, Mr. Stensgaard; this other table will do quite as well. (*Crosses over to the right.*) Waiter!—No waiters about, either! The committee ought to see to things better than this. Ah, Aslaksen—just go in and order us four bottles of champagne—the best they have. Tell them to charge it to me! (*ASLAKSEN goes into the marquee. The other three sit down. LUNDESTAD goes quietly over to them and speaks to STENSGAARD.*)

Lundestad. I hope you are not offended at my——

Monsen. Offended? Good gracious, no! Far from it!

Lundestad (still addressing STENSGAARD). I have no personal feeling in the matter; it was the committee that ordered that table to be——

Monsen. Quite so, quite so. We must do as the committee directs——

Lundestad (as before). We are in Mr. Bratsberg's own grounds, you know. He has very good-naturedly thrown open his park and gardens this evening; and so we thought——

Stensgaard. Oh, we are quite comfortable at this table, Mr. Lundestad—if only we may be left in peace—away from the crowd, I mean.

Lundestad (amicably). Quite so. That's all right. (*Goes to the background. ASLAKSEN comes out of the tent.*)

Aslaksen. The waiter is bringing the wine. (*Sits down.*)

Monsen. A table reserved for him by special instructions from the Committee! And on Independence Day! There is a sample of what goes on, for you!

Stensgaard. Well, you are all straightforward, honest men; why do you put up with it?

Monsen. Oh, it's an old-established custom, you see.

Aslaksen. You are a stranger to these parts, Mr. Stensgaard. If you were a little more intimate with our local conditions, I think——. (*The WAITER comes in with the champagne.*)

Waiter. Was this ordered for you, gentlemen?

Aslaksen. Yes, you may open the bottles.

Waiter (opening the bottles). Am I to put it down to you, Mr. Monsen?

Monsen. Yes. That will be all right. (*Exit WAITER. MONSEN clinks glasses with STENSGAARD.*) Welcome among us, Mr. Stensgaard! I am delighted to have made your acquaintance, and I am sure it is an honour to the district that so distinguished a man should settle down here. We have often read about you, in the newspapers, as taking part in meetings of all kinds. You have great gifts as a speaker, Mr. Stensgaard, and I am sure you have the good of the people at heart. What we hope is that you will bring all your energies to bear on—hm! to bear on——

Aslaksen. On our local conditions.

Monsen. Quite so; on our local conditions. Your health! (*They drink.*)

Stensgaard. You shan't have to complain of want of energy on my part!

Monsen. Bravo! Hear, hear! Another glass, to seal that promise!

Stensgaard. No, stop! I have already had——

Monsen. Nonsense! We must have one more, for luck! (*They touch glasses and drink again. During the following dialogue BASTIAN industriously fills up the glasses as soon as they are empty.*) By the way, as we have got on to the subject, I may as well tell you that it isn't Mr. Bratsberg that rules the roost, as a matter of fact. No; the man

behind the scenes who pulls all the strings is old Lundestad, let me tell you.

Stensgaard. So I have heard from various sources. I can't understand how a democrat like Lundestad—

Monsen. Lundestad, a democrat? It is true enough that he called himself one in his young days because he thought it would help him to climb the ladder. It was for the same reason that he succeeded his father in his seat in parliament. Everything is handed down from father to son here, it seems to me!

Stensgaard. But there must be some way of putting an end to these abuses?

Aslaksen. Yes, that's it, Mr. Stensgaard!—you shall put an end to them!

Stensgaard. Oh, I don't say that I—

Aslaksen. Yes, you are the very man!—I am sure you are. You have the gift of the gab, as people say—and, what is of more importance, you have a ready pen. The columns of my paper are always open to you, as you know.

Monsen. Well, if anything is going to be done, it must be done at once. The elections will be coming on directly.

Stensgaard. If you are elected, Mr. Monsen, won't your private interests, which I know are considerable, suffer?

Monsen. Very likely they might; but, if it were represented to me that the good of the community demanded it, I would naturally put aside all private considerations.

Stensgaard. That is very public-spirited of you. And I have noticed that you seem to have a party at your back already.

Monsen. Yes, I flatter myself that the majority of the more active minds among the younger generation—

Aslaksen. Ahem! Here comes a spy! (*HEJRE comes out of the marquee. He is short-sighted; looks round about; then comes up to the others.*)

Hejre. If you have a spare chair, may I beg the loan of it? I should like to sit down over there.

Monsen. These seats are fixed, as you see. But why not sit down at this table?

Hejre. Here? At your table? After all, why not? (*Sits down. Looks at the bottles.*) What's this? Champagne—eh?

Monsen. Yes. Will you have a glass?

Hejre. No, thank you. The champagne mother Rundholmen keeps in stock is——. Oh, well, just half a glass, to show there is no ill-will; at least, I might if I had a glass.

Monsen. Bastian, go in and fetch one.

Bastian. Oh, Aslaksen, go in and fetch a glass. (*ASLAKSEN goes into the marquee. A silence ensues.*)

Hejre. I hope I am not in the way? I shouldn't like to——. (*ASLAKSEN comes back with a glass.*) Thank you, Aslaksen. (*Bows to STENSGAARD.*) A stranger, I believe, sir—recently arrived here? You must be Mr. Stensgaard, if I am not mistaken.

Monsen. Quite right. (*Introduces them.*) Mr. Stensgaard, a distinguished lawyer; Mr. Hejre——

Bastian. A distinguished capitalist.

Hejre. Ex-capitalist, to be accurate. I have disposed of all my capital now; put it away from me, as you might say. Not bankrupt, though! For goodness' sake don't suppose that!

Monsen. Drink up your wine before it gets flat.

Hejre. It was rascality that did it—sharp practice, and that sort of thing. But never mind about that. Indeed, I hope it is only a temporary state of things. When I get off my hands some lawsuits that are pending, and one or two other matters, then our distinguished friend Old Slyboots will have to look out, I can tell you! Here's a toast! Will you drink to his confusion?

Stensgaard. I should like to know first whom you mean "Old Slyboots"?

Hejre. Ho, ho! You needn't look so embarrassed! You suppose I meant Mr. Monsen, do you? I think you will admit that no one would call him distinguished. No, it was Mr. Bratsberg that I meant, my dear young friend.

Stensgaard. What? Surely as a man of business Mr. Bratsberg is the soul of honour?

Hejre. Do you think so, young man? Hm!—But never mind about that. (*Moves nearer to him.*) Twenty years ago, I was worth a hundred thousand pounds. I came into a lot of money at my father's death. I dare say you have heard of my father? No? Old Matthew Hejre? They used to call him "Gold-leaf Hejre." He was a ship-owner, and made a tremendous lot of money. He had the

window-frames and door-posts of his house gilded. He could afford it—but never mind about that. That's why they called him "Gold-leaf Hejre."

Aslaksen. Didn't he have his chimney-pots gilded as well?

Hejre. No, that was only a journalist's tale—and it was long before your time, any way. But he got some fun out of his money; and I followed his example. Did you ever hear what I spent on my trip to London? I took a regular retinue with me—hasn't any one told you? No? And haven't you heard of the sums I spent as a patron of the arts and sciences?—and in giving young men of talent a chance to get on?

Aslaksen (getting up). If you will excuse me, gentlemen——

Monsen. What? Going to leave us?

Aslaksen. Yes, I want to stretch my legs a bit. (*Goes out.*)

Hejre (lowering his voice). He was one of my young men. And repays me in the same style as all the others—ha, ha! Do you know that I paid for his education for a whole year?

Stensgaard. Really? Has Aslaksen had any education?

Hejre. Yes—and just the same with young Monsen here—never came to any good; and just the same with—but never mind about that. What I mean is—I had to give him up; I very soon saw the signs of this unfortunate taste for liquor——

Monseñ. But you have forgotten that you were telling Mr. Stensgaard about Bratsberg.

Hejre. Oh, it's a long story. When my father was at the height of his glory, old Bratsberg—this chap's father, you understand—was in very low water. He was a Gentleman-in-Waiting to the King, like his son, you know——

Bastian. Naturally. Everything runs in families in this country.

Hejre. Including charm of disposition. But never mind about that. Well, loss of money—thriftlessness—all sorts of extravagance that he got entangled in, about the year 1816—obliged him to sell some of his property——

Stensgaard. Which your father bought?

Hejre. Bought—and paid for. Well, what happened? I inherited my father's estate—improved it a thousandfold——

Bastian. Naturally.

Hejre. Your good health! Improved it a thousandfold, as I said; did some necessary cutting-down of timber; after some years Mr. Bratsberg comes along—the present chap, I mean—and cancels the transaction!

Stensgaard. But, my dear Mr. Hejre, you could surely have prevented that?

Hejre. It wasn't so easy. He declared some small formalities had been neglected. And at the moment I was in temporary financial difficulties which subsequently became permanent. And you know how far a man can go nowadays without capital!

Monsen. By Jove, that's true! And in some respects a man can't go far even *with* capital. I have had experience of that. Why, even my innocent children——

Bastian (*rapping on the table*). Ugh, father!—if I could only lay my hands on certain folk I could name——

Stensgaard (*to MONSEN*). Your children, you were saying——?

Monsen. Yes. Look at Bastian, for instance. Hasn't he had a good education——?

Hejre. Three good educations! First of all very nearly an undergraduate; then very nearly a painter; and then very nearly—oh, no, it is true he is now quite—a civil engineer.

Bastian. Yes, that I am, worse luck!

Monsen. Yes, he is. He has his diploma to show it. But who has had all the municipal jobs? Who has had the making of all the new roads here—especially these last two years? Foreigners—or, at all events, strangers; people, to make a long story short, that no one knows anything about!

Hejre. Yes, it is perfectly shameful. At the beginning of this year, when they were appointing a new Manager to the Savings-Bank, they passed over Mr. Monsen and selected an individual whose knowledge of management (*coughs*) consists in managing to keep his purse-strings tied—a qualification which our generous host here ob-

viously does not possess. When it is a question of filling a confidential position in the municipality, it is just the same thing! Never Monsen, but always some fellow that enjoys the confidence of those in authority. I'll tell you what; this "manhood suffrage" that the law makes such a point of—it is "manhood shipwreck" in local matters! That is what it comes to; I'm damned if it doesn't. Your good health!

Monsen. The same to you! But—to go to a different subject—how are your various lawsuits going?

Hejre. They are still in the stage of preparation; I can't say any more than that, for the moment. The rascality that I have been exposed to in that direction! I am sorry to say that within the next week I shall be obliged to summon the whole town council before the Conciliation Court.¹

Bastian. Is it a true story that you once summoned yourself before the Conciliation Court?

Hejre. Summoned myself? Yes. But I didn't appear.

Monsen. Ha, ha! You didn't appear, eh?

Hejre. I had a legitimate excuse. I was across the river and unfortunately it was the year when Bastian had built his bridge there; and, as you know, it broke and fell plump into the water——

Bastian. Devil take it——!

Hejre. Keep cool, young man! There are lots of folk here who stretch things so fine that they give way; and so do bridges, I mean. Everything runs in families, you know—but never mind about that!

Monsen. Ha, ha! Never mind about that, eh? Have another glass on the head of it! (*To STENSGAARD.*) Mr. Hejre is privileged to say anything he likes, you see.

Hejre. Yes, the right of free speech is about the only right of a citizen that I attach any importance to.

Stensgaard. It seems almost a pity that the law puts any limit to freedom of speech.

Hejre. Ha, ha! Perhaps your mouth is watering for a

¹ In Norway, as a preliminary to an action in open court, both parties are obliged to appear before a private Conciliation Court, which endeavours to arbitrate. If it succeeds, the case goes no farther.

libel action, sir—eh? I advise you not to meddle with those! I know all about them!

Stensgaard. All about damages, perhaps you mean?

Hejre. Forgive me, young man! As a matter of fact, the resentment you feel does your heart honour. I must beg you to forget that an old man has sat here talking too freely about your absent friends.

Stensgaard. My absent friends?

Hejre. The son is certainly worthy of all respect; no more of that! And the daughter, too. And if I happened casually to throw any slur upon the elder Mr. Bratsberg's character——

Stensgaard. Mr. Bratsberg? Are you calling the Bratsbergs my friends?

Hejre. Well, a man doesn't pay calls on his enemies, surely?

Stensgaard. Pay calls?

Monsen. What the deuce——?

Hejre. Dear, dear! I seem to have let something out of the bag that——

Monsen (to STENSGAARD). Have you been paying calls on the Bratsbergs?

Stensgaard. Nonsense! It is a perversion of facts!

Hejre. I really seem to have put my foot in it, badly! But how was I to know that it was a secret? (*To MONSEN.*) At all events, you mustn't take my words too literally, When I say "calls" I mean nothing more than a formal call—a frock-coat and best gloves sort of call, you know——

Stensgaard. Allow me to inform you that I have not spoken a single word to any of the family.

Hejre. Is it possible? Didn't you get in the second time, either? They said they were not at home the first time, I know.

Stensgaard (to MONSEN). I had some papers to deliver, from a third person in Christiania; that's all.

Hejre (getting up). Upon my soul, it is shocking! Here is a young man trustful, though inexperienced in the ways of the world—who goes to call on an experienced man of the world, in his own house—goes to this man, who is well off, to ask for—but never mind about that—and the man of the world slams the door in his face—is "not at home"

to him; of course, people never are at home when it is a case of—but never mind about that! It is a most scandalous piece of discourtesy, too!

Stensgaard. Oh, do let the tiresome subject drop!

Hejre. Not at home! A man who is so fond of saying: “I am always at home to decent people!”

Stensgaard. Does he say that?

Hejre. So they tell me. He has never been at home to Mr. Monsen, either. But I am at a loss to understand why he should show any ill-feeling to you. Yes, I said “ill-feeling”; because, do you know what I heard yesterday?

Stensgaard. I have no wish to know what you heard yesterday.

Hejre. As you please. It wasn’t so much that the expressions used surprised me—coming as they did from Mr. Bratsberg’s mouth; but I can’t understand why he should have called you a “charlatan.”

Stensgaard. A charlatan?

Hejre. Since you absolutely force me, I must admit that Mr. Bratsberg called you a charlatan and an adventurer.

Stensgaard. What the devil——?

Hejre. Charlatan and adventurer—or adventurer and charlatan—I can’t be certain in which order the words came.

Stensgaard. And you heard him?

Hejre. I? If I had been present, Mr. Stensgaard, you certainly should not have lacked the defence you deserve.

Monsen. There, you see what comes of——

Stensgaard. How dare the impudent fellow presume——?

Hejre. Oh, come, come! not so hasty. He was only speaking figuratively, I’ll bet my boots. Perhaps it was only his humorous way of expressing himself. Anyhow, you can ask him for an explanation to-morrow; because he has asked you to his dinner-party, I suppose?

Stensgaard. I have been invited to no dinner-party.

Hejre. Two calls, and no invitation——!

Stensgaard. Charlatan and adventurer! What could he be driving at?

Monsen (looking off to the left). Look there! Talk of the Devil——! Come along, Bastian! (*He and BASTIAN go out.*)

Hejre. I am afraid I can't oblige you with an answer, Mr. Stensgaard. You are feeling hurt? Your hand, my young friend! Forgive me if my outspokenness has wounded you. Believe me, you have a lot of bitter experiences before you in life. You are young; you are trustful, and believe the best of everybody. That is very beautiful; it is even very touching. But—but—trustfulness is silver; experience of the world is golden. That's a proverb of my own invention, my boy! God bless you! (*Goes out.* BRATSBERG, THORA and FJELDBO *come in from the left.* LUNDESTAD, *at the same time, comes forward from the back, gets on to the rostrum and calls for silence.*)

Lundestad. I call upon Mr. Ringdal to say a few words. (*RINGDAL comes forward.*)

Stensgaard (shouting). Mr. Lundestad, I wish to say a few words!

Lundestad. Later on!

Stensgaard. No—now! At once!

Lundestad. You can't. I have called upon Mr. Ringdal. (*RINGDAL mounts the rostrum. A crowd clusters at the back.*)

Ringdal. Ladies and gentlemen! We have the honour to welcome among us the warm-hearted and open-handed man to whom for so many years we have looked up as to a father; the man whose advice and practical kindness have never failed us; the man whose door is never closed to any honourable man; the man who—who—but I know that our honoured guest has no love of long speeches; and therefore I ask for three cheers for Mr. Bratsberg and his family! Hip, hip, hurrah! (*The crowd cheer lustily and swarm round BRATSBERG, who thanks them and shakes hands with those nearest to him.*)

Stensgaard. Am I allowed to speak now?

Lundestad. By all means. The platform is at your service.

Stensgaard (jumping on to the table). Thank you, I will choose my own platform!

Some Young Men (crowding round him). Hurrah!

Bratsberg (to FJELDBO). Who is this unruly fellow?

Fjeldbo. Stensgaard—a lawyer.

Bratsberg. He!

Stensgaard. Listen to me, my brothers and sisters! You

whose hearts are full of the joyful music of this Day of Liberty, even though you yourselves are slaves! I am a stranger among you——

Aslaksen No, no!

Stensgaard. Thank you for that "no." I accept it as evidence of your aspirations and longings! I am a stranger, it is true, but I swear to you that I stand here with a heart in my bosom that beats in unison with yours—in your sorrows and your joys, your defeats and your victories. And I swear to you that if I had any influence here——

Aslaksen. You have that, sir! You have that!

Lundestad. No interruptions, if you please! You are not making this speech.

Stensgaard. No more are you! I depose the entire committee! Let us have Freedom on the Day of Freedom, lad!

The Young Men. Three cheers for Freedom!

Stensgaard. They want to deprive you of freedom of speech! You heard! They want to stop your mouths! Down with such tyranny! I am not going to stand here making speeches to a tongue-tied crowd. I want to talk to you—and want you to talk to me! We must have a heart-to-heart talk!

The Crowd (with increasing fervour). Hurrah!

Stensgaard. Let us have no more of these ineffectual meetings, dressed up in our Sunday best! The next time we meet to celebrate the Seventeenth of May, we will have some golden result—achieve something of importance. May!—the month of blossoms!—the triumphant youth-time of the year! At the beginning of June, it will be just two months since I settled down here among you. And in that time I have seen examples of greatness of soul, as well as of pettiness—of beauty of conduct, and of the reverse——

Bratsberg (to FJELDBO). What do you suppose he is driving at, doctor?

Fjeldbo. Aslaksen says he is talking about local conditions.

Stensgaard. I have seen all sorts of signs of latent power among the people; but I have also seen that power repressed and kept under by the spirit of corruption. I

have seen the enthusiasm with which youth and confidence can swarm to a meeting such as this; but I have also seen those who have sat still behind closed doors.

Thora. Oh, dear!

Bratsberg. What does he mean by that?

Stensgaard. Yes, brothers and sisters of freedom! I can feel in the very air around me the presence of a power—the haunting ghost of the corruption of past years—that brings weariness and darkness where there should be happiness and light. Let us drive that spectre back into its grave!

The Crowd. Hurrah! Hurrah for Independence Day!

Thora. Father, come away——!

Bratsberg. What the deuce does he mean by his spectre? Doctor, whom is he alluding to?

Fjeldbo (hurriedly). Oh, to—— (*Whispers to BRATSBERG.*)

Bratsberg. Oho! Is that what he means?

Thora (softly to FJELDBO). Thank you!

Stensgaard. If no one else will kill the dragon, I will! But we must all hold together, my lads!

Voices. Yes, yes!

Stensgaard. We are the youth of the nation, and the present is ours; but we also belong to it. Our duty is our law! We have elbow-room for every enterprise—a welcome for every idea that has strength behind it. Listen to me! Let us found a League. The reign of money-bags in these parts is over!

Bratsberg. Bravo! (*To FJELDBO.*) “Money-bags,” he said; so I suppose it was really——

Stensgaard. Yes, my lads, we are what is of real value, for we have the real stuff in us. Our will shall be the true-ringing currency that shall pass from man to man. Confusion to any one that tries to hinder us from minting *that* coin!

The Crowd. Hurrah!

Stensgaard. I heard an ironical “bravo” thrown at me just now——

Bratsberg. No!

Stensgaard. It is of no consequence! Neither flattery nor threats can influence a man who knows his own mind.

And God is with us, too; for it is His voice speaking to us that bids us go on confidently with our task. Come along, follow me into this tent, and we will found our League this very minute.

The Crowd. Hurrah! Carry him in, shoulder high!

Voices. Go on, sir! Another speech!

Stensgaard. We must hold together, I said. But Providence itself is an ally to the League of Youth! The mastery of the world—or, at any rate, of this district—is in our hands! (*They carry him into the tent amidst wild applause.*)

Madam Rundholmen (*drying her eyes*). How beautifully he speaks! It makes one feel inclined to kiss him, doesn't it, Mr. Hejre?

Hejre. Thank you, I would rather not.

Madam Rundholmen. No, I suppose you wouldn't.

Hejre. Perhaps you would like to kiss him, Madam Rundholmen?

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, you horrid man! (*She and HEJRE go into the tent.*)

Bratsberg. Spectre—dragon—money-bags! It was abominably rude; but quite justifiable!

Lundestad (*coming forward*). I am really dreadfully distressed, Mr. Bratsberg—

Bratsberg. Yes, what about your knowledge of men? Oh, well—every one is mistaken sometimes. Good-night, Lundestad, and thank you for a very pleasant evening. (*Turns to THORA and FJELDBO.*) But, hang it all, I *have* behaved very rudely to that young man, you know!

Fjeldbo. Indeed?

Thora. Do you mean when he called?

Bratsberg. Yes—both times when he called. It was really Lundestad's fault; he described him to me as an adventurer and—and—something else I don't remember. Fortunately I can make up for my remissness.

Thora. How?

Bratsberg. Come along, Thora; before we go to bed we will—

Fjeldbo. Mr. Bratsberg, is it really worth while——?

Thora (*genily*). Hush!

Bratsberg. When a man has made a blunder, the only

thing he can do is to repair it; it is nothing more than his duty. Good-night, doctor! I have really spent a most enjoyable evening; and that was more than you had led me to anticipate.

Fjeldbo. I, Mr. Bratsberg?

Bratsberg. Yes, yes—you; you and the rest of them.

Fjeldbo. But may I ask in what way I——?

Bratsberg. Mr. Fjeldbo—don't want to know too much. I never do. Now for any sake let us say good-night! (*BRATSBERG and THORA go out to the left. FJELDBO looks pensively after them. ASLAKSEN comes out of the tent.*)

Aslaksen. Here, waiter! Bring a pen and ink! (*To FJELDBO.*) Ah, doctor, things are marching!

Fjeldbo. What things?

Aslaksen. He is founding the League. It is nearly founded.

Lundestad (who has come quietly up to them). Have you got many names?

Aslaksen. About thirty-seven already, without counting widows and such like.—Waiter, pen and ink! No waiter here, of course; the fault of our local conditions, as usual! (*Goes out behind the tent.*)

Lundestad. Poof! This has been a heating day!

Fjeldbo. I am afraid we are in for something hotter yet!

Lundestad. Do you think Mr. Bratsberg was very angry?

Fjeldbo. Oh, not a bit. Surely you could see that. But what have you to say about this new League?

Lundestad. Hm! I have nothing to say about it. What should I say?

Fjeldbo. But it is the beginning of a fight for mastery in the district.

Lundestad. Oh, yes. That is right enough. He is a very clever man, this Stensgaard.

Fjeldbo. And ambitious.

