

THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH

Henrik Ibsen

1869

Translated by William Archer

CHARACTERS.

CHAMBERLAIN BRATSBERG, owner of the iron-works.

ERIK BRATSBERG, his son, a merchant.

THORA, his daughter.

SELMA, Erik's wife.

DOCTOR FIELDBO, physician at the Chamberlain's works.

STENSGÅRD, a lawyer.

MONS MONSEN, of Stonelee.

BASTIAN MONSEN, his son.

RAGNA, his daughter.

HELLE, student of theology, tutor at Stonelee.

RINGDAL, manager of the iron-works.

ANDERS LUNDESTAD, landowner.

DANIEL HEIRE.

MADAM RUNDHOLMEN, widow of a storekeeper and publican.

ASLAKSEN, a printer

A MAID-SERVANT AT THE CHAMBERLAIN'S.

A WAITER.

A WAITRESS AT MADAM RUNDHOLMEN'S.

Townspeople, Guests at the Chamberlain's, etc. etc.

The action takes place in the neighborhood of the iron-works, not far from a market town in Southern Norway.

ACT FIRST

[The Seventeenth of May. A Popular fete in the Chamberlain's grounds. Music and dancing in the background. Coloured lights among the trees. In the middle, somewhat towards the back, a rostrum. To the right, the entrance to a large refreshment-tent; before it, a table with benches. In the foreground on the left, another table, decorated with flowers and surrounded with lounging-chairs.]

[A Crowd of People. LUNDESTAD, with a committee-badge at his button-hole, stands on the rostrum. RINGDAL, also with a committee-badge, at the table on the left.]

Lundestad.

. . . Therefore, friends and fellow citizens, I drink to our freedom! As we have inherited it from our fathers, so will we preserve it for ourselves and for our children! Three cheers for the day! Three cheers for the Seventeenth of May!

The Crowd.

Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

Ringdal

[(as LUNDESTAD descends from the rostrum).]
And one cheer more for old Lundestad!

Some of the Crowd

[(hissing).]
Ss! Ss!

Many Voices

[(drowning the others).]
Hurrah for Lundestad! Long live old Lundestad! Hurrah! [The CROWD gradually disperses. MONSEN, his son BASTIAN, STENSGARD, and ASLAKSEN make their way forward, through the throng.]

Monsen.

'Pon my soul, it's time he was laid on the shelf!

Aslaksen.

It was the local situation he was talking about! Ho-ho!

Monsen.

He has made the same speech year after year as long as I can remember. Come over here.

Stensgard.

No, no, not that way, Mr. Monsen. We are quite deserting your daughter.

Monsen.

Oh, Ragna will find us again.

Bastian.

She's all right; young Helle is with her.

Stensgard.

Helle?

Monsen.

Yes, Helle. But (nudging STENSGARD familiarly) you have me here, you see, and the rest of us. Come on! Here we shall be out of the crowd, and can discuss more fully what -- [Has meanwhile taken a seat beside the table on the left.]

Ringdal

[(approaching).]

Excuse me, Mr. Monsen -- that table is reserved --

Stensgard.

Reserved? For whom?

Ringdal

For the Chamberlain's party.

Stensgard.

Oh, confound the Chamberlain's party! There's none of them here.

Ringdal

No, but we expect them every minute.

Stensgard.

Then let them sit somewhere else. [Takes a chair.]

Lundestad

[(laying his hand on the chair).]

No, the table is reserved, and there's an end of it.

Monsen

[(rising).]

Come, Mr. Stensgard; there are just as good seats over there. (Crosses to the right.) Waiter! Ha, no waiters either. The Committee should have seen to that in time. Oh, Aslaksen, just go in and get us four bottles of champagne. Order the dearest; tell them to put it down to Monsen! [ASLAKSEN goes into the tent; the three others seat themselves.]

Lundestad

[(goes quietly over to them and addresses STENSGARD).]

I hope you won't take it ill --

Monsen.

Take it ill! Good gracious, no! Not in the least.

Lundestad

[(Still to STENSGARD).]

It's not my doing; it's the Committee that decided --

Monsen.

Of course. The Committee orders, and we must obey.

Lundestad

[(as before).]

You see, we are on the Chamberlain's own ground here. He has been so kind as to throw open his park and garden for this evening; so we thought

--

Stensgard.

We're extremely comfortable here, Mr. Lundestad -- if only people would leave us in peace -- the crowd, I mean.

Lundestad

[(unruffled).]

Very well; then it's all right. [Goes towards the back.]

Aslaksen

[(entering from the tent).]

The waiter is just coming with the wine. [Sits.]

Monsen.

A table apart, under special care of the Committee! And on our Independence Day of all others! There you have a specimen of the way things go.

Stensgard.

But why on earth do you put up with all this, you good people?

Monsen.

The habit of generations, you see.

Aslaksen.

You're new to the district, Mr. Stensgard. If only you knew a little of the local situation --

A Waiter

[(brings champagne).]

Was it you that ordered -- ?

Aslaksen.

Yes, certainly; open the bottle.

The Waiter

[(pouring out the wine).]

It goes to your account, Mr. Monsen?

Monsen.

The whole thing; don't be afraid. [The WAITER goes.]

Monsen

[(clinks glasses with STENSGARD).]

Here's welcome among us, Mr. Stensgard! It gives me great pleasure to have made your acquaintance; I cannot but call it an honour to the district that such a man should settle here. The newspapers have made us familiar with your name, on all sorts of public occasions. You have great gifts of oratory, Mr. Stensgard, and a warm heart for the public weal. I trust you will enter with life and vigour into the -- h'm, into the --

Aslaksen.

The local situation.

Monsen.

Oh yes, the local situation. I drink to that. [They drink.]

Stensgard.

Whatever I do, I shall certainly put life and vigour into it.

Monsen.

Bravo! Hear, hear! Another glass in honour of that promise.

Stensgard.

No, stop; I've already --

Monsen.

Oh, nonsense! Another glass, I say -- to seal the bond! They clink glasses and drink. During what follows BASTIAN keeps on filling the glasses as soon as they are empty.

Monsen.

However -- since we have got upon the subject -- I must tell you that it's not the Chamberlain himself that keeps everything under his thumb. No, sir -- old Lundestad is the man that stands behind and drives the sledge.

Stensgard.

So I am told in many quarters. I can't understand how a Liberal like him -
-

Monsen.

Lundestad? Do you call Anders Lundestad a Liberal? To be sure, he professed Liberalism in his young days, when he was still at the foot of the ladder. And then he inherited his seat in Parliament from his father. Good Lord! everything runs in families here.

Stensgard.

But there must be some means of putting a stop to all these abuses.

Aslaksen.

Yes, damn it all, Mr. Stensgard -- see if you can't put a stop to them!

Stensgard.

I don't say that I --

Aslaksen.

Yes, you! You are just the man. You have the gift of gab, as the saying goes; and what's more: you have the pen of a ready writer. My paper's at your disposal, you know.

Monsen.

If anything is to be done, it must be done quickly. The preliminary election comes on in three days now.

Stensgard.

And if you were elected, your private affairs would not prevent your accepting the charge?

Monsen.

My private affairs would suffer, of course; but if it appeared that the good of the community demanded the sacrifice, I should have to put aside all personal considerations.

Stensgard.

Good; that's good. And you have a party already: that I can see clearly.

Monsen.

I flatter myself the majority of the younger, go-ahead generation --

Aslaksen.

H'm, h'm! 'ware spies! DANIEL HEIRE enters from the tent; he peers about shortsightedly, and approaches.

Heire.

May I beg for the loan of a spare seat; I want to sit over there.

Monsen.

The benches are fastened here, you see; but won't you take a place at this table?

Heire.

Here? At this table? Oh, yes, with pleasure. (Sits.) Dear, dear! Champagne, I believe.

Monsen.

Yes; won't you join us in a glass?

Heire.

No, thank you! Madam Rundholmen's champagne -- Well, well, just half a glass to keep you company. If only one had a glass, now.

Monsen.

Bastian, go and get one.

Bastian.

Oh, Aslaksen, just go and fetch a glass. [ASLAKSEN goes into the tent. A pause.]

Heire.

Don't let me interrupt you, gentlemen. I wouldn't for the world -- ! Thanks, Aslaksen. (Bows to STENSGARD.) A strange face -- a recent arrival! Have I the pleasure of addressing our new legal luminary, Mr. Stensgard?

Monsen.

Quite right. (Introducing them.) Mr. Stensgard, Mr. Daniel Heire --

Bastian.

Capitalist.

Heire.

Ex-capitalist, you should rather say. It's all gone now; slipped through my fingers, so to speak. Not that I'm bankrupt -- for goodness' sake don't think that.

Monsen.

Drink, drink, while the froth is on it.

Heire.

But rascality, you understand -- sharp practice and so forth -- I say no more. Well, well, I am confident it is only temporary. When I get my outstanding law-suits and some other little matters off my hands, I shall soon be on the track of our aristocratic old Reynard the Fox. Let us drink to that -- You won't, eh?

Stensgard.

I should like to know first who your aristocratic old Reynard the Fox may be.

Heire.

Hee-hee; you needn't look so uncomfortable, man. You don't suppose I'm alluding to Mr. Monsen. No one can accuse Mr. Monsen of being aristocratic. No; it's Chamberlain Bratsberg, my dear young friend.

Stensgard.

What! In money matters the Chamberlain is surely above reproach.

Heire.

You think so, young man? H'm; I say no more. (Draws nearer.) Twenty years ago I was worth no end of money. My father left me a great fortune. You've heard of my father, I daresay? No? Old Hans Heire? They called him Gold Hans. He was a shipowner: made heaps of money in the blockade time; had his window-frames and door-posts gilded; he could afford it -- I say no more; so they called him Gold Hans.

Aslaksen.

Didn't he gild his chimney-pots too?

Heire.

No; that was only a penny-a-liner's lie; invented long before your time, however. But he made the money fly; and so did I in my time. My visit to London, for instance -- haven't you heard of my visit to London? I took a prince's retinue with me. Have you really not heard of it, eh? And the sums I have lavished on art and science! And on bringing rising talent to the front!

Aslaksen

[(rises).]

Well, good-bye, gentlemen.

Monsen.

What? Are you leaving us?

Aslaksen.

Yes; I want to stretch my legs a bit. [Goes.]

Heire

[(speaking low).]

He was one of them -- just as grateful as the rest, hee-hee! Do you know, I kept him a whole year at college?

Stensgard.

Indeed? Has Aslaksen been to college?

Heire.

Like young Monsen. He made nothing of it; also like -- I say no more. Had to give him up, you see; he had already developed his unhappy taste for spirits --

Monsen.

But you've forgotten what you were going to tell Mr. Stensgard about the Chamberlain.

Heire.

Oh, it's a complicated business. When my father was in his glory, things were going downhill with the old Chamberlain -- this one's father, you understand; he was a Chamberlain too.

Bastian.

Of course; everything runs in families here.

Heire.

Including the social graces -- I say no more. The conversion of the currency, rash speculations, extravagances he launched out into, in the year 1816 or thereabouts, forced him to sell some of his land.

Stensgard.

And your father bought it?

Heire.

Bought and paid for it. Well, what then? I come into my property; I make improvements by the thousand --

Bastian.

Of course.

Heire.

Your health, my young friend! -- Improvements by the thousand, I say -- thinning the woods, and so forth. Years pass; and then comes Master Reynard -- the present one, I mean -- and repudiates the bargain!

