

**PARIAH, OR THE OUTCAST**  
**a play in one-act**

**by August Strindberg**

The following one-act play is reprinted from *Plays: Comrades, Facing Death, Pariah, Easter*. Trans. Edith & Warner Oland. Boston: John W. Luce & Co., 1912. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

MR. X., an archeologist

MR. Y., a traveller from America

Both middle-aged

*[Simple room in a country house; door and window at back, through which one sees a country landscape. In the middle of the room a large dining table; on one side of it books and writing materials and on the other side some antiques, a microscope, insect boxes, alcohol jars. To the left of scene a book-shelf, and all the other furnishings are those of a country gentleman. Mr. Y. enters in his shirt-sleeves, carrying an insect net and a botanical tin box. He goes directly to the book-shelf, takes down a book and reads stealthily from it. The after-service bell of a country church rings. The landscape and room are flooded with sunshine. Now and then one hears the clucking of hens outside. Mr. X. comes in also in shirt-sleeves. Mr. Y. starts nervously, returns the book to its place, and pretends to look for another book on the shelf.]*

MR. X: What oppressive heat! We'll surely have a thunder-shower.

MR. Y: Yes? What makes you think so?

MR. X: The bells sound like it, the flies bite so, and the hens are cackling. I wanted to go fishing, but I couldn't find a single worm. Don't you feel rather nervous?

MR. Y: (*Reflectively*) I? Well, yes.

MR. X: But you always look as if you expected a thunder-shower.

MR. Y: Do I?

MR. X: Well, as you are to start off on your travels again tomorrow, it's not to be wondered at if you have the knapsack fever. What's the news? Here's the post. [*Takes up letters from the table.*] Oh, I have palpitation of the heart every time I open a letter. Nothing but debts, debts! Did you ever have any debts?

MR. Y: [*Reflecting*] No-o-o.

MR. X: Well, then, of course you can't understand how it feels to have unpaid bills come in. [*He reads a letter.*] The rent owing--the landlord clamoring--and my wife in despair. And I, I sitting up to my elbows in gold. [*Opens an iron-mounted case, which stands on the table. They both sit down, one on each side of the case.*] Here is six thousand crowns' worth of gold that I've dug up in two weeks. This bracelet alone would bring the three hundred and fifty crowns I need. And with all of it I should be able to make a brilliant career for myself. The first thing I should do would be to have drawings made and cuts of the figures for my treatises. After that I would print--and then clear out. Why do you suppose I don't do this?

MR. Y: It must be because you are afraid of being found out.

MR. X: Perhaps that, too. But don't you think that a man of my intelligence should be able to manage it so that it wouldn't be found out? I always go alone to dig out there on the hills--without witnesses. Would it be remarkable to put a little something in one's pockets?

MR. Y: Yes, but disposing of it, they say, is the dangerous part.

MR. X: Humph, I should of course have the whole thing smelted, and then I should have it cast into ducats--full weight, of course--

MR. Y: Of course!

MR. X: That goes without saying. If I wanted to make counterfeit money--well, it wouldn't be necessary to dig the gold first. [*Pause.*] It's remarkable, nevertheless, that if some one were to do what I can't bring myself to do, I should acquit him. But I should not be able to acquit myself. I should be able to put up a brilliant

defense for the thief; prove that this gold was *res nullius*, or no one's, and that it got into the earth before there were any land rights; that even now it belongs to no one but the first comer, as the owner had never accounted it part of his property, and so on.

MR. Y: And you would not be able to do this if--h'm!--the thief had stolen through need, but rather as an instance of a collector's mania, of scientific interest, of the ambition to make a discovery--isn't that so?

MR. X: You mean that I wouldn't be able to acquit him if he had stolen through need? No, that is the only instance the law does not pardon. That is simple theft, that is!

MR. Y: And that you would not pardon?

MR. X: H'm! Pardon! No, I could hardly pardon what the law does not, and I must confess that it would be hard for me to accuse a collector for taking an antique that he did not have in his collection, which he had dug up on some one else's property.

MR. Y: That is to say, vanity, ambition, could gain pardon where need could not?

MR. X: Yes, that's the way it is. And nevertheless need should be the strongest motive, the only one to be pardoned. But I can change that as little as I can change my will not to steal under any condition.

MR. Y: And you count it a great virtue that you cannot--h'm--steal?

MR. X: With me not to steal is just as irresistible as stealing is to some, and, therefore, no virtue. I cannot do it and they cannot help doing it. You understand, of course, that the idea of wanting to possess this gold is not lacking in me. Why don't I take it then? I cannot; it's an inability, and a lack is not a virtue. And there you are!

*[Closes the case with a bang. At times stray clouds have dimmed the light in the room and now it darkens with the approaching storm.]*

MR. X: How close it is! I think we'll have some thunder.

*[Mr. Y. rises and shuts the door and window.]*

MR. X: Are you afraid of thunder?

MR. Y: One should be careful.

*[They sit again at table.]*

MR. X: You are a queer fellow. You struck here like a bomb two weeks ago, and you introduced yourself as a Swedish-American who travels, collecting insects for a little museum.

MR. Y: Oh, don't bother about me.

MR. X: That's what you always say when I get tired of talking about myself and want to devote a little attention to you. Perhaps it was because you let me talk so much about myself that you won my sympathy. We were soon old acquaintances; there were no corners about you for me to knock against, no needles or pins to prick. There was something so mellow about your whole personality; you were so considerate, a characteristic which only the most cultivated can display; you were never noisy when you came home late, never made any disturbance when you got up in the morning; you overlooked trifles, drew aside when ideas became conflicting; in a word, you were the perfect companion; but you were altogether too submissive, too negative, too quiet, not to have me reflect about it in the course of time. And you are fearful and timid; you look as if you led a double life. Do you know, as you sit there before the mirror and I see your back, it's as if I were looking at another person. *[Mr. Y. turns and looks in the mirror.]* Oh, you can't see your back in the mirror. Front view, you look like a frank, fearless man who goes to meet his fate with open heart, but back view--well, I don't wish to be discourteous, but you look as if you carried a burden, as if you were shrinking from a lash; and when I see your red suspenders across your white shirt--it looks like--like a big brand, a trade mark on a packing box.

MR. Y: *[Rising]* I believe I will suffocate--if the shower doesn't break and come soon.

MR. X: It will come soon. Just be quiet. And the back of your neck, too, it looks as if there were another head on it, with the face of another type than you. You are so terribly narrow between the ears that I sometimes wonder if you don't belong to another race. *[There is flash of lightning.]* That one looked as if it struck at the sheriff's.

MR. Y: [*Worried*] At the--sh-sheriff's!

MR. X: Yes, but it only looked so. But this thunder won't amount to anything. Sit down now and let's have a talk, as you are off again tomorrow.--It's queer that, although I became intimate with you so soon, you are one of those people whose likeness I cannot recall when they are out of my sight. When you are out in the fields and I try to recall your face, another acquaintance always comes to mind--some one who doesn't really look like you, but whom you resemble nevertheless.

MR. Y: Who is that?

MR. X: I won't mention the name. However, I used to have dinner at the same place for many years, and there at the lunch counter I met a little blond man with pale, worried eyes. He had an extraordinary faculty of getting about in a crowded room without shoving or being shoved. Standing at the door, he could reach a slice of bread two yards away; he always looked as if he was happy to be among people, and whenever he ran into an acquaintance he would fall into rapturous laughter, embrace him, and do the figure eight around him, and carry on as if he hadn't met a human being for years; if any one stepped on his toes he would smile as if he were asking pardon for being in the way. For two years I used to see him, and I used to amuse myself trying to figure out his business and character, but I never asked any one who he was--I didn't want to know, as that would have put an end to my amusement. That man had the same indefinable characteristics as you; sometimes I would make him out an undergraduate teacher, an under officer, a druggist, a government clerk, or a detective, and like you, he seemed to be made up of two different pieces and the front didn't fit the back. One day I happened to read in the paper about a big forgery by a well-known civil official. After that I found out that my indefinable acquaintance had been the companion of the forger's brother, and that his name was Stråman; and then I was informed that the aforementioned Stråman had been connected with a free library, but that he was then a police reporter on a big newspaper. How could I then get any connection between the forgery, the police, and the indefinable man's appearance? I don't know, but when I asked a man if Stråman had ever been convicted, he answered neither yes nor no--he didn't know.