Lundestad. Youth is always ambitious. I was, when I was young. It is only natural. Perhaps we might just look in and——. (*HEJRE comes out of the tent.*)

Hejre. Well, Mr. Lundestad, are you going in to heckle him? Eh? Be the opposition, eh? Ha, ha! If you mean to, you must make haste.

Lundestad. Oh, I shall be in plenty of time.

Hejre. Too late, old chap! Unless you want to act as sponsor! (*Cheering is heard from the tent.*) There! You hear the clergy singing the Amen; the christening is over!

Lundestad. I suppose one may go in and hear what is going on. I shan't speak. (*Goes into the tent.*)

Hejre. There is another tree down. Lots more of them are going to fall now! The place will look like a forest after a storm. It is really delightful!

Fjeldbo. But tell me, Mr. Hejre—how does it interest you personally?

Hejre. Interest me? I am not an interested person, doctor! If I feel pleased, it is only on my fellow-citizens' account. We shall have a little life here now—something real! Personally—goodness knows, it is all one to me. I can say, as the Grand Turk did of the Emperor of Austria and the King of France: "It is all the same to me whether the pig swallows the dog or the dog swallows the pig!" (*Goes out at the back to the right.*)

The Crowd (in the tent). Three cheers for Mr. Stensgaard! Hip, hip, hurrah!—Waiter, bring some wine! Some punch! Here, waiter! Beer!—Hurrah! (*BASTIAN comes from the tent.*)

Bastian. God bless him, and every one else! (*In a voice shaky with emotion.*) Oh, doctor, I feel a perfect Hercules to-night! I must do something!

Fjeldbo. Don't mind me! But *what* do you want to do?

Bastian. I think I will go to the ballroom and thrash a couple of my friends! (*Goes out behind the tent.* STENSGAARD comes out of the tent, without his hat, and in a great state of excitement.)

Stensgaard. My dear fellow, is that you?

Fjeldbo. At your service, Tribune of the People. You are elected, I imagine—

Stensgaard. Yes, of course; but—

Fjeldbo. And what is it going to lead to? What important post in the community? A bank managership?—or—?

Stensgaard. Oh, don't talk nonsense! Of course I know you don't mean it. Your heart is not really so dead and empty as you would like to make out.

Fjeldbo. Well, spout away!

Stensgaard. Fjeldbo, be my friend, as you used to be! A coolness has grown up between us. You have treated me so oddly—always jesting and sneering—and that has repelled me. But I know I was in the wrong! (*Throws his arm round FJELDBO's shoulders.*) Great God, how happy I am!

Fjeldbo. You too! Well, then, so am I!

Stensgaard. Well, shouldn't I be the most pitiful wretch alive if all the goodness that has been shown me did not make me proud and confident? I don't know what I have done to deserve it. What has such a good-for-nothing rascal as I done, to be so heaped with favours?

Fjeldbo. Here is my hand! Upon my soul, I feel quite fond of you to-night!

Stensgaard. Thank you! Be a true friend, as I shall. I can't tell you how proud I feel at being able to carry all that crowd with me! Why—mere gratitude for such a thing ought to make one a good man, and make one love all one's fellow-men. I feel as if I should live to take them all in my arms, and beg them, with tears in my eyes, to forgive me for the fact that God has been so partial as to give me more than He has given to them.

Fjeldbo (quietly). Yes, it is astonishing how much may fall to one man's lot. I feel as if I could not tread on a worm, or a blade of grass in my path, to-night.

Stensgaard. You?

Fjeldbo. Yes, but I don't want to talk about it. I only wanted to let you know that I understood.

Stensgaard. What an exquisite night it is! Listen to the music and laughter ringing out over the meadows. All is quiet over there—I tell you, if a man did not feel his life sanctified afresh by such an hour as this, he would not deserve to live on God's earth!

Fjeldbo. Quite so—but tell me this; what is to come of it all? What are you going to create—to-morrow or after?

Stensgaard. Create? First of all we must destroy. Do you know, Fjeldbo, I once dreamt—or perhaps I actually saw what I am going to tell you—no, of course it was a dream, but such a vivid one! I dreamt it was the Day of Judgment, and I could see the whole world. There was no sunshine; only a yellow stormy light. Then a tempest

arose, rushing from the west and driving everything before it—first of all withered leaves, and then men—and the men managed to keep on their feet in spite of it. It twisted their cloaks under them, so that they seemed almost as if they were being blown along in a sitting position. At first they looked like folk running after their hats in a gale; but when they came nearer I saw they were emperors and kings; and what they were running after and grasping at, and always seemed to be just reaching but never reached, were their crowns and sceptres. There were hundreds and hundreds of them, of all sorts; and not one of them knew what it meant. Many of them were asking, in terrified voices: "Where has this frightful storm come from?" Then I heard an answer: "A Voice spoke; and that the echoes of that Voice were so terrible that the storm arose!"

Fjeldbo. When did you have this dream?

Stensgaard. Oh, some time ago—I don't remember when. Many years ago.

Fjeldbo. There were probably disturbances going on somewhere in Europe; and you had eaten a heavy supper, and read the newspaper on the top of it.

Stensgaard. I felt just the same shiver down my spine to-night. I *shall* carry out my ambition. I mean to be the Voice that—

Fjeldbo. Look here, my dear Stensgaard; you must really call a halt, and think over the situation. You mean to be the Voice, you say. Very well. But how far is that Voice going to be heard? Across this parish?—or, if you shout very loud, across the county? And who is going to be the echo that shall be so loud as to awake the storm? Some one, I suppose, like old Monsen—or Aslaksen—or that fat-headed genius, Bastian! And, instead of your crowd of kings and emperors, we shall see our worthy Lundestad running after a seat in parliament. What will it all come to? It will come to what you first thought it was, in your dream—a lot of snobs in a high wind!

Stensgaard. Just at first, perhaps. But no one can tell how far a storm will travel.

Fjeldbo. Oh, dry up about that storm!—I will tell you something else, though; and that is, that you—being blind, and gullible—are easily induced to direct your

attack against the ablest and most honourable men amongst us——

Stensgaard. That isn't true!

Fjeldbo. It is true! Old Monsen got hold of you as soon as ever you came here. If you don't shake him off, it will be the ruin of you. Mr. Bratsberg is an honourable man; you may rely on that. Do you know why Monsen hates him so viciously? Just because——

Stensgaard. I won't hear another word! Not a single word that insults my friends!

Fjeldbo. Think again, Stensgaard. Is old Monsen really your friend?

Stensgaard. Mr. Monsen has opened his doors to me in the most friendly way——

Fjeldbo. He opens them in vain to the best people here.

Stensgaard. Whom do you mean by the "best people"? A handful of stuck-up officials! I know all about that. All that concerns me is that at the Monsens' house I was courteously received and appreciated——

Fjeldbo. "Appreciated"—yes, unfortunately that is the root of the whole matter.

Stensgaard. Not a bit of it! I can look at things quite impartially. Mr. Monsen has abilities; he is well-informed; and he takes an intelligent interest in public affairs.

Fjeldbo. Abilities? Oh, yes—in his way. And well-informed too; he takes in the papers, and has paid special attention to the reports of your speeches and to any articles you have contributed. As for his intelligent interest in public affairs, naturally he has shown that by agreeing with the views expressed in your speeches and your articles.

Stensgaard. Fjeldbo, you are letting the dregs of your character come up to the top again. Can't you ever shake off your ignoble way of thinking of things? Why always impute to people motives that are either base or ridiculous?—Ah, I know you don't really mean it! You look your own trusty self again now. I will tell you **what** is the best part of it—the real root of the matter. Do you know Ragna?

Fjeldbo. Ragna Monsen? Yes; at least, at secondhand.

Stensgaard. She goes to the Bratsbergs' sometimes.

Fjeldbo. Yes, on the quiet. She and Miss Bratsberg are old schoolfellows.

Stensgaard. Well, what do you think of her?

Fjeldbo. From all I hear, she seems to be a very nice girl.

Stensgaard. Ah, you should see her in her own home. She thinks of nothing else but her little brother and sister. And the way she looked after her mother! You know her mother was out of her mind, the last few years of her life.

Fjeldbo. I know. I attended her at one time. But tell me, my dear fellow, am I to conclude that——?

Stensgaard. Yes, Fjeldbo, I am seriously in love with her; I can tell *you* that. I don't wonder at your being surprised; you think it very odd that I should so suddenly——. Because of course you know I was engaged to a girl when I was in Christiania?

Fjeldbo. So I have heard.

Stensgaard. The whole thing was a mistake. I *had* to break it off; it was best for all concerned. Believe me, it wasn't an easy thing to do, and I felt it terribly. However, thank goodness it is all over and done with now. It was the real reason why I left Christiania.

Fjeldbo. And are you sure of yourself with regard to Ragna Monsen?

Stensgaard. Yes, indeed I am! There is no question of a mistake this time.

Fjeldbo. Well then, go on with it, and good luck to you! You are a fortunate fellow. I could enlarge on that theme if I liked——

Stensgaard. You could? Has she said anything then? To Miss Bratsberg perhaps?

Fjeldbo. You don't understand me. But, in the middle of all that, what on earth makes you want to go and mix yourself up with the hurly-burly of politics? I can't understand petty local affairs having any interest for a mind like yours——

Stensgaard. Why not? We are all complex creatures, at least I am. Besides, it is only through taking part in the political fight that I can find a way to her.

Fjeldbo. But what a way!—Good Lord!

Stensgaard. Fjeldbo, I am ambitious; you know that

I want to make my way in the world. When I think that I am thirty, and yet am only at the bottom of the ladder, I feel my conscience gnawing at me.

Fjeldbo. Yes, but not with its wisdom teeth.

Stensgaard. Oh, it's no use talking to you. You have never felt the spur of ambition. You have always been a lounging and an idler—at school, at college, abroad, and now here——

Fjeldbo. Very likely; but anyway, it has been very pleasant. And it isn't followed by any such reaction as one may feel after getting down off a table, on which one has been——

Stensgaard. Quite so. But I am not going to let you talk like this. You are doing me an ill turn—you are robbing me of my enthusiasm.

Fjeldbo. Well, but your enthusiasm is so abominably misplaced, you know——

Stensgaard. Be quiet, I tell you! What right have you to disturb my happiness? Do you think I am not sincere in what I say?

Fjeldbo. Indeed I am sure you are!

Stensgaard. Then why do you want to discourage me and make me feel mean and wretched? (*A noise of shouting and cheering from the tent.*) Listen, listen! They are drinking my health! An idea which can so take hold of a crowd like that, *must* have God's own truth in it! (THORA BRATSBERG, RAGNA MONSEN, and HELLE come in from the left and move towards the back.)

Helle (to THORA). Look, Miss Bratsberg—there is Mr. Stensgaard, over there.

Thora. Ah, then I won't go any farther with you. Good-night, Ragna! Good-night, Mr. Helle!

Helle and Ragna. Good-night! Good-night! (*They go out to the right.*)

Thora (coming forward). I am Miss Bratsberg. I have brought you a letter from my father.

Stensgaard. A letter for me?

Thora. Yes. Here it is. (*Turns to go.*)

Fjeldbo. Mayn't I see you home?

Thora. No, thank you. Don't trouble. Good-night! (*Goes out to the left.*)

Stensgaard (*reading the letter by the light of a Chinese lantern*). What on earth——?

Fjeldbo. What does he say to you?

Stensgaard (*bursts out laughing*). I certainly didn't expect this!

Fjeldbo. What? Tell me!

Stensgaard. Bratsberg is a pitiful cur!

Fjeldbo. How dare you——?

Stensgaard. Pitiful! Pitiful! Repeat it to any one you like. But, after all, it is of no consequence. (*Puts the letter in his pocket*.) Don't let this go any farther. (*The crowd come out of the tent*.)

Monsen. Where is our leader? Where is Mr. Stensgaard?

Voices. There he is! Three cheers for Stensgaard!

Lundestad. You forgot your hat, Mr. Stensgaard. (*Gives it him*.)

Aslaksen. Some punch, Mr. Stensgaard? We have just brewed a fresh bowl!

Stensgaard. No, thank you; no more.

Monsen. Then all who belong to the League will remember that we meet to-morrow at my house——

Stensgaard. To-morrow? No, we didn't say to-morrow.

Monsen. Yes, to-morrow; to draw up the circular which——

Stensgaard. I really can't very well come to-morrow. I will see you the next day, or the day after that. Well, good-night, gentlemen. I am very grateful to you for the way you have received me. Three cheers for the future! *

The Crowd. Hurrah! Let us escort him home!

Stensgaard. No, no, thank you. Really you mustn't——

Aslaksen. Oh yes, we must, sir!

Stensgaard. All right! Good-night, *Fjeldbo*. I suppose you are not coming with me?

Fjeldbo. No. But let me tell you this: What you said about Mr. Bratsberg——

Stensgaard. Hush, hush! It was too strong an expression. Consider it cancelled! Now, my worthy friends, if you really insist on escorting me, come along. I will lead the way.

Monsen. Your arm, Stensgaard!

Bastian. Strike up a chorus, some one! Something really patriotic!

The Crowd. Yes, yes—a chorus! (*The procession files out at the back to the right, singing a national song.*)

Fjeldbo (*to LUNDESTAD, who has stayed behind with him.*) He has a wonderful following.

Lundestad. Yes. But then, he is a wonderful leader.

Fjeldbo. And where are you going, Mr. Lundestad?!

Lundestad. I? I am going home to bed. (*Goes out.*)
FJELDBO remains alone, as the curtain falls.)

ACT II

(SCENE.—*The drawing-room at the BRATSBERGS' house, tastefully furnished; piano, flowers, etc. The entrance door is at the back. On the left a door leads to the dining-room; on the right are glass doors leading to the garden. It is evening. ASLAKSEN is standing at the entrance door. A MAID crosses the room, carrying a pair of fruit-dishes into the dining-room.*)

Maid. Don't you hear that they are still at dinner? You must call again later.

Aslaksen. Mayn't I wait?

Maid. Oh, if you like. Take a seat in the meantime. (*She goes into the dining-room. ASLAKSEN sits down by the door. A pause. Then FJELDBO comes in by the same door.*)

Fjeldbo. Hullo, Aslaksen! I didn't expect to find you here. (*The MAID comes out of the dining-room.*)

Maid. How late you are, doctor!

Fjeldbo. I was called out to a patient.

Maid. Mr. Bratsberg and Miss Thora have asked several times if you hadn't come.

Fjeldbo. Have they?

Maid. You really ought to go in, sir. Or shall I go and tell them that you——

Fjeldbo. No, no; never mind. I will get something to eat later on. For the present I will wait here.

Maid. Very well, sir. They have nearly finished. (*Goes out.*)

Aslaksen. Do you mean to say you can resist such a liberal table as they keep here—everything of the best?

Fjeldbo. It is true enough one is more likely to suffer from too many good things than too few, here.

Aslaksen. I don't agree with you.

Fjeldbo. Hm! But, tell me, are you waiting to see some one?

Aslaksen. Yes, I am waiting to see some one.

Fjeldbo. And are things going fairly well with you at home? How is your wife?

Aslaksen. Confined to her bed, as usual; coughing and wasting away.

Fjeldbo. And your boy?

Aslaksen. Oh, he will always be a cripple; I know that, of course. It is our fate; what's the good of talking about it?

Fjeldbo. Let me look at you, *Aslaksen*.

Aslaksen. Well, what do you want to see?

Fjeldbo. You have been drinking to-day.

Aslaksen. Yes—and yesterday too.

Fjeldbo. Yesterday? Oh, well—that was excusable. But to-day—

Aslaksen. And what of them, in there? (*Pointing to the dining-room.*) I imagine they are drinking too, aren't they?

Fjeldbo. Yes, my dear man, you are right in a way; but your circumstances are different from theirs, you know.

Aslaksen. I didn't choose my circumstances.

Fjeldbo. No, Providence chose them for you.

Aslaksen. That it didn't! Men have chosen them for me. Old Hejre chose them, when he took me out of the printing-shop and began to "educate" me. And Mr. Bratsberg chose them, when he ruined Mr. Hejre, with the result that I had to go back to the printing-shop.

Fjeldbo. You are talking against your own better conscience. Mr. Bratsberg never ruined Mr. Hejre; Mr. Hejre ruined himself.

Aslaksen. Well, if he did, how dare he ruin himself when he had undertaken such a responsibility towards me? Providence is partly to blame too, undoubtedly. What did it want to give me any abilities for? I might have

made use of them by becoming a respectable workman; but then this prating old fool comes along and——

Fjeldbo. You ought to be ashamed of talking like that. What Mr. Hejre did for you, he did with the best of intentions.

Aslaksen. A lot of use his good intentions have been! I have sat in that room, where they are sitting sipping their wine—sat there like one of themselves—in good clothes! The life suited me. I had read a lot, and craved for a share of all the good things that make life pleasant. Then—all of a sudden—smash! I was kicked out, like Christopher Sly out of the palace, and all my fine life was broken up into “pie,” as we say in the printing-shop.

Fjeldbo. After all, you weren’t so badly off as you might have been; you still had your trade to turn to, you know.

Aslaksen. Don’t talk nonsense. After an experience like that, one’s trade isn’t really one’s trade any longer. They took away my foothold and turned me out on to slippery ice—and now, after it all, I have got to put up with being slanged because I make a false step or two.

Fjeldbo. Well, I certainly don’t want to judge you harshly——

Aslaksen. You are right there. Good Lord, what a mix-up it all is! Old Hejre, and Providence, and Mr. Bratsberg, and Fate, and Circumstances—and myself into the bargain! I have sometimes thought of trying to disentangle the muddle and write a book about it; but it is such a confounded tangle——. (*Looks towards the dining-room door.*) Ah, I hear them leaving the table. (*The Guests come out of the dining-room, talking gaily, and walk out into the garden. Among them comes STENSGAARD, with THORA on his left arm and SELMA on his right. FJELDBO and ASLAKSEN stand by the entrance door.*)

Stensgaard. I am a stranger here, you know. You ladies must tell me where I am to take you.

Selma. Out into the fresh air. You must see the garden.

Stensgaard. That will be delightful. (*They go out through the glass doors to the right.*)

Fjeldbo. Good Lord, surely that was Stensgaard!

Aslaksen. Yes, it was him I wanted to see. I had been looking for him all over the town, when fortunately I

met Mr. Hejre——. (*HEJRE and ERIK BRATSBERG come out of the dining-room.*)

Hejre. Aha! Excellent sherry, upon my word. I haven't tasted any like it since I was in London.

Erik. It is a good wine, isn't it? Puts life into a man, doesn't it?

Hejre. Dear, dear! It really does one's heart good to see one's money so well expended!

Erik. How do you mean? (*Laughs.*) Oh, yes—I see! (*They go out into the garden.*)

Fjeldbo. Did you say you wanted to see Stensgaard?

Aslaksen. I do.

Fjeldbo. On business?

Aslaksen. Of course. The report of last night's doings for my paper——

Fjeldbo. I'll tell you what—you had better wait outside in the meantime——

Aslaksen. Out in the passage?

Fjeldbo. In the ante-room, yes. This is neither the time nor the place for——. I will try and manage it, if I can catch him alone for a minute. Do you hear?

Aslaksen. All right. I will bide my time. (*Goes out.* BRATSBERG, LUNDESTAD, RINGDAL and some other Guests come out of the dining-room.)

Bratsberg (*to* LUNDESTAD). Outrageous, you think? Well, I won't defend the *manner* of the speech; but there were some grains of gold in the *matter* of it, I assure you.

Lundestad. Oh, well—if you are satisfied with it, Mr. Bratsberg, I suppose I can manage to be.

Bratsberg. So I should think. Ah, here is the doctor! And with an empty stomach, I expect?

Fjeldbo. It doesn't feel anxious, Mr. Bratsberg! It is not far from here to the dining-room—and I feel pretty well at home in this house.

Bratsberg. Indeed? Do you? It is rather early days yet, isn't it——?

Fjeldbo. What do you mean? I hope I haven't offended you? You have given me leave yourself, you know, to——

Bratsberg. By all means do what I gave you leave to. Well, well—make yourself at home, and see if you can

find your way to the dining-room. (*Pats him on the shoulder and turns to LUNDESTAD.*) Now, here's a fellow you might call an adventurer and—and the other thing—I forget what you said——

Fjeldbo. Really, Mr. Bratsberg!

Lundestad. I assure you, I——

Bratsberg. Now, no quarrelling after dinner; it is bad for the digestion. I expect coffee will be in the garden. (*Goes out to the garden.*)

Lundestad (to *FJELDBO*). Have you noticed how oddly Mr. Bratsberg is behaving to-day?

Fjeldbo. I noticed it last night.

Lundestad. Just imagine, he will have it that I said Mr. Stensgaard was an adventurer and something else of that sort!

Fjeldbo. Well, suppose you did, Mr. Lundestad? What of it? But excuse me; I must go out and pay my respects to the ladies. (*Goes out to the right. RINGDAL has come in, and is putting out a card-table.*)

Lundestad. How does Mr. Stensgaard come to be here?

Ringdal. I wish you could tell me. He wasn't on the original list of guests.

Lundestad. Added afterwards, then? After the lecturing Mr. Bratsberg had to listen to last night——?

Ringdal. Yes; can you understand such a thing?

Lundestad. Understand it? Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Ringdal (*lowering his voice*). Do you mean that Mr. Bratsberg is afraid of him?

Lundestad. I mean that he is prudent. That's what I mean. (*They go out into the garden, as SELMA and STENSGAARD come in from it.*)

Selma. Yes, look—you can see from here. Over the tree-tops there, we can just see the church tower and the upper part of the town.

Stensgaard. So you can. I shouldn't have thought it.

Selma. Don't you think the view from up here is delightful?

Stensgaard. Everything is delightful here—the garden, and the view, and the sky, and the company. Perfectly charming! Do you stay here through the summer?

Selma. No, my husband and I don't; we come and go.

We have a lovely big house in town, much bigger than this. You must come and see it.

Stensgaard. And do your people live in town, too?

Selma. My people? Whom do you mean?

Stensgaard. Oh, I didn't know——

Selma. We fairy-tale princesses have no people.

Stensgaard. Fairy-tale princesses?

Selma. At the very most we only have a cruel step-mother——

Stensgaard. A witch, eh? And so you are a princess?

Selma. Yes, and rule over all the palaces which have been swallowed up by the sea—where you hear the sound of music at midnight. Dr. Fjeldbo says he thinks it must be a delightful profession; but, let me tell you——

Erik (coming in from the garden). Ah, here is my little wife at last!

Selma. Yes, I was telling Mr. Stensgaard the story of my life!

Erik. Oh, were you! And what part does your husband play in that?

Selma. Fairy prince, of course. (*To STENSGAARD.*) You know, a prince always comes and breaks the witch's spell, and then everything ends happily, and that is the end of the fairy-tale.

Stensgaard. Oh, it was much too short.

Selma. Yes, perhaps it was—in one way.

Erik (putting his arm round her). But there was a sequel to it, and, in that, the princess became a queen.

Selma. On the same terms as real princesses.

Erik. What terms?

Selma. Having to leave their own country and go to a strange one.

Erik. Will you have a cigar, Mr. Stensgaard?

Stensgaard. No, thank you, not just now. (*FJELDBO and THORA come in from the garden.*)

Selma. Well, Thora, my dear, I hope you are not feeling ill?

Thora. I? No.

Selma. I was afraid you must be. You seem to me to have been consulting the doctor very frequently, lately!

