

Comrades

BY AUGUST STRINDBERG

Comedy in Four Acts

CHARACTERS

AXEL, an artist BERTHA, his wife, artist ABEL, her friend
WILLMER, litterateur ÖSTERMARK, a doctor MRS. HALL, his
divorced wife THE MISSES HALL, her daughters by a second
marriage CARL STARCK, lieutenant MRS. STARCK, his wife
MAID

[SCENE for the whole play.--An artist's studio in Paris; it is on the ground floor, has glass windows looking out on an orchard. At back of scene a large window and door to hall. On the walls hang studies, canvases, weapons, costumes and plaster casts. To right there is a door leading to Axel's room; to left a door leading to Bertha's room. There is a model stand left center. To right an easel and painting materials. A large sofa, a large store through the doors of which one sees a hot coal fire. There is a hanging-lamp from ceiling. At rise of curtain Axel and Doctor Östermark are discovered.]

ACT I.

AXEL [Sitting, painting]. And you, too, are in Paris!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Everything gathers here as the center of the world; and so you are married--and happy?

AXEL. Oh, yes, so, so. Yes, I'm quite happy. That's understood.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. What's understood?

AXEL. Look here, you're a widower. How was it with your marriage?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, very nice--for her.

AXEL. And for you?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. So, so! But you see one must compromise, and we compromised to the end.

AXEL. What do you mean by compromise?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. I mean--that I gave in!

AXEL. You?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Yes, you wouldn't think that of a man like me, would you?

AXEL. No, I would never have thought that. Look here, don't you believe in woman, eh?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. No, sir! I do not. But I love her.

AXEL. In your way--yes!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. In my way--yes. How about your way?

AXEL. We have arranged a sort of comradeship, you see, and friendship is higher and more enduring than love.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. H'm--so Bertha paints too. How? Well?

AXEL. Fairly well.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. We were good friends in the old days, she and I,--that is, we always quarreled a little.--Some visitors. Hush! It is Carl and his wife!

AXEL [Rising]. And Bertha isn't at home! Sacristi! [Enter Lieutenant Carl Starck and his wife.] Welcome! Well, well, we certainly meet

here from all corners of the world! How do you do, Mrs. Starck?
You're looking well after your journey.

MRS. STARCK. Thanks, dear Axel, we have certainly had a
delightful trip. But where is Bertha?

CARL. Yes, where is the young wife?

AXEL. She's out at the studio, but she'll be home at any moment now.
But won't you sit down?

[The doctor greets the visitors.]

CARL. Hardly. We were passing by and thought we would just look
in to see how you are. But we shall be on hand, of course, for your
invitation for Saturday, the first of May.

AXEL. That's good. You got the card then?

MRS. STARCK. Yes, we received it while we were in Hamburg.
Well, what is Bertha doing nowadays?

AXEL. Oh, she paints, as I do. In fact, we're expecting her model, and
as he may come at any moment, perhaps I can't risk you to sit down
after all, if I'm going to be honest.

CARL. Do you think we would blush, then?

MRS. STARCK. He isn't nude, is he?

AXEL. Of course.

CARL. A man? The devil!--No, I couldn't allow my wife to be mixed
up with anything of that sort. Alone with a naked man!

AXEL. I see you still have prejudices, Carl.

CARL. Yes, you know--

MRS. STARCK. Fie!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Yes, that's what I say, too.

AXEL. I can't deny that it, is not altogether to my taste, but as long as I must have a woman model--

MRS. STARCK. That's another matter.

AXEL. Another?

MRS. STARCK. Yes, it is another matter--although it resembles the other, it is not the same. [There is a knock.]

AXEL. There he is!

MRS. STARCK. We'll go, then. Good-bye and au revoir. Give my love to Bertha.

AXEL. Good-bye, then, as you're so scared. And au revoir.

CARL and DR. ÖSTERMARK. Good-bye, Axel.

CARL [To Axel]. You stay in here, at least, while--

AXEL. No, why should I?

CARL [Goes shaking his head]. Ugh!

[Axel alone starts to paint. There is a knock.]

AXEL. Come in. [The model enters.] So, you are back again. Madame hasn't returned yet.

THE MODEL. But it's almost twelve, and I must keep another appointment.

AXEL. Is that so? It's too bad, but--h'm--something must have detained her at the studio. How much do I owe you?

THE MODEL. Five francs, as usual.

AXEL [Paying him]. There. Perhaps you'd better wait awhile, nevertheless.

THE MODEL. Yes, if I'm needed.

AXEL. Yes, be kind enough to wait a few minutes.

[The model retires behind a screen. Axel alone, draws and whistles. Bertha comes in after a moment.]

AXEL. Hello, my dear! So you're back at last?

BERTHA. At last?

AXEL. Yes, your model is waiting.

BERTHA [Startled]. No! No! Has he been here again?

AXEL. You had engaged him for eleven o'clock.

BERTHA. I? No! Did he say that?

AXEL. Yes. But I heard you when you made the engagement yesterday.

BERTHA. Perhaps it's so, then, but anyway the professor wouldn't let us leave and you know how nervous one gets in the last hours. You're not angry with me, Axel?

AXEL. Angry? No. But this is the second time, and he gets his five francs for nothing, nevertheless.

BERTHA. Can I help it if the professor keeps us? Why must you always pick on me?

AXEL. Do I pick on you?

BERTHA. What's that? Didn't you--

AXEL. Yes, yes, yes! I picked on you--forgive me--forgive me--for thinking that it was your fault.

BERTHA. Well, it's all right there. But what did you pay him with?

AXEL. To be sure. Gaga paid back the twenty francs he owed me.

BERTHA [Takes out account-book.] So, he paid you back? Come on, then, and I'll put it down, for the sake of order. It's your money, so of course you can dispose of it as you please, but as you wish me to take care of the accounts--[Writes] fifteen francs in, five francs out, model. There.

AXEL. No. Look here. It's twenty francs in.

BERTHA. Yes, but there are only fifteen here.

AXEL. Yes, but you should put down twenty.

BERTHA. Why do you argue?

AXEL. Did I--Well, the man's waiting--

BERTHA. Oh, yes. Be good and get things ready for me.

AXEL. [Puts model stand in place. Calls to model]. Are you undressed yet?

THE MODEL [From back of screen]. Soon, monsieur.

BERTHA [Closes door, puts wood in stove]. There, now you must go out.

AXEL [Hesitating]. Bertha!

BERTHA. Yes?

AXEL. Is it absolutely necessary--with a nude model?

BERTHA. Absolutely!

AXEL. H'm--indeed!

BERTHA. We have certainly argued that matter out.

AXEL. Quite true. But it's loathsome nevertheless--[Goes out right.]

BERTHA [Takes up brushes and palette. Calls to model]. Are you ready?

THE MODEL. All ready.

BERTHA. Come on, then. [Pause.] Come on. [There is a knock.] Who is it? I have a model.

WILLMER [Outside]. Willmer. With news from the salon.

BERTHA. From the salon! [To model]. Dress yourself! We'll have to postpone the sitting.--Axel! Willmer is here with news from the salon.

[Axel comes in, also Willmer; the model goes out unnoticed during the following scene.]

WILMER. Hello, dear friends! Tomorrow the jury will begin its work. Oh, Bertha, here are your pastels. [Takes package from pocket.]

BERTHA. Thanks, my good Gaga; how much did they cost? They must have been expensive.

WILLMER. Oh, not very.

BERTHA. So they are to start tomorrow. So soon? Do you hear, Axel?

AXEL. Yes, my friend.

BERTHA. Now, will you be very good, very, very good?

AXEL. I always want to be good to you, my friend.

BERTHA. You do? Now, listen. You know Roubey, don't you?

AXEL. Yes, I met him in Vienna mid we became good friends, as it's called.

BERTHA. You know that he is on the jury?

AXEL. And then what?

BERTHA. Well--now you'll be angry, I know you will.

AXEL. You know it? Don't prove it, then.

BERTHA [Coaxing]. You wouldn't make a sacrifice for your wife, would you?

AXEL. Go begging? No, I don't want to do that.

BERTHA. Not for me? You'll get in anyway, but for your wife!

AXEL. Don't ask me.

BERTHA. I should really never ask you for anything!

AXEL. Yes, for things that I can do without sacrificing--

BERTHA. Your man's pride!

AXEL. Let it go at that.

BERTHA. But I would sacrifice my woman's pride if I could help you.

AXEL. You women have no pride.

BERTHA. Axel!

AXEL. Well, well, pardon, pardon!

BERTHA. You must be jealous. I don't believe you would really like it if I were accepted at the salon.

AXEL. Nothing would make me happier. Believe me, Bertha.

BERTHA. Would you be happy, too, if I were accepted and you were refused?

AXEL. I must feel and see. [Puts his hand over his heart.] No, that would be decidedly disagreeable, decidedly. In the first place, because I paint better than you do, and because--

BERTHA [Walking up and down]. Speak out. Because I am a woman!

AXEL. Yes, just that. It may seem strange, but to me it's as if you women were intruding and plundering where we have fought for so long while you sat by the fire. Forgive me, Bertha, for talking like this, but such thoughts have occurred to me.

BERTHA. Has it ever occurred to you that you're exactly like all other men?

AXEL. Like all others? I should hope so!

BERTHA. And you have become so superior lately. You didn't use to be like that.

AXEL. It must be because I am superior! Doing something that we men have never done before!

BERTHA. What! What are you saving! Shame on you!

WILLMER. There, there, good friends! No, but, dear friends--Bertha, control yourself.

[He gives her a look which she tries to make out.]