[*Pause.*]

MR. Y: Well, was he ever--convicted?

MR. X: No, he had not been convicted.

*[Pause.]*

MR. Y: You mean that was why keeping close to the police had such attraction for him, and why he was so afraid of bumping into people?

MR. X: Yes.

MR. Y: Did you get to know him afterward?

MR. X: No, I didn't want to.

MR. Y: Would you have allowed yourself to know him if he had been convicted?

MR. X: Yes, indeed.

*[Mr. Y. rises and walks up and down.]*

MR. X: Sit still. Why can't you sit quietly.

MR. Y: How did you get such a liberal attitude towards people's conduct? Are you a Christian?

MR. X: No--of course I couldn't be--as you've just heard. The Christians demand forgiveness, but I demand punishment for the restoration of balance, or whatever you like to call it, and you, who have served time, ought to understand that.

MR. Y: *[Stops as if transfixed. Regards Mr. X. at first with wild hatred, then with surprise and wonderment.]* How--do--you--know--that?

MR. X: It's plain to be seen.

MR. Y: How? How can you see it?

MR. X: I have taught myself. That's an art, too. But we won't talk about that matter. *[Looks at his watch. Takes out a paper for signing. Dips a pen and offers it to Mr. Y.]* I must think about my muddled affairs. Now be so kind as to witness my signature on this note, which I must leave at the bank at Malmö when I go there with you tomorrow morning.

MR. Y: I don't intend to go by way of Malmö.

MR. X: No?

MR. Y: No.

MR. X: But you can witness my signature nevertheless.

MR. Y: No-o. I never sign my name to papers--

MR. X: --Any more! That's the fifth time that you have refused to write your name. The first time was on a postal receipt,--and it was then that I began to observe you; and now, I see that you have a horror of touching pen and ink. You haven't sent a letter since you've been here. Just one postal-card, and that you wrote with a blue pencil. Do you see now how I have figured out your mis-step? Furthermore, this is the seventh time that you have refused to go to Malmö, where you have not gone since you have been here. Nevertheless you came here from America just to see Malmö; and every morning you have walked southward three miles and a half to the windmill hill just to see the roofs of Malmö; also, when you stand at the right-hand window, through the third window-pane to the left, counting from the bottom up, you can see the turrets of the castle, and the chimneys on the *state prison*. Do you see now that it is not that I am so clever but that you are so stupid?

MR. Y: Now you hate me.

MR. X: No.

MR. Y: Yes, you do, you must.

MR. X: No--see, here's my hand.

*[MR. Y. kisses the proffered hand.]*

MR. X: *[Drawing back his hand]* What dog's trick is that?

MR. Y: Pardon! But thou art the first to offer me his hand after knowing--

MR. X: --And now you are "thou-ing" me! It alarms me that, after serving your time, you do not feel your honor retrieved, that you do not feel on equal footing-- in fact, just as good as any one. Will you tell me how it happened? Will you?

MR. Y: *[Dubiously]* Yes, but you won't believe what I say. I'm going to tell you, though, and you shall see that I was not a common criminal. You shall be convinced that mis-steps are made, as one might say, involuntarily--*[Shakily]* as if they came of their own accord, spontaneously, without intention, blamelessly!-- Let me open the window a little. I think the thunder shower-has passed over.

MR. X: Go ahead.

*[MR. Y. goes and opens the window, then comes and sits by the table again and tells the following with great enthusiasm, theatrical gestures and false accents.]*

MR. Y: Well, you see I was a student at Lund, and once I needed a loan. I had no dangerously big debts, my father had some means--not very much, to be sure; however, I had sent away a note of hand to a man whom I wanted to have sign it as second security, and contrary to all expectations, it was returned to me with a refusal. I sat for a while benumbed by the blow, because it was a disagreeable surprise, very disagreeable. The note lay before me on the table, and beside it the letter of refusal. My eyes glanced hopelessly over the fatal lines which contained my sentence. To be sure it wasn't a death-sentence, as I could easily have got some other man to stand as security; as many as I wanted, for that matter--but, as I've said, it was very unpleasant; and as I sat there in my innocence, my glance rested gradually on the signature, which, had it been in the right place, would have made my future. That signature was most unusual calligraphy--you know how, as one sits thinking, one can scribble a whole blotter full of meaningless words. I had the pen in my hand--*[He takes up the pen]* like this, and before I knew what I was doing it started to write--of course I don't want to imply that there was anything mystical spiritualistic, behind it--because I don't believe in such things!--it was purely a thoughtless, mechanical action--when I sat and copied the beautiful autograph time after time--without, of course, any prospect of gain. When the letter was scribbled all over, I had acquired skill enough to reproduce the signature remarkably well *[Throws the pen down with violence]* and then I forgot the whole thing. That night my sleep was deep and heavy, and when I awakened I felt that I had been dreaming, but I could not recall the dream; however, it seemed as though the door to my dream opened a little when I saw the writing table and the note in memory--and when I got up I was driven to the table absolutely, as if, after ripe consideration, I had made the irrevocable resolution to write that name on the fateful paper. All thought of risk, of consequence, had disappeared--there was no wavering--it was almost as if I were fulfilling a precious duty--and I wrote. *[Springs to his feet.]* What can such a thing be? Is it inspiration, hypnotic suggestion, as it is called? But from whom? I slept alone in my room. Could it



have been my uncivilized ego, the barbarian that does not recognize conventions, but who emerged with his criminal will and his inability to calculate the consequences of his deed? Tell me, what do you think about such a case?

MR. X: [*Bored*] To be honest, your story does not quite convince me. There are holes in it--but that may be clue to your not being able to remember all the details--and I have read a few things about criminal inspirations--and I recall--h'm--but never mind. You have had your punishment, you have had character enough to admit your error, and we won't discuss it further.

MR. Y: Yes, yes, yes, we will discuss it; we must talk, so that I can have complete consciousness of my unswerving honesty.

MR. X: But haven't you that?

MR. Y: No, I haven't.

MR. X: Well, you see, that's what bothers me, that's what bothers me. Don't you suppose that each one of us has a skeleton in his closet? Yes, indeed! Well, there are people who continue to be children all their lives, so that they cannot control their lawless desires. Whenever the opportunity comes, the criminal is ready. But I cannot understand why you do not feel innocent. As the child is considered irresponsible, the criminal should be considered so too. It's strange--well, it doesn't matter; I'll regret it later. [*Pause.*] I killed a man once, and I never had any scruples.

MR. Y: [*Very interested*] You--did?

MR. X: Yes--I did. Perhaps you wouldn't like to take a murderer's hand?

MR. Y: [*Cheerily*] Oh, what nonsense!

MR. X: Yes, but I have not been punished for it.

MR. Y: [*Intimate, superior*] So much the better for you. How did you get out of it?

MR. X: There were no accusers, no suspicions, no witnesses. It happened this way: one Christmas a friend of mine had invited me for a few days' hunting just outside of Upsala; he sent an old drunken servant to meet me, who fell asleep on the coach-box and drove into a gate-post, which landed us in the ditch. It was not

because my life had been in danger, but in a fit of anger I struck him a blow to wake him, with the result that he never awakened again--he died on the spot.

MR. Y: [*Cunningly*] And you didn't give yourself up?