Thora. No, I am sure I——

Selma. Nonsense; let me feel your cheek. Why, it is burning! My dear doctor, do you think this high temperature will pass off?

Fjeldbo. Probably, in good time.

Thora. Too low a temperature is just as bad as——

Selma. What one wants is an even, moderate temperature—Erik thinks so, too. (*BRATSBERG comes in from the garden.*)

Bratsberg. The whole family engaged in a confidential chat? That is not exactly polite to our guests.

Thora. I will go at once, father dear——

Bratsberg. Ah, Mr. Stensgaard, it is you the ladies are paying court to, is it? I shall have to take on their job.

Thora (*in a low voice to FJELDBO*). Stay here! (*She goes out into the garden.*)

Erik (*offering SELMA his arm*). Will your Royal Highness condescend——?

Selma. Come along! (*They go out.*)

Bratsberg (*looking after them*). One can't tear those two away from one another.

Fjeldbo. It would be a wicked thing to try.

Bratsberg. Yes, Fortune favours fools! (*Calls out.*) Thora!—Thora! Keep an eye on Selma! Get her a shawl, and don't let her run about so much; she will catch a chill! We men are short-sighted, doctor. Do you know any cure for that complaint?

Fjeldbo. Yes; experience. A little of it makes one see much more clearly.

Bratsberg. Ah! Much obliged for your advice!—But, look here, if you consider yourself at home here, you ought to pay a little attention to your guests, it seems to me.

Fjeldbo. Certainly. Stensgaard, may I show you——?

Bratsberg. Oh no, my dear fellow! I see my old friend Hejre out there——

Fjeldbo. Yes, he considers himself at home here, too.

Bratsberg. Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I believe he does.

Fjeldbo. Well, he and I will join forces and see what we can do. (*Goes out into the garden.*)

Stensgaard. You mentioned Mr. Hejre, Mr. Bratsberg. I must say I was surprised to see him here.

Bratsberg. Were you? Mr. Hejre is an old schoolfellow

and playmate of mine. Besides, our lives have crossed at so many points——

Stensgaard. Yes, Mr. Hejre was telling us a good deal about that last night.

Bratsberg. Hm!

Stensgaard. If it had not been for that, I am sure I shouldn't have let my feelings run away with me the way they did. But he has a way of talking about people and things that—well, to put it plainly, he has a wicked tongue.

Bratsberg. My dear young friend, Mr. Hejre is my guest; you must please not to forget that. This is Liberty Hall—but with one restriction. There must be no unchivalrous talk about those I invite here.

Stensgaard. Oh, a thousand apologies——!

Bratsberg. Well, well—you belong to the younger generation, which is not so punctilious in those matters. And, with regard to Mr. Hejre, I doubt if you really know him. At all events, he is a man to whom I owe a very great deal.

Stensgaard. So I had understood. But I scarcely expected to hear you——

Bratsberg. I owe him what is the brightest spot in our family happiness, Mr. Stensgaard. I owe him my daughter-in-law. Yes, that is a fact. Mr. Hejre interested himself in her when she was a child. She was a little prodigy—used to give concerts when she was ten. I expect you have heard her name—Selma Sjöblom?

Stensgaard. Sjöblom? Yes, of course. Her father was a Swede.

Bratsberg. Yes, a music-teacher. That profession, as you know, is not as a rule a very lucrative one; and in many ways not very desirable for——. Well, Mr. Hejre has always taken a pleasure in discovering new talent; he interested himself in the child, and had her sent to Berlin; and, when her father was dead and Mr. Hejre's circumstances considerably altered, she came back to Christiania, where naturally she was soon taken up by the best people. And that was how she and my son came to meet.

Stensgaard. Well, certainly, in that way Mr. Hejre does seem to have been an instrument of——

Bratsberg. It is the way one thing hangs on another in this life. We are all instruments, every one of us—you as much as the rest—and, I should say, an instrument of destruction——

Stensgaard. Oh, Mr. Bratsberg, please! I feel thoroughly ashamed——

Bratsberg. Ashamed?

Stensgaard. Yes, it was most unseemly of me——

Bratsberg. Oh, there may have been points here and there to object to in the manner of your speech; but the matter was good. Now, I want to make a request. In future, if you have something on your mind, come to me; talk it over with me frankly, trustfully and straightforwardly. We all want to do our best; and certainly it is my duty——

Stensgaard. You really want me to talk quite frankly to you?

Bratsberg. Of course I do. Do you suppose I haven't noticed for a long time that the trend affairs have taken here is in some ways far from desirable? But what could I do? In the late king's time I lived for the most part in Stockholm. I am an old man now; and, besides that, I haven't the disposition of a reformer, nor the inclination to mix myself up in these popular movements. You, on the contrary, Mr. Stensgaard, have all the qualifications for doing that; so let us pull together.

Stensgaard. Thank you, Mr. Bratsberg! Thank you, thank you! (*RINGDAL and HEJRE come in from the garden.*)

Ringdal (to HEJRE). I tell you it must have been a misunderstanding.

Hejre. Do you think so? It's a funny thing if I can't believe my own ears!

Bratsberg. Any news, Hejre?

Hejre. No, except that Lundestad is on the high road to joining the Monsen faction.

Bratsberg. Oh, come, you are joking!

Hejre. I beg your pardon; I have it from his own lips. Lundestad is proposing to retire into private life on account of ill-health—so one may infer the rest.

Stensgaard. And you have that from his own lips?

Hejre. I have. He announced the important news to a group of listeners outside. Ha, ha, ha!

Bratsberg. But, my dear Ringdal, how can this mean what Hejre says?

Hejre. Oh, it isn't difficult to make an inference.

Bratsberg. To make a reliable inference, I think it is. But it will be an important matter for the district. Come with me, Ringdal; we certainly must go and have it out with him. (*He and RINGDAL go into the garden. FJELDBO comes in a moment later.*)

Fjeldbo. Has Mr. Bratsberg gone out?

Hejre. Hush! The wiseacres are in council! Great news, doctor! Lundestad is going to resign his seat in parliament.

Fjeldbo. Impossible!

Stensgaard. Yes, can you understand it?

Hejre. Oh, there is a fine rumpus brewing. It is the League of Youth beginning to work, Mr. Stensgaard! Do you know what you ought to call that society? I will tell you later.

Stensgaard. Do you really believe it is our League that——?

Hejre. I am sure there is no doubt of it. And I have no doubt we shall have the pleasure of sending our dear Mr. Monsen into parliament. I wish he were well on his way there already. I would gladly give him a lift on the road——. But never mind about that. Ha, ha!

Stensgaard. But tell me, Fjeldbo—what do you make of it all?

Fjeldbo. There are other things I find it harder to understand. How do you come to be here?

Stensgaard. I? In the same way as the others, of course. I was invited.

Fjeldbo. Invited last night, I hear — after your speech——

Stensgaard. Well?

Fjeldbo. But how could you accept the invitation?

Stensgaard. What the devil was I to do? I couldn't insult the excellent man.

Fjeldbo. Really! Couldn't you? You could in your speech, though.

Stensgaard. Nonsense! In my speech it was principles I attacked, not individuals.

Fjeldbo. And how do you explain Mr. Bratsberg's invitation?

Stensgaard. My dear chap, there is only one explanation possible.

Fjeldbo. That he is afraid of you?

Stensgaard. I shall certainly give him no cause to be! He is an honourable man.

Fjeldbo. He is.

Stensgaard. And isn't it rather touching that the old fellow should take it the way he has? How charming Miss Bratsberg looked when she brought his letter!

Fjeldbo. But tell me—I suppose there has been nothing said here about yesterday's scene?

Stensgaard. Far from it; they are too well-bred to take any notice of such a thing. But it gives me an uneasy conscience. I must make an apology later on.

Fjeldbo. No, no—I earnestly advise you not to do that! You don't know Mr. Bratsberg——

Stensgaard. Very well; then my actions shall speak for me.

Fjeldbo. You don't mean to break with the Monsen lot, do you?

Stensgaard. I shall make an expiation of some sort. I have my League, you know; it is a power already, as you see.

Fjeldbo. Yes. But there is one thing, while I remember it—your affection for Miss Monsen. I advised you yesterday to think seriously about that——

Stensgaard. Yes, yes—we will talk about that some other time——

Fjeldbo. No, listen. I have thought it over more fully. You must put that idea out of your head.

Stensgaard. Yes, I believe you are right there. If a man marries into a family of underbred people, he, so to speak, marries the whole family.

Fjeldbo. Yes; and both on that account and on others——

Stensgaard. Monsen is an ill-bred fellow. I see that now.

Fjeldbo. He is not a well-bred man, certainly.

Stensgaard. That he certainly is not! He goes about speaking ill of people whom he receives in his house; that is ungentlemanly. And his house stinks of bad tobacco in every room——

Fjeldbo. My dear friend—how was it you never noticed that stink of tobacco till now?

Stensgaard. It is the result of contrast. I made a false step as soon as ever I came here, by letting myself fall into the clutches of party wire-pullers who talked me nearly silly. I won't have any more of it! I don't intend to wear myself out working for self-interested people or for boors and fools.

Fjeldbo. What are you going to use your League for, then?

Stensgaard. The League is all right as it is. It is founded on a fairly broad basis. That is to say, it was formed to oppose pernicious influences—and I am just beginning to see from which quarter those influences come.

Fjeldbo. But do you think the "Youth" will see things in the same light?

Stensgaard. They *shall*. I certainly have the right to expect that fellows like that will be guided by my superior judgment.

Fjeldbo. But suppose they won't?

Stensgaard. Then they can go their own way; I shan't need them any longer. Do you propose that I should be wilfully blind, and, for the sake of some miserable scruple about consistency, allow my future to slip off the right lines, and so never attain my object?

Fjeldbo. What object?

Stensgaard. A life suitable to my capabilities—a life where I can pursue all my interests to the full.

Fjeldbo. No vague phrases! What object do you mean?

Stensgaard. Well, I can tell *you* at all events. My object is, some day, to get into parliament—perhaps into the Cabinet; also to make a good marriage, with a member of a rich and respected family.

Fjeldbo. I see. And so your idea is, by means of Mr. Bratsberg's connections, to——

Stensgaard. My idea is to do it by means of my own abilities! I must and shall accomplish it; and without

any outside help. It is all a long way off, I dare say. Never mind that. Till then, I mean to enjoy my life in these charming surroundings——

Fjeldbo. Here?

Stensgaard. Yes, here! Here where there is refinement, and where life has some charm; where the very carpets look as if they were only meant to be trodden on by the daintiest shoes; where the chairs are soft, and fair ladies sit in them; where the conversation is easy and graceful, like a ball tossed lightly from hand to hand; where no sudden, awkward silences are caused by clumsy *gaucheries*. *Fjeldbo*, I never realised what breeding meant before. We really *have* an aristocracy¹—a little circle apart—an aristocracy of good breeding; and I mean to belong to it. Don't you feel the refining influence of this place yourself? Wealth here has quite a different appearance. When I think of Monsen's wealth I picture it to myself in the shape of stacks of greasy notes, and bundles of soiled and dirty bonds; whereas here—here it is gleaming silver! And it is just the same with people. Look at Mr. Bratsberg—what a fine, courteous old fellow!

Fjeldbo. That he is.

Stensgaard. And his son—clear-headed, straightforward and capable!

Fjeldbo. Quite true.

Stensgaard. And the daughter-in-law, my boy! She is a jewel! Such a striking individuality!

Fjeldbo. So has Thora—Miss Bratsberg—too.

Stensgaard. Oh, yes; but I think she is less striking.

Fjeldbo. Ah, you don't know her. You don't know how much there is in that quiet steadfast disposition of hers.

Stensgaard. Yes, but the daughter-in-law is so frank—almost uncompromising—in her manner; and so appreciative, so winning——

Fjeldbo. I really believe you have fallen in love with her.

Stensgaard. With a married woman? Are you mad? What would that lead to?—No, but I *have* fallen in love, and am quite aware of it. You are quite right, there are great depths in that quiet, steadfast disposition.

¹ There is no Norwegian aristocracy in the ordinary sense of the word.

Fjeldbo. Whose disposition?

Stensgaard. Miss Bratsberg's, of course.

Fjeldbo. Do you mean to say——? Surely you don't really mean——?

Stensgaard. As sure as I am alive, I do!

Fjeldbo. But I can assure you it is not the slightest use——

Stensgaard. Oho! Will-power is a very strong weapon, my friend! We shall see whether it is no use.

Fjeldbo. But this is simply the wildest recklessness! Yesterday it was Ragna Monsen——

Stensgaard. Yes, that was over-hasty, I admit; and you warned me off that yourself, you know——

Fjeldbo. I warned you most precisely not to think of any of them.

Stensgaard. Oh! Perhaps you are intending to propose to one of them yourself?

Fjeldbo. I? No, I assure you——

Stensgaard. Oh, if it had been so, it wouldn't have prevented me. If any one tries to stand in my way, or to thwart my plans for my future, I shall show him no consideration.

Fjeldbo. Take care I don't say the same!

Stensgaard. You? What right have you to pose as guardian and champion of the Bratsberg family?

Fjeldbo. A friend's right, at all events.

Stensgaard. Pooh! You don't catch me with any such nonsense. You are merely self-interested — that's all! It qualifies your petty vanity to play the tame cat in this house; so I shall keep my distance.

Fjeldbo. That is the best thing you can do. Your footing here is a very precarious one.

Stensgaard. Is it really! Thank you very much! I know how to secure my footing, then.

Fjeldbo. Try! But I prophesy that it will give way under you.

Stensgaard. Ho, ho! You have some cards up your sleeve, have you? It is just as well you have shown your true colours. You are my enemy; the only one I have here.

Fjeldbo. That I am not!

Stensgaard You are! You always have been, since we were at school. See how every one appreciates me here, although I am a stranger to them. You, on the other hand, who know me, have never appreciated me. That's the worst of you; you never can appreciate any one. You used to go about in Christiania idling at tea-parties, and spent your existence in silly small-talk. Such a life takes its revenge on one, let me tell you! The sense that there is something of more importance in life—the sense of things that elevate a man—gets blunted by such an existence as that, until a man gets into such a state that he is good for nothing.

Fjeldbo. Am I good for nothing?

Stensgaard. Have you ever been able to appreciate me?

Fjeldbo. What is there in you to appreciate?

Stensgaard. My strength of will, if nothing else. All the others appreciate that—even the rabble at that fête yesterday, not to mention Mr. Bratsberg and his family——

Fjeldbo. And Mr. Monsen and his! By the same token, there is some one outside here waiting to see you.

Stensgaard. Who?

Fjeldbo (*going to the door at the back*). Some one who appreciates you. (*Opens the door and calls*.) Aslaksen come in!

Stensgaard. Aslaksen?

Aslaksen (*coming in*). Well, at last!

Fjeldbo. Au revoir! I won't come between two friends. (*Goes out into the garden*.)

Stensgaard. What the devil do you want here?

Aslaksen. I really must speak to you. You promised me last night a report of the founding of the League, and——

Stensgaard. You can't have it. That must wait till another time.

Aslaksen. Impossible, Mr. Stensgaard; my paper must come out to-morrow morning——

Stensgaard. Fiddlesticks! The whole thing must be altered. Matters have entered upon a new stage, and the conditions are different. What I said about Mr. Bratsberg must be edited drastically before it can be used.

Aslaksen. But that bit is in type already.

Stensgaard. Cancel it, then.

Aslaksen. Cancel it?

Stensgaard. Yes, I can't have it appear as it is. Why are you looking at me like that? Do you suppose I don't know how to manage the League's affairs?

Aslaksen. Of course you do; but you must let me tell you——

Stensgaard. Don't begin raising objections, Aslaksen; understand that I won't allow it.

Aslaksen. Mr. Stensgaard, do you know that it is just a toss-up whether I lose the bare crust of bread I earn?—and that it is your fault?

Stensgaard. No, I certainly don't.

Aslaksen. Well, it is true. In the winter, before you came here, my paper was in a flourishing condition. I edited it myself, I may tell you, and I edited it on a principle.

Stensgaard. You did?

Aslaksen. Yes, I did! I said to myself: "It is the support of the general public that a paper needs; but the general public is the inferior public—that is a result of our local conditions; and the inferior public will have an inferior paper. And I edited the paper on those lines——"

Stensgaard. On inferior lines! Yes, that is undeniable.

Aslaksen. Quite so; and I relied on that. Then you come bringing ideas into the district, and the paper has had to change its character a bit in consequence; that has lost me a number of subscribers, including Mr. Lundestad and all his friends; and those I have left don't pay their subscriptions readily——

Stensgaard. Yes, but the tone of your paper has improved.

Aslaksen. But I can't make a living out of a high-toned paper! We ought to be working up an agitation now. Things ought to be going as you promised yesterday—our leading men pilloried, and all that sort of thing; then I should be able to fill my paper with good sensational stuff. And then you go and fail me——

Stensgaard. Ha, ha! You mean that I ought to provide you with sensations? No, thank you, my good man!

Aslaksen. Mr. Stensgaard, don't drive me into a corner, or things may get serious.

Stensgaard. What do you mean?

Aslaksen. I mean that I may have to try another way of making my paper pay. Heaven knows I shan't do that willingly! Before you came I made an honest livelihood out of reports of "horrible accidents" and suicides, and harmless things of that sort, even though some of them had never happened. But now you have turned everything topsy-turvy; it is the case of the new broom—

Stensgaard. Yes, and let me tell you this: if you dare to act on your own—if you dare to go a step beyond my instructions, and try to stir up an agitation here on behalf of your dirty little interests—I shall find another printer and start a new paper. There will be no difficulty about finding the capital; and your rag of a paper will be dead within a fortnight.

Aslaksen (paling). You surely wouldn't do that!

Stensgaard. Indeed I would; and I shall edit the paper in such a way that it will get hold of the general public.

Aslaksen. Then I shall go to Mr. Bratsberg—

Stensgaard. You? What do you think you are going to get out of him?

Aslaksen. What do *you* think you are going to get out of him? Do you think I don't know why he invited you here? It is because he is afraid of you and what you may do; and you are taking advantage of that. But if he is afraid of what you may do, he certainly is also afraid of what I may print; and *I* mean to take advantage of *that*!

Stensgaard. Do you mean to say you would dare? You! A wretched creature like you——!

Aslaksen. Yes, and I will tell you how. If I don't print that speech of yours, Mr. Bratsberg has got to pay me for not printing it.

Stensgaard. You dare to try such a thing! Just you dare! Why, man, you are drunk——!

Aslaksen. Not more than is reasonable. But I can be as strong as a lion if any one tries to take the bread out of my mouth. You can't realise my circumstances at home; a bedridden wife, a crippled child——

Stensgaard. Be off with you! I don't want to have my ears soiled with your filthy whining! What do I care about your played-out wife and misshapen children? If you dare

to oppose me or stand in my way in the slightest degree, you will find yourself in the workhouse before the year is out!

Aslaksen. I will wait another day——

Stensgaard. Ah, now you are beginning to come to your senses.

Aslaksen. I will print an extra issue, and inform my subscribers that as the editor is suffering from indisposition consequent on the recent fête——

Stensgaard. Yes, yes; do that. Later on I daresay you and I will be able to come to some arrangement.

Aslaksen. I hope we may. Mr. Stensgaard, remember this: my paper is my ewe-lamb! (*Goes out at the back. A moment later LUNDESTAD comes in from the garden.*)

Lundestad. Well, Mr. Stensgaard?

Stensgaard. Well, Mr. Lundestad?

Lundestad. All alone here? If it is quite convenient I should like to have a little talk with you.

Stensgaard. By all means.

Lundestad. In the first place, let me tell you that if you have heard that I have said anything derogatory about you, you mustn't believe it.

Stensgaard. About me? What could you have said?

Lundestad. Nothing, I assure you. But there are such a lot of folk about here with nothing better to do than invent lying scandal.

Stensgaard. Certainly, taking things all round, you and I got into rather a false position with regard to each other.

Lundestad. It is a perfectly natural position, Mr. Stensgaard. It is the attitude of the old to the new. It is always so.

Stensgaard. Oh, come, Mr. Lundestad—you are not so old as all that!

Lundestad. Oh yes, I am getting old. I have sat in parliament now for thirty years; and I think it is about time to take a rest.

Stensgaard. Take a rest?

Lundestad. Times are changing, you see. New problems are cropping up, and new forces are needed to tackle them.

Stensgaard. Tell me frankly, Mr. Lundestad—are you proposing to retire in favour of Monsen?

Lundestad. Monsen? No, I won't retire in favour of Monsen.

Stensgaard. But then I don't understand——

Lundestad. Suppose I did retire in Monsen's favour; do you think he would have any prospect of being elected?

Stensgaard. It is difficult to say. Of course the preliminary¹ elections come on the day after to-morrow, and public opinion has been by no means sufficiently worked; still——

Lundestad. I don't believe it is likely. Neither my party nor Mr. Bratsberg's will vote for him. When I say "my party," you mustn't take me literally; I mean the men of property, the old families which live on the estates where they were bred and born. They won't have anything to do with Monsen. He is an interloper; and no one really knows anything about the man or his affairs. And I fancy he has had to lay about him pretty freely with his axe to get a footing here—had to cut down family trees as well as forest-trees, so to speak.

Stensgaard. Yes, but then if you think there is no prospect——

Lundestad. Hm! You know, taking you all round, you are an unusually gifted man, Mr. Stensgaard. Heaven has equipped you generously. But there is one little thing heaven ought to have added to your other gifts.

Stensgaard. And that is?

Lundestad. Tell me—why do you never think of yourself? Why have you no spark of ambition?

Stensgaard. Ambition? I?

Lundestad. Why are you wasting your talents like this on other people's behalf? To speak plainly—why don't you think of parliament yourself?

Stensgaard. I? You don't mean it seriously.

Lundestad. You have qualified for a vote here, I believe? If you don't make use of your opportunity now, some one else will get in before you; and when he has got firmly into the saddle, it will not be so easy to turn him out.

¹ In Norway, members of parliament are not elected directly, but by a "college of electors" nominated by the voters in a preliminary election. The electors afterwards meet in each county and choose the number of members fixed by law.

Stensgaard. But do you really mean what you say, Mr. Lundestad?

Lundestad. We don't seem to get any farther. Of course, if you are unwilling; then——

Stensgaard. Unwilling? It is only fair that I should tell you that I am by no means so devoid of ambition as you think. But do you really suppose I should stand any chance?

Lundestad. Of course you would. I would do my best for you, and I am sure Mr. Bratsberg would do the same; he knows what a good speaker you are. You have the young men on your side, and——

Stensgaard. Mr. Lundestad, you are a real friend!

Lundestad. Think what that means, then. If I were your friend, you would be willing to take the burden off my shoulders; yours are younger, and can so easily bear it.

Stensgaard. Do what you like with me in that respect. I will not disappoint you.

Lundestad. Then you are not unwilling——?

Stensgaard. Here is my hand on it!

Lundestad. Thank you! Believe me, Mr. Stensgaard, you will never repent it. But now we must go cautiously to work. We must see that we are both elected to the College of Electors—I, so that I may propose you as my successor and heckle you a little at our meetings; and you, so that you may be able to make a declaration of your opinions——

Stensgaard. Oh, if we get as far as that, we shall be safe. I know you are a power at the College of Electors' meetings.

Lundestad. There is a limit to my power. Of course you must use your gifts of oratory—explain away all the awkward corners and rough edges——

Stensgaard. You don't think I ought to break with my party, I suppose?