BERTHA [Changing]. Axel, let's be friends! And hear me a moment. Do you think that my position in your house--for it is yours--is

agreeable to me? You support me, you pay for my studying at Julian's, while you yourself cannot afford instruction. Don't you think I see how you sit and wear out yourself and your talent on these pot-boiling drawings, and are able to paint only in leisure moments? You haven't been able to afford models for yourself, while you pay mine five hard-earned francs an hour. You don't know how good--how noble--how sacrificing you are, and also you don't know how I suffer to see you toil so for me. Oh, Axel, you can't know how I feel my position. What am I to you? Of what use am I in your house? Oh, I blush when I think about it!

AXEL. What, what, what! Aren't you my wife?

BERTHA. Yes, but--

AXEL. Well, then?

BERTHA. But you support me.

AXEL. Well, isn't that the right thing to do?

BERTHA. It was formerly--according to the old scheme of marriage, but we weren't to have it like that. We were to be comrades.

AXEL. What talk! Isn't a man to support his wife?

BERTHA. I don't want it. And you, Axel, you must help me. I'm not your equal when it's like that, but I could be if you would humble yourself once, just once! Don't think that you are alone in going to one of the jury to say a good word for another. If it were for yourself, it would be another matter, but for me--Forgive me! Now I beg of you as nicely as I know how. Lift me from my humiliating position to your side, and I'll be so grateful I shall never trouble you again with reminding you of my position. Never, Axel!

AXEL. Don't ask me; you know how weak I am.

BERTHA [Embracing him]. Yes, I shall ask you--beg of you, until you fulfil my prayer. Now, don't look so proud, but be human! So! [Kisses him.]

AXEL [To Willmer]. Look here, Gaga, don't you think that women are terrible tyrants?

WILLMER [Pained]. Yes, and especially when they are submissive.

BERTHA. See, now, the sky is clear again. You'll go, won't you, Axel? Get on your black coat now, and go. Then come home, and we'll strike out together for something to eat.

AXEL. How do you know that Roubey is receiving now?

BERTHA. Don't you think that I made sure of that?

AXEL. What a schemer you are!

BERTHA [Takes a black cutaway coat from wardrobe]. Well, one would never get anywhere without a little wire-pulling, you know. Here's your black coat. So!

AXEL. Yes. But this is awful. What am I to say to the man?

BERTHA. H'm. Oh, you'll hit, on something on the way. Say that--that--that your wife--no--that you're expecting a christening--

AXEL. Fie, Bertha.

BERTHA. Well, say that you can get him decorated, then.

AXEL. Really you frighten me, Bertha!

BERTHA. Say what you please, then. Come, now, and I'll fix your hair so you'll be presentable. Do you know his wife?

AXEL. No, not at all.

BERTHA [Brushing his hair]. Then you must get an introduction to her. I understand that she has great influence, but that she doesn't like women.

AXEL. What are you doing to my hair?

BERTHA. I am fixing it as they are wearing it now.

AXEL. Yes, but I don't want it that way.

BERTHA. Now then--that's fine. Just mind me. [She goes to chiffonier and takes out a case which contains a Russian Annae order. She tries to put it in Axel's buttonhole.]

AXEL. No, Bertha. You've gone far enough now. I won't wear that decoration.

BERTHA. But you accepted it.

AXEL. Yes, because I couldn't decline it. But I'll never wear it.

BERTHA. Do you belong to some political party that is so liberal-minded as to suppress individual freedom to accept distinctions?

AXEL. No, I don't. But I belong to a circle of comrades who have promised each other not to wear their merit on their coats.

BERTHA. But who have accepted salon medals!

AXEL. Which are not worn on their coats.

BERTHA. What do you say to this, Gaga?

WILLMER. As long as distinctions exist, one does one's self harm to go about with the mark of infamy, and the example no one is likely to follow. Take them away for all of me--I certainly can't get them away from the others.

AXEL. Yes, and when my comrades who are more deserving than I do not wear them, I would lower them by wearing the emblem.

BERTHA. But it doesn't show under your overcoat. No one will know, and you won't brand any one.

WILLMER. Bertha is right there. You'll wear your order *under* your coat, not *on* your coat.

AXEL. Jesuits! When you are given a finger, you take the whole arm.

[Abel comes in wearing fur coat and cap.]

BERTHA. Oh, here's Abel! Come on, now, and settle this controversy.

ABEL. Hello, Bertha! Hello, Axel! How are you, Gaga? What's the matter?

BERTHA. Axel doesn't want to wear his order, because he daren't on account of his comrades.

ABEL. Comrades come before a wife, of course--that's an unwritten law. [She sits by table, takes up tobacco and rolls a cigarette.]

BERTHA [Fastens ribbon in Axel's buttonhole and puts the star back in case] He can help me without hurting any one, but I fear he would rather hurt me!

AXEL. Bertha, Bertha! But you people will drive me mad! I don't consider it a crime to wear this ribbon, nor have I taken any oath that I wouldn't do so, but at our exhibitions it's considered cowardly not to dare to make one's way without them.

BERTHA. Cowardly, of course! But you're not going to take your own course this time--but mine!

ABEL. You owe it to the woman who has consecrated her life to you to be her delegate.

AXEL. I feel that what you people are saying is false, but I haven't the time or energy to answer you now; but there is an answer! It's as if you were drawing a net about me while I sit absorbed in my work. I can feel the net winding about me, but my foot gets entangled when I want to kick it aside. But, you wait, if only I free my hands, I'll get out my knife and cut the meshes of your net! What were we talking

about? Oh, yes, I was going to make a call. Give me my gloves and my overcoat. Good-bye, Bertha! Good-bye. Oh, yes,--where does Roubey live?

WILLMER, ABEL and BERTHA [In unison]. Sixty-five Rue des Martyrs.

AXEL. Why, that's right near here!

BERTHA. Just at the corner. Thanks, Axel, for going. Does the sacrifice feel very heavy?

AXEL. I can't feel anything but that I am tired of all this talk and that it will be delightful to get out. Good-bye. [Goes out.]

ABEL. It's too bad about Axel. It's a pity. Did you know that he is refused?

BERTHA. And I, then?

ABEL. That's not settled yet. As you wrote your own name with French spelling, you won't be reached until O.

BERTHA. There's still hope for me?

ABEL. Yes, for you, but not for Axel.

WILLMER. Now, we'll see something!

BERTHA. How do you know that he is refused?

ABEL. H'm, I met a "hors concours" who knew, and I was quite prepared to witness a scene when I came in here. But of course he hasn't received the notice yet.

BERTHA. No, not that I know of. But, Abel, are you sure that Axel will meet Madame Roubey and not Monsieur?

ABEL. What should he see Monsieur Roubey for? He hasn't any say about it, but she is president of the Woman-Painters Protective Society.

BERTHA. And I am not refused--yet?

ABEL. No, as I said, and Axel's call is bound to do good. He has a Russian order, and everything Russian is very popular in Paris just now. But it's too bad about Axel just the same.

BERTHA. Too bad? Why? They haven't room for everybody on the salon walls. There are so many women refused that a man might put up with it and be made to feel it for once. But if I get in now--we'll soon hear how *he* painted my picture, how *he* has taught me, how *he* has paid for my lessons. But I shall not take any notice of that, because it isn't true.

WILLMER. Well, we're bound to see something unusual happen now.

BERTHA. No, I believe--granted that I am not refused--that we'll see something very usual. But nevertheless I'm afraid of the actual moment. Something tells me that things won't be right between Axel and me again.

ABEL. And it was just when you were equals that things were going to be right.

WILLMER. It seems to me that your position will be much more clearly defined and much pleasanter when you can sell your pictures and support yourself.

BERTHA. It should be! We'll see--we'll see! [The maid enters with a green letter.] A green letter for Axel! Here it is! Here it is! He is refused! Yes, but this is terrible; however, it will be a consolation to me if I should be refused.

ABEL. But if you are not refused?

BERTHA [Pause].

ABEL. You won't answer that?

BERTHA. No, I won't answer that.

ABEL. Because, if you are accepted, the equality will be destroyed, as you will be his superior.

BERTHA. Superior? A wife superior to her husband--her husband--oh!

WILLMER. It's about time an example was made.

ABEL [To Bertha]. You were at the luncheon today? Was it interesting?

BERTHA. Oh, yes.

WILLMER. When are you going to review my book, Abel?

ABEL. I'm just working on it.

WILLMER. Are you going to be nice to me?

ABEL. Very nice.--Well, Bertha, how and when will you deliver the letter?

BERTHA [Walking about]. That is just, what I am thinking about. If he hasn't met Madame Roubey, and if he hasn't carried out our plan, he will hardly do it after receiving this blow.

ABEL [Rising]. I don't think Axel is so base as to revenge himself on you.

BERTHA. Base? Such talk! Didn't he go just now when I wanted him to, because I am his wife? Do you think he would ever have gone for any one else?

ABEL. Would you like it if he had done it for some one else?

BERTHA. Good-bye to you--you must go now, before he returns!

ABEL. That's what I think. Good bye, Bertha.

WILLMER. Yes, we had better get away. Goodbye for now.

[The maid enters and announces Mrs. Hall.]

BERTHA. Who? Mrs. Hall? Who can that be?

ABEL and WILLMER. Good-bye, Bertha.

[They go out. Mrs. Hall comes in. She is flashily though carelessly dressed. She looks like an adventuress.]

MRS. HALL. I don't know that I have the honor to be known to you, but you are Mrs. Alberg, née Ålund, are you not?

BERTHA. Yes, I'm Mrs. Alberg. Won't you sit down?

MRS. HALL. My name is Hall. [Sits.] Oh, my lord, but I'm so tired! I have walked up so many stairs--oh-ho-ho-ho, I believe I'll faint!

BERTHA. How can I be of service to you?

MRS. HALL. You know Doctor Östermark, don't you?