MR. X: No, and for the following reasons. The man had no relatives or other connections who were dependent on him. He had lived out his period of vegetation and his place could soon be filled by some one who was needed more, while I, on the other hand, was indispensable to the happiness of my parents, my own happiness, and perhaps to science. Through the outcome of the affair I was cured of the desire to strike any more blows, and to satisfy an abstract justice I did not care to ruin the lives of my parents as well as my own life.

MR. Y: So? That's the way you value human life?

MR. X: In that instance, yes.

MR. Y: But the feeling of guilt, the "restoration of balance?"

MR. X: I had no guilty feeling, as I had committed no crime. I had received and given blows as a boy, and it was only ignorance of the effect of blows on old people that caused the fatality.

MR. Y: Yes, but it is two years' hard labor for homicide--just as much as for--forgery.

MR. X: You may believe I have thought of that too, and many a night have I dreamed that I was in prison. Ugh! is it as terrible as it's said to be behind bolts and bars?

MR. Y: Yes, it is terrible. First they disfigure your exterior by cutting off your hair, so if you did not look like a criminal before, you do afterward, and when you look at yourself in the mirror, you become convinced that you are a desperado.

MR. X: It's the mask that they pull off; that's not a bad idea.

MR. Y: You jest! Then they cut down your rations, so that every day, every hour you feel a distinct difference between life and death; all life's functions are repressed; you feel yourself grovelling, and your soul, which should be bettered and uplifted there, is put on a starvation cure, driven back a thousand years in time; you are only allowed to read what was written for the barbarians of the

migratory period; you are allowed to hear about nothing but that which can never come to pass in heaven, but what happens on earth remains a secret; you are torn from your own environment, moved down out of your class; you come under those who come under you; you have visions of living in the bronze age, feel as if you went about in an animal's skin, lived in a cave, and ate out of a trough! Ugh!

MR. X: That's quite rational. Any one who behaves as if he belonged to the bronze age ought to live in the historic costume.

MR. Y: [*Spitefully*] You scoff, you, you who have behaved like a man of the stone age! And you are allowed to live in the gold age!

MR. X: [*Searchingly and sharp*] What do you mean by that last expression--the gold age?

MR. Y: [*Insidiously*] Nothing at all.

MR. X: That's a lie; you are too cowardly to state your whole meaning.

MR. Y: Am I cowardly? Do you think that? I wasn't cowardly when I dared to show myself in this neighborhood, where I have suffered what I have.--Do you know what one suffers from most when one sits in there? It is from the fact that the others are not sitting in there too.

MR. X: What others?

MR. Y: The unpunished.

MR. X: Do you allude to me?

MR. Y: Yes.

MR. X: I haven't committed any crime.

MR. Y: No? Haven't you?

MR. X: No. An accident is not a crime.

MR. Y: So, it's an accident to commit murder?

MR. X: I haven't committal any murder.

MR. Y: So? Isn't it murder to slay a man?

MR. X: No, not always. There is manslaughter, homicide, assault resulting in death, with the subdivisions, with or without intent. However, now I am really afraid of you, for you belong in the most dangerous category of human beings, the stupid.

MR. Y: So you think that I am stupid? Now listen! Do you want me to prove that I am very shrewd?

MR. X: Let me hear.

MR. Y: Will you admit that I reason shrewdly and logically when I say this? You met with an accident which might have brought you two years of hard labor. You have escaped the ignominious penalty altogether. Here sits a man who also has been the victim of an accident, an unconscious suggestion, and forced to suffer two years of hard labor. This man can wipe out the stain he has unwittingly brought upon himself only through scientific achievement; but for the attainment of this he must have money--much money, and that immediately. Doesn't it seem to you that the other man, the unpunished one, would restore the balance of human relations if he were sentenced to a tolerable fine? Don't you think so?

MR. X: [*Quietly*] Yes.

MR. Y: Well, we understand each other.--H'm! How much do you consider legitimate?

MR. X: Legitimate? The law decrees that a man's life is worth at the minimum fifty crowns. But as the deceased had no relatives, there's nothing to be said on that score.

MR. Y: Humph, you will not understand? Then I must speak more plainly. It is to me that you are to pay the fine.

MR. X: I've never heard that a homicide should pay a fine to a forger, and there is also no accuser.

MR. Y: No? Yes, you have me.

MR. X: Ah, now things are beginning to clear up. How much do you ask to become accomplice to the homicide?

MR. Y: Six thousand crowns.

MR. X: That's too much. Where am I to get it? [*Mr. Y. points to the case.*] I don't want to do that, I don't want to become a thief.

MR. Y: Don't pretend. Do you want me to believe that you haven't dipped into that case before now?

MR. X: [*As to himself*] To think that I could make such a big mistake! But that's the way it always is with bland people. One is fond of gentle people, and then one believes so easily that he is liked; and just on account of that I have been a little watchful of those of whom I've been fond. So you are fully convinced that I have helped myself from that case?

MR. Y: Yes, I'm sure of it.

MR. X: And you will accuse me if you do not receive the six thousand crowns?

MR. Y: Absolutely. You can't get out of it, so it's not worth while trying to do so.

MR. X: Do you think I would give my father a thief for son, my wife a thief for husband, my children a thief for father, and my confrères a thief for comrade? That shall never happen. Now I'll go to the sheriff and give myself up.

MR. Y: [*Springs up and gets his things together*] Wait a moment.

MR. X: What for?

MR. Y: [*Stammering*] I only thought--that as I'm not needed--I wouldn't need to be present--and could go.

MR. X: You cannot. Sit down at your place at the table, where you've been sitting, and we will talk a little.

MR. Y: [*Sits, after putting on a dark coat*] What's going to happen now?

MR. X: [*Looking into mirror*] Now everything is clear to me! Ah!

MR. Y: [*Worried*] What do you see now that's so remarkable?

MR. X: I see in the mirror that you are a thief, a simple, common thief. Just now, when you sat there in your shirt-sleeves, I noticed that something was wrong about my book-shelf, but I couldn't make out what it was, as I wanted to listen to you and observe you. Now, since you have become my antagonist, my sight is keener, and since you have put on that black coat, that acts as a color contrast against the red backs of the books, which were not noticeable before against your red suspenders, I see that you have been there and read your forgery story in Bernheim's essay on hypnotic suggestion, and returned the book upside down. So you stole that story too! In consequence of all this I consider that I have the right to conclude that you committed your crime through need, or because you were addicted to pleasures.

MR. Y: Through need. If you knew--

MR. X: If *you* knew in what need I have lived, and lived, and still live! But this is no time for that. To continue, that you have served time is almost certain, but that was in America, for it was American prison life that you described; another thing is almost as certain--that you have not served out your sentence here.

MR. Y: How can you say that?

MR. X: Wait until the sheriff comes and you will know. [*Mr. Y. rises.*] Do you see? The first time I mentioned the sheriff in connection with the thunderbolt, you wanted to run then, too; and when a man has been in that prison he never wants to go to the windmill hill every day to look at it, or put himself behind a window-pane to--to conclude, you have served one sentence, but not another. That's why you were so difficult to get at.

[*Pause.*]

MR. Y: [*Completely defeated*] May I go now?

MR. X: Yes, you may go now.

MR. Y: [*Getting his things together*] Are you angry with me?

MR. X: Yes. Would you like it better if I pitied you?

MR. Y: [*Wrathfully*] Pity! Do you consider yourself better than I am?

MR. X: Of course I do, as I *am* better. I am more intelligent than you are, and of more worth to the common weal.

MR. Y: You are pretty crafty, but not so crafty as I am. I stand in check myself, but, nevertheless, the next move you can be checkmated.

MR. X: [*Fixing Mr. Y. with his eye*] Shall we have another bout? What evil do you intend to do now?

MR. Y: That is my secret.

MR. X: May I look at you?--You think of writing an anonymous letter to my wife, disclosing my secret.

MR. Y: Yes, and you cannot prevent it. You dare not have me imprisoned, so you must let me go; and when I have gone I can do what I please.

MR. X: Ah, you devil! You've struck my Achilles heel--will you force me to become a murderer?