Lundestad. Consider the matter dispassionately for a moment. Here we have two parties; what does that mean? It means that on the one hand we have certain people or families that are in enjoyment of the ordinary advantages of citizens—I mean property, independence,

and a share of power. That is the party I belong to. And on the other hand, we have the crowd of younger men, who would very much like to acquire these advantages. That is your party. But that party will quite naturally and straightforwardly withdraw, if you now make yourself possessed of a share of power and thereby establish yourself here securely as a man of property—for that is a necessary condition, you know, Mr. Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. Yes, I quite believe it is. But there is not much time; a position like that is not acquired by the wave of a hand.

Lundestad. No, indeed it isn't; but perhaps you could do something for yourself in the way of finding an opening——

Stensgaard. An opening?

Lundestad. Would you have any great objection, Mr. Stensgaard, to think of a good marriage? There are some rich heiresses in this neighbourhood. A man like you, with a future before him—a man that can count on making sure of the highest civic posts—believe me, no one will reject you, if you play your cards properly.

Stensgaard. Then, for heaven's sake, help me to play them! You open a tremendous prospect before me! You make me see great visions!—all that I have hoped for and coveted; to go out amongst people as a free man; all that I have dreamed of, that used to seem so far off, but now seems so vividly close to me——!

Lundestad. Yes, we must be wide awake, Mr. Stensgaard. Your ambition is already afoot, I can see. That is good. The rest will come of itself.—Well, thank you, so far at all events! I shall never forget that you were willing to take the burden of power off my old shoulders! (*The guests and members of the family come in gradually from the garden. Two maids bring more lamps, and hand round refreshments during the following dialogue. SELMA goes towards the piano, which is at the back on the left.*)

Selma. Mr. Stensgaard, you must join us. We are going to play Forfeits.

Stensgaard. With pleasure. I shall be delighted. (*Goes up to her, and talks to her, sitting down beside her.*)

Erik (in a low voice, to HEJRE). What on earth is this

tale of my father's, Mr. Hejre? What sort of a speech was it that Mr. Stensgaard made up here last night?

Hejre. Ho, ho! Don't you know?

Erik. No. We had been at a dinner and dance at the club. But my father says that Mr. Stensgaard has absolutely broken with the Monsen lot, and spoke so amazingly rudely about Monsen himself——

Hejre. About Monsen? No, you are certainly misinformed there——

Erik. There was such a crowd round him when we came up, that I couldn't hear him properly; but I certainly heard him distinctly say——

Hejre. Never mind about that! Wait till the morning, and you will be able to read the whole story at breakfast in Aslaksen's paper. (*Moves away from him.*)

Bratsberg (to LUNDESTAD). Well, my dear Lundestad, are you still full of that ridiculous idea?

Lundestad. It isn't a ridiculous idea, Mr. Bratsberg. When a man is in danger of being superseded, his best way is to retire voluntarily.

Bratsberg. That is mere idle talk! Who do you suppose is going to supersede you?

Lundestad. Hm! I am an old weather-prophet, and I smell changes in the air here. Well, I have found my substitute, at all events. Mr. Stensgaard is willing——

Bratsberg. Mr. Stensgaard?

Lundestad. Yes, wasn't that what you meant? I thought you were giving me the hint when you said that one ought to support that chap and make common cause with him.

Bratsberg. I meant in his opposition to all that mass of corruption that centres round Monsen.

Lundestad. But what made you so sure that he would break with that gang?

Bratsberg. My dear fellow, surely that was obvious last night?

Lundestad. Last night?

Bratsberg. Yes, when he talked about Monsen's pernicious influence in these parts.

Lundestad (with open mouth). About Monsen——?

Bratsberg. Certainly; when he was up on the table——

Lundestad. When he was up on the table——yes?

Bratsberg. He was abominably rude; called him a money-grubber, and a basilisk, or a tape-worm, or something of that sort. Ha, ha!—it was really very amusing to hear.

Lundestad. It was amusing to hear, was it?

Bratsberg. Yes. I won't deny, Lundestad, that I envy the common people the enjoyment they get from that sort of thing. But now we must support him; although after such a bloodthirsty attack——

Lundestad. As yesterday's, you mean.

Bratsberg. Of course.

Lundestad. When he was up on the table?

Bratsberg. When he was up on the table.

Lundestad. An attack on Monsen?

Bratsberg. Yes, on Monsen and his crew. Naturally, they will try and take their revenge now; and one can't blame them if they do.

Lundestad (decisively). We must support Mr. Stensgaard—that is clear!

Thora. Father, dear—you must come and play.

Bratsberg. Oh, nonsense, my dear——

Thora. Yes, you must. Selma wants you to.

Bratsberg. Does she? Well, I suppose I must humour her. (*Lowers his voice as he moves away with THORA.*) It is very distressing, you know, my dear, but Mr. Lundestad is really getting quite stupid. Can you believe it, he hadn't in the least understood what Mr. Stensgaard——

Thora. Oh, come along! We want to begin our game! (*Pulls him into the circle where the game is in full cry among the young people.*)

Erik (calling to HEJRE). Mr. Hejre, you are appointed Forfeit Judge.

Hejre. Ho, ho! It is the first appointment I have ever had in my life, I declare!

Stensgaard. It is on account of your familiarity with law-courts, Mr. Hejre!

Hejre. Oh, my dear young friends, it would give me the greatest pleasure to sentence you all—but never mind about that!

Stensgaard (stealing up to LUNDESTAD, who is standing in the foreground on the left). You were talking to Mr.

Bratsberg. What were you talking about? Anything about me?

Lundestad. Unfortunately—yes. About what happened here last night.

Stensgaard (*writhing*). Damnation!

Lundestad. He said he thought you had been abominably rude.

Stensgaard. Do you suppose I don't realise that?

Lundestad. You might make up for it now.

Erik (*calling out*). Mr. Stensgaard, it is your turn!

Stensgaard. I am coming! (*Hurriedly, to LUNDESTAD.*) Make up for it? How?

Lundestad. Find some opportunity of making Mr. Bratsberg an apology.

Stensgaard. By Jove, I will.

Selma. Be quick! Be quick!

Stensgaard. I am coming, Mrs. Bratsberg! Here I am! (*The game goes on amid merry laughter. Some of the older folk are playing cards on the right. LUNDESTAD sits down on the left, and HEJRE near him.*)

Hejre. The puppy says I am familiar with law-courts!

Lundestad. He has rather a dangerous tongue, I must admit.

Hejre. And because of that the whole family go fawning on him. Ha, ha! It is pitiable to see how afraid they all are of him.

Lundestad. No, you are wrong there, Mr. Hejre. Mr. Bratsberg is not afraid of him.

Hejre. Isn't he? Do you think I am blind, my dear sir?

Lundestad. No, but—look here, can you keep a secret? You can? Well, I will tell you the real state of affairs. Mr. Bratsberg thinks it was Monsen that Stensgaard was talking about yesterday.

Hejre. Monsen? Rubbish!

Lundestad. On my honour, it's true! Either Ringdal or Miss Thora has put the idea in his head—

Hejre. And then he goes and asks him to a big dinner-party! Well, upon my soul, it is extraordinary! No, I must warn you, I can't keep *that* a secret!

Lundestad. Hush, hush! Remember your promise.

Mr. Bratsberg is an old schoolfellow of yours, you know; and even if he has treated you a little harshly——

Hejre. Ha, ha! I will pay him back with interest——

Lundestad. Mind what you are doing! He is powerful. It is dangerous to tease lions.

Hejre. Bratsberg a lion? Pooh! He is stupid, my dear fellow; I am not. What tricks, what sarcasms, what nice warm blisters for him I see in this, when once I get our big lawsuit going!

Selma (calling out). Mr. Judge, what forfeit shall he pay who owns this pretty thing?

Erik (aside to HEJRE). It is Stensgaard's! Suggest something ridiculous.

Hejre. What forfeit? Ha, ha! Let me see. He might, for instance—but never mind that! He shall make a speech!

Selma. It is Mr. Stensgaard's forfeit.

Stensgaard. Oh, no—let me off! I did quite badly enough in that line last night.

Bratsberg. You did excellently, Mr. Stensgaard, and I flatter myself I know something about speech-making.

Lundestad (to HEJRE). Good Lord! I hope he won't go and put his foot in it!

Hejre. Put his foot in it? Ha, ha! You are a crafty one! A delightful idea! (*In a low voice, to STENSGAARD.*) If you did make a mess of it yesterday, you can put things right to-day.

Stensgaard (struck by a sudden idea). Lundestad, here is my opportunity!

Lundestad (evasively). Play your cards carefully, then. *Looks for his hat, and edges gradually towards the door.*

Stensgaard. Yes, I will make a speech!

The Ladies. Bravo! Bravo!

Stensgaard. Fill your glasses for a toast, ladies and gentlemen! I am going to begin my speech by telling you a fairy-tale; because I feel the spirit of fairy-tales at work in this little gathering.

Bratsberg. Hear, hear! (*BRATSBERG goes to the side table and takes a glass from it. RINGDAL, FJELDBO, and some other men come in from the garden.*)

Stensgaard. It was springtime; and a young cuckoo

came flying over the mountain-side. The cuckoo is a chevalier of fortune; and there was a great gathering of birds on the meadows beneath him. Both wild birds and tame were flocking to it. They came tripping from the poultry-yards, waddling along from the duck-ponds. Down from Storli (where Mr. Monsen lives) there swept an old grouse with his low, showy flight, settled and preened his feathers, shook out his wings and made himself look bigger than he was; and crowed all the time, "Squawk, squawk, squawk," as much as to say, "I am the boss from Storli, I am!"

Bratsberg. Splendid! Go on!

Stensgaard. And there was also an old woodpecker. He bustled along up and down the tree-trunks, bored into them with his sharp beak, picked out the grubs and all sorts of tit-bits; and you heard all over the place, "Tick, tick, tick," that was the woodpecker——

Erik. Excuse me, but wasn't he a stork or a heron¹——

Hejre. Never mind about that!

Stensgaard. It was the old woodpecker. Then suddenly all the company of birds woke up, because they had found some one to cackle abuse of. They clustered together and cackled in chorus, until at last the young cuckoo began to join in the cackling——

Fjeldbo (*aside*). For God's sake, man, shut up!

Stensgaard. The subject of all their abuse was an eagle, that perched in solitary silence on the steep mountain-side. They were all of one mind about him. "He is a bugbear to the whole neighbourhood," croaked an old raven. But the eagle swooped down in slanting flight, caught hold of the cuckoo, and carried him up to the heights. The cuckoo's heart was captured! From up there this adventurer-bird had a magnificent wide view over all the mean things beneath him. There was peace and sunshine up there. There he learnt to see the rabble from the duck-ponds and the litter of the meadows in their true perspective——

Fjeldbo (*aloud*). Amen, amen! And then the band played!

¹ Erik is punning on the fact that the name *Hejre* in Norwegian means "Heron."

Bratsberg. Hush! Don't interrupt him!

Stensgaard. Mr. Bratsberg, that is the end of my fairy-tale; and now I come forward before all our friends here and ask your forgiveness for what I said last night.

Bratsberg (recoiling). Ask me—?

Stensgaard. Let me thank you for the way you took your revenge for my ill-considered words. From to-day every weapon in my armoury is at your service. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to drink the health of the eagle on the mountain-top—the health of our host, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg (feeling for the support of the table). Thank you, Mr. Stensgaard.

The Guests (most of them painfully embarrassed). Mr. Bratsberg! Your health, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. Thank you! Thank you! (*Aside to THORA.*) Thora!

Thora. Father!

Bratsberg (to FJELDBO). Ah, doctor, doctor—what have you done!

Stensgaard (with his glass in his hand, his face beaming with happiness). And now let us get on with our game! Hi, Fjeldbo! You must join us—join this League of Youth. It's a grand game!

Hejri (in the foreground on the left). It is a grand game, upon my word! (*LUNDESTAD disappears through the door at the back. Curtain.*)

ACT III

(SCENE.—Another sitting-room at the BRATSBERGS'. On the left a door to BRATSBERG'S office: further back a door to another room. To the right a door leading to RINGDAL'S office; further forward on the same side, a window. THORA is sitting on a sofa on the left, crying. BRATSBERG is walking restlessly up and down.)

Bratsberg. Yes, this is the epilogue—tears and lamentations.

Thora. I wish to goodness we had never set eyes on that man!

Bratsberg. What man?

Thora. That dreadful Stensgaard, of course.

Bratsberg. Wouldn't it be more reasonable to say, "I wish to goodness we had never set eyes on that horrible Dr. Fjeldbo"?

Thora. Dr. Fjeldbo?

Bratsberg. Yes, Fjeldbo, Fjeldbo! Wasn't it his lying that led me to——?

Thora. No, father dear—it was me.

Bratsberg. You? Then it was both of you! You conspired together, behind my back! That's a nice thing!

Thora. Oh, father, if you only knew——

Bratsberg. I know quite enough. More than enough—much more! (FJELDBO comes in at the back.)

Fjeldbo. Good-morning, Mr. Bratsberg. Good-morning, Miss Bratsberg.

Bratsberg (still pacing up and down). Oh, it's you, is it?—you bird of ill omen!

Fjeldbo. It certainly was a most unfortunate thing to happen.

Bratsberg (looking out of the window). You don't mean it!

Fjeldbo. I thought you must have noticed how closely I was watching Stensgaard the whole time. Unluckily, when I heard they were going to play Forfeits I thought there was no danger——

Bratsberg (stamping his foot). To be made a laughing-stock of by such a windbag! And what do you suppose

my guests thought of me? Of course they would think I had been a pitiable enough creature to try and buy off that fellow, that—that—what Lundestad called him, you know!

Fjeldbo. Yes, but——

Thora (to FJELDBO). Don't say anything!

Bratsberg (after a short pause, turning to FJELDBO). Tell me honestly, doctor—am I really stupider than most people?

Fjeldbo. How can you ask, Mr. Bratsberg?

Bratsberg. Then how on earth was it that I probably was the only one who didn't understand that his infernal speech was aimed at me?

Fjeldbo. Shall I tell you?

Bratsberg. Yes, please do.

Fjeldbo. It was because you see your position in these parts through different eyes from others.

Bratsberg. I see it in the same light as my dear father did. No one would have dared to make such accusations about him.

Fjeldbo. But your father died more than thirty years ago.

Bratsberg. That is true. Much water has flowed under the bridge here since then. And I daresay, after all, it is my own fault. I have mixed too familiarly with these people; and the result is that I find myself treated with no more consideration than they treat Lundestad with!

Fjeldbo. Well, frankly, I don't see any discredit in that.

Bratsberg. Oh, you know quite well what I mean. Of course, I don't set any store by mere social distinctions—rank, and all that sort of thing. But what I do respect, and what I expect others to respect, is the integrity of character that has been the pride of my family for generations. What I mean is that a man like Lundestad, when he goes in for public life, can't hope to escape altogether from imputations on his character and conduct. Therefore Lundestad must expect to have some mud thrown at him. But they ought to let me alone; I stand outside all their party squabbles.

Fjeldbo. Not so entirely, Mr. Bratsberg. You were very pleased, at all events, as long as you thought it was Monsen that was being attacked.

Bratsberg. Don't breathe that fellow's name! It is he that has lowered the whole moral tone of the neighbourhood. Unhappily, he has turned my son's head too!

Thora. Erik?

Fjeldbo. Your son?

Bratsberg. Yes. What does he want to go and mix himself up with trade for? It won't do him any good.

Fjeldbo. But, my dear Mr. Bratsberg, he must live, you know——

Bratsberg. Oh, if he were careful, he could live quite well on the money his mother left him.

Fjeldbo. Yes, perhaps he could live *on* that; but what has he to live *for*?

Bratsberg. For? Well, if he absolutely must have something to live for, he is a qualified lawyer; he might surely live for his profession.

Fjeldbo. No, he couldn't, with a nature like his. He couldn't reasonably expect to get any public appointment either. You have always looked after your own property yourself; and your son has no children to think about. And when, in those circumstances, he sees tempting examples before him—sees men who began with nothing and are on the way to make their half million——

Bratsberg. Half million? Oh, let us keep well within the hundred thousands! But neither the half million nor the hundred thousands are scraped together with particularly clean hands—I don't mean that other people know that—far from it—I am quite aware that they can keep on the windy side of the law; but a man's own conscience *must* know it. Of course, my son would never condescend to that sort of thing. So you may make your mind easy on that point; my son's efforts are not the least likely to produce half a million. (*SELMA, in walking-dress, comes in from the back.*)

Selma. Good-morning! Isn't Erik here?

Bratsberg. Good-morning, my dear. Are you looking for Erik?

Selma. Yes, he said he was coming out here. Mr. Monsen came to see him early this morning, and——

Bratsberg. Monsen? Does Monsen come to your house?

Selma. Only now and then—mostly on business. But, Thora dear, what is the matter? Have you been crying?

Thora. Oh, it is nothing!

Selma. I am sure it is! At home, Erik was in the dumps; and here——. I see it in all your faces; something is wrong. What is it?

Bratsberg. Oh, well, anyway it is nothing for you to bother about, my dear. Your shoulders are too dainty to carry worries, little girl! Go into the other room for a little. If Erik said he was coming, you may be sure he will come.

Selma. Come along, Thora—and see that I don't get into draughts! Oh, I should like to give you a good hug, dear! (*She and THORA go into the room on the left.*)

Bratsberg. Our two speculators seem to be getting on. They ought to go into partnership—Messrs. Monsen and Bratsberg—that would sound nice, wouldn't it? (*A knock is heard at the door.*) Come in! (*STENSGAARD comes in.* BRATSBERG recoils.) What the devil——?

Stensgaard. Yes, here I am again, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. So I see.

Fjeldbo. Are you quite mad?

Stensgaard. You retired early last night. When Fjeldbo had enlightened me as to the true state of affairs, you had already——

Bratsberg. Please, please! Any explanation you can make will be superfluous——

Stensgaard. Quite so. And you mustn't suppose that I have come back for that purpose.

Bratsberg. Haven't you?

Stensgaard. I know I have slandered you.

Bratsberg. So do I; and before I have you turned out of the house, perhaps you will kindly tell me what you have come for?

Stensgaard. I have come because I love your daughter, Mr. Bratsberg.

Fjeldbo. What——!

Bratsberg. What is he saying, doctor?

Stensgaard. Ah, I daresay you can't quite grasp the situation, Mr. Bratsberg. You are an old man, and past the need of fighting for your future——

Bratsberg. And you presume——?

Stensgaard. I have come to ask for your daughter's hand, Mr. Bratsberg.

Bratsberg. You!—you! Won't you sit down?

Stensgaard. Thank you, I would rather stand.

Bratsberg. What have you got to say to it, doctor?

Stensgaard. Oh, Fjeldbo is on my side; he is my friend—the only real friend I have.

Fjeldbo. No, no, indeed I am not—and never shall be, after your—

Bratsberg. Was this why you got me to invite him here, doctor?

Stensgaard. All you know of me is what happened yesterday and the day before—and that is not enough. I am not the same man as I was two days ago, either. The effect of associating with you and your children has been like that of a spring shower on thirsty soil. My soul has blossomed in a single night. You mustn't push me back into the ugliness outside. I have never known the meaning of beauty in every-day life, till now; it has always been far out of my reach—

Bratsberg. But my daughter——?

Stensgaard. Oh, I shall win her consent.

Bratsberg. Really? Hm!

Stensgaard. Yes, because I have the will to do it. Remember what you told me yesterday. You didn't care much about your son's marriage, at first; but you see how happily it has turned out. You should learn from experience, as Fjeldbo said——

Bratsberg. Was that what he meant——?

Fjeldbo. Not at all! My dear Mr. Bratsberg, let me have a word alone with him——

Stensgaard (to FJELDBO). Nonsense, I don't want to talk to *you*. Listen, Mr. Bratsberg; be sensible and reasonable. A family like yours needs some new blood in it now and then, or the stock will deteriorate——

Bratsberg. This is a little too much!

Stensgaard. Hush, hush! Don't lose your temper! Put all these stupid ideas of social position out of your head. Why—hang it!—they are nothing but nonsense, really! You shall see how proud you will be of me when you have got to know me properly. Yes, yes, you *shall* be

proud of me—both you and your daughter! I shall make her——

Bratsberg. What do you think, doctor?

Fjeldbo. I think he is mad.

Stensgaard. It would be madness in a man like you; but I am different, you see. I have a task to perform in this beautiful world; and I am not going to be frightened off it by any nonsensical prejudices!

Bratsberg. Mr. Stensgaard, there is the door.

Stensgaard. You are turning me——?

Bratsberg. —out of the house.

Stensgaard. Don't do that!

Bratsberg. Out you go! You are an adventurer and a——a——what the devil was the other word? You are a——

Stensgaard. What am I?

Bratsberg. You are the other thing—the word that is on the tip of my tongue; that's what you are!

Stensgaard. If you stand in the way of my future, take care!

Bratsberg. Why?

Stensgaard. Because I will persecute you, write against you in the papers, defame you, undermine your reputation in every way I can. I will make you howl under the lash of my whip, until you imagine the devils themselves are at you. You shall crouch down in terror, holding your arms over your head to ward off my blows; you shall creep about seeking shelter from me——

Bratsberg. Seek shelter yourself—in a madhouse! You will feel quite at home there!

Stensgaard. Ha, ha! That is a very poor retort; but you know no better, Mr. Bratsberg! Let me tell you this; I am the instrument of heaven's wrath! It is God's will you are trying to oppose. I represent His light. Do not try to darken that!—Well, I see I can make no impression on you to-day; but that doesn't matter. All I ask is that you will speak to your daughter. Prepare her! Give her at all events the opportunity of making her choice! Think it over, and look about you here. Where do you expect to find a son-in-law amongst these dolts and blockheads? Fjeldbo says there are great possibilities in that quiet, steadfast disposition of hers. Well, now you know all I

have to say. Good-bye, Mr. Bratsberg. It is in your hands to make me your friend or your enemy. Good-bye. (*Goes out at the back.*)

Bratsberg. Things have come to a pretty pass! To think that any one should dare to take such a liberty with me in my own house!

Fjeldbo. Stensgaard dares; no one else would.

Bratsberg. If he does it to-day, another may to-morrow.

Fjeldbo. Let them try! I will soon send them packing! I would go through fire and water for you——!

Bratsberg. Yes, you—who are to blame for the whole thing!—Hm! that fellow Stensgaard is the most shameless rascal I have ever met; and yet, all the same—— I don't know how the deuce it is, but there is something about him I can't help liking.

Fjeldbo. There are possibilities in him——

Bratsberg. He is straightforward, doctor! He doesn't go playing tricks on one behind one's back, as so many others do. He—he——

Fjeldbo. He is not worth arguing about. Only be firm, Mr. Bratsberg. Say no—and again no—to him!

Bratsberg. Oh, keep your advice for yourself. You may be quite sure that neither he nor any one else——. (*RINGDAL comes in from his office on the right.*)

Ringdal. Excuse me, Mr. Bratsberg; may I have a word with you? (*Whispers to him.*)

Bratsberg. What on earth——? In your office, you say?

Ringdal. He came in by the back door, and says he wants most urgently to speak to you.