BERTHA. Yes, he's an old friend of mine.

MRS. HALL. An old friend. Well, you see, dear Mrs. Alberg, I was married to him once, but we separated. I am his divorced wife.

BERTHA. Oh! He has never told me about that.

MRS. HALL. Oh, people don't tell such things.

BERTHA. He told me he was a widower.

MRS. HALL. Well, you were a young girl then, and I suppose he isn't so anxious to have it known anyway.

BERTHA. And I who have always believed that Doctor Östermark was an honorable man!

MRS. HALL [Sarcastic]. Yes, he's a good one! He is a real gentleman, I must say.

BERTHA. Well, but why do you tell me all this?

MRS. HALL. Just wait, my dear Mrs. Alberg wait and you shall hear. You are a member of the society, aren't you?

BERTHA. Yes, I am.

MRS. HALL. Just so; only wait now.

BERTHA. Did you have any children?

MRS. HALL. Two--two daughters, Mrs. Alberg.

BERTHA. That's another matter! And he left you in want?

MRS. HALL. Just wait now! He gave us a small allowance, not enough for the rent even. And now that the girls are grown up and about to start in life, now he writes us that he is a bankrupt and that he can't send us more than half the allowance. Isn't that nice, just now, when the girls are grown up and are going out into life?

BERTHA. We must look into this. He'll be here in a few days. Do you know that you have the law on your side and that the courts can force him to pay? And he shall be forced to do so. Do you understand? So, he can bring children into the world and then leave them empty-handed with the poor, deserted mother. Oh, he'll find out something very different! Will you give me your address?

MRS. HALL [Gives her card]. You are so good, Mrs. Alberg. And you won't be vexed with me if I ask a little favor of you?

BERTHA. You can depend on me entirely. I shall write the secretary immediately--

MRS. HALL. Oh, you're so good, but before the secretary can answer, I and my poor children will probably be thrown out into the street. Dear Mrs. Alberg, you couldn't lend me a trifle--just wait--a trifle of twenty francs?

BERTHA. No, dear lady, I haven't any money. My husband supports me for the time being, and you may be sure that I'm reminded of the fact. It's bitter to eat the bread of charity when one is young, but better times are coming for me too.

MRS. HALL. My dear, good Mrs. Alberg, you must not refuse me. If you do, I am a lost woman. Help me, for heaven's sake.

BERTHA. Are you terribly in need?

MRS. HALL. And you ask me that!

BERTHA. I'll let you have this money as a loan. [She goes to chiffonier.] Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty--lacking twenty. What did I do with it? H'm, luncheon, of course! [She writes in account-book.] Paints twenty, incidentals twenty--there you are.

MRS. HALL. Thank you, my good Mrs. Alberg, thanks, dear lady.

BERTHA. There, there. But I can't give you any more time today. So, good-bye, and depend on me.

MRS. HALL [Uncertain]. Just a moment now.

BERTHA [Listening without]. No, you must go now.

MRS. HALL. Just a moment. What was I going to say?--Well, it doesn't matter.

[Goes out. Bertha is alone for a moment, when she hears Axel coming. She hides the green letter in her pocket.]

BERTHA. Back already? Well, did you meet her--him?

AXEL. I didn't meet him, but her, which was much better. I congratulate you, Bertha. Your picture is already accepted!

BERTHA. Oh, no! What are you saying? And yours?

AXEL. It isn't decided yet--but it will surely go through, too.

BERTHA. Are you sure of that?

AXEL. Of course--

BERTHA. Oh, I'm accepted! Good, how good! But why don't you congratulate me?

AXEL. Haven't I? I'm quite sure that I said, "I congratulate you!" For that matter, one mustn't sell the skin before the bear is killed. To get into the salon isn't anything. It's just a toss-up. It can even depend on what letter one's name begins with. You come in O, as you spelled your name in French. When the lettering starts with M it's always easier.

BERTHA. So, you wish to say that perhaps I got in because my name begins with O?

AXEL. Not on account of that alone.

BERTHA. And if you are refused, it's because your name begins with A.

AXEL. Not exactly that alone, but it might be on that account.

BERTHA. Look here, I don't think you're as honorable as you would seem. You are jealous.

AXEL. Why should I be, when I don't know what has happened to me yet?

BERTHA. But when you do know?

AXEL. What? [Bertha takes out letter. Axel puts his hand to his heart and sits in a chair.] What! [Controls himself.] That was a blow I had not expected. That was most disagreeable!

BERTHA. Well, I suppose I'll have to help you now.

AXEL, You seem to be filled with malicious delight, Bertha. Oh, I feel that a great hate is beginning to grow in here. [Indicating his breast.]

BERTHA. Perhaps I look delighted because I've had a success, but when one is tied to a man who cannot rejoice in another's good fortune, it's difficult to sympathize with his misfortune.

AXEL. I don't know why, but it seems as if we had become enemies now. The strife of position has come between us, and we can never be friends any more.

BERTHA. Can't your sense of justice bend and recognize me as the abler, the victorious one in the strife?

AXEL. You are not the abler.

BERTHA. The jury must have thought so, however.

AXEL. But surely you know that I paint better than you do.

BERTHA. Are you so sure of that?

AXEL. Yes, I am. But for that matter--you worked under better conditions than I. You didn't have to do any pot-boiling, you could go to the studio, you had models, and you were a woman!

BERTHA. Yes, now I'll hear how I have lived on you--

AXEL. Between ourselves, yes, but the world won't know unless you go and tell it yourself.

BERTHA. Oh, the world knows that already. But tell me, why don't you suffer when a comrade, a man comrade, is accepted, although he has less merit than you?

AXEL. I'll have to think about that. You see our feeling toward you women has never been critical--we've taken you as a matter of course, and so I've never thought about our relations as against each other. Now when the shoe pinches, it strikes me that we are not comrades, for this experience makes me feel that you women do not belong here. [Indicating the studio.] A comrade is a more or less loyal competitor; we are enemies. You women have been lying down in the rear while we attacked the enemy. And now, when we have set and supplied the table, you pounce down upon it as if you were in your own home!

BERTHA. Oh, fie, have we ever been allowed in the conflict?

AXEL. You have always been allowed, but you have never wanted to take part, or haven't been able to do so in our domain, where you are now breaking in. Technic had to be put through its whole development and completion by us before you entered. And now you buy the centurions' work for ten francs an hour in a studio, and with money that we have acquired by our work.

BERTHA. You are not honorable now, Axel.

AXEL. When was I honorable? When I allowed you to use me like an old shoe? But now you are my superior--and now I can't strive to be honorable any longer. Do you know that this adversity will also change our economic relations? I cannot think of painting any more, but must give up my life's dream and become a pot-boiler in earnest.

BERTHA. You needn't do that; when I can sell, I will support myself.

AXEL. For that matter, what sort of an alliance have we gone into? Marriage should be built on common interests; ours is built on opposing interests.

BERTHA. You can work all that out by yourself; I'm going out for dinner now,--are you coming?

AXEL. No, I want to be alone with my unhappiness.

BERTHA. And I want company for my happiness.--But we have invited people to come here for the evening--that won't do now, with your misery, will it?

AXEL. It isn't a very brilliant prospect, but there's no way out. Let them come.

BERTHA [Dressing to go out]. But you must be here, or it will look as if you were cowardly.

AXEL. I'll be with you, don't worry--but give me a bit of money before you go.

BERTHA. We've reached the end of our cash.

AXEL. The end?

BERTHA. Yes, money comes to an end too!

AXEL. Can you lend me ten francs?

BERTHA [Taking out pocketbook]. Ten francs? Yes, indeed, if I have it. Here you are. Won't you come along? Tell me. They'll think it rather strange!

AXEL. And play the defeated lion before the triumphant chariot? No, indeed, I'll need my time to learn my part for this evening's performance.

BERTHA. Good-bye then.

AXEL. Good-bye, Bertha. Let me ask you one thing.

BERTHA. What then?

AXEL. Don't come home intoxicated. It would be more disagreeable today than ever.

BERTHA. Does it concern you how I come home?

AXEL. Well, I feel sort of responsible for you, as for a relative, considering that you bear the same name that I do, and besides, it is still disgusting to me to see a woman intoxicated.

BERTHA. Why is it any more disgusting than to see a man intoxicated?

AXEL. Yes, why? Perhaps because you don't bear being seen without a disguise.

BERTHA [Starting]. Good-bye, you old talking-machine. You won't come along?

AXEL. No!

[Bertha goes out; Axel rises, takes off his cutaway to change it for working coat.]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

[Same scene as Act I, but there is a large table with chairs around it in middle of scene. On table there is writing material and a speaker's gavel. Axel is painting. Abel is sitting near him. She is smoking.]

AXEL. They have finished dinner and are having their coffee now. Did they drink much?

ABEL. Oh, yes, and Bertha bragged and was disagreeable.

AXEL. Tell me one thing, Abel, are you my friend, or not?

ABEL. H'm--I don't know.

AXEL. Can I trust you?

ABEL. No--you can't.

AXEL. Why not?

ABEL. Oh, I just feel that you can't.

AXEL. Tell me, Abel, you who have the common sense of a man and can be reasoned with, tell me how it feels to be a woman. Is it so awful?

ABEL [Jokingly]. Yes, of course. It feels like being a nigger.

AXEL. That's strange. Listen, Abel. You know that I have a passion for equity and justice--

ABEL. I know you are a visionary--and that's why things will never go well with you.

AXEL. But things go well with you--because you never feel anything?

ABEL. Yes.

AXEL. Abel, have you really never had any desire to love a man?

ABEL. How silly you are!

AXEL. Have you never found any one?

ABEL. No, men are very scarce.

AXEL. H'm, don't you consider me a man?

ABEL. You! No!