MR. Y: You couldn't become one! You timid creature!

MR. X: You see, then, there is a difference in people after all, and you feel within you that I cannot commit such deeds as you, and that is your advantage. But think if you forced me to deal with you as I did with the coachman!

[*Lifts his hand as if to strike. Mr. Y. looks hard at Mr. X.*]

MR. Y: You can't do it. He who dared not take his salvation out of the case couldn't do that.

MR. X: Then you don't believe that I ever took from the case?

MR. Y: You were too cowardly, just as you were too cowardly to tell your wife that she is married to a murderer.

MR. X: You are a different kind of being from me--whether stronger or weaker I do not know--more criminal or not--that doesn't concern me. But you are the stupider, that's proven. Because you were stupid when you forged a man's name

instead of begging as I have had to do; you were stupid when you stole out of my book--didn't you realize that I read my books? You were stupid when you thought that you were more intelligent than I am and that you could fool me into becoming a thief; you were stupid when you thought, that the restoration of balance would be accomplished by the world's having two thieves instead of one, and you were most stupid when you believed that I have built my life's happiness without having laid the cornerstone securely. Go and write your anonymous letter to my wife about her husband being a homicide--that she knew as my fiancée. Do you give up now?

MR. Y: Can I go?

MR. X: Now you *shall* go--immediately. Your things will follow you.

CURTAIN



**THE STRONGER**  
*a play in one-act*

by August Strindberg

translated by Charles Wangel

The following one-act play is reprinted from *Ten Minute Plays*. Ed. Pierre Loving. New York: Brentano's, 1923. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

MME. X: an actress, married

MLLE. Y: an actress, single

SETTING

The corner of a ladies' cafe, two little iron tables,  
a red velvet sofa, several chairs.

*[MME. X enters, dressed in winter clothes, wearing hat and cloak and carrying a dainty Japanese basket on her arm. MLLE. Y sits beside a half-empty beer bottle, reading an illustrated newspaper which later she changes for another.]*

MME. X: Good evening, Amelia, you're sitting here alone on Christmas eve like a poor old maid. *[MLLE. Y glances up from the newspaper, nods, and resumes her reading.]* Do you know it worries me to see you this way, alone in a café, and on Christmas eve, too. It makes me feel as I did that time when I saw a bridal party in a Paris restaurant, the bride sitting reading a comic paper, while the groom played billiards with the witnesses. Ah! thought I, with such a beginning, what a sequel and what an ending! He played billiards on his wedding evening--and she read a comic paper!--But that is neither here nor there. *[The WAITER enters, places a cup of Chocolate before MME. X and goes out.]* I tell you what, Amelia! I believe you would have done better to have kept him! Do you remember I was the first to say 'forgive him!' Recollect? Then you would have been married now and have had a home. Remember that Christmas in the country? How happy you were with your fiancé's parents, how you enjoyed the happiness of their home, yet longed for the theater. Yes, Amelia, dear, home is the best of all--next to the theater--and the children, you understand--but that you don't understand! *[MLLE. Y looks scornful. MME. X sips a spoonful out of the cup, then opens her basket and takes out the*

*Christmas presents.] Here you can see what I have bought for my little pigs. [Takes up a doll] Look at this! This is for Liza. See?--And here is Maja's pop gun [Loads and shoots at MLLÉ. Y who makes a startled gesture] Were you frightened? Do you think I should like to shoot you? What? My soul! I don't believe you thought that! If you wanted to shoot me, that wouldn't surprise me, because I came in your way--and that, I know, you can never forget. But I was quite innocent. You still believe I intrigued you out of the theater, but I didn't do that! I didn't do that even if you do think so. But it's all one whether I say so or not, for you still believe it was I! [Takes up a pair of embroidered slippers] And these are for my old man. With tulips on them which I embroidered myself. I can't bear tulips, you know, but he must have tulips on everything. [MLLÉ. Y looks up ironically and curiously. MME. X puts a hand in each slipper.] See what little feet Bob has! What? And you ought to see how elegantly he walks! You've never seen him in slippers? [MLLÉ. Y laughs aloud.] Look here, this is he. [She makes the slippers walk on the table. MLLÉ. Y laughs loudly.] And when he is peeved, see, he stamps like this with his foot. 'What! Damn that cook, she never can learn to make coffee. Ah! now those idiots haven't trimmed the lamp wick straight!' And then he wears out the soles and his feet freeze. 'Ugh, how cold it is and the stupid fools never can keep the fire in the heater.' [She rubs together the slippers' soles and uppers. MLLÉ. Y laughs clearly.] And then he comes home and has to hunt for his slippers which Marie has stuck under the chiffonier. Oh, but it is a sin to sit here and make fun of one's husband. He's a pretty good little husband -- You ought to have such a husband, Amelia. What are you laughing at? What? What? -- And then I know he's true to me. Yes I know that. Because he tole me himself. What are you tittering about? When I came back from my tour of Norway, that shameless Frederika came and wanted to elope with him. Can you imagine anything so infamous? [Pause] But I'd have scratched her eyes out if she had come to see him when I was at home! [Pause] It was good that Bob spoke of it himself and that it didn't reach me through gossip. [Pause] But Frederika wasn't the only one, would you believe it! I don't know why, but women are crazy about my husband. They must think he has something to say about theater engagements because he's connected with the government. Perhaps you were there yourself and tried to influence him! I don't trust you any too much. But, I know he's not concerned about you, and you seem to have a grudge against him. [Pause. They look quizzically at each other.] Come to see us this evening, Amerlia, and show that you're not angry with us -- not angry with me at any rate! I don't know why, but it's so uncomfortable to have you an enemy. Possibly it's because I came in your way [rallentando] or -- I really don't know -- just why. [Pause. MLLÉ. Y stares at MME. X curiously.] Our acquaintance has been so peculiar. [Thoughtfully] When I saw you the first time I was so afraid of you, so afraid, that*

I couldn't look you in the face; still as I came and went I always found myself near you -- I couldn't risk being your enemy, so I became your friend. But there was always a discordant note when you came to our house, because I saw that my husband couldn't bear you -- and that was as annoying to me as an ill-fitting gown -- and I did all I could to make him friendly toward you, but before he consented you announced your engagement. Then came a violent friendship, so that in a twinkling it appeared as if you dared only show him your real feelings when you were betrothed -- and then -- how was it later? -- I didn't get jealous -- how wonderful! And I remember that when you were Patin's godmother, I made Bob kiss you -- he did it, but you were so confused -- that is, I didn't notice it then -- thought about it later -- never thought about it before -- now! *[Gets up hastily]* Why are you silent? You haven't said a word this whole time, but you have let me go on talking! You have sat there and your eyes loosened out of me all these thoughts which lay like raw silk in their cocoon -- thoughts -- suspicious thoughts, perhaps -- let me see -- why did you break your engagement? Why do you come so seldom to our house these days? Why won't you visit us tonight? *[MLLE. Y appears as if about to speak.]* Keep still! You don't have to say anything. I comprehend it all myself! It was because, and because and because. Yes! Yes! Now everything is clear. So that's it! Pfui, I won't sit at the same table with you. *[Takes her things to the next table]* That's the reason why I had to embroider tulips, which I hate, on his slippers; because you are fond of tulips; that's why *[Throws the slippers on the floor]* we go to the mountains during the summer, because you don't like the sea air; that's why my boy is named Eskil, because it's your father's name; that's why I wear your colors, read your authors, eat your pet dishes, drink your beverages--this chocolate, for example--that's why. Oh, my God, it's fearful, when I think about it; it's fearful! Everything, everything, came from you to me, even your passion! Your soul crept into mine, like a worm into an apple, ate and ate, grubbed and grubbed, until nothing was left but the rind within. I wanted to fly from you, but I couldn't; you lay like a snake and enchanted me with your black eyes--I felt as if the branch gave way and let me fall. I lay with feet bound together in the water and swam mightily with my hands, but the harder I struggled the deeper I worked myself under, until I sank to the bottom, where you lay like a giant crab ready to catch hold of me with your claws--and I just lay there! Pfui! how I hate you! hate you! hate you! But you, you only sit there and keep silent, peacefully, indifferently, indifferent as to whether the moon waxes or wanes, whether it is Christmas or New Year, whether others are happy or unhappy, without the ability to hate or to love, as composed as a stork by a mouse hole. You can't make conquests yourself, you can't keep a man's love, but you can steal away that love from others! Here you sit in your corner--do you know they have named a mouse-trap after you?--and read your newspapers in order to see if