Bratsberg. Hm!—Doctor, go in to the ladies for a moment. There is some one who——. But don't say a word to Selma about Stensgaard's visit. She mustn't be mixed up in any of this. As far as my daughter is concerned—I wish I could keep my own counsel in that quarter too; but——. If only I could——? Well, go in to them, please. (*FJELDBO goes into the other room. RINGDAL in the meantime has gone back into his office. A moment later MONSEN comes in from it.*)

Monsen (at the door). I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Bratsberg——

Bratsberg. Oh, come in! Come in!

Monsen. I hope you are all quite well.

Bratsberg. Thank you. Do you want anything?

Monsen. I wouldn't say that. Thank heaven, I am a man who has pretty well all he wants.

Bratsberg. Indeed? That is a good deal to say.

Monsen. But I have worked for it, Mr. Bratsberg. Oh, I know you haven't a particularly good opinion of the way I have worked for it.

Bratsberg. My opinion certainly hasn't had much effect on the way you have worked for it.

Monsen. Who knows? At any rate I am beginning to entertain the idea of retiring from business.

Bratsberg. Indeed?

Monsen. I must say I have been very fortunate in business. I have got on about as far as I care to; and that is why I have an idea that it may be time to drop it by degrees—

Bratsberg. I congratulate you—and many others too—on that decision.

Monsen. And if at the same time I could do you a good turn, Mr. Bratsberg—?

Bratsberg. Do me a good turn?

Monsen. When that forest-land came into the market five years ago, you made a bid for it—

Bratsberg. Yes, but afterwards you overbid me and it was knocked down to you.

Monsen. You can have it now, with all its accrued advantages—

Bratsberg. After the sinful way you have cut the forests about—?

Monsen. Oh, they have still a considerable value; and, with your knowledge of forestry, in a few years—

Bratsberg. Thank you. Unfortunately, I cannot entertain the idea.

Monsen. But there is a lot of money in it, Mr. Bratsberg. And, as far as I am concerned—well, to be frank with you, I have a big speculation in hand; I am playing for high stakes. I mean that I have a chance of a very big haul—ten thousand pounds, or so.

Bratsberg. Ten thousand? That certainly is a good sum.

Monsen. Ha, ha! Yes, a very nice sum to lay hands on

and add to what I have got already. But, to bring off such a big deal as that, one needs auxiliary support, so to speak. Ready money is none too plentiful here, and the backers whose names are worth anything have been worked pretty assiduously——

Bratsberg. Yes, certain people have seen to that, I know.

Monsen. Oh, it is as broad as it is long. Come, Mr. Bratsberg, can't we strike a bargain? You can have the forest-land dirt-cheap——

Bratsberg. I won't have it at any price, Mr. Monsen.

Monsen. But one good turn deserves another. Mr. Bratsberg, will you help me?

Bratsberg. What do you mean?

Monsen. Of course you shall have security. I have plenty of real estate. Look here. These papers—will you let me show you a statement of my financial position?

Bratsberg (*refusing to take the papers*). Is it monetary assistance you——?

Monsen. Not ready money; far from it. But your backing. For a consideration, of course—and with security, and——

Bratsberg. And you come to me with such a proposal?

Monsen. Yes, to you. I know how often you have forgotten your personal dislike to a man, when you have known him to be in great difficulties.

Bratsberg. In a way I suppose I ought to thank you for your good opinion—especially at a time like this; but, all the same——

Monsen. Mr. Bratsberg, won't you tell me why it is that you are so set against me?

Bratsberg. What would be the use?

Monsen. It might clear the situation. I am not conscious of ever having tried to put a spoke in your wheel.

Bratsberg. Aren't you? Well, I will tell you one instance in which you have stood in my way. I founded a savings-bank at my works for the benefit of my work-people and others. And then you promptly started a banking business. People go to you with their savings——

Monsen. Of course they do, Mr. Bratsberg; I give them a higher interest on their deposits.

Bratsberg. And charge a higher interest on loans.

Monsen. But then I don't make so many difficulties about security and that sort of thing.

Bratsberg. Unfortunately, you don't; and the result is that we get people bringing off business deals of four or five thousand pounds, without either party actually possessing a couple of shillings. There, that is one reason why I am set against you, Mr. Monsen. And there is another reason—a more personal one. Do you suppose it was with my consent that my son allowed himself to be mixed up with these wild-cat schemes?

Monsen. But it isn't my fault!

Bratsberg. It was your example that infected him, just as it has infected others. Why didn't you stick to your last?

Monsen. Be content to be a lumberman, like my father, do you mean?

Bratsberg. Was it a disgrace to be in my service, then? Your father made an honest living, and was respected in his own class.

Monsen. Yes, until he had worked himself hopelessly ill, and ended by going over the falls with his raft. Do you know anything about the life of a man in that class, Mr. Bratsberg? Have you ever once realised what the men have to suffer who toil for you in the depths of the forests and along the river-sides, while you sit in your comfortable room and enjoy the results? Can you blame those men if they try to work their way up out of it? Take my own case; I had had a rather better education than my father—perhaps had rather more brains, too——

Bratsberg. May be. But what about your method of working your way up? You began by being a brandy-merchant; then you took to buying up bad debts, and enforced payment inexorably; and so you went on from one thing to another. Do you ever stop to think how many you have ruined in order to get on?

Monsen. That is the way of business; it is one up and another down.

Bratsberg. But what about *your* way? There are respectable families here that are on the parish, thanks to you.

Monsen. Mr. Hejre is not far off the workhouse either, I believe.

Bratsberg. I understand what you mean. But I can defend my action before God and man! After the separation from Denmark, when there was great distress in this country, my father spent more than he had in relieving it. The result was that part of our estates passed into the Hejre family's hands. And what did that lead to? There were tenants living on the land, and they suffered from Daniel Hejre's stupid management of it. He cut down timber till it was a disgrace—indeed, a misfortune—to the district. Wasn't it plainly my duty to put an end to such a state of things if I could? And I was able; I had the law on my side, and was acting quite within my rights when I took over the freehold of my property again.

Monsen. I have never offended against the law, either.

Bratsberg. But against your own better sense—against your conscience—for it is to be hoped you *have* a conscience. Look how you have broken down all social order here—how you have weakened the respect that wealth should carry with it! People no longer inquire how a fortune was made or how long it has been in a family, all they ask is: "How much is so-and-so worth?" And they judge him by that. I suffer from all this too; your name and mine are coupled together in people's mouths, because we are the two largest proprietors here—and I will not stand that! Once for all, that is why I am set against you.

Monsen. It shall be put an end to, Mr. Bratsberg. I will give up all my business, and yield to you in every way; but I beg and entreat you just to help me this time!

Bratsberg. No, I won't.

Monsen. I am willing to pay anything you like——

Bratsberg. Pay? Do you dare to——

Monsen. Well, if not for my sake, help me for your son's!

Bratsberg. My son's?

Monsen. Yes, he is in this with me; I believe his share will be about four thousand pounds.

Bratsberg. If he wins?

Monsen. Yes!

Bratsberg. But, good God, who is it that *loses* the money, then?

Monsen. How do you mean——?

Bratsberg. If my son wins it, there must be some one that loses it!

Monsen. It will be a profitable transaction; I am not at liberty to say more than that. But I need some substantial name; your name as a backing would——

Bratsberg. My name? To back you?

Monsen. Only for a matter of some two or three thousand pounds.

Bratsberg. Did you really suppose for a moment that I——? *My* name as backing! In such an affair as that! *My* name! As surety, I suppose?

Monsen. Merely as a matter of form——

Bratsberg. You rascal! My name! No, not at any price. I have never backed another man's bill yet.

Monsen. Never? That is an exaggeration, you know, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. What I say is literally true.

Monsen. No, not literally. I have seen it myself.

Bratsberg. Seen what?

Monsen. Your signature——on *one* bill at least.

Bratsberg. It's a lie! You have never seen it!

Monsen. I have! On a bill for four hundred pounds. Just think again!

Bratsberg. Neither for four hundred nor four thousand. On my sacred word of honour, never!

Monsen. Then it is a forgery.

Bratsberg. A forgery?

Monsen. Yes, a forgery——your signature imitated; because I *have* seen it.

Bratsberg. A forgery? A forgery? Where did you see it? Who had it?

Monsen. I shan't tell you.

Bratsberg. Ha, ha! We'll find that out some day.

Monsen. Listen to me——

Bratsberg. Be quiet! So it has come to that! Forgery! And they have mixed me in this filth! It's no wonder they lump me together with these other fellows! But I mean to play a little game with *them* now!

Monsen. Mr. Bratsberg—for your own sake and that of many others——

Bratsberg. Get out of my sight! Be off! You are the

source of all this mischief! Yes, you are! "Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." It is a sinful life you live, up at your place. And look at the company you keep! Fellows that come out to you from Christiania and elsewhere, simply for the sake of eating and drinking, and don't care who their host is so long as they get that. Hold your tongue! I have seen your fine friends at Christmas time tearing along the roads like a pack of ravening wolves. And there is worse than that. There have been scandals about you and your own maidservants. Your unfaithfulness and your cruelty drove your wife out of her mind.

Monsen. This is a little too much! You shall live to repent what you have said!

Bratsberg. Oh, damn it—don't you try to threaten me! What harm do you suppose you can do me? Me! You asked me why I was so set against you. Now you know. And now you know why I have kept you out of decent society.

Monsen. Yes, and now I mean to drag your decent society down——

Bratsberg. Down the road you have gone!

Monsen. I know my road, Mr. Bratsberg! (*Goes out at the back.* BRATSBERG goes to the door of RINGDAL's office, opens it, and calls.)

Bratsberg. Ringdal—Ringdal! Come here! (*RINGDAL comes in.*)

Ringdal. Yes, Mr. Bratsberg?

Bratsberg (*calls into the other room*). Doctor! Will you be so good——? Well, Ringdal, my prophecies are going to be fulfilled. (*FJELDBO comes in.*)

Fjeldbo. What can I do for you, Mr. Bratsberg?

Ringdal. Have you been prophesying, sir?

Bratsberg. Listen to this, doctor. You always maintained that I was exaggerating when I declared that Monsen was corrupting the people here.

Fjeldbo. Yes. What of it?

Bratsberg. Well, they have been apt pupils, I can tell you. What do you think? There are forged bills in circulation here now.

Fjeldbo. Forged bills?

Bratsberg. Yes, forged bills. And whose name do you think has been forged on them? Mine!

Fjeldbo. Good heavens, who can have done that?

Bratsberg. How should I know? Do I know all the scoundrels in the place? But it will come out in good time. Doctor, do me a service. These bills must have been either through the Town Bank or my bank at the Works. Go and see Lundestad. He is the most capable of the bank directors. Find out whether any such bills——

Fjeldbo. I will go at once!

Ringdal. Lundestad is here to-day, at the Works; he has a meeting of the Schools Committee.

Bratsberg. So much the better. See if you can find him and bring him up here.

Fjeldbo. I'll do so at once. (*Goes out at the back.*)

Bratsberg. And you, Ringdal, must make inquiries at the Bank. As soon as we have anything to go upon, we must inform the authorities. No mercy on the swindlers!

Ringdal. Very well, sir. Good heavens, I should never have believed such a thing! (*Goes into his office.* BRATSBERG walks up and down once or twice: then is just going into his office when ERIK comes in from the back.)

Erik. Dad——!

Bratsberg. Oh, it is you, is it!

Erik. I want particularly to speak to you.

Bratsberg. Hm! To tell the truth, I am not much in the mood to talk to any one. What do you want?

Erik. You know, dad, that I have never bothered you with my business affairs.

Bratsberg. No; I should have declined to be bothered with them if you had.

Erik. But to-day I am forced——

Bratsberg. What are you forced to do?

Erik. Dad, you must help me!

Bratsberg. Money! You may be quite sure I won't——

Erik. Only this once! I swear I never will ask you again. Listen, dad! You know I have certain business relations with Mr. Monsen——

Bratsberg. I know. I hear you have a very promising speculation in hand.

Erik. A speculation? We? No. Who told you that?

Bratsberg. Monsen himself.

Erik. Has Monsen been here?

Bratsberg. Yes, just now; and I turned him out of the house.

Erik. Dad, if you won't help me, I am ruined.

Bratsberg. You?

Erik. Yes; Monsen has advanced me money. It has turned out a very bad bargain for me; and now, in addition to that, my repayment to him is due——

Bratsberg. There you are! What did I tell you?

Erik. Yes, yes; but it is too late now to talk about——

Bratsberg. Ruined! After only two years! But what else could you expect? Why did you want to have anything to do with these conjurers who dazzle folks' eyes with visions of fortunes which have no real existence? It was no fit company for you. You have to be up to all their tricks, in dealing with fellows like that—or you get the worst of it. You see that now.

Erik. Dad, will you save me, or not?

Bratsberg. No. For the last time, no; I will not.

Erik. My reputation is at stake——

Bratsberg. Oh, no heroics, please! Reputation has not much to do with success in business here; rather the reverse, I should say. Go home and think things over. Dissolve your partnership and make an end of it—and the sooner the better.

Erik. Oh, but you don't know——! (*SELMA and THORA come in from the other room.*)

Selma. Did I hear Erik's voice? Good gracious, what is the matter?

Bratsberg. Nothing. Leave us, dear, will you?

Selma. No, I won't. I will know. Erik, what is it?

Erik. I am ruined—that's all.

Thora. Ruined?

Bratsberg. So it seems!

Selma. Ruined in what?

Erik. In everything.

Selma. Do you mean that you have lost all your money?

Erik. Money, home, prospects—everything!

Selma. Yes, that is everything to you!

Erik. Come, Selma—let us go. You are the only one I have now. We must bear misfortune together.

Selma. Misfortune? Bear it together? (*With a little cry.*) Do you think I am fit for that?

Erik. What do you mean?

Thora. Pull yourself together, dear!

Selma. No! I won't! I can't hold my tongue and play the hypocrite and lie any longer! You shall know the truth now. I don't mean to bear anything!

Erik. Selma!

Bratsberg. My child, what are you saying?

Selma. How ill you have all treated me! Shamefully, the whole lot of you! You have always made me take, and never let me give anything. You have treated me like a fool. You have never come and asked me to make the least sacrifice—never thought me good enough to bear anything. I hate you! I detest you!

Erik. What on earth do you mean?

Bratsberg. She isn't well. She isn't herself.

Selma. You don't know how I have longed to be allowed to share your troubles! But if I asked about anything, you only put me off with a joke. You dressed me up like a doll; you played with me as if I were a child. I would have been glad to share any sorrow; I had some seriousness in me, and longed for things that stir one's heart and elevate one. Now you think I am good enough—now that Erik has nothing else. But I am not going to be a last resort, like that. I won't have anything to do with your troubles now. I shall leave you! I would rather play and sing in the streets——! Let me be! Let me be! (*Rushes out at the back.*)

Bratsberg. Thora—was she in earnest? or——?

Thora. Oh, yes. I see it now, for the first time. She was in earnest. (*Goes after SELMA.*)

Erik. No, no! Anything else!—but not her! Selma! (*Goes after them. RINGDAL comes in from his office.*)

Ringdal. Mr. Bratsberg——!

Bratsberg. What is it?

Ringdal. I have been to the bank——

Bratsberg. To the bank? Well? The bill?

Ringdal. Everything is in order. No bill has ever been presented with your name on it. (*FJELDBO and LUNDE-STAD come in from the back.*)

Fjeldbo. A false alarm, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. Really? Not at the Town Bank either?

Lundestad. No. All the years I have been a director, I have never once seen your name on a bill—at least, of course, I mean, except on your son's bill.

Bratsberg. On my son's bill?

Lundestad. Yes, the bill you backed for him this spring.

Bratsberg. For my son? For Erik? Do you mean to say——?

Lundestad. But, bless me!—surely you remember? Your son's bill for four hundred pounds.

Bratsberg (*fumbling for a chair*). Good God——!

Fjeldbo. Good heavens!

Ringdal. It isn't possible——!

Bratsberg. Gently, gently! My son's bill? Backed by me? For four hundred pounds?

Fjeldbo (*to LUNDESTAD*). And is that bill in the bank's hands?

Lundestad. No, it isn't any longer. It was redeemed a week or two ago by Monsen——

Bratsberg. By Monsen——!

Ringdal. Perhaps Monsen is at the Works now. I will go and——

Bratsberg. Stay where you are! (*HEJRE comes in from the back.*)

Hejre. Good - morning, gentlemen! Good - morning, Mr. Bratsberg! Let me thank you for the pleasant evening you gave us yesterday. I have got a nice little story for you——

Ringdal. You must excuse us. We have been very busy——

Hejre. Others have been very busy too. Monsen, for instance——

Bratsberg. Monsen!

Hejre. Ha, ha! It is a very pretty little story! Electioneering intrigues are in full swing. What do you think they are up to? They want to bribe you, Mr. Bratsberg.

Lundestad. Bribe, did you say?

Bratsberg. The tree is judged by its fruit.

Hejre. Yes, upon my soul, it is the most blackguardly thing I ever heard of! I went into Madam Rundholmen's

for a sherry and bitters, and there were Monsen and Stensgaard drinking port—beastly stuff, I wouldn't touch it for anything. And they never offered me any, either, I am sorry to say. And then says Monsen: "What will you bet," he says, "that Mr. Bratsberg won't vote with our party at the election to-morrow?" "How do you propose to manage that?" I asked. "Oh," says he, "by the help of this bill——"

Fjeldbo and Ringdal. Bill?

Lundestad. At the election?

Bratsberg. Well—what more?

Hejre. I don't know any more. It was a bill, I heard, for four hundred pounds. That was their idea of a price for a man of your position. I call it positively shameful!

Bratsberg. A bill for four hundred pounds?

Ringdal. And Monsen has it?

Hejre. No, he had made it over to Stensgaard.

Lundestad. So that's it.

Fjeldbo. To Stensgaard?

Bratsberg. Are you certain of that?

Hejre. Of course I am certain of it. "You may make the best use of it you can," he said. But I can't understand——

Lundestad. Come here, Mr. Hejre—and you, too, Ringdal. (*The three retire to the background, talking in a low voice.*)

Fjeldbo. Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. Yes.

Fjeldbo. Of course, the signature on your son's bill is genuine——

Bratsberg. I should think that was obvious.

Fjeldbo. Of course. But suppose the forged bill should turn up——

Bratsberg. I won't lay any information before the authorities.

Fjeldbo. Naturally—but you must do more than that.

Bratsberg (rising). I can't do more than that.

Fjeldbo. Yes, for God's sake!—you can, and you must. You must save the unhappy man——

Bratsberg. And how, pray?

Fjeldbo. Simply by acknowledging the signature as yours.

Bratsberg. Do you imagine, doctor, that a Bratsberg is going to do a thing like that?

Fjeldbo. I mean it for the best, Mr. Bratsberg.

Bratsberg. And do you for a single moment suppose me capable of a lie?—of condoning a forgery?

Fjeldbo. Do you realise what the result would be, otherwise?

Bratsberg. That is a matter that rests between the criminal and the law. (*Goes into his office. The curtain falls.*)

ACT IV

(SCENE.—*The bar-parlour at MADAM RUNDHOLMEN'S.*

Entrance at the back. Other doors at each side. To the right a window, in front of which is a table with writing materials. Another table in the middle of the room, a little way back.)

Madam Rundholmen (*heard shouting within a room on the left*). Oh, I don't care a bit about that! You can say you came here to vote, and not to drink. If you don't want to wait, you can please yourself.

Stensgaard (*coming in at the back*). Good-morning! Ahem! *Madam Rundholmen!* (*Goes to the door on the left and knocks.*) Good-morning, *Madam Rundholmen!*

Madam Rundholmen (*from within*). Who is there?

Stensgaard. It is me—*Stensgaard.* May I come in?

Madam Rundholmen. Good gracious, no! I haven't got my clothes on.

Stensgaard. What! Not up yet?

Madam Rundholmen (*as before*). Oh yes, I was up at an unholy hour; but I must make myself a little presentable. (*Peeps in, with a shawl over her head.*) Well, what do you want? No, really you mustn't look at me, Mr. *Stensgaard.* Oh, there is some one else coming! (*Retreats and slams the door. ASLAKSEN comes in from the back, carrying a bundle of newspapers.*)

Aslaksen. Good-morning, Mr. *Stensgaard.*

Stensgaard. Well, is it in?

Aslaksen. Yes, it is in. Look here: "Independence Day Celebrations. From our Special Correspondent." And here on the other side is the account of the founding of the League. Your speech is there. I have put all the rudest bits in leaded type!

Stensgaard. It looks to me as if it were all in leaded type.

Aslaksen. Well, it has nearly come to that.

Stensgaard. You got your extra number distributed yesterday, of course?

Aslaksen. Of course; all over the country—to subscribers and non-subscribers as well. Will you have a look? (*Hands him a copy.*)

Stensgaard (*running his eye over the paper*). "Our worthy fellow-citizen Mr. Lundestad contemplates retirement from Parliament"—"long and faithful services"—"as the poet says: 'The citizen has fully earned his rest.'" Hm! "The League founded on Independence Day—The League of Youth"—"Mr. Stensgaard, the eminent lawyer, the leading spirit of the League"—"opportune reforms, easier facilities for loans." Yes, that all seems very well put. Has the voting begun?

Aslaksen. It is in full swing. Our League is very much in evidence—both the voters and those who haven't votes.

Stensgaard. Oh, the latter don't count—between ourselves, of course! Well, you go out and talk to them. You are considered a rather doubtful quantity, you know——

Aslaksen. All right.

Stensgaard. You can tell them that I and Lundestad are practically of one mind——

Aslaksen. You may rely on me; I am familiar with our local conditions.

Stensgaard. There is one more point. Be a good chap, *Aslaksen*, and don't get drinking to-day——

Aslaksen. What do you mean——?

Stensgaard. We will make a night of it when the election is over; but remember how important a matter it is for you too. Your paper, you know—let me see, you are——

Aslaksen. You need say no more, thanks. I think each of us can look after himself. (*Goes out to the right.*)

Madam Rundholmen (coming in from her room, fully dressed). Now then, Mr. Stensgaard—here I am. Was it anything important——?

Stensgaard. No, I only wanted to ask you to be so good as to let me know when Mr. Monsen comes in.

Madam Rundholmen. He won't be in to-day, I am pretty sure.

Stensgaard. Won't he?

Madam Rundholmen. No; he was passing the house at four o'clock this morning. He seems to be always on the run now. He came in and caught me in bed, so to speak—wanted to borrow money; if you please!

Stensgaard. Monsen? Wanted to borrow money?

Madam Rundholmen. Yes, he's a beggar for needing money, he is! I only hope he will have good luck. And I must wish you that, too—because they do say that you are going to be elected to parliament.

Stensgaard. I? Nonsense. Who says so?

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, some of Mr. Lundestad's lot. (*HEJRE comes in.*)

Hejre. Ah, there you are! Good-morning! I hope I am not disturbing you?

Madam Rundholmen. The idea!

Hejre. Bless my soul, how smart you are! You didn't put on those pretty things for *me*, I am sure?

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, yes, I did! One dresses to please bachelors, you know!

Hejre. Suitors, my dear lady! Suitors! Unfortunately, my lawsuits take up all my time, or——

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, come!—one has always time to get married.

Hejre. No, indeed one hasn't! Marriage is a most exacting occupation. Well, what am I to say? If you can't have me, you can easily have some one else. For you ought to have a husband, you know.

Madam Rundholmen. Do you know I have that idea myself, sometimes.