AXEL. That's what I fancied myself to be.

ABEL. Are you a man? You, who work for a woman and go around dressed like a woman?

AXEL. What? I, dressed like a woman?

ABEL. The way you wear your hair and go around bare-necked, while she wears stiff collars and short hair; be careful, she'll soon take your trousers away from you.

AXEL. How you talk!

ABEL. And what is your position in your own house? You beg money from her, and she puts you under her guardianship. No, you are not a man! But that's why she took you, when her affairs were in bad shape.

AXEL. You hate Bertha; what have you against her?

ABEL. I don't know, but perhaps I, too, have been struck with that same passion for justice.

AXEL. Look here. Don't you believe in your great cause any longer?

ABEL. Sometimes! Sometimes not! What can one believe in any more? Sometimes it strikes me that the old ways were better. As mothers we had an honored and respected position when in that way we fulfilled our duty as citizens; as housewives we were a great power, and to bring up a family was not an ignominious occupation. Give me a cognac, Axel. We have talked so much.

AXEL [Getting cognac]. Why do you drink?

ABEL. I don't know. If one could only find the exceptional man!

AXEL. What sort would that be?

ABEL. The man who rules a woman!

AXEL. Well, and if you found one?

ABEL. Then I would--as they say--fall in love with him. Think if this whole noise were *blague*. Think!

AXEL. No, there is surely life, motion in the movement, whatever it is.

ABEL. Yes, there's so much motion--forward and backward! And a good deal of folly can come of the "motion," if they only get the majority for it.

AXEL. If it turns out that way, then you've made a damned lot of noise uselessly, for now it's beginning to be loathsome to live.

ABEL. We make so much noise that we make your heads reel. That's the trouble! Well, Axel, your position will be freer now that Bertha has been able to sell.

AXEL. Sell! Has she sold a picture?

ABEL. Don't you know that? The small picture with the apple-tree.

AXEL. No, she hasn't said anything about it. When did it happen?

ABEL. Day before yesterday. Don't you know about it? Well, then she intends to surprise you with the money.

AXEL. Surprise me? She takes care of the cash herself.

ABEL. So! Then it will--Hush, she is coming.

[Bertha comes in.]

BERTHA [To Abel]. Oh, good evening; are you here? What made you leave us?

ABEL. I thought it was tiresome.

BERTHA. Yes, there is no fun in rejoicing for others!

ABEL. No!

BERTHA [To Axel]. And you sit diligently niggling, I see.

AXEL. Yes, I'm daubing away.

BERTHA. Let me see! That's very good indeed--but the left arm is far too long.

AXEL. Do you think so?

BERTHA. Think so? Can't I see that it is? Give me the brush and--
[She takes brush.]

AXEL. No, let me alone. Aren't you ashamed?

BERTHA. What's that?

AXEL [Vexed]. Shame, I said. [Rises.] Are you trying to teach me how to paint?

BERTHA. Why not?

AXEL. Because you have still much to learn from me. But I can learn nothing from you.

BERTHA. It seems to me that the gentleman is not very respectful to his wife. One should bear in mind the respect one owes to--

ABEL. Now you're old-fashioned. What particular respect does a man owe a woman if they are to be equals?

BERTHA [To Abel]. So you think it's all right for a man to be coarse with his wife?

ABEL. Yes, when she is impudent to him.

AXEL. That's right! Tear each other's eyes out!

ABEL. Not at all! The whole thing is too insignificant for that.

AXEL. Don't say that. Look here, Bertha, considering that our economic condition is to undergo a change from now on, won't you be so good as to let me see the account-book?

BERTHA. What a noble revenge for being refused!

AXEL. What revenge? What has the account-book got to do with my being turned down at the salon? Give me the key to the chiffonier.

BERTHA [Feeling in her pocket]. Very well. H'm! That's strange! I thought I just had it.

AXEL. Find it!

BERTHA. You speak in such a commanding tone. I don't like that.

AXEL. Come now, find the key.

BERTHA [Looking here and there in the room]. Yes, but I can't understand it; I can't find it. It must be lost some way.

AXEL. Are you sure that you haven't got it?

BERTHA. Absolutely sure.

[Axel rings; after a moment the maid comes in.]

AXEL [To maid]. Go fetch a locksmith.

MAID. A locksmith?

AXEL. Yes, a smith who can pick a lock.

[Bertha gives the maid a look.]

MAID. Right away, monsieur.

[Maid goes out. Axel changes his coat, discovers the order on the lapel, tears it off and throws it on the table.]

AXEL. Pardon me, ladies!

BERTHA [Mildly]. Don't mind us. Are you going out?

AXEL. I am going out.

BERTHA. Aren't you going to stay for the meeting?

AXEL. No, I am not!

BERTHA. Yes, but they will think that very discourteous.

AXEL. Let them. I have more important things to do than listening to the drivel of you women.

BERTHA [Worried]. Where are you going?

AXEL. I don't need to account for myself, as I don't ask you to account for your actions.

BERTHA. You won't forget that we have invited guests for the masquerade tomorrow evening?

AXEL. Guests? That's true, tomorrow evening. H'm!

BERTHA. It won't do to postpone it when both Östermark and Carl have arrived today, and I have asked them to come.

AXEL. So much the better!

BERTHA. And now come home early enough to try on your costume.

AXEL. My Costume? Yes, of course; I am to take the part of a woman.

[The maid enters.]

MAID. The smith hasn't time now, but he'll come within two hours.

AXEL. He hasn't time, eh? Well, perhaps the key will turn up anyway. However, I must be off now. Good-bye.

BERTHA [Very mild]. Good-bye then. Don't come home late.

AXEL. I don't know just what I will do. Goodbye.

[Abel nods good-bye, Axel goes out.]

ABEL. How very cocky his lordship was!

BERTHA. Such impudence! Do you know, I had a good mind to tame him, break him so that he'd come back crawling to me.

ABEL. Yes, that tweak the salon disappointment gave him doesn't seem to have taken all the spunk out of him. Bertha, tell me, have you ever loved that clown?

BERTHA. Loved him? I liked him very much because he was nice to me. But he is so silly and--when he nags as he did just now, I feel that I could hate him. Think of it, it's already around that he painted my picture!

ABEL. Well, if it's gone as far as that, then you must do something éclatant.

BERTHA. If I only knew how!

ABEL. I'm usually inventive. Let me see. Look here, why couldn't you have his refused picture brought home just as all your friends have gathered here?

BERTHA. No, that would look as if I wanted to triumph. No, that would be too terrible.

ABEL. Yes, but if I should have it done? Or Gaga, that would be better still. It would be sent here in Axel's name by the porter. It's got to come home anyway, and it's no secret that it was refused.

BERTHA. No, but you know--

ABEL. What? Hasn't he spread false reports, and haven't you the right to defend yourself?

BERTHA. I would like it to happen very much, but I don't want to have anything to do with the doing of it. I want to be able to stand and swear that I am quite clean and innocent.

ABEL. You shall be able to do so. I'll attend to it.

BERTHA. What do you think he wanted the account-book for? He has never asked to see it before. Do you think he has some scheme in his head about it?

ABEL. Ye-es! Doubtless. He wants to see if you've accounted for the three hundred francs you got for your picture.

BERTHA. What picture?

ABEL. The one you sold to Madame Roubey.

BERTHA. How do you know about that?

ABEL. The whole crowd knows about it.

BERTHA. And Axel, too?

ABEL. Yes. I happened to mention it because I thought he knew. It was stupid of you not to tell him.

BERTHA. Does it concern him if I sell a--

ABEL. Yes, in a way, of course it concerns him.

BERTHA. Well, then, I will explain that I didn't want to give him another disappointment after he had already had the unhappiness of seeing me accepted at the salon.

ABEL. Strictly speaking, he has nothing to do with your earnings, as you have a marriage compact, and you have every reason to be tight with him. Just to establish a precedent, buck up and stand your own ground when he returns with his lecture tonight.

BERTHA. Oh, I know how to take care of him. But--another matter. How are we to treat the Östermark case?

ABEL. Östermark,--yes, he is my great enemy. You had better let me take care of him. We have an old account that is still unsettled, he and I. Calm yourself on that score. I'll make him yield, for we have the law on our side.

BERTHA. What do you intend to do?

ABEL. Invite Mrs. Hall and her two daughters here for tomorrow night, and then we will find out how he takes it.

BERTHA. No, indeed, no scandal in my house!

ABEL. Why not? Can you deny yourself such a triumph? If it's war, one must kill one's enemies, not just wound them. And now it is war. Am I right?

BERTHA. Yes, but a father, and his wife and daughters whom he has not seen for eighteen years!

ABEL. Well, he'll have a chance to see them now.

BERTHA. You're terrible, Abel!

ABEL. I'm a little stronger than you, that's all. Marriage must have softened you. Do you live as married people, h'm?

BERTHA. How foolish you are!

ABEL. You have irritated Axel; you have trampled on him. But he can yet bite your heel.

BERTHA. Do you think he would dare to do anything?

ABEL. I believe he'll create a scene when he comes home.

BERTHA. Well, I shall give him as good as he sends--

ABEL. If you only can! But that business about the chiffonier key-- that was foolish, very foolish.

BERTHA. Perhaps it was foolish. But he will be nice enough again after he has had an airing. I know him.

[The maid comes in with a package.]

MAID. A messenger brought this costume for Monsieur.

BERTHA. Very well, let me have it. That's fine!

MAID. But it must be for madame, as it's a lady's costume.

BERTHA. No, that's all right. It's for monsieur.

MAID. But, heavens! is monsieur to wear dresses too?

BERTHA. Why not, when we have to wear them? But you may leave us now.

[Maid goes out. Bertha opens bundle and takes out Spanish costume.]

