

3912  
.T5  
C5  
1900

TO DAMASCUS  
PART I  
AUGUST STRINDBERG  
TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH  
BY ARVID PAULSON

OLIN  
PT  
9812  
T5  
E5  
1900



CORNELL  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

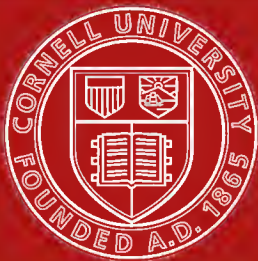


Gift of  
Howard Taubman

CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



3 1924 072 162 997



Cornell University  
Library

The original of this book is in  
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in  
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924072162997>

august strindberg

**TO DAMASCUS, PART I**



in the picture gallery of the monastery where the last part of the trilogy *To Damascus* (1898–1904) ends, there are a number of curious portraits, described in some detail by a priest. Each portrait has “at least two heads.” There is Boccaccio, who began by writing tales of debauchery and ended as a “saint” lecturing in a monastery about Dante’s hell and the devils of his own youth. There is Luther, who began his career as a defender of tolerance and finished as a supporter of intolerance. Third is Gustavus Adolphus, who took Catholic money from Richelieu to fight for the Protestants. Then come Schiller and Goethe, the one beloved of the leaders of the French Revolution but also much honored by intrenched monarchs, the other the “great pagan” who allowed his Faust to be converted in Part II of the drama, and not merely converted but saved by the Virgin Mary and by angels. Voltaire has more than two heads; the “Godless one” all his life defended God and, though a mocker, was himself mocked because “he believed in God like a child.” Napoleon, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Victor Hugo, Lafayette, and Bismarck are also present and doubly accounted for. And so is August Strindberg, here only the Stranger looking on, being guided through the collection, but very much himself a two- or three- or four-headed man, and undoubtedly the subject of the speculations not only of this scene but of the whole play.

Hegel’s “magic formula” is used by the

priest at the end of the scene to explain the inconsistencies and contradictions of life and of history and of the human spirit. The thesis is affirmation, the antithesis is negation, and the synthesis is comprehension. The young accept everything. The middle-aged, on principle, deny everything. The priest suggests to the Stranger that he end his life by understanding everything. He must cease to say “either/or” and say instead “not only, but also.” His attitude must be one of resignation, a resignation that grows out of an acceptance of humanity—humanity as it is, he implies, not as we would like to see it. That was Strindberg’s formula, not a magic one at all, but a tortured one, for the resignation did not come only once, as in the speech, but many times, as in *To Damascus* the Stranger is reconciled to himself and to life many times, only to lose his respect for both again and again and again.

The whole process is lived through in the trilogy, most satisfactorily perhaps in the first of the three plays. There, seventeen scenes start and end on a street corner, leading to and from a central ninth scene in a convent which is as much an asylum as a religious house. The recapitulation of the opening scenes from this center makes the point of Strindberg’s trilogy and perhaps of all his significant plays. The road to Damascus is not for him a one-way path, but a maze that takes him back and forth across the same ground in an endless search for identity that forces him through agonies of reli-

## august strindberg

1849–1912

gious conversion, deconversion, and reconversion. The Stranger is determined not to be made a fool, either by life in general or by women in particular. But with each adventure there is a manifest increase in folly; whether because of the nature of life, the nature of woman, or the nature of the Stranger is never made clear. The reason of man has only a fearfully limited capacity to understand such things, and this dramatist who dabbled in alchemy and respected all mysteries was certainly not the one to offer facile revelations about either life or woman. Both were united in combat with the male of the species—that much was obvious. But it was also true that the best guide a man could find through life, the best intercessor in any world, was woman. Her guidance and intercession might be shortlived, as had been true with each of Strindberg's three wives. But for a long time or for a brief while, the relationship was necessary, even though it might end with the kind of cruelty visited by women upon men in *The Father* (1887) and *The Dance of Death* (1901).

*To Damascus*, a drama so much concerned with centers, stands at the center of Strindberg's life as a dramatist. The first two parts were finished in 1898, when he was himself finished with the naturalistic examination of human weakness and frustration and the tyrannies that grow out of both, such as he conducted in *Miss Julie* (1888) and *The Father*. In Parts I and II of *To Damascus* the expressionist techniques which he contributed to the theater are brilliantly outlined. The substance of these parts of the trilogy, as of the last, is the projection on the stage of an interior drama. By means of symbol and allegory and every apparatus of the world of dreams, Strindberg sought to externalize conflicts of mind and soul. This sometimes led to a fuzziness of expression, with pseudo-mystical overtones and a language uncomfortably close to pseudo-religions, such as is to be found in *A Dream Play* (1902). But just as often the effort produced the network of impressions that is *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) or the last part of *To Damascus* (1904), in which psychological perception finds a masterful theatrical mounting.

The theatrical resourcefulness of Strindberg has not yet been fully explored, either by pro-

ducers and directors of his plays or by other playwrights. Too many have been caught up in his coarse strength to notice how much else there is in his dramatic methods. It is easy enough to recognize the ingenuity which translates a humbling seduction into a peasant dance in *Miss Julie* and to note how thoroughly he avoids the kind of characterization he associates contemptuously, in his preface to that play, with the repetition of a phrase such as "Barkis is willin'" or the drumming into an audience's senses of a physical defect such as a clubfoot or a wooden leg. It is not so simple to run to earth the devices which light up character in the late historical dramas or stretch satire into a touch of horror or mingle terror with farce in others of the plays of the last years. Motivation in these dramas is hidden. Character, so far from being associated with any one physical or psychological or spiritual quality, changes back and forth many times. Concealment is as important as revelation; a suppressed fact, just barely hinted at, may offer as much as one paraded openly. It is a teasing game that Strindberg plays with his audiences, but not to mock them. If there is mockery in his drama, it is because Strindberg has translated it from the world around him onto his stage. This, he says, is the way the world goes: now in shadow, which only confirms light, for as the Tempter says at the end of Part III of *To Damascus*, "without light there can be no shadow"; now in darkness, which only denies light, for "where there is darkness there can be no light." "Stop!" the Stranger cries at this point. "Stop! Or there will be no end to this!" And only at this point does Strindberg stop. But he does not really stop; he only halts. The death of the Stranger is merely pretended: "You are to lie in that coffin and make believe you are dying. . . ." The curtain comes down on a Strindberg play only to open, not to close a mystery.

## THE PLAYS OF STRINDBERG

*The Free Thinker* (1869)

*Hermione* (1869)

*In Rome* (1870)

*The Outlaw* (1871)



*Master Olof* (1872)  
*The Secret of the Guild* (1880)  
*In the Year Forty-eight* (1881)  
*The Wanderings of Lucky Per* (1881)  
*Sir Bengt's Wife* (1882)  
*The Father* (1887)  
*Comrades* (1887)  
*Miss Julie* (1888)  
*Creditors* (1888)  
*Pariah* (1890)  
*Samum* (1890)  
*The Stronger* (1890)  
*The Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven* (1892)  
*Facing Death* (1893)  
*The First Warning* (1893)  
*Debit and Credit* (1893)  
*Mother Love* (1893)  
*The Link* (1893)  
*Playing with Fire* (1893)  
*To Damascus, Parts I and II* (1898)  
*There Are Crimes and Crimes* (1899)  
*Advent* (1899)  
*Gustavus Vasa* (1899)  
*Eric XIV* (1899)  
*The Saga of the Folkungs* (1899)  
*Gustavus Adolphus* (1900)  
*Caspar's Shrove Tuesday* (1901)  
*Easter* (1901)  
*Midsummer* (1901)  
*The Dance of Death* (1901)  
*Englebrekt* (1901)  
*Charles XII* (1901)  
*The Bridal Crown* (1902)

*Swanwhite* (1902)  
*The Dream Play* (1902)  
*Christina* (1903)  
*Gustavus III* (1903)  
*The Nightingale of Wittenberg* (1903)  
*To Damascus, Part III* (1904)  
*The Storm* (1907)  
*The Burned Lot* (1907)  
*The Ghost Sonata* (1907)  
*The Pelican* (1907)  
*The Last Knight* (1908)  
*The Slippers of Abu Casem* (1908)  
*The Regent* (1909)  
*The Earl of Bjalbo* (1909)  
*The Black Glove* (1909)  
*The Great Highway* (1909)

#### OTHER WORKS

*The Red Room* (1879)  
*Married* (1874–1875)  
*Gothic Rooms* (1904)  
*Black Flags* (1904)

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Joan Bulman, *Strindberg and Shakespeare* (1933)  
 George A. Campbell, *Strindberg* (1933)  
 C. E. W. L. Dahlström, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* (1930)  
 V. J. McGill, *August Strindberg, the Bedevilled Viking* (1930)  
 Elizabeth Sprigge, *The Strange Life of August Strindberg* (1949)

# TO DAMASCUS, PART I

a drama in five acts, translated by Arvid Paulson

## characters

THE STRANGER

THE LADY

THE BEGGAR

THE PHYSICIAN

THE SISTER

THE OLD MAN

THE MOTHER

THE ABBESS

THE CONFESSOR

THE WAITER

THE BLACKSMITH

THE MILLER'S WIFE

THE SIX PALLBEARERS

MOURNERS

THE CAFE PROPRIETOR

CAESAR THE MADMAN

SERVANTS, INMATES, etc.

## act one

### SCENE ONE

*A street corner. A bench underneath a tree. The side doors of a small Gothic church are visible, also a post office and a café with chairs and tables outside. The café and the post office are closed.*

*The strains of a funeral march, indicating an approaching procession, are heard and die out gradually.*

*The Stranger is standing at the edge of the sidewalk, seemingly at a loss to know in which direc-*

*tion to go. The clock in the church tower strikes: first four times, in a high pitch, the quarter hours; then the hour, three times, in a lower pitch.*

*The Lady enters. She greets the Stranger and is about to move on, but stops.*

**THE STRANGER** Well—there you are. I was almost certain you would come.

**THE LADY** You wanted me to come, didn't you? Yes—I could feel it.—But why are you standing here on the street corner?

**THE STRANGER** I don't know. . . . I have to stand somewhere while I am waiting.

**THE LADY** What are you waiting for?

**THE STRANGER** If I only knew. . . . For forty years I have been waiting for something—I think they call it happiness . . . or it may be for nothing but the end of unhappiness. . . . Listen—listen again to this dismal music! Don't leave me, don't leave me, I beg of you. . . . I shall be in dread if you go. . . .

**THE LADY** My friend! We met yesterday for the first time, and we spoke—we two, alone—for four hours. You awakened my sympathy . . . but that does not entitle you to take advantage of my kindness.

**THE STRANGER** You are right. . . . I must not. But I beg—I pray of you: Do not leave me alone! I am a stranger in this city—have not a single friend here—and the few acquaintances I have seem to me even more remote than strangers—I could well call them enemies.

**THE LADY** Enemies everywhere—alone everywhere! Why did you leave your wife and children?

**THE STRANGER** If I only knew!—If I even knew why I was born—why I should be standing here—where to go—what to do!—Do you believe that we can be doomed already here on earth?

**THE LADY** No, I don't believe that.

**THE STRANGER** Look at me!

**THE LADY** Have you then never felt any happiness in this life?

**THE STRANGER** No—and when I thought I had found happiness, it was only a trap to lure me into a greater misery. . . . Whenever the golden apple fell into my hand, it was either poisoned or rotten at the core.

**THE LADY** What religion do you profess, if you will forgive my asking? . . .

**THE STRANGER** This is my religion: When my cup has run over, I shall take my leave.

**THE LADY** And go where?

**THE STRANGER** To perdition. The very fact that I hold death in my hand—gives me an unbelievable feeling of strength. . . .

**THE LADY** Oh, my God, you are playing with death!

**THE STRANGER** . . . as I have been playing with

life—wasn't I a poet? Despite being born with a morbid and melancholy turn of mind, I have never been able to take anything quite seriously—not even my own deep sorrows. . . . And there are moments when I doubt that life is more real than my poetic fancies.

[*The funeral procession is coming closer, and the strains of "De Profundis" are heard.*]

**THE STRANGER** Here they are again! I can't understand why they should be marching around here in the streets!

**THE LADY** Is it of them you are afraid?

**THE STRANGER** No, but it annoys me. . . . It seems like witchery! . . . I have no fear of death—it is loneliness I am afraid of—for the loneliness of life is peopled. . . . I don't know whether it is someone else or myself I sense—but in the loneliness one is never alone. The air becomes dense, the atmosphere thickens, and spirits that are invisible and yet have life can be perceived, hovering about. . . .

**THE LADY** You have felt that?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—for some time I have been intensely aware of such things. . . . But not the way I saw them in the past—as mere things and happenings, shapes and colors. . . . Now I see thoughts and motives. Life—which previously was a meaningless nothing—has taken on purpose, and I observe an intention where I formerly saw only aimlessness, chance.—Therefore, when I met you yesterday, the idea occurred to me that you were sent to me either to save me or to destroy me.

**THE LADY** Why should I destroy you?

**THE STRANGER** Because that was your mission in life.

**THE LADY** I have no such intention whatever—and you make me feel compassion for you most of all, because—well, I have never met a human being . . . never in my life have I met a human being whose very sight makes me feel so like weeping. . . . Tell me what is gnawing at your conscience? Have you committed some vile act that has remained unknown to others and gone unpunished?

**THE STRANGER** You are indeed justified in asking that! I have no more crimes on my conscience than other men who have gone free. . . . Yes—one: I rebelled against being a fool, being at

the mercy of life.

**THE LADY** In order to live, one has to be willing to be more or less of a fool, or a dupe.

**THE STRANGER** It seems to be almost a duty, and one I wouldn't want to shirk. Or else, there is a mystery in my past, of which I am not aware. . . . Do you know there is a legend in my family that I am a changeling?

**THE LADY** What is a changeling?

**THE STRANGER** A changeling is a child that has been exchanged by the elves for the child that was born.

**THE LADY** Do you believe such things?

**THE STRANGER** No, but I think it is a parable that has a certain meaning.—As a child I cried continuously and seemed to be ill at ease with life. I hated my parents as much as they hated me. I could stand no coercion, no conventions, no rules and regulations. . . . And my only longing was for the woods and the sea.

**THE LADY** Have you ever had any visions?

**THE STRANGER** Never! But I have often seemed to notice that my fate is being ruled by two different forces, one giving me all that I ask for, the other standing beside me tainting the gift, so that when I receive it, it is so worthless that I don't want to touch it. Yet it is true that I have been given everything I wished for of life . . . but I have found all of it to be idle, useless. . . .

**THE LADY** You have been given everything, and yet you are dissatisfied.

**THE STRANGER** That is what I call my curse. . . .

**THE LADY** Don't curse!—But why, then, have you not projected your desires beyond this life—to the land where nothing exists that is unclean?

**THE STRANGER** Because I have doubted the existence of all life beyond that on earth.

**THE LADY** But what about the elves?

**THE STRANGER** Well, that was nothing but a fairy tale!—But shouldn't we sit down on the bench there?

**THE LADY** Why, yes—but what is it you are waiting for?

**THE STRANGER** I am really waiting for the post office to open. There is a letter for me that has been following me about without locating me. *[They sit down on the bench.]*

**THE STRANGER** Tell me now a little about yourself!

*[The Lady busies herself with her needlework.]*

**THE LADY** I have nothing special to tell.

**THE STRANGER** It is strange—but I would rather prefer to think of you impersonally—as one without any name. . . . I have only a vague idea of your name. . . . I would like to give you a name myself. Let me see—what name should I give you? . . . Yes—your name shall be Eve. . . . *[He makes a gesture in the direction of offstage.]* Fanfares. . . . *[The funeral march is again heard.]* There is that funeral march again!—Now I shall give you your age—for I have no idea how old you are. . . . From now on you are thirty-four years old—thus you were born in 1864.—And now we come to your character. I am in ignorance on that score, too.—I shall give you a very good character, for your voice has a ring like my late mother's. . . . When I say mother I use it in an abstract sense—and I pronounce it M-O-T-H-E-R. . . . For my mother never fondled me, but I remember that she used to beat me. Yes—and so, you see, I have been reared in hate. Hate! Hate against hate! An eye for an eye! Look at the scar here on my forehead! It is from an axe—and my brother held it! I had cast a stone at him, and it broke off his front tooth. I refused to attend my father's funeral because he had me thrown out at my sister's wedding. I was born illegitimate while bankruptcy proceedings were going on, and while the family was in mourning for an uncle who committed suicide. Now you know the family! The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. By luck I have escaped fourteen years of hard labor—and therefore I have every reason to be thankful to the elves, though not especially happy. . . .

**THE LADY** I enjoy hearing you speak, but you must not say anything bad about the elves. . . . It hurts me—hurts me deeply!

**THE STRANGER** Frankly, I do not believe in them. . . . Yet they always keep coming back. Are not the elves doomed spirits who have not yet earned their forgiveness? Aren't they? In that case, I am also a child of trolls. At one time I believed reconciliation was close at hand

—through a woman. But no delusion could have been greater—for it was the beginning of a seventh hell!

**THE LADY** Oh, how can you say things like that? Yes—you are a doomed soul. . . . But you shall not remain one.

**THE STRANGER** You mean that holy water and church bells would bring me peace. . . . I have tried it, but it had the opposite effect. It affected me as it does the devil when he sees the sign of the cross.—Let us talk about you now. . . .

**THE LADY** There is no need for that!—Have you ever been accused of having wasted your gifts?

**THE STRANGER** I have been accused of everything! No one in my city was so hated as I, no one so detested. Alone I had to tread my way, coming and going alone. If I went into a public place, people moved five yards away from me. If I came to rent a room, it was already rented. The clergy read their anathemas over me from their pulpits, the teachers denounced me from their desks and platforms, and the parents in the homes. Once the ecclesiastical council wanted to take my children away from me. That time I forgot myself and raised my clenched fist against—Heaven. . . .

**THE LADY** Why are you so hated?

**THE STRANGER** I just don't know!—Yes—I could not bear to see humanity suffer. . . . I said so . . . and I wrote: Set yourselves free! I shall help you! . . . And to the poor I said: Do not let the rich squeeze you and suck your blood . . . and to the woman: Let not the man dominate you! . . . Then to the children, and this was no doubt the very worst: Do not obey your parents when they are unjust!—The consequences—well, they are entirely incomprehensible . . . for instantly rich and poor, men and women, parents and children, turned against me. . . . And added to this came sickness and poverty, the dishonor of being forced to beg, divorce, lawsuits, exile, loneliness—and now, at the very last—do you think I am insane?

**THE LADY** No, I do not. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then I believe you are the only one who does not think so—and that makes you the more precious to me.

**THE LADY** [*rises*] Now I must leave you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You, too!

**THE LADY** But you must not remain here.

**THE STRANGER** Where, then, shall I go?

**THE LADY** You must go home and work.

**THE STRANGER** I am not a laborer—I am a poet. . . .

**THE LADY** I don't wish to hurt your feelings—and you are right: poetry is a grace given to us. . . . But it can be reclaimed. Do not forfeit it!

**THE STRANGER** Where are you going?

**THE LADY** Merely on an errand. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Are you religious?

**THE LADY** I am nothing.

**THE STRANGER** So much the better; then you shall be something. Oh, I wish I were your blind old father, whom you used to lead to the market places to sing. . . . But my misfortune is that I cannot grow old. . . . It is the same with the children of the elves. They do not grow up, only their heads enlarge, and they keep crying. . . . I wish I were someone's dog and that I had someone I could follow, so that I would never be alone. . . . A little food now and then, a kick sometimes, a little petting, a whipping or two. . . .

**THE LADY** Now I must go! Goodbye!

**THE STRANGER** [*his thoughts wandering*] Goodbye! [*He remains seated on the bench, removes his hat and wipes his brow. Then he begins to draw figures in the sand with his stick.*]

[*The Beggar enters. He has a weird face. He pokes about in the gutter.*]

**THE STRANGER** What are you poking about for, beggar?

**THE BEGGAR** First of all: Why do you ask? And secondly, I am no beggar. Have I asked you for anything?

**THE STRANGER** I beg your pardon, but it is a little difficult to judge people by their exterior.

**THE BEGGAR** You are certainly right there. For example, have you any idea who I am?

**THE STRANGER** No, I neither have, nor do I care. It does not interest me.

**THE BEGGAR** Who can tell about that? The interest generally comes afterwards—when it is too late. *Virtus post nummos!*

**THE STRANGER** What's this! You are acquainted

with the language of the Romans?

**THE BEGGAR** Just see! Your interest is coming to life. *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci.* It is I who have succeeded in whatever I have undertaken—for the reason that I have never done anything. I would like to call myself Polycrates—he with the ring. Do you know that I have received everything that I have wished for from life? But I have never asked for anything; and tired of success, I threw away the ring. Now that I am old and gray, I regret it and keep seeking the ring in the gutter. . . . But as the search might drag out indefinitely, I don't begrudge myself a few discarded cigar butts for lack of the golden ring.

**THE STRANGER** It is not quite clear to me whether you are being cynical—or whether your mind is somewhat disconnected.

**THE BEGGAR** Well, you see that's just what I don't know myself.

**THE STRANGER** But do you know who I am?

**THE BEGGAR** Haven't the faintest idea, and it doesn't interest me.

**THE STRANGER** The interest generally comes afterwards. . . . What nonsense is this! Here you let me fool myself into putting your words in my mouth. That's very like picking other people's cigar butts. Phew!

**THE BEGGAR** [*tipping his hat*] And you refuse to smoke after me?

**THE STRANGER** How did you get that scar on your forehead?

**THE BEGGAR** An intimate relative gave it to me.

**THE STRANGER** Oh no! Now you frighten me! Let me feel if you are made of flesh and blood! [*He feels the beggar's arm.*] Yes, he is really a human being!—You wouldn't deign to accept a small amount of money, would you, in return for your promise to seek Polycrates' ring in a more remote part of the city? [*He holds up a coin.*] *Post nummos virtus.* . . . Why, this is ridiculous! Here I am rechewing his words again! Go away! Go away!

**THE BEGGAR** [*accepting the coin*] I'll go—but this is altogether too much. Let me return three fourths. Then we don't owe each other anything but a friendly gift. . . .

**THE STRANGER** A friendly gift? Am I your friend?

**THE BEGGAR** At least I am yours. And when one

stands alone in the world, one can't be too particular when it comes to human beings.

**THE STRANGER** Allow me—as a farewell greeting—to toss the brief word *behave* after you!

**THE BEGGAR** With pleasure, with pleasure! But next time we meet, I shall have a word of greeting ready that will not be as brief. . . . [*He leaves.*]

**THE STRANGER** [*seats himself and again starts to make figures with his stick*] Sunday afternoon! The interminable, murky, dreary Sunday afternoon when every family in town eats pot roast and sauerkraut with peeled potatoes. Just now the old people are taking their dinner nap, the young people are playing chess and smoking tobacco, the servants have gone to vesper service, and the shops are closed. Oh, this long, dreary, killing afternoon! The day of rest, when the soul ceases to function—when it is as impossible to run across a familiar face as it is to get into a bar-room.

[*The Lady returns. She is now wearing a flower on her bodice.*]

**THE STRANGER** There! It is strange that I cannot open my mouth and say something without being immediately contradicted.

**THE LADY** Are you still sitting here?

**THE STRANGER** Yes. If I sit here, writing in the sand, or somewhere else—what does it matter, as long as I write in the sand. . . .

**THE LADY** What are you writing? Let me see. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I think I wrote: Eve, 1864. . . . Oh no—don't walk on it! . . .

**THE LADY** What will happen if I do?

**THE STRANGER** Then misfortune will befall you—and me also.

**THE LADY** How can you know?

**THE STRANGER** I do! And I know also that the Christmas rose you carry at your breast is a Mandragora. According to symbolism it is the flower of malice and calumny—but in medicine it was once used as a cure for insanity. Won't you give it to me?

**THE LADY** [*hesitates*] As a medicine?

**THE STRANGER** Yes!—Have you read my books?

**THE LADY** Certainly. You know that I have read them . . . that I have you to thank for my education in freedom, and my faith in human rights and human values. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then you have not read my last books? . . .

**THE LADY** No—and if they are different from your previous works, I don't care to know about them. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I am glad of that! And will you give me your promise never to open another book of mine?

**THE LADY** Let me think that over first.—Yes, I promise.

**THE STRANGER** Good! But do not break your promise! Keep in mind Bluebeard's wife, when her curiosity got the best of her and she was tempted to open the forbidden chamber. . . .

**THE LADY** Do you realize that your demands already are those of a Bluebeard? And are you not aware that you have already, for some time, forgotten that I am married, that my husband is a physician, and that he is an admirer of yours—and that his home is open to you whenever you choose to be welcomed?

**THE STRANGER** I have made every effort to forget it—and I have so erased it from my memory that for me it has ceased to be reality.

**THE LADY** That being so, will you accompany me to my home this evening?

**THE STRANGER** No. But would you care to come with me?

**THE LADY** Where?

**THE STRANGER** Out into the world—wherever you choose. I have no home—all I have is my travelling bag. I have no money—except once in a while; in other words, rarely. Money is the only thing life has been obstinate enough to refuse me—perhaps because I have not demanded it with sufficient boldness.

**THE LADY** H'm!

**THE STRANGER** Well—what are you thinking about?

**THE LADY** I am surprised that I do not feel offended by your jesting.

**THE STRANGER** Jest or seriousness—it is all the same to me. . . . There—the organ is playing. . . . It won't be long now before the bar is open.

**THE LADY** Is it true that you do a good deal of drinking?

**THE STRANGER** A good deal, yes! The wine frees my soul from my body—I fly into the ether—I see what no one ever divined—hear what no

one ever heard. . . .

**THE LADY** And the day after? . . .

**THE STRANGER** . . . I have the joy of feeling the beautiful pangs of conscience—experience the saving sensation of guilt and remorse—revel in the sufferings of my body while my soul hovers like mist round my brow. . . . It is as if swaying betwixt life and death—when the spirit feels its wings lifted in flight and can soar into space at will.

**THE LADY** Come to church with me—if only for a moment. . . . You will not have to listen to any preaching—only the beautiful vespers music. . . .

**THE STRANGER** No—not to church! It merely gives me a feeling of pain and depression . . . makes me conscious of not belonging there—of being a doomed soul, who will never again be one of the fold—no more than I could become a child again.

**THE LADY** You really think such thoughts?

**THE STRANGER** That is how far gone I am! And I almost feel as if I were lying carved up in Medea's cauldron, simmering and seething, boiling eternally. If I don't turn into soap, I shall rise up rejuvenated out of my own brine. It all depends upon Medea's skill.

**THE LADY** This sounds like the language of the oracles. Now let us see if you can't become a child again.

**THE STRANGER** In that case it would have to begin with the cradle—and with the right child in it.

**THE LADY** Exactly!—But wait for me here while I go into the chapel of Saint Elisabeth! If the café were open, I would ask you nicely not to drink anything—but fortunately it is closed.

*[The Stranger seats himself again and starts to draw in the sand.]*

*Six pallbearers, dressed in brown, enter together with some mourners. One of the men carries a standard with the insignia of the carpenters' guild draped with brown crape; another one an enormous broadaxe with a garland of spruce twigs; a third one carries a cushion with a speaker's gavel. They halt outside the café, waiting.]*

**THE STRANGER** Forgive me, but who is the dead man?

**FIRST GUEST** He was a carpenter. [*He makes a ticking sound, like that of a clock.*]

**THE STRANGER** A real carpenter or one of those carpenter insects that sit in wooden walls and tick?

**SECOND GUEST** Both. But most of all, one of the kind that sits in the walls and ticks. . . . What is it they call it now?

**THE STRANGER** [*to himself*] The rascal! He wants to entice me into saying the death tick, but I shall give him a different answer just to annoy him. You mean a goldsmith, don't you?

**SECOND GUEST** No—I don't mean a goldsmith. [*The ticking sound is heard again.*]

**THE STRANGER** Is it your intention to frighten me, or is the dead man performing miracles? For, in that case, I shall have to inform you that I am not afraid—and I do not believe in miracles. However, I find it a little strange that the guests show their grief in brown. Why not in black, which is both inexpensive and attractive and practical?

**THIRD GUEST** To us in our simple-minded innocence it is black; but if Your Grace so commands, let it be called brown.

**THE STRANGER** I cannot deny that I find this gathering utterly strange, and I feel an uneasiness, which I am inclined to ascribe to yesterday's intoxication from Mosel wine. But if I should say that the broadaxe is wound with twigs of spruce, I suppose I'd be told that it is. . . . Well—what is it?

**FIRST GUEST** It is a grape vine.

**THE STRANGER** I had a curious feeling it wasn't spruce!—Well—now—at last! The bar-room is open!

[*The café is opened. The Stranger seats himself at one of the tables and is served a bottle of wine. The mourners occupy some of the other vacant tables.*]

**THE STRANGER** I can see the corpse must have been a happy soul, since you intoxicate yourselves the moment the funeral is over.

**FIRST GUEST** Yes, he was a good-for-nothing who never could learn to take life seriously.

**THE STRANGER** And he probably imbibed excessively?

**SECOND GUEST** That's exactly what he did.

**THIRD GUEST** And he let others take care of his wife and children and feed them.

**THE STRANGER** Not very nice of him! But I suppose that is why he is being given such a nice funeral oration by his friends. . . .

[*One of the Guests gets up and knocks against the Stranger's table.*]

**THE STRANGER** Would you please stop bumping against my table while I am having my drink!

**FIRST GUEST** When I drink, I have the right to. . . .

**THE STRANGER** When you drink, yes. . . . For there is, of course, a great difference between you and me.

[*The Guests start to demur. The Beggar enters.*]

**THE STRANGER** Why, there is the beggar again—the fellow who picks about in the gutters.

**THE BEGGAR** [*seats himself at an unoccupied table and orders some wine*] Wine! Mosel!

**THE CAFE PROPRIETOR** [*comes out, exhibiting an official placard*] You will be good enough to leave! We can't serve you anything because you have not paid your taxes and obligations to the state. Here—here you see the decision of the municipal court—and here you'll find your name, your age and your character. . . .

**THE BEGGAR** *Omnias serviliter pro dominatione!* I am a free man with an academic education and refuse to pay taxes because I haven't the slightest desire to run for any office. [*To the Waiter*] Mosel!

**THE CAFE PROPRIETOR** If you don't leave this very minute, you will be given free transportation to the community poorhouse! . . .

**THE STRANGER** Couldn't you two gentlemen settle this affair somewhere else? . . . You are disturbing your guests here. . . .

**THE CAFE PROPRIETOR** Very well—but I call on you to witness that I am in the right!

**THE STRANGER** Not at all! I think this business is altogether too painful. . . . Simply because a man doesn't pay his taxes—that is no reason why he shouldn't be allowed to enjoy some of the trivial little pleasures that life can offer.

**THE CAFE PROPRIETOR** Oh so! You are one of those who go about freeing people of their obligations and responsibilities!

**THE STRANGER** Oh no! This is going a bit too far!



—Do you realize that I am a famous man?

[*The Café Proprietor and the Guests laugh loudly.*]

**THE CAFÉ PROPRIETOR** You mean notorious, don't you! Just a second—let me look at the placard again and see if that description doesn't fit you. . . . Thirty-eight years old—brown hair—mustache—blue eyes—no permanent occupation—livelihood questionable—married, but left his wife and children—known for his subversive opinions on social questions—and gives the impression of lacking the full use of his mental faculties. . . . Does the description fit, eh?

**THE STRANGER** [*rises, pale and crushed*] Oh! What is this!

**THE CAFÉ PROPRIETOR** By my soul, I believe it fits!

**THE BEGGAR** Perhaps he is the man, then, and not I!

**THE CAFÉ PROPRIETOR** It seems so, doesn't it! And now I think you two gentlemen can take each other by the arm and go for a walk. . . .

**THE BEGGAR** [*to the Stranger*] Come, let us go!

**THE STRANGER** Us?—This is beginning to seem like a conspiracy!

[*The bells in the church tower peal; the sun breaks forth, lighting up the colored, ornamented rose window over the portal, which opens, showing the interior of the church. Organ music is heard, and the singing of "Ave Maris Stella."*]

**THE LADY** [*comes from the church*] Where are you? What are you doing? Why did you call me again? You just have to hang on to a woman's skirts, like a little child, don't you!

**THE STRANGER** Yes—this time I am really afraid. . . . Things are happening—things that cannot be explained by ordinary logic. . . .

**THE LADY** I thought you weren't afraid of anything—not even death. . . .

**THE STRANGER** No—I have no fear of death! But I am afraid of—the other . . . the unknown!

**THE LADY** Come—give me your hand, my friend—then I shall lead you to the doctor . . . for you are ill. . . . Come!

**THE STRANGER** Perhaps I am. But first—tell me one thing. . . . Is this a carnival—or what is it? Is it—as it should be?

**THE LADY** It is no doubt as it should be . . .

nothing wrong with them. . . .

**THE STRANGER** But how about that beggar? I have a feeling he is an abominable person. Is it true that he resembles me?

**THE LADY** Well—if you keep on drinking, you will be like him.—But now you must go to the post office and get your letter. . . . Then you will come with me.

**THE STRANGER** No, I am not going to the post office. The letter would only contain court proceedings, legal papers, I am sure.

**THE LADY** But suppose it did not?

**THE STRANGER** Even so, it would only be something unpleasant.

**THE LADY** Do as you please. . . . No one escapes his fate. And at this moment I feel as if a higher power were debating our fate and had come to a decision.

**THE STRANGER** You feel that, too! Do you know that just now I heard the sound of the gavel, the chairs pushed back, and servants sent out. . . . Oh, this anguish! . . . No—I am not coming with you!

**THE LADY** I don't know what you have done to me! . . . In there, in the chapel, I could find no spiritual comfort—a candle went out on the altar—and a chill wind swept across my face . . . and at that moment I heard you call to me.

**THE STRANGER** I did not call—I merely yearned for you. . . .

**THE LADY** You are not the weakling child you make yourself out to be. You have powers that are enormous.—I am afraid of you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** When I am alone, I am powerless as a paralytic. But the moment I find a human being to hold on to, I become strong! That is why I attach myself to you!

**THE LADY** Yes, do—then perhaps you can free me from the werewolf!

**THE STRANGER** Is he really a werewolf?

**THE LADY** It's a name I have given him!

**THE STRANGER** Very well! Then I am with you! To battle with trolls and evil spirits—liberate princesses—slay werewolves—that is to live life!

**THE LADY** Come, my liberator! [*She covers her face with her veil. Then she kisses him impulsively on the lips and hastens out.*]

[*The Stranger stands for a moment in astonishment, stunned.*

*The loud sound of women singing in mixed chorus resembling a scream is heard from within the church. The lighted rose window is suddenly darkened. The tree by the bench shakes; the funeral guests arise from their seats, staring at the sky as if they were witnessing something awesome and fearful.*

*The Stranger hastens after the Lady.]*

## SCENE TWO

*At the physician's. A courtyard, enclosed by three houses joined into one. The houses are one-story frame houses with a tiled brick roof. The windows are, throughout, small and of the same appearance and size. On the left, French windows and a veranda. Outside the windows, at right, a hedge of rose bushes, also beehives. In the center of the courtyard, fire logs are piled up in the shape of an Oriental cupola. Close by is a well. Rising above the center house is seen the top of a walnut tree. In the corner, at the extreme left, is a gate leading to the garden. Near the well is seen a large turtle. At left, steps leading to the wine cellar below. An ice box; a barrel for refuse. Outside the veranda, tables and chairs.*

**THE SISTER** [*comes from the veranda with a telegram*] Today misfortune is coming to this house, brother.

**THE PHYSICIAN** It would not be the first time, sister.

**THE SISTER** But this time. . . . Oh! . . . Ingeborg is returning, bringing with her—can you imagine whom? . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Wait a moment!—Yes, I know—I have long suspected it—and I have waited for the moment anxiously—he is the author I have most admired—whom I have learned from—and always wanted to know. And now you say he is coming here. . . . Where did Ingeborg meet him?

**THE SISTER** In the city, it seems—in her literary circle, I presume.

**THE PHYSICIAN** I have often wondered whether this man could be the same fellow with whom

I went to school and who had a name similar to his. I almost wish he were not—for that fellow had something fatalistic about him . . . and in a generation his fatal tendencies could have grown and intensified.

**THE SISTER** Don't let him come to this house!—Give some excuse—go away—plead a sick call. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** No—it would be of no use—we cannot escape our fate. . . .

**THE SISTER** You—who have never been intimidated by anything, you cringe before this phantasm you call fate!

**THE PHYSICIAN** Life has taught me a few things, and I have spent time and strength battling the inevitable. . . .

**THE SISTER** Why do you allow your wife to go gallivanting around, compromising both her and you?

**THE PHYSICIAN** You know why! Because when I released her from her engagement, I held out to her a life of freedom instead of the restraint she was living under. And besides, I could never have loved her if she had submitted to my will or could have been ordered about.

**THE SISTER** And so you are a friend of your enemy. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Now, now!

**THE SISTER** And now you permit her to drag the very man who will be your undoing into your home. Oh, if you knew how boundlessly I hate that man!

**THE PHYSICIAN** I know, I know! His latest book is really horrible. . . . And at the same time it reveals a mental disturbance.

**THE SISTER** That is just why they should have put him in an asylum. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** There are those who have suggested it. But I can't see that he has crossed the borderline. . . .

**THE SISTER** That's because you yourself are an eccentric, and because you have a wife around you who is stark mad.

**THE PHYSICIAN** I won't deny that maniacal persons have always had a powerful fascination for me. . . . And really, you can't say that there is anything shallow or superficial about originality. . . .

[*The sound of a steamboat whistle is heard.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** What was that? I heard somebody scream!

**THE SISTER** Your nerves are strained, my brother. . . . It was only the steamboat.—And now I plead with you again: Go away!

**THE PHYSICIAN** I am almost tempted to—but I feel as if I were nailed down. . . . Do you know—when I stand here, I can see his portrait in my study—and the sun casts a shadow over it that disfigures his whole body so that he resembles. . . . Why, it's horrible! . . . Do you see whom he resembles?

**THE SISTER** He looks exactly like the devil!—Again I say: Flee!

**THE PHYSICIAN** I can't!

**THE SISTER** But you can at least defend yourself. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** I usually do! But this time I feel as if a storm was in the offing.—How often haven't I wanted to move, without being able to. It is as if I was standing on a foundation of iron ore and I was a magnetic needle. . . . If misfortune should strike, it would not be of my choosing. . . . I heard someone come in through the entrance gate now. . . .

**THE SISTER** I didn't hear anything.

**THE PHYSICIAN** But I did! And now I see, too! I see my childhood comrade! . . . He once played a prank in school—and I was given the blame for it and was punished. . . . His nickname was Caesar. Why he got that name, I don't know. . . .

**THE SISTER** And this man. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes—life is like that!—Caesar!

**THE LADY** [*entering*] How are you, my husband! I am bringing precious company with me.

**THE PHYSICIAN** So I heard. I wish him welcome.

**THE LADY** He is in the guest room. He is changing his collar.

**THE PHYSICIAN** Are you satisfied with your conquest?

**THE LADY** He is undoubtedly the most unhappy human being I have ever met.

**THE PHYSICIAN** That is saying a good deal!

**THE LADY** Yes—and that takes in all of them, for good measure.

**THE PHYSICIAN** I don't doubt that.—Sister, will you go out and show him the way?

[*The Sister goes out.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** You have had an interesting trip?

**THE LADY** Yes—I have met many unusual persons. . . . Have you had many patients?

**THE PHYSICIAN** No—the waiting room was empty this morning. My practice seems to be on the downgrade.

**THE LADY** [*in a kindly tone*] My poor husband!—Don't you think the fire wood ought to be brought inside soon? It will get wet with damp where it is.

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*without any sign of reproach in his voice*] Why, of course, it should be. And the bees should be slaughtered, and the fruit in the garden should be picked—but I just can't get things done. . . .

**THE LADY** You are tired, my husband. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Tired of it all, yes.

**THE LADY** [*without any bitterness in her voice*] And you have a good-for-nothing wife who is of no help to you!

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*with gentleness*] You must not talk like that, since I don't think so.

**THE LADY** [*looking in the direction of the veranda*] There!

[*The Stranger, dressed more youthfully than in Scene 1, comes from the veranda with a forced abandon and nonchalance. He appears to recognize the Physician, shrinks and stumbles forward, but regains his composure.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Welcome to my home!

**THE STRANGER** Thank you, doctor!

**THE PHYSICIAN** You bring good weather with you, which is something we need. . . . It has been raining here for six weeks.

**THE STRANGER** Not seven! Ordinarily it rains for seven weeks following a rain on Deep-sleepers' Day . . . but—come to think of it—we haven't had Deep-sleepers' Day yet.—How stupid of me!

**THE PHYSICIAN** To you—who are accustomed to the attractions of big cities—I am afraid life in our simple little community will seem monotonous.

**THE STRANGER** Oh no! I am no more at home here than there. . . . Forgive me if I ask you a rather blunt question. . . . Haven't we seen each other before? When we were young?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Never.

[*The Lady has seated herself by the table and*

*busies herself with her needlework.]*

**THE STRANGER** Are you sure?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Absolutely! I have followed your literary career from its very beginning and, I know my wife must have told you, with the greatest interest. If we had known each other earlier, I would certainly have remembered it—at least the name. However, now you see how a country doctor lives. . . .

**THE STRANGER** If you could only imagine how a so-called liberator lived, you would not envy him.

**THE PHYSICIAN** I can well imagine—having seen how people adore being fettered. But perhaps that is the way it *should* be, since that is the way it *is*.

**THE STRANGER** [*listening as if to sounds from outside*] That's strange. . . . Who can that be playing in the house next door?

**THE PHYSICIAN** I don't know who it can be. Do you, Ingeborg?

**THE LADY** No. . . .

**THE STRANGER** It's Mendelssohn's funeral march—that forever haunts me. . . . I don't know whether I hear it in my ear, or. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Are you subject to hearing things?

**THE STRANGER** No, I don't suffer from hallucinations, but I seem to be annoyed by petty little incidents that keep pursuing me repeatedly. . . . Don't you hear someone playing?

**THE PHYSICIAN AND THE LADY** Yes, someone is playing. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And it is Mendelssohn, isn't it? . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes . . . but Mendelssohn is being played a good deal today. He is quite popular. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I know he is—but that this piece should be played here, at this very moment. . . . [*He gets up.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Just to put you at ease, I shall ask my sister. . . . [*He goes inside the veranda.*]

**THE STRANGER** [*to the Lady*] I suffocate here! I won't sleep a wink beneath this roof! Your husband looks like a werewolf . . . and you turn into a pillar of salt as soon as he appears. These premises have seen murder—there are ghosts here—and I am leaving as soon as I can find an excuse.

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*returns*] Why yes, it's the lady

from the room where she is playing the piano. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*nervously*] Good! Then there is nothing to worry about!—You have a unique place here, doctor. Everything is so unusual. . . . That pile of logs, for instance. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes!—Twice it's been struck by lightning. . . .

**THE STRANGER** How ghastly! And still you leave it there?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes—for that very reason. . . . And this year I have made it still higher. But there is another reason: It gives shade in the summer. It's my Jonah's gourd. . . . When fall comes, it is stacked away in the woodbin.

**THE STRANGER** [*looking around*] And here you have Christmas roses. . . . Where did you get them? And blooming at this time of the year. . . . Everything seems to be upside down here. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Oh, those. . . . Well, I have a patient staying here as a guest—he is slightly demented. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Here in this house?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes, but he is of a quiet nature. He just broods over the futility of life. He thinks it stupid to let the hellebores stand and freeze in the snow, so he puts them away in the cellar and brings them out again in the spring.

**THE STRANGER** You keep an insane man in the house? This is most disagreeable, I must say!

**THE PHYSICIAN** Oh, but he is so gentle.

**THE STRANGER** How did he lose his wits?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Well, answer that, if you can. . . . It is a disease of the mind, not a bodily ill, you understand.

**THE STRANGER** Just one question! Is he here? I mean—close by?

**THE PHYSICIAN** The lunatic? Oh yes, he potters around in the garden, arranging the blooms of Creation. . . . But if his presence is disturbing, we can lock him up in the cellar.

**THE STRANGER** Why aren't such poor devils put out of their misery once for all?

**THE PHYSICIAN** One can never be certain when they are quite ready. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Ready for what?

**THE PHYSICIAN** For the hereafter!

**THE STRANGER** You don't really think that there

is such a thing, do you?

[*There is a silence.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Who knows?

**THE STRANGER** I don't know—but there is something uncanny, something sinister, about this house. . . . Perhaps there are even a few corpses lying about?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes, indeed! Here in the ice box I have a couple of stumps I am sending to the medical board. . . . [*He brings out an arm and a bone.*] Here—see!

**THE STRANGER** Heavens! One would think you were Bluebeard himself. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*with a biting voice*] What do you mean by that? [*He gives the Lady a sharp glance.*] Are you implying I do away with my wives?

**THE STRANGER** Why, certainly not! I can see that you don't, can't I?—But you have spooks here, haven't you?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Do we have spooks! Ask my wife! [*The Physician withdraws behind the wood pile, so that he becomes invisible to the Lady and the Stranger.*]

**THE LADY** [*to the Stranger*] You might speak a little louder. . . . My husband is hard of hearing. But he can read your lips. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then let me tell you, while he is out of sight, that a more miserable half hour I have never experienced in my life. Here we have been standing, prattling the most stupid nonsense, because none of us has the courage to say what he really thinks. A moment ago I suffered so frightfully that I almost took out my knife to open my pulse, in order to bring down my blood pressure. . . . But now I feel a burning desire to speak straight out and seal his doom! Shall we tell him straight to his face that we are planning to run away? That we have had enough of his idiotic nonsense?

**THE LADY** If you keep talking like that, I shall hate you. No matter what, one has to behave with decency.

**THE STRANGER** You are a thoroughbred, I must say!

[*The Physician appears again in view of the others, who continue their conversation.*]

**THE STRANGER** Will you flee with me before the sun sets?

**THE LADY** My dear sir. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Tell me why you kissed me yesterday?

**THE LADY** Sir. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Just imagine if he should hear what we are saying. . . . He has such an untrustworthy face. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** What shall we do to amuse our guest?

**THE LADY** Our guest has no great expectations as far as pleasures are concerned. His life has not been a very happy one.

[*The Physician blows a whistle. Caesar, the mental patient, appears in the garden. On his brow he wears a laurel wreath, and is otherwise dressed in a strange manner.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Caesar! Come here!

**THE STRANGER** [*unpleasantly touched*] Is his name Caesar?

**THE PHYSICIAN** No, it's a nickname I gave him in remembrance of a schoolmate I once had.

**THE STRANGER** [*uneasily*] What is the meaning of this? . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Well, it has to do with a strange incident—for which I received the blame.

**THE LADY** [*to the Stranger*] Have you ever heard of a child being so vile?

[*The Stranger looks pained. Caesar enters.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Come here and pay your respects to the great author, Caesar.

**CAESAR** Is he the Great One?

**THE LADY** [*to the Physician*] Why do you have that lunatic come in here? You know it makes our guest uncomfortable.

**THE PHYSICIAN** You must behave and be polite, Caesar, or I'll have to use the whip.

**CAESAR** He may be Caesar—but he is not great! He doesn't even know which came first: the hen or the egg. . . . But I know. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*to the Lady*] I am leaving! I don't know whether you have enticed me into a trap, or what to think. . . . In another minute I presume he'll try to amuse me by setting the bees loose. . . .

**THE LADY** No matter how bad things may seem, I ask you to have complete confidence in me. . . . And don't speak so loud. . . .

**THE STRANGER** But we shall never be rid of him, the awful werewolf. . . . Never!

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*glancing at his watch*] I hope you will forgive me, but I must absent myself for about an hour. Have to make a sick call. I hope you won't find the time too long.

**THE STRANGER** I am used to waiting for what never comes. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*to Caesar*] Caesar, you rascal, come here! I am going to lock you up in the cellar! . . . [*He goes out with Caesar.*]

**THE STRANGER** [*to the Lady*] What is this? Who is persecuting me? You assure me that your husband is kindly disposed toward me. I believe he is; and still he never opens his mouth without wounding me. Every word he spoke went through me like an awl . . . and now that funeral march is being played. . . . And I find the Christmas rose here again. . . . Why does everything come back to one—corpses and beggars and lunatics, and human fates and childhood memories. . . . Come away from here! Out! Anywhere! Let me be your liberator—take you away from this hell!

**THE LADY** That is why I brought you here—and also . . . so that no one would be able to say that you had stolen another man's wife. But there is one thing I must ask you! Can I depend upon you?

## act two

### SCENE ONE

*A room in a hotel.*

**THE STRANGER** [*with a travelling bag in his hand*] You have no other room, then?

**THE WAITER** Not a single one.

**THE STRANGER** But I will not sleep in this room! . . .

**THE LADY** As long as there is no other room to be had, my friend, and all the other hotels are filled. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*to the Waiter*] Leave us!

[*The Waiter leaves. The Lady sinks down in a chair without removing either hat or cloak.*]

**THE STRANGER** Is there anything you would like?

**THE LADY** Yes—one thing—that you kill me!

**THE STRANGER** . . . . .  
ings? . . .

**THE LADY** We are not speaking of them—we took that part for granted. . . . They last as long as they last. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then you are talking about my means of support!—Well, I have considerable money outstanding, and I need only write or telegraph. . . .

**THE LADY** Then I can rely on you. . . . Very well! [*She places her needlework in her pocket.*] Go straight through that gate there—this minute—then follow the lilac hedge, and you'll come to a gate in the fence. Open the gate—and you are on the great highway. . . . We will meet in the next village!

**THE STRANGER** [*hesitates*] The gate in the fence does not appeal to me. I would much have preferred to have battled him right here in the courtyard. . . .

**THE LADY** [*with a gesture*] Hurry!

**THE STRANGER** I'd rather you came along with me now!

**THE LADY** That is what I shall do! But I must be the first one to leave. [*She turns round and throws a kiss toward the veranda.*] My poor werewolf!

**THE STRANGER** I can well understand! Hunted by the police—chased out of the hotels because of not being married—we finally land in this one—where I least of all wanted to stay! And in this room—number eight. . . . Someone is waging a battle against me—there is someone. . . .

**THE LADY** Are we in number eight?

**THE STRANGER** You have been here before?

**THE LADY** And so have you, haven't you?

**THE STRANGER** Yes.

**THE LADY** Let us get away from here—out in the street—to the woods—anywhere. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Gladly! But I am as tired as you are after this wild chase! Believe it or not, I had a feeling that our path would lead us here. . . . I fought against it and struggled to go in a different direction. . . . But the trains

were not on time—we missed out on connections—we were doomed to come here—and to this very room. . . . It is the devil himself I am challenging—and this time we shall grapple unto death, he and I.

**THE LADY** I feel as if we were never again going to have peace in this world. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Just think, how familiar everything is here. . . . There is that ever-wilting Christmas rose. . . . Look—do you see? . . . And here is a picture of the Hotel Breuer in Montreux. . . . I have stayed there, too. . . .

**THE LADY** Did you go to the post office?

**THE STRANGER** I knew you would ask me that. . . . Yes, I was there. . . . And in reply to five letters and three telegrams, I found only one telegram—informing me that my publisher was away on a trip for fourteen days.

**THE LADY** Then we are utterly lost. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Not far from it!

**THE LADY** And in five minutes the waiter will be here to inspect our passports. . . . And then the proprietor will appear, demanding that we leave. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And then there will be only one way out for us. . . .

**THE LADY** Two!

**THE STRANGER** But the second choice is impossible.

**THE LADY** What is the second choice?

**THE STRANGER** To go to your parents in the country.

**THE LADY** You are reading my thoughts. . . .

**THE STRANGER** We can have no secrets from each other from now on.

**THE LADY** And so our long dream is at an end.

**THE STRANGER** Perhaps. . . .

**THE LADY** You must send another telegram!

**THE STRANGER** I ought to do it, yes—but I find myself unable to move. . . . I have no faith any longer in anything I do. . . . Someone has paralysed me.

**THE LADY** And me, too!—We decided not to speak about the past . . . yet we keep dragging it along with us. Look at the wallpaper here—can you see the portrait that the flowers have shaped?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—it's he—he is everywhere—everywhere! How many hundred times. . . . But

I see someone else's face in the pattern of the table cloth there. . . . Do these things come about naturally?—No—they are mere illusions. . . . I expect at any moment to hear my funeral march—and when I hear that, the picture will be complete! [*He listens.*] There it is!

**THE LADY** I don't hear anything. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then—I am—on the way to. . . .

**THE LADY** Shall we go to my home?

**THE STRANGER** The last hope—and the worst!—To come as adventurers, beggars!—No, that I could never do. . . .

**THE LADY** It is really . . . no, that would be too much! To come with shame and disgrace to bring sorrow to the old people . . . and to see you placed in a humiliating position—as you will see me humiliated. . . . We would never be able to have any regard for each other again.

**THE STRANGER** You are right. It would be worse than death. But can you imagine—I feel it approaching—inevitably approaching . . . and I am beginning to long for the moment—to pass through the ordeal—the sooner the better—since it must come. . . .

**THE LADY** [*takes out her needlework*] But I have no desire to be insulted in your presence. . . . There must be some other way out of it. If we were only married! And that shouldn't take long, for my marriage is actually invalid—according to the laws of the country where we were married. . . . All we need to do is to make a journey and be wedded by the same clergyman, who. . . . Oh, but that would be humiliating for you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** That fits in perfectly with all the rest . . . since this wedding trip is turning out to be a pilgrimage—or a trial by fire. . . .

**THE LADY** You are right—and in five minutes the proprietor will be here to drive us out! Therefore—and in order to put an end to all these humiliations—we have only one choice: We must swallow this last humiliation. . . . Ssh! I hear someone coming. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I can feel it—and I am prepared. . . . After all this, I am prepared for anything! Even if I can't fight against the invisible power, I will show you what I can endure. . . . Pawn your jewels, and I'll redeem them as soon as my publisher returns—unless he has drowned

going swimming, or been killed in a train collision. . . . If one is ambitious for honor as I am, one must be prepared to offer one's honor first of all!

**THE LADY** Since we are now agreed, don't you think it would be better if we left this place of our own free will? . . . O God! He is coming—the proprietor!

**THE STRANGER** Let us go! . . . Running the gauntlet between waiters, chambermaids, bootblacks and porters—blushing with shame and turning pale from anger. . . . The beasts of the forest can hide in their lairs—but we are forced to exhibit our shame. . . . Cover your face with your veil, at least!

**THE LADY** This is freedom!

**THE STRANGER** And here you see the liberator! [*They leave.*]

## SCENE TWO

*By the sea. A cottage at the top of a mountain crest by the seashore. Tables and chairs outside. The Stranger and the Lady, dressed in light colors, appear more youthful than in the preceding scene. The Lady is crocheting.*

**THE STRANGER** After three days of tranquility and bliss by the side of my wife, the old anxiety and restlessness are back again. . . .

**THE LADY** What is it you fear?

**THE STRANGER** I have a fear that this will not last!

**THE LADY** What makes you think so?

**THE STRANGER** I don't know. . . . I just can't help feeling it will come to an end—suddenly—horribly! There seems to be something unreal about even the sunshine and the calm wind. . . . I have a feeling that happiness will never be my fate in life.

**THE LADY** But everything has been adjusted, hasn't it? My parents have submitted patiently, my husband has written in a spirit of friendliness and understanding. . . .

**THE STRANGER** What good does that do? How can it possibly help? . . . Fate spins its intrigues—I can again hear the gavel fall and the chairs pushed back from the table—the judgment has been pronounced. . . . But it must have been

made before I was born—for already in my youth I began to serve my punishment. . . . There is not a single thing in my life that I can look back on with a feeling of joy. . . .

**THE LADY** And yet you have been given everything you wished from life, you poor man. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Everything! The only thing I forgot to ask for was riches.

**THE LADY** Now you are harping on that again!

**THE STRANGER** Do you wonder at that?

**THE LADY** Hush!

**THE STRANGER** What is it you are crocheting? Like one of the three Fates of old, you sit passing the yarn between your fingers. . . . But don't stop. . . . The most beautiful thing I know is a woman busy with her work or her child.—What is it you are crocheting?

**THE LADY** It is . . . it is nothing but a piece of needlework. . . .

**THE STRANGER** It looks like a network of knots and nerves, in which your thoughts are being woven. I imagine that is how the inside of your brain looks. . . .

**THE LADY** I only wish I possessed half as much as you seem to think I have! But my mental power is nil.

**THE STRANGER** Perhaps that is why I feel so at home with you—feel that you are perfection—and therefore cannot think of life without you!—Now the cloud has disappeared! Now the sky is clear again, the air is mild. . . . Can't you feel it stroking your cheek? This is what I call living—yes, now I am living—in this very moment! And I can feel my ego swell—stretch itself—become rarefied—and take on infinity. . . . I am everywhere: in the sea, which is my blood—in the mountain ridge, which is my skeleton—in the trees—in the flowers . . . and my head reaches up into the heavens—I can look out over the universe, which is I—and I sense the full power of the Creator within me—I am the Creator! I feel an urge to take the whole giant mass in my hand and knead it over into something more perfect, more lasting, more beautiful. . . . I would like to see the whole of creation and all creatures of mankind imbued with happiness . . . to be born without pain, to live without sorrow, to die in peaceful joy!—Eve, will you die with me—now—this very



instant . . . for in another moment we shall again be racked by pain. . . .

**THE LADY** No—I am not ready to die yet!

**THE STRANGER** Why?

**THE LADY** I feel I still have something to do here.

I may not have suffered sufficiently yet. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then you think we are here on earth that we may suffer?

**THE LADY** So it seems! . . . But now I want to ask you to do me one favor. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And that is. . . .

**THE LADY** Do not profane Heaven—as you did a moment ago. And do not liken yourself to the Creator . . . for when you do that, you remind me of Caesar at home. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*agitated*] Of Caesar! How can you know . . . how can you say such a thing?

**THE LADY** Did I say something to offend you? If I did, I didn't mean to! It was a stupid remark that just fell from my lips. . . . I shouldn't have said at home. . . . Forgive me!

**THE STRANGER** You were thinking of the blasphemies? And in your opinion they identify me with—with Caesar?

**THE LADY** I was thinking only of them. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Strange—I believe what you say—that you had no thought of offending me. . . . Yet, despite that, you do offend me . . . you, like all the rest, with whom I come in contact. Why is that?

**THE LADY** It's because you are hypersensitive. . . .

**THE STRANGER** There you are again! Do you mean that I possess some secret, vulnerable weakness?

**THE LADY** No—I swear by all that's holy I did not mean that!—Oh, now the spirits of dissension and suspicion have come between us! Drive them away! Before it is too late!

**THE STRANGER** You have no cause to say that I blaspheme because I adhere to the ancient maxim: Behold, we are gods!

**THE LADY** If that were true, why can't you come to your own rescue—rescue us both?

**THE STRANGER** You think I can't? Wait! So far we have seen only the beginning. . . .

**THE LADY** If the end is to be like the beginning, then Heaven help us!

**THE STRANGER** I know what you are afraid of—I had a happy surprise in store for you. . . . I

wasn't going to tell you just yet. . . . But now I don't want to torment you any longer. [*He produces an unopened registered letter.*] Here—you see. . . .

**THE LADY** The money has come!

**THE STRANGER** This morning!—Who can destroy me now?

**THE LADY** Don't speak like that! You know who can destroy us!

**THE STRANGER** Whom do you mean?

**THE LADY** He who punishes the arrogance of men!

**THE STRANGER** And the courage of men! Especially their courage! This was forever my Achilles heel! I have steadfastly borne everything—except this fatal lack of money—which always strikes me when most in need.

**THE LADY** Forgive me for asking, but how much did you receive?

**THE STRANGER** I don't know—I haven't opened the letter yet. But I know approximately what I have coming to me.—Let me look and see!—[*He opens the letter.*] What is this? No money—only a royalty statement—informing me that no money is due me. . . . Can this be right?

**THE LADY** I begin to think it is . . . as you say. . . .

**THE STRANGER** That I am a doomed soul, yes! But I catch the curse with two fingers and fling it back on the magnanimous giver [*flinging the letter in the air*] . . . followed by my curse!

**THE LADY** Don't, don't! I am afraid of you!

**THE STRANGER** Be afraid—but you must not despise me. . . . The gauntlet has been thrown, and now you shall see grappling between giants! [*Unbuttoning his coat and waistcoat, with a challenging glance at the sky*] Now—come! Strike me with your lightning and your thunder, if you dare! Frighten me with your storm, if you have the power!

**THE LADY** No—not that! No!

**THE STRANGER** Yes—just that! Who dares disturb me in my dream of love? Who snatches the cup from my lips and the woman from my arms? The envious, be they gods or devils! Paltry bourgeois saints—who parry a sword thrust with pin pricks from behind . . . who don't meet you face to face but retaliate with an unpaid bill, sent by way of the kitchen door—in

order to humiliate the master of the house before his servants. . . . No striking down—no thrust of blade—but put to scorn, derided and mocked. . . . For shame, you mighty powers, you great dominions, you empires! For shame!

**THE LADY** I pray that Heaven will not punish you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** The Heavens are still just as blue and silent—the sea just as blue and still. . . . Quiet! I feel a poetic inspiration. . . . That is what I call it, when an idea comes to life in my brain. . . . I hear the rhythm first—this time it comes like horses at a trot—with the clinking of spurs—the clanging of arms . . . but there is a flapping, too—like the lashing of sails . . . it is the flags and banners. . . .

**THE LADY** It is only the wind! You hear it moaning in the tree tops. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Hush! Now they are riding over a bridge—it is a wooden bridge—and there is no water in the river—nothing but stones and pebbles. . . . Wait! Now I can hear the rosary being recited by men and women—the “Ave Maria” . . . and now I see—can you imagine *where* I see it—in your needlework: a huge, white kitchen, with calcimined walls—it has three small, grated windows, with potted flowers on the deep window sill. . . . In the right corner stands the stove—in the left corner the dining table, with benches of pine—and on the wall by the table hangs a black crucifix—underneath burns a lamp—and the ceiling has soot-brown beams. . . . On the walls are also hung some twigs of mistletoe—they are beginning to wither. . . .

**THE LADY** [alarmed] Where do you see all this—where?

**THE STRANGER** In your needlework. . . .

**THE LADY** Do you see any people there?

**THE STRANGER** I see an elderly, a very old man. . . . He is seated at the table and has a game bag beside him. . . . His hands are clasped in prayer—and kneeling on the floor is an elderly woman. . . . Now I can hear again—as from out beyond—from outside a veranda—the “Ave Maria.” . . . But the two in the kitchen look as if they were made of white wax or honey . . . and the scene is as if covered by a

veil. . . . Oh no, this is no figment of the imagination! . . . [*He awakens from his dreams.*] This is something else!

**THE LADY** It is as real as it can be! It is the kitchen in my parents' home, where you have never been. . . . The old man you saw was my grandfather, the forester, and the woman was my mother. . . . She was praying for us! It is now six o'clock—the hour that the rosary is recited by the servants out on the porch. . . .

**THE STRANGER** This is awesome! I am beginning to have visions. . . . But what a beautiful thing to see—this room—so snowy white—and flowers and mistletoe. . . . But why are they praying for us?

**THE LADY** Yes—why? Have we done something wrong?

**THE STRANGER** What—is—wrong?

**THE LADY** I have read that there is no such thing; nevertheless. . . . I have a boundless longing to see my mother—but not my father, for he has disowned me—just as he cast aside my mother. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Why did he abandon your mother? . . .

**THE LADY** Who knows? The children least of all. —But let us go to my home—I have an irrepressible longing. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Lion dens and snake pits—one more or less matters little. I shall go with you—for your sake . . . but not like the prodigal son—no, no. . . . You will see that for your sake I can go through fire and water. . . .

**THE LADY** Are you so certain?

**THE STRANGER** I can generally divine. . . .

**THE LADY** Do you also divine that the road is very hard? The old people live in the mountains where no carriage can pass.

**THE STRANGER** It sounds like a fairy tale—yet I seem to have read or dreamed something akin to it. . . .

**THE LADY** It is possible; but all that you will see is quite natural and real. A little out of the ordinary, perhaps—even the people are not ordinary people. . . . Are you prepared to come with me?

**THE STRANGER** Entirely prepared—for whatever may happen!

[*The Lady kisses him on the forehead and*

*makes the sign of the cross, simply, humbly and without affectation.]*

**THE LADY** Comè!

### SCENE THREE

*On the highway. A hilly landscape. A chapel on a hilltop at the extreme left. The highway winds its way toward the rear, its sides lined with fruit trees. Between the trees are seen shrines, miniature expiation chapels, and crosses in commemoration of some accident or disaster. In the foreground there is a signpost with the following notice attached to it: "Begging Forbidden in This Community."*

**THE LADY** You are tired, my poor husband. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I won't deny it. But I feel it a disgrace to be hungry because my money has come to an end. I never thought that would happen to me.

**THE LADY** It seems to me as if we really had to be prepared for anything. We have fallen out of grace, I think. Do you see that the leather of my boot has cracked? I am ready to weep—having to drag along like this—and looking like beggars.

**THE STRANGER** [*points to the signpost*] And begging is forbidden in this community. But just why must it be posted here in huge letters?

**THE LADY** That sign has been there as long as I can remember. Can you imagine that I haven't been here since I was a child? At that age, the way seemed short. The hills over there seemed not so high, the trees were smaller, and the birds were always singing, it seemed to me.

**THE STRANGER** The birds sang to you the year round! Oh, you child! And now they sing only in the spring . . . and we are approaching fall. . . . But as a child you danced along this endless Calvary road, plucking flowers at the foot of the crosses. . . .

*[In the distance is heard the sound of a hunting horn.]*

**THE STRANGER** What is that?

**THE LADY** Oh, that—that is grandfather returning from the hunt.—My dear, dear old grandfather! Let us hurry on so that we reach home before it gets dark.

**THE STRANGER** Are we still far from your home?

**THE LADY** Not very. We have only the mountains—and then the river—to cross.

**THE STRANGER** Then it is the river I hear?

**THE LADY** Yes—it is the great water near which I was born and raised. I was eighteen years old before I came over to this shore—to see what existed in faraway lands. . . . Now I have seen it. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You are weeping. . . .

**THE LADY** Oh, my dear old grandfather. . . . When I was about to step into the boat, he said: Beyond lies the world, my child. When you have seen enough of it, return to your mountains. . . . The mountains know how to keep a secret. —Well—I have seen enough! Enough!

**THE STRANGER** Let us go! The road is long, and it is getting dark. . . .

*[They pick up their travelling effects and leave.]*

### SCENE FOUR

*A narrow entrance to a mountain pass between steep crags and precipices. A wood of spruce crowns the mountainous landscape. In the foreground is seen a shelter, or shed. A broom leans against the door, a buck horn hanging from the handle. On the right there is a smithy; the door stands open, emitting a red glare. On the left stands a flour mill.*

*In the rear, the mountain pass with a mill brook and footbridge. The mountain formations resemble profiles of giants.*

*When the curtain rises, the Smith is seen in the doorway of the smithy. The Miller's Wife stands in the doorway of the mill. As the Lady enters, they gesticulate to each other and disappear hastily, each one in a different direction. The Lady's and the Stranger's clothes are torn and dishevelled. The Lady enters. She walks toward the smithy, and is followed by the Stranger.*

**THE STRANGER** They are hiding—probably because of us.

**THE LADY** I don't think so.

**THE STRANGER** How strange nature is here—as though it had all been created to excite awe. Why are the broom and the horn of anoint-

ment standing there? Probably because it is their customary place—yet it makes me think of witches. . . . Why is the smithy black and the mill white? Because the one is sooty and the other one mealy. . . . When I saw the blacksmith standing in the glimmer of the fire, facing the white woman by the mill, I thought of an old poem. . . . But do you see the giants up there? . . . No—I can't endure this any longer. . . . Don't you see your werewolf, from whose clutches I saved you? . . . Why—it's his profile!—Look—there!

**THE LADY** So it is, yes . . . but it's of stone. . . .

**THE STRANGER** It is of stone—and yet it is he!

**THE LADY** Spare me from having to say why we see him!

**THE STRANGER** You mean—our conscience, which comes to life when we have not had enough to eat and when we are worn out from fatigue—but goes to sleep when we are well fed and rested. . . . Isn't it a curse that we have to come to your home like a couple of wretched beggars? Don't you see how torn and tattered we are after the journey in the mountain between the hawthorn bushes? . . . I have a feeling that someone is waging war on me. . . .

**THE LADY** Isn't it you who are the challenger?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—I am aching for a battle in the open! I don't want a contest with unpaid bills and an empty purse. Even if I did—here goes my last farthing. . . . May the water-sprites take it—if there are such things. . . . [*He flings a coin into the brook.*]

**THE LADY** God help us! We were to have used it to take the boat across the river! Now we shall have to speak about money the moment we enter my home. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Has there ever been a time when we talked about anything else?

**THE LADY** No doubt because you always had contempt for money. . . .

**THE STRANGER** As for everything else. . . .

**THE LADY** But not everything is to be disdained. . . . There are good things in life, too. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I have never met with them. . . .

**THE LADY** Come with me, and you shall see. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I will—come. . . . [*He hesitates when he is about to pass the smithy.*]

**THE LADY** [*who has preceded him*] Are you afraid

of the flames and the fire?

**THE STRANGER** No—but. . . .

[*The hunting horn is again heard in the distance. He rushes past the smithy and follows her.*]

## SCENE FIVE

*A roomy kitchen with white calcimined walls. In the left corner are three windows: two in the rear, one in the left wall. The windows are small, with deep niches in which are placed potted flowers. The ceiling is sooted brown; the beams are visible. In the right corner, a large kitchen range with cooking utensils of copper, tin and iron, wooden jugs and pots and pans. On the wall, in the left corner, hang a crucifix and a vigil light; underneath, a square table with built-in benches. Here and there are hung twigs of mistletoe. There is a door in the rear wall. Beyond is seen the poorhouse, and through the rear windows, the church. There is a sleeping place for dogs by the kitchen range; also a table for beggars.*

*The Old Man sits at the table, beneath the crucifix, with clasped hands. In front of him lies a game bag. He is in his early eighties, has white hair and beard, and is powerfully built. He is dressed in the uniform of a chief forester. The Mother is kneeling in the center of the floor. She is about fifty. Her hair is gray, and she is dressed in black, with touches of white.*

*From outside can plainly be heard the last words of the "Ave Maria": "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." The words are spoken in unison by men, women, and children.*

**THE OLD MAN and THE MOTHER** Amen!

**THE MOTHER** And now I must tell you something, father. . . . Two vagrants have been seen down by the river. They were tattered and unkempt and looked as if they had been drenched. When the ferryman came to collect the fare on the boat, they didn't have a single farthing in their pockets. . . . They are now sitting in the waiting room at the ferry station drying their clothes. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** Let them sit there!

**THE MOTHER** You must never refuse to take a beggar into your house. . . . A beggar may turn out to be an angel!

**THE OLD MAN** You are right!—Let them come. . . .

**THE MOTHER** I'll put some food for them here on the beggars' table, if it won't disturb you. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** Not in the least!

**THE MOTHER** Shall I let them have some of the apple juice?

**THE OLD MAN** Yes, give them some.—And have a fire ready for them, too, if they should be frozen.

**THE MOTHER** It is a little late to start a fire—but if you wish it, father. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** [*looks out through the window*] Oh yes—start a fire. . . .

**THE MOTHER** What are you looking at, father?

**THE OLD MAN** I am watching the river . . . it is rising. . . . And I am wondering—as I have wondered for seventy-five years now—when shall I ever see the ocean. . . .

**THE MOTHER** You are in a sad mood tonight, father, aren't you?

**THE OLD MAN** . . . *et introibo ad altare Dei: ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.*—Yes, I am sad. . . . *Deus, Deus meus: quare tristis' es anima mea, et quare conturbas me.*

**THE MOTHER** *Spera in Deo.* . . .

[*The Maid enters. She gives a sign to the Mother, who goes to her. They whisper. The Maid goes out.*]

**THE OLD MAN** I heard what you said! . . . Oh, my God! I must bear even this!

**THE MOTHER** You don't have to meet them—you can go upstairs to your room. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** No—I shall accept it as a penitence.—But why do they come like this—like a couple of vagrants?

**THE MOTHER** They probably lost their way and met with some mishap. . . . Do you think that. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** But that she would bring her—her man with her here—that is nothing short of indecent. . . .

**THE MOTHER** You know how strange Ingeborg is. . . . She thinks that whatever she does is proper, not to say right and correct. Have you ever seen her ashamed of anything she ever did—or seen her hurt or offended by a reprimand? I never

have. Yet she is really not immodest. On the contrary: No matter what she does or says—it may be ever so lacking in what you and I consider good taste—it seems appropriate to her.

**THE OLD MAN** Yes, and I have often been surprised that I can't be angry with her. . . . She always feels as if she had no responsibility for anything. She doesn't even feel the sting of an offending remark. One would almost think she was lacking in self-consciousness—or that she had a dual nature: one doing everything that was bad, and the other one giving absolution. . . . But as for this man—there is no one I have ever detested from afar as I have him! He sees nothing but evil in the world—and I have never heard so many bad things said about anyone as I have of him!

**THE MOTHER** What you say is quite true, father. . . . But isn't it possible that Ingeborg may have some special mission in this man's life—and he in hers? Could it be that they must torment each other until they obtain salvation? . . .

**THE OLD MAN** It may be as you say—nevertheless it goes against me to be an accomplice in an act that to me seems disgraceful. . . . And to have this man under my roof! But I have to bear it—as I have to bear all else that my sins have brought on me. . . .

**THE MOTHER** In God's name, then. . . .

[*The Lady and the Stranger enter.*]

**THE MOTHER** Welcome home!

**THE LADY** Thank you, mother! [*She approaches the two.*]

[*The Old Man rises. He regards the Stranger.*]

**THE LADY** God's peace to you, grandfather! This is my husband. Give him your hand.

**THE OLD MAN** I want to take a look at him first. . . . [*He approaches the Stranger, places his hands on his shoulders, and looks him straight in the eyes.*] With what intentions do you enter this house?

**THE STRANGER** [*with simplicity*] My intentions are none other than to keep my wife company—and at her earnest and urgent request.

**THE OLD MAN** If what you say is true, you are welcome! I have behind me a long and stormy life. Here in the loneliness I have at last found a certain peace. I beg of you not to disturb that peace. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I have not come to ask for favors; and when I leave I shall take nothing with me. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** Your answer does not please me. . . . We all need each other—perhaps even I shall need you—we never know about such things, young man.

**THE LADY** Grandfather!

**THE OLD MAN** Yes, my child! Happiness I cannot wish you, for it does not exist. . . . But strength to bear your fate—that I wish you.—Now I shall leave you for a few moments—your mother will see to your needs. . . . [*He goes out.*]

**THE LADY** [*to the Mother*] Is the table set for us, mother?

**THE MOTHER** You mean the beggars' table?—No, that—you must know—was a misunderstanding, of course. . . .

**THE LADY** Well—we do look rather miserable after having taken the wrong road through the mountains. . . . And if grandfather hadn't signalled with his hunting horn. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Grandfather has long ago stopped going hunting. . . .

**THE LADY** Then it must have been someone else who blew. . . . But now, mother, I am going up to the rose chamber and put things in order. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Yes, do that, my child. I'll be up soon. . . .

[*The Lady seems about to say something, but hesitates; she leaves.*]

**THE STRANGER** [*to the Mother*] I have seen this room before. . . .

**THE MOTHER** And I have seen you before. . . . I have almost been expecting you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** As one expects a misfortune. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Why do you say that?

**THE STRANGER** Because I usually bring disaster with me.—But as I have to be somewhere, and can't change my fate, I have no scruples. . . .

**THE MOTHER** In that respect you are like my daughter. . . . She has neither scruples nor conscience.

**THE STRANGER** What do you mean?

**THE MOTHER** Don't think I mean anything bad! How could I say anything bad about my own child? It was only because I took it for granted that you, too, were sensible of her characteris-

tics that I made the comparison.

**THE STRANGER** I have never noticed that Eve possesses the characteristics you ascribe to her. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Why do you call Ingeborg Eve?

**THE STRANGER** By giving her a name of my own invention, I made her mine—just as I intend to remould her according to my desires. . . .

**THE MOTHER** In your image, you mean! [*She smiles.*] I have heard it said that the wizards among the peasants carve an effigy of the one they try to bewitch. And then they baptize it with the name of the person they are trying to destroy. It is in the same manner you have figured out that you, through the Eve of your own creation, will destroy her whole sex.

**THE STRANGER** [*regards the Mother with astonishment*] Well, I'll be damned! Forgive me! You are my mother-in-law—but you are also deeply religious: How can you harbor such thoughts?

**THE MOTHER** They are your thoughts.

**THE STRANGER** This is beginning to be interesting! I had been under the impression I was to encounter an idyl in the loneliness of a forest. . . . and—I find myself in a witch's kitchen. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Not precisely—but you forget—or you didn't know—that I am a woman who was infamously abandoned by a man . . . and that you are a man who shamelessly abandoned a woman.

**THE STRANGER** You certainly speak plainly—straight out; and now I know where I am.

**THE MOTHER** And now I would like to know where I stand: Can you take care of two families?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—if things go as they should. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Things don't always go the way you wish them to go here in life—money can dwindle and be lost. . . .

**THE STRANGER** My talent is a capital that is not likely to be lost. . . .

**THE MOTHER** I must say that sounds strange! Haven't some of the greatest talents suddenly ceased to exist—or dwindled little by little?

**THE STRANGER** Never in my life have I met a man or a woman who could so rob one of courage. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Your arrogance must be subjugated!

Your latest book was a step backward. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You have read that one, too?

**THE MOTHER** Yes—and that is why I know all your secrets. So it's no use trying to do any acting. If you keep that in mind, you'll be well received.—And now to a little matter that casts an unfortunate reflection on this house: Why did you not pay the ferryman?

**THE STRANGER** Now you have touched my Achilles heel!—I'll explain why. . . . I threw away my last coin. . . . But is there nothing you can speak about in this house except money?

**THE MOTHER** Indeed there is . . . but in this house we have, first of all, the habit of living up to our duties, and afterwards we can amuse ourselves.—I can only conclude, then, that you have travelled here by foot for lack of money.

**THE STRANGER** Y-e-s!

**THE MOTHER** And perhaps you haven't eaten anything either?

**THE STRANGER** N-o-o!

**THE MOTHER** Listen to me! You are nothing but a boy, a reckless scamp. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I have had many experiences in my days—but never before have I been in a situation like this. . . .

**THE MOTHER** I almost feel sorry for you. And I would be inclined to laugh at your pitiful predicament, if I didn't know that you will be shedding tears before long—and not only you, but some others.—But now that you have had your way, hold on to her who loves you. For if you abandon her—well, then you shall never be happy again . . . and you will soon forget what real happiness is. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Is this a threat?

**THE MOTHER** No—a warning. . . . Go and eat your supper now. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*pointing to the beggars' table*] At this table here?

**THE MOTHER** This mean trick is a prank of your own doing. But it can turn out to be stark seriousness. Such things have happened before.

**THE STRANGER** I believe there is no limit to what may happen now—for this is the worst that has happened to me yet. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Oh no! It could be much worse. . . . Just wait and see!

**THE STRANGER** [*depressed*] Yes—now I can expect anything. . . . [*He goes out.*]

[*The Mother is alone. Soon after, the Old Man enters.*]

**THE OLD MAN** Well—it didn't turn out to be an angel, did it?

**THE MOTHER** At any rate, no angel of light!

**THE OLD MAN** No, that he is not!—You know how superstitious the people here are. Well, when I went down to the river, I overheard some of them talking. One man said that his horse had shied at the sight of "him"; another one that his dogs had made such a racket that he had to tie them up; the ferryman swore that the ferry lightened the moment he boarded it. . . . All this is, of course, mere superstition—yet . . . yet . . .

**THE MOTHER** Yet . . .

**THE OLD MAN** Well . . . it was only that I saw a magpie fly in through the window—the closed window—through the glass pane in their room. But perhaps I didn't see right. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Probably—but why does one see wrong sometimes—and in the right place. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** The mere presence of this man makes me ill. And I get a pain in the chest when he looks at me.

**THE MOTHER** We must try to get him to leave—though I am almost certain he will not feel at home here for very long.

**THE OLD MAN** I, too, have a feeling he won't remain here very long. . . . You see—I received a letter this evening, warning me about this man. Among other things—he is being sought by court officers. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Court officers? Here in your house?

**THE OLD MAN** Yes . . . financial matters. . . . But I beg you . . . the laws of hospitality—even toward a beggar . . . or even an enemy—are sacred. Leave him in peace for a few days until he has recovered after this wild chase. . . . You can plainly see that Providence has caught up with him, and that his soul has to be ground to grist in the mill before he is put through the sieve. . . .

**THE MOTHER** I already feel an irresistible call to act as an instrument of Providence in his case. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** But take care that you do not confuse a revengeful spirit with a call from on high. . . .

**THE MOTHER** I shall try to—if I can. . . .

**THE OLD MAN** Goodnight now!

**THE MOTHER** Do you think that Ingeborg has

read his latest book?

**THE OLD MAN** I have no idea! It doesn't seem probable. How could she possibly have become attached to a man who holds such opinions? . . .

**THE MOTHER** You are right! She hasn't read it—but now she is going to. . . .

## act three

### SCENE ONE

*In the rose chamber, a plain room, furnished tastefully and in a homelike manner, at the Forester's. The walls are plastered a rosy red; the curtains are of the same shade and of thin muslin. In the small, grated windows are potted flowers on the sill. On the left, a writing table and a book case. On the right, an ottoman, over which is hung a canopy, in the same shade as the curtains at the windows. Chairs and tables in antique German style. There is a door, rear. Outside is seen a landscape with the poorhouse, a dreary, dilapidated building with black window holes without curtains. The sun is shining brightly.*

*The Lady is seated in the ottoman, crocheting. The Mother is standing before her, a book with red covers in her hand.*

**THE MOTHER** You will not read your own husband's book?

**THE LADY** No—not that book! I have given him my promise not to.

**THE MOTHER** You do not care to know the man to whom you have entrusted your fate?

**THE LADY** No! What good will it do? We are satisfied the way we have it.

**THE MOTHER** You don't demand much of life, do you?

**THE LADY** What would be the use? Our demands are never fulfilled anyhow.

**THE MOTHER** I don't know whether you were born with all the wisdom of the universe—or whether you are merely innocent, or foolish.

**THE LADY** Well, I know little or nothing about myself. . . .

**THE MOTHER** As long as the sun shines and you

have enough to eat for the day, you are satisfied.

**THE LADY** Yes! And if the sun doesn't shine, I say to myself: Well, I suppose that's the way it's meant to be. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Now . . . let us speak about something else.—Do you know that your husband is being harried by court officers for some kind of financial obligation?

**THE LADY** Yes, I know that . . . but so are all poets. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Tell me!—Is your husband a lunatic or a rogue?

**THE LADY** Oh—now, mother! He is neither, of course! He is a little eccentric; and there is one thing I find rather tiresome: I can never mention anything that he doesn't already know. As a consequence we say very little to each other—but he is happy merely to have me near him . . . and I feel the same way about him!

**THE MOTHER** So! You have already come to a deadlock! Then you are not far from the rapids. But don't you think you will have something to talk about when you have read what he has written?

**THE LADY** Perhaps! Leave the book here, if you like. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Take it—and hide it! It will be a surprise to him to hear you recite something from his masterwork.

**THE LADY** [*hiding the book in her pocket*] He is coming! It is almost as if he could hear at a distance when he is being spoken of. . . .

**THE MOTHER** If he could only *feel* at a distance when others suffer for his sake. . . . [*She goes out.*]

[*The Lady is alone for a moment. She reads here and there in the book and is taken aback.*]



*She hides it again in her pocket.]*

**THE STRANGER** *[entering]* Your mother was here just now. You spoke about me, of course. I still seem to hear the vibration of her angry words. I can feel their lashing in the air—I can see them darken the sunrays—I seem to notice the impression of her body in the atmosphere of this room—and she has left an odor after her as of a dead snake.

**THE LADY** Oh, how nervous and excited you are today!

**THE STRANGER** Frightfully nervous! Some bungler has tuned over my nerves and put them out of tune—and now he is playing on them with a bow of horsehair, bringing forth a squeak like the clucking of a partridge. . . . You have no idea what it is like. . . . Here is someone who is stronger than I am—someone who pursues me with a searchlight, taking aim at me wherever I go.—Tell me—do people use magic in these parts of the land?

**THE LADY** Don't turn your back to the sunshine . . . look at the lovely landscape, and it will calm you.

**THE STRANGER** No—I can't bear to look at the poorhouse out there—it seems to be built especially for me. And there is a crazy female over there, who is forever waving in this direction. . . .

**THE LADY** Do you feel you are being treated badly here?

**THE STRANGER** I wouldn't say that exactly—no! But I am being glutted with delicacies as if I were being readied for slaughter; yet nothing seems to have any taste—because it is being offered grudgingly—and I can feel the hate like an icy cellar exuding a damp cold. Can you imagine, I feel a cold wind everywhere—despite the dead calm and the frightful heat. And that damnable mill—I hear it continually. . . .

**THE LADY** Well—but it isn't grinding now. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Yes—it keeps grinding—grinding. . . .

**THE LADY** But my dear husband. . . . There is no hate here. . . . They may feel compassion—but nothing else. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And then another thing. . . . Why do people cross themselves whenever they see

me on the highway? . . .

**THE LADY** That's merely a habit of theirs. They do that when they trudge along on the road reciting their silent prayers. . . .—You received a disagreeable letter this morning, didn't you?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—and such a letter! It made the hairs stand up on my head! I felt like spitting my fate in the face! Think of it, I have money being owed to me, but I can't get it. . . . And now I am being harassed by—by my children's guardians, for not contributing to their support. . . . Have you ever seen any human being in such a humiliating predicament? And yet I am without blame. I am in a position to take care of my obligations—want to do the right thing—yet I am hindered from doing so. Am I then to be blamed, do you think? No—but the shame—the shame is mine! This is an unnatural state of things. . . . It is the doings of the devil!

**THE LADY** But why should it be so?

**THE STRANGER** Exactly! There is the rub! Why are we born so ignorant of laws, customs, conventions and formalities against which we breach—from ignorance—and for which we are scourged? Why do we grow into youths with all sorts of noble intentions and ideals, which we hope to realize? And why are we driven into all manner of despicable misery that we abhor and despise?—Why—why?

**THE LADY** *[unobserved, has been glancing in the book, absentmindedly]* I presume there is some meaning to it, although we are not aware of it. . . .

**THE STRANGER** If it is intended to make us humble—as they say it is—then it is not the right way. In my case it only serves to make me more arrogant. . . . Eve!

**THE LADY** You must not call me by that name!

**THE STRANGER** *[startled]* Why not?

**THE LADY** I don't like it. No more than you would like being called Caesar. . . .

**THE STRANGER** So we are back again where we started. . . .

**THE LADY** Where? What?

**THE STRANGER** Did you have any veiled implication in mind when you called me by that name?

**THE LADY** Caesar? No—I did not. But now I

insist that you tell me the whole thing.

**THE STRANGER** Very well! May I have the honor of falling by my own hand: I am Caesar—the schoolboy who perpetrated a prank for which another boy was given the blame. This other boy was your husband—the werewolf! That is how fate amuses itself, twisting, plaiting thongs for eternity. . . . A noble pleasure, eh? [*The Lady hesitates; remains silent.*] Say something!

**THE LADY** I can't!

**THE STRANGER** Say that he turned into a werewolf because of having lost his faith in a divine justice as a child when he was innocently punished for another's misdeed. . . . Say *that*—and then I shall tell you how I suffered tenfold more from remorse and pangs of conscience . . . and how I came out of the religious crisis, that followed as a consequence, so chastened that I could never do anything like it again.

**THE LADY** It isn't that! It is not that!

**THE STRANGER** What is it, then?—You mean that you no longer can have any respect for me?

**THE LADY** That isn't it, either!

**THE STRANGER** Then it is that you want me to acknowledge my shame to you—to humiliate me! If so, everything is over between us.

**THE LADY** No!

**THE STRANGER** Eve!

**THE LADY** No, not that—you will only bring to life evil thoughts. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You have broken your promise! You have been reading my book!

**THE LADY** Yes.

**THE STRANGER** That was wicked of you!

**THE LADY** My intention was good—entirely good!

**THE STRANGER** [*with sarcasm*] The result seems to have been tarnished by your good intentions. . . . Now I am blown sky high—and I have supplied the gunpowder myself.—To think that everything has to come back to us—everything: childish pranks and villainous misdeeds! That we have to reap evil where we have sown evil—that is fair play. . . . But I only wish I would see a good act rewarded at least *once*! However, that is something I will never see! He who keeps a record of all his sins and mistakes, small as well as great, is put to shame. . . . And how many of us *do* it? We

human beings may forgive—but the gods never do. . . .

**THE LADY** Don't speak things like that!—Don't! But say that you can forgive!

**THE STRANGER** I am neither mean nor petty, as you well know—but what have I to forgive you?

**THE LADY** Oh—so much! There is so much that I have not the courage to tell you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Then tell me—and we are rid of it!

**THE LADY** Well—he and I used to read the curse from Deuteronomy over you—you . . . who destroyed his life. . . .

**THE STRANGER** What is this curse?

**THE LADY** It is in the Book of Moses—which the priests chant in unison at the beginning of Lent. . . .

**THE STRANGER** I don't remember it. . . . But what does it matter—one more or less?

**THE LADY** Yes—for in our family there is an old saying that anyone we place a curse on, will be struck down! . . .

**THE STRANGER** I put no faith in such things. . . . But that evil exudes from this house, I have no doubt. May it fall upon their own heads! That is my prayer!

And now—according to the custom of this land—I ought to go out and shoot myself—but I can't do that while I still have duties to fulfill. . . . Imagine, I am not even permitted to die—and thus have lost the last vestige of what I called my religion. . . . How cleverly calculated! I have heard it said that man can wrestle with God, and not without profit. But battling with Satan—that is something not even Job could do!—Shouldn't we talk a little about you now?

**THE LADY** Not yet—a little later perhaps. . . . After becoming acquainted with your terrible book—I have merely glanced through it; only read a few lines here and there—I feel as if I had eaten of the tree of knowledge: My eyes have been opened and now I know what evil is—and what good is!—I didn't before. . . . And now I see how wicked you are! Now I know why you gave me the name of Eve! Yet if sin came into the world through her, the mother of the world, another woman—who

was also a mother—brought expiation and atonement into it! If our first mother brought on damnation, blessing came through the other one! Through me you shall not destroy the race. . . . My mission in your life is an entirely different one! We shall see. . . .

**THE STRANGER** So you have eaten of the tree of knowledge. . . . Farewell!

**THE LADY** You are thinking of leaving?

**THE STRANGER** What else can I do? How can I remain here?

**THE LADY** Don't go!

**THE STRANGER** I must—in order to unravel my tangled affairs. I am going to bid goodbye to the old people. . . . Then I'll return to you!—And so—for a few moments. . . . [*He goes out.*] [*The Lady remains standing as if turned to stone. Then she advances toward the door and stands gazing outside.*]

**THE LADY** Oh—he is gone—he is gone! . . . [*She takes refuge within herself and falls on her knees.*]

## SCENE TWO

*The asylum. The refectory of an ancient cloister, resembling a simple, white Norman or Romanesque church with round arches. The plastered walls are covered with spots of dampness which have formed into bizarre figures. There are dining tables with bowls. At one end of one of the tables is a stand for the lector. In the rear, a door to the chapel. Lighted candles on the tables. On the wall to the right, a painting, representing Michael slaying Satan.*

*Seated alone with his bowl at a long table on the right is the Stranger. He wears the white garb of a hospital patient. At the table on the left sit the Brownclad Mourners from Act One; the Beggar; a Woman in Mourning, with two children; a Woman, resembling the Lady, but who is not the Lady—and who is knitting instead of eating; a Man, who resembles the Physician but is not the Physician; Caesar's Image; the Images of the Old Man and the Mother; the Image of the Brother; the Parents of the Lost Son; and others. All are dressed in white, over which they wear habits of crape in*

*different colors. Their faces have a waxen, deathlike pallor. They all look and move like ghosts.*

*When the curtain rises, all—except the Stranger—are speaking the last words of a paternoster.*

**THE STRANGER** [*rises, goes over to the Abbess, who is standing by the serving table*] Mother, let me speak to you a moment.

**THE ABBESS** [*in the black and white dress of the Augustinian order*] Yes, my son.  
[*They walk downstage.*]

**THE STRANGER** Let me first ask you where I am.

**THE ABBESS** In the cloister of "Good Help." You were found in the mountains above the pass—with a cross you had broken off from the shrine. You were threatening someone you imagined you saw up in the clouds. You had a fever, and you fell down a precipice. You were not hurt, but you were delirious. They brought you here to the hospital, and we put you to bed. You have been delirious ever since, and you've been complaining of pain in your hips. But the doctors have been unable to discover any injury.

**THE STRANGER** What did I say when I was delirious?

**THE ABBESS** The usual fantasies of a sick and fevered mind. . . . You reproached yourself for all sorts of things and had visions of your victims, as you called them.

**THE STRANGER** What else?

**THE ABBESS** Well, you talked a great deal about money. You said you wanted to pay for your keep here in the hospital . . . and I tried to quiet you by telling you that we don't do things for money here. . . . What we do, we do for love.

**THE STRANGER** I want no charity—I don't need it!

**THE ABBESS** It is more blessed to give than to receive. . . . But it requires a great spirit to be able to receive, and to be grateful.

**THE STRANGER** I need nothing, and I ask for nothing. . . . I have no desire to be coerced into feeling grateful.

**THE ABBESS** H'mm. H'mm.

**THE STRANGER** But will you tell me why none of these people want to sit at the same table

with me? They immediately get up, and avoid me. . . .

**THE ABBESS** I presume they are afraid of you.

**THE STRANGER** Why?

**THE ABBESS** You—look—so . . .

**THE STRANGER** I—look—so. . . . But that group over there—how do they look? Are they real people?

**THE ABBESS** If you mean real . . . then they present a ghastly reality. That you look at them in a peculiar way might be due to your fever, which is still with you . . . unless there is some other reason.

**THE STRANGER** But I feel as if I knew them all—all of them! It is almost as if I was looking at them in a mirror . . . and as if they were making believe that they are eating. . . . Is this some sort of drama that is being acted out? . . . There I see a couple that look like my parents—in a vague way. . . . I have never had a fear of anything before, because I was indifferent to life—but now I am beginning to be frightened.

**THE ABBESS** If you don't think these people are real, we'll ask the confessor to introduce them to us. . . . [*She gestures to the Confessor, who comes over to them.*]

**THE CONFESSOR** [*dressed in the Dominican black and white habit*] Sister!

**THE ABBESS** Will you tell this poor suffering man who the people are, sitting at the table there?

**THE CONFESSOR** That won't be difficult. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Allow me to ask you first: Haven't we seen each other before?

**THE CONFESSOR** Yes—I sat at your bedside while you were ill with fever . . . and you asked me to hear your confession. . . .

**THE STRANGER** My confession, did you say?

**THE CONFESSOR** Yes . . . but I was unable to give you absolution because I felt that, in your fever, you did not know what you were saying. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Why?

**THE CONFESSOR** Because there was scarcely a crime or a sin that you did not take upon yourself. . . . And besides, they were of such a horrible nature that the sinner customarily

would be penitence before asking for absolution. Now that you have regained your senses, I feel I should ask you whether there was any ground for your self-accusations. . . .

[*The Abbess leaves them.*]

**THE STRANGER** Is it your duty to inquire into such things?

**THE CONFESSOR** No—you are right, it is not. . . . However—you wanted to know in whose company you are here. . . . Well, it is not the happiest company.—There we have, for example, a lunatic called Caesar. . . . He went insane from reading a certain author, whose notoriety far surpassed his fame. . . . And there we have the Beggar, who refuses to acknowledge that he is a beggar . . . because he has studied Latin, and found freedom! And then there is the Physician—or, as he is commonly called, the werewolf—whose story is well known . . . and then a couple of parents, who worried themselves to death over their depraved son—who had raised his hand against them—who had refused to accompany his father's remains to the graveyard—and who, in a drunken stupor, profaned his mother's grave. . . . Well—that is something he himself will have to answer for! And there sits his poor sister, whom he drove outside into the snowy winter—according to his own statement, with good intentions. . . . There you see an abandoned wife with two children that are unprovided for . . . and there is another—the one who is knitting.—So you see, they are all old acquaintances—every one of them. . . . Go over and speak with them. . . .

[*During the final part of the Confessor's recitation, the Stranger has turned his back to the assemblage. Now he goes over to the table on the right and sits down, his back still to the company. As he lifts his head, he sees the painting of Michael and he turns his eyes toward the floor. The Confessor goes to the Stranger and places himself behind him. At that moment a Catholic requiem, played on the organ, is heard from the chapel. The Confessor, standing, speaks with the Stranger in a subdued voice, while the music plays softly.*]

*Quantus tremor est futurus  
Quando iudex est venturus  
Cuncta stricte discussurus.*

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum  
Per sepulchra regionum  
Coget omnes ante thronum.*

*Mors stupebit et natura,  
Cum resurget creatura  
Judicanti responsura.*

*Liber scriptus proferetur  
In quo totum continetur  
Unde mundus judicetur.*

*Judex ergo cum sedebit  
Quidquid latet apparebit  
Nil inultum remanebit.*

[*The Confessor goes over to the stand at the table, left. He opens his breviary. The music subsides.*]

**THE CONFESSOR** Let us continue the reading: But it shall come to pass, if you will not hear the voice of the Lord, your God, to keep and to do all his commands and precepts—that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.

Cursed shall be your barn, and cursed your stores.

Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed going out!

**THE CONGREGATION** [*in subdued voice*] Cursed!

**THE CONFESSOR** The Lord shall send upon you famine and hunger, and a rebuke upon all the works which you shall do: until he consume and destroy you quickly, for your most wicked inventions, by which you have forsaken Him.

**THE CONGREGATION** [*aloud*] Cursed!

**THE CONFESSOR** The Lord make you to fall down before your enemies: one way may you go out against them, and flee seven ways, and be scattered throughout all the kingdoms of the earth.

And be your carcass meat for all the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the earth, and be there none to drive them away!

The Lord will smite you with the ulcer of Egypt, and the part of your body, by which the dung is cast out, with the scab, and with the itch: so that you cannot be healed.

The Lord shall strike you with madness and blindness and fury of mind; and you shall grope at midday as the blind are wont to grope in the dark, and not make straight your ways. And you shall at all times suffer wrong, and be oppressed with violence, and you shall have no one to deliver you!

You shall take a wife, and another sleep with her; you shall build a house, and not dwell therein; you shall plant a vineyard and not gather the vintage thereof.

May your sons and daughters be given to another people, your eyes looking on, and languishing at the sight of them all the day, and may there be no strength in your hand. . . .

Neither shall you be quiet, nor shall there be any rest for the sole of your foot; for the Lord will give you a fearful heart, and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness: And your life shall be as it were hanging before you. You shall fear night and day. . . . In the morning you shall say: Who will grant me evening? And at evening: Who will grant me morning? . . . And because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things:

You shall serve your enemy, whom the Lord will send upon you, in hunger and thirst, and nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put an iron yoke upon your neck, till he consume you.

**THE CONGREGATION** Amen!

[*The Confessor has read the words speedily and in a loud voice, without any allusion by glance or gesture to the Stranger. All those present—with the exception of the Lady, who has been knitting—have listened and joined in the anathemas without seeming to notice the Stranger, who throughout has sat with his back turned to the Congregation, in quiet contemplation. The Stranger rises and is about to leave. The Confessor goes toward him.*]

**THE STRANGER** What was the text you read?

**THE CONFESSOR** It was from Deuteronomy.

**THE STRANGER** Oh, yes. . . . But I seem to recall that there is a blessing in it as well.

**THE CONFESSOR** Yes—for those who keep His commandments.

**THE STRANGER** Oh!—I won't deny that for a moment I felt a little shaken . . . but I don't know whether this is a trial that has to be withstood, or a warning that has to be heeded. . . . However, now I am certain that my fever has taken hold of me again, and I am going to seek a competent physician.

**THE CONFESSOR** Well—but what about the *real* physician?

**THE STRANGER** Yes, of course, of course!

**THE CONFESSOR** He who cures the “beautiful pangs of conscience.” . . .

**THE ABBESS** If you should ever be in need of charity again, you know where to go. . . .

**THE STRANGER** No—I don't. . . .

**THE ABBESS** [*almost inaudibly*] Well—then I shall tell you! In a rosy red room—by a broad, flowing river. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You are right! In a rosy red room. . . . Let me think—how long have I been lying sick here?

**THE ABBESS** It is exactly three months today. . . .

**THE STRANGER** A quarter of a year! Oh! Have I been sleeping, or where have I been? [*He glances outside through the window.*] Why, it is already fall. The trees are barren, and the clouds have a frigid look. . . . Now my memory is coming back. . . . Can you hear a mill grinding away? A hunting horn—blowing dulcet tones? A rushing river—a whispering forest—and . . . a woman, who is weeping? Yes—you are right—only *there* is charity! Farewell! [*He hastens out.*]

**THE CONFESSOR** [*to the Abbess*] That lunatic! That lunatic!

### SCENE THREE

*The rose chamber. The curtains have been removed. The windows are gaping like black holes against the darkness outside. The furniture is covered with brown linen covers, and has been placed in the middle of the room. The flowers are gone; a large black parlor stove is lighted.*

*The Mother.* THE STRANGER *the light of a single candle.*

*There is a knock at the door.*

**THE MOTHER** Come in!

**THE STRANGER** [*entering*] Good evening!—Where is my wife?

**THE MOTHER** It's you!—Where did you come from?

**THE STRANGER** I would say from hell!—But where is my wife?

**THE MOTHER** Which one of them?

**THE STRANGER** You might well ask me that. . . . There is justification for everything—except myself!

**THE MOTHER** There may be good reason for that. That you realize it is a good sign.—But where have you been?

**THE STRANGER** I don't know whether it was a poorhouse, a lunatic asylum, or an ordinary hospital—but I would like to think it was all a delirious nightmare. I have been ill—out of my mind—and I can't believe that three months have passed. . . . But where is my wife?

**THE MOTHER** I ought to ask you that same question. When you abandoned her, she left—to search for you. Whether she tired of it and gave up, I don't know. . . .

**THE STRANGER** It looks ghastly in here!—Where is the Old Man?

**THE MOTHER** Where he is now, there is no more grief. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You mean—he is dead!

**THE MOTHER** Yes—he is dead. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You say it, as if I were the cause of it. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Perhaps I have a right to think that.

**THE STRANGER** He didn't seem so very sensitive. He was certainly capable of hating. . . .

**THE MOTHER** No, he hated only what was evil—in himself and in others.

**THE STRANGER** Then I am wrong in that, too! [*There is a silence.*]

**THE MOTHER** What have you come for?

**THE STRANGER** Charity!

**THE MOTHER** At last!—How did you fare at the hospital? Sit down and tell me. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*seating himself*] That is something I do not care to remember! I do not even know that it was a hospital. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Strange! But what happened after you left us here?

**THE STRANGER** I fell down a precipice and injured my hip, and lost consciousness. . . . If you speak gently to me, I'll tell you the whole story.

**THE MOTHER** I shall speak gently.

**THE STRANGER** Very well. . . . I woke up in a bed, made of red steel bars, and saw three men pulling at a cord that ran through two blocks. . . . Each time they pulled, I felt as if I had been stretched two yards—and . . .

**THE MOTHER** Something was out of joint, and they had to pull it back into place. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Yes, of course, I never thought of that. . . . And afterward I . . . well, as I lay there, I saw my entire life pass before me—from the days of my childhood, through my youth, until that hour. . . . And when the cavalcade had passed, it started all over again—and all through it I heard the grinding of a mill. . . . I hear it now. . . . Yes, the sound follows me here, too!

**THE MOTHER** It was not a pretty picture you saw, was it?

**THE STRANGER** No! And I finally came to the conclusion that I was a loathsome creature. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Why do you say such a thing?

**THE STRANGER** I understand very well that you would prefer to have me use the expression "a wayward human being." . . . But somehow I feel that anyone using that expression is a braggart. And, besides, the term implies a confidence in judgment that I have not yet acquired.

**THE MOTHER** You are still the doubter!

**THE STRANGER** Yes! About some things—about many things. . . . But there is one thing that is beginning to be clear. . . .

**THE MOTHER** What is that?

**THE STRANGER** That there are powers—that there are forces . . . in which . . . I put no faith before . . .

**THE MOTHER** Have you also noticed that it is neither you nor any other human being who rules your remarkable fate?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—I sensed that. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Well—then you are on the right road. . . .

**THE STRANGER** But I am also—bankrupt. . . . I have lost my poetic inspiration—and I can't sleep nights. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Why not?

**THE STRANGER** I have nightmares . . . and—what is worse—I have a fear of dying—for I am no longer convinced that our misery ends with death—once it comes!

**THE MOTHER** Really?

**THE STRANGER** But the worst of all is that I have come to detest myself to such a degree that I should like to put an end to myself—but I am not free to do that. If I were a Christian, I would not be able to live up to the first commandment, to love my neighbor as myself; for then I would hate my neighbor. . . . And that's what I undoubtedly do. . . . It is probably true that I am a wretch and a scoundrel. I have long suspected that I was. But because I always refused to be duped by life, I kept an eye on my fellow beings. And having discovered that they were no better than myself, I was angered when they tried to subjugate and muzzle me.

**THE MOTHER** That is all very well—but you are looking at these things in the wrong way. You seem to think that it is a matter between you and your fellow beings—but it is a matter entirely between you and Him. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Him?

**THE MOTHER** The Invisible One, who rules your fate.

**THE STRANGER** If I could only meet Him!

**THE MOTHER** You will be dying when you do!

**THE STRANGER** Oh no!

**THE MOTHER** Where do you get this fiendish spirit of rebellion from? Will you never humble yourself as others do? If you will not, then you shall be broken like a reed!

**THE STRANGER** I don't know from where I get this hellish obstinacy and defiance. . . . It is true—I tremble when I can't pay a bill; but if I were to ascend Mount Sinai and I should come face to face with The Eternal One, I would meet Him with my face uncovered!

**THE MOTHER** Jesus! Mary!—When you speak like

that, I believe you are an offspring of the devil!  
**THE STRANGER** That seems to be the general opinion here! But I have heard it said that they who are close to the devil usually have honors, gold and riches heaped upon them—especially gold! Does it seem to you that I justify the suspicion?

**THE MOTHER** You will bring a curse upon my house!

**THE STRANGER** In that case I shall leave your house. . . .

**THE MOTHER** In the dark of night! No, no—Where would you go?

**THE STRANGER** I shall go and seek the only one I do not hate. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Are you so certain she will welcome you?

**THE STRANGER** Absolutely certain!

**THE MOTHER** I am not!

**THE STRANGER** But I am!

**THE MOTHER** Then I must make you feel less confident.

**THE STRANGER** You can't shake my confidence!

**THE MOTHER** Yes—I can!

**THE STRANGER** You lie!

**THE MOTHER** We are no longer speaking calmly, and so let us stop.—Do you think you can sleep up in the attic room?

**THE STRANGER** Anywhere! I'll get no sleep anywhere!

**THE MOTHER** Then I shall say good night . . . whether you think I mean it sincerely or not!

**THE STRANGER** I hope there are no rats up there! I am not afraid of ghosts—but rats are disgusting.

**THE MOTHER** I am glad you are not afraid of ghosts, for—no one has ever slept out the night up there. . . . What the reason may be, I don't know. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*tarries a moment; then says*] You are the meanest human being I ever met in my life! But that's because you are religious!

**THE MOTHER** Good night!

#### SCENE FOUR

*The kitchen. It is dark, but the moon outside casts shadows of the grated windows upon the floor. The shadows move when the storm clouds*

*drift by. In the corner to the left—underneath the crucifix, where the Old Man used to sit—the wall is now covered with hunting horns, shot-guns and game bags. A stuffed bird of prey stands on the table. The windows are open, and the curtains are flapping; kitchen and scouring rags, aprons and towels, hung on a line in front of the range, move in the wind. The souging of the wind is heard. From the distance, the roaring sound of a waterfall. Occasionally there is the sound of a knock from the wooden floor.*

**THE STRANGER** [*enters, half dressed, a candle in his hand*] Is someone there?—Not a soul! [*He advances, light in hand; the light reduces the shadow play.*] What is that on the floor that's moving?—Is someone here? [*He goes over to the table, but seeing the bird of prey, he remains standing as if petrified.*] Christ in Heaven!

**THE MOTHER** [*comes in, dressed, carrying a candle in her hand*] Are you still up?

**THE STRANGER** Yes—I could not sleep.

**THE MOTHER** [*gently*] Why not, my son?

**THE STRANGER** I heard someone tramping above me. . . .

**THE MOTHER** That's impossible—there is no floor above you.

**THE STRANGER** That's just what made me feel uneasy. . . . What is that crawling on the floor like snakes? . . .

**THE MOTHER** It's the moonbeams!

**THE STRANGER** Yes—it's the moonlight! And this is a stuffed bird—and there are some kitchen rags. . . . Everything is as simple and natural as that—and that's the very thing that disturbs me. . . . Who is it who keeps knocking in the night? Has someone been locked out?

**THE MOTHER** No—it is just one of the horses in the stable, stamping his hoofs.

**THE STRANGER** I have never heard that horses. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Oh yes, horses suffer from nightmares, too.

**THE STRANGER** What is a nightmare?

**THE MOTHER** Well—who knows. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Let me sit down for a moment. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Sit down and let us have a serious talk. I was unkind last evening, and for that I beg you to forgive me. But, you see, just because I am so terribly sinful, I use my religion



as I do the hair shirt and the stone floor. In order not to offend you, I shall put the question to myself: What is a nightmare?—It is my own evil conscience. . . . Whether it is I myself or someone else who punishes me, I do not know . . . and I do not think I have any right to pry into that!—Now tell me what happened to you upstairs. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Really . . . I don't know . . . I didn't see anything—but when I came into the room, I could feel that somebody was there. I looked round with the candle, but saw no one. Then I went to bed. Suddenly somebody started walking about with heavy steps, directly over my head. . . . Do you believe in ghosts, or in people coming back? . . .

**THE MOTHER** No—and my religion forbids me to have such notions. . . . But I believe in the power of our sense of justice to create its own means of punishment. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And then. . . . After a while an icy chill settled across my chest. It moved about and focussed on my heart. . . . My heart turned cold as stone—and I jumped out of bed. . . .

**THE MOTHER** And what happened then?

**THE STRANGER** I felt myself riveted to the floor and had to watch the whole panorama of my life roll by—everything, everything . . . and that was the very hardest of all. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Yes! I know—I know it all . . . I have been through it myself. . . . The illness has no name—and there is only one cure. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And—what is it?

**THE MOTHER** You know!—You know what children have to do when they have misbehaved!

**THE STRANGER** What do they have to do?

**THE MOTHER** First they must ask forgiveness . . .

**THE STRANGER** And then?

**THE MOTHER** Then they try to make up for their misdeeds.

**THE STRANGER** You mean it is not enough to have to suffer one's deserts?

**THE MOTHER** No, that would be nothing but revenge!

**THE STRANGER** Well, what else?

**THE MOTHER** Can you yourself make good a life you have destroyed? Can you undo an act of evil? Undo it?

**THE STRANGER** No—you are right!—But I was

forced to use evil means in self-defense—to achieve justice, when it was denied me. And shame on him who forced me! Woe to him! [*With his hand on his heart*] Oh, now he is here—in this room—and he is tearing the heart out of my breast! Oh!

**THE MOTHER** Humble yourself!

**THE STRANGER** I cannot!

**THE MOTHER** Down on your knees!

**THE STRANGER** No—I will not!

**THE MOTHER** O Christ, have mercy! Lord, be compassionate! . . . [*To the Stranger*] Get on your knees before the One who was crucified! He—and He alone—can undo what you have done!

**THE STRANGER** No—I will not bend a knee before Him! Not before Him!—And if I am coerced into doing it, I will recant and disavow Him afterward!

**THE MOTHER** Down on your knees, my son!

**THE STRANGER** I cannot—I cannot!—Oh, help me, Eternal God! Help me!  
[*There is a silence.*]

**THE MOTHER** [*ferently mumbles a prayer, then asks*] Do you feel better?

**THE STRANGER** [*seeming to recover*] Yes. . . . But do you know what it was? . . . It was not death—it was annihilation. . . .

**THE MOTHER** The annihilation of the divine . . . what we call spiritual death.

**THE STRANGER** [*soberly, with no sign of irony*] You mean to say . . . yes, now I am beginning to understand. . . .

**THE MOTHER** My son! You have taken leave of Jerusalem, and you are now on the road to Damascus. . . . Continue on the same road that you have travelled to come here—and plant a cross at every station you come to; but halt at the seventh . . . you do not have to suffer the fourteen that He had to. . . .

**THE STRANGER** You speak in riddles. . . .

**THE MOTHER** Never mind!—Go and seek all those to whom you have something to say . . . first of all, your wife. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Where?

**THE MOTHER** Seek her—but do not forget to look in on him whom you call the werewolf. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Never!

**THE MOTHER** That is what I am told you said

when you were about to come here—and you remember I told you I expected you. . . .

**THE STRANGER** What made you expect me?

**THE MOTHER** I had no tangible reason. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Perhaps much as I have seen this kitchen before—in a sort of vision . . . if I may call it that.

**THE MOTHER** That is why I now regret that I tried to separate you from Ingeborg—for it was meant that you were to meet. . . . However, go and seek her now. . . . If you find her, all is well again; if you don't—then perhaps that is the way it was meant to be. . . . But the day is dawning. . . . Morning is here—and night is over. . . .

**THE STRANGER** And what a night!

**THE MOTHER** It is a night that you must never forget!

## act four

### SCENE ONE

*Inside the mountain pass. It is now autumn, however, and the trees have lost their leaves. One hears the sound of a sledge hammer from the smithy, and the grinding of the mill.*

*The Blacksmith is standing in the doorway, right; the Miller's Wife stands at the left of the stage. The Lady is dressed for travelling in a short jacket and wears a patent leather hat. Her dress indicates she is in mourning. The Stranger is wearing an Alpine suit, Bavarian in style: shooting jacket, knee breeches, Alpine boots, alpenstock, and a green hunting cap with a black cock feather. Over this he wears a cape with fur collar and hood.*

**THE LADY** [*enters; she seems weary and distressed*] Has a gentleman, dressed for travelling, passed by here?

*[The Blacksmith shakes his head, as does the Miller's Wife.]*

**THE LADY** Could you possibly put me up for the night?

*[The Blacksmith again shakes his head; so does the Miller's Wife.]*

**THE LADY** [*to the Blacksmith*] Would you let me

**THE STRANGER** I am not anxious to remember all it has brought—but I shall keep some of it in my memory!

**THE MOTHER** [*looking out through the window, speaking as though to herself*] You beautiful morning star—how could you so stray from your heaven?

*[There is a silence.]*

**THE STRANGER** Have you ever noticed that before the sun rises, we humans shiver and shudder? Can it be that we are children of darkness, since we tremble when we face the light?

**THE MOTHER** Don't you ever tire of asking questions?

**THE STRANGER** No—never! You see—I long for the light!

**THE MOTHER** Then go and seek it! And peace be with you!

stand in the door there and warm myself?

*[The Blacksmith pushes her aside.]*

**THE LADY** May God reward you as you deserve. . . . [*She goes away and soon after disappears over the footbridge.*]

**THE STRANGER** [*entering*] Has a lady, dressed for travelling, gone across the river?

*[The Blacksmith shakes his head; the Miller's Wife does likewise.]*

**THE STRANGER** [*to the Miller's Wife*] Could I buy a loaf of bread from you? Here's the money. . . .

*[The Miller's Wife makes a gesture of refusal.]*

**THE STRANGER** No compassion. . . .

**THE ECHO** [*in the distance*] No compassion. . . . [*The Blacksmith and the Miller's Wife burst out into a long, loud laughter, answered by the echo.*]

**THE STRANGER** This is what I like: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! This helps to lighten my conscience somewhat! [*He goes into the pass.*]

### SCENE TWO

*On the highway. It is now fall. The Beggar is sitting by the shrine, holding a lime twig and a bird cage that houses a starling.*

**THE STRANGER** [*entering, dressed as in the preceding scene*] My dear beggar, have you seen a lady, dressed for travelling, pass by here?

**THE BEGGAR** I have seen five hundred ladies in travelling dress pass here. But I must seriously ask you not to refer to me as a beggar. . . . I have now found something to do.

**THE STRANGER** Oh—so it is you!

**THE BEGGAR** *Ille ego qui quondam*. . . .

**THE STRANGER** What sort of work are you doing?

**THE BEGGAR** I have a starling who whistles and talks. . . .

**THE STRANGER** In other words, it is the starling who works?

**THE BEGGAR** Yes, I have become my own employer. . . .

**THE STRANGER** So you catch birds, too, do you?

**THE BEGGAR** Oh, you mean the lime twig? No—that's only for display.

**THE STRANGER** So you go in for appearances, do you?

**THE BEGGAR** Why, certainly! What else is there to judge by? The inside is nothing but empty—trash!

**THE STRANGER** So that is the sum of your philosophy?

**THE BEGGAR** The whole metaphysical substance! My viewpoint may be considered somewhat obsolete; still . . .

**THE STRANGER** Won't you tell me—seriously—just one thing? Tell me something about your past. . . .

**THE BEGGAR** Ugh! What good does it do to rake up old rubbish!—Keep on reeling and winding, my dear sir, just keep on winding! Do you think I am always as silly as you see me now? No—it's only when I meet you—for you are excruciatingly funny.

**THE STRANGER** How can you keep smiling with your whole life gone to splinters?

**THE BEGGAR** Now, now—now he is getting to be impertinent!—When you no longer can laugh at misery—not even at other people's—then life is nothing but idle nonsense! Listen carefully to me! If you follow that wheel track in the mud of the road, you will come to the water—and there the road ends. . . . Sit down and rest there—and you will soon take a different view of life! Here there are so many mementos of

tragedy—so many religious objects and unhappy memories that prevent your thoughts from going to the rose chamber. . . . But just follow the track closely—only the track! If you get a little soiled or dusty now and then, just spread your wings and fly aloft!

. . . And speaking of wings—I once heard a bird sing something about Polycrates' ring—and that he had been given all the glory of the world . . . but didn't know what to do with it. And so he prated east and west about the great emptiness of the universe, which he helped to create out of nothing. . . . I would not say it was you—if I didn't believe it so firmly that I could swear to it . . . and I remember that I once asked you if you knew who I was, and you replied that it did not interest you. . . . In return I offered you my friendship—but you refused it with these words: For shame!—However, I am neither supersensitive nor do I hold a grudge! Therefore I shall give you some good advice to chew on on the way: Follow the track!

**THE STRANGER** [*backing away*] Oh no, you won't deceive me again!

**THE BEGGAR** My dear sir! You think nothing but bad thoughts. That is why nothing good comes your way! Try my advice!

**THE STRANGER** I—shall—try. . . . But if you deceive me—then I shall be justified in . . .

**THE BEGGAR** You will never be justified in that!

**THE STRANGER** [*as if to himself*] Who reads my secret thoughts—who turns my soul inside out—who persecutes me? Why are you following me?

**THE BEGGAR** Why are you following me, Saul? [*The Stranger goes out with a haunted expression. The strains from the dirge can be heard as before. The Lady enters.*]

**THE LADY** Have you seen a gentleman dressed for travelling go by here?

**THE BEGGAR** Yes—there was a poor devil here a moment ago. . . . He hobbled by. . . .

**THE LADY** The person I am seeking does not limp.

**THE BEGGAR** This fellow didn't limp either, but he seemed to be suffering from a hip ailment. . . . His walk was a little unsteady.—No, I mustn't be mean! Look there in the mud—on

the road. . . .

**THE LADY** Where?

**THE BEGGAR** [pointing] There! There—where you see the wheel track . . . and right beside it you'll see the imprint of a hiking boot—someone with a heavy trudge. . . .

**THE LADY** [goes over to investigate] Yes, it is he—with his heavy step. . . . But will I be able to catch up with him?

**THE BEGGAR** Follow the track!

**THE LADY** [takes his hand, kissing it] Thank you, my friend! [She leaves.]

### SCENE THREE

*By the sea. It is now winter. The sea is blue-black, and clouds are piled aloft in the shape of gigantic heads. In the distance can be seen the naked masts of a shipwrecked vessel, resembling three white crosses. The table and the bench beneath the tree still remain, but the chairs have been removed. The ground is covered by snow. Now and then a bell buoy emits its sound of warning.*

*The Stranger enters from the right. He pauses for a moment and glances out over the sea. Then he disappears, left, behind the cottage. The Lady enters from the right. She seems to be tracing the footprints that the Stranger has left in the snow. She goes out, left, past the cottage. The Stranger comes from the left. He crosses to the right, and discovers the Lady's footprints. He stops and glances over his shoulder, toward the left. The Lady returns.*

**THE LADY** [throws herself in the Stranger's arms, then recoils] You thrust me aside?

**THE STRANGER** No—but someone seemed to stand between us!

**THE LADY** You may be right!—But what a reunion!

**THE STRANGER** Yes. . . . It is winter—as you see. . . .

**THE LADY** Yes—I can feel the chill on you!

**THE STRANGER** Over there in the mountains, I was chilled to the marrow. . . .

**THE LADY** Don't you believe there will be another spring?

**THE STRANGER** Not for us! Driven from Paradise, we shall wander among stones and thistles. . . . And when our feet are rent, and our hands are torn and pricked, we will have to sprinkle salt on each other's wounds. And so the eternal mill grinds on—ceaselessly . . . for the water that drives it flows on without end.

**THE LADY** I think you may be right.

**THE STRANGER** Yes—but I don't want to yield to the inevitable—I wouldn't like to see us tear each other apart—and therefore I shall carve myself to pieces—as an offering to the gods. . . . I shall take the guilt upon myself—shall say that it was I who persuaded you to throw off the shackles—that it was I who enticed you—and . . . you are free to blame me for everything: the curse itself and all its consequences. . . .

**THE LADY** It would be more than you could bear!

**THE STRANGER** Oh no! There are moments when I feel myself carrying all the sins and sorrows, the filth and shame of the universe! There are times when I believe that the evil act, the crime itself, is a punishment inflicted upon us! Do you know that recently, when I lay sick with fever, so much happened to me. . . . Among other things, I dreamt that I saw a crucifix—but without the Crucified One . . . and when I asked the Dominican—there was a Dominican there among the others—well, I asked what it could mean—and he answered: You do not wish Him to suffer for your sake—therefore suffer yourself! . . . And that is why mankind has become so sensitive to its own sufferings!

**THE LADY** And that is why our conscience becomes so heavy when no one will help to carry our burden. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Have you also come to that cross-road?

**THE LADY** Not yet—but I am on my way there!

**THE STRANGER** Put your hand in mine and let us leave this place together. . . .

**THE LADY** Where shall we go?

**THE STRANGER** Let us return the same way we came! Are you tired?

**THE LADY** No longer!

**THE STRANGER** I have been on the point of succumbing several times. . . . And then I met a curious beggar—perhaps you remember him. . . . I have heard people say he resembles me

somewhat—and he asked me to try to think kindly of his intentions, merely to make the effort. . . . I did try, simply as a test, and . . .

THE LADY And . . .

THE STRANGER . . . And it succeeded!—And ever since I have felt strong enough to continue. . . .

THE LADY Let us be on our way!

THE STRANGER [*facing the sea*] Yes—it is growing dark—the clouds are gathering. . . .

THE LADY Turn away from the clouds. . . .

THE STRANGER But underneath the clouds—what is that I see?

THE LADY It is only a sunken ship.

THE STRANGER [*in a whisper*] A trinity of crosses!—What new Golgotha can be awaiting us now?

THE LADY But they are white! That is an omen for good!

THE STRANGER Can anything good be in store for us ever?

THE LADY Yes—but not this very moment. . . .

THE STRANGER Let us go!

#### SCENE FOUR

*A room in a hotel. The Lady is seated beside the Stranger. She is knitting.*

THE LADY Say something!

THE STRANGER No—I have nothing to talk about except unpleasant things, since we came back to this room.

THE LADY Then why did you have no rest until you could move into this horrible room?

THE STRANGER I just don't know! There is nothing I could have wished for less!—I felt I had to come here in order to suffer! That's the reason!

THE LADY And you have suffered. . . .

THE STRANGER Yes. . . . No longer do I hear anything to inspire me—I see nothing of beauty. . . . In the daytime I hear the mill grinding and see the vast panorama which has enlarged into a cosmorama . . . and during the night. . . .

THE LADY Yes—why did you scream in your sleep?

THE STRANGER I had a dream. . . .

THE LADY A true dream? . . .

THE STRANGER . . . so horribly real. . . . Now you can see the curse coming true: I feel a

compulsion to tell someone . . . and to whom if not you? But I can't—for then I would open the door to the forbidden room. . . .

THE LADY The past, you mean?

THE STRANGER Yes!

THE LADY [*artlessly*] There must be something wicked in your past?

THE STRANGER There might well be.

[*There is a silence.*]

THE LADY Tell me!

THE STRANGER I am afraid I must!—Well, I dreamed that I saw—your former husband—married to—my former wife. . . . My children, consequently, would have him—as their father. . . .

THE LADY No one but you could have invented such a thing!

THE STRANGER Oh! If it were only a dream!—But I saw him mistreat them. . . . [*He rises.*] And then I strangled him, of course. . . . No, I can't go on! . . . I shall have no peace until I have reassured myself—and to do that, I shall have to seek him out—in his own home! . . .

THE LADY It has come to this!

THE STRANGER It has been brewing for some time—and now there is no turning back. . . . I have to see him!

THE LADY And if he refuses to see you?

THE STRANGER Then I must go to him as a patient and tell him about my sickness. . . .

THE LADY [*frightened*] Don't tell him about your sickness—whatever you do!

THE STRANGER I see what you mean. . . . You mean he might feel compelled to shut me up as demented. . . . Well, I have to take that risk. . . . I feel that I have to risk everything—life, liberty and all that goes with it! I feel the need for an emotion, an excitement so powerful that my own self is shaken up and brought to see the light again! I revel in torturing myself until the balance in our relationship is restored—so that I won't have to lurk about like a man in debt. . . . And so: down into the snake pit—and the sooner the better!

THE LADY If you would only let me go along with you. . . .

THE STRANGER There is no need for that! I shall suffer for us both!

THE LADY Then you will be my liberator . . .

and the curse that I once called down upon you shall be turned into a blessing!—You see—it is spring again!

**THE STRANGER** I see it by the Christmas rose there—it is beginning to wither.

**THE LADY** But can't you feel it in the air?

**THE STRANGER** Yes, I feel the chill in my breast going away. . . .

**THE LADY** Perhaps the werewolf can cure you completely?

**THE STRANGER** We shall see. He may not be so dangerous after all.

**THE LADY** He certainly couldn't be as cruel as you are.

**THE STRANGER** But my dream!—Imagine. . . .

**THE LADY** . . . if it turned out to be nothing but

a dream!—Well, now I have no more yarn left—but my worthless needlework is finished! And look how soiled it is!

**THE STRANGER** It can be washed.

**THE LADY** Or dyed.

**THE STRANGER** A rosy red.

**THE LADY** Oh, no!

**THE STRANGER** It resembles a scroll of parchment . . .

**THE LADY** . . . holding the saga of our lives . . .

**THE STRANGER** . . . written in the dust and grime of the highroad—in blood and tears. . . .

**THE LADY** Yes—soon our tale will be told. . . . Go and complete the final chapter!

**THE STRANGER** And then we shall meet at the seventh station—from where we started. . . .

## act five

### SCENE ONE

*At the Physician's. The setting is nearly the same as earlier. The woodpile, however, is only half its former size; and on the veranda is seen a bench, on which lie a number of surgical instruments: knives, lancets, saws, pincers, etc. The Physician is engaged in cleaning the instruments.*

**THE SISTER** [coming from the veranda] There is a patient waiting for you.

**THE PHYSICIAN** Do you know him?

**THE SISTER** I didn't see him—but here is his card.

**THE PHYSICIAN** [taking the card and glancing at it] Why! This surpasses anything I have ever heard of. . . .

**THE SISTER** It isn't he, is it?

**THE PHYSICIAN** It is! While I do not belittle courage, I can't help finding this sort of forwardness a little cynical. I feel myself challenged! But, never mind, let him come in.

**THE SISTER** Are you serious?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Of course I am! But you might engage him in a casual conversation to begin with, if you wish—you know how to do it.

**THE SISTER** That is what I intended. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Good! You start in with the preliminaries, and I'll put on the finishing touches. . . .

**THE SISTER** Don't worry! I'll tell him everything that your good heart forbids you to say.

**THE PHYSICIAN** Never mind about my heart.—And hurry up before I lose my temper. . . . And lock the doors!

[The Sister leaves.]

**THE PHYSICIAN** What are you doing there again by the trash barrel, Caesar?

[Caesar steps forward.]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Tell me, Caesar—if your enemy came to you and put his head in your lap . . . what would you do?

**CAESAR** I'd chop off his head!

**THE PHYSICIAN** That's not what I have taught you!

**CAESAR** No—you told me to heap hot coals on his head . . . but I think that's cruel!

**THE PHYSICIAN** I think so, too, as a matter of fact! It is more cruel, and more crafty and treacherous.—Don't you think it would be better to take a less harsh revenge, so that the other fellow could be rehabilitated and feel that he has made up for his errors, so to speak? . . .

**CAESAR** Since you understand such things better than I—why do you ask me?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Be quiet, Caesar! I am not talking to you!—And so—let us take off his head—and then we'll see what to do next. . . .

**CAESAR** Depending upon how he behaves. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** Exactly!—How he behaves. . . .

Now be still! And go away! . . .

[*The Stranger comes from the veranda. He is agitated, but he collects himself with an air of resignation.*]

**THE STRANGER** Doctor!

**THE PHYSICIAN** Oh yes!

**THE STRANGER** You are surprised to see me here, aren't you?

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*with a solemn expression*] I ceased to be surprised years ago; but I see I have to begin all over again.

**THE STRANGER** Will you let me have a private talk with you?

**THE PHYSICIAN** On any subject fit to be discussed between cultivated persons, yes! Are you sick?

**THE STRANGER** [*hesitating*] Yes!

**THE PHYSICIAN** Why do you come especially to me?

**THE STRANGER** You should be able to guess why. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** I don't care to. . . . What is troubling you?

**THE STRANGER** [*hesitatingly*] I can't sleep.

**THE PHYSICIAN** That isn't an illness. It is a symptom.—Have you been to any other physician?

**THE STRANGER** I have been lying sick in—in an institution—with fever. . . . But it was no ordinary fever. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** What was strange about it?

**THE STRANGER** May I first ask you one question: Is it possible that one can walk about in a delirium?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Yes—if one is deranged—but only in such cases. . . .

[*The Stranger rises; then he seats himself again.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** What was the name of the institution?

**THE STRANGER** Its name was The Good Help. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** There is no hospital of that name.

**THE STRANGER** Is it a cloister, then?

**THE PHYSICIAN** No—it is an insane asylum!

[*The Stranger rises. The Physician gets up also.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*calling out*] Sister! Lock the door to the street! And the back gate—to the highway! [*To the Stranger*] Won't you please sit down!—I have to lock the doors because we've had tramps in the neighborhood recently. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*quieting down*] Doctor, tell me

frankly: Do you think I am mentally disturbed?

**THE PHYSICIAN** It is not customary to give a frank answer to such a question—you know that. And no one suffering from such a malady ever believes what he is told. Therefore it matters little what my opinion is.—If, on the other hand, you feel that your soul is afflicted, then—go to your spiritual adviser. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Wouldn't you care to assume that task yourself for the moment?

**THE PHYSICIAN** No—I do not feel myself capable of that.

**THE STRANGER** Even if . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*interrupting*] Besides, I haven't the time, for we are preparing for a wedding. . . .

**THE STRANGER** My dream! . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** I thought it would give you a little peace to know that I have overcome my sorrow—consoled myself, as it is called . . . and that it would even make you happy . . . that's what usually happens. . . . But instead I see you suffer even more. . . . There must be a reason for that! I have to get to the bottom of it little by little. . . . How can my marrying a widow possibly upset you?

**THE STRANGER** With two children?

**THE PHYSICIAN** Let me see! Let me see!—Now I have it! An infernal thought like that is indeed worthy of you! Listen carefully! If there were a hell, you would be its sovereign lord, for—when it comes to punishments—your power of invention surpasses my boldest fabrications—and yet I have been named the werewolf!

**THE STRANGER** It might seem . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** [*interrupting*] For a long time I bore a hatred for you, as you perhaps know . . . because you—by an unforgivable act—brought me an undeservedly bad reputation. . . . But as I grew older and more understanding, I realized that if my punishment at that time seemed unjust, I nevertheless deserved it for other pranks that had remained undiscovered. . . . And, besides, you were the sort of child with a conscience that would make you suffer—so that shouldn't worry you, either! Was this the subject you wanted to discuss?

**THE STRANGER** Yes!

**THE PHYSICIAN** Are you satisfied now, if I let you leave without hindrance?

[*The Stranger looks at the Physician quizzically.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** Or did you, perhaps, think that I intended to lock you up—or saw you in two with my instruments there? [*He points to a case with surgical instruments.*] Perhaps kill you? Such poor wretches should be done away with, of course, shouldn't they?

[*The Stranger looks at his watch.*]

**THE PHYSICIAN** You have time to catch the boat.

**THE STRANGER** Will you give me your hand?

**THE PHYSICIAN** No—that is something I can't do! I would be a traitor to myself! What good would it do, anyhow, if I did forgive you—when you haven't the strength to forgive yourself. . . . There are things that can only be helped by being undone. What you have done is irreparable!

**THE STRANGER** The Good Help . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** That was of some help, yes!—You challenged fate, and were defeated. . . . There is no shame in an honest battle! I did the same—but as you see, I have done away with part of my woodpile: I don't care to invite the lightning indoors—and I have given up playing with fire. . . .

**THE STRANGER** One more station—and I have reached my goal. . . .

**THE PHYSICIAN** We never reach our goal, my dear sir!

**THE STRANGER** Farewell!

## SCENE TWO

*On the street corner. The Stranger is seated on the bench underneath the tree. He is drawing in the sand. The Lady enters.*

**THE LADY** What are you doing?

**THE STRANGER** I am still writing in the sand. . . .

**THE LADY** You have found nothing to inspire you?

**THE STRANGER** [*pointing toward the church*] Yes—but from in there. . . . In there is someone I have wronged without knowing it. . . .

**THE LADY** I thought the pilgrimage was coming to its end, since we happened to come back here. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Where we started from . . . in

the street—between the bar-room, the church and—the post office. . . . The post office. Post . . . tell me—didn't I leave a registered letter uncalled for there—at the general delivery? . . .

**THE LADY** Yes—because it was full of maliciousness, you said. . . .

**THE STRANGER** . . . or legal court proceedings. [*He strikes his forehead.*] . . . It's still lying there.

**THE LADY** Go inside with the thought that it brings good news. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*with irony*] Good news!

**THE LADY** Think it! Believe it!

**THE STRANGER** [*goes into the post office*] I shall try!

[*The Lady, waiting on the sidewalk, walks back and forth. The Stranger comes out from the post office with a letter in his hand.*]

**THE LADY** Well?

**THE STRANGER** I am ashamed of myself!—It's the money!

**THE LADY** You see!—And all these sorrows—these many tears—all in vain. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Not in vain!—It may seem like a game of evil, but it probably isn't. . . . I wronged the Invisible One when I doubted. . . .

**THE LADY** Ssh! Not that! Don't put the blame on others. . . .

**THE STRANGER** No—it was my own stupidity—my own weakness and evil-doing. . . . I hated to be the dupe of life—that is why I became its victim!—But the elves. . . .

**THE LADY** They have made the exchange!—Let us leave. . . .

**THE STRANGER** Yes, let us go and hide ourselves in the mountains—with all our misery. . . .

**THE LADY** Yes—the mountains hide—and they protect. . . . But first I must go inside and light a candle to my good Saint Elisabeth. . . .

[*The Stranger shakes his head.*]

**THE LADY** Come!

**THE STRANGER** Oh well! I'll go with you inside—It can't hurt me—but I won't stay for long!

**THE LADY** You never know. . . . Come! In there you will receive fresh inspiration. . . .

**THE STRANGER** [*follows her to the portals of the church*] Perhaps. . . .

**THE LADY** Come!



The last scene of Part III of *To Damascus* is worth quoting in its entirety. It brings the cycle of acceptance, rejection, and resignation to an end, but only for immediate theatrical purposes. Because the Stranger only pretends to die and the funeral ceremony is only a mock ritual, we understand that he will soon once again be on the road to Damascus. The return, by implication at least, to the mood of the opening scene of Part I of the trilogy is a striking anticipation

of the structure of *Finnegans Wake*. How close Strindberg's thought was to Joyce's is a matter for entertaining conjecture. Certainly, though there is nothing in *To Damascus* to compare with the verbal ingenuity demonstrated in the *Wake*, there is every sort of likeness in the freedom of the imagination exercised in the two works and in the emphasis both men place on the words and images of the world of dream and hallucination.

*The sanctuary of the chapel. An open coffin with funeral pall. Two lighted candles. The Confessor enters. He leads the Stranger, now dressed in the white linen robe of a novice, by the hand.*

**THE CONFESSOR** And so you have carefully considered the step you are now about to take?

**THE STRANGER** I have—carefully!

**THE CONFESSOR** And have no more questions you wish to ask?

**THE STRANGER** Questions to ask? . . . No!

**THE CONFESSOR** Then remain here while I go to call together the chapter, the fathers and the brothers, so that we can begin the ceremony.

**THE STRANGER** Very well! So be it!

*[The Confessor leaves. The Stranger is alone. He stands meditating. The Tempter enters. He goes to the Stranger.]*

**THE TEMPTER** Are you ready?

**THE STRANGER** So ready that I have no words left to answer you with.

**THE TEMPTER** At the brink of the grave. . . . I understand. You are to lie in that coffin and make believe you are dying; three shovels of earth are to be heaped on the old being and then *De profundis* is to be sung. With that you are raised from the dead—you will have shed your old name—and you will be baptized again like a newborn infant. . . . What will be your new name, do you know? *[The Stranger does not answer.]* There it is written: John—Brother John—because you had been preaching in the wilderness and . . .

**THE STRANGER** Let me be!

**THE TEMPTER** Say a few words to me first, before you enter upon the long silence . . . after this, you know, you will not be permitted to speak for a whole year!

**THE STRANGER** So much the better! At the end,

speaking became a vice, just like drinking! And why speak, when your words fail to convey what you think?

**THE TEMPTER** Now that you stand at the brink of the grave—did you find life so very bitter?

**THE STRANGER** My life—yes!

**THE TEMPTER** Did you never know any joy?

**THE STRANGER** Yes, much joy—but, oh, so brief—and it seemed as if it only existed to make the grief over losing it so much the deeper!

**THE TEMPTER** Could one not, conversely, say that sorrow existed for the purpose of bringing out joy, and emphasizing it?

**THE STRANGER** One can say whatever one likes. *[A woman carrying an infant in baptismal robe passes across the stage.]*

**THE TEMPTER** There you see a little mortal about to be consecrated to suffering!

**THE STRANGER** Poor child!

**THE TEMPTER** The beginning of a human tale. . . . *[A bride and bridegroom walk across the stage. The Tempter points to them.]* And there you see—the sweetest—the bitterest—Adam and Eve in their Paradise . . . which after a week or so will be a hell—and in fourteen days a Paradise again. . . .

**THE STRANGER** The sweetest! The brightest! . . . The first—the only—the last . . . that which gave meaning to life. I, too, had my day in the sun once. . . . It was a day in Spring—on a veranda—beneath the first tree to bear leaves—and a tiny coronet crowned her head, a white veil—like a gentle mist—covered her countenance, which was not of this world. . . .

And then came the darkness. . . .

**THE TEMPTER** From where?

**THE STRANGER** From the light itself! . . . That is all I know!

**THE TEMPTER** It could not have been anything but a shadow; for without light there can be no shadow—but where there is darkness there can be no light.

**THE STRANGER** Stop! Or there will be no end to this!

*[The Confessor and the Chapter enter in procession.]*

**THE TEMPTER** *[as he disappears]* Farewell!

**THE CONFESSOR** *[with a large black funeral pall]*  
May the Lord give him eternal rest!

**THE CHOIR** And may perpetual light shine upon him!

**THE CONFESSOR** *[covering the Stranger with the funeral pall]* May he rest in peace!

**THE CHOIR** Amen!