Hejre. I can quite believe it. Once any one has tasted the joys of matrimony——. Poor Rundholmen was a splendid specimen, of course——

Madam Rundholmen. I don't know that I should say

that. He was coarse; and he drank, too. But, all the same, a husband is a husband.

Hejre. Perfectly true, Madam Rundholmen. A husband is a husband, and a widow is a widow——

Madam Rundholmen. And business is business. I am sure it is enough to drive a woman crazy, to think of all I have to do! Every one is ready enough to buy; but when it comes to getting in payment, I have to get out summonses and distress-warrants and what not——! I shall have to go in for a private lawyer of my own soon, I declare!

Hejre. Well, I should recommend you to go in for Mr. Stensgaard! He is unemployed just now——

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, you're a dreadful man! I won't listen to you any longer! (*Goes out to the right.*)

Hejre. A sound woman, that! Smart and active——no children, up to date——and money invested. She is not without education, either; a woman of wide reading, my boy!

Stensgaard. Wide reading? Indeed?

Hejre. Ha, ha! I should think so! She was in the Circulating Library here for two years. Ah, well—I can understand that you have other things to think about to-day.

Stensgaard. Not a bit of it. I am not even sure if I shall vote. Whom are you voting for, Mr. Hejre?

Hejre. I haven't a vote, my good sir! There was only one dog-kennel on the register left in the market, and you took that, you know.

Stensgaard. If you are homeless, I will give it up to you.

Hejre. Ha, ha! You are so full of your jokes!——youth has a delightful humour of its own. Well, I am going out now to have a look at the menagerie. All the members of your League are out and about, I hear. (*DR. FJELDBO comes in at the back.*) Ah, here is the doctor, too! Here on a scientific mission, I suppose, doctor?

Fjeldbo. Scientific——?

Hejre. To study the epidemic, I mean. You know there is a serious outbreak of Rabies Agitatoria! God bless you, my dear young friends! (*Goes out to the right.*)

Stensgaard. Look here——tell me this, Fjeldbo. Have you seen Mr. Bratsberg to-day?

Fjeldbo. Yes.

Stensgaard. And what did he say?

Fjeldbo. What did he say?

Stensgaard. Certainly. I have written to him——

Fjeldbo. Have you? What did you write?

Stensgaard. I told him that I cling to the hope of winning his daughter; and that I want to talk it over with him, and will call on him for that purpose to-morrow morning.

Fjeldbo. You had better postpone your visit, any way. It is his birthday to-morrow, and there will be a whole lot of people——

Stensgaard. All the more reason why I shall go; the more there are there, the better. I have got a strong card in my hand, I may tell you.

Fjeldbo. And have you given him any hint of that, may I ask?

Stensgaard. How do you mean?

Fjeldbo. I mean—have you by any chance embellished your declaration of love with some nice little threats, or anything of that sort?

Stensgaard. Fjeldbo, you have seen my letter!

Fjeldbo. No, I assure you——

Stensgaard. Well—to be frank with you—I *have* threatened him.

Fjeldbo. Ah, then, I have a sort of answer for you.

Stensgaard. An answer? Out with it, then, my dear fellow!

Fjeldbo (*showing him a sealed paper*). Look at that, Mr. Bratsberg's voting paper.

Stensgaard. Who does he vote for?

Fjeldbo. Not for you, any way.

Stensgaard. Who, then? Who?

Fjeldbo. For the Sheriff and the Provost.

Stensgaard. What? Not even for Lundestad?

Fjeldbo. No. And do you know why? Because Lundestad intends to put you up as his successor.

Stensgaard. Do you mean to say that he has the face to——

Fjeldbo. I do. And, what is more, he said: "If you meet Stensgaard, tell him how I am voting; it will show him how things stand between us."

Stensgaard. Very well. He will have brought it on himself.

Fjeldbo. Take care; it is dangerous work pulling down an old tower—one may be crushed under it.

Stensgaard. Oh, I have had my wits sharpened this last day or two.

Fjeldbo. Indeed? They are not sharp enough yet, it seems, to prevent old Lundestad openly doing what he likes with you.

Stensgaard. Do you suppose I haven't seen through Lundestad? Do you suppose I don't know that he took up with me because he thought I had Mr. Bratsberg in my pocket, and because he wanted to break up our League and keep Monsen out?

Fjeldbo. But now that he realises that you have not got Mr. Bratsberg in your pocket——

Stensgaard. He has gone too far to be able to draw back; and I have made good use of the time and sent out election addresses. Most of his supporters won't show up; all mine are here——

Fjeldbo. Still, there is many a slip between the preliminary elections and the final one.

Stensgaard. Lundestad knows very well that if he fails me in the College of Electors, I am capable of agitating him out of the Town Council.

Fjeldbo. You seem to have made your calculations pretty well! But, if you are to succeed, you must be more firmly rooted here than you are now, you know.

Stensgaard. I know. The public always sets great store by material prosperity, community of interests, and——

Fjeldbo. Quite so. And therefore Miss Bratsberg is to be sacrificed.

Stensgaard. Sacrificed? If that were so, I should be an absolute scoundrel. No; I feel certain it will mean her happiness. What is it, *Fjeldbo*? Why do you look like that? Have you got something up your sleeve too——?

Fjeldbo. I?

Stensgaard. Yes, you have! You go quietly about, working against me. Why do you do it? Be open with me, will you?

Fjeldbo. Frankly, I won't. You are too dangerous, too

unprincipled—oh, well, let us say too reckless—for any one to venture to be quite open with you. Whatever you know, you make use of without a second thought. But as a friend I give you this bit of advice: put Miss Bratsberg out of your head.

Stensgaard. I can't. I must raise myself out of all the dirt that surrounds me here. I can't stand living in this crowd any longer. I have to be hand-in-glove with Tom, Dick and Harry; whisper with them in corners; drink with them, and pump up a laugh at their beery jokes; be on familiar terms with board-school boys and uneducated ruffians. How am I to keep my love for the People alive under conditions like these? I feel even my powers of speaking failing me. I have no elbow-room—no pure air to breathe. I simply crave for refined female society every now and then. I want some beauty in my life! It is as if I were lying here in a muddy backwater, while the clear blue stream of life was sweeping past me out there——! But of course you can't understand such thoughts as that. (*LUNDESTAD comes in from the back.*)

Lundestad. Ah, well met! Good-morning!

Stensgaard. I have got some news for you, Mr. Lundestad. Whom do you think Mr. Bratsberg is voting for?

Fjeldbo. Hold your tongue! It is dishonest of you!

Stensgaard. I can't help that. He is voting for the Sheriff and the Provost.

Lundestad. Just what one might have expected. You have made a mess of it with him, you know. I asked you so particularly to play your cards carefully.

Stensgaard. And so I will—in future.

Fjeldbo. Take care others don't do the same. (*Goes out to the right.*)

Stensgaard. That chap has something up his sleeve. Can you tell what it is?

Lundestad. No, I can't. But, by the way, I see you are to the fore in the paper to-day.

Stensgaard. I?

Lundestad. Yes, with such a nice obituary notice of me.

Stensgaard. That is Aslaksen, of course, in his best style——

Lundestad. And there is all about your quarrel with Mr. Bratsberg, too.

Stensgaard. I don't know anything about that. If I want to pick a quarrel with Mr. Bratsberg, I have got a keener weapon than that.

Lundestad. Indeed?

Stensgaard (shows him the bill). Do you know anything about this bill? Look at it. Is it genuine?

Lundestad. Genuine? This bill?

Stensgaard. Yes. Look closely at it. (*HEJRE comes back, from the right.*)

Hejre. But what the devil can——? Ah, look there! No, no, gentlemen, please stay as you were! Do you know what you reminded me of? Of a summer night in the far north!

Lundestad. That is an extraordinary thing to compare us to.

Hejre. It is quite an obvious simile—the setting sun and the rising sun both visible together! Very pretty—very pretty indeed! But, *à propos*, what on earth is going on outside? Our worthy fellow-citizens are going about like frightened fowls cackling and crowing, and not knowing which perch they want to settle on.

Stensgaard. It is a very important occasion.

Hejre. Oh, you and your “importance”! No, it is something quite distinct from that, my dear friends. There are rumours of a big failure—a bankruptcy—no, not a political one, Mr. Lundestad, heaven forbid!

Stensgaard. A bankruptcy?

Hejre. Ha, ha! See the lawyer prick up his ears at that! Yes, a bankruptcy. There is some one tottering to his fall; the axe is laid to the root of the tree—but never mind about that. Two strange men have driven past—but where were they going? What does it all mean? Haven't you any idea, Mr. Lundestad?

Lundestad. I have an idea how to hold my tongue, Mr. Hejre.

Hejre. Of course; you are a political personage, a statesman, ha, ha! But I must go and see if I can find any one who can throw some light on the matter. It is such fun to watch these bill-jobbers; they are like beads

on a string—if one rolls off, they all roll off together.
(*Goes out at the back.*)

Stensgaard. Is there any truth in all this talk?

Lundestad. You were showing me a bill. I thought I saw Erik Bratsberg's name on it.

Stensgaard. His father's too.

Lundestad. And you asked me if it were genuine?

Stensgaard. Exactly. Just take a look at it.

Lundestad. I don't fancy it is quite genuine.

Stensgaard. You see it too, do you?

Lundestad. What?

Stensgaard. The forgery.

Lundestad. The forgery? Well, forged bills are the safest of all—they are always the soonest redeemed.

Stensgaard. What is your opinion, then? Isn't it a forgery?

Lundestad. It's a bad business.

Stensgaard. What is?

Lundestad. I am afraid there are too many of the same sort about, Mr. Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. What? Surely it isn't possible that——?

Lundestad. Oh, well, if Erik Bratsberg rolls off the string, one mustn't be surprised if his nearest neighbour follows suit.

Stensgaard (*catching him by the arm*). Whom do you mean by his nearest neighbour?

Lundestad. Are any neighbours nearer than father and son?

Stensgaard. But, good heavens——!

Lundestad. It is not my idea; don't forget it was Mr. Hejre that was gossiping about bankruptcy and failures and——

Stensgaard. It is like a stroke of lightning!

Lundestad. Oh, such a lot of highly respected folk come to grief. A man may be too good-natured, stands security for some one; ready money is not always to be had at a moment's notice; and so property has to be put up for sale, and sells for——

Stensgaard. And of course all that naturally hits his children too!

Lundestad. Yes, I am really very sorry for the daughter.

She hasn't much of her own—and goodness knows if the little she has is safely tied up.

Stensgaard. Now I understand Fjeldbo's advice; he is a true friend after all.

Lundestad. Didn't you understand what I meant before?

Stensgaard. Not altogether; I forgot the saying about rats and a sinking ship.

Lundestad. It is not quite kind of you to say that. But what is the matter? You look so upset. Bless me, I hope I haven't put my foot in it?

Stensgaard. In what way?

Lundestad. Yes, yes—I see I have. What a stupid old fool I am! My dear Mr. Stensgaard, if you really love the girl what does it matter whether she is rich or poor?

Stensgaard. What does it matter? No, of course——

Lundestad. Married happiness does not depend on money—I know that.

Stensgaard. Naturally.

Lundestad. And with industry and application one can soon make up for lost ground. Don't be afraid of small means. I know what love means—I used to read a lot about it when I was a young man; happiness at home, a faithful wife——. Ah, my dear fellow, see that you behave now in a way that will not mean a life of remorse afterwards.

Stensgaard. But what about your plans, then?

Lundestad. They must look after themselves. Do you suppose I am capable of asking you to sacrifice your heart in this way?

Stensgaard. But I will make the sacrifice of my own accord. You shall see that I am strong enough to do it. (*Points to the window.*) Out there stands a people craving my help—inarticulate, but mutely pleading. How could I have the heart to refuse myself to them!

Lundestad. Yes, but what about the property qualification?

Stensgaard. I shall contrive to satisfy the demands of my fellow-citizens in that aspect, Mr. Lundestad! I see a way—a new way—which I shall take. I relinquish the happiness of renouncing everything and working for the woman I love. I will say to the People: "Here I am. Take me!"

Lundestad (after looking at him with quiet admiration, and grasping his hand). You certainly are an exceptionally clever man, Mr. Stensgaard! (Goes out to the right. STENSGAARD walks up and down the room once or twice, halting every now and then by the window and scratching his head. After a little BASTIAN MONSEN comes in from the back.)

Bastian. Hullo, old chap!

Stensgaard. Where have you sprung from?

Bastian. From the Nation.

Stensgaard. The Nation? What the deuce do you mean?

Bastian. Don't you know what "the Nation" means? It means the People; the common folk, who have nothing and are nothing; who lie struggling in the toils of—

Stensgaard. What the devil do you mean by these monkey tricks?

Bastian. What monkey tricks?

Stensgaard. I have noticed lately that you have been imitating me in every way—even to the matter of clothes and handwriting, you are copying me. You must drop it.

Bastian. Why, what's up? Don't we belong to the same party?

Stensgaard. Yes, but I am not going to put up with it. You are making yourself ridiculous—

Bastian. What?—by modelling myself on you?

Stensgaard. By aping me. Please oblige me, Monsen, by dropping it. I hate to see it. Now, tell me one thing—when is your father coming back?

Bastian. I haven't the least idea. I believe he has gone over to Christiania; he may not be back for a week.

Stensgaard. Indeed? That would be very awkward. He has some big stroke of business on hand, I believe.

Bastian. Yes, and so have I. Look here, Stensgaard, will you do me a favour?

Stensgaard. If I can. What is it?

Bastian. I feel a strong man now. I have you to thank for that; you have woke me up. I want to *do* something, Stensgaard—I want to get married.

Stensgaard. Married? To whom?

Bastian. Hush! It is some one in this house.

Stensgaard. Madam Rundholmen?

Bastian. Hush! Yes, it is she. Put in a good word for

me, will you? This marriage would be just the sort of thing for me. She does a splendid business here; and she has been quite in favour with the Bratsbergs ever since her sister was with them as housekeeper. If I get her, perhaps I shall get some of the municipal jobs too. Yes, take it all round, I love her—I'm damned if I don't!

Stensgaard. Love her! Love her! Leave that disgusting hypocrisy out of the question.

Bastian. Hypocrisy!

Stensgaard. Yes; you are lying to yourself, anyway. Here are you, talking of municipal jobs and love in the same breath. For any sake call things by their right names. It is a dirty business altogether, and I won't have anything to do with it——

Bastian. But, listen——!

Stensgaard. No, you must leave me out of it, I tell you! (*FJELDBO comes in from the right. STENSGAARD turns to him.*) Well, how is the election going?

Fjeldbo. Splendidly, for you. I was just talking to Lundestad. He says you have pretty nearly collared all the votes.

Stensgaard. Really?

Fjeldbo. But what is the good of it? You haven't the property qualification, you know, and so——

Stensgaard (in a low voice). It's damnable!

Fjeldbo. Well, you can't have it both ways. If you win in one direction, you must expect to lose in another. Good-bye! (*Goes out at the back.*)

Bastian. What did he mean about winning and losing?

Stensgaard. I will tell you later. But, my dear Monsen—to come back to what we were saying—I promised to put in a good word for you——

Bastian. Did you? I thought what you said was that you——?

Stensgaard. Nonsense; you didn't let me finish what I was saying. What I meant was that it is a dirty business to mix up love with municipal jobs and that sort of thing; it is doing outrage to one's finest feelings. And therefore, my dear fellow, if you really love the girl——

Bastian. Widow.

Stensgaard. Quite so. It is all the same. It seems to

me that if one really loves a woman, that mere fact of itself ought to be enough to——

Bastian. I quite agree with you. Then you will speak for me?

Stensgaard. With the greatest pleasure—but on one condition.

Bastian. What is that?

Stensgaard. Tit for tat, my dear Bastian; you must put in a word for me in return.

Bastian. I? Who to?

Stensgaard. Do you mean to say you have noticed nothing? And it was right before your eyes!

Bastian. You don't mean to say——?

Stensgaard. Your sister Ragna, of course. Yes, she is the one! You don't know how touched I have been to see her going quietly and unostentatiously about her duties at home——

Bastian. Is it really possible that——?

Stensgaard. How is it that you, with your keen eye, never detected it?

Bastian. Well, at one time I did think——. But lately people have been saying that you were beginning to be quite a "friend of the family" at the Bratsbergs'!

Stensgaard. At the Bratsbergs'! Well, Monsen, I will be frank with you and admit that there was a moment when I did not feel absolutely certain; but, thank heaven, that moment passed, and now I am quite certain of myself and of the course I should steer.

Bastian. Shake hands! I will talk about you—don't you fret! And as for Ragna, she daren't do anything but what I and her father tell her.

Stensgaard. Yes, but about your father—that was just what I wanted to——

Bastian. Hush! I am sure I hear Madam Rundholmen coming. Say a word for me now—if she has not been too busy; when she has been very busy she is rather hard to please. Do your best for me, my dear fellow, and leave the rest to me. Has Aslaksen been here?

Stensgaard. He is out at the hustings. (*BASTIAN goes out at the back. Immediately afterwards MADAM RUNDHOLMEN comes in from the right.*)

Madam Rundholmen. Everything is going swimmingly, Mr. Stensgaard; they are all voting for you.

Stensgaard. It is wonderful, isn't it!

Madam Rundholmen. It is. Goodness knows what old Monsen will think of it!

Stensgaard. Will you give me a moment, Madam Rundholmen?

Madam Rundholmen. Well, what is it?

Stensgaard. Will you listen to me?

Madam Rundholmen. To be sure I will.

Stensgaard. Very well. You were talking just now of your lonely condition——

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, that was that horrid old man, Hejre——

Stensgaard. You were saying how difficult life is for a lone widow——

Madam Rundholmen. So it is, Mr. Stensgaard—you should just try it!

Stensgaard. But suppose a fine young man should come along——

Madam Rundholmen. A fine young man?

Stensgaard. Some one who has long loved you in secret——

Madam Rundholmen. No, really, I won't listen to you any longer.

Stensgaard. You must! A young man who finds a solitary life difficult too——

Madam Rundholmen. Eh? I don't understand you a bit!

Stensgaard. Suppose, now, that you could ensure two people's happiness, Madam Rundholmen—your own, and——

Madam Rundholmen. And a fine young man's?

Stensgaard. Answer me——

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, Mr. Stensgaard, are you really serious?

Stensgaard. Do you think I would jest on such a subject? Wouldn't you be willing, in that case——?

Madam Rundholmen. Heaven knows I would! You dear, sweet——

Stensgaard (recoiling). What?

Madam Rundholmen. Bother, here's some one coming! (RAGNA MONSEN comes in hastily from the back, evidently very uneasy.)

Ragna. Excuse me, but is my father here?

Madam Rundholmen. Your father? Yes—no—I don't know—excuse me——

Ragna. Where is he?

Madam Rundholmen. Your father? Well, he drove past——

Stensgaard. Christiania way.

Ragna. No, that's impossible——

Madam Rundholmen. He drove past here—I know that. My dear Miss Monsen, you can't think how happy I am! Wait just a moment, while I run down to the cellar and fetch up a bottle of the real stuff! (Goes out to the left.)

Stensgaard. Miss Monsen, is it really your father you are looking for?

Ragna. You heard me say so, I think.

Stensgaard. And you didn't know he had gone away from home?

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, how should I know? I am never told anything. But Christiania way? It is impossible; you would have met him. Good-bye!

Stensgaard (intercepting her exit). *Ragna!* Listen to me! Why are you so changed towards me?

Ragna. I? Let me go, please! Let me go!

Stensgaard. No, I won't let you go! It seems to me a stroke of Providence that you should come here at this moment. Don't be so cold to me; you usedn't to be like that.

Ragna. Those days are over, thank heaven!

Stensgaard. But why——?

Ragna. I have learnt to know you better—and it is a good thing I have learnt it in time.

Stensgaard. Really? Some one has been telling you lies about me? Perhaps it is partly my own fault; I have got entangled in a very difficult situation. But that is over now! When I look at you, I feel a better man! It is you that have the real key to my heart; it is you I love, *Ragna!*—you, and no one else!

Ragna. Let me go! You frighten me!

Stensgaard. To-morrow, then, Ragna? May I come and speak to you to-morrow?

Ragna. Yes, yes—only, for any sake, not to-day.

Stensgaard. Only not to-day? Hurrah! It is all right! I am the happiest of men! (*MADAM RUNDHOLMEN comes in from the left, with wine and cakes.*)

Madam Rundholmen. There! Now we must drink a glass for good luck!

Stensgaard. For good luck in love! Here's to love and good luck! Hurrah for to-morrow! (*Drinks. HELLE comes in from the right.*)

Helle (to RAGNA). Have you found him?

Ragna. No, he is not here. Come away!

Madam Rundholmen. But, dear me, what's the matter?

Helle. Nothing; only some strangers have turned up at Mr. Monsen's, and—

Ragna. Thank you for all your kindness, Madam Rundholmen—

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, have you had strangers landed on you again?

Ragna. Yes, yes. Excuse me—I must go home. Good-bye!

Stensgaard. Good-bye—till to-morrow! (*HELLE and RAGNA go out at the back. HEJRE comes in from the right.*)

Hejre. Ha, ha—it's going like a house on fire! They are all cackling "Stensgaard, Stensgaard, Stensgaard!" they are all voting for him! You ought to vote for him, too, Madam Rundholmen!

Madam Rundholmen. Now you are talking! Are they really all voting for him?

Hejre. That they are! Mr. Stensgaard "enjoys the confidence of the People," they say. Old Lundestad is going about with a face like a pickled gherkin. It is perfectly delightful to see.

Madam Rundholmen. They shan't repent having voted for him. If I can't vote, I can at all events stand treat! (*Goes out to the left.*)

Hejre. You are a dangerous man with the widows, Mr. Stensgaard! I'll tell you what—you ought to clinch the matter with her! You would be all right then, my boy!

Stensgaard. With Madam Rundholmen?

Hejre. Exactly. That is a sound business woman; and she will be cock of the walk as soon as that rickety box of tricks of Monsen's has been upset.

Stensgaard. You don't really think Monsen is shaky, do you?

Hejre. Don't I? You must have a very poor memory, my dear sir. Aren't there whispers of failure and bankruptcy about?

Stensgaard. Well, and if there are?

Hejre. If there are? Well, what do *you* think? People looking for Monsen here—two strange men out at his house—

Stensgaard. A couple of guests; yes, I know—

Hejre. Unbidden guests, my dear young friend. Aren't there whispers of the police and angry creditors? Something wrong with the books and papers, let me tell you! Ah—*à propos*—what was that paper Monsen gave you yesterday?

Stensgaard. Oh, only a scrap of paper. Something wrong with the books? Look here—do you know Mr. Bratsberg's signature when you see it?

Hejre. Ha, ha! I should think so!

Stensgaard (*taking the bill out of his pocket*). Well, look at this, then.

Hejre. Give it here; I am a bit short-sighted, but—
(*Looks at it.*) That, my dear sir? That was never signed by Mr. Bratsberg.

Stensgaard. No? Well, then—

Hejre. Was it drawn by Monsen?

Stensgaard. No, by Erik Bratsberg.

Hejre. Nonsense! Let me look at it again. (*Looks at it and returns it.*) You may light your pipe with that, for all it is worth.

Stensgaard. The devil! Do you mean that the drawer's name too—?