ABEL. But that is certainly well thought out. Oh, it's beautiful to avenge any one's stupidities.

[Willmer comes in with a messenger, who carries a package. Willmer is dressed in black frock coat with lapels faced with white, a flower in buttonhole, knee breeches, red cravat, and turned over cuffs.]

WILLMER. Good evening; are you alone? Here are the candles and here are the bottles. One chartreuse and two vermouth; here are two packages of tobacco and the rest of the things.

BERTHA. Well, but you are a good boy, Gaga!

WILLMER. And here is the receipted bill.

BERTHA. Is it paid? Then you have spent money again?

WILLMER. We'll have plenty of time to settle that. But you must hurry now, as the old lady will soon be here.

BERTHA. Then be good enough to open the bottles while I fix the candles.

WILLMER. Of course I will.

[Bertha opens package of candles at table; Willmer stands beside her, taking the wrappers from bottles.]

ABEL. You look quite family-like as you stand there together. You might have made quite a nice little husband, Gaga.

[Willmer puts his arm around Bertha and kisses her on the neck. Bertha turns on Willmer and slaps his face.]

BERTHA. Aren't you ashamed, you little hornet! What are you up to, anyway?

ABEL. If you can stand that, Gaga, then you can stand the knife.

WILLMER [Angry]. Little hornet? Don't you know who I am? Don't you know that I'm an author of rank?

BERTHA. You! who write nothing but trash!

WILLMER. It wasn't trash when I wrote for you.

BERTHA. You only copied what we said, that was all!

WILLMER. Take care, Bertha. You know that I can ruin you!

BERTHA. So, you threaten, you little Fido! [To Abel.] Shall we give the boy a spanking?

ABEL. Think what you are saying!

WILLMER. So! I've been a little Fido, who has been lying on your skirt; but don't forget that I can bite too.

BERTHA. Let me see your teeth!

WILLMER. No, but you shall feel them!

BERTHA. Very well, come on then! Come!

ABEL. Now, now, be quiet before you go too far.

WILLMER [To Bertha]. Do you know what one has a right to say about a married woman who accepts presents from a young bachelor?

BERTHA. Presents?

WILLMER. You've accepted presents from me for two years.

BERTHA. Presents! You should have a thrashing, you lying little snipe, always hanging around the petticoats! Don't you suppose I can squelch you?

WILLMER [With a shrug]. Perhaps.

BERTHA. And you dare throw a shadow on a woman's honor!

WILLMER, Honor! H'm! Does it do you any honor to have had me buy part of the household things which you have charged up to your husband?

BERTHA. Leave my house, you scamp!

WILLMER. Your house! Among comrades one is not careful, but among enemies one must count every hair! And you shall be compelled to go over the accounts with me--adventuress--depend on that! [Goes out.]

ABEL. You will suffer for this foolishness! To let a friend leave you as an enemy--that's dangerous.

BERTHA. Oh, let him do what he likes. He dared to kiss me! He dared to remind me that I'm a woman.

ABEL. Do you know, I believe a man will always have that in mind. You have been playing with fire.

BERTHA. Fire! Can one ever find a man and a woman who can live like comrades without danger of fire?

ABEL. No, I don't think so; as long as there are two sexes there is bound to be fire.

BERTHA. Yes, but that must be done away with!

ABEL. Yes--it must be--try it!

[The maid comes in; she is bursting with laughter.]

MAID. There is a lady out here who calls herself--Richard--Richard Wahlström!

BERTHA [Going toward door]. Oh! Richard is here.

ABEL. Oh, well then, if she has come, we can open the meeting. And now to see if we can disentangle your skein.

BERTHA. Disentangle it, or cut it!

ABEL. Or get caught in it!

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

[Same scene. The hanging-lamp is lighted. Moonlight streams in, lighting up the studio window. There is a fire in the stove. Bertha and the maid are discovered. Bertha is dressed in a negligée with lace. She is sewing on the Spanish costume. The maid is cutting out a frill.]

BERTHA. There's no fun sitting up waiting for one's husband.

MAID. Do you think it is more fun for him to sit and wait for madame? This is the first time that he has been out alone--

BERTHA. Well, what does he do when he sits here alone?

MAID. He paints on pieces of wood.

BERTHA. On wooden panels?

MAID. Yes, he has big piles of wood that he paints on.

BERTHA. H'm! Tell me one thing, Ida; has monsieur ever been familiar with you?

MAID. Oh, never! No, he is such a proper gentleman.

BERTHA. Are you sure?

MAID [Positive]. Does madame think that I am such a--

BERTHA.--What time is it now?

MAID. It must be along toward twelve.

BERTHA. Very well. Then you may go to bed.

MAID. Won't you be afraid to be alone with all these skeletons?

BERTHA. I, afraid?--Hush, some one is coming through the gate--so, good night to you.

MAID. Good night, Madame. Sleep well.

[Goes out. Bertha alone; she puts the work away; throws herself on the couch, arranges lace on her gown, then she jumps up, turns down the lamp to half-light, then returns to couch and pretends to sleep. A pause before Axel enters.]

AXEL. Is any one here? Are you here, Bertha? [Bertha is silent. Axel goes to her.] Are you asleep?

BERTHA. [Softly.] Ah, is it you, my friend? Good evening! I was lying here and fell asleep, and I had such a bad dream.

AXEL. Now you are lying, for I saw you thro' the window from the garden when you took this pose. [Bertha jumps up.]

AXEL [Quietly]. And we don't want any seductive scenes in nightgowns, nor any melodramas. Be calm and listen to what I am going to tell you. [He sits down in the middle of the room.]

BERTHA. What have you got to tell me?

AXEL. A whole lot of things; but I shall begin with the ending. We must dissolve this concubinage.

BERTHA. What? [Throwing herself on the couch.] Oh, my God, what am I not made to live through!

AXEL. No hysteria, or I will empty the water bottle on your laces!

BERTHA. This is your revenge because I defeated you in an open competition!

AXEL. That has no connection with this matter.

BERTHA. You have never loved me!

AXEL. Yes, I have loved you; that was my only motive for marrying you. But why did you marry me? Because you were hard up, and because you had green sickness!

BERTHA. It's fortunate that no one can hear us.

AXEL. It would be no misfortune if any one did hear us. I've treated you like a comrade, with unlimited trust, and I've even made small sacrifices that you know about.--Has the locksmith been here yet?

BERTHA. No, he didn't come.

AXEL. It doesn't matter--I have looked over your accounts.

BERTHA. So, you've been spying in my book, have you?

AXEL. The household account-book is common property. You have entered false expenses and neglected to put down some of the income.

BERTHA. Can I help it if we are not taught bookkeeping at school?

AXEL. Nor are we. And as far as your bringing-up is concerned, you had things much better than I did; you went to a seminary, but I only went to a grade school.

BERTHA. It's not books that bring one up--

AXEL. No, it's the parents! But it's strange that they can't teach their daughters to be honorable--

BERTHA. Honorable! I wonder if the majority of criminals are not to be found among men?

AXEL. The majority of the punished, you should say; but of ninety-nine per cent. of criminal men one can ask with the judge, "Où est la femme?" But--to return to you. You have lied to me all the way through, and finally you have cheated me. For instance, you put down twenty francs for paints instead of for a twenty franc luncheon at Marguery.

BERTHA. That's not true; the luncheon only cost twelve francs.

AXEL. That is to say, you put eight in your pocket. Then you have received three hundred francs for the picture that you sold.

BERTHA. "What a woman earns by her work, she also controls." That's what the law states.

AXEL. That's not a paradox, then? Not monomania?

BERTHA. No, it seems not.

AXEL. Of course, we must not be petty; you control your earnings, and have controlled mine, in an unspeakable way; still, don't you think that, as comrades, you should have told me about the sale?

BERTHA. That didn't concern you.

AXEL. It didn't concern me? Well, then it only remains for me to bring suit for divorce.

BERTHA. Divorce! Do you think I would stand the disgrace of being a divorced wife? Do you think that I will allow myself to be driven from my home, like a servant-maid who is sent away with her trunk?

AXEL. I could throw you out into the street if I wished, but I shall do a more humane thing and get the divorce on the grounds of incompatibility of temperament.

BERTHA. If you can talk like that, you have never loved me!

AXEL. Tell me, why do you think I asked for your hand?

BERTHA. Because you wanted me to love you.

AXEL. Oh, holy, revered, uncorruptible stupidity--yes! I could accuse you of counterfeiting, for you have gone into debt to Willmer and made me responsible for the amount.

BERTHA. Ah, the little insect! he has been talking, has he?

AXEL. I just left him after paying him the three hundred and fifty francs for which you were indebted to him. But we mustn't be small about money matters, and we have more serious business to settle. You have allowed this scoundrel partially to pay for my household, and in doing so you have completely ruined my reputation. What have you done with the money?

BERTHA. The whole thing is a lie.

AXEL. Have you squandered it on luncheon and dinner parties?

BERTHA. No, I have saved it; and that's something you have no conception of, spendthrift!

AXEL. Oh, you saving soul! That negligée cost two hundred francs, and my dressing-gown cost twenty-five.

BERTHA. Have you anything else to say to me?

AXEL. Nothing else, except that you must think about supporting yourself from now on. I don't care to decorate wooden panels any more and let you reap the earnings.

BERTHA. A-ha, you think you can so easily get out of the duty that you made yourself responsible for when you fooled me into becoming your wife? You shall see!