Stensgard.

But, my dear Mr. Heire, you could surely have snapped your fingers at him.

Heire.

Not so easily! Some small formalities had been overlooked, he declared. Besides, I happened then to be in temporary difficulties, which afterwards became permanent. And what can a man do nowadays without capital?

Monsen.

You're right there, by God! And in many ways you can't do very much with capital either. That I know to my cost. Why, even my innocent children --

Bastian

[(thumps the table).]

Ugh, father! if I only had certain people here!

Stensgard.

Your children, you say?

Monsen.

Yes; take Bastian, for example. Perhaps I haven't given him a good education?

Heire.

A threefold education! First for the University; then for painting; and then for -- what is it? -- it's a civil engineer he is now, isn't it?

Bastian.

Yes, that I am, by the Lord!

Monsen.

Yes, that he is; I can produce his bills and his certificates to prove it! But who gets the town business? Who has got the local road-making -- especially these last two years? Foreigners, or at any rate strangers -- in short, people no one knows anything about!

Heire.

Yes; it's shameful the way things go on. Only last New Year, when the managementship of the Savings Bank fell vacant, what must they do but give Monsen the go-by, and choose an individual that knew -- (Coughs) -- that knew how to keep his purse-strings drawn -- which our princely host obviously does not. Whenever there's a post of confidence going, it's always the same! Never Monsen -- always some one that enjoys the confidence -- of the people in power. Well, well; commune suffragium, as the Roman Law puts it; that means shipwreck in the Common Council, sir. It's a shame! Your health!

Monsen.

Thanks! But, to change the subject -- how are all your law-suits getting on?

Heire.

They are still pending; I can say no more for the present. What endless annoyance they do give me! Next week I shall have to summon the whole Town Council before the Arbitration Commission.

Bastian.

Is it true that you once summoned yourself before the Arbitration Commission?

Heire.

Myself? Yes; but I didn't put in an appearance.

Monsen.

Ha, ha! You didn't, eh?

Heire.

I had a sufficient excuse: had to cross the river, and it was unfortunately the very year of Bastian's bridgeplump! down it went, you know --

Bastian.

Why, confound it all -- !

Heire.

Take it coolly, young man! You are not the first that has bent the bow till it breaks. Everything runs in families, you know -- I say no more.

Monsen.

Ho ho ho! You say no more, eh? Well, drink, then, and say no more! (To STENSGARD.) You see, Mr. Heire's tongue is licensed to wag as it pleases.

Heire.

Yes, freedom of speech is the only civic right I really value.

Stensgard.

What a pity the law should restrict it.

Heire.

Hee-hee! Our legal friend's mouth is watering for a nice action for slander, eh? Make your mind easy, my dear sir! I'm an old hand, let me tell you!

Stensgard.

Especially at slander?

Heire.

Your pardon, young man! That outburst of indignation does honour to your heart. I beg you to forget an old man's untimely frankness about your absent friends.

Stensgard.

Absent friends?

Heire.

I have nothing to say against the son, of course -- nor against the daughter. And if I happened to cast a passing slur upon the Chamberlain's character --

Stensgard.

The Chamberlain's? Is it the Chamberlain's family you call my friends?

Heire.

Well, you don't pay visits to your enemies, I presume?

Bastian.

Visits?

Monsen.

What?

Heire.

Ow, ow, ow! Here am I letting cats out of bags!

Monsen.

Have you been paying visits at the Chamberlain's?

Stensgard.

Nonsense! A misunderstanding --

Heire.

A most unhappy slip on my part. But how was I to know it was a secret?
(To MONSEN.) Besides, you mustn't take my expressions too literally.
When I say a visit, I mean only a sort of formal call; a frock-coat and yellow
gloves affair --

Stensgard.

I tell you I haven't exchanged a single word with any of that family!

Heire.

Is it possible? Were you not received the second time either? I know they were "not at home" the first time.

Stensgard

[(to MONSEN).]

I had a letter to deliver from a friend in Christiania -- that was all.

Heire

[(rising).]

I'll be hanged if it isn't positively revolting! Here is a young man at the outset of his career; full of simple-minded confidence, he seeks out the experienced man-of-the-world and knocks at his door; turns to him, who has brought his ship to port, to beg for -- I say no more! The man-of-the-world shuts the door in his face; is not at home; never is at home when it's his duty to be -- I say no more! (With indignation.) Was there ever such shameful insolence!

Stensgard.

Oh, never mind that stupid business.

Heire.

Not at home! He, who goes about professing that he is always at home to reputable people!

Stensgard.

Does he say that?

Heire.

A mere empty phrase. He's not at home to Mr. Monsen either. But I can't think what has made him hate you so much. Yes, hate you, I say; for what do you think I heard yesterday?

Stensgard.

I don't want to know what you heard yesterday.

Heire.

Then I say no more. Besides, the expressions didn't surprise me -- coming from the Chamberlain, I mean. Only I can't understand why he should have added "demagogue."

Stensgard.

Demagogue!

Heire.

Well, since you insist upon it, I must confess that the Chamberlain called you an adventurer and demagogue.

Stensgard

[(jumps up).]

What!

Heire.

Adventurer and demagogue -- or demagogue and adventurer; I won't answer for the order.

Stensgard.

And you heard that?

Heire.

I? If I had been present, Mr. Stensgard, you may be sure I should have stood up for you as you deserve.

Monsen.

There, you see what comes of --

Stensgard.

How dare the old scoundrel -- ?

Heire.

Come, come, come! Keep your temper. Very likely it was a mere figure of speech -- a harmless little joke, I have no doubt. You can demand an explanation tomorrow; for I suppose you are going to the great dinner-party, eh?

Stensgard.

I am not going to any dinner-party.

Heire.

Two calls and no invitation -- !

Stensgard.

Demagogue and adventurer! What can he be thinking of?

Monsen.

Look there! Talk of the devil -- ! Come, Bastian. [Goes off with BASTIAN.
]

Stensgard.

What did he mean by it, Mr. Heire?

Heire.

Haven't the ghost of an idea. -- It pains you? Your hand, young man! Pardon me if my frankness has wounded you. Believe me, you have yet many bitter lessons to learn in this life. You are young; you are confiding; you are trustful. It is beautiful; it is even touching; but -- but -- trustfulness is silver, experience is gold: that's a proverb of my own invention, sir! God bless you! [Goes. CHAMBERLAIN BRATSBERG, his daughter THORA, and DOCTOR FIELDBO enter from the left.]

Lundestad

[(strikes the bell on the rostrum).]
Silence for Mr. Ringdal's speech!

Stensgard

[(shouts).]

Mr. Lundestad, I demand to be heard.

Lundestad.

Afterwards.

Stensgard.

No, now! at once!

Lundestad.

You can't speak just now. Silence for Mr. Ringdal!

Ringdal

[(on the rostrum).]

Ladies and gentlemen! We have at this moment the honour of seeing in our midst the man with the warm heart and the open hand -- the man we have an looked up to for many a year, as to a father -- the man who is always ready to help us, both in word and deed -- the man whose door is never closed to any reputable citizen -- the man who -- who -- ladies and gentlemen, our honoured guest is no lover of long speeches; so, without more words, I call for three cheers for Chamberlain Bratsberg and his family! Long life to them! Hurrah!

The Crowd.

Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! [Great enthusiasm; people press around the CHAMBERLAIN, who thanks them and shakes hands with those nearest him.]

Stensgard.

Now may I speak?

Lundestad.

By all means. The platform is at your service.

Stensgard

[(jumps upon the table).]

I shall choose my own platform!

The Young Men
[(crowding around him).]
Hurrah!

The Chamberlain
[(to the DOCTOR).]
Who is this obstreperous personage?

Fieldbo.
Mr. Stensgard.

The Chamberlain.
Oh, it's he, is it?

Stensgard.
Listen to me, my glad-hearted brothers and sisters! Hear me, all you who have in your souls -- though it may not reach your lips -- the exultant song of the day, the day of our freedom! I am a stranger among you --

Aslaksen.
No!

Stensgard.
Thanks for that "No!" I take it as the utterance of a longing, an aspiration. A stranger I am, however; but this I swear, that I come among you with a great and open-hearted sympathy for your sorrows and your joys, your victories and defeats. If it lay in my power --

Aslaksen.
It does, it does!

Lundestad.

No interruptions! You have no right to speak.

Stensgard.

You still less! I abolish the Committee! Freedom on the day of freedom, boys!

The Young Men.

Hurrah for freedom!

Stensgard.

They deny you the right of speech! You hear it -- they want to gag you! Away with this tyranny! I won't stand here declaiming to a flock of dumb animals. I will talk; but you shall talk, too. We will talk to each other, from the heart!

The Crowd

[(with growing enthusiasm).]

Hurrah!

Stensgard.

We will have no more of these barren, white-chokered festivities! A golden harvest of deeds shall hereafter shoot up from each Seventeenth of May. May! Is it not the season of bud and blossom, the blushing maiden-month of the year? On the first of June I shall have been just two months among you; and in that time what greatness and littleness, what beauty and deformity, have I not seen?

The Chamberlain.

What on earth is he talking about, Doctor?

Fieldbo.

Aslaksen says it's the local situation.

Stensgard.

I have seen great and brilliant possibilities among the masses; but I have seen, too, a spirit of corruption brooding over the germs of promise and

bringing them to nought. I have seen ardent and trustful youth rush yearning forth -- and I have seen the door shut in its face.

Thora.

Oh, Heaven!

The Chamberlain.

What does he mean by that?

Stensgard.

Yes, my brothers and sisters in rejoicing! There hovers in the air an Influence, a Spectre from the dead and rotten past, which spreads darkness and oppression where there should be nothing but buoyancy and light. We must lay that Spectre; down with it!

The Crowd.

Hurrah! Hurrah for the Seventeenth of May!

Thora.

Come away, father -- !

The Chamberlain.

What the deuce does he mean by a spectre? Who is he talking about, Doctor?

Fieldbo

[(quickly).]

Oh, it's about -- [Whispers a word or two.]

The Chamberlain.

Aha! So that's it!

Thora

[(softly to FIELDBO).]

Thanks!

Stensgard.

If no one else will crush the dragon, I will! But we must hold together, boys!

Many Voices.

Yes! yes!

Stensgard.

We are young! The time belongs to us; but we also belong to the time. Our right is our duty! Elbowroom for faculty, for will, for power! Listen to me! We must form a League. The money-bag has ceased to rule among us!

The Chamberlain.

Bravo! (To the DOCTOR). He said the money-bag; so no doubt you're right --

Stensgard.

Yes, boys; we, we are the wealth of the country, if only there's metal in us. Our will is the ringing gold that shall pass from man to man. War to the knife against whoever shall deny its currency!

The Crowd.

Hurrah!

Stensgard.

A scornful "bravo" has been flung in my teeth --

The Chamberlain.

No, no!

Stensgard.

What care! Thanks and threats alike are powerless over the perfect will. -- And now, God be with us! For we are going about His work, with youth and faith to help us. Come, then, into the refreshment-tent -- our League shall be baptised this very hour.

The Crowd.

Hurrah! Carry him! Shoulder high with him! [He is lifted shoulder high.]

Voices.

Speak on! More! More!

Stensgard.

Let us hold together, I say! Providence is on the side of the League of Youth. It lies with us to rule the world -- here in the district! [He is carried into the tent amid wild enthusiasm.]