anything has happened to any one, or who's had a run of bad luck, or who has left the theater; here you sit and review your work, calculating your mischief as a pilot does his course; collecting your tribute.... *[Pause]* Poor Amelia, do you know that I'm really sorry for you, because you are so unhappy. Unhappy like a wounded animal, and spiteful because you are wounded! I can't be angry with you, no matter how much I want to be--because you come out at the small end of the horn. Yes; that affair with Bob--I don't care about that. What is that to me, after all? What is that to me, after all? And if I learned to drink chocolate from you or from somebody else, what difference does it make. *[Drinks a spoonful out of the cup; knowingly]* Besides, chocolate is very healthful. And if you taught me how to dress--tant mieux--that only makes me more attractive to my husband. And you lost what I won. Yes, to sum up: I believe you have lost him. But it was certainly your intent that I should go my own road--do as you did and regret as you now regret--but I don't do that! We won't be mean, will we? And why should I take only what nobody else will have? *[Pause]* Possibly, all in all, at this moment I am really the stronger. You get nothing from me, but you gave me much. And now I appear like a thief to you. You wake up and find I possess what you have lost! How was it that everything in your hands was worthless and sterile? You can hold no man's love with your tulips and your passion, as I can. You can't learn housekeeping from your authors, as I have done; you have no little Eskil to cherish, even if your father was named Eskil! And why do you keep silent, silent, silent? I believe that is strength, but, perhaps, it's because you have nothing to say! Because you don't think anything. *[Rises and gathers up her slippers]* Now I'm going home--and take the tulips with me--your tulips! You can't learn from another, you can't bend--and therefore you will be broken like a dry stalk--but I won't be! Thank you, Amelia, for all your good lessons. Thanks because you taught me to love my husband! Now I'll go home and love him!

*[She goes.]*

CURTAIN

## **DEBIT AND CREDIT**

**a play in one-act**

**by August Strindberg**

The following one-act play is reprinted from *Poet Lore*. Volume XVII. Autumn, 1906. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

### CHARACTERS

MR. AXEL, Doctor and African traveler

MR. TURE, his brother, a gardener

Mr. Ture's WIFE

MISS CECILIA

MISS CECILIA'S BETROTHED

DOCTOR LINDGREN, formerly a teacher

MISS MARY

A GENTLEMAN of the court

A WAITER

*[A beautifully furnished room in a hotel. Doors left and right. Enter TURE and his WIFE.]*

TURE: Pretty fine room, this! But it's a fine man, too, who lives here.

THE WIFE: Yes, I suppose so! To be sure, I've never seen your brother, but I've heard of him often enough to make up for it.

TURE: Jabber away! My brother, the doctor, has traveled half way through Africa, and it isn't every one who will follow his footsteps,--though he may have drunk such a lot of toddy when he was young...

THE WIFE: Your brother, the doctor, indeed! After all he is nothing but an M.A....

TURE: No ma'am, he is a Doctor of Philosophy!

THE WIFE: Well, what is that but an M.A.! And my brother at the school at Aby is that too.

TURE: Your brother is a very good man, but he is only a teacher in a public school, and that is not the same thing as a Doctor of Philosophy and that much I can say without boasting.

THE WIFE: Well, he may be whatever he likes, and be called whatever you like, at all events, he has cost us something.

TURE: Yes, he has cost us something, but he has also given us pleasure.

THE WIFE: Fine pleasure! When we had to leave house and home on his account.

TURE: That's true enough, but we don't know whether his delay in the discharge of the loan, wasn't caused by something he couldn't help. Probably it's not so easy to send money orders out of darkest Africa.

THE WIFE: His having any excuse or not doesn't help matters. Is he going to do anything for us now? It's no more than his duty!

TURE: We shall see! We shall see! -- In any case, have you heard that he has gotten four orders?

THE WIFE: Yes, but how does that help us? I believe they'll only make him that much haughtier. No sir, I shan't forget so soon how the sheriff came with those papers -- and brought people with him as witnesses -- and then -- the auction -- when all the neighbors came in and fumbled around in our things. Do you know, Ture, what grieved me the most?

TURE: The black ...

THE WIFE: Yes, my black silk dress that my sister-in-law bought at fifteen kronen. Fifteen kronen!

TURE: Just wait! Wait! We'll be able to buy a new silk dress ...

THE WIFE: [*weeps*] Yes, but never the same one -- the one my sister-in-law bought in.

TURE: Then we can buy another. Look, here, see what a fine hat this is. It must be a gentleman of the court who is in there with Axel.

THE WIFE: What do I care if it is?

TURE: Oh, don't you think it's rather nice, that some one who bears the same name as you and I, is thought so much of that he is visited by friends of the king? I remember that you rejoiced for two weeks when your brother, the teacher, was invited to dine at the bishop's.

THE WIFE: I don't remember it.

TURE: Oh, no, of course not!

THE WIFE: But I remember the fourteenth of March, when, on his account, we had to leave the farm we had leased, -- and we had been married two years and had a child in our arms -- oh dear! -- And then, the arrival of the steamboat with all its passengers, just as we were moving out, I'll not forget that for all the three-cornered hats in the world. And anyhow, what attention do you think a gentleman of the court will pay to a gardener and his wife, who have been ejected?

TURE: Look at this! What is this? Do you see these orders, his! Look at this one!

*[He takes an order out of the case on the writing-table, lays it in his hands and strokes it gently.]*

THE WIFE: Such trash!

TURE: Don't speak so disrespectfully of orders, we never know where we may be ourselves some day. The gardener at Staringe was made a director and knight today.

THE WIFE: What good does that do us!

TURE: It doesn't do us any good, that's quite true, but this order here [points to the order] may be instrumental in some way or other in helping us to a position. -- In the mean time, I think this waiting begins to be rather long, so we might as well make ourselves at home here. Come, I will help you take your cloak off. Come!

THE WIFE: *[after slight resistance]* Are you so sure that we shall be welcome? I have a feeling that we won't grow old in this house.

TURE: Oho! And I expect to get a good dinner here, if I know Axel. If he only knew that we are here, he -- But, wait a minute! *[He presses a bell on the table; a*

*WAITER comes in.*] What will you have? Some bread and butter perhaps? *[To the WAITER.]* Give us some sandwiches and beer. -- Wait a minute! A pearl for me -- fine brandy! We have to take care of ourselves, you see!

*[AXEL and the GENTLEMAN of the court enter.]*

AXEL: *[to the GENTLEMAN of the court]* At five o'clock, then, in frock coat.

THE GENTLEMAN: And orders.

AXEL: Is that necessary?

THE GENTLEMAN: Absolutely necessary, if you do not wish to be discourteous, and you surely would not be that to any one, since you are a democrat. Farewell, Doctor.

AXEL: Farewell!

*[The GENTLEMAN bows slightly to TURE and his WIFE as he passes them; but his greeting is not returned.]*

AXEL: Hello! You there, old fellow! It is a long time since we have seen each other! -- And this is your wife! Welcome! Welcome!

TURE: Thank you, brother! And welcome yourself after your long journey!

AXEL: Yes, it was something of a journey. -- You have read all about it in the newspapers, I suppose ...

TURE: Yes, indeed, I have read everything! *[Pause.]* Father sent you his greetings.

AXEL: Did he? Is he still angry at me?

TURE: You know the old man and how he is. If you had not been with this expedition, he would have considered it one of the seven wonders of the world. But because you were with it, it is all humbug.

AXEL: Then he hasn't changed at all. Because I am his son, nothing that I undertake amounts to anything. At least there is no self-love in that. Well, that's the way with some people! -- But what have you been doing with yourself all this time?

TURE: Not much! That old loan ...



AXEL: Yes, that's true! Well, what about it?

TURE: There's this about it, I had to pay it.

AXEL: That's really very vexatious. But we'll arrange that matter at the first opportunity.

*[The WAITER enters with the things ordered.]*

AXEL: What is that?

TURE: Oh, I took the liberty of ordering some bread and butter ...

AXEL: That was wise! But we ought to drink a glass of wine with my sister-in-law, since I could not be with you at the wedding.

TURE: No, thank you, not for us! Not in the forenoon. Thank you very much!

AXEL: *[Nods to the waiters, he goes out.]* I ought really to invite you to dine with me, but I'm going out to dine myself. Can you guess where?

TURE: You are not going to the castle, are you?

AXEL: Just there. I am to dine with the prince himself.

TURE: God bless us! -- What do you say to that, Anna?

*[The WIFE squirms around uneasily in her chair, and is unable to answer.]*

AXEL: The old man will surely become a republican when he hears that his royal majesty is willing to associate with me.

TURE: Listen, Axel. Pardon me, if I mention a subject that is very unpleasant, but of which we must speak.

AXEL: I suppose it's that accursed loan?

TURE: Yes, but not only that. To be brief -- we have had to have a forced sale on your account, and are hard up.

AXEL: So you had a scene, too. But why didn't you renew the loan?

TURE: Oh, that's easy for you to say. Where was I to find any one to go my security when you were away?

AXEL: You might have gone to my friends.

TURE: I did go to them. And the result was what it was. Can you help us now?

AXEL: How can I help you now? Now, when all my creditors are harassing me? How can I begin to borrow, now, when all my friends are on the point of procuring a position for me? There is no worse recommendation than borrowing. Just wait a little while and matters will arrange themselves.

TURE: Do you think we can wait without being utterly ruined? Right now is the time to begin gardening; the digging and sowing must be done now, if anything is to be gotten out of the earth in good season. Can't you find a position for us?

AXEL: Where shall I find the garden?

TURE: At your friends'.

AXEL: My friends have no gardens. Don't get in my way when I am trying to save myself. When I am saved, I will save you.

TURE: *[to his wife]* He will not help us, Anna.

AXEL: I cannot -- not now. Is it reasonable to expect that I, I who am seeking a position for myself, should seek one for someone else too? What will people say to that? There, you see, now we are getting not only him, but his whole family on our shoulders. And then they will let me fall.

TURE: *[looks at the clock, then at his wife]* Well, we must be going.

AXEL: Why are you in such a hurry?

TURE: We want to take our child to the doctor.

AXEL: Good God, you have a child?

THE WIFE: Yes, we have a child. A sick child, that took sick because we had to move into the kitchen while the auction was being held.

AXEL: And this on my account? I shall go crazy over all this. For my sake! That I might become a celebrated man! What can I do for you? But would I have been any better off, if I had remained at home? Worse, for then I should still be a poor school teacher, who most certainly would be of less use to you than I am now. Listen! Go to the doctor and come back again in a little while, and I shall then have thought of something for you.

TURE: *[to his wife]* You see, he is going to help us.

THE WIFE: He must be able to.

TURE: He is able to do what he will!

AXEL: But don't depend too much on my help, for then the last state may be worse than the first. -- Go, good God, that you should have a sick child too! And for my sake!

TURE: Oh, it isn't so bad as it sounds.

THE WIFE: That's the way you talk, you who understand nothing ...

TURE: Farewell, then, for a little while, Axel.

*[LINDGREN appears in the doorway.]*

THE WIFE: Say, he didn't introduce us to the gentleman from the castle.

TURE: Don't talk nonsense. Why should he?

*[They go out. LINDGREN enters. He is rather poorly clad and looks besotted, unshaven and only half awake. AXEL starts back at LINDGREN'S entrance.]*

LINDGREN: Don't you recognize me?

AXEL: Yes, now I do; but you have changed so.

LINDGREN: You think so?

AXEL: Yes, I think so, and I am astonished that three years could make so much ...

LINDGREN: Three years may be a long time! -- Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?

AXEL: Certainly, but I am in somewhat of a hurry.

LINDGREN: You were always in a hurry. *[Sits down.]*

*[Pause.]*

AXEL: How much do you want?

LINDGREN: Three hundred and fifty.

AXEL: I haven't it and can't get it.

LINDGREN: Oh yes, you have! -- Pardon me if I take a tear-drop.

*[LINDGREN pours out a glass of brandy.]*

AXEL: Will you do me the pleasure of taking a glass of wine instead?

LINDGREN: No, why?

AXEL: Well, it looks badly for you to take your brandy straight that way.

LINDGREN: How elegant you have become!

AXEL: It hurts my prestige, my credit.

LINDGREN: If you have credit, then you can help me up, after having pulled me down.

AXEL: That means that you demand help!

LINDGREN: I only remind you of the fact that I am one of your sacrifices.

AXEL: Then I beg you, by the gratitude I owe you, to be allowed to remind you: that you helped me with my examination at the university, at a time when you had the money; that you had my thesis printed ...

LINDGREN: That I taught you the method of study which was to be the determining factor in your scientific career; that I who was, at that time, a person of orderly habits, worked advantageously on your careless nature; that, to be brief, I made something of you; and that, later, when I sought for the subsidy for the expedition, you came in my way and took it from me.

AXEL: Received it. Because I was regarded as the man adapted to the undertaking and you were not.

LINDGREN: And then it was all up with me. One is lifted up, and another is cast down! -- Do you think that was acting kindly toward me?

AXEL: It was ungrateful, as people say, but the great deed was accomplished, science was enriched, the honor of the Fatherland was increased, and new lands were opened up for the needs of coming generations.

LINDGREN: Hello! -- You have been practicing eloquence! -- Do you know how unpleasant it is to be obliged to play the part of being used up and thrown away?

AXEL: I imagine it must be just as unpleasant as to be the black ingrate, and I congratulate you that you are not in my false position -- Let us go back to existing conditions. -- What can I do for you?

LINDGREN: What do you think?

AXEL: At this moment, nothing!

LINDGREN: And the next moment, you will be gone again. And then I'll never get a chance to see you again. [*Pours out another glass of brandy.*]

AXEL: Do me the kindness not to empty the brandy bottle, so that the servants may not be suspicious of me.

LINDGREN: For shame!

AXEL: Do you think it is pleasant for me to have to reprove you here? Do you think so?

LINDGREN: Look here! Will you get me a ticket to the castle this evening?

AXEL: It pains me to be obliged to say that I think you would not be allowed to enter.

LINDGREN: Because ...

AXEL: You are drunk!

LINDGREN: Thank you, old friend! -- Will you let me see your botanical collections?

AXEL: No! I am going to arrange them myself for the benefit of the academy.

LINDGREN: Your ethnographic collections, then?

AXEL: No, they don't belong to me.

LINDGREN: Then will you -- give me twenty-five kronen?

AXEL: I can't give you more than ten, as I possess but twenty, myself.

LINDGREN: Oh, the devil!

AXEL: This is the position of the man you envy! Do you think there is any one with whom I can enjoy myself? None! For those who are below me hate the man

who has gone up, and those who are above, fear the man who has come from below.

LINDGREN: Yes, you are most unfortunate!...

AXEL: Well, let me tell you, after what I have gone through in the last half hour, I should be willing to change places with you. How at ease and unapproachable is the man who has nothing to lose; how interesting is the insignificant man, the man who has been misunderstood and passed by, to get a nickel, you have only to offer your arm and you have a friend to hook theirs into it; and what a powerful party your kindred spirits make! Envidable person, who know not your own good fortune!

LINDGREN: You are of the opinion, then, that I am so far down, and you, so high up. -- Look here, perhaps you haven't happened to read this newspaper? [*Pulls out a newspaper.*]

AXEL: No, and I don't wish to read it.

LINDGREN: And yet you should read it, for your own good.

AXEL: I certainly shall not do so, not even to give you pleasure. You say: come here and I will spit on you, and are naive enough to demand that I should really come. -- Do you know; I have this moment arrived at the conviction that if I should meet you in a bamboo jungle, I should, without fail, stretch you out with my breech-loader.

LINDGREN: I believe it of you, you beast of prey!

AXEL: It is best never to settle up accounts with friends or with people with whom you have lived intimately, for you never know who has the most figures on the debt side. But if you will bring your account to me, I will examine it. -- Do you think I wouldn't have seen before long, that behind your benevolence lay an unconscious desire to make of me the strong arm you lacked, which would accomplish for you what you could not for yourself? For I possessed the inventive faculty and initiative, while you possessed only money and a university education. I can congratulate myself that you did not eat me, and I am excusable for having eaten you, since I had no other choice than to eat or be eaten.

LINDGREN: Beast of prey!

AXEL: Rodent, that could not rise to be the beast of prey, -- you would so gladly have been! At this moment, you do not wish yourself up with me, so much as you wish me down with you. If you have anything more of importance to add, hurry up with it; I am expecting a guest.

LINDGREN: Your fiancée?

AXEL: So you have sniffed that out too?

LINDGREN: Yes, of course! And I know what Mary, the girl you deserted, thinks and says; and I know how things have gone with your brother and his wife ...

AXEL: Do you know my future fiancée? I am not yet engaged.

LINDGREN: No, but I know the man to whom she is engaged.

AXEL: What do you mean?

LINDGREN: That she has been going with another man all this time -- Oh, you didn't knot it, then?

AXEL: *[listens for a sound in the hall]* Yes, I knew it, but I thought she had broken with him. -- See here, won't you come back in a quarter of an hour? In the meantime I'll try to arrange your matter in some way.

LINDGREN: Is that a nice way of showing me out?

AXEL: No! It is an effort to discharge an obligation. In solemn earnest.

LINDGREN: Then I'll go, and come back again. -- Goodbye for a while ...

*[The WAITER enters.]*

THE WAITER: A gentleman begs to be allowed to speak to you, Doctor.

AXEL: Let him come in.

*[The WAITER goes out, leaving the door open. CECELIA'S BETROTHED enters. He is dressed in black with blue bands.]*

LINDGREN: *[observing him carefully]* Goodbye, Axel! -- Good luck to you!  
*[Goes out.]*

AXEL: Goodbye!

*[CECELIA'S BETROTHED, embarrassed.]*

AXEL: Whom have I the honor ...

CECELIA'S BETROTHED: My name is not a distinguished name like yours, and my errand is an affair of the heart ...

AXEL: Do you ... You know Miss Cecilia?

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: I am he.

AXEL: *[hesitating, then decidedly]* I pray you be seated. *[Opens the door and beckons to the waiter.]* Have my account ready; pack my things in there, and order a hack in half an hour.

THE WAITER: *[bows and goes out.]* I will attend to it, Doctor.

AXEL: *[goes over to CECILIA'S BETROTHED, sits down on a chair.]* Pray tell me your errand.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[after a pause, unctuously]* Two men lived in the same city, one rich, the other poor. The rich man had a great number of sheep and cattle: the poor man possessed nothing but a little lamb ...

AXEL: What concern of mine is that?

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[as before]* --a little lamb, that he had bought and raised ...

AXEL: This is too long! What do you want? Are you still engaged to Cecilia?

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[changes suddenly]* Have I said anything of Cecilia? Have I?

AXEL: Listen, sir, out with your errand, or you'll be shown out the door! And tell what you have to tell quickly, and to the point, without any twistings ...

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[offers his snuff]* May I?

AXEL: No, thank you!

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: A great man has no small weaknesses like this.

AXEL: Since you will not speak, I shall. It really doesn't concern you, but it may be useful for you to know, since you don't seem to know it: I am formally engaged to Miss Cecilia, your former fiancée.



CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[surprised]* Former?

AXEL: Yes, she has of course broken off her engagement to you.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: I know nothing of it.

AXELL: *[takes a ring from his vest pocket]* Inexplicable! You knew nothing of it? Well, now you know it. Here you see my ring.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: She has broken off her engagement to me?

AXEL: Since she cannot be engaged to two men at once, and since she no longer loves you, of course, she had to break with you. I would have said all this much more politely, if you hadn't trodden on me when you came in.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: I didn't tread on you.

AXEL: Cowardly and deceitful, sneaky and boastful!

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[weakly]* You are a hard man, Doctor!

AXEL: No, I am not, but I shall be. You didn't spare my feelings before; you sneered, I didn't do that. Now, this conversation is at an end.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[with genuine emotion]* She was my one lamb, and I feared you would take her away from me; but surely you will not, you who have so many ...

AXEL: Granted that I really wouldn't, are you sure that she would stay with you?

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: Think of me, Doctor ...

AXEL: I will, if you will think of me.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: I am a poor man ...

AXEL: I am, too. But you, according to what I can see and hear, can expect constant bliss beyond this life. I cannot! -- Beside that, I have taken nothing from you -- only accepted what was offered me. Just as you did.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: And I, who had dreamed of a future for this girl, a future so bright ...

AXEL: Pardon me, if I say anything uncivil, since you are saying uncivil things; you are so sure that the future of this girl might not be brighter at my side?...

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: You remind me of my low social position as a laborer ...

AXEL: No, I only remind you of this girl's future, which lies so near to your heart, and since I am told that she no longer loves you, but me, I take the liberty of dreaming that her future will be brighter with the man she loves than with the one she does not love.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: You are so strong and we smaller people are here to be sacrificed.

AXEL: See here! I have been told you supplanted a rival in Cecilia's affections, and by none too honorable means. What do you think your sacrifice thought of you?

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: He was a bad man.

AXEL: From whom you saved the girl. Well, now I am saving her from you. Farewell!

*[CECILIA enters.]*

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: Cecilia!

*[CECILIA starts back.]*

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: You seem to be finding your way her already.

AXEL: *[To CECILIA'S BETROTHED]* Take yourself off!

CECILIA: Give me a glass of water.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: *[lifts up the brandy bottle]* The carafe seems to have been emptied. -- Beware of this man, Cecilia!

AXEL: *[pushes CECILIA'S BETROTHED out of the door]* Your presence here is absolutely unnecessary -- go!

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: Beware of this man, Cecilia! *[Goes.]*

AXEL: That was a most uncomfortable incident, and you could have spared me it; first, by breaking with him openly, and then, by abstaining from visiting me in my rooms.

CECILIA: *[weeps]* And now I have to listen to reproaches!

AXEL: We had to discuss whose fault this was, and now that that is clear -- let us talk of something else. -- To begin with something: how are you?

CECILIA: So, so.

AXEL: Then you are not ill?

CECILIA: How are you, yourself?

AXEL: Very well, only a little tired.

CECILIA: Are you coming with me to my aunt's this afternoon?

AXEL: No, I can't. I have to go away at noon.

CECILIA: That's nice. You go away so much, and I never go.

AXEL: Hm!

CECILIA: Why do you say Hm?

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

CECILIA: One has so many unpleasant impressions these days ...

AXEL: For example?

CECILIA: When you read the newspapers.

AXEL: You read those scandalous stories about me! Do you believe them?

CECILIA: What are you to believe?

AXEL: So you entertain a suspicion that I may be the infamous person described in them. If you are willing to marry me in spite of this, I can only believe that you would do it from purely practical motives and not because of any personal liking for me.

CECILIA: You speak so hardly, as if you had no opinion at all of me.

AXEL: Cecilia! Will you go away from here with me in a quarter of an hour?

CECILIA: In a quarter of an hour? Where?

AXEL: To London.

CECILIA: I will not travel with you until we have been married.

AXEL: Why not?

CECILIA: Why should we go away in such a hurry?

AXEL: Because -- it is suffocating here. And if we remain, I shall be pulled down so low that I shall never rise again.

CECILIA: That would be queer! Is it so bad as that?

AXEL: Will you go with me, or won't you go with me?

CECILIA: Not before we are married, for you'll never marry me afterward.

AXEL: Do you believe that? -- Sit down here a few minutes, while I go in and write one or two letters.

CECILIA: Do you want me to sit here alone, with the doors open?

AXEL: Don't lock the door, if you do we are totally lost. *[Goes out left.]*

CECILIA: Don't stay long!

*[She goes to the door leading into the hall and turns the key. CECILIA alone. Later MARY comes in through the door leading from the hall.]*

CECILIA: Wasn't the door locked?

MARY: No, not that I noticed! -- Oho, so it should have been locked, should it?

CECILIA: Whom have I the honor?

MARY: And whom have I?

CECILIA: That doesn't concern you!

MARY: So aristocratic? I understand. It is you! And I have been sacrificed to you -- until someone else comes.

CECILIA: I do not know you.

MARY: But I know you so much the better.

CECILIA: *[rises, goes to the door left.]* Indeed. *[Speaks to AXEL.]* Come out a minute.

*[AXEL enters.]*

AXEL: *[To MARY.]* What do you want here?

MARY: You never can tell.

AXEL: Then go away.

MARY: Why?

AXEL: Because everything has been at an end between us for three years.

MARY: And now there is another girl to be thrown out on the rubbish heap.

AXEL: Did I ever make you a promise that I didn't keep? Do I owe you anything? Did I ever speak of marriage? Did we have a child? Was I the only one in your favor?

MARY: And now he thinks he is the only one? With that girl, there?

CECILIA: *[goes up to MARY.]* Be still! -- I do not know you.

MARY: But when we used to tramp round the streets, then we knew each other; and when we went to market we called each other thou. *[To AXEL.]* And you intend to marry that girl. Do you know what, you are much too good for her!

AXEL: *[To CECILIA.]* Did you used to know this girl?

CECILIA: No!

MARY: Aren't you ashamed of yourself? At first I did not recognize you, because you looked so fine ...

*[AXEL gazes at CECILIA.]*

CECILIA: *[To AXEL.]* Come! I will go with you.

AXEL: *[absentmindedly]* Right away! Just wait a few minutes. -- I must go in and write one more letter. -- But this time we will lock the door.

MARY: No, thank you, I don't wish to be locked in, the way she was before.

AXEL: *[becoming attentive]* Was the door locked before?

CECILIA: *[To MARY]* Can you say that the door was locked?

MARY: As you thought it was locked, I took it for granted that you had locked it so carelessly that it opened ...

AXEL: *[looks searchingly at CECILIA, then says to MARY.]* Mary, you were a good girl, at least so it seemed to me. Will you give me back my letters?

MARY: No!

AXEL: What do you want with them?

MARY: I have heard that since you became such a celebrated man, I can sell them.

AXEL: And then, you can revenge yourself with them.

MARY: Yes!

AXEL: Is Lindgren ...

MARY: Yes. -- Here he is, himself.

*[LINDGREN enters.]*

LINDGREN: *[in a good humor]* Just look! What a lot of girls! And Mary is here, like the roaches wherever there is a fish-spawn. Listen, Axel!

AXEL: I hear you even if I don't see you. You are in a very good humor. What misfortune has happened to me?

LINDGREN: I had overslept a little, it was some time before I felt like myself, but I went downstairs and had them bring me a beefsteak. -- Yes! See here! -- You don't really owe me anything *[AXEL: play of expression]*, for what I did for you I did out of the goodness of my heart, and I have had both honor and pleasure in return. What you have received, you have received and not borrowed.

AXEL: Now you are too meek and high-souled.

LINDGREN: Don't say that. And now, service for service: will you sign this, as my security?

*[AXEL hesitates.]*

LINDGREN: You needn't be afraid, I won't bring you into the dilemma that your brother ...

AXEL: What do you mean? It was I who brought misfortune on him ...

LINDGREN: The two hundred kronen, yes, but he gave you as his security for a five years' lease ...

AXEL: Good Lord!

LINDGREN: What was that? -- Hm, hm!

AXEL: *[looks at his watch]* Wait a few minutes, I must go in and write a few letters.

*[CECILIA is about to follow him.]*

AXEL: *[holds her back]* A few minutes, my dear friend ... *[Kisses her on the forehead.]* A few minutes! *[Goes out, left.]*

LINDGREN: Here is the paper. Sign this at the same time.

AXEL: Give it here. *[Goes resolutely to the left.]*

LINDGREN: Well, are we on good terms now, little girls?!

MARY: Yes, indeed. And before we go away from here, together, we'll be on still better terms.

*[CECILIA: play of expression.]*

MARY: I think I'd like to do something nice today.

LINDGREN: Come with me; I'm going to get some money.

MARY: No.

*[CECILIA sits down, uneasily, near the door where AXEL went out and leans against it.]*

LINDGREN: We'll go and look at the fireworks tonight, then we can see what a big man made of Bengal lights looks like; or don't you want to, Cissa? -- You there!

CECILIA: Do you know, I shall be sick if I stay here.

MARY: It wouldn't be the first time.

LINDGREN: Now quarrel, little girls, that'll give me something to listen to. Go ahead, make it hail round your ears -- ha, ha!

*[TURE and his WIFE come in.]*

LINDGREN: Look here! Old acquaintances! How are you?

TURE: Very well, thank you!

LINDGREN: And the child?

TURE: The child?

LINDGREN: Oh, you had forgotten it, had you? -- Do you find it just as hard to retain names?

TURE: Names?

LINDGREN: Signatures? -- It's dreadful how slowly that man in there writes.

TURE: Is my brother, the doctor, in there?

LINDGREN: Whether the doctor is in there, I do not know, but your brother went in there just now. -- At all events, we can find out. *[Knocks at the door.]* Quiet as a grave. *[Knocks again.]* I'll go in. *[Goes in.]*

*[General tension and uneasiness.]*

CECILIA: What does this mean?

MARY: We shall see.

TURE: What has happened?

THE WIFE: Something's the matter -- you'll see, he won't help us.

LINDGREN: *[comes out of the room with a bottle and some letters.]* What is written on this? *[Reads the label on the bottle.]* Cyanide of potassium! -- Look at that, how stupid he was, the sentimental dreamer, to go and take his life for so little.

*[General outcry.]*

So you weren't a beast of prey, my dear Axel! -- But -- *[Peeps through the door into the room.]* he isn't there -- and neither are his things. So he has gone off. And the bottle is unopened -- that means: he thought of taking his life, but then decided to do something else. -- Well, here are the writings he left behind.



'To Miss Cecilia----' seems to contain something round -- probably an engagement ring. -- Be so good!

'To my brother, Ture.' [*Holds the letter up to the light.*] -- On blue paper -- that's a draught for -- the full amount. -- May it do you good!

[*CECILIA'S BETROTHED appears in the door to the right.*]

TURE: [*who has opened his letter*] You see, he has helped us ...

THE WIFE: Yes, in that way, oh, yes!

LINDGREN: And here's my note. -- Without his signature! This was a strong man. Diable!

MARY: Then there'll be no fireworks.

CECILIA'S BETROTHED: Was there nothing for me?

LINDGREN: Why, certainly, a fiancée, over there. -- What a man! To be able to bring such tangled affairs into order in each case! It vexes me, of course, that I let myself be cheated; but the devil take me, if I don't think I'd have done just the same -- you too, perhaps? Eh?

CURTAIN