AXEL. Now that I've had my eyes opened, the past is beginning to take on another color. It seems to me almost as if you conjured that courtship of ours; it seems almost as if I had been the victim of what you women call seduction; it now seems to me as if I had fallen into the hands of an adventuress, who lured my money away from me in a *hôtel garni*; it seems almost as if I had lived in vice ever since I was united with you! [Rising.] And now, as you stand there with your back turned to me and I see your neck with your short hair, it is--yes, it is exactly as if--ugh!--as if you were Judith and had given your body to be able to behead me! Look, there is the dress I was going to wear, that you wished to humiliate me with. Yes, you felt that it was debasing to wear those things, and thought it disguised your desire to irritate,--this low-cut bodice and the corsets which were to advertise your woman's wares. No, I return your love-token and shake off the fetters. [He throws down the wedding-ring. Bertha looks at him in wonderment. Axel pushes back his hair.] You didn't want to see that my forehead is higher than yours, so I let my hair conceal it, so as not to humble and frighten you. But now I am going to humble you, and since you were not willing to be my equal when I lowered myself to your level, you shall be my inferior, which you are.

BERTHA. And all this--all this noble revenge because *you* were *my* inferior!

AXEL. Yes, I was your inferior, even when I painted your picture!

BERTHA. Did you paint my picture? If you repeat that, I'll strike you.

AXEL. Yes, your kind, who despise raw strength, are always the first to resort to it. Go ahead and strike.

BERTHA [Advancing]. Don't you think I can measure strength with you?

[Axel takes both her wrists in one hand.]

AXEL. No, I don't think so. Are you convinced now that I am also your physical superior? Bend, or I'll break you!

BERTHA. Do you dare strike me?

AXEL. Why not? I know of only one reason why I should not strike you.

BERTHA. What's that?

AXEL. Because you are morally irresponsible.

BERTHA [Trying to free herself]. Let go!

AXEL. When you have begged for forgiveness! So, down on your knees. [He forces her down with one hand.] There, now look up to me, from below! That's your place, that you yourself have chosen.

BERTHA [Giving in]. Axel, Axel, I don't know you any more. Are you he who swore to love me, who begged to carry me, to lift me?

AXEL. It is I. I was strong then, and believed I had the power to do it; but you sapped my strength while my tired head lay in your lap, you sucked my best blood while I slept--and still there was enough left to subdue you. But get up and let us end this declaiming. We have

business to talk over! [Berths rises, sits on couch and weeps.] Why are you crying?

BERTHA. I don't know! Because I'm weak, perhaps.

[Bertha's attitude and actions are those of complete surrender.]

AXEL. You see--I was your strength. When I took what was mine, you had nothing left. You were a rubber ball that I blew up; when I let go of you, you fell together like an empty bag.

BERTHA [Without looking up]. I don't know whether you are right or not, but since we have quarreled, my strength has left me. Axel, will you believe me,--I have never experienced before what I now feel--

AXEL. So? What do you feel, then?

BERTHA. I can't say it! I don't know whether it is--love, but--

AXEL. What do you mean by love? Isn't it a quiet longing to eat me alive once more? You begin to love me! Why didn't you do that before, when I was good to you? Goodness is stupidity, though; let us be evil! Isn't that right?

BERTHA. Be a little evil, rather, but don't be weak. [Rises.] Axel, forgive me, but don't desert me. Love me! Oh, love me!

AXEL. It is too late! Yesterday, this morning, I would have fallen before you as you stand there now, but it's too late now.

BERTHA. Why is it too late now?

AXEL. Because tonight I have broken all ties, even the last.

BERTHA [Taking his hands]. What do you mean?

AXEL. I have been untrue to you.

BERTHA [Falls in a heap]. Oh!

AXEL. It was the only way to tear myself loose.

BERTHA [Collecting herself]. Who was she?

AXEL. A woman--[Pause.]

BERTHA. How did she look?

AXEL. Like a woman! With long hair and high breasts, et cetera.-- Spare yourself.

BERTHA. Do you think I am jealous of one of that kind?

AXEL. One of that kind, two of that kind, many of that kind!

BERTHA [Gasping]. And tomorrow our friends are invited here! Do you want to create a scandal and call in the invitations?

AXEL. No, I don't want to be mean in my revenge. Tomorrow we'll have our friends, and the day after our ways will part.

BERTHA. Yes, our ways must part now. Good night! [Goes to door left.]

AXEL [Going to door right]. Good night!

BERTHA [Stops]. Axel!

AXEL. Yes?

BERTHA. Oh, it wasn't anything!--Yes, wait. [Goes toward Axel with clasped hands.] Love me, Axel! Love me!

AXEL. Would you share with another?

BERTHA [Pause]. If only you loved me!

AXEL. No, I cannot. You can't draw me to you as you used to do.

BERTHA. Love me, be merciful! I am honest now, I believe, otherwise I would never humiliate myself as--as I am doing now, before a man.

AXEL. Even if I had compassion for you, I cannot call forth any love. It has come to an end. It is dead.

BERTHA. I beg for a man's love, I, a woman, and he shoves me away from him!

AXEL. Why not? *We* should also have leave to say no for once, although we are not always very hard to please.

BERTHA. A woman offers herself to a man and is refused!

AXEL. Feel now how millions have felt, when they have begged on their knees for the mercy of being allowed to give what the other accepts. Feel it for your whole sex, and then tell them how it felt.

BERTHA [Rising]. Good night. The day after tomorrow, then.

AXEL. You still want the party tomorrow, then?

BERTHA. Yes, I want the party tomorrow.

AXEL. Good. The day after tomorrow, then.

[They go out, each their own way right and left.]

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

[SCENE.--Same. But the glass doors leading to orchard are open. The sun is still shining outside and the studio is brightly lighted. The side doors are open. A serving table is seen out in the orchard; on it are glasses and bottles, et cetera. Axel wears cutaway, but without the decoration, and is wearing a standing collar with four-in-hand scarf.

His hair is brushed straight back. Bertha wears a dark gown, cut square, with frilled fichu. She has a flower on the left shoulder. The Misses Hall are extravagantly and expensively dressed. Bertha enters from orchard. She is pale and has dark shadows under her eyes. Abel enters from door at back. They embrace and kiss each other.]

BERTHA. Good afternoon, and welcome.

ABEL. Good afternoon.

BERTHA. And Gaga promised to come?

ABEL. Absolutely certain. He was in a regretful spirit and begged forgiveness. [Bertha straightens out her fichu.] But what is the matter with you today? Has anything happened?

BERTHA. How so? What?

ABEL. You are not like yourself. Have you--? Bertha! Have you--

BERTHA. Don't talk.

ABEL. Your eyes are so full of color and brilliancy! What? Is it possible--? And so pale? Bertha!

BERTHA. I must go out to my guests.

ABEL. Tell me, are Carl and Östermark here?

BERTHA. Both are out in the orchard.

ABEL. And Mrs. Hall and the girls?

BERTHA. Mrs. Hall will come later, but the girls are in my room.

ABEL. I'm afraid that our scheme of revenge will fall as flat as a pancake.

BERTHA. No, not this--not this one!

[Willmer enters with a bouquet of flowers. He goes to Bertha, kisses her hand, and gives her the bouquet.]

WILLMER. Forgive me! For my love's sake!

BERTHA. No, not on that account, but--it doesn't matter. I don't know why, but today I don't want any enemies.

[Axel comes in. Bertha and Willmer look distressed.]

AXEL [To Bertha, not noticing Willmer]. Pardon--if I disturb--

BERTHA. Not at all.

AXEL. I only wanted to ask if you had ordered the supper?

BERTHA. Yes, of course--as you wished.

AXEL. Very well. I only wanted to know. [Pause.]

ABEL. How festive you two look! [Bertha and Axel are silent. Willmer breaks the embarrassment by starting for the orchard.] Listen, Gaga--

[She hastens out after Willmer.]

AXEL. What have you ordered for the supper?

BERTHA [Looks at him and smiles]. Lobsters and poulet.

AXEL [Uncertain]. What are you smiling at?

BERTHA. My thoughts.

AXEL. What are you thinking then?

BERTHA. I am thinking--no, I really don't know--unless it was about the betrothal supper we had together in the Gardens that spring evening when you had wooed--

AXEL. You had wooed--

BERTHA. Axel!--And now it is the last, last time. It was a short summer.

AXEL. Quite short, but the sun will come again.

BERTHA. Yes, for you who can find sunshine in every street.

AXEL. What is there to hinder you from seeking warmth at the same fire?

BERTHA. And so we shall meet again, perhaps--some evening by street light, you mean?

AXEL. I didn't mean that--but *à la bonne heure!* That at least will be a free relation.

BERTHA. Yes, very free, especially for you.

AXEL. For you, too, but pleasanter for me.

BERTHA. That's a noble thought.

AXEL. Now, now--don't tear open the old wounds! We were talking about the supper. And we must not forget our guests. So! [Goes toward his room right.]

BERTHA. About the supper--yes, of course! That's what we were talking about.

[She flies toward her room left, stirred and agitated. They both go out. The scene is empty for a moment. Then the Misses Hall come in from the orchard.]

MISS AMÉLIE. How very dull it is here!

MISS THÉRÈSE. Insufferably stupid, and our hosts are not altogether polite.

MISS AMÉLIE. The hostess is especially unpleasant. And the short-hair kind, too.

MISS THÉRÈSE. Yes, but I understand that a lieutenant is coming--

MISS AMÉLIE. Well, that's good, for these artists are a lot of free traders. Hush, here is a diplomat surely.--He looks so distinguished.

[They sit on couch. Doctor Östermark comes in from the orchard; he discovers the Misses Hall and looks at them through his pince-nez.]

DR. ÖSTERMARK. I am honored, ladies. H'm, one meets so many of one's countrywomen here. Are you artists, too? You paint, I suppose?

MISS AMÉLIE. No, we don't paint.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, but just a little, perhaps. Here in Paris all ladies paint--themselves.

MISS THÉRÈSE. We don't have to.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, well, you play then?

MISS AMÉLIE. Play?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, I don't mean playing at cards. But all ladies play a little.

MISS AMÉLIE. Evidently you are just from the country.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Yes, just from the country. Can I be of any slight service to you?

MISS THÉRÈSE. Pardon, but we don't know with whom we have the honor--?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. You ladies have evidently just come from Stockholm. In this country we can talk to each other without asking for references.

MISS AMÉLIE. We haven't asked for references.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. What do you ask, then? To have your curiosity satisfied? Well, I'm an old family physician and my name is Anderson. Perhaps I may know your names now?--Character not needed.

MISS THÉRÈSE. We are the Misses Hall, if that can be of any interest to the doctor.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Hall? H'm! I've surely heard that name before. Pardon, pardon me a question, a somewhat countrified question--

MISS AMÉLIE.--Don't be bashful!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Is your father still living?

MISS AMÉLIE. No, he is dead.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, yes. Well, now that I have gone so far, there is nothing to do but continue. Mr. Hall was--

MISS THÉRÈSE. Our father was a director of the Fire Insurance Company of Göteborg.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, well, then I beg your pardon. Do you find Paris to your liking?

MISS AMELIE. Very! Thérèse, do you remember what I did with my shawl? Such a cold draught here! [Rises.]

MISS THÉRÈSE. You left it in the orchard, no doubt.

DR. ÖSTERMARK [Rising]. No, don't go out. Allow me to find it for you--no--sit still--just sit still.

[Goes out into orchard. After a moment Mrs. Hall comes in from left, quite comfortable with drink; her cheeks are flaming red and her voice is uncertain.]

MISS AMÉLIE. Look, there's mother! And in that condition again! Heavens, why does she come here? Why did you come here, mother?

MRS. HALL. Keep quiet! I have as much right here as you.

MISS THÉRÈSE. Why have you been drinking again? Think if some one should come!

MRS. HALL. I haven't been drinking. What nonsense!

MISS AMÉLIE. We will be ruined if the doctor should come back and see you. Come, let's go in here and you can get a glass of water.

MRS. HALL. It's nice of you to treat your mother like this and say that she has been drinking, to say such a thing to your own mother!

MISS THÉRÈSE. Don't talk, but go in, immediately.

[They lead her in right. Axel and Carl come in from the orchard.]

CARL. Well, you're looking fine, my dear Axel, and you have a manlier bearing than you used to have.

AXEL. Yes, I have emancipated myself.

CARL. You should have done that at the start, as I did.

AXEL. As you did?

CARL. As I did. Immediately I took my position as head of the family, to which place I found myself called both because of my superior mind and my natural abilities.

AXEL. And how did your wife like that?

CARL. Do you know, I forgot to ask her! But to judge by appearances, I should say that she found things as they should be. They only need real men--and human beings can be made even out of women.

AXEL. But at least the power should be divided?

CARL. Power cannot be divided! Either obey or command. Either you or I. I preferred myself to her, and she had to adjust herself to it.

AXEL. Yes, but didn't she have money?

CARL. Not at all. She didn't bring more than a silver soup-spoon to our nest. But she demanded an accounting of it; and she got it. She was a woman of principle, you see!--She is so good, so good, but so am I good to her. I think it's really great sport to be married, what? And besides, she's such a splendid cook!

[The Misses Hall come in from right.]

AXEL. Let me introduce you to the Misses Hall, Lieutenant Starck.

CARL. I am very happy to make your [Carl gives them a look of recognition] acquaintance.

[The young ladies seem surprised and embarrassed; they nod and go out to the orchard somewhat excited.]

CARL. How did they get in here?

AXEL. What do you mean? They are friends of my wife's and this is the first time that they have been here. Do you know them?

CARL. Yes, somewhat!

AXEL. What do you mean to imply?

CARL. H'm, I met them in St. Petersburg late one night!

AXEL. Late one night?

CARL. Yes.

AXEL. Isn't there some mistake?

CARL. No-o! There is no mistake. They were very well known ladies in St. Petersburg.

AXEL. And Bertha allows that kind in my house!

[Bertha comes rushing in from orchard.]

BERTHA. What does this mean? Have you insulted the young ladies?

AXEL. No--but--

BERTHA. They came out of here crying and declared that they couldn't stay in the company of you gentlemen any longer! What has happened?

AXEL. Do you know these young ladies?

BERTHA. They are my friends! Isn't that enough?

AXEL. Not quite enough.

BERTHA. Not quite? Well, but if--

[Dr. Östermark comes in from the orchard.]

DR. ÖSTERMARK. What does this mean? What have you done to the little girls who ran away? I offered to help them with their wraps, but they refused to be helped and had tears in their eyes.

CARL [To Bertha]. I must ask you, are they your friends?

BERTHA. Yes, they are! But if my protection is not sufficient, then perhaps Doctor Östermark will take them under his wing, considering that he has a certain claim to them.

CARL. But a mistake has been made here. You mean that I, who have had certain relations with these girls, should appear as their cavalier?

BERTHA. What sort of relations?

CARL. Chance, such as one has with such women!

BERTHA. Such women? That's a lie!

CARL. I'm not in the habit of lying.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. But I don't understand what *I* have got to do with these young ladies.

BERTHA. *You* would prefer to have nothing to do with your deserted children.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. My children! But I don't understand.

BERTHA. They are your two daughters--daughters of your divorced wife.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Since you consider that you have the right to be personal and make my affairs the subject of public discussion, I will answer you publicly. You seem to have taken the trouble to find out that I am not a widower. Good! My marriage, which was childless, was dissolved twenty years ago. Since then I have entered into another relation, and we have a child that is just five years old. These grown girls, therefore, cannot be my children. Now you know the whole matter.

BERTHA. But your wife--whom you threw out upon the world--

DR. ÖSTERMARK.--No, that wasn't the case either. She walked out, or staggered, if you prefer it, and then she received half my income until at last I found out that--enough said. If you could conceive what it cost me of work and self-denial to support two establishments, you would have spared me this unpleasant moment, but your kind wouldn't consider anything like that. You needn't know any more, as it really doesn't concern you.

BERTHA. But it would amuse me to know why your first wife left you.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. I don't think it would amuse you to know that she was ugly, narrow, paltry, and that I was too good for her! Think now, you tender-hearted, sensitive Bertha, think if they really had been my daughters, these friends of yours and Carl's; imagine how my old heart would have been gladdened to see, after eighteen years, these children that I had borne in my arms during the long night of illness. And imagine if she, my first love, my wife, with whom life the first time became life, had accepted your invitation and come here? What a fifth act in the melodrama you wished to offer us, what a noble revenge on one who is guiltless! Thanks, old friend. Thank you for your reward for the friendship I have shown you.

BERTHA. Reward! Yes, I know that I owe you--a fee. [Axel, Carl and the doctor make protestations of "Oh," "Now," "Really," et cetera.] I know that, I know it very well.

[Axel, Carl and doctor say "No," "Fie," "This is going too far."]

DR. ÖSTERMARK. No, but I'm going to get out of here. Horrors! Yes, you are the right sort! Pardon me, Axel, but I can't help it!

BERTHA [To Axel]. You're a fine man, to allow your wife to be insulted!

AXEL. I can understand neither your allowing yourself to insult, or to be insulted! [Music is heard from the orchard; guitar and an Italian song.] The singers have arrived; perhaps you would all like to step out and have a bit of harmony on top of all this.

[They all go out except the doctor, who goes over to look at some drawings on wall right near door to Axel's room. The music outside is played softly. Mrs. Hall comes in and walks unsteadily across the scene and sits in a chair. The doctor, who does not recognize her, bows deeply.]

MRS. HALL. What music is that out there?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. They are some Italians, dear lady.

MRS. HALL. Yes? No doubt the ones I heard at Monte Carlo.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Oh, perhaps there are other Italians.

MRS. HALL. Well, I believe it's none other than Östermark! No one could be as quick as he in his retorts.

DR. ÖSTERMARK [Stares at her]. Ah--think--there are things--that--are less dreadful than dread! It is you, Carolina! And this is the moment that for eighteen years I have been running away from, dreamed about, sought, feared, wished for; wished for that I might receive the shock and afterward have nothing to dread! [He takes out a vial and wets his upper lip with a few drops.] Don't be afraid; it's not poison, in such little doses. It's for the heart, you see.

MRS. HALL. Ugh, your heart! Yes, you have so much!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. It's strange that two people cannot meet once every eighteen years without quarreling.

MRS. HALL. It was always you who quarreled!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Alone? What!--Shall we stop now?--I must try to look at you. [He takes a chair and sits down opposite Mrs. Hall.] Without trembling!

MRS. HALL. I've become old!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. That's what happens; one has read about it, seen it, felt it one's self, but nevertheless it is horrifying. I am old, too.

MRS. HALL. Are you happy in your new life?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. To tell the truth, it's one and the same thing; different, but quite the same.

MRS. HALL. Perhaps the old life was better, then?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. No, it wasn't better, as it was about the same, but it's a question if it wouldn't have seemed better now, just because it was the old life. One doesn't blossom but once, and then one goes to

seed; what comes afterward is only a little aftermath. And you, how are you getting along?

MRS. HALL [Offended]. What do you mean?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Don't misunderstand me. Are you contented with--your--lot? I mean--oh, that it should be so difficult to make one's self understood by women!

MRS. HALL. Contented? H'm!

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Well, you were never contented. But when one is young, one always demands the first class, and then one gets the third class when one is old. Now, I understand that you told Mrs. Alberg here that your girls are my children!

MRS. HALL. I did? That is a lie.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Still untruthful, eh? In the old days, when I was foolish, I looked upon lying as a vice; but now I know it to be a natural defect. You actually believe in your lies, and that is dangerous. But never mind about that now. Are you leaving, or do you wish me to leave?

MRS. HALL [Rising]. I will go.

[She falls back into the chair and gropes about.]

DR. ÖSTERMARK. What, drunk too?--I really pity you. Oh, this is most unpleasant! Dear me, I believe I'm ready to cry!--Carolina! No, I can't bear this!

MRS. HALL. I am ill.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Yes, that's what happens when one drinks too much. But this is more bitter than I ever thought it could be. I have killed little unborn children to be able to save the mother, and I have felt them tremble in their fight against death. I have cut living muscles, and have seen the marrow flow like butter from healthy bones, but never has anything hurt me so much as this since the day

you left me. Then it was as if you had gone away with one of my lungs, so I could only gasp with the other!--Oh, I feel as if I were suffocating now!

MRS. HALL. Help me out of here. It's too noisy. I don't know why we came here, anyway. Give me your hand.

DR. ÖSTERMARK [Leading her to door]. Before it was I who asked for your hand; and it rested so heavily on me, the little delicate hand! Once it struck my face, the little delicate hand, but I kissed it nevertheless.--Oh, now it is withered, and will never strike again.--Ah, dolce Napoli! Joy of life, what became of it? You who were the bride of my youth!

MRS. HALL [In the hall door]. Where is my wrap?

DR. ÖSTERMARK [Closing door]. In the hall, probably. This is horrible! [Lights a cigar]. Oh, dolce Napoli! I wonder if it is as delightful as it's said to be in that cholera breeding fishing harbor. *Blague*, no doubt! *Blague! Blague!* Naples--bridal couples, love, joy of life, antiquities, modernity, liberalism, conservatism, idealism, realism, naturalism,--*blague, blague*, the whole thing!

[Axel, Abel, Willmer, Mrs. Starck and Bertha come in from orchard.]

MRS. STARCK. What is happening to the doctor?

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Pardon, it was only a little *qui pro quo*. Two strangers sneaked in here and we had to identify them.

MRS. STARCK. The girls?

CARL. Well, that has nothing to do with you. I don't know why, but I seem to feel "the enemy in the air."

MRS. STARCK. Ah, you're always seeing the enemy, you dear Carl.

CARL. No, I don't see them, but I feel them.

MRS. STARCK. Well, come to your friend, then, and she will defend you.

CARL. Oh, you're always so good to me.

MRS. STARCK. Why shouldn't I be, when you are so good to me?

[The door at back is opened and the maid and two men come in carrying a picture.]

AXEL. What's this?

MAID. The porter said that it must be carried into the studio, as he didn't have any room for it.

AXEL. What foolishness is this? Take it out.

MAID. The mistress sent for the picture herself.

BERTHA. That's not true. For that matter, it's not my picture, anyway. It's your master's. Put it down there. [The maid and the man go out.] Perhaps it isn't yours, Axel? let's see. [Axel places himself in front of picture.] Move a little so we can see.

AXEL [Gives way]. It's a mistake.

BERTHA [Shrieks]. What! What is this! It's a mistake! What does it mean? It's my picture, but it's Axel's number! Oh!

[She falls in a faint. The doctor and Carl carry her into her room left, the women follow.]

ABEL. She is dying!

MRS. STARCK. Heaven help us, what is this! The poor little dear! Doctor Östermark, do something, say something--and Axel stands there crestfallen.

[Axel and Willmer are alone.]

AXEL. This is your doing.

WILLMER. My doing?

[Axel takes him by the ear.]

AXEL. Yes, yours, but not altogether. But I am going to give you your share. [He leads hunt to the door, which he opens with one foot, and kicks out Willmer with the other.] Out with you!

WILLMER. I'll get even for this!

AXEL. I shall be waiting for it!

[Doctor and Carl come in.]

DR. ÖSTERMARK. What's the trouble with the picture, anyway?

AXEL. Nothing--only that it seemed to represent sulphuric acid.

CARL. Now tell us, are you refused, or is she?

AXEL. I am refused on her picture. I wanted to help her a bit, as a good comrade, and that's why I changed the numbers.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. Yes, but there is something else too. She says that you don't love her any more.

AXEL. She is right in that. That's how it is, and tomorrow we part.

DR. ÖSTERMARK and CARL. Part?

AXEL. Yes, when there are no ties to bind things, they loosen of themselves. This wasn't a marriage; it was only living together, or something even worse.

DR. ÖSTERMARK. There is bad air here. Come, let's go.

AXEL. Yes, I want to get out--out of here. [They start for the door. Abel comes in.]

ABEL. What, are you leaving?

AXEL. Does that astonish you?

ABEL. Let me have a word with you.

AXEL. Go on.

ABEL. Don't you want to go in and see Bertha?

AXEL. No!

ABEL. What have you done to her?

AXEL. I have bent her.

ABEL. I noticed that--she is black and blue around the wrists! Look at me! I didn't think that of you. Well, conqueror, triumph now!

AXEL. It's an uncertain conquest, and I don't even wish for it.

ABEL. Are you sure of that? [She leans over to Axel, in low voice.] Bertha loves you now--now that you have bent her.

AXEL. I know it. But I don't love her any longer.

ABEL. Won't you go in and see her?

AXEL. No, it's all over. [Takes doctor's arm.] Come!

ABEL. May I take a message to Bertha?

AXEL. No! Yes! Tell her, that I despise and abhor her.

ABEL. Good-bye, my friend.

AXEL. Good-bye, my enemy.

ABEL. Enemy?

AXEL. Are you my friend?

ABEL. I don't know. Both and neither. I am a bastard--

AXEL. We are all that, as we are crocheted out of man and woman! Perhaps you have loved me in your way, as you wanted to separate Bertha and me.

ABEL [Rolling a cigarette]. Loved! I wonder how it seems to love? No, I cannot love; I must be deformed--for it made me happy to see you two until the envy of deformity set me on fire. Perhaps you love me?

AXEL. No, on my honor! You have been an agreeable comrade who happened to be dressed like a woman; you have never impressed me as belonging to another sex; and love, you see, can and should exist only between individuals of opposite sexes--

ABEL. Sex love, yes!

AXEL. Is there any other, then?

ABEL. I don't know! But I am to be pitied. And this hate, this terrible hate! Perhaps that would disappear if you men were not so afraid to love us, if you were not so--how shall I express it--so moral, as it's called.

AXEL. But in heaven's name, be a little more lovable, then, and don't get yourselves up so that one is forced to think of the penal law whenever one looks at you.

ABEL. Do you think I'm such a fright, then?

AXEL. Well, you know, you must pardon me, but you are awful.
[Bertha comes in.]

BERTHA [To Axel]. Are you going?

AXEL. Yes, I was just about to go, but now I'll stay.

BERTHA [Softly]. What? You--

AXEL. I shall stay in *my* home.

BERTHA. In *our*--home.

AXEL. No, in *mine*. In my studio with my furniture.

BERTHA. And I?

AXEL. You may do what you please, but you must know what you risk. You see in my suit I have applied for one year's separation in bed and board. Should you stay, that is to say, if you should seek me during this time, you would have to choose between imprisonment, or being considered my mistress. Do you feel like staying?

BERTHA. Oh, is that the law?

AXEL. That's the law.

BERTHA. You drive me out, then?

AXEL. No, but the law does.

BERTHA. And you think I'll be satisfied with that?

AXEL. No, I don't, for you won't be satisfied until you have taken all the life out of me.

BERTHA. Axel! How you talk! If you knew how I--love you!

AXEL. That doesn't sound irrational, but I don't love you.

BERTHA [Flaring up and pointing to Axel]. Because you love her!

AXEL. No, indeed, I don't. Have never loved her, and never will. What incredible imagining! As if there were not other women and more fascinating than you two!

BERTHA. But Abel loves you!

AXEL. That is possible. I even believe that she suggested something of the kind. Yes, she said so distinctly; let's see, how was it--

BERTHA [Changing]. You are really the most shameless creature I have ever met!

AXEL. Yes, I can well believe that.

BERTHA [Puts on her hat and wrap]. Now you expect to put me out on the street? That is final?

AXEL. On the street, or where you please.

BERTHA [Angry]. Do you think a woman will allow herself to be treated like this?

AXEL. Once you asked me to forget that you were a woman. Very well, I have forgotten it.

BERTHA. But do you know that you have liabilities to the one who has been your wife?

AXEL. You mean the pay for good comradeship? What? A life annuity!

BERTHA. Yes.

AXEL [Putting a few bills on the table]. Here is a month in advance.

BERTHA [Takes money and counts it]. You still have a little honor left!

ABEL. Good-bye, Bertha. Now I am off.

BERTHA. Wait and you can go along with me.

ABEL. No, I won't go any further with you.

BERTHA. What? Why not?

ABEL. I am ashamed to.

BERTHA [Astonished]. Ashamed?

ABEL. Yes, ashamed. Good-bye. [Abel goes out.]

BERTHA. I don't understand. Good-bye, Axel! Thanks for the money. Are we friends? [Taking his hand.]

AXEL. I am not, at least.--Let go of my hand, or I will believe that you wish to seduce me again. [Bertha goes toward door.]

AXEL [With a sigh of relief]. Pleasant comrades! Oh!

[The maid enters from the orchard.]

MAID [To Axel]. There is it lady waiting for you.

AXEL. I'll soon be free.

BERTHA. Is that the new comrade?

AXEL. No, not comrade, but sweetheart.

BERTHA. And your wife to be?

AXEL, Perhaps. Because I want to meet, my comrades at the café, but at home I want a wife. [Starts as if to go.] Pardon me!

BERTHA. Farewell, then! Are we never to meet again?

AXEL. Yes, of course! But at the café. Good-bye!

CURTAIN.