Hejre. Forged, my young friend; forged, as sure as my Christian name is Daniel. You only want to look at it with your eyes sharpened by a touch of suspicion—

Stensgaard. But how could it possibly—? Monsen couldn't have known—

Hejre. Monsen? No; that chap knows nothing about paper—his own or any one else's. But it is a good thing it has all come to an end, Mr. Stensgaard. It gratifies one's moral sense. I assure you I have sometimes felt myself glowing with virtuous indignation, if I may say so, merely at having to stand by and see—— But never mind about that. The most entertaining part of it is that Monsen's smash will mean, first of all, Erik Bratsberg's failure, and he will drag his father down with him——

Stensgaard. Yes, that is what Lundestad said.

Hejre. But of course there is method in bankruptcy. Take my word for it—and I am an experienced prophet—Monsen will find himself in gaol, Erik Bratsberg will compound with his creditors, and his father's affairs will be put into a receiver's hands—that is to say, his creditors will present him with a pension of four hundred pounds a year for life. That is how these things go, Mr. Stensgaard! I know; I know. What does it say in the classics? *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus*. That is to say: There is no justice in this battered old world, my boy!

Stensgaard (walking up and down). First the one and then the other! Both ways blocked!

Hejre. What on earth——?

Stensgaard. And just now, of all times. Now! Now! (*ASLAKSEN comes in from the right.*)

Aslaksen. Congratulations! Congratulations!

Stensgaard. Am I elected?

Aslaksen. Yes—117 votes; and Lundestad with 53. The others are nowhere.

Hejre. So you have taken your first step on the path to glory, Mr. Stensgaard!

Aslaksen. And you must pay your footing in a bowl of punch!

Hejre. Yes, it is the first step that costs, as the saying is.

Aslaksen (calling through the door on the left). Some punch, Madam Rundholmen! Our newly-elected friend stands treat! (*LUNDESTAD and some other voters come in from the right.*)

Hejre (sympathisingly to LUNDESTAD). Fifty - three! And that is the grey-haired citizen's reward!

Lundestad (whispering, to STENSGAARD). I hope you are quite determined to——?

Stensgaard. What's the good of being determined, when everything is going to pieces?

Lundestad. Do you mean that the game is lost?

Aslaksen (coming back from the door on the left). Madam Rundholmen is going to stand us the punch. She says she is the proper person to——

Stensgaard (struck by an idea). Madam Rundholmen! The proper person to——!

Lundestad. To do what?

Stensgaard. The game is not lost, Mr. Lundestad! (*Sits down at the table on the right, and writes.*)

Lundestad (aside, to ASLAKSEN). Look here, Aslaksen, can you put something of mine into the paper the day after to-morrow?

Aslaksen. Of course I can. Is it something tasty?

Lundestad. No, it certainly isn't something tasty.

Aslaksen. Oh, it doesn't matter; I will take it, anyhow.

Lundestad. It is my political last will and testament; I will write it this evening. (*Crosses the room.*)

A Maid (coming in from the left). Here is the punch, with my mistress's compliments.

Aslaksen. Hurrah!—now we shall get some life into our local conditions! (*He takes the bowl and puts it on the table in the middle of the room, serves the others, and drinks industriously during the following scene. BASTIAN MONSEN comes in from the right.*)

Bastian (to ASLAKSEN, in an undertone). You haven't forgotten my letter, have you?

Aslaksen. Don't disturb yourself. (*Taps his breast pocket.*) I have got it here.

Bastian. Deliver it as soon as you can—whenever you see she has time, you know.

Aslaksen. I know, I know! (*Calls out.*) Now then, gentlemen, I have filled your glasses!

Bastian. You won't be doing it for nothing—I will see to that.

Aslaksen. All right, all right! (*To the MAID.*) A lemon, Karen! Fly like the wind, my dear!

Stensgaard. Aslaksen! Just a word! Shall you be passing here to-morrow afternoon?

Aslaksen. To-morrow afternoon? I can, easily.

Stensgaard. Good. Then look in here and give Madam Rundholmen this letter, will you?

Aslaksen. From you?

Stensgaard. Yes. Put it in your pocket. That's it. To-morrow afternoon, you understand?

Aslaksen. I understand. That will be all right. (*The MAID brings the lemon. STENSGAARD moves towards the window.*)

Bastian (*to STENSGAARD*). Well, old chap—have you spoken to Madam Rundholmen yet?

Stensgaard. Spoken to her? Yes, I did speak to her a little—

Bastian. And what do you think?

Stensgaard. Well—you see—we were interrupted. I have nothing definite to tell you.

Bastian. I shall have a try, anyway. She is always complaining of being a lonely widow. In an hour from now I shall have got it over.

Stensgaard. In an hour from now? (*MADAM RUNDHOLMEN comes in from the left.*)

Bastian. Hush! Don't let any one notice anything. (*Crosses the floor.*)

Stensgaard (*in an undertone, going up to ASLAKSEN*). Give me back that letter.

Aslaksen. You want it back?

Stensgaard. Yes, be quick. I will deliver it myself.

Aslaksen. All right. Here you are. (*STENSGAARD puts the letter in his pocket and mixes with the others.*)

Madam Rundholmen (*to BASTIAN*). What do you think of the election, Mr. Monsen?

Bastian. Excellent. Stensgaard and I are great friends, let me tell you. I shouldn't wonder if he got into parliament.

Madam Rundholmen. Your father wouldn't be particularly pleased with that, I expect?

Bastian. Oh, father has so many irons in the fire. Besides, if Stensgaard goes to parliament, we shall still keep the honour and glory in the family, I fancy.

Madam Rundholmen. How?

Bastian. He is going a-wooing—

Madam Rundholmen. Good Lord! Has he said anything?

Bastian. Yes; and I have promised to put in a word for him. It will be all right; I feel certain Ragna rather fancies him.

Madam Rundholmen. Ragna?

Lundestad (coming up to them). Well, what are you two so busy gossiping about?

Madam Rundholmen. Only fancy—he says Mr. Stensgaard is going a-wooing—

Lundestad. I know; but he won't find it easy to get over Mr. Bratsberg—

Madam Rundholmen. Mr. Bratsberg?

Lundestad. I dare say he thinks her too good for a mere lawyer—

Madam Rundholmen. Thinks whom too good?

Lundestad. Miss Bratsberg—his daughter—of course.

Bastian. Surely you don't mean that he is courting Miss Bratsberg?

Lundestad. Indeed he is.

Madam Rundholmen. Will you take your oath on it?

Bastian. And he told me——! Mr. Lundestad, just a word with you! (*He and LUNDESTAD go together to the back.*)

Madam Rundholmen (going up to STENSGAARD). You must be on your guard, Mr. Stensgaard!

Stensgaard. Against whom?

Madam Rundholmen. Wicked people. There are people going about slandering you.

Stensgaard. Let them!—if only they don't slander me to one person.

Madam Rundholmen. Who is that one?

Stensgaard (handing her the letter unobserved). Look here—read that when you are alone.

Madam Rundholmen. Ah, I knew it! (*Goes in to the left. RINGDAL comes in from the right.*)

Ringdal. Well, I hear you have come off with flying colours, Mr. Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. Yes, I have, Mr. Ringdal—and that in spite of your esteemed master's exertions.

Ringdal. His exertions to do what?

Stensgaard. To prevent my being elected.

Ringdal. He used his liberty of voting, like any one else.

Stensgaard. It is a pity that he won't have many more opportunities of using it.

Ringdal. What do you mean?

Stensgaard. I mean that in consequence of the state his books are in——

Ringdal. His books? What books? What on earth have you got in your head?

Stensgaard. Oh, you needn't pretend you don't understand. Isn't there a storm brewing?—a failure on a very large scale?

Ringdal. I hear so on all sides.

Stensgaard. And do you mean that Mr. Bratsberg and his son are not involved in it?

Ringdal. Excuse me, but have you gone mad?

Stensgaard. Oh, of course you will try to hush it up.

Ringdal. What use would that be? Do you suppose a thing like that could be hushed up?

Stensgaard. Isn't it true, then?

Ringdal. Not a syllable of it, as far as Mr. Bratsberg is concerned. How on earth could you believe such a story? Who has induced you to believe it?

Stensgaard. I won't tell you that, for the moment.

Ringdal. All right. But whoever has done it, has done it with a purpose.

Stensgaard. With a purpose——?

Ringdal. Yes, just consider—isn't there any one here who might see some advantage to himself in causing a split between you and Mr. Bratsberg?

Stensgaard. Upon my word, there is!—there is!

Ringdal. Mr. Bratsberg is really very fond of you——

Stensgaard. Is he?

Ringdal. Yes, and that is what they want to prevent; they are building their hopes on the fact of your not being familiar with the conditions of things here, and being impetuous and unsuspecting——

Stensgaard. The reptiles! And Madam Rundholmen has my letter!

Ringdal. What letter?

Stensgaard. Oh, nothing. But it is not too late yet. My dear Mr. Ringdal, shall you see Mr. Bratsberg this evening?

Ringdal. I am sure to.

Stensgaard. Then will you tell him to think no more about certain threats he knows of? Tell him I will come myself to see him in the morning and explain everything.

Ringdal. You will?

Stensgaard. Yes, to prove to him—ah, by the way, talking of proof, look here, Mr. Ringdal—give him this bill from me.

Ringdal. This bill——?

Stensgaard. Yes. It is something you don't understand; but just give it to him and——

Ringdal. Really, Mr. Stensgaard, I must say——

Stensgaard. And you may add just this much as a message from me; tell him that is the way I deal with people who try to get me beaten at the elections.

Ringdal. You may rely on me. (*Goes out at the back.*)

Stensgaard (to HEJRE). Look here, Mr. Hejre—how could you try to come over me with that story about Mr. Bratsberg?

Hejre. How could I try to come over you——?

Stensgaard. Certainly; you know it is the blackest lie——

Hejre. Eh? Really? I am delighted to hear it! Mr. Lundestad, do you hear that? It is all a lie about Mr. Bratsberg——

Lundestad. Hush! We were on the wrong track; it is something nearer home.

Stensgaard. How nearer home?

Lundestad. I don't know anything about it; but people are talking about Madam Rundholmen——

Stensgaard. What?

Hejre. Ah, I thought as much! Her association with the Monsen lot——

Lundestad. He decamped this morning, before it was light——

Hejre. And his family are out looking for him——

Lundestad. And his son has been doing his level best to get his sister provided for——

Stensgaard. Provided for! "To-morrow," she said—and her anxiety about her father——!

Hejre. Ha, ha! You will see, her father has gone and hanged himself!

Aslaksen (coming up to them). What's that? Some one hanged himself?

Lundestad. Mr. Hejre says that Monsen——. (*MONSEN comes in at the back.*)

Monsen. Champagne all round, please!

Aslaksen and the others. Monsen!

Monsen. Yes, Monsen! Champagne Monsen! Rich Monsen! Let us have a drink, for goodness sake!

Hejre. But, my dear sir——!

Stensgaard. You! Where have you come from?

Monsen. From a good stroke of business! I've made twenty thousand pounds! Ha, ha! I'm going to give a thundering big dinner at my house to-morrow! I invite you all! Champagne, do you hear! Congratulations on your election, Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. Yes, I want to explain to you——

Monsen. Oh, bother that! I don't want your explanations! Champagne! Where is Madam Rundholmen? (*Goes towards the door on the left. The MAID comes out from there.*)

Maid. No one is to go in there; Madam is sitting reading a letter——

Bastian. The devil! (*Goes out at the back.*)

Stensgaard. Reading a letter?

Maid. Yes, and seems quite distracted.

Stensgaard. Good-bye, Mr. Monsen. Dinner to-morrow, then——

Monsen. Good-bye, till to-morrow!

Stensgaard (aside, to HEJRE). Mr. Hejre, will you do me a favour?

Hejre. Of course, of course.

Stensgaard. Then blacken my character a little to Madam Rundholmen; tell her something a little questionable about me—you do that sort of thing so well, you know.

Hejre. What the devil for?

Stensgaard. I have my reasons. It is a little joke, you

understand; a bet with—with some one you owe a grudge to.

Hejre. Aha! I understand! That's all right!

Stensgaard. But don't spoil it by saying too much, you know; just make her a little dubious about her opinion of me—a little uncertain for the present—you understand?

Hejre. Rely on me; it will give me the very greatest pleasure——

Stensgaard. Thank you! Thank you! Good-bye for the present! (*Goes to the table.*) Mr. Lundestad, you and I will talk that matter over again at Mr. Bratsberg's to-morrow morning.

Lundestad. You have hopes?

Stensgaard. Threefold hopes!

Lundestad. Threefold? But I don't understand——

Stensgaard. You needn't try. For the future I shall rely on myself. (*Goes out at the back.*)

Monsen (at the punch-bowl). One more glass, Aslaksen! Where is Bastian?

Aslaksen. He went out just now. But I have a letter to deliver for him.

Monsen. Have you?

Aslaksen. Yes, to Madam Rundholmen.

Monsen. Really?

Aslaksen. But she is not to have it till to-morrow afternoon, he said; neither sooner nor later than that; just up to time! Your good health! (*Drinks.*)

Hejre (to LUNDESTAD). What the devil is going on between Stensgaard and Madam Rundholmen? Do you know?

Lundestad (in a low voice). He is courting her.

Hejre. I thought so, too. But he asked me to blacken his character a little to her—to make her dubious——. But never mind about that!

Lundestad. And you said you would?

Hejre. Of course I did.

Lundestad. I expect he thought you would promise one thing and perform another.

Hejre. Ha, ha! The dear fellow! He will find he is out in his calculations, this time, then. (*MADAM RUNDHOLMEN, holding an open letter, appears in the door on the left.*)

Madam Rundholmen. Where is Mr. Stensgaard?

Hejre. He has just kissed your maid and gone out, Madam Rundholmen! (*Curtain.*)

ACT V

(SCENE.—*A big reception-room at the BRATSBERGS'. Entrance at the back; doors also to right and left. RINGDAL is standing at a table turning over some papers. A knock is heard at the door.*)

Ringdal. Come in!

Fjeldbo (coming in from the back). Good-morning!

Ringdal. Good-morning, doctor!

Fjeldbo. Well, is everything all right?

Ringdal. Yes, thanks; everything is all right here; but——

Fjeldbo. But?

Ringdal. I suppose you have heard the great piece of news?

Fjeldbo. No. What is it?

Ringdal. Haven't you heard about Monsen?

Fjeldbo. No!

Ringdal. He bolted last night.

Fjeldbo. Bolted? Monsen?

Ringdal. Bolted.

Fjeldbo. But, good Lord——

Ringdal. There were all sorts of rumours flying about yesterday; but Monsen came back; he must have dissembled pretty well——

Fjeldbo. But the reason? What is the reason?

Ringdal. Enormous losses over timber, they say; several firms in Christiania gone smash; and so——

Fjeldbo. And so he has bolted?

Ringdal. Yes, gone over the border into Sweden, probably. The authorities were up at his house this morning, making inventories and sealing things up——

Fjeldbo. And his unfortunate family——?

Ringdal. Well, the son has always kept clear of his

father's affairs; anyway, he pretends to know nothing about it, as I hear.

Fjeldbo. Yes, but the daughter?

Ringdal. Hush! The daughter is here.

Fjeldbo. Here?

Ringdal. Mr. Helle brought her and the little ones over here this morning; and Miss Bratsberg has quietly taken charge of them.

Fjeldbo. And how does she take it?

Ringdal. Oh, philosophically enough, I think. You may imagine that after the way she has been treated at home——. Besides, I may tell you that she——. Hush! here comes Mr. Bratsberg. (*BRATSBERG comes in from the left.*)

Bratsberg. Ah, good-morning, doctor! You here so early?

Fjeldbo. Yes, I was out rather early to-day. May I wish you many happy returns of the day, Mr. Bratsberg?

Bratsberg. I don't want many days like this one, God knows! But thank you, all the same; I know you mean it kindly.

Fjeldbo. And may I venture to ask——

Bratsberg. Before we go any farther, I want to tell you that I am resigning my post as gentleman-in-waiting to the king. I am sending in my resignation, with my humble duty, to-day.

Fjeldbo. You ought to sleep over it first.

Bratsberg. When my king was graciously pleased to honour me with an appointment at Court, he did so in recognition of a certain prestige that my family had proudly enjoyed for many generations.

Fjeldbo. Well, what then?

Bratsberg. Now my family has been disgraced—as fully as Monsen himself. You have heard about him, I suppose?

Fjeldbo. Yes, I have.

Bratsberg (to RINGDAL). Is there any further news?

Ringdal. No, except that a whole lot of the younger farmers are involved in his failure.

Bratsberg. And my son?

Ringdal. Your son has sent me a statement. He will be able to satisfy all his creditors; but he will have nothing left.

Bratsberg. Hm! Then will you please have a fair copy of my letters of resignation made.

Ringdal. As you wish. (*Goes out to the right.*)

Fjeldbo. But aren't you being too hasty? I am sure everything can be quietly put right.

Bratsberg. Indeed? Can I get rid of my own consciousness of what has happened?

Fjeldbo. After all, what is it that *has* happened? I know the boy has written to you, confessed his recklessness, and implored your forgiveness; but what does all that amount to, after all?

Bratsberg. Would you have done what my son has done?

Fjeldbo. He won't do it again; that is the main point.

Bratsberg. And how do you know that he won't do it again?

Fjeldbo. If for no other reason, I know it because of the scene that you told me had taken place—with your daughter-in-law, I mean. Whatever else comes of all this, it will have taught him a lesson.

Bratsberg (*walking up and down*). My poor Selma! Our quiet peace and happiness all gone!

Fjeldbo. There is something better even than that. Your happiness has gone no deeper than the surface. Let me tell you this, Mr. Bratsberg: in that respect, as in so many others, you have built on a very insecure foundation. You have been infatuated and too proud, sir!

Bratsberg (*standing still*). I have?

Fjeldbo. Yes, you! You have prided yourself on your family honour; but when has that honour ever been put to the test? How do you know whether it would have withstood temptation?

Bratsberg. You may spare me your sermons, doctor. I have not lived through the occurrences of the last few days without their leaving their mark on me.

Fjeldbo. I can well believe it; but let the result appear in a gentler judgment and a clearer understanding. You reproach your son; but what have you done for your son? You have taken pains to educate him, but you have never given a thought to the moulding of his character. You have lectured him on what he owes to the honour of his family, but you have not guided him and

moulded and formed his character, so that to act honourably should become an unconscious instinct with him.

Bratsberg. Do you really think that?

Fjeldbo. I think it and know it. But it is the same with nearly every one here; mental education is thought so much more of than any real preparation for life. And look what it leads to; look at the hundreds of clever men that are going about with only one side of their natures developed—of one colour as regards their feelings and sentiments, but of quite another colour in matters of work and business. You need only look at Stensgaard—

Bratsberg. Ah, Stensgaard! Well, what have you got to say about him?

Fjeldbo. He is a mere bit of patchwork. I have known him from his childhood. His father was a miserable creature and a contemptible coward. He used to run a small provision shop and a pawnbroking business at the same time—or, to be more accurate, it was his wife who used to run them. She was a great, coarse woman, the most unwomanly woman I have ever known. She got her husband declared incapable of managing his affairs; there wasn't an atom of feeling in her heart. And that was the home that Stensgaard grew up in. However, he went to the grammar school. "He shall have an education," said his mother; "we will make a splendid debt-collector of him." Ugliness at home; fine thoughts at school; his mind, his character, his will, his abilities—all pulling different ways. What else could it result in, but a personality that is all shreds and patches?

Bratsberg. I don't know what it could result in. But I should like to know what you consider good enough. We are not to expect anything of Stensgaard, nor of my son either; but to expect great things from you, I suppose!—you, who—

Fjeldbo. Yes, from me—precisely. Oh, you needn't smile. I am not setting myself up on a pedestal; but I have had exactly what gives a man equilibrium and stability of character. I grew up in the peace and harmony of a quiet middle-class family. My mother is every inch a true woman; in our home our desires were never allowed to outstrip our means; we had no cravings that were

doomed to disappointment by our circumstances; and, so far, death has not laid his cold hand on our family, to make empty places there and leave want behind him. We were taught to love beauty—with a love that coloured the whole of our daily life and did not merely exist alongside of it. We were free from excesses, either of intellect or of temperament——

Bratsberg. Quite so; and that is what has made you so absolutely perfect, I suppose?

Fjeldbo. I am far from thinking myself that. All I say is that the conditions of my life have been uninterruptedly favourable; and I feel a certain responsibility in consequence.

Bratsberg. May be; but if Stensgaard hasn't any responsibility of that kind, it makes it all the finer of him to have acted as he has done and——

Fjeldbo. How? What has he done?

Bratsberg. You are misjudging him, my dear doctor! Look here. (*Holds out the bill.*) What do you say to that?

Fjeldbo. Your son's bill!

Bratsberg. Yes, he has sent it back to me.

Fjeldbo. Voluntarily?

Bratsberg. Voluntarily and unconditionally. It was a fine thing to do—a noble thing; and therefore from to-day my house is open to him.

Fjeldbo. Be careful! For your own sake—for your daughter's sake——

Bratsberg. Oh, let me be! He has the advantage of you in many ways; at the very least he is straightforward—but you go to work in an underhand way.

Fjeldbo. I do?

Bratsberg. Yes, you do! You have made yourself the guiding spirit of this house; you go in and out as you please; I consult you about everything—and yet——

Fjeldbo. Well?—and yet?

Bratsberg. And yet there is something behind it all with you—something confoundedly objectionable; something—something superior that I can't stand!

Fjeldbo. Oh—but—explain yourself!

Bratsberg. I? No! It is *you* that should explain yourself! You can make what you like of that answer.

Fjeldbo. Mr. Bratsberg, you and I do not understand one another. I have no bill to send back to you; but it is quite possible that I might do you even a greater service than that.

Bratsberg. Indeed? How?

Fjeldbo. By holding my tongue.

Bratsberg. By holding your tongue? Shall I tell you what I should like? I should like to be changed into one of these coarse, foul-mouthed fellows that are joining the League of Youth! You carry your nose much too high in the air, my friend; that won't do in a free community like ours. Look at Stensgaard; there is nothing of that about him; and that is why I will have him here. I will—I will! Why, upon my soul I would like to——! You must make the best of it; you have made your bed, and must lie on it. (*LUNDESTAD comes in from the back.*)

Lundestad. Many happy returns of the day, Mr. Bratsberg! Allow me to wish you every possible——

Bratsberg. Oh, damn your good wishes!—I beg your pardon, my dear Lundestad! What I mean is that everything seems such humbug. There is nothing in the world that will really stand the test of trial.

Lundestad. So Monsen's creditors are saying!

Bratsberg. Ah, yes—that affair of Monsen's, for instance—weren't you thunderstruck to hear of it?

Lundestad. Oh, you know you have been prophesying it for ever so long, Mr. Bratsberg.

Bratsberg. Hm, hm! so I have—so I have. As recently as the day before yesterday, he came here to beg me——

Fjeldbo. To beg you to save him, perhaps.

Lundestad. No, he was too deeply involved for that; and everything has happened for the best.

Bratsberg. Really! Was it for the best, then, that you were beaten at the election yesterday?

Lundestad. I wasn't beaten; as a matter of fact, everything went just as I wished. Stensgaard is a man that it is better not to oppose. He has something that the rest of us would give our ears to have.

Bratsberg. I don't quite understand——?

Lundestad. He has the power of carrying the crowd with him. And he is lucky enough not to be hampered by

character or convictions or position, so that it is easy enough for him to be broad-minded.

Bratsberg. But I certainly should have supposed that we were broad-minded too?