Madam Rundholmen

[(wiping her eyes).]

Oh, Lord, how beautifully he does speak! Don't you feel as if you could kiss him, Mr. Heire?

Heire.

Thank you, I'd rather not.

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, you! I daresay not.

Heire.

Perhaps you would like to kiss him, Madam Rundholmen.

Madam Rundholmen.

Ugh, how horrid you are! [She goes into the tent; HEIRE follows her.]

The Chamberlain.

Spectre -- and dragon -- and money- bag! It was horribly rude -- but well deserved!

Lundestad

[(approaching).]

I'm heartily sorry, Chamberlain --

The Chamberlain.

Yes, where was your knowledge of character, Lundestad? Well, well; we are none of us infallible. Good-night, and thanks for a pleasant evening. [Turns to THORA and the DOCTOR.] But bless me, I've been positively rude to that fine young fellow!]

Fieldbo.

How so?

Thora.

His call, you mean -- ?

The Chamberlain.

He called twice. It's really Lundestad's fault. He told me he was an adventurer and -- and I forget what else. Fortunately I can make up for it.

Thora.

How?

The Chamberlain.

Come, Thora; let us see to it at once --

Fieldbo.

Oh, do you think it's worth while, Chamberlain -- ?

Thora

[(softly).]

How?

The Chamberlain.

When one has done an injustice one should lose no time in undoing it; that's a plain matter of duty. Good-night, Doctor. After all, I've spent an amusing hour; and that's more than I have to thank you for to-day.

Fieldbo.

Me, Chamberlain?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, yes, yes -- you and others.

Fieldbo.

May I ask what I -- ?

The Chamberlain.

Don't be curious, Doctor. I am never curious. Come, come -- no offence -- good-night! [THE CHAMBERLAIN and THORA go out to the left; FIELDBO gazes thoughtfully after them.

]

Aslaksen

[(from the tent).]

Hei, waiter! Pen and ink! Things are getting lively, Doctor!

Fieldbo.

What things?

Aslaksen.

He's founding the League. It's nearly founded.

Lundestad

[(who has quietly drawn near).]
Are many putting down their names?

Aslaksen.

We've enrolled about seven-and-thirty, not counting widows and so forth. Pen and ink; I say! No waiters to be found! -- that's the fault of the local situation. [Goes off behind the tent.]

Lundestad.

Puh! It has been hot to-day.

Fieldbo.

I'm afraid we have hotter days to come.

Lundestad.

Do you think the Chamberlain was very angry?

Fieldbo.

Oh, not in the least; you could see that, couldn't you? But what do you say to the new League?

Lundestad.

H'm; I say nothing. What is there to be said?

Fieldbo.

It's the beginning of a struggle for power here in the district.

Lundestad.

Well, well -- ; no harm in a fight. He has great gifts, that Stensgard.

Fieldbo.

He is determined to make his way.

Lundestad.

Youth is always determined to make its way. I was, when I was young; no one can object to that. But mightn't we look in and see --

Heire

[(from the tent).]

Well, Mr. Lundestad, are you going to move the previous question, eh? To head the opposition? Hee-hee! You must make haste!

Lundestad.

Oh, I daresay I shall be in time.

Heire.

Too late, sir! Unless you want to stand godfather. (Cheering from the tent.) There, they're chanting Amen; the baptism is over.

Lundestad.

I suppose one may be permitted to listen; I shall keep quiet. [Enters the tent.]

Heire.

There goes one of the falling trees! There will be a rare uprooting, I can tell you! The place will soon look like a wood after a tornado. Won't I chuckle over it!

Fieldbo.

Tell me, Mr. Heire, what interest have you in the matter?

Heire.

Interest? I am entirely disinterested, Doctor! If I chuckle, it is on behalf of my fellow citizens. There will be life, spirit, go, in things. For my own part -- good Lord, it's all the same to me; I say, as the Grand Turk said of the Emperor of Austria and the King of France -- I don't care whether the pig eats the dog or the dog the pig. [Goes toward the back on the right.]

The Crowd

[(in the tent).]

Long live Stensgard! Hurrah! Hurrah for the League of Youth! Wine! Punch!
Hei, hei! Beer! Hurrah!

Bastian

[(comes from the tent).]

God bless you and every one. (With tears in his voice.) Oh, Doctor, I feel so strong this evening; I must do something.

Fieldbo.

Don't mind me. What would you like to do?

Bastian.

I think I'll go down to the dancing-room and fight one or two fellows.
[Goes out behind the tent.]

Stensgard

[(comes from the tent without his hat, and greatly excited).]

My dear Fieldbo, is that you?

Fieldbo.

At your service, Tribune of the People! For I suppose you've been elected -- ?

Stensgard.

Of course; but --

Fieldbo.

And what is to come of it all? What nice little post are you to have? The management of the Bank? Or perhaps --

Stensgard.

Oh, don't talk to me like that! I know you don't mean it. You are not so empty and wooden as you like to appear.

Fieldbo.

Empty and wooden, eh?

Stensgard.

Fieldbo! Be my friend as you used to be! We have not understood each other of late. You have wounded and repelled me with your ridicule and irony. Believe me, it was wrong of you. (Embraces him.) Oh, my great God! how happy I am!

Fieldbo.

You too? So am I, so am I!

Stensgard.

Yes, I should be the meanest hound on earth if all heaven's bounty didn't make me good and true. How have I deserved it, Fieldbo? What have I, sinner that I am, done to be so richly blessed?

Fieldbo.

There is my hand! This evening I am your friend indeed!

Stensgard.

Thanks! Be faithful and true, as I shall be! -- Oh, isn't it an unspeakable joy to carry all that multitude away and along with you? How can you help becoming good from mere thankfulness? And how it makes you love all your fellow creatures! I feel as if I could clasp them all in one embrace, and weep, and beg their forgiveness because God has been so partial as to give me more than them.

Fieldbo

[(quietly).]

Yes, treasures without price may fall to one man's lot. This evening I would not crush an insect, not a green leaf upon my path.

Stensgard.

You?

Fieldbo.

Never mind. That's apart from the question. I only mean that I understand you.

Stensgard.

What a lovely night! Listen to the music and merriment floating out over the meadows. And how still it is in the valley! I tell you the man whose life is not reconsecrated in such an hour, does not deserve to live on God's earth!

Fieldbo.

Yes; but tell me now: what do you mean to build up out of it-to-morrow, and through the working-days to come?

Stensgard.

To build up? We have to tear down first. -- Fieldbo, I had once a dream - or did I see it? No; it was a dream, but such a vivid one! I thought the Day of judgment was come upon the world. I could see the whole curve of the hemisphere. There was no sun, only a livid storm- light. A tempest arose; it came rushing from the west and swept everything before it: first withered leaves, then men; but they kept on their feet all the time, and their garments clung fast to them, so that they seemed to be hurried along sitting. At first they looked like townspeople running after their hats in a wind; but when they came nearer they were emperors and kings; and it was their crowns and orbs they were chasing and catching at, and seemed always on the point of grasping, but never grasped. Oh, there were hundreds and hundreds of them, and none of them understood in the least what was happening; but many bewailed themselves, and asked: "Whence can it come, this terrible storm?" Then there came the answer: "One Voice spoke, and the storm is the echo of that one Voice."

Fieldbo.

When did you dream that?

Stensgard.

Oh, I don't remember when; several years ago.

Fieldbo.

There were probably disturbances somewhere in Europe, and you had been reading the newspapers after a heavy supper.

Stensgard.

The same shiver, the same thrill, that then ran down my back, I felt again to-night. Yes, I will give my whole soul utterance. I will be the Voice --

Fieldbo.

Come, my dear Stensgard, pause and reflect. You will be the Voice, you say. Good! But where will you be the Voice? Here in the parish? Or at most here in the county! And who will echo you and raise the storm? Why, people like Monsen and Aslaksen, and that fat-headed genius, Mr. Bastian. And instead of the flying emperors and kings, we shall see old Lundestad rushing about after his lost seat in Parliament. Then what will it all amount to? Just what you at first saw in your dream -- townsfolk in a wind.

Stensgard.

In the beginning, yes. But who knows how far the storm may sweep?

Fieldbo.

Fiddlesticks with you and your storm! And the first thing you go and do, hoodwinked and blinded and gulled as you are, is to turn your weapons precisely against all that is worthy and capable among us --

Stensgard.

That is not true.

Fieldbo.

It is true! Monsen and the Stonelee gang got hold of you the moment you came here; and if you don't shake him off it will be your ruin. Chamberlain Bratsberg is a man of honour; that you may rely on. Do you know why the great Monsen hates him? Why, because --

Stensgard.

Not a word more! I won't hear a word against my friends!

Fieldbo.

Look into yourself, Stensgard! Is Mr. Mons Monsen really your friend?

Stensgard.

Mr. Monsen has most kindly opened his doors to me --

Fieldbo.

To people of the better sort he opens his doors in vain.

Stensgard.

Oh, whom do you call the better sort? A few stuck-up officials! I know all about it. As for me, I have been received at Stonelee with so much cordiality and appreciation --

Fieldbo.

Appreciation? Yes, unfortunately -- there we are at the root of the matter.

Stensgard.

Not at all! I can see with unprejudiced eyes. Mr. Monsen has abilities, he has reading, he has a keen sense for public affairs.

Fieldbo.

Abilities? Oh, yes, in a way. Reading, too: he takes in the papers, and has read your speeches and articles. And his sense for public affairs he has, of course, proved by applauding the said articles and speeches.

Stensgard.

Now, Fieldbo, up come the dregs of your nature again. Can you never shake off that polluting habit of thought? Why must you always assume mean or ridiculous motives for everything? Oh, you are not serious! Now you look good and true again. I'll tell you the real root of the matter. Do you know Ragna?

Fieldbo.

Ragna Monsen? Oh, after a fashion -- at second hand.

Stensgard.

Yes, I know she is sometimes at the Chamberlain's.

Fieldbo.

In a quiet way, yes. She and Miss Bratsberg are old schoolfellows.

Stensgard.

And what do you think of her?

Fieldbo.

Why, from all I have heard she seems to be a very good girl.

Stensgard.

Oh, you should see her in her home! She thinks of nothing but her two little sisters. And how devotedly she must have nursed her mother! You know the mother was out of her mind for some years before she died.

Fieldbo.

Yes, I was their doctor at one time. But surely, my dear fellow, you don't mean that --

Stensgard.

Yes, Fieldbo, I love her truly; to you I can confess it. Oh, I know what you are surprised at. You think it strange that so soon after -- of course you know that I was engaged to Christiania?

Fieldbo.

Yes, so I was told.

Stensgard.

The whole thing was a disappointment. I had to break it off -- it was best for all parties. Oh, how I suffered in that affair! The torture, the sense of oppression I endured -- ! Now, thank heaven, I am out of it all. That was my reason for leaving town.

Fieldbo.

And with regard to Ragna Monsen, are you quite sure of yourself?

Stensgard.

Yes, I am, indeed. There's no mistake possible in this case.

Fieldbo.

Well, then, in heaven's name, go in and win! It means your life's happiness! Oh, there's so much I could say to you --

Stensgard.

Really? Has she said anything? Has she confided in Miss Bratsberg?

Fieldbo.

No; that's not what I mean. But how can you, in the midst of your happiness, go and fuddle yourself in these political orgies? How can town tattle take any hold upon a mind that is --

Stensgard.

Why not? Man is a complex machine -- I am, at any rate. Besides, my way to her lies through these very party turmoils.

Fieldbo.

A terribly prosaic way.

Stensgard.

Fieldbo, I am ambitious; you know I am. I must make my way in the world. When I remember that I'm thirty, and am still on the first round of the ladder, I feel my conscience gnawing at me.

Fieldbo.

Not with its wisdom teeth.

Stensgard.

It's of no use talking to you. You have never felt the spur of ambition. You have dawdled and drifted all your days -- first at college, then abroad, now here.

Fieldbo.

Perhaps; but at least it has been delightful. And no reaction follows, like what you feel when you get down from the table after --

Stensgard.

Stop that! I can bear anything but that. You are doing a bad action -- you are damping my ardour.

Fieldbo.

Oh, come! If your ardour is so easily damped --

Stensgard.

Stop, I say! What right have you to break in upon my happiness? Do you think I am not sincere?

Fieldbo.

Yes, I am sure you are.

Stensgard.

Well, then, why go and make me feel empty, and disgusted, and suspicious of myself? (Shouts and cheers from the tent.) There -- listen! They are drinking my health. An idea that can take such hold upon people -- by God, it must have truth in it! THORA BRATSBURG, RAGNA MONSEN, and MR. HELLE enter from the left and cross, half-way back.

Helle.

Look, Miss Bratsberg; there is Mr. Stensgard.

Thora.

Then I won't go any further. Good-night, Ragna dear.

Helle

and Miss Monsen. Good-night, good-night. [They go out to the right.

]

Thora

[(advancing).]

I am Miss Bratsberg. I have a letter for you, from my father.

Stensgard.

For me?

Thora.

Yes; here it is. [Going.]

Fieldbo.

May I not see you home?

Thora.

No, thank you. I can go alone. Good-night. [Goes out to the left.]

Stensgard

[(reading the letter by a Chinese lantern).]

What is this!

Fieldbo.

Well -- what has the Chamberlain to say to you?

Stensgard

[(bursts into loud laughter).]
I must say I didn't expect this!

Fieldbo.
Tell me -- ?

Stensgard.
Chamberlain Bratsberg is a pitiful creature.

Fieldbo.
You dare to --

Stensgard.
Pitiful! Pitiful. Tell any one you please that I said so. Or rather, say nothing about it -- (Puts the letter in his pocket.) Don't mention this to any one! [The COMPANY come out from the tent.]

Monsen.
Mr. President! Where is Mr. Stensgard?

The Crowd.
There be is! Hurrah!

Lundestad.
Mr. President has forgotten his hat. [Hands it to him.]

Aslaksen.
Here; have some punch! Here's a whole bowlful!

Stensgard.
Thanks, no more.

Monsen.

And the members of the League will recollect that we meet to-morrow at Stonelee --

Stensgard.

To-morrow? It wasn't to-morrow, was it -- ?

Monsen.

Yes, certainly; to draw up the manifesto

Stensgard.

No, I really can't to-morrow -- I shall see about it the day after to-morrow, or the day after that. Well, good-night, gentlemen; hearty thanks all round, and hurrah for the future!

The Crowd.

Hurrah! Let's take him home in triumph!

Stensgard.

Thanks, thanks! But you really mustn't --

Aslaksen.

We'll all go with you.

Stensgard.

Very well, come along. Good-night, Fieldbo; you're not coming with us?

Fieldbo.

No; but let me tell you, what you said about Chamberlain Bratsberg --

Stensgard.

Hush, hush! It was an exaggeration -- I withdraw it! Well, my friends, if you're coming, come; I'll take the lead.

Monsen.

Your arm, Stensgard!

Bastian.

A song! Strike up! Something thoroughly patriotic!

The Crowd.

A song! A song! Music! [A popular air is played and sung. The procession marches out by the back to the right.]

Fieldbo

[(to LUNDESTAD, who remains behind).]

A gallant procession.

Lundestad.

Yes -- and with a gallant leader.

Fieldbo.

And where are you going, Mr. Lundestad?

Lundestad.

I? I'm going home to bed.

[He nods and goes off. DOCTOR FIELDBO remains behind alone.]

ACT SECOND

[A garden-room at the Chamberlain's, elegantly furnished with a piano, flowers, and rare plants. Entrance door at the back. On the left, a door leading to the diningroom; on the right, several glass doors lead out to the garden.]

[ASLAKSEN stands at the entrance door. A MAID-SERVANT is carrying some dishes of fruit into the dining-room.]

The Maid.

Yes, but I tell you they're still at table; you must call again.

Aslaksen.

I'd rather wait, if I may.

The Maid.

Oh, yes, if you like. You can sit there for the present. [She goes into the dining-room. ASLAKSEN takes a seat near the door. Pause. DR. FIELDBO enters from the back.]

Fieldbo.

Ah, good evening, Aslaksen: are you here?

The Maid

[(returning).]

You're late this evening, sir.

Fieldbo.

I was called to see a patient.

The Maid.

The Chamberlain and Miss Bratsberg have both been inquiring about you.

Fieldbo.

Indeed?

The Maid.

Yes. Won't you go in at once, sir; or shall I say that -- ?

Fieldbo.

No, no; never mind. I can have a snack afterwards; I shall wait here in the meantime.

The Maid.

Dinner will soon be over. [She goes out by the back.

]

Aslaksen

[(after a pause).]

How can you resist such a dinner, Doctor -- with dessert, and fine wines, and all sorts of good things?

Fieldbo.

Why, man, it seems to me we get too many good things hereabouts, rather than too few.

Aslaksen.

There I can't agree with you.

Fieldbo.

H'm. I suppose you are waiting for some one.

Aslaksen.

Yes, I am.

Fieldbo.

And are things going tolerably at home? Your wife -- ?

Aslaksen.

In bed, as usual; coughing and wasting away.

Fieldbo.

And your second child?

Aslaksen.

Oh, he's a cripple for the rest of his days; you know that. That's our luck, you see; what the devil's the use of talking about it?

Fieldbo.

Let me look at you, Aslaksen!

Aslaksen.

Well; what do you want to see?

Fieldbo.

You've been drinking to-day.

Aslaksen.

Yes, and yesterday, too.

Fieldbo.

Well, yesterday there was some excuse for it; but to-day --

Aslaksen.

What about your friends in there, then? Aren't they drinking, too?

Fieldbo.

Yes, my dear Aslaksen; that's a fair retort; but circumstances differ so in this world.

Aslaksen.

I didn't choose my circumstances.

Fieldbo.

No; God chose them for you.

Aslaksen.

No, he didn't -- men chose them. Daniel Heire chose, when he took me from the printing-house and sent me to college. And Chamberlain Bratsberg chose, when he ruined Daniel Heire and sent me back to the printing- house.

Fieldbo.

Now you know that's not true. The Chamberlain did not ruin Daniel Heire; Daniel Heire ruined himself.

Aslaksen.

Perhaps! But how dared Daniel Heire ruin himself, in the face of his responsibilities towards me? God's partly to blame, too, of course. Why should he give me talent and ability? Well, of course, I could have turned them to account as a respectable handicraftsman; but then comes that tattling old fool --

Fieldbo.

It's base of you to say that. Daniel Heire acted with the best intentions.

Aslaksen.

What good do his "best intentions" do me? You hear them in there, clinking glasses and drinking healths? Well, I, too, have sat at that table in my day, dressed in purple and fine linen, like the best of them -- ! That was just the thing for me, that was -- for me, that has read so much and had thirsted so long to have my share in all the good things of life. Well, well; how long was Jeppe in Paradise? Smash, crash! down you go -- and my fine fortunes fell to pi, as we printers say.

Fieldbo.

But, after all, you were not so badly off; you had your trade to fall back upon.

Aslaksen.

That's easily said. After getting out of your class you can't get into it again. They took the ground from under my feet, and shoved me out on the slippery ice -- and then they abuse me because I stumble.

Fieldbo.

Well, far be it from me to judge you harshly --

Aslaksen.

No; you have no right to. -- What a queer jumble it is! Daniel Heire, and Providence, and the Chamberlain, and Destiny, and Circumstance -- and I myself in the middle of it! I've often thought of unravelling it all and writing a book about it; but it's so cursedly entangled that -- (Glances towards the door on the left.) Ah! They're rising from table.

[The party, ladies and gentlemen, pass from the dining-room into the garden, in lively conversation. Among the guests is STENSGARD, with THORA on his left arm and SELMA on his right. FIELDBO and ASLAKSEN stand beside the door at the back.]

Stensgard.

I don't know my way here yet; you must tell me where I am to take you, ladies.

Selma.

Out into the air; you must see the garden.

Stensgard.

Oh, that will be delightful. They go out by the foremost glass door on the right.

Fieldbo.

Why, by all that's wonderful, there's Stensgard!

Aslaksen.

It's him I want to speak to. I've had a fine chase after him; fortunately I met Daniel Heire -- DANIEL HEIRE and ERIK BRATSBURG enter from the dining-room.

Heire.

Hee-hee! Excellent sherry, upon my word. I've tasted nothing like it since I was in London.

Erik.

Yes, it's good, isn't it? It puts life into you.

Heire.

Well, well -- it's a real pleasure to see one's money so well spent.

Erik.

How so? (Laughing.) Oh, yes; I see, I see. [They go into the garden.]

Fieldbo.

You want to speak to Stensgard, you say?

Aslaksen.

Yes.

Fieldbo.

On business?

Aslaksen.

Of course; the report of the fete --

Fieldbo.

Well, then, you must wait out there in the meantime.

Aslaksen.

In the passage?

Fieldbo.

In the anteroom. This is scarcely the time or place -- but the moment I see Stensgard alone, I'll tell him --

Aslaksen.

Very well; I'll bide my time. [Goes out by the back. CHAMBERLAIN BRATSBERG, LUNDESTAD, RINGDAL, and one or two other gentlemen come out of the dining-room.]

The Chamberlain

[(conversing with LUNDESTAD).]

Violent, you say? Well, perhaps the form wasn't all that could be desired; but there were real gems in the speech, I can assure you.

Lundestad.

Well, if you are satisfied, Chamberlain, I have no right to complain.

The Chamberlain.

Why should you? Ah, here's the Doctor! Starving, I'll be bound.

Fieldbo.

It doesn't matter, Chamberlain. The servants will attend to me. I feel myself almost at home here, you know.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, you do, do you? I wouldn't be in too great a hurry.

Fieldbo.

What? Am I taking too great a liberty? You yourself permitted me to --

The Chamberlain.

What I permitted, I permitted. Well, well, make yourself at home, and forage for something to eat. (Slaps him lightly on the shoulder and turns to LUNDESTAD.) Now, here's one you may call an adventurer and -- and the other thing I can't remember.

Fieldbo.

Why, Chamberlain -- !

Lundestad.

No, I assure you --

The Chamberlain.

No arguments after dinner; it's bad for the digestion. They'll serve the coffee outside presently. [Goes with the guests into the garden.]

Lundestad

[to FIELDBO].]

Did you ever see the Chamberlain so strange as he is to-day?

Fieldbo.

I noticed it yesterday evening.

Lundestad.

He will have it that I called Mr. Stensgard an adventurer and something else of that sort.

Fieldbo.

Oh, well, Mr. Lundestad, what if you did? Excuse me; I must go and talk to the ladies. [Goes out to the right.]

Lundestad

[to RINGDAL, who is arranging a card table].]

How do you account for Mr. Stensgard's appearance here to-day?

Ringdal

Yes, how? He wasn't on the original list.

Lundestad.

An afterthought, then? After his attack on the Chamberlain yesterday -- ?

Ringdal

Yes, can you understand it?

Lundestad.

Understand it? Oh, yes, I suppose I can.

Ringdal

[(more softly).]

You think the Chamberlain is afraid of him?

Lundestad.

I think he is prudent -- that's what I think. [They go up to the back conversing, and so out into the garden. At the same time SELMA and STENSGARD enter by the foremost door on the right.]

Selma.

Yes, just look -- over the tops of the trees you can see the church tower and all the upper part of the town.

Stensgard.

So you can; I shouldn't have thought so.

Selma.

Don't you think it's a beautiful view?

Stensgard.

Everything is beautiful here: the garden, and the view, and the sunshine, and the people! Great heaven, how beautiful it all is! And you live here all the summer?

Selma.

No, not my husband and I; we come and go. We have a big, showy house in town, much finer than this; you'll see it soon.

Stensgard.

Perhaps your family live in town?

Selma.

My family? Who are my family?

Stensgard.

Oh, I didn't know --

Selma.

We fairy princesses have no family.

Stensgard.

Fairy princesses?

Selma.

At most we have a stepmother --

Stensgard.

A witch, yes! So you are a princess!

Selma.

Princess of all the sunken palaces, whence you hear the soft music on midsummer nights. Doctor Fieldbo thinks it must be pleasant to be a princess; but I must tell you --

Erik

Bratsberg (coming from the garden). Ah, at last I find the little lady!

Selma.

The little lady is telling Mr. Stensgard the story of her life.

Erik.

Oh, indeed. And what part does the husband play in the little lady's story?

Selma.

The Prince, of course. (To STENSGARD.) You know the prince always comes and breaks the spell, and then all ends happily, and every one calls and congratulates, and the fairy-tale is over.

Stensgard.

Oh, it's too short.

Selma.

Perhaps -- in a way.

Erik

[(putting his arm round her waist).]

But a new fairy-tale grows out of the old one, and in it the Princess becomes a Queen!

Selma.

On the same conditions as real Princesses?

Erik.

What condition?

Selma.

They must go into exile -- to a foreign kingdom.

Erik.

A cigar, Mr. Stensgard?

Stensgard.

Thank you, not just now. DOCTOR FIELDBO and THORA enter from the garden.

Selma

[(Going toward them).]

Is that you, Thora dear? I hope you're not ill?

Thora.

I? No.

Selma.

Oh, but I'm sure you must be; you seem to be always consulting the doctor of late.

Thora.

No, I assure you --

Selma.

Nonsense; let me feel your pulse! You are burning. My dear Doctor, don't you think the fever will pass over?

Fieldbo.

Everything has its time.

Thora.

Would you rather have me freezing -- ?

Selma.

No, a medium temperature is the best -- ask my husband.

The Chamberlain

[(enters from the garden).]

The whole family gathered in secret conclave? That's not very polite to the guests.

Thora.

I am just going, father dear --

The Chamberlain.

Aha, it is you the ladies are paying court to, Mr. Stensgard! I must look to this.

Thora

[(softly to FIELDBO).]

Remain here! [She goes into the garden.]

Erik

[(offers SELMA his arm).]

Has Madame any objection -- ?

Selma.

Come! [They go out to the right.]

The Chamberlain

[(looking after them).]

It's impossible to get these two separated.

Fieldbo.

It would be sinful to try.

The Chamberlain.

Fools that we are! How Providence blesses us in spite of ourselves. (Calls out.) Thora, Thora, do look after Selma! Get a shawl for her, and don't let her run about so: she'll catch cold! How short-sighted we mortals are, Doctor! Do you know any cure for that disease?

Fieldbo.

The spectacles of experience; through them you will see more clearly a second time.

The Chamberlain.

You don't say so! Thanks for the advice. But since you feel yourself at home here, you must really pay a little attention to your guests.

Fieldbo.

Certainly; come, Stensgard, shall we -- ?

The Chamberlain.

Oh, no, no -- there's my old friend Heire out there --

Fieldbo.

He thinks himself at home here, too.

The Chamberlain.

Ha, ha, ha! So he does.

Fieldbo.

Well, we two will join forces, and do our best. [Goes into the garden.]

Stensgard.

You were speaking of Daniel Heire, Chamberlain. I must say I was rather surprised to see him here.

The Chamberlain.

Were you? Mr. Heire and I are old school and college friends. Besides, we have had a good deal to do with each other in many ways since --

Stensgard.

Yes, Mr. Heire was good enough to give his own account of some of these transactions, yesterday evening.

The Chamberlain.

H'm!

Stensgard.

Had it not been for him, I certainly should not have let myself boil over as I did. But he has a way of speaking of people and things, that -- in short, he has a vile tongue in his head.

The Chamberlain.

My dear young friend -- Mr. Heire is my guest; you must not forget that. My house is liberty hall, with only one reservation: my guests must not be discussed to their disadvantage.

Stensgard.

I beg your pardon, I'm sure -- !

The Chamberlain.

Oh, never mind; you belong to the younger generation, that's not so punctilious. As for Mr. Heire, I don't think you really know him. I, at any rate, owe Mr. Heire a great deal.

Stensgard.

Yes, he gave one to understand; but I didn't think --

The Chamberlain.

I owe him the best part of our domestic happiness, Mr. Stensgard! I owe him my daughter-in-law. Yes, that is really so. Daniel Heire was kind to her in her childhood. She was a youthful prodigy; she gave concerts when she was only ten years old. I daresay you have heard her spoken of -- Selma Sjoblom.

Stensgard.

Sjoblom? Yes, of course; her father was Swedish?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, a music-teacher. He came here many years ago. Musicians, you know, are seldom millionaires; and their habits are not always calculated to -- ; in short, Mr. Heire has always had an eye for talent; he was struck with the child, and had her sent to Berlin; and then, when her father was dead and Heire's fortunes were on the wane, she returned to Christiania, where she was, of course, taken up by the best people. That was how my son happened to fall in with her.

Stensgard.

Then in that way old Daniel Heire has indeed been an instrument for good --

The Chamberlain.

That is how one thing leads to another in this life, you see. We are all instruments, Mr. Stensgard; you, like the rest of us; an instrument of wrath, I suppose --

Stensgard.

Oh, don't speak of it, Chamberlain. I am utterly ashamed --

The Chamberlain.

Ashamed?

Stensgard.

It was most unbecoming --

The Chamberlain.

The form was perhaps open to criticism, but the intention was excellent. And now I want to ask you, in future, when you are contemplating any move of the sort, just to come to me and tell me of it openly, and without reserve. You know we all want to act for the best; and it is my duty --

Stensgard.

You will permit me to speak frankly to you?

The Chamberlain.

Of course I will. Do you think I haven't long realised that matters here have in some ways taken a most undesirable turn? But what was I to do? In the late King's time I lived for the most part in Stockholm. I am old now; and besides, it is not in my nature to take the lead in reforms, or to throw myself personally into the turmoil of public affairs. You, on the other hand, Mr. Stensgard, have every qualification for them; so let us hold together.

Stensgard.

Thanks, Chamberlain; many, many thanks! RINGDAL and DANIEL HEIRE enter from the garden.

Ringdal

And I tell you it must be a misunderstanding.

Heire.

Indeed? I like that! How should I misunderstand my own ears?

The Chamberlain.

Anything new, Heire?

Heire.

Only that Anders Lundestad is going over to the Stonelee party.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, you're joking!

Heire.

I beg your pardon, my dear sir; I have it from his own lips. Mr. Lundestad intends, on account of failing health, to retire from political life; you can draw your own conclusions from that.

Stensgard.

He told you so himself?

Heire.

Of course he did. He made the momentous announcement to an awe-struck circle down in the garden; hee-hee!

The Chamberlain.

Why, my dear Ringdal, what can be the meaning of this?

Heire.

Oh, it's not difficult to guess.

The Chamberlain.

Indeed it is, though. This is a most important affair for the district. Come along, Ringdal; we must find the man himself. [He and RINGDAL go down the garden.]

Fieldbo

[(entering by the furthest back garden-door).]

Has the Chamberlain gone out?

Heire.

Sh! The sages are deliberating! Great news Doctor! Lundestad is going to resign.

Fieldbo.

Oh, impossible!

Stensgard.

Can you understand it?

Heire.

Ah, now we may look out for real sport. It's the League of Youth that's beginning to work, Mr. Stensgard. Do you know what you should call your League? I'll tell you some other time.

Stensgard.

Do you think it's really our League -- ?

Heire.

Not the least doubt about it. So we're to have the pleasure of sending our respected friend Mr. Mons Monsen to Parliament! I wish he were off already; -- I'd give him a lift with pleasure -- I say no more; hee-hee! [Goes into the garden.]

Stensgard.

Tell me, Fieldbo -- how do you explain all this?

Fieldbo.

There are other things still more difficult to explain. How come you to be here?

Stensgard.

I? Like the rest, of course -- by invitation.

Fieldbo.

I hear you were invited yesterday evening -- after your speech --

Stensgard.

What then?

Fieldbo.

How could you accept the invitation?

Stensgard.

What the deuce was I to do? I couldn't insult these good people.

Fieldbo.

Indeed! You couldn't? What about your speech then?

Stensgard.

Nonsense! It was principles I attacked in my speech, not persons.

Fieldbo.

And how do you account for the Chamberlain's invitation?

Stensgard.

Why, my dear friend, there can only be one way of accounting for it.

Fieldbo.

Namely, that the Chamberlain is afraid of you?

Stensgard.

By heaven, he shall have no reason to be! He is a gentleman.

Fieldbo.

That he is.

Stensgard.

Isn't it touching the way the old man has taken this affair? And how lovely Miss Bratsberg looked when she brought me the letter!

Fieldbo.

But look here -- they haven't mentioned the scene of yesterday, have they?

Stensgard.

Not a word; they have far too much tact for that. But I am filled with remorse; I must find an opportunity of apologising --

Fieldbo.

I strongly advise you not to! You don't know the Chamberlain --

Stensgard.

Very well; then my acts shall speak for me.

Fieldbo.

You won't break with the Stonelee party?

Stensgard.

I shall bring about a reconciliation. I have my League; it's a power already, you see.

Fieldbo.

By-the-bye, while I remember -- we were speaking of Miss Monsen -- I advised you to go in and win --

Stensgard.

Oh, there's no hurry --

Fieldbo.

But listen; I have been thinking it over: you had better put all that out of your head.

Stensgard.

I believe you are right. If you marry into an underbred family, you marry the whole tribe of them.

Fieldbo.

Yes, and there are other reasons --

Stensgard.

Monsen is an underbred fellow; I see that now.

Fieldbo.

Well, polish is not his strong point.

Stensgard.

No, indeed it's not! He goes and speaks ill of his guests; that's ungentlemanly. His rooms all reek of stale tobacco --

Fieldbo.

My dear fellow, how is it you haven't noticed the stale tobacco before?

Stensgard.

It's the contrast that does it. I made a false start when I settled here. I fell into the clutches of a clique, and they bewildered me with their clamour. But there shall be an end to that! I won't go and wear my life out as a tool in the hands of self-interest or coarse stupidity.

Fieldbo.

But what will you do with your League?

Stensgard.

The League shall remain as it is; it's founded on a pretty broad basis. Its purpose is to counteract noxious influences; and I am just beginning to realise what side the noxious influences come from.

Fieldbo.

But do you think the "Youth" will see it in the same light?

Stensgard.

They shall! I have surely a right to expect fellows like that to bow before my superior insight.

Fieldbo.

But if they won't?

Stensgard.

Then they can go their own way. I have done with them. You don't suppose I am going to let my life slip into a wrong groove, and never reach the goal, for the sake of mere blind, pig-headed consistency!

Fieldbo.

What do you call the goal?

Stensgard.

A career that gives scope for my talents, and fulfills my aspirations.

Fieldbo.

No vague phrases! What do you mean by your goal?

Stensgard.

Well, to you I can make a clean breast of it. My goal is this: in the course of time to get into Parliament, perhaps into the Ministry, and to marry happily into a family of means and position.

Fieldbo.

Oh, indeed! And by help of the Chamberlain's social connections you intend to -- ?

Stensgard.

I intend to reach the goal by my own exertions! I must and will reach it; and without help from any one. It will take time, I daresay; but never mind! Meanwhile I shall enjoy life here, drinking in beauty and sunshine --

Fieldbo.

Here?

Stensgard.

Yes, here! Here there are fine manners; life moves gracefully here; the very floors seem laid to be trodden only by lacquered shoes. Here the arm-chairs are deep and the ladies sink exquisitely into them. Here conversation moves lightly and elegantly, like a game at battledore; here

no blunders come plumping in to make an awkward silence. Oh, Fieldbo -- here I feel for the first time what distinction means! Yes, we have indeed an aristocracy of our own; a little circle; an aristocracy of culture; and to it I will belong. Don't you yourself feel the refining influence of this place? Don't you feel that wealth here loses its grossness? When I think of Monsen's money, I seem to see piles of fetid bank-notes and greasy mortgages -- but here! here it is shimmering silver! And the people are the same. Look at the Chamberlain -- what a fine high-bred old fellow!

Fieldbo.

He is, indeed.

Stensgard.

And the son -- alert, straightforward, capable!

Fieldbo.

Certainly.

Stensgard.

And then the daughter-in-law! Isn't she a pearl? Good God, what a rich, what a fascinating nature!

Fieldbo.

Thora -- Miss Bratsberg has that, too.

Stensgard.

Oh, yes; but she is less remarkable.

Fieldbo.

Oh, you don't know her. You don't know how deep, and steadfast, and true her nature is.

Stensgard.

But, oh, the daughter-in-law! So frank, almost reckless; and yet so appreciative, so irresistible

Fieldbo.

Why, I really believe you're in love with her.

Stensgard.

With a married woman? Are you crazy? What good would that do me? No, but I am falling in love -- I can feel that plainly. Yes, she is indeed deep, and steadfast, and true.

Fieldbo.

Who?

Stensgard.

Miss Bratsberg, of course.

Fieldbo.

What? You're never thinking of -- ?

Stensgard.

Yes, by heaven I am!

Fieldbo.

I assure you it's quite out of the question.

Stensgard.

Ho-ho! Will rules the world, my dear fellow! We shall see if it doesn't.

Fieldbo.

Why, this is the merest extravagance! Yesterday it was Miss Monsen --

Stensgard.

Oh, I was too hasty about that; besides, you yourself advised me not to -

-

Fieldbo.

I advise you most emphatically to dismiss all thought of either of them.

Stensgard.

Indeed! Perhaps you yourself think of throwing the handkerchief to one of them?

Fieldbo.

I? No, I assure you --

Stensgard.

Well, it wouldn't have mattered if you had. If people stand in my way and want to balk me of my future, why, I stick at nothing.

Fieldbo.

Take care I don't say the same!

Stensgard.

You! What right have you to pose as guardian and protector to Chamberlain Bratsberg's family?

Fieldbo.

I have at least the right of a friend.

Stensgard.

Pooh! that sort of talk won't do with me. Your motive is mere self-interest! It gratifies your petty vanity to imagine yourself cock-of-the-walk in this house; and so I am to be kept outside the pale.

Fieldbo.

That is the best thing that could happen to you. Here you are standing on hollow ground.

Stensgard.

Am I indeed? Many thanks. I shall manage to prop it up.

Fieldbo.

Try; but I warn you, it will fall through with you first.

Stensgard.

Ho-ho! So you are intriguing against me, are you? I'm glad I have found it out. I know you now; you are my enemy, the only one I have here.

Fieldbo.

Indeed I am not.

Stensgard.

Indeed you are! You have always been so, ever since our school-days. Just look around here and see how every one appreciates me, stranger as I am. You, on the other hand, you who know me, have never appreciated me. That is the radical weakness of your character -- you can never appreciate any one. What did you do in Christiania but go about from tea-party to tea-party, spreading yourself out in little witticisms? That sort of thing brings its own punishment! You dull your sense for all that makes life worth living, for all that is ennobling and inspiring; and presently you get left behind, fit for nothing.

Fieldbo.

Am I fit for nothing?

Stensgard.

Have you ever been fit to appreciate me?

Fieldbo.

What was I to appreciate in you?

Stensgard.

My will, if nothing else. Every one else appreciates it -- the crowd at the fete yesterday -- Chamberlain Bratsberg and his family --

Fieldbo.

Mr. Mons Monsen and his ditto -- ! And by- the-bye, that reminds me -- there's some one out here waiting for you --

Stensgard.

Who?

Fieldbo

[(going towards the back).]

One who appreciates you. (Opens the door and calls.) Aslaksen, come in!

Stensgard.

Aslaksen?

Aslaksen

[(entering).]

Ah, at last!

Fieldbo.

Good-bye for the present; I won't intrude upon friends in council. [Goes into the garden.]

Stensgard.

What in the devil's name do you want here?

Aslaksen.

I must speak to you. You promised me yesterday an account of the founding of the League, and --

Stensgard.

I can't give it you; it must wait till another time.

Aslaksen.

Impossible, Mr. Stensgard; the paper appears to-morrow morning.

Stensgard.

Nonsense! It has all to be altered. The matter has entered on a new phase; new forces have come into play. What I said about Chamberlain Bratsberg must be entirely recast before it can appear.

Aslaksen.

Oh, that about the Chamberlain, that's in type already.

Stensgard.

Then it must come out of type again.

Aslaksen.

Not go in?

Stensgard.

I won't have it published in that form. Why do you stare at me? Do you think I don't know how to manage the affairs of the League?

Aslaksen.

Oh, certainly; but you must let me tell you --

Stensgard.

Not arguing, Aslaksen; that I can't stand and won't stand!

Aslaksen.

Do you know, Mr. Stensgard, that you are doing your best to take the bread out of my mouth? Do you know that?

Stensgard.

No; I know nothing of the sort.

Aslaksen.

But you are. Last winter, before you came here, my paper was looking up. I edited it myself, I must tell you, and I edited it on a principle.

Stensgard.

You?

Aslaksen.

Yes, I! -- I said to myself: it's the great public that supports a paper; now the great public is the bad public -- that comes of the local situation; and the bad public will have a bad paper. So you see I edited it --

Stensgard.

Badly! Yes, that's undeniable.

Aslaksen.

Well, and I prospered by it. But then you came and brought ideas into the district. The paper took on a colour, and then Lundestad's supporters all fell away. The subscribers that are left won't pay their subscriptions --

Stensgard.

Ah, but the paper has become a good one.

Aslaksen.

I can't live on a good paper. You were to make things lively; you were to grapple with abuses, as you promised yesterday. The bigwigs were to be pilloried; the paper was to be filled with things people were bound to read -- and now, you leave me in the lurch --

Stensgard.

Ho-ho! You think I am going to keep you supplied with libels! No, thank you, my good sir!

Aslaksen.

Mr. Stensgard, you mustn't drive me to desperation, or you'll repent it.

Stensgard.

What do you mean?

Aslaksen.

I mean that I must make the paper pay in another way. Heaven knows I should be sorry to do it. Before you came I made an honest living out of accidents and suicides and other harmless things, that often hadn't even happened. But now you have turned everything topsy-turvy; people now want very different fare --

Stensgard.

Just let me tell you this: if you break loose in any way, if you go a single step beyond my orders, and try to exploit the movement in your own dirty interests, I'll go to the opposition printer and start a new paper. We have money, you must know! We can bring your rag to ruin in a fortnight.

Aslaksen

[(pale).]

You wouldn't do that!

Stensgard.

Yes, I would; and you'll see I can edit a paper so as to appeal to the great public.

Aslaksen.

Then I'll go this instant to Chamberlain Bratsberg --

Stensgard.

You? What have you to do with him?

Aslaksen.

What have you to do with him? Do you think I don't know why you are invited here? It's because he is afraid of you, and of what you may do; and

you are making capital of that. But if he's afraid of what you may do, he'll be no less afraid of what I may print; and I will make capital of that!

Stensgard.

Would you dare to? A wretched creature like you -- !

Aslaksen.

I'll soon show you. If your speech is to be kept out of the paper, the Chamberlain shall pay me for keeping it out.

Stensgard.

Try it; just try it! You're drunk, fellow -- !

Aslaksen.

Only in moderation. But I'll fight like a lion if you try to take my poor crust out of my mouth. Little you know what sort of a home mine is: a bedridden wife, a crippled child --

Stensgard.

Off with you! Do you think I want to be soiled with your squalor? What are your bedridden wives and deformed brats to me? If you stand in my way, if you dare so much as to obstruct a single one of my prospects, you shall be on the parish before the year's out!

Aslaksen.

I'll wait one day --

Stensgard.

Ah, you're coming to your senses.

Aslaksen.

I shall announce to the subscribers in a hand- bill that in consequence of an indisposition contracted at the fete, the editor --

Stensgard.

Yes, do so; I daresay, later on, we shall come to an understanding.

Aslaksen.

I trust we may. -- Remember this, Mr. Stensgard: that paper is my one ewe lamb. [Goes out by the back.]

Lundestad

[(at the foremost garden door).]

Ah, Mr. Stensgard!

Stensgard.

Ah, Mr. Lundestad!

Lundestad.

You here alone? If you have no objection, I should like to have a little talk with you.

Stensgard.

With pleasure.

Lundestad.

In the first place, let me say that if any one has told you that I have said anything to your disadvantage, you mustn't believe it.

Stensgard.

To my disadvantage? What do you mean?

Lundestad.

Oh, nothing; nothing, I assure you. You see, there are so many busybodies here, that go about doing nothing but setting people by the ears.

Stensgard.

Well, on the whole -- I'm afraid our relations are a little strained.

Lundestad.

They are quite natural relations, Mr. Stensgard: the relation of the old to the new; it is always so.

Stensgard.

Oh, come, Mr. Lundestad, you are not so old as all that.

Lundestad.

Yes, indeed, I'm getting old. I have held my seat ever since 1839. It's time I should be relieved.

Stensgard.

Relieved?

Lundestad.

Times change, you see. New problems arise, and for their solution we want new forces.

Stensgard.

Now, frankly, Mr. Lundestad -- are you really going to give up your seat to Monsen?

Lundestad.

To Monsen? No, certainly not to Monsen.

Stensgard.

Then I don't understand --

Lundestad.

Suppose, now, I did retire in Monsen's favour: do you think he would be elected?

Stensgard.

It's hard to say. As the preliminary election comes on the day after tomorrow, there may scarcely be time to prepare the public mind; but --

Lundestad.

I don't believe he would manage it. The Chamberlain's party, my party, would not vote for him. Of course "my party" is a figure of speech; I mean the men of property, the old families, who are settled on their own land and belong to it. They won't have anything to do with Monsen. Monsen is a newcomer; no one really knows anything about Monsen and his affairs. And then he has had to cut down so much to clear a place for himself -- to fell both trees and men, you may say.

Stensgard.

Well, then, if you think he has no chance --

Lundestad.

H'm! You are a man of rare gifts, Mr.

Stensgard.

Providence has dealt lavishly with you. But it has made one little oversight: it ought to have given you one thing more.

Stensgard.

And what might that be?

Lundestad.

Tell me -- why do you never think of yourself? Why have you no ambition?

Stensgard.

Ambition? I?

Lundestad.

Why do you waste all your strength on other people? In one word -- why not go into Parliament yourself?

Stensgard.

I? You are not serious?

Lundestad.

Why not? You have qualified, I hear. And if you don't seize this opportunity, then some one else will come in; and when once he is firm in the saddle, it may not be so easy to unseat him.

Stensgard.

Great heavens, Mr. Lundestad! do you really mean what you say?

Lundestad.

Oh, I don't want to commit you; if you don't care about it --

Stensgard.

Not care about it! Well, I must confess I'm not so utterly devoid of ambition as you suppose. But do you really think it possible?

Lundestad.

Oh, there's nothing impossible about it. I should do my best, and so, no doubt, would the Chamberlain; he knows your oratorical gifts. You have the young men on your side --

Stensgard.

Mr. Lundestad, by heaven, you are my true friend!

Lundestad.

Oh, you don't mean much by that. If you really looked upon me as a friend, you would relieve me of this burden. You have young shoulders; you could bear it so easily.

Stensgard.

I place myself entirely at your disposal; I will not fail you.

Lundestad.

Then you are really not disinclined to --

Stensgard.

Here's my hand on it!

Lundestad.

Thanks! Believe me, Mr. Stensgard, you will not regret it. But now we must go warily to work. We must both of us take care to be on the electoral college -- I to propose you as my successor, and put you through your facings before the rest; and you to give an account of your views --

Stensgard.

If we once get so far, we are safe. In the electoral college you are omnipotent.

Lundestad.

There is a limit to omnipotence. You must of course bring your oratory into play; you must take care to explain away anything that might seem really awkward or objectionable --

Stensgard.

You don't mean that I am to break with my party?

Lundestad.

Now just look at the thing reasonably. What do we mean when we talk of two parties? We have, on the one hand, certain men or families who are in possession of the common civic advantages -- I mean property, independence, and power. That is the party I belong to. On the other hand, we have the mass of our younger fellow citizens who want to share in these advantages. That is your party. But that party you will quite naturally and properly pass out of when you get into power -- to say

nothing of taking up a solid position as a man of property -- for, of course, that is essential, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

Yes, I believe it is. But the time is short; and such a position is not to be attained in a day.

Lundestad.

That's true; but perhaps the prospect of such a position would be enough --

Stensgard.

The prospect -- ?

Lundestad.

Have you any rooted objection to a good marriage, Mr. Stensgard? There are heiresses in the country-side. A man like you, with a future before him -- a man who can reckon on attaining the highest offices -- believe me, you needn't fear a repulse if you play your cards neatly.

Stensgard.

Then, for heaven's sake, help me in the game! You open wide vistas to me -- great visions! All that I have hoped and longed for, and that seemed so dreamlike and far away, stands suddenly before me in living reality -- to lead the people forward towards emancipation, to --

Lundestad.

Yes, we must keep our eyes open, Mr. Stensgard. I see your ambition is already on the alert. That's well. The rest will come of itself. -- In the meantime, thanks! I shall never forget your readiness to take the burden of office from my shoulders. [The whole party gradually enters from the garden. Two maid-servants bring in candles and hand round refreshments during the following scene.]

Selma

[(goes towards the piano at the back, left).]

Mr. Stensgard, you must join us; we are going to have a game of forfeits.

Stensgard.

With pleasure; I am just in the mood.

[Follows her towards the back, makes arrangements with her, places chairs, etc., etc.]

Erik

Bratsberg (in an undertone). What the deuce is this my father is saying, Mr. Heire? What speech has Mr. Stensgard been making yesterday?

Heire.

Hee-hee! Don't you know about it?

Erik.

No; we townspeople had our dinner and ball at the Club. My father declares Mr. Stensgard has entirely broken with the Stonelee gang -- that he was frightfully rude to Monsen --

Heire.

To Monsen! No, you must have misunderstood him, my dear sir.

Erik.

Well, there were a whole lot of people about, so that I couldn't quite follow what he said; but I certainly heard --

Heire.

Wait till to-morrow -- I say no more. You'll have the whole story with your coffee, in Aslaksen's paper. [They separate.]

The Chamberlain.

Well, my dear Lundestad, are you sticking to those crotchets of yours?

Lundestad.

They are no crotchets, Chamberlain; rather than be ousted, one should give way gracefully.

The Chamberlain.

Nonsense; who is dreaming of ousting you?

Lundestad.

H'm; I'm an old weather-prophet. There has been a change in the wind. Besides, I have my successor ready. Mr. Stensgard is willing --

The Chamberlain.

Mr. Stensgard?

Lundestad.

Wasn't that what you meant? I took it for a hint when you said he was a man we must make friends with and support.

The Chamberlain.

I meant in his onslaught upon all the corruption and swindling that goes on at Stonelee.

Lundestad.

But how could you count so confidently upon his breaking with that crew?

The Chamberlain.

He did it openly enough last evening, my dear fellow.

Lundestad.

Last evening?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, when he spoke of Monsen's deplorable influence in the district.

Lundestad
[(open-mouthed).]
Of Monsen's -- ?

The Chamberlain.
Of course; that time on the table --

Lundestad.
On the table? Yes?

The Chamberlain.
He was frightfully rude; called him a money-bag, and a griffin or a basilisk, or something, Ha-ha! -- it was great sport to hear him.

Lundestad.
Great sport, was it?

The Chamberlain.
Yes, I own I'm not sorry to see these people a little roughly handled. But now we must back him up; for after such a savage attack --

Lundestad.
As that of yesterday, you mean?

The Chamberlain.
Of course.

Lundestad.
Upon the table?

The Chamberlain.
Yes, upon the table.

Lundestad.

Against Monsen?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, against Monsen and his set. Of course they'll try to have their revenge; you can't blame them --

Lundestad

[(decidedly).]

Mr. Stensgard must be supported -- that is clear.

Thora.

Father dear, you must join in the game.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, nonsense, child --

Thora.

Yes, indeed you must; Selma insists upon it.

The Chamberlain.

Very well, I suppose I must give in. (In an undertone as they go towards the back.) I'm quite distressed about Lundestad; he is really failing; fancy, he didn't in the least understand what Stensgard --

Thora.

Oh, come, come; they've begun the game. [She drags him into the circle of young people where the game is in full swing.

]

Erik

[(calls from his place).]

Mr. Heire, you are appointed forfeit-judge.

Heire.

Hee-hee! It's the first appointment I ever had.

Stensgard

[(also in the circle).]

On account of your legal experience, Mr. Heire.

Heire.

Oh, my amiable young friends, I should be delighted to sentence you all -- I say no more!

Stensgard

[(slips up to LUNDESTAD, who stands in front on the left).]

You were speaking to the Chamberlain. What about? Was it about me?

Lundestad.

Unfortunately it was -- about that affair of yesterday evening --

Stensgard

[(writhing).]

Oh, confound it all!

Lundestad.

He said you had been frightfully rude.

Stensgard.

Do you think it isn't a torture to me?

Lundestad.

Now is your chance to atone for it.

Erik

[(calls).]

Mr. Stensgard, it's your turn.

Stensgard.

Coming. (Quickly to LUNDESTAD.) What do you mean?

Lundestad.

Find an opportunity and apologise to the Chamberlain.

Stensgard.

By heaven, I will!

Selma.

Make haste, make haste!

Stensgard.

I'm coming! Here I am! [The game goes on with noise and laughter. Some elderly gentlemen play cards on the right. LUNDESTAD takes a seat on the left; DANIEL HEIRE near him.]

Heire.

That whelp twits me with my legal experience, does he?

Lundestad.

He's rather free with his tongue, that's certain.

Heire.

And so the whole family goes and fawns upon him. Hee-hee! They're pitifully afraid of him.

Lundestad.

No, there you are wrong, Mr. Heire; the Chamberlain is not afraid of him.

Heire.

Not afraid? Do you think I'm blind, my good sir?

Lundestad.

No, but -- I can trust you to keep the secret? Well, I'll tell you all about it. The Chamberlain thinks it was Monsen he was attacking.

Heire.

Monsen? Oh, absurd!

Lundestad.

Fact, Mr. Heire! Ringdal or Miss Thora must have got him persuaded that --

Heire.

And so he goes and asks him to a state dinner- party! Deuce take me, if that isn't the best thing I've heard for long! No, really now, I can't keep that bottled up.

Lundestad.

Sh, sh! Remember your promise. The Chamberlain's your old school-fellow; and even if he has been a little hard upon you --

Heire.

Hee-hee! I'll pay him back with interest!

Lundestad.

Take care! The Chamberlain is powerful. Don't play tricks in the lion's den!

Heire.

Bratsberg a lion? Pooh, he's a blockhead, sir, and I am not. Oh, won't I get a rare crop of taunts, and jibes, and innuendoes out of this, when once our great suit comes on!

Selma

[(calls from the circle).]

Learned judge, what shall the owner of this forfeit do?

Erik

[(unnoticed, to HEIRE).]

It's Stensgard's! Think of something amusing.

Heire.

That forfeit? Hee-hee, let me see; he might, for example -- yes, -- he shall make a speech!

Selma.

It's Mr. Stensgard's forfeit.

Erik.

Mr. Stensgard is to make a speech.

Stensgard.

Oh no, spare me that; I came off badly enough last night.

The Chamberlain.

Excellently, Mr. Stensgard; I know something of public speaking.

Lundestad

[(to HEIRE).]

If only he doesn't put his foot in it now.

Heire.

Put his foot in it? Hee-hee! You're a sharp one! That's an inspiration! (In an undertone to STENSGARD.) If you came off badly last night, why not put yourself right again to-night?

Stensgard

[(seized with a sudden idea).]
Lundestad, here is the opportunity!

Lundestad
[(evasively).]
Play your cards neatly. [Looks for his hat and slips quietly towards the door.]

Stensgard.
Yes, I will make a speech!

The Young Ladies.
Bravo! Bravo!

Stensgard.
Fill your glasses, ladies and gentlemen! I am going to make a speech which shall begin with a fable; for here I seem to breathe the finer air of fable-land.

Erik
[(to the LADIES).]
Hush! Listen! [The CHAMBERLAIN takes his glass from the cardtable on the right, beside which he remains standing. RINGDAL, FIELDBO, and one or two other gentlemen come in from the garden.]

Stensgard.
It was in the spring time. There came a young cuckoo flying over the uplands. Now the cuckoo is an adventurer. There was a great Bird-Parliament on the meadow beneath him, and both wild and tame fowl flocked to it. They came tripping out of the hen-yards; they waddled up from the goose-ponds; down from Stonelee hulked a fat capercaillie, flying low and noisily; he settled down, and ruffled his feathers and flapped his wings, and made himself even broader than he was; and every now and then he crowed, "Krak, krak, krak!" as much as to say: I'm the game-cock from Stonelee, I am!

The Chamberlain.
Capital! Hear, hear!

Stensgard.

And then there was an old woodpecker. He bustled up and down the tree-trunks, pecking with his pointed beak, and gorging himself with grubs and everything that turns to gall. To right and left you heard him going: prik, prik, prik! And that was the woodpecker.

Erik.

Excuse me, wasn't it a stork, or a -- ?

Heire.

Say no more!

Stensgard.

That was the old woodpecker. But now there came life into the crew; for they found something to cackle evil about. And they flustered together, and cackled in chorus, until at last the young cuckoo began to join in the cackling --

Fieldbo

[(unnoticed).]

For God's sake, man, be quiet!

Stensgard.

Now it was an eagle they cackled about -- an eagle who dwelt in lonely dignity upon a beetling cliff. They were all agreed about him. "He's a bugbear to the neighbourhood," croaked a hoarse raven. But the eagle swooped down into their midst, seized the cuckoo, and bore him aloft to his eyrie. -- Heart conquered heart! From that clear summit the adventurer-cuckoo looked far and wide over the lowlands; there he found sunshine and peace; and there he learned to judge aright the swarm from the hen-yards and the clearings --

Fieldbo

[(loudly).]

Bravo, bravo! And now some music.

The Chamberlain.

Hush! Don't interrupt him.

Stensgard.

Chamberlain Bratsberg -- here my fable ends; and here I stand before you, in the presence of every one, to beg your forgiveness for last night.

The Chamberlain

[(falls a step backwards).]

Mine -- ?

Stensgard.

I thank you for the magnanimous vengeance you have taken for my senseless words. In me you have henceforth a faithful champion. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I drink the health of the eagle on the mountain-top -- the health of Chamberlain Bratsberg.

The Chamberlain

[(clutching at the table).]

Thank you, Mr. -- Mr. Stensgard.

The Guests

[(for the most part in painful embarrassment).]

The Chamberlain! Chamberlain Bratsberg!

The Chamberlain.

Ladies! Gentlemen! (Softly.) Thora!

Thora.

Father!

The Chamberlain.

Oh, Doctor, Doctor, what have you done -- ?

Stensgard

[(with his glass in his hand, radiant with self- satisfaction).]

Now to our places again! Hullo, Fieldbo! Come, join in -- join in the League of Youth! The game's going merrily!

Heire

[(in front, on the left).]

Yes, on my soul, the game's going merrily!

[LUNDESTAD slips out by the door in the back.]

An allusion to Holberg's comedy, *Jeppe pa Bierget*, which deals with the theme of Abou Hassan, treated by Shakespeare in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, and by Hauptmann in *Schluck und Jau*.

Pronounce "Shoblom" -- the modified "o" much as in German.

As before stated, "Heire" means a heron.

"Et brat fjeld" -- an allusion to the name Bratsberg.

ACT THIRD

[An elegant morning-room, with entrance-door in the back. On the left, the door of the CHAMBERLAIN's Study; further back, a door leading to the drawing-room. On the right, a door leading to RINGDAL'S offices; further forward, a window.]

[THORA is seated on the sofa, left, weeping. The CHAMBERLAIN paces angrily up and down.]

The Chamberlain.

Yes, now we have the epilogue -- tears and lamentations --

Thora.

Oh, that we had never seen that man!

The Chamberlain.

What man?

Thora.

That wretched Mr. Stensgard, of course.

The Chamberlain.

You should rather say: Oh, that we had never seen that wretched Doctor.

Thora.

Doctor Fieldbo?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, Fieldbo, Fieldbo! Wasn't it he that palmed off a parcel of lies upon me -- ?

Thora.

No, my dear father, it was I.

The Chamberlain.

You? Well, then, both of you! You were his accomplice -- behind my back. A nice state of affairs!

Thora.

Oh, father, if you only knew --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, I know enough; more than enough; much more! DR. FIELDBO enters from the back.

Fieldbo.

Good morning, Chamberlain! Good morning, Miss Bratsberg!

The Chamberlain

[(still pacing the room).]

So you are there, are you -- bird of evil omen!

Fieldbo.

Yes, it was a very unpleasant affair.

The Chamberlain

[(looking out at the window).]

Oh, you think so?

Fieldbo.

You must have noticed how I kept my eye upon Stensgard all the evening. Unfortunately, when I heard there was to be a game of forfeits, I thought there was no danger --

The Chamberlain

[(stamping on the floor).]

To be made a laughing-stock by such a windbag! What must my guests have thought of me? That I was mean enough to want to buy this creature, this -- this -- as Lundestad calls him!

Fieldbo.

Yes, but --

Thora

[(unnoticed by her father).]

Don't speak.

The Chamberlain

[(after a short pause, turns to FIELDBO).]

Tell me frankly, Doctor: -- Am I really denser than the general run of people?

Fieldbo.

How can you ask such a question, Chamberlain?

The Chamberlain.

Then how did it happen that I was probably the only person there who didn't understand that that confounded speech was meant for me?

Fieldbo.

Shall I tell you why?

The Chamberlain.

Certainly.

Fieldbo.

It is because you yourself regard your position in the district differently from other people.

The Chamberlain.

I regard my position as my father before me regarded his. No one would ever have ventured to treat him so.

Fieldbo.

Your father died about the year 1830.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, yes; many a barrier has broken down since that time. But, after all, it's my own fault. I have mixed myself up too much with these good people. So now I must be content to have my name coupled with Anders Lundestad's!

Fieldbo.

Well, frankly, I see no disgrace in that.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, you know quite well what I mean. Of course I don't plume myself on rank, or titles, or anything of that sort. But what I hold in honour, and expect others to hold in honour, is the integrity handed down in our family from generation to generation. What I mean is that when a man like Lundestad goes into public life, he cannot keep his character and his conduct entirely free from stain. In the general mud-throwing, he is sure to find himself bespattered. But they might leave me in peace; I stand outside their parties.

Fieldbo.

Not so entirely, Chamberlain; at least you were delighted so long as you thought it was Monsen that was attacked.

The Chamberlain.

Don't mention that fellow! -- It is he that has relaxed the moral sense of the district. And now he has gone and turned my son's head, confound him!

Thora.

Erik's?

Fieldbo.

Your son's?

The Chamberlain.

Yes; what tempted him to go and set up in business? It leads to nothing.

Fieldbo.

Why, my dear Chamberlain, he must live and --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, with economy he could quite well live on the money that came to him from his mother.

Fieldbo.

He might perhaps live on it; but what could he live for?

The Chamberlain.

For? Well, if he absolutely must have something to live for, hasn't he qualified as a lawyer? He might live for his profession.

Fieldbo.

No, that he couldn't do; it is against his nature. Then there was no official appointment he could well hope for; you have kept the management of your property in your own hands; and your son has no children to educate. Under these circumstances, when he sees tempting examples around him -- people who have started from nothing and are worth their half million --

The Chamberlain.

Their half million! Oh, come now, let us keep to the hundred thousands. But neither the half million nor the hundred thousands can be scraped together with perfectly clean hands: -- I don't mean in the eyes of the world; Heaven knows it is easy enough to keep within the law; but in respect to one's own conscience. Of course my son cannot descend to anything questionable; so you may be quite sure Mr. Erik Bratsberg's financial operations won't bring in any half millions. SELMA, in walking dress, enters from the back.

Selma.

Good-morning! Is Erik not here?

The Chamberlain.

Good-morning, child! Are you looking for your husband?

Selma.

Yes, he said he was coming here. Mr. Monsen called upon him early this morning, and then --

The Chamberlain.

Monsen? Does Monsen come to your house?

Selma.

Now and then; generally on business. Why, my dear Thora, what's the matter? Have you been crying?

Thora.

Oh, it's nothing.

Selma.

No, it's not nothing! At home Erik was out of humour, and here -- I can see it in your looks: there is something wrong. What is it?

The Chamberlain.

Nothing you need trouble about, at any rate. You are too dainty to carry burdens, my little

Selma.

Go into the drawing-room for the present. If Erik said he was coming, he will be here soon, no doubt.

Selma.

Come, Thora -- and be sure you don't let me sit in a draught! (Embracing her.) Oh, I could hug the life out of you, my sweet Thora! [The two ladies go off to the left.]

The Chamberlain.

So they are hand in glove, are they, the two speculators! They should go into partnership. Monsen and Bratsberg -- how nice it would sound! (A knock at the door in the back.) Come in! STENSGARD enters.

The Chamberlain
[(recoiling a step).]
What is this?

Stensgard.
Yes, here I am again, Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain.
So I see.

Fieldbo.
Are you mad, Stensgard?

Stensgard.
You retired early yesterday evening. When Fieldbo had explained to me how matters stood, you had already --

The Chamberlain.
Excuse me -- all explanations are superfluous --

Stensgard.
I understand that; therefore I have not come to make any.

The Chamberlain.
Oh, indeed?

Stensgard.
I know I have insulted you.

The Chamberlain.
I know that too; and before I have you turned out, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why you are here.

Stensgard.

Because I love your daughter, Chamberlain.

Fieldbo.

What -- !

The Chamberlain.

What does he say, Doctor?

Stensgard.

Ah, you can't grasp the idea, Chamberlain. You are an old man; you have nothing to fight for --

The Chamberlain.

And you presume to -- ?

Stensgard.

I am here to ask for your daughter's hand, Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain.

You -- you -- ? Won't you sit down?

Stensgard.

Thanks, I prefer to stand.

The Chamberlain.

What do you say to this, Doctor?

Stensgard.

Oh, Fieldbo is on my side; he is my friend; the only true friend I have.

Fieldbo.

No, no, man! Never in this world, if you --

The Chamberlain.

Perhaps it was with this view that Doctor Fieldbo secured his friend's introduction into my house?

Stensgard.

You know me only by my exploits of yesterday and the day before. That is not enough. Besides, I am not the same man to-day that I was then. My intercourse with you and yours has fallen like spring showers upon my spirit, making it put forth new blossoms in a single night! You must not hurl me back into my sordid past. Till now, I have never been at home with the beautiful in life; it has always been beyond my reach --

The Chamberlain.

But my daughter -- ?

Stensgard.

Oh, I shall win her.

The Chamberlain.

Indeed? H'm!

Stensgard.

Yes, for I have will on my side. Remember what you told me yesterday. You were opposed to your son's marriage -- and see how it has turned out! You must put on the glasses of experience, as Fieldbo said --

The Chamberlain.

Ah, that was what you meant?

Fieldbo.

Not in the least! My dear Chamberlain, let me speak to him alone

Stensgard.

Nonsense; I have nothing to speak to you about. Now, pray be reasonable, Chamberlain! A family like yours needs new alliances, or its brains stagnate --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, this is too much!

Stensgard.

Now, now, don't be angry! These high-and- mighty airs are unworthy of you -- of course you know they are all nonsense at bottom. You shall see how much you'll value me when you come to know me. Yes, yes; you shall value me -- both you and your daughter! I will make her --

The Chamberlain.

What do you think of this, Doctor?

Fieldbo.

I think it's madness.

Stensgard.

Yes, it would be in you; but I, you