

The Creditor

BY AUGUST STRINDBERG

PERSONS

THELKA. ADOLF [*her husband, a painter*].

GUSTAV [*her divorced husband*].

TWO LADIES

A WAITER

THE CREDITOR

A PLAY BY AUGUST STRINDBERG

[SCENE: *A small watering-place. Time, the present. Stage directions with reference to the actors.*

A drawing-room in a watering-place; furnished as above.

Door in the middle, with a view out on the sea; side doors right and left; by the side door on the left the button of an electric bell; on the right of the door in the center a table, with a decanter of water and a glass. On the left of the door in the center a what-not; on the right a fireplace in front; on the right a round table and arm-chair; on the left a sofa, a square table, a settee; on the table a small pedestal with a draped figure--papers, books, arm-chairs. Only the items of furniture which are introduced into the action are referred to in the above plan. The rest of the scenery remains unaffected. It is summer, and the day-time.]

SCENE I.

[*Adolf sits on the settee on the left of the square table; his stick is propped up near him.*]

ADOLF. And it's you I've got to thank for all this.

GUSTAV [*walks up and down on the right, smoking a cigar*]. Oh, nonsense.

ADOLF. Indeed, I have. Why, the first day after my wife went away, I lay on my sofa like a cripple and gave myself up to my depression; it was as though she had taken my crutches, and I couldn't move from the spot. A few days went by, and I cheered up and began to pull myself together. The delirious nightmares which my brain had produced, went away. My head became cooler and cooler. A thought which I once had came to the surface again. My desire to work, my impulse to create, woke up. My eye got back again its capacity for sound sharp observation. You came, old man.

GUSTAV. Yes, you were in pretty low water, old man, when I came across you, and you went about on crutches. Of course, that doesn't prove that it was simply my presence that helped so much to your recovery: you needed quiet, and you wanted masculine companionship.

ADOLF. You're right in that, as you are in everything else you say. I used to have it in the old days. But after my marriage it seemed unnecessary. I was satisfied with the friend of my heart whom I had chosen. All the same I soon got into fresh sets, and made many new acquaintances. But then my wife got jealous. She wanted to have me quite to herself; but much worse than that, my friends wanted to have her quite to themselves--and so I was left out in the cold with my jealousy.

GUSTAV. You were predisposed to this illness, you know that.

[*He passes on the left behind the square table and comes to Adolf's left.*]

ADOLF. I was afraid of losing her--and tried to prevent it. Are you surprised at it? I was never afraid for a moment that she'd be unfaithful to me.

GUSTAV. What husband ever was afraid?

ADOLF. Strange, isn't it? All I troubled about was simply this--about friends getting influence over her and so being able indirectly to acquire power over me--and I couldn't bear that at all.

GUSTAV. So you and your wife didn't have quite identical views?

ADOLF. I've told you so much, you may as well know everything---my wife is an independent character. [*Gustav laughs.*] What are you laughing at, old man?

GUSTAV. Go on, go on. She's an independent character, is she?

ADOLF. She won't take anything from me.

GUSTAV. But she does from everybody else?

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Yes. And I've felt about all this, that the only reason why my views were so awfully repugnant to her, was because they were mine, not because they appeared absurd on their intrinsic merits. For it often happened that she'd trot out my old ideas, and champion them with gusto as her own. Why, it even came about that one of my friends gave her ideas which he had borrowed direct from me. She found them delightful; she found everything delightful that didn't come from me.

GUSTAV. In other words, you're not truly happy.

ADOLF. Oh yes, I am. The woman whom I desired is mine, and I never wished for any other.

GUSTAV. Do you never wish to be free either?

ADOLF. I wouldn't like to go quite so far as that. Of course the thought crops up now and again, how calmly I should be able to live if I were free--but she scarcely leaves me before I immediately long for her again, as though she were my arm, my leg. Strange. When I'm alone I sometimes feel as though she didn't have any real self of her own, as though she were a part of my ego, a piece out of my inside, that stole away all my will, all my *joie de vivre*. Why, my very

marrow itself, to use an anatomical expression, is situated in her; that's what it seems like.

GUSTAV. Viewing the matter broadly, that seems quite plausible.

ADOLF. Nonsense. An independent person like she is, with such a tremendous lot of personal views, and when I met her, what was I then? Nothing. An artistic child which she brought up.

GUSTAV. But afterwards you developed her intellect and educated her, didn't you?

ADOLF. No; her growth remained stationary, and I shot up.

GUSTAV. Yes; it's really remarkable, but her literary talent already began to deteriorate after her first book, or, to put it as charitably as possible, it didn't develop any further. [*He sits down opposite Adolf on the sofa on the left.*] Of course she then had the most promising subject-matter--for of course she drew the portrait of her first husband--you never knew him, old man? He must have been an unmitigated ass.

ADOLF. I've never seen him. He was away for more than six months, but the good fellow must have been as perfect an ass as they're made, judging by her description--you can take it from me, old man, that her description wasn't exaggerated.

GUSTAV. Quite; but why did she marry him?

ADOLF. She didn't know him then. People only get to know one another afterwards, don't you know.

GUSTAV. But, according to that, people have no business to marry until--Well, the man was a tyrant, obviously.

ADOLF. Obviously?

GUSTAV. What husband wouldn't be? [*Casually.*] Why, old chap, you're as much a tyrant as any of the others.

ADOLF. Me? I? Well, I allow my wife to come and go as she jolly well pleases!

GUSTAV [*stands up*]. Pah! a lot of good that is. I didn't suppose you kept her locked up. [*He turns round behind the square table and comes over to Adolf on the right.*] Don't you mind if she's out all night?

ADOLF. I should think I do.

GUSTAV. Look here. [*Resuming his earlier tone.*] Speaking as man to man, it simply makes you ridiculous.

ADOLF. Ridiculous? Can a man's trusting his wife make him ridiculous?

GUSTAV. Of course it can. And you've been so for some time. No doubt about it.

[*He walks round the round table on the right.*]

ADOLF [*excitedly*]. Me? I'd have preferred to be anything but that. I must put matters right.

GUSTAV. Don't you get so excited, otherwise you'll get an attack again.

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Why doesn't she look ridiculous when I stay out all night?

GUSTAV. Why? Don't you bother about that. That's how the matter stands, and while you're fooling about moping, the mischief is done.

[*He goes behind the square table, and walks behind the sofa.*]

ADOLF. What mischief?

GUSTAV. Her husband, you know, was a tyrant, and she simply married him in order to be free. For what other way is there for a girl to get free, than by getting the so-called husband to act as cover?

ADOLF. Why, of course.

GUSTAV. And now, old man, you're the cover.

ADOLF. I?

GUSTAV. As her husband.

ADOLF [*looks absent*].

GUSTAV. Am I not right?

ADOLF [*uneasily*]. I don't know. [*Pause.*] A man lives for years on end with a woman without coming to a clear conclusion about the woman herself, or how she stands in relation to his own way of looking at things. And then all of a sudden a man begins to reflect--and then there's no stopping. Gustav, old man, you're my friend, the only friend I've had for a long time, and this last week you've given me back all my life and pluck. It seems as though you'd radiated your magnetism over me. You were the watchmaker who repairs the works in my brain, and tightened the spring. [*Pause.*] Don't you see yourself how much more lucidly I think, how much more connectedly I speak, and at times it almost seems as though my voice had got back the timbre it used to have in the old days.

GUSTAV. I think so, too. What can be the cause of it?

ADOLF. I don't know. Perhaps one gets accustomed to talk more softly to women. Thekla, at any rate, was always ragging me because I shrieked.

GUSTAV. And then you subsided into a minor key, and allowed yourself to be put in the corner.

ADOLF. Don't say that. [*Reflectively.*] That wasn't the worst of it. Let's talk of something else--where was I then--I've got it. [*Gustav turns round again at the back of the square table and comes to Adolf on his right.*] You came here, old man, and opened my eyes to the mysteries of my art. As a matter of fact, I've been feeling for some

time that my interest in painting was lessening, because it didn't provide me with a proper medium to express what I had in me; but when you gave me the reason for this state of affairs, and explained to me why painting could not possibly be the right form for the artistic impulse of the age, then I saw the true light and I recognized that it would be from now onwards impossible for me to create in colors.

GUSTAV. Are you so certain, old man, that you won't be able to paint any more, that you won't have any relapse?

ADOLF. Quite. I have tested myself. When I went to bed the evening after our conversation I reviewed your chain of argument point by point, and felt convinced that it was sound. But the next morning, when my head cleared again, after the night's sleep, the thought flashed through me like lightning that you might be mistaken all the same. I jumped up, and snatched up a brush and palette, in order to paint, but--just think of it!--it was all up. I was no longer capable of any illusion. The whole thing was nothing but blobs of color, and I was horrified at the thought. I could never have believed I could convert any one else to the belief that painted canvas was anything else except painted canvas. The scales had fallen from my eyes, and I could as much paint again as I could become a child again.

GUSTAV. You realized then that the real striving of the age, its aspiration for reality, for actuality, can only find a corresponding medium in sculpture, which gives bodies extension in the three dimensions.

ADOLF [*hesitating*]. The three dimensions? Yes--in a word, bodies.

GUSTAV. And now you want to become a sculptor? That means that you were a sculptor really from the beginning; you got off the line somehow, so you only needed a guide to direct you back again to the right track. I say, when you work now, does the great joy of creation come over you?

ADOLF. Now, I live again.

GUSTAV. May I see what you're doing?

ADOLF [*undraping a figure on the small table*]. A female figure.

GUSTAV [*probing*]. Without a model, and yet so lifelike?

ADOLF [*heavily*]. Yes, but it is like somebody; extraordinary how this woman is in me, just as I am in her.

GUSTAV. That last is not so extraordinary--do you know anything about transfusion?

ADOLF. Blood transfusion? Yes.

GUSTAV. It seems to me that you've allowed your veins to be opened a bit too much. The examination of this figure clears up many things which I'd previously only surmised. You loved her infinitely?

ADOLF. Yes; so much that I could never tell whether she is I, or I am her; when she laughed I laughed; when she cried I cried, and when--just imagine it--our child came into the world I suffered the same as she did.

GUSTAV [*stepping a little to the right*]. Look here, old chap, I am awfully sorry to have to tell you, but the symptoms of epilepsy are already manifesting themselves.