Lundestad. Of course we are, Mr. Bratsberg. No doubt of it. But the fact remains that we are broad-minded merely with regard to what concerns ourselves; but here is this fellow Stensgaard being broad-minded as to what concerns others as well! That is the new feature in it.

Bratsberg. And you mean to back up these revolutionary ideas?

Lundestad. I have read in history books that in old days there were men who had the power of conjuring up spirits; but they couldn't manage to conjure them away again.

Bratsberg. But, my dear Lundestad, I cannot understand how an intelligent man like you——

Lundestad. Oh, I know it sounds like Popish superstition, Mr. Bratsberg; but new ideas are like spirits—you can't conjure them away again, and so the only thing is to make the best of them.

Bratsberg. Yes, but now, when Monsen is done for, and probably the whole gang of disturbers of the peace with him——

Lundestad. If Monsen had gone to smash a few days earlier, things would have been very different.

Bratsberg. Yes, worse luck! You have been too previous——

Lundestad. I was thinking of you as well, Mr. Bratsberg.

Bratsberg. Of me?

Lundestad. Our party must keep up its reputation. We represent the old, solid Norwegian tradition of honesty. If I had failed Stensgaard, let me tell you, he has a paper which——

Bratsberg. He hasn't it any longer.

Lundestad. What?

Bratsberg. Here it is.

Lundestad. He has sent it back to you?

Bratsberg. Yes. In personal matters he is an honourable man; I must do him that justice.

Lundestad (thoughtfully). He is a remarkably clever

man. (STENSGAARD *comes in at the back, and stops in the doorway.*)

Stensgaard. May I come any farther?

Bratsberg (*going to meet him*). Certainly, you may.

Stensgaard. And will you accept my good wishes?

Bratsberg. That I will.

Stensgaard. Then let me offer them to you from the bottom of my heart! And I hope you will blot out all thoughts of those stupid things I wrote——

Bratsberg. I judge by deeds, Mr. Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. God bless you, sir!

Bratsberg. And from to-day—since you wish it—you must consider yourself at home here.

Stensgaard. May I? May I really? (*A knock is heard at the door.*)

Bratsberg. Come in! (*A number of townsfolk come in to congratulate BRATSBERG on his birthday. He goes amongst them, thanking them and talking to them. Meanwhile THORA has come in from the left.*)

Thora. Mr. Stensgaard, let me take this opportunity of quietly thanking you.

Stensgaard. You, Miss Bratsberg!

Thora. My father has told me how splendidly you have behaved.

Stensgaard. But——?

Thora. How we have misjudged you!

Stensgaard. Have you?

Thora. But you know it was your own fault—no, no, it was ours. I wish I could find some way of making amends for it.

Stensgaard. Do you? Do you really? Would you really——?

Thora. Certainly, if only we could—

Bratsberg (*to THORA*). Let us have some refreshments for our guests, my dear.

Thora. They are just being brought. (*She goes towards the door on the left, from which the MAID comes with a tray of wine and cakes, which she hands round during the following dialogue.*)

Stensgaard. My dear, kind Lundestad, I feel like the god of Victory!

Lundestad. You felt like that yesterday, too, I believe.

Stensgaard. Pooh!—to-day it is quite a different matter—the best thing of all—the crown of it all! Life has been made a glorious thing!

Lundestad. Aha! Thoughts of love, eh?

Stensgaard. Not thoughts—real happiness! The happiness of love!

Lundestad. So brother-in-law Bastian has brought you an answer, eh?

Stensgaard. Bastian——?

Lundestad. Yes, he hinted at something yesterday; hadn't he promised to speak for you to a certain little girl?

Stensgaard. What nonsense——

Lundestad. Oh, you needn't be shy with me. If I don't know it yet, then I can tell you; you have won, Mr. Stensgaard—I have it from Ringdal.

Stensgaard. You have it from Ringdal?

Lundestad. Miss Monsen has said "yes."

Stensgaard. What do you say?

Lundestad. I say that she has said "yes."

Stensgaard. "Yes?" "Yes?" And her father bolted?

Lundestad. But the daughter hasn't bolted.

Stensgaard. Said "yes!" With such a scandal as this in her family! How unwomanly! Such conduct is enough to turn away any man of decent feelings. But the whole thing is a misunderstanding. I never asked Bastian——. How on earth could the brute——? But it is of no consequence; it has nothing to do with me. Whatever he has done, he must be responsible for, and no one else. (*HEJRE comes in at the back.*)

Hejre. Ha, ha! Quite a gathering! Of course! Paying their respects—making up to the great man, as they say. Perhaps I may be allowed, too——

Bratsberg. Thanks, thanks, old friend!

Hejre. Bless me, my dear Mr. Bratsberg, you shouldn't make yourself so cheap. (*More guests arrive.*) Ah, here they come—officers of the courts—the executive—but never mind about that! (*Goes up to STENSGAARD.*) Ah, my dear, lucky young man, are you here? Your hand! Let me offer you the assurance of an old fellow's sincere gratification——

Stensgaard. What about?

Hejre. You asked me yesterday to say something a little equivocal about you to her—you know——

Stensgaard. Oh, yes—yes; well, what of it?

Hejre. It gave me the greatest pleasure to carry out your wishes——

Stensgaard. Well, what of it, I want to know? How did she take it?

Hejre. Like a woman in love—naturally; began to cry—banged the door in my face—wouldn't either answer or show herself——

Stensgaard. Thank heaven for that!

Hejre. You are barbarous! To put a poor lone widow's heart to such a cruel test! To go making fun of the pangs of jealousy! But the eyes of love can see through all that sort of thing. To-day, when I passed her house, there was Madam Rundholmen standing at her open window, looking as well and hearty as you like, combing her hair; she looked like a mermaid, if I may be allowed to say so! Ah, that's a capable woman, if you like!

Stensgaard. Well?

Hejre. Well, then she laughed, as if she were possessed, my boy—and waved a letter in the air, and called out: "A love-letter, Mr. Hejre; I got engaged yesterday!"

Stensgaard. What? Engaged?

Hejre. My heartiest congratulations, young man; I can't tell you how happy I am to be the first to bring you the news——

Stensgaard. It's all nonsense! Just idle talk!

Hejre. What is nonsense?

Stensgaard. You have misunderstood her; or else she has misunderstood——. Engaged, indeed! Are you mad? Now that Monsen has gone to smash, there is very little doubt that she will, too——

Hejre. No, I'll be bound she won't, my boy! She's as safe as a rock.

Stensgaard. It is all one to me. My thoughts are running in another direction altogether. That letter was only a joke—a wager, as I told you, you know. My dear Mr. Hejre, do me the favour not to say a word to any one about that stupid story.

Hejre. I understand! I understand! You want to keep it secret—that is what they call romance, I believe! Yes, yes—you young people have such poetical ideas!

Stensgaard. Quite so, quite so. Only hold your tongue, and I will pay you for it. I will take up your lawsuits, and——. Hush! I rely on you. (*Leaves him.*)

Bratsberg (who has been talking to LUNDESTAD). No, really, Lundestad—I can't believe that!

Lundestad. I swear it is true, Mr. Bratsberg! I had it from Mr. Hejre's own mouth.

Hejre. What had you from my mouth, may I ask?

Bratsberg. Tell me—did Mr. Stensgaard show you a bill yesterday?

Hejre. Yes, that's true!—no doubt about it! But what is the point?

Bratsberg. I will tell you that presently. And you told him, didn't you——?

Lundestad. You made him believe it was a forgery, didn't you?

Hejre. By way of a harmless joke, yes; just to upset his triumph a little bit——

Lundestad. But I understand that you said both the signatures were forgeries?

Hejre. Well, hang it, why not both just as much as one?

Bratsberg. So that was it!

Lundestad (to BRATSBERG). And it was when he heard that——

Bratsberg. That he gave the bill to Ringdal; yes!

Lundestad. When it was no longer any use to him as a weapon to threaten with.

Bratsberg. To think of his playing the magnanimous—and humbugging me a second time! Gaining admission to my house—extorting my gratitude!—the—the——! And this is the creature you——

Hejre. But what makes you behave so strangely, my dear sir?

Bratsberg. I will tell you some other time, old friend! (*Takes LUNDESTAD aside.*) And this is the creature you patronise and shove to the front and help in every way you can!

Lundestad. And what about you?

Bratsberg. Oh, I should like to——!

Lundestad (*pointing to STENSGAARD, who is talking to THORA*). Look over there. What do you suppose people will think——?

Bratsberg. I will soon disabuse their minds.

Lundestad. It is too late, Mr. Bratsberg. He will force himself to the front by all sorts of underhand and deceitful means——

Bratsberg. I know a trick or two myself, Mr. Lundestad!

Lundestad. What do you mean to do?

Bratsberg. Never mind! (*To FJELDBO.*) Doctor Fjeldbo, will you do me a favour?

Fjeldbo. With pleasure!

Bratsberg. Then turn that fellow out of the house.

Fjeldbo. Stensgaard?

Bratsberg. Yes, the adventurer; I don't want to hear his name; turn him out!

Fjeldbo. But how can I——?

Bratsberg. That's your affair. I give you a free hand.

Fjeldbo. A free hand! Do you really?—without any restrictions?

Bratsberg. Devil take it, yes!

Fjeldbo. Your hand on that, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. There it is.

Fjeldbo. Then it is now or never for me. (*In a loud voice.*) May I ask you all for your attention for a moment?

Bratsberg. Dr. Fjeldbo has something to say!

Fjeldbo. I have the great happiness, with Mr. Bratsberg's consent, to announce to you my engagement to his daughter. (*Outburst of astonishment. THORA gives a little cry; BRATSBURG is about to speak, but checks himself. A din of congratulations arises.*)

Stensgaard. Engagement? Your engagement——?

Hejre (*to BRATSBURG*). With your——? With Miss——? With—with——?

Lundestad. Is he out of his mind?

Stensgaard (*to BRATSBURG*). But, Mr. Bratsberg——?

Bratsberg. What can I do? I am a Liberal. I am going to join the League of Youth.

Fjeldbo (*to BRATSBURG*). Thank you, sir—thank you! And, forgive me!

Bratsberg. New combinations are in the air to-day, Mr. Stensgaard! Free competition is a splendid thing!

Thora. My dear, kind father!

Lundestad. Yes, and engagements are in the air, too. I can tell you of another——

Stensgaard. It is merely an invented story!

Lundestad. Nothing of the kind! It is Miss Monsen's engagement——

Stensgaard. It's a lie! It's a lie, I tell you!

Thora. No, dad, it's quite true; they are both here.

Bratsberg. Who? Where?

Thora. Ragna and Mr. Helle. In there. (*Points to the door on the right.*)

Lundestad. Mr. Helle? Then it's he that——!

Bratsberg. And here—in my house! (*Calls to the door on the right.*) Come out, my dear child!

Ragna (*shrinking back in the doorway*). Oh, no, no! There are so many people here!

Bratsberg. Don't be bashful! What has happened isn't your fault.

Helle. Mr. Bratsberg, she is homeless now.

Ragna. Do be good to us!

Bratsberg. Of course I will. And thank you, my dear, for having come to me in your trouble!

Hejre. Engagements *are* in the air, and no mistake! And I can add another to the list——

Bratsberg. What? You? —in your old age? What giddy behaviour!

Hejre. Oh, I could——. But never mind about that.

Lundestad. The game is lost, Mr. Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. Do you think so? (*Raises his voice.*) No, you are not going to add another to the list, Mr. Hejre, but I am! I want to make an announcement, gentlemen; I have reached port too.

Bratsberg. How?

Stensgaard. One sometimes has to play a double game, and conceal one's true purpose, when it is necessary. I regard that as permissible, when it conduces to the general welfare. My life's work is clearly mapped out before me—and everything is second to that, in my eyes. My energies are to be devoted to this district; new ideas

are working and fermenting here, but need straining and clarifying. But that is no work for a mere adventurer. If the people here are to have a leader, he must belong to the place. That is why I have entered into ties that bind me up irrevocably with local interests here—bind me by my heart-strings. If I have aroused misconceptions in any quarter, that must be forgiven me. I, too, am engaged!

Bratsberg. You?

Fjeldbo. Engaged? To whom?

Lundestad. Surely you don't mean——?

Stensgaard. It is the result of much deliberation—much weighing of my feelings. Yes, fellow-townsmen, I am engaged—to Madam Rundholmen!

Fjeldbo. To Madam Rundholmen!

Bratsberg. The tradesman's widow?

Lundestad. Hm! So that's it!

Bratsberg. But this is all very puzzling. What made you——?

Stensgaard. It was just a manœuvre, Mr. Bratsberg!

Lundestad. He's a very clever fellow. (*ASLAKSEN peeps in at the door at the back.*)

Aslaksen. I hope you will excuse me, but——

Bratsberg. Come in, Aslaksen, come in! Have you come to wish me many happy returns of the day, too?

Aslaksen. No, indeed, sir—I wouldn't take such a liberty. But I absolutely must speak to Mr. Stensgaard.

Stensgaard. Afterwards. You can wait outside.

Aslaksen. No, I swear it is urgent——

Stensgaard. Hold your tongue! What do you mean by this intrusion?—Yes, gentlemen, as I was saying, the ways of fate are wonderful. There was need of some close and permanent bond to link me to this district; and I found a woman of ripe years, who could make a home for me. I have sloughed the skin of the adventurer; and here I stand before you all, a plain man of the people. Take me. I am ready to stand or fall in any post your confidence may assign to me.

Lundestad. He has won.

Bratsberg. Really, I must say——. (*To the MAID, who has come forward from the door at the back.*) Well? Well? What is it? What are you giggling about?

Maid. Please, sir, Madam Rundholmen is outside, with her young man——

Several of the Guests. Her young man? Madam Rundholmen? What on earth——?

Stensgaard. What nonsense!

Aslaksen. Well, I told you——

Bratsberg (going towards the door). Come in! Come in! (BASTIAN MONSEN and MADAM RUNDHOLMEN come in arm-in-arm. General sensation.)

Madam Rundholmen. Oh, Mr. Bratsberg, I hope you won't be angry with me——

Bratsberg. Not at all! Not at all!

Madam Rundholmen. But I simply had to come straight up and show my young man to you and Miss Thora.

Bratsberg. Quite so; you are engaged—I know; but——

Thora. But we didn't know——

Stensgaard (to ASLAKSEN). But how the devil did——?

Aslaksen. I had so many things in my head yesterday; so many things to think of, I mean——

Stensgaard. But surely she got my letter?

Aslaksen. No, she got Bastian Monsen's. Here is yours. (Gives him a letter.)

Stensgaard. Bastian? And this is——? (Glances at the envelope, then crumples it up and stuffs it into his pocket.) Oh, you infernal idiot!

Madam Rundholmen. Yes, of course I consented. You have to be wary; men are deceitful creatures; but when you have it in black and white that a man's intentions are honourable, then——. Why, there's Mr. Stensgaard, too! Well, Mr. Stensgaard, surely you are going to congratulate me?

Højre (to LUNDESTAD). She looks as if she would like to bite him, doesn't she!

Bratsberg. Of course he is, Madam Rundholmen; but aren't you going to congratulate your future sister-in-law?

Madam Rundholmen. Who is that?

Thora. Ragna. She has got engaged, too.

Bastian. Have you, Ragna?

Madam Rundholmen. Is that it? I remember my young man said that a certain person had gone a-courting.

Good luck to you both; and welcome into the family, Mr. Stensgaard!

Fjeldbo. No, no—it isn't he!

Bratsberg. No—it's Mr. Helle—a capital choice to make. And you have got to congratulate my daughter too.

Madam Rundholmen. Miss Thora! Well, Mr. Lundestad was right after all. I congratulate you, Miss Thora—I congratulate you, Mr. Stensgaard!

Fjeldbo. Mr. Fjeldbo, you mean.

Madam Rundholmen. What?

Fjeldbo. Yes, it's me!

Madam Rundholmen. Well, I am absolutely bewildered!

Bratsberg. And I see things clearly for the first time.

Stensgaard. Excuse me; I have some important business——

Bratsberg (aside, to LUNDESTAD). Lundestad, what was the other word?

Lundestad. What other word?

Bratsberg. Not "adventurer"—the other——?

Lundestad. Charlatan.

Stensgaard. Good-day to everybody.

Bratsberg. Just a word with you, Mr. Stensgaard! A word—a word that has been on my mind for a long time——

Stensgaard (moving to the door). Excuse me; I have some pressing business to attend to.

Bratsberg (following him). Charlatan!

Stensgaard. Good-bye! Good-bye! (*Goes out at the back.*)

Bratsberg (coming back). Now the air is purified, my friends!

Bastian. I hope you won't think I am to blame for what has happened at home, Mr. Bratsberg?

Bratsberg. Every one must sweep up his own mess.

Bastian. I had absolutely nothing to do with it. (*SELMA has appeared at the door at the back, and has stood there listening.*)

Selma. Dad! You look happy now!—May he come in now?

Bratsberg. Selma? You? Pleading for him? You, who only the day before yesterday——

Selma. Pooh, it is a long time since then! Everything is all right. I know now that he can do reckless things——

Bratsberg. And you are glad of it?

Selma. Glad that he *can*; but I am not going to let him!

Bratsberg. Go and bring him in. (*SELMA goes out to the right.*)

Ringdal (coming in). Here is your letter of resignation, sir.

Bratsberg. Thanks, but you can tear it up.

Ringdal. Tear it up?

Bratsberg. Yes, Ringdal. That wouldn't be the way. But I can atone, all the same, by setting seriously to work——. (*ERIK and SELMA come in.*)

Erik. Can you forgive me, dad?

Bratsberg (putting the bill into his hand). I mustn't be less merciful than fate has been.

Erik. Dad! From to-day onwards, I will have nothing to do with the business that you dislike so much.

Bratsberg. No, my boy. Thank you—but you must stay as you are. No cowardice! No running away from temptation! But *I* mean to stand by you. (*Raises his voice.*) I have a piece of news for you, gentlemen, I am going into partnership in my son's business.

Guests. What? You, Mr. Bratsberg?

Hejre. You, sir?

Bratsberg. Yes. It is an honourable calling and one that is rich in blessings—or, at any rate, may be made so. And I have no longer any reason for standing out of it, either.

Lundestad. I will tell you what, Mr. Bratsberg—if you are going to set to work for the good of the district, it would be an infernal shame if an old soldier like me shirked his duty.

Erik. You? Do you mean it?

Lundestad. Indeed I do. After the pangs Mr. Stensgaard's heart has suffered to-day—well, it would be brutal to force him into politics now. He needs time to recuperate; he ought to go away for a bit—and I shall see that he does! Therefore, fellow-townsmen, if you have any use for me, here I am!

Guests (pressing his hand with emotion). Thank you, Lundestad! Good old chap! You won't desert us!

Bratsberg. That's right—that's right! Things are falling

into their proper places again. But who is really responsible for all this?

Fjeldbo. Aslaksen, you know something about this.

Aslaksen (in alarm). I, doctor? I am as innocent as a babe unborn!

Fjeldbo. But the letter, that——

Aslaksen. It wasn't my fault, I tell you! It was the fault of the elections, and Bastian Monsen, and Fate, and Accident, and Madam Rundholmen's punch—there was no lemon in it—and I represented the Majesty of the Press, and——

Bratsberg (coming up to him). What's that? What's that?

Aslaksen. The Press, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. The Press! There you are! Haven't I always said that the Press has an extraordinary power nowadays?

Aslaksen. Oh, Mr. Bratsberg——

Bratsberg. No false modesty, Mr. Aslaksen. Hitherto I have not read your paper; but for the future I will. May I ask you to send me ten copies?

Aslaksen. Twenty, with pleasure, Mr. Bratsberg!

Bratsberg. Oh, well—thank you—let me have twenty, then. And, if you should find yourself pressed for money, come to me. I mean to support the Press. But I tell you this beforehand—I won't write anything in it.

Ringdal. What is this I hear? Your daughter engaged?

Bratsberg. Yes; what do you say to that?

Ringdal. Capital! But when was it settled?

Fjeldbo (hurriedly). Oh, I will tell you some other time——

Bratsberg. It was settled on the seventeenth of May.

Fjeldbo. How on earth——?

Bratsberg. The same day little Miss Ragna——

Thora. Oh, dad!—have you known all the time?

Bratsberg. Yes, my dear; I have known all the time.

Fjeldbo. Oh, Mr. Bratsberg——!

Thora. But who can have——?

Bratsberg. Another time you children must lower your voices a little when I am taking a nap in the bay window!

Thora. Oh, were you behind that blind?

Fjeldbo. That explains the way you have treated me!

Bratsberg. Yes, you are a nice one—coming here and never saying a word about it.

Fjeldbo. Would it have been any use if I had spoken before to-day?

Bratsberg. You are right, *Fjeldbo*; things had to happen in between.

Thora (in a low voice, to FJELDBO). Yes, you know how to hold your tongue. Why was I allowed to know nothing of all this business about *Stensgaard*?

Fjeldbo. When a hawk is hovering over your pigeon-house, you look after your pigeons—but you don't frighten them. *(They are interrupted by MADAM RUNDHOLMEN.)*

Hejre (to BRATSBERG). I say—you must excuse me, you know—but I am afraid we shall have to postpone our lawsuit indefinitely.

Bratsberg. Shall we? Very well.

Hejre. I may tell you that I have undertaken a job as reporter on *Aslaksen's* paper.

Bratsberg. I am delighted to hear it.

Hejre. And, of course, you can see for yourself—with so much on my hands——

Bratsberg. Quite so, old friend; I can wait.

Madam Rundholmen (to THORA). Yes, that bad man has cost me bitter tears. But thank God I have got *Bastian* now! The other fellow is as deceitful as can be; and never done smoking, *Miss Thora*; and wants the best of everything every day; he's a regular glutton.

Maid (coming in). Lunch is served, sir.

Bratsberg. Now you will all come and take pot-luck. You must come and sit beside me, *Mr. Lundestad*—and you too, *Mr. Aslaksen*.

Ringdal. We shall have plenty of toasts to drink, to-day!

Hejre. Yes; and perhaps you won't think it altogether indiscreet if an old chap like me proposes the toast of "absent friends."

Lundestad. There is one absent friend that we shall see back again, *Mr. Hejre*.

Hejre. Do you mean *Stensgaard*?

Lundestad. Yes, mark my words. In ten or fifteen years *Stensgaard* will be in parliament—perhaps in the cabinet——

Fjeldbo. In ten or fifteen years? Yes, but then he won't be able to preside over the League of Youth.

Hejre. Why not?

Fjeldbo. Well, he will be at what you may call an "uncertain age" then.

Hejre. Then he can preside over an Uncertain League, my boy! I am sure Lundestad agrees with me. He agrees with Napoleon, who said: "It is the uncertain quantities that make politicians." Ha, ha!

Fjeldbo. Well, however that may be, *our* League will outlast both the days of youth and those of uncertain age, and yet remain always the League of Youth. When Stensgaard founded it, and was carried shoulder-high amidst all the noise and excitement of Independence Day, he said that Providence was on the side of the League of Youth! As far as we are concerned, I think even our friend the theologian here would say that we may take the application to ourselves.

Bratsberg. I quite agree, my friend; because, in all seriousness, we have groped and fumbled in darkness, but there have been good angels at the back of us.

Lundestad. Ah, well—they were very middling sort of angels, after all.

Aslaksen. That is the result of our local conditions, Mr. Lundestad! (*Curtain.*)