ADOLF [*crushed*]. In me? What makes you say so.

GUSTAV. Because I watched these symptoms in a younger brother of mine, who eventually died of excess.

[*He sits down in the arm-chair by the circular table.*]

ADOLF. How did it manifest itself--that disease, I mean?

[*Gustav gesticulates vividly; Adolf watches with strained attention, and involuntarily imitates Gustav's gestures.*]

GUSTAV. A ghastly sight. If you feel at all off color, I'd rather not harrow you by describing the symptoms.

ADOLF [*nervously*]. Go on; go on.

GUSTAV. Well, it's like this. Fate had given the youngster for a wife a little innocent, with kiss-curls, dove-like eyes, and a baby face, from which there spoke the pure soul of an angel. In spite of that, the little one managed to appropriate the man's prerogative.

ADOLF. What is that?

GUSTAV. Initiative, of course; and the inevitable result was that the angel came precious near taking him away to heaven. He first had to be on the cross and feel the nails in his flesh.

ADOLF [*suffocating*]. Tell me, what was it like?

GUSTAV [*slowly*]. There were times when he and I would sit quite quietly by each other and chat, and then--I'd scarcely been speaking a few minutes before his face became ashy white, his limbs were paralyzed, and his thumbs turned in towards the palm of the hand. [*With a gesture.*] Like that! [*Adolf imitates the gesture.*] And his eyes were shot with blood, and he began to chew, do you see, like this. [*He moves his lips as though chewing; Adolf imitates him again.*] The saliva stuck in his throat; the chest contracted as though it had been compressed by screws on a joiner's bench; there was a flicker in the pupils like gas jets; foam spurted from his mouth, and he sank gently back in the chair as though he were drowning. Then--

ADOLF [*hissing*]. Stop!

GUSTAV. Then--are you unwell?

ADOLF. Yes.

GUSTAV [*gets up and fetches a glass of water from the table on the right near the center door*]. Here, drink this, and let's change the subject.

ADOLF [*drinks, limp*]. Thanks; go on.

GUSTAV. Good! When he woke up he had no idea what had taken place. [*He takes the glass back to the table.*] He had simply lost consciousness. Hasn't that ever happened to you?

ADOLF. Now and again I have attacks of dizziness. The doctor puts it down to anæmia.

GUSTAV [*on the right of Adolf*]. That's just how the thing starts, mark you. Take it from me, you're in danger of contracting epilepsy; if you aren't on your guard, if you don't live a careful and abstemious life, all round.

ADOLF. What can I do to effect that?

GUSTAV. Above all, you must exercise the most complete continence.

ADOLF. For how long?

GUSTAV. Six months at least.

ADOLF. I can't do it. It would upset all our life together.

GUSTAV. Then it's all up with you.

ADOLF. I can't do it.

GUSTAV. You can't save your own life? But tell me, as you've taken me into your confidence so far, haven't you any other wound that hurts you?--some other secret trouble in this multifarious life of ours, with all its numerous opportunities for jars and complications? There is usually more than one *motif* which is responsible for a discord. Haven't you got a skeleton in the cupboard, old chap, which you hide even from yourself? You told me a minute ago you'd given your child to people to look after. Why didn't you keep it with you?

[*He goes behind the square table on the left and then behind the sofa.*]

ADOLF [*covers the figure on the small table with a cloth*]. It was my wife's wish to have it nursed outside the house.

GUSTAV. The motive? Don't be afraid.

ADOLF. Because when the kid was three years old she thought it began to look like her first husband.

GUSTAV. Re-a-lly? Ever seen the first husband?

ADOLF. No, never. I just once cast a cursory glance over a bad photograph, but I couldn't discover any likeness.

GUSTAV. Oh, well, photographs are never like, and besides, his type of face may have changed with time. By the by, didn't that make you at all jealous?

ADOLF. Not a bit. The child was born a year after our marriage, and the husband was traveling when I met Thekla, here--in this watering-place--in this very house. That's why we come here every summer.

GUSTAV. Then all suspicion on your part was out of the question? But so far as the intrinsic facts of the matter are concerned you needn't be jealous at all, because it not infrequently happens that the children of a widow who marries again are like the deceased husband. Very awkward business, no question about it; and that's why, don't you know, the widows are burned alive in India. Tell me, now, didn't you ever feel jealous of him, of the survival of his memory in your own self? Wouldn't it have rather gone against the grain if he had just met you when you were out for a walk, and, looking straight at Thekla, said "We," instead of "I"? "We."

ADOLF. I can't deny that the thought has haunted me.

GUSTAV [*sits down opposite Adolf on the sofa on the left*]. I thought as much, and you'll never get away from it. There are discords in life, you know, which never get resolved, so you must stuff your ears with wax, and work. Work, get older, and heap up over the coffin a mass of new impressions, and then the corpse will rest in peace.

ADOLF. Excuse my interrupting you--but it is extraordinary at times how your way of speaking reminds me of Thekla. You've got a trick,

old man, of winking with your right eye as though you were counting, and your gaze has the same power over me as hers has.

GUSTAV. No, really?

ADOLF. And now you pronounce your "No, really?" in the same indifferent tone that she does. "No, really?" is one of her favorite expressions, too, you know.

GUSTAV. Perhaps there is a distant relationship between us: all men and women are related of course. Anyway, there's no getting away from the strangeness of it, and it will be interesting for me to make the acquaintance of your wife, so as to observe this remarkable characteristic.

ADOLF. But just think of this, she doesn't take a single expression from me; why, she seems rather to make a point of avoiding all my special tricks of speech; all the same, I have seen her make use of one of my gestures; but it is quite the usual thing in married life for a husband and a wife to develop the so-called marriage likeness.

GUSTAV. Quite. But look here now. [*He stands up.*] That woman has never loved you.

ADOLF. Nonsense.

GUSTAV. Pray excuse me, woman's love consists simply in this--in taking in, in receiving. She does not love the man from whom she takes nothing: she has never loved you.

[*He turns round behind the square table and walks to Adolf's right.*]

ADOLF. I suppose you don't think that she'd be able to love more than once?

GUSTAV. No. Once bit, twice shy. After the first time, one keeps one's eyes open, but you have never been really bitten yet. You be careful of those who have; they're dangerous customers.

[*He goes round the circular table on the right.*]

ADOLF. What you say jabs a knife into my flesh. I've got a feeling as though something in me were cut through, but I can do nothing to stop it all by myself, and it's as well it should be so, for abscesses will be opened in that way which would otherwise never be able to come to a head. She never loved me? Why did she marry me, then?

GUSTAV. Tell me first how it came about that she did marry you, and whether she married you or you her?

ADOLF. God knows! That's much too hard a question to be answered offhand, and how did it take place?--it took more than a day.

GUSTAV. Shall I guess?

[He goes behind the round table, toward the left, and sits on the sofa.]

ADOLF. You'll get nothing for your pains.

GUSTAV. Not so fast! From the insight which you've given me into your own character, and that of your wife, I find it pretty easy to work out the sequence of the whole thing. Listen to me and you'll be quite convinced. *[Dispassionately and in an almost jocular tone.]* The husband happened to be traveling on study and she was alone. At first she found a pleasure in being free. Then she imagined that she felt the void, for I presume that she found it pretty boring after being alone for a fortnight. Then he turned up, and the void begins gradually to be filled--the picture of the absent man begins gradually to fade in comparison, for the simple reason that he is a long way off--you know of course the psychological algebra of distance? And when both of them, alone as they were, felt the awakening of passion, they were frightened of themselves, of him, of their own conscience. They sought for protection, skulked behind the fig-leaf, played at brother and sister, and the more sensual grew their feelings the more spiritual did they pretend their relationship really was.

ADOLF. Brother and sister! How did you know that?

GUSTAV. I just thought that was how it was. Children play at mother and father, but of course when they grow older they play at brother

and sister--so as to conceal what requires concealment; they then discard their chaste desires; they play blind man's bluff till they've caught each other in some dark corner, where they're pretty sure not to be seen by anybody. [*With increased severity.*] But they are warned by their inner consciences that an eye sees them through the darkness. They are afraid--and in their panic the absent man begins to haunt their imagination--to assume monstrous proportions--to become metamorphosed--he becomes a nightmare who oppresses them in that love's young dream of theirs. He becomes the creditor [*he raps slowly on the table three times with his finger, as though knocking at the door*] who knocks at the door. They see his black hand thrust itself between them when their own are reaching after the dish of pottage. They hear his unwelcome voice in the stillness of the night, which is only broken by the beating of their own pulses. He doesn't prevent their belonging to each other, but he is enough to mar their happiness, and when they have felt this invisible power of his, and when at last they want to run away, and make their futile efforts to escape the memory which haunts them, the guilt which they have left behind, the public opinion which they are afraid of, and they lack the strength to bear their own guilt, then a scapegoat has to be exterminated and slaughtered. They posed as believers in Free Love, but they didn't have the pluck to go straight to him, to speak straight out to him and say, "We love each other." They were cowardly, and that's why the tyrant had to be assassinated. Am I not right?

ADOLF. Yes; but you're forgetting that she trained me, gave me new thoughts.

GUSTAV. I haven't forgotten it. But tell me, how was it that she wasn't able to succeed in educating the other man--in educating him into being really modern?

ADOLF. He was an utter ass.

GUSTAV. Right you are--he was an ass; but that's a fairly elastic word, and according to her description of him, in her novel, his asinine nature seemed to have consisted principally in the fact that he didn't understand her. Excuse the question, but is your wife really as deep as all that? I haven't found anything particularly profound in her writings.

ADOLF. Nor have I. I must really own that I too find it takes me all my time to understand her. It's as though the machinery of our brains couldn't catch on to each other properly--as though something in my head got broken when I try to understand her.

GUSTAV. Perhaps you're an ass as well.

ADOLF. No, I flatter myself I'm not that, and I nearly always think that she's in the wrong--and, for the sake of argument, would you care to read this letter which I got from her to-day?

[He takes a letter out of his pocketbook.]

GUSTAV *[reads it cursorily]*. Hum, I seem to know the style so well.

ADOLF. Like a man's, almost.

GUSTAV. Well, at any rate I know a man who had a style like that. *[Standing up.]* I see she goes on calling you brother all the time--do you always keep up the comedy for the benefit of your two selves? Do you still keep on using the fig leaves, even though they're a trifle withered--you don't use any term of endearment?

ADOLF. No. In my view, I couldn't respect her quite so much if I did.

GUSTAV *[hands back the letter]*. I see, and she calls herself "sister" so as to inspire respect.

[He turns around and passes the square table on Adolf's right.]

ADOLF. I want to esteem her more than I do myself. I want her to be my better self.

GUSTAV. Oh, you be your better self; though I quite admit it's less convenient than having somebody else to do it for you. Do you want, then, to be your wife's inferior?

ADOLF. Yes, I do. I find pleasure in always allowing myself to be beaten by her a little. For instance, I taught her swimming, and it

amuses me when she boasts about being better and pluckier than I am. At the beginning I simply pretended to be less skillful and courageous than she was, in order to give her pluck, but one day, God knows how it came about, I was actually the worse swimmer and the one with less pluck. It seemed as though she's taken all my grit away in real earnest.

GUSTAV. And haven't you taught her anything else?

ADOLF. Yes--but this is in confidence--I taught her spelling, because she didn't know it. Just listen to this. When she took over the correspondence of the household I gave up writing letters, and--will you believe it?--simply from lack of practice I've lost one bit of grammar after another in the course of the year. But do you think she ever remembers that she has to thank me really for her proficiency? Not for a minute. Of course, I'm the ass now.

GUSTAV. Ah, really? You're the ass now, are you?

ADOLF. I'm only joking, of course.

GUSTAV. Obviously. But this is pure cannibalism, isn't it? Do you know what I mean? Well, the savages devour their enemies so as to acquire their best qualities. Well, this woman has devoured your soul, your pluck, your knowledge.

ADOLF. And my faith. It was I who kept her up to the mark and made her write her first book.

GUSTAV [*with facial expression*]. Re-a-lly?

ADOLF. It was I who fed her up with praise, even when I thought her work was no good. It was I who introduced her into literary sets, and tried to make her feel herself in clover; defended her against criticism by my personal intervention. I blew courage into her, kept on blowing it for so long that I got out of breath myself. I gave and gave and gave--until nothing was left for me myself. Do you know--I'm going to tell you the whole story--do you know how the thing seems to me now? One's temperament is such an extraordinary thing, and when my artistic successes looked as though they would eclipse her--her prestige--I tried to buck her up by belittling myself and by

representing that my art was one that was inferior to hers. I talked so much of the general insignificant rôle of my particular art, and harped on it so much, thought of so many good reasons for my contention, that one fine day I myself was soaked through and through with the worthlessness of the painter's art; so all that was left was a house of cards for you to blow down.

GUSTAV. Excuse my reminding you of what you said, but at the beginning of our conversation you were asserting that she took nothing from you.

ADOLF. She doesn't--now, at any rate; now there is nothing left to take.

GUSTAV. So the snake has gorged herself, and now she vomits.

ADOLF. Perhaps she took more from me than I knew of.

GUSTAV. Oh, you can reckon on that right enough--she took without your noticing it. [*He goes behind the square table and comes in front of the sofa.*] That's what people call stealing.

ADOLF. Then what it comes to is that she hasn't educated me at all?

GUSTAV. Rather you her. Of course she knew the trick well enough of making you believe the contrary. Might I ask how she pretended to educate you?

ADOLF. Oh--at first--hum!

GUSTAV. Well? [*He leans his arms on the table.*]

ADOLF. Well, I--

GUSTAV. No; it was she--she.

ADOLF. As a matter of fact I couldn't say which it was.

GUSTAV. You see.

ADOLF. Besides, she destroyed my faith as well, and so I went backward until you came, old chap, and gave me a new faith.

GUSTAV [*he laughs*]. In sculpture?

[*He turns round by the square table and comes to Adolf's right.*]

ADOLF [*hesitating*]. Yes.

GUSTAV. And you believed in it?--in that abstract, obsolete art from the childhood of the world. Do you believe that by means of pure form and three dimensions--no, you don't really--that you can produce an effect on the real spirit of this age of ours, that you can create illusions without color? Without color, I say. Do you believe that?

ADOLF [*tonelessly*]. No.

GUSTAV. Nor do I.

ADOLF. But why did you say you did?

GUSTAV. You make me pity you.

ADOLF. Yes, I am indeed to be pitied. And now I'm bankrupt, absolutely--and the worst of it is I haven't got her any more.

GUSTAV [*with a few steps toward the right*]. What good would she be to you? She would be what God above was to me before I became an atheist--a subject on which I could lavish my reverence. You keep your feeling of reverence dark, and let something else grow on top of it--a healthy contempt, for instance.

ADOLF. I can't live without some one to reverence.

GUSTAV. Slave!

[*He goes round the table on the right.*]

ADOLF. And without a woman to reverence, to worship.

GUSTAV. Oh, the deuce! Then you go back to that God of yours--if you really must have something on which you can crucify yourself; but you call yourself an atheist when you've got the superstitious belief in women in your own blood; you call yourself a free thinker when you can't think freely about a lot of silly women. Do you know what all this illusive quality, this sphinx-like mystery, this profundity in your wife's temperament all really comes to? The whole thing is sheer stupidity; why, the woman can't distinguish between A.B. and bull's foot for the life of her. And look here, it's something shoddy in the mechanism, that's where the fault lies. Outside it looks like a fifty-guinea hunting watch, open it and you find it's tuppenny-halfpenny gun-metal. [*He comes up to Adolf.*] Put her in trousers, draw a mustache under her nose with a piece of coal, and then listen to her in the same state of mind, and then you'll be perfectly convinced that it is quite a different kettle of fish altogether---a gramophone which reproduces, with rather less volume, your words and other people's words. Do you know how a woman is constituted? Yes, of course you do. A boy with the breasts of a mother, an immature man, a precocious child whose growth has been stunted, a chronically anæmic creature that has a regular emission of blood thirteen times in the year. What can you do with a thing like that?

ADOLF. Yes--but--but then how can I believe--that we are really on an equality?

GUSTAV [*moves away from him again towards the right*]. Sheer hallucination! The fascination of the petticoat. But it is so; perhaps, in fact you have become like each other, the leveling has taken place. But I say. [*He takes out his watch.*] We've been chatting for quite long enough. Your wife's bound to be here shortly. Wouldn't it be better to leave off now, so that you can rest for a little?

[*He comes nearer and holds out his hand to say good-by. Adolf grips his hand all the tighter.*]

ADOLF. NO, don't leave me. I haven't got the pluck to be alone.

GUSTAV. Only for a little while. Your wife will be coming in a minute.

ADOLF. Yes, yes--she's coming. [*Pause.*] Strange, isn't it? I long for her and yet I'm frightened of her. She caresses me, she is tender, but her kisses have something in them which smothers one, something which sucks, something which stupefies. It is as though I were the child at the circus whose face the clown is making up in the dressing-room, so that it can appear red-cheeked before the public.

GUSTAV [*leaning on the arm of Adolf's chair*]. I'm sorry for you, old man. Although I'm not a doctor I am in a position to tell you that you are a dying man. One only has to look at your last pictures to be quite clear on the point.

ADOLF. What do you say--what do you mean?

GUSTAV. Your coloring is so watery, so consumptive and thin, that the yellow of the canvas shines through. It is just as though your hollow ashen white cheeks were looking out at me.

ADOLF. Ah!

GUSTAV. Yes, and that's not only my view. Haven't you read to-day's paper?

ADOLF [*he starts*]. No.

GUSTAV. It's before you on the table.

ADOLF [*he gropes after the paper without having the courage to take it*]. Is it in here?

GUSTAV. Read it, or shall I read it to you?

ADOLF. No.

GUSTAV [*turns to leave*]. If you prefer it, I'll go.

ADOLF. NO, no, no! I don't know how it is--I think I am beginning to hate you, but all the same I can't do without your being near me. You have helped to drag me out of the slough which I was in, and, as luck would have it, I just managed to work my way clear and then you

knocked me on the head and plunged me in again. As long as I kept my secrets to myself I still had some guts--now I'm empty. There's a picture by an Italian master that describes a torture scene. The entrails are dragged out of a saint by means of a windlass. The martyr lies there and sees himself getting continually thinner and thinner, but the roll on the windless always gets perpetually fatter, and so it seems to me that you get stronger since you've taken me up and that you're taking away now with you, as you go, my innermost essence, the core of my character, and there's nothing left of me but an empty husk.

GUSTAV. Oh, what fantastic notions; besides, your wife is coming back with your heart.

ADOLF. No; no longer, after you have burnt it for me. You have passed through me, changing everything in your track to ashes--my art, my love, my hope, my faith.

GUSTAV [*comes near to him again*]. Were you so splendidly off before?

ADOLF. No, I wasn't, but the situation might have been saved; now it's too late. Murderer!

GUSTAV. We've wasted a little time. Now we'll do some sowing in the ashes.

ADOLF. I hate you! I curse you!

GUSTAV. A healthy symptom. You've still got some strength, and now I'll screw up your machinery again. I say. [*He goes behind the square table on the left and comes in front of the sofa.*] Will you listen to me and obey me?

ADOLF. Do what you will with me, I'll obey.

GUSTAV. Look at me.

ADOLF [*looks him in the face*]. And now you look at me again with that other expression in those eyes of yours, which draws me to you irresistibly.

GUSTAV. Now listen to me.

ADOLF. Yes, but speak of yourself. Don't speak any more of me: it's as though I were wounded, every movement hurts me.

GUSTAV. Oh no, there isn't much to say about me, don't you know. I'm a private tutor in dead languages and a widower, that's all. [*He goes in front of the table.*] Hold my hand.

[*Adolf does so.*]

ADOLF. What awful strength you must have, it seems as though a fellow were catching hold of an electric battery.

GUSTAV. And just think, I was once quite as weak as you are. [*Sternly.*] Get up.

ADOLF [*gets up*]. I am like a child without any bones, and my brain is empty.

GUSTAV. Take a walk through the room.

ADOLF. I can't.

GUSTAV. You must; if you don't I'll hit you.

ADOLF [*stands up*]. What do you say?

GUSTAV. I've told you--I'll hit you.

ADOLF [*jumps back to the circular table on the right, beside himself.*] You!

GUSTAV [*follows him*]. Bravo! That's driven the blood to your head, and woken up your self-respect. Now I'll give you an electric shock. Where's your wife?

ADOLF. Where's my wife?

GUSTAV. Yes.

ADOLF. At--a meeting.

GUSTAV. Certain?

ADOLF. Absolutely.

GUSTAV. What kind of a meeting?

ADOLF. An orphan association.

GUSTAV. Did you part friends?

ADOLF [*hesitating*]. Not friends.

GUSTAV. Enemies, then? What did you say to make her angry?

ADOLF. You're terrible. I'm frightened of you. How did you manage to know that?

GUSTAV. I've just got three known quantities, and by their help I work out the unknown. What did you say to her, old chap?

ADOLF. I said--only two words--but two awful words. I regret them-- I regret them.

GUSTAV. You shouldn't do that. Well, speak!

ADOLF. I said, "Old coquette."

GUSTAV. And what else?

ADOLF. I didn't say anything else.

GUSTAV. Oh yes, you did; you've only forgotten it. Perhaps because you haven't got the pluck to remember it. You've locked it up in a secret pigeonhole; open it.

ADOLF. I don't remember.

GUSTAV. But I know what it was--the sense was roughly this: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to be always flirting at your age. You're getting too old to find any more admirers."

ADOLF. Did I say that--possibly? How did you manage to know it?

GUSTAV. On my way here I heard her tell the story on the steamer.

ADOLF. To whom?

GUSTAV [*walks up and down on the left*]. To four boys, whom she happened to be with. She has a craze for pure boys, just like--

ADOLF. A perfectly innocent *penchant*.

GUSTAV. Quite as innocent as playing brother and sister when one is father and mother.

ADOLF. You saw her, then?

GUSTAV. Yes, of course; but you've never seen her if you didn't see her then--I mean, if you weren't present--and that's the reason, don't you know, why a husband can never know his wife. Have you got her photograph?

ADOLF [*takes a photo out of his pocketbook. Inquisitively*]. Here you are.

GUSTAV [*takes it*]. Were you present when it was taken?

ADOLF. No.

GUSTAV. Just look at it? Is it like the portrait you painted? No, the features are the same, but the expression is different. But you don't notice that, because you insist on seeing in it the picture of her which you've painted. Now look at this picture as a painter, without thinking of the original. What does it represent? I can see nothing but a tricked-out flirt, playing the decoy. Observe the cynical twist in the mouth, which you never managed to see. You see that her look is seeking a

man quite different from you. Observe the dress is *décolleté*, the coiffure titivated to the last degree, the sleeves finished high up. You see?

ADOLF. Yes, now I see.

GUSTAV. Be careful, my boy.

ADOLF. Of what?

GUSTAV [*gives him back the portrait*]. Of her revenge. Don't forget that by saying she was no longer attractive to men you wounded her in the one thing which she took most seriously. If you'd called her literary works twaddle she'd have laughed, and pitied your bad taste, but now--take it from me--if she hasn't avenged herself already it's not her fault.

ADOLF. I must be clear on that point.

[*He goes over to Gustav, and sits down in his previous place. Gustav approaches him.*]

GUSTAV. Find out yourself.

ADOLF. Find out myself?

GUSTAV. Investigate. I'll help you, if you like.

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Good. Since I've been condemned to death once--so be it--sooner or later it's all the same what's to happen.

GUSTAV. One question first. Hasn't your wife got just one weak point?

ADOLF. Not that I know of. [*Adolf goes to the open door in the center*]. Yes. You can hear the steamer in the Sound now--she'll be here soon. And I must go down to meet her.

GUSTAV [*holding him back*]. No, stay here. Be rude to her. If she's got a good conscience she'll let you have it so hot and strong that you

won't know where you are. But if she feels guilty she'll come and caress you.

ADOLF. Are you so sure of it?

GUSTAV. Not absolutely. At times a hare goes back in the tracks, but I'm not going to let this one escape me. My room is just here. [*Points to the door on the right and goes behind Adolf's chair.*] I'll keep this position, and be on the look-out, while you play your game here, and when you've played it to the end we'll exchange parts. I'll go in the cage and leave myself to the tender mercies of the snake, and you can stand at the keyhole. Afterwards we'll meet in the park and compare notes. But pull yourself together, old man, and if you show weakness I'll knock on the floor twice with a chair.

ADOLF [*getting up*]. Right. But don't go away: I must know that you're in the next room.

GUSTAV. You can trust me for that. But be careful you aren't afraid when you see later on how I can dissect a human soul and lay the entrails here on the table. It may seem a bit uncanny to beginners, but if you've seen it done once you don't regret it. One thing more, don't say a word that you've met me, or that you have made any acquaintance during her absence--not a word. I'll ferret out her weak point myself. Hush! She's already up there in her room. She's whistling--then she's in a temper. Now stick to it. [*He points to the left.*] And sit here on this chair, then she'll have to sit there [*He points to the sofa on the left.*], and I can keep you both in view at the same time.

ADOLF. We've still got an hour before dinner. There are no new visitors, for there has been no bell to announce them. We'll be alone together--more's the pity!

GUSTAV. You seem pretty limp. Are you unwell?

ADOLF. I'm all right; unless, you know, I'm frightened of what's going to happen. But I can't help its happening. The stone rolls, but it was not the last drop of water that made it roll, nor yet the first--everything taken together brought it about.

GUSTAV. Let it roll, then; it won't have any peace until it does.
Good-by, for the time being.

[Exit on the right. Adolf nods to him, stands up for a short time, looking at the photograph, tears it to pieces, and throws the fragments behind the circular table on the right; he then sits down in his previous place, nervously arranges his tie, runs his fingers through his hair, fumbles with the lapels of his coat, etc. Thekla enters on the left.]

SCENE II.

THEKLA *[frank, cheerful and engaging, goes straight up to her husband and kisses him]*. Good-day, little brother; how have you been getting on?

[She stands on his left.]

ADOLF *[half overcome but jocularly resisting]*. What mischief have you been up to, for you to kiss me?

THEKLA. Yes, let me just confess. Something very naughty--I've spent an awful lot of money.

ADOLF. Did you have a good time, then?

THEKLA. Excellent. *[She goes to his right.]* But not at the Congress. It was as dull as ditch-water, don't you know. But how has little brother been passing the time, when his little dove had flown away?

[She looks around the room, as though looking for somebody or scenting something, and thus comes behind the sofa on the left.]

ADOLF. Oh, the time seemed awfully long.

THEKLA. Nobody to visit you?

ADOLF. Not a soul.

THEKLA [*looks him up and down and sits down on the sofa*]. Who sat here?

ADOLF. Here? No one.

THEKLA. Strange! The sofa is as warm as anything, and there's the mark of an elbow in the cushion. Have you had a lady visitor?

[*She stands up.*]

ADOLF. Me? You're not serious?

THEKLA [*turns away from the square table and comes to Adolf's right*]. How he blushes! So the little brother wants to mystify me a bit, does he? Well, let him come here and confess what he's got on his conscience to his little wife.

[*She draws him to her. Adolf lets his head sink on her breast; laughing.*]

ADOLF. You're a regular devil, do you know that?

THEKLA. No, I know myself so little.

ADOLF. Do you never think about yourself?

THEKLA [*looking in the air, while she looks at him searchingly*]. About myself? I only think about myself. I am a shocking egoist, but how philosophical you've become, my dear.

ADOLF. Put your hand on my forehead.

THEKLA [*playfully*]. Has he got bees in his bonnet again? Shall I drive them away? [*She kisses him on the forehead.*] There, it's all right now? [*Pause, moving away from him to the right.*] Now let me hear what he's been doing to amuse himself. Painted anything pretty?

ADOLF. No; I've given up painting!

THEKLA. What, you've given up painting!

ADOLF. Yes, but don't scold me about it. How could I help it if I wasn't able to paint any more?

THEKLA. What are you going to take up then?

ADOLF. I'm going to be a sculptor. [*Thekla passes over in front of the square table and in front of the sofa.*] Yes, but don't blame me--just look at this figure.

THEKLA [*unwraps the figure on the table*]. Hallo, I say. Who's this meant to be?

ADOLF. Guess!

THEKLA [*tenderly*]. Is it meant to be his little wife? And he isn't ashamed of it, is he?

ADOLF. Hasn't he hit the mark?

THEKLA. How can I tell?--the face is lacking.

[*She drapes the figure.*]

ADOLF. Quite so--but all the rest? Nice?

THEKLA [*taps him caressingly on yhe cheek*]. Will he shut up? Otherwise I'll kiss him.

[*She goes behind him; Adolf defending himself.*]

ADOLF. Look out, look out, anybody might come.

THEKLA [*nestling close to him*]. What do I care! I'm surely allowed to kiss my own husband. That's only my legal right.

ADOLF. Quite so; but do you know the people here in the hotel take the view that we're not married because we kiss each other so much, and our occasional quarreling makes them all the more cocksure about it, because lovers usually carry on like that.

THEKLA. But need there be any quarrels? Can't he always be as sweet and good as he is at present. Let him tell me. Wouldn't he like it himself? Wouldn't he like us to be happy?

ADOLF. I should like it, but--

THEKLA [*with a step to the right*]. Who put it into his head not to paint any more?

ADOLF. You're always scenting somebody behind me and my thoughts. You're jealous.

THEKLA. I certainly am. I was always afraid some one might estrange you from me.

ADOLF. You're afraid of that, you say, though you know very well that there isn't a woman living who can supplant you--that I can't live without you.

THEKLA. I wasn't frightened the least bit of females. It was your friends I was afraid of: they put all kinds of ideas into your head.

ADOLF [*probing*]. So you were afraid? What were you afraid of?

THEKLA. Some one has been here. Who was it?

ADOLF. Can't you stand my looking at you?

THEKLA. Not in that way. You aren't accustomed to look at me like that.

ADOLF. How am I looking at you then?

THEKLA. You are spying underneath your eyelids.

ADOLF. Right through. Yes, I want to know what it's like inside.

THEKLA. I don't mind. As you like. I've nothing to hide, but--your very manner of speaking has changed--you employ expressions.

[*Probing.*] You philosophize. Eh? [*She goes toward him in a menacing manner.*] Who has been here?

ADOLF. My doctor--nobody else.

THEKLA. Your doctor! What doctor?

ADOLF. The doctor from Strömastad.

THEKLA. What's his name?

ADOLF. Sjöberg.

THEKLA. What did he say?

ADOLF. Well--he said, among other things--that I'm pretty near getting epilepsy.

THEKLA [*with a step to the right*]. Among other things! What else did he say?

ADOLF. Oh, something extremely unpleasant.

THEKLA. Let me hear it.

ADOLF. He forbade us to live together as man and wife for some time.

THEKLA. There you are. I thought as much. They want to separate us. I've already noticed it for some time.

[*She goes round the circular table toward the right.*]

ADOLF. There was nothing for you to notice. There was never the slightest incident of that description.

THEKLA. What do you mean?

ADOLF. How could it have been possible for you to have seen something which wasn't there if your fear hadn't heated your

imagination to so violent a pitch that you saw what never existed? As a matter of fact, what were you afraid of? That I might borrow another's eye so as to see you as you really were, not as you appeared to me?

THEKLA. Keep your imagination in check, Adolf. Imagination is the beast in the human soul.

ADOLF. Where did you get this wisdom from? From the pure youths on the steamer, eh?

THEKLA [*without losing her self-possession*]. Certainly--even youth can teach one a great deal.

ADOLF. You seem for once in a way, to be awfully keen on youth?

THEKLA [*standing by the door in the center*]. I have always been so, and that's how it came about that I loved you. Any objection?

ADOLF. Not at all. But I should very much prefer to be the only one.

THEKLA [*coming forward on his right, and joking as though speaking to a child*]. Let the little brother look here. I've got such a large heart that there is room in it for a great many, not only for him.

ADOLF. But little brother doesn't want to know anything about the other brothers.

THEKLA. Won't he just come here and let himself be teased by his little woman, because he's jealous--no, envious is the right word.

[*Two knocks with a chair are heard from the room on the right.*]

ADOLF. No, I don't want to fool about, I want to speak seriously.

THEKLA [*as though speaking to a child*]. Good Lord! he wants to speak seriously. Upon my word! Has the man become serious for once in his life? [*Comes on his left, takes hold of his head and kisses him.*] Won't he laugh now a little?

[*Adolf laughs.*]

THEKLA. There, there!

ADOLF [*laughs involuntarily*]. You damned witch, you! I really believe you can bewitch people.

THEKLA [*comes in front of the sofa*]. He can see for himself, and that's why he mustn't worry me, otherwise I shall certainly bewitch him.

ADOLF [*springs up*]. Thekla! Sit for me a minute in profile, and I'll do the face for your figure.

THEKLA. With pleasure.

[*She turns her profile toward him.*]

ADOLF [*sits down, fixes her with his eyes and acts as though he were modeling*]. Now, don't think of me, think of somebody else.

THEKLA. I'll think of my last conquest.

ADOLF. The pure youth?

THEKLA. Quite right. He had the duckiest, sweetest little mustache, and cheeks like cherries, so delicate and soft, one could have bitten right into them.

ADOLF [*depressed*]. Just keep that twist in your mouth.

THEKLA. What twist?

ADOLF. That cynical insolent twist which I've never seen before.

THEKLA [*makes a grimace*]. Like that?

ADOLF. Quite. [*He gets up.*] Do you know how Bret Harte describes the adulteress?

THEKLA [*laughs*]. No, I've never read that Bret What-do-you-call-him.

ADOLF. Oh! she's a pale woman who never blushes.

THEKLA. Never? Oh yes, she does; oh yes, she does. Perhaps when she meets her lover, even though her husband and Mr. Bret didn't manage to see anything of it.

ADOLF. Are you so certain about it?

THEKLA [*as before*]. Absolutely. If the man isn't able to drive her very blood to her head, how can he possibly enjoy the pretty spectacle?

[*She passes by him toward the right.*]

ADOLF [*raving*]. Thekla! Thekla!

THEKLA. Little fool!

ADOLF [*sternly*]. Thekla!

THEKLA. Let him call me his own dear little sweetheart, and I'll get red all over before him, shall I?

ADOLF [*disarmed*]. I'm so angry with you, you monster, that I should like to bite you.

THEKLA [*playing with him*]. Well, come and bite me; come.

[*She holds out her arms towards him.*]

ADOLF [*takes her by the neck and kisses her*]. Yes, my dear, I'll bite you so that you die.

THEKLA [*joking*]. Look out, somebody might come.

[*She goes to the fireplace on the right and leans on the chimneypiece.*]

ADOLF. Oh, what do I care if they do. I don't care about anything in the whole world so long as I have you.

THEKLA. And if you don't have me any more?

ADOLF [*sinks down on the chair on the left in front of the circular table*]. Then I die!

THEKLA. All right, you needn't be frightened of that the least bit; I'm already much too old, you see, for anybody to like me.

ADOLF. You haven't forgotten those words of mine?--I take them back.

THEKLA. Can you explain to me why it is that you're so jealous, and at the same time so sure of yourself?

ADOLF. No, I can't explain it, but it may be that the thought that another man has possessed you, gnaws and consumes me. It seems to me at times as though our whole love were a figment of the brain--a passion that had turned into a formal matter of honor. I know nothing which would be more intolerable for me to bear, than for him to have the satisfaction of making me unhappy. Ah, I've never seen him, but the very thought that there is such a man who watches in secret for my unhappiness, who conjures down on me the curse of heaven day by day, who would laugh and gloat over my fall--the very idea of the thing lies like a nightmare on my breast, drives me to you, holds me spellbound, cripples me.

THEKLA [*goes behind the circular table and comes on Adolf's right*]. Do you think I should like to give him that satisfaction, that I should like to make his prophecy come true?

ADOLF. No, I won't believe that of you.

THEKLA. Then if that's so, why aren't you easy on the subject?

ADOLF. It's your flirtations which keep me in a chronic state of agitation. Why do you go on playing that game?

THEKLA. It's no game. I want to be liked, that's all.

ADOLF. Quite so; but only liked by men.

THEKLA. Of course. Do you suggest it would be possible for one of us women to get herself liked by other women?

ADOLF. I say. [*Pause.*] Haven't you heard recently--from him?

THEKLA. Not for the last six months.

ADOLF. Do you never think of him?

THEKLA [*after a pause, quickly and tonelessly*]. No. [*With a step toward the left.*] Since the death of the child there is no longer any tie between us. [*Pause.*]

ADOLF. And you never see him in the street?

THEKLA. No; he must have buried himself somewhere on the west coast. But why do you harp on that subject just now?

ADOLF. I don't know. When I was so alone these last few days, it just occurred to me what he must have felt like when he was left stranded.

THEKLA. I believe you've got pangs of conscience.

ADOLF. Yes.

THEKLA. You think you're a thief, don't you?

ADOLF. Pretty near.

THEKLA. All right. You steal women like you steal children or fowl. You regard me to some extent like his real or personal property. Much obliged.

ADOLF. No; I regard you as his wife, and that's more than property: it can't be made up in damages.

THEKLA. Oh yes, it can. If you happen to hear one fine day that he has married again, these whims and fancies of yours will disappear. [*She comes over to him.*] Haven't you made up for him to me?

ADOLF. Have I?--and did you use to love him in those days?

THEKLA [*goes behind him to the fireplace on the right*]. Of course I loved him--certainly.

ADOLF. And afterwards?

THEKLA. I got tired of him.

ADOLF. And just think, if you get tired of me in the same way?

THEKLA. That will never be.

ADOLF. But suppose another man came along with all the qualities that you want in a man? Assume the hypothesis, wouldn't you leave me in that case?

THEKLA. No.

ADOLF. If he riveted you to him so strongly that you couldn't be parted from him, then of course you'd give me up?

THEKLA. No; I have never yet said anything like that.

ADOLF. But you can't love two people at the same time?

THEKLA. Oh yes. Why not?

ADOLF. I can't understand it.

THEKLA. Is anything then impossible simply because you can't understand it? All men are not made on the same lines, you know.

ADOLF [*getting up a few steps to the left*]. I am now beginning to understand.

THEKLA. No, really?

ADOLF [*sits down in his previous place by the square table*]. No, really? [*Pause, during which he appears to be making an effort to remember something, but without success.*] Thekla, do you know that your frankness is beginning to be positively agonizing? [*Thekla moves away from him behind the square table and goes behind the sofa on the left.*] Haven't you told me, times out of number, that frankness is the most beautiful virtue you know, and that I must spend all my time in acquiring it? But it seems to me you take cover behind your frankness.

THEKLA. Those are the new tactics, don't you see.

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. I don't know how it is, but this place begins to feel uncanny. If you don't mind, we'll travel home this very night.

THEKLA. What an idea you've got into your head again. I've just arrived, and I've no wish to travel off again.

[*She sits down on the sofa on the left.*]

ADOLF. But if I want it?

THEKLA. Nonsense! What do I care what you want? Travel alone.

ADOLF [*seriously*]. I now order you to travel with me by the next steamer.

THEKLA. Order? What do you mean by that?

ADOLF. Do you forget that you're my wife?

THEKLA [*getting up*]. Do you forget that you're my husband?

ADOLF [*following her example*]. That's just the difference between one sex and the other.

THEKLA. That's right, speak in that tone--you have never loved me.

[*She goes past him to the right up to the fireplace.*]

ADOLF. Really?

THEKLA. No, for loving means giving.

ADOLF. For a man to love means giving, for a woman to love means taking--and I've given, given, given.

THEKLA. Oh, to be sure, you've given a fine lot, haven't you?

ADOLF. Everything.

THEKLA [*leans on the chimneypiece*]. There has been a great deal besides that. And even if you did give me everything, I accepted it. What do you mean by coming now and handing the bill for your presents? If I did take them, I proved to you by that very fact that I loved you. [*She approaches him.*] A girl only takes presents from her lover.

ADOLF. From her lover, I agree. There you spoke the truth. [*With a step to the left.*] I was just your lover, but never your husband.

THEKLA. A man ought to be jolly grateful when he's spared the necessity of playing cover, but if you aren't satisfied with the position you can have your *congé*. I don't like a husband.

ADOLF. No, I noticed as much, for when I remarked, some time back, that you wanted to sneak away from me, and get a set of your own, so as to be able to deck yourself out with my feathers, to scintillate with my jewels, I wanted to remind you of your guilt. And then I changed from your point of view into that inconvenient creditor, whom a woman would particularly prefer to keep at a safe distance from one, and then you would have liked to have canceled the debt, and to avoid getting any more into my debt; you ceased to pilfer my coffers and transferred your attention to others. I was your husband without having wished it, and your hate began to arise; but now I'm going to be your husband, whether you want it or not. I can't be your lover any more, that's certain!

[*He sits down in his previous place on the right.*]

THEKLA [*half joking, she moves away behind the table and goes behind the sofa*]. Don't talk such nonsense.

ADOLF. You be careful! It's a dangerous game, to consider every one else an ass and only oneself smart.

THEKLA. Everybody does that more or less.

ADOLF. And I'm just beginning to suspect that that husband of yours wasn't such an ass after all.

THEKLA. Good God! I really believe you're beginning to have sympathy--for him?

ADOLF. Yes, almost.

THEKLA. Well, look here. Wouldn't you like to make his acquaintance, so as to pour out your heart to him if you want to? What a charming picture! But I, too, begin to feel myself drawn to him somehow. I'm tired of being the nurse of a baby like you. [*She goes a few steps forward and passes by Adolf on the right.*] He at any rate was a man, even though he did make the mistake of being my husband.

ADOLF. Hush, hush! But don't talk so loud, we might be heard.

THEKLA. What does it matter, so long as we're taken for man and wife.

ADOLF. So this is what it comes to then? You are now beginning to be keen both on manly men and pure boys.

THEKLA. There are no limits to my keenness, as you see. And my heart is open to the whole world, great and small, beautiful and ugly. I love the whole world.

ADOLF [*standing up*]. Do you know what that means?

THEKLA. No, I don't know, I only feel.

ADOLF. It means that old age has arrived.

THEKLA. Are you starting on that again now? Take care!

ADOLF. You take care!

THEKLA. What of?

ADOLF. Of this knife.

[Goes towards her.]

THEKLA *[flippantly]*. Little brother shouldn't play with such dangerous toys.

[She passes by him behind the sofa.]

ADOLF. I'm not playing any longer.

THEKLA *[leaning on the arm of the sofa]*. Really, he's serious, is he, quite serious? Then I'll jolly well show you--that you made a mistake. I mean--you'll never see it yourself, you'll never know it. The whole world will be up to it, but you jolly well won't, you'll have suspicions and surmises and you won't enjoy a single hour of peace. You will have the consciousness of being ridiculous and of being deceived, but you'll never have proofs in your hand, because a husband never manages to get them. *[She makes a few steps to the right in front of him and toward him.]* That will teach you to know me.

ADOLF *[sits down in his previous place by the table on the left]*. You hate me.

THEKLA. No, I don't hate you, nor do I think that I could ever get to hate you. Simply because you're a child.

ADOLF. Listen to me! Just think of the time when the storm broke over us. *[Standing up.]* You lay there like a new-born child and shrieked; you caught hold of my knees and I had to kiss your eyes to

sleep. Then I was your nurse, and I had to be careful that you didn't go out into the street without doing your hair. I had to send your boots to the shoe-maker. I had to take care there was something in the larder. I had to sit by your side and hold your hand in mine by the hour, for you were frightened, frightened of the whole world, deserted by your friends, crushed by public opinion. I had to cheer you up till my tongue stuck to my palate and my head ached; I had to pose as a strong man, and compel myself to believe in the future, until at length I succeeded in breathing life into you while you lay there like the dead. Then it was I you admired, then it was I who was the man; not the athlete like the man you deserted, but the man of psychic strength, the man of magnetism, who transferred his moral force into your enervated muscles and filled your empty brain with new electricity. And then I put you on your feet again, got a small court for you, whom I jockeyed into admiring you, as a sheer matter of friendship to myself, and I made you mistress over me and my home. I painted you in my finest pictures, in rose and azure on a ground of gold, and there was no exhibition in which you didn't have the place of honor. At one moment you were called St. Cecelia, then you were Mary Stuart, Karm Mansdotter, Ebba Brahe, and so I succeeded in awakening and stimulating your interests and so I compelled the yelping rabble to look at you with my own dazzled eyes. I impressed your personality on them by sheer force. I compelled them until you had won their overwhelming sympathy--so that at last you have the free *entrée*. And when I had created you in this way it was all up with my own strength--I broke down, exhausted by the strain. [*He sits down in his previous place. Thekla turns toward the fireplace on the right.*] I had lifted you up, but at the same time I brought myself down; I fell ill; and my illness began to bore you, just because things were beginning to look a bit rosy for you--and then it seemed to me many times as though some secret desire were driving you to get away from your creditor and accomplice. Your love became that of a superior sister, and through want of a better part I fell into the habit of the new rôle of the little brother. Your tenderness remained the same as ever, in fact it has rather increased, but it is tinged with a grain of pity which is counterbalanced by a strong dose of contempt, and that will increase until it becomes complete, even as my genius is on the wane and your star is in the ascendant. It seems, too, as though your source were likely to dry up, when I leave off feeding it, or, rather, as soon as you show that you don't want to draw your inspiration from me any

longer. And so we both go down, but you need somebody you can put in your pocket, somebody new, for you are weak and incapable of carrying any moral burden yourself. So I became the scapegoat to be slaughtered alive, but all the same we had become like twins in the course of years, and when you cut through the thread of my longing, you little thought that you were throttling our own self. You are a branch from my tree, and you wanted to cut yourself free from your parent stem before it had struck roots, but you are unable to flourish on your own, and the tree in its turn couldn't do without its chief branch, and so both perish.

THEKLA. Do you mean, by all that, that you've written my books?

ADOLF. No; you say that so as to provoke me into a lie. I don't express myself so crudely as you, and I've just spoken for five minutes on end simply so as to reproduce all the nuances, all the half-tones, all the transitions, but your barrel organ has only one key.

THEKLA [*walking up and down on the right*]. Yes, yes; but the gist of the whole thing is that you've written my books.

ADOLF. No, there's no gist. You can't resolve a symphony into one key; you can't translate a multifarious life into a single cipher. I never said anything so crass as that I'd written your books.

THEKLA. But you meant it all the same.

ADOLF [*furious*]. I never meant it.

THEKLA. But the result--

ADOLF [*wildly*]. There's no result if one doesn't add. There is a quotient, a long infinitesimal figure of a quotient, but I didn't add.

THEKLA. You didn't, but I can.

ADOLF. I quite believe you, but I never did.

THEKLA. But you wanted to.

ADOLF [*exhausted, shutting his eyes*]. No, no, no--don't speak to me any more, I'm getting convulsions--be quiet, go away! You're flaying my brain with your brutal pinchers--you're thrusting your claws into my thoughts and tearing them.

[*He loses consciousness, stares in front of him and turns his thumbs inwards.*]

THEKLA [*tenderly coming towards him*]. What is it, dear? Are you ill? [*Adolf beats around him. Thekla takes her handkerchief, pours water on to it out of the bottle on the table right of the center door, and cools his forehead with it.*] Adolf!

ADOLF [*he shakes his head*]. Yes.

THEKLA. Do you see now that you were wrong?

ADOLF [*after a pause*]. Yes, yes, yes--I see it.

THEKLA. And you ask me to forgive you?

ADOLF. Yes, yes, yes--I ask you to forgive me; but don't talk right into my brain any more.

THEKLA. Now kiss my hand.

ADOLF. I'll kiss your hand, if only you won't speak to me any more.

THEKLA. And now you'll go out and get some fresh air before dinner.

ADOLF [*getting up*]. Yes, that will do me good, and afterwards we'll pack up and go away.

THEKLA. No.

[*She moves away from him up to the fireplace on the right.*]

ADOLF. Why not? You must have some reason.

THEKLA. The simple reason that I've arranged to be at the reception this evening.

ADOLF. That's it, is it?

THEKLA. That's it right enough. I've promised to be there.

ADOLF. Promised? You probably said that you'd try to come; it doesn't prevent you from explaining that you have given up your intention.

THEKLA. No, I'm not like you: my word is binding on me.

ADOLF. One's word can be binding without one being obliged to respect every casual thing one lets fall in conversation; or did somebody make you promise that you'd go? In that case, you can ask him to release you because your husband is ill.

THEKLA. No, I've no inclination to do so. And, besides, you're not so ill that you can't quite well come along too.

ADOLF. Why must I always come along too? Does it contribute to your greater serenity?

THEKLA. I don't understand what you mean.

ADOLF. That's what you always say when you know I mean something which you don't like.

THEKLA. Re-a-lly? And why shouldn't I like it?

ADOLF. Stop! stop! Don't start all over again--good-by for the present--I'll be back soon; I hope that in the meanwhile you'll have thought better of it.

[Exit through the central door and then toward the right. Thekla accompanies him to the back of the stage. Gustav enters, after a pause, from the right.]

SCENE III.

[Gustav goes straight up to the table on the left and takes up a paper without apparently seeing Thekla.]

THEKLA *[starts, then controls herself]*. You?

[She comes forward.]

GUSTAV. It's me--excuse me.

THEKLA *[on his left]*. Where do you come from?

GUSTAV. I came by the highroad, but--I won't stay on here after seeing that--

THEKLA. Oh, you stay--Well, it's a long time.

GUSTAV. You're right, a very long time.

THEKLA. You've altered a great deal, Gustav.

GUSTAV. But you, on the other hand, my dear Thekla, are still quite as fascinating as ever--almost younger, in fact. Please forgive me. I wouldn't for anything disturb your happiness by my presence. If I'd known that you were staying here I would never have--

THEKLA. Please--please, stay. It may be that you find it painful.

GUSTAV. It's all right as far as I'm concerned. I only thought--that whatever I said I should always have to run the risk of wounding you.

THEKLA *[passes in front of him toward the right]*. Sit down for a moment, Gustav; you don't wound me, because you have the unusual gift--which always distinguished you--of being subtle and tactful.

GUSTAV. You're too kind; but how on earth can one tell if--your husband would regard me in the same light that you do.

THEKLA. Quite the contrary. Why, he's just been expressing himself with the utmost sympathy with regard to you.

GUSTAV. Ah! Yes, everything dies away, even the names which we cut on the tree's bark--not even malice can persist for long in these temperaments of ours.

THEKLA. He's never entertained malice against you--why, he doesn't know you at all--and, so far as I'm concerned, I always entertained the silent hope that I would live to see the time in which you would approach each other as friends--or at least meet each other in my presence, shake hands, and part.

GUSTAV. It was also my secret desire to see the woman whom I loved more than my life in really good hands, and, as a matter of fact, I've only heard the very best account of him, while I know all his work as well. All the same, I felt the need of pressing his hand before I grew old, looking him in the face, and asking him to preserve the treasure which providence had entrusted to him, and at the same time I wanted to extinguish the hate which was burning inside me, quite against my will, and I longed to find peace of soul and resignation, so as to be able to finish in quiet that dismal portion of my life which is still left me.

THEKLA. Your words come straight from your heart; you have understood me, Gustav--thanks.

[*She holds out her hand.*]

GUSTAV. Ah, I'm a petty man. Too insignificant to allow of your thriving in my shadow. Your temperament, with its thirst for freedom, could not be satisfied by my monotonous life, the slavish routine to which I was condemned, the narrow circle in which I had to move. I appreciate that, but you understand well enough--you who are such an expert psychologist--what a struggle it must have cost me to acknowledge that to myself.

THEKLA. How noble, how great to acknowledge one's weaknesses so frankly--it's not all men who can bring themselves to that point. [*She sighs.*] But you are always an honest character, straight and reliable--which I knew how to respect,--but--

GUSTAV. I wasn't--not then, but suffering purges, care ennobles and--and--I have suffered.

THEKLA [*comes nearer to him*]. Poor Gustav, can you forgive me, can you? Tell me.

GUSTAV. Forgive? What? It is I who have to ask you for forgiveness.

THEKLA [*striking another key*]. I do believe that we're both crying--though we're neither of us chickens.

GUSTAV [*softly sliding into another tone*]. Chickens, indeed! I'm an old man, but you--you're getting younger every day.

THEKLA. Do you mean it?

GUSTAV. And how well you know how to dress!

THEKLA. It was you and no one else who taught me that. Do you still remember finding out my special colors?

GUSTAV. No.

THEKLA. It was quite simple, don't you remember? Come, I still remember distinctly how angry you used to be with me if I ever had anything else except pink.

GUSTAV. I angry with you? I was never angry with you.

THEKLA. Oh yes, you were, when you wanted to teach me how to think. Don't you remember? And I wasn't able to catch on.

GUSTAV. Not able to think, everybody can think, and now you're developing a quite extraordinary power of penetration--at any rate in your writings.

THEKLA [*disagreeably affected, tries to change the subject quickly*]. Yes, Gustav dear, I was really awfully glad to see you again, especially under circumstances so unemotional.

GUSTAV. Well, you can't say at any rate that I was such a cantankerous cuss: taking it all round, you had a pretty quiet time of it with me.

THEKLA. Yes; if anything too quiet.

GUSTAV. Really? But I thought, don't you see, that you wanted me to be quiet and nothing else. Judging by your expressions of opinion as a bride, I had to come to that assumption.

THEKLA. How could a woman know then what she really wanted? Besides, mother had always drilled into me to make the best of myself.

GUSTAV. Well, and that's why it is that you're going as strong as possible. There's such a lot always doing in artist life--your husband isn't exactly a home-bird.

THEKLA. But even so one can have too much of a good thing.

GUSTAV [*suddenly changing his tone*]. Why, I do believe you're still wearing my earrings.

THEKLA [*embarrassed*]. Yes, why shouldn't I? We're not enemies, you know--and then I thought I would wear them as a symbol that we're not enemies--besides, you know that earrings like this aren't to be had any more.

[*She takes one off.*]

GUSTAV. Well, so far so good; but what does your husband say on the point?

THEKLA. Why should I ask him?

GUSTAV. You don't ask him? But that's rubbing it in a bit too much--it could quite well make him look ridiculous.

THEKLA [*simply--in an undertone*]. If it only weren't so pretty.

[*She has some trouble in adjusting the earring.*]

GUSTAV [*who has noticed it*]. Perhaps you will allow me to help you?

THEKLA. Oh, if you would be so kind.

GUSTAV [*presses it into the ear*]. Little ear! I say, dear, supposing your husband saw us now.

THEKLA. Then there'd be a scene.

GUSTAV. Is he jealous, then?

THEKLA. I should think he is--rather!

[*Noise in the room on the right.*]

GUSTAV [*passes in front of her toward the right*]. Whose room is that?

THEKLA [*stepping a little toward the left*]. I don't know--tell me how you are now, and what you're doing.

[*She goes to the table on the left.*]

GUSTAV. You tell me how you are. [*He goes behind the square table on the left, over to the sofa.--Thekla, embarrassed, takes the cloth off the figure absent-mindedly.*] No! who is that? Why--it's you!

THEKLA. I don't think so.

GUSTAV. But it looks like you.

THEKLA [*cynically*]. You think so?

GUSTAV [*sits down on the sofa*]. It reminds one of the anecdote: "How could your Majesty say that?"

THEKLA [*laughs loudly and sits down opposite him on the settee*].
What foolish ideas you do get into your head. Have you got by any
chance some new yarns?

GUSTAV. No; but you must know some.

THEKLA. I don't get a chance any more now of hearing anything
which is really funny.

GUSTAV. Is he as prudish as all that?

THEKLA. Rather!

GUSTAV. Never different?

THEKLA. He's been so ill lately.

[*Both stand up.*]

GUSTAV. Well, who told little brother to walk into somebody else's
wasps' nest.

THEKLA [*laughs*]. Foolish fellow, you!

GUSTAV. Poor child! do you still remember that once, shortly after
our engagement, we lived in this very room, eh? But then it was
furnished differently, there was a secretary for instance, here, by the
pillar, and the bed [*With delicacy.*] was here.

THEKLA. Hush!

GUSTAV. Look at me!

THEKLA. If you would like me to.

[*They keep their eyes looking into each other's for a minute.*]

GUSTAV. Do you think it is possible to forget a thing which has
made so deep an impression on one's life?

THEKLA. No; the power of impressions is great, particularly when they are the impressions of one's youth.

[She turns toward the fireplace on her right.]

GUSTAV. Do you remember how we met for the first time? You were such an ethereal little thing, a little slate on which your parents and governess had scratched some wretched scrawl, which I had to rub out afterwards, and then I wrote a new text on it, according to what I thought right, till it seemed to you that the slate was filled with writing. *[He follows her to the circular table on the right.]* That's why, do you see, I shouldn't like to be in your husband's place--no, that's his business. *[Sits down in front of the circular table.]* But that's why meeting you has an especial fascination for me. We hit it off together so perfectly, and when I sit down here and chat with you it's just as though I were uncorking bottles of old wine which I myself have bottled. The wine which is served to me is my own, but it has mellowed. And now that I intend to marry again, I have made a very careful choice of a young girl whom I can train according to my own ideas. *[Getting up.]* For woman is man's child, don't you know; if she isn't his child, then he becomes hers, and that means that the world is turned upside down.

THEKLA. You're going to marry again?

GUSTAV. Yes. I'm going to try my luck once more, but this time I'll jolly well see that the double harness is more reliable and shall know how to guard against any bolting.

THEKLA *[turns and goes over toward him to the left]*. Is she pretty?

GUSTAV. Yes, according to my taste, but perhaps I'm too old, and strangely enough--now that chance brings me near to you again--I'm now beginning to have grave doubts of the feasibility of playing a game like that twice over.

THEKLA. What do you mean?

GUSTAV. I feel that my roots are too firmly embedded in your soil, and the old wounds break open. You're a dangerous woman, Thekla.

THEKLA. Re-a-lly? My young husband is emphatic that is just what I'm not--that I can't make any more conquests.

GUSTAV. That means he's left off loving you.

THEKLA. What he means by love lies outside my line of country.

[She goes behind the sofa on the left. Gustav goes after her as far as the table on the left.]

GUSTAV. You've played hide and seek so long with each other that the "he" can't catch the she, nor the she the "he," don't you know. Of course it's just the kind of thing one would expect. You had to play the little innocent, and that makes him quite tame. As a matter of fact a change has its disadvantages--yes, it has its disadvantages.

THEKLA. You reproach me?

GUSTAV. Not for a minute. What always happens, happens with a certain inevitability, and if this particular thing hadn't happened something else would, but this did happen, and here we are.

THEKLA. You're a broad-minded man. I've never yet met anybody with whom I liked so much to have a good straight talk as with you. You have so little patience with all that moralizing and preaching, and you make such small demands on people, that one feels really free in your presence. Do you know I'm jealous of your future wife?

[She comes forward and passes by him toward the right.]

GUSTAV. And you know I'm jealous of your husband.

THEKLA. And now we must part! Forever!

[She goes past him till she approaches the center door.]

GUSTAV. Quite right, we must part--but before that, we'll say good-bye to each other, won't we?

THEKLA [*uneasily*]. No.

GUSTAV [*dogging her*]. Yes, we will; yes, we will. We'll say good-by; we will drown our memories in an ecstasy which will be so violent that when we wake up the past will have vanished from our recollection forever. There are ecstasies like that, you know. [*He puts his arm around her waist.*] You're being dragged down by a sick spirit, who's infecting you with his own consumption. I will breathe new life into you. I will fertilize your genius, so that it will bloom in the autumn like a rose in the spring, I will--

[*Two lady visitors appear on the right behind the central door.*]

SCENE IV.

[*The previous characters; the Two Ladies.*]

[*The ladies appear surprised, point, laugh, and exeunt on the left.*]

SCENE V.

THEKLA [*disengaging herself*]. Who was that?

GUSTAV [*casually, while he closes the central door*]. Oh, some visitors who were passing through.

THEKLA. Go away! I'm afraid of you.

[*She goes behind the sofa on the left.*]

GUSTAV. Why?

THEKLA. You've robbed me of my soul.

GUSTAV [*comes forward*]. And I give you mine in exchange for it. Besides, you haven't got any soul at all. It's only an optical illusion.

THEKLA. You've got a knack of being rude in such a way that one can't be angry with you.

GUSTAV. That's because you know very well that I am designated for the place of honor--tell me now when--and where?

THEKLA [*coming toward him*]. No. I can't hurt him by doing a thing like that. I'm sure he still loves me, and I don't want to wound him a second time.

GUSTAV. He doesn't love you. Do you want to have proofs?

THEKLA. How can you give me them?

GUSTAV [*takes up from the floor the fragments of photograph behind the circular table on the right*]. Here, look at yourself!

[*He gives them to her.*]

THEKLA. Oh, that is shameful!

GUSTAV. There, you can see for yourself--well, when and where?

THEKLA. The false brute!

GUSTAV. When?

THEKLA. He goes away to-night by the eight-o'clock boat.

GUSTAV. Then--

THEKLA. At nine. [*A noise in the room on the right.*] Who's in there making such a noise?

GUSTAV [*goes to the right at the keyhole*]. Let's have a look--the fancy table has been upset and there's a broken water-bottle on the floor, that's all. Perhaps some one has shut a dog up there. [*He goes again toward her.*] Nine o'clock, then?

THEKLA. Right you are. I should only like him to see the fun--such a piece of deceit, and what's more, from a man that's always preaching truthfulness, who's always drilling into me to speak the truth. But stop--how did it all happen? He received me in almost an unfriendly

manner--didn't come to the pier to meet me--then he let fall a remark over the pure boy on the steam-boat, which I pretended not to understand. But how could he know anything about it? Wait a moment. Then he began to philosophize about women--then you began to haunt his brain--then he spoke about wanting to be a sculptor, because sculpture was the art of the present day--just like you used to thunder in the old days.

GUSTAV. No, really?

[*Thekla moves away from Gustav behind the sofa on the left.*]

THEKLA. "No, really?" Now I understand. [*To Gustav.*] Now at last I see perfectly well what a miserable scoundrel you are. You've been with him and have scratched his heart out of his body. It's you--you who've been sitting here on the sofa. It was you who've been suggesting all these ideas to him: that he was suffering from epilepsy, that he should live a celibate life, that he should pit himself against his wife and try to play her master. How long have you been here?

GUSTAV. Eight days.

THEKLA. You were the man, then, I saw on the steamer?

GUSTAV [*frankly*]. It was I.

THEKLA. And did you really think that I'd fall in with your little game?

GUSTAV [*firmly*]. You've already done it.

THEKLA. Not yet.

GUSTAV [*firmly*]. Yes, you have.

THEKLA [*comes forward*]. You've stalked my lamb like a wolf. You came here with a scoundrelly plan of smashing up my happiness and you've been trying to carry it through until I realize what you were up to and put a spoke in your precious wheel.

GUSTAV [*vigorously*]. That's not quite accurate. The thing took quite another course. That I should have wished in my heart of hearts that things should go badly with you is only natural. Yet I was more or less convinced that it would not be necessary for me to cut in actively; because, I had far too much other business to have time for intrigues. But just now, when I was loafing about a bit, and happened to run across you on the steamer with your circle of young men, I thought that the time had come to get to slightly closer quarters with you two. I came here and that lamb of yours threw himself immediately into the wolf's arms. I aroused his sympathy by methods of reflex suggestion, into details of which, as a matter of good form, I'd rather not go. At first I experienced a certain pity for him, because he was in the very condition in which I had once found myself. Then, as luck would have it, he began unwittingly to probe about in my old wound--you know what I mean--the book--and the ass--then I was overwhelmed by a desire to pluck him to pieces and to mess up the fragments in such a tangle that they could never be put together again. Thanks to the conscientious way in which you have cleared the ground, I succeeded only too easily, and then I had to deal with you. You were the spring in the works that had to be taken to pieces. And, that done, the game was to listen for the smash-up. When I came into this room I had no idea what I was to say. I had a lot of plans in my head, like a chess player, but the character of the opening depended on the moves you made; one move led to another, chance was kind to me. I soon had you on toast--and now you're in a nice mess.

THEKLA. Nonsense.

GUSTAV. Oh yes; what you'd have prayed your stars to avoid has happened: society, in the persons of two lady visitors--I didn't commandeer their appearance because intrigue is not in my line--society, I say, has seen your pathetic reconciliation with your first husband, and the penitent way in which you crawled back into his faithful arms. Isn't that enough?

THEKLA [*she goes over to him toward the right*]. Tell me--you who make such a point of being so logical and so intellectual--how does it come about that you, who make such a point of your maxim that everything which happens happens as a matter of necessity, and that all our actions are determined--

GUSTAV [*corrects her*]. Determined up to a certain extent.

THEKLA. It comes to the same thing.

GUSTAV. No.

THEKLA. How does it come about that you, who are bound to regard me as an innocent person, inasmuch as nature and circumstances have driven me to act as I did, could regard yourself as justified in revenging yourself on me.

GUSTAV. Well, the same principle applies, you see--that is to say, the principle that my temperament and circumstances drove me to revenge myself. Isn't it a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other? But do you know why you've got the worst of it in this struggle? [*Thekla looks contemptuous.*] Why you and that husband of yours managed to get downed? I'll tell you. Because I was stronger than you, and smarter. It was you, my dear, who was a donkey--and he as well! So you see that one isn't necessarily bound to be quite an ass even though one doesn't write any novels or paint any pictures. Just remember that!

[*He turns away from her to the left.*]

THEKLA. Haven't you got a grain of feeling left?

GUSTAV. Not a grain--that's why, don't you know, I'm so good at thinking, as you are perhaps able to see by the slight proofs which I've given you, and can play the practical man equally well, and I've just given you something of a sample of what I can do in that line.

[*He strides round the table and sofa on the left and turns again to her.*]

THEKLA. And all this simply because I wounded your vanity?

GUSTAV [*on her left*]. Not that only, but you be jolly careful in the future of wounding other people's vanity--it's the most sensitive part of a man.

THEKLA. What a vindictive wretch! Ugh!

GUSTAV. What a promiscuous wretch. Ugh!

THEKLA. Do you mean that's my temperament?

GUSTAV. Do you mean that's my temperament?

THEKLA [*goes over toward him to the left*]. You wouldn't like to forgive me?

GUSTAV. Certainly, I have forgiven you.

THEKLA. You?

GUSTAV. Quite. Have I ever raised my hand against you two in all these years? No. But when I happened to be here I favored you two with scarce a look and the cleavage between you is already there. Did I ever reproach you, moralize, lecture? No. I joked a little with your husband and the accumulated dynamite in him just happened to go off, but I, who am defending myself like this, am the one who's really entitled to stand here and complain. Thekla, have you nothing to reproach yourself with?

THEKLA. Not the least bit--the Christians say it's Providence that guides our actions, others call it Fate, aren't we quite guiltless?

GUSTAV. No doubt we are to a certain extent. But an infinitesimal something remains, and that contains the guilt, all the same, and the creditors turn up sooner or later! Men and women may be guiltless, but they have to render an account. Guiltless before Him in whom neither of us believes any more, responsible to themselves and to their fellow-men.

THEKLA. You've come, then, to warn me?

GUSTAV. I've come to demand back what you stole from me, not what you had as a present. You stole my honor, and I could only win back mine by taking yours--wasn't I right?

THEKLA [*after a pause, going over to him on the right*]. Honor! Hm!
And are you satisfied now?

GUSTAV [*after a pause*]. I am satisfied now.

[*He presses the bell by the door L. for the Waiter.*]

THEKLA [*after another pause*]. And now you're going to your bride,
Gustav?

GUSTAV. I have none--and shall never have one. I am not going
home because I have no home, and shall never have one.

[*Waiter comes in on the left.*]

SCENE VI.

[*Previous characters--Waiter standing back.*]

GUSTAV. Bring me the bill--I'm leaving by the twelve-o'clock boat.

[*Waiter bows and exit left.*]

SCENE VII.

THEKLA. Without a reconciliation?

GUSTAV [*on her left*]. Reconciliation? You play about with so many
words that they've quite lost their meaning. We reconcile ourselves?
Perhaps we are to live in a trinity, are we? The way for you to effect a
reconciliation is to put matters straight. You can't do that alone. You
have not only taken something, but you have destroyed what you
took, and you can never put it back. Would you be satisfied if I were
to say to you: "Forgive me because you mangled my heart with your
claws; forgive me for the dishonor you brought upon me; forgive me
for being seven years on end the laughing-stock of my pupils, forgive
me for freeing you from the control of your parents; for releasing you
from the tyranny of ignorance and superstition; for making you
mistress over my house; for giving you a position and friends, I, the

man who made you into a woman out of the child you were? Forgive me like I forgive you? Anyway, I now regard my account with you as squared. You go and settle up your accounts with the other man.

THEKLA. Where is he? What have you done with him? I've just got a suspicion--a--something dreadful!

GUSTAV. Done with him? Do you still love him?

THEKLA [*goes over to him toward the left*]. Yes.

GUSTAV. And a minute ago you loved me? Is that really so?

THEKLA. It is.

GUSTAV. Do you know what you are, then?

THEKLA. You despise me?

GUSTAV. No, I pity you. It's a characteristic--I don't say a defect, but certainly a characteristic--that is very fatal, by reason of its results. Poor Thekla! I don't know--but I almost think that I'm sorry for it, although I'm quite innocent--like you. But anyway it's perhaps all for the best that you've now got to feel what I felt then. Do you know where your husband is?

THEKLA. I think I know now. [*She points to the right.*] He's in your room just here. He has heard everything, seen everything, and you know they say that he who looks upon his vampire dies.

SCENE VIII.

[*Adolf appears on the right, deadly pale, a streak of blood on his left cheek, a fixed expression in his eyes, white foam on his mouth.*]

GUSTAV [*moves back*]. No, here he is--settle with him now! See if he'll be as generous to you as I was. Good-by.

[*He turns to the left, stops after a few steps, and remains standing.*]

THEKLA [*goes toward Adolf with outstretched arms*]. Adolf! [*Adolf sinks down in his chair by the table on the left. Thekla throws herself over him and caresses him.*] Adolf! My darling child, are you alive? Speak! Speak! Forgive your wicked Thekla! Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me! Little brother must answer. Does he hear? My God, he doesn't hear me! He's dead! Good God! O my God! Help! Help us!

GUSTAV. Quite true, she loves him as well--poor creature!

[*Curtain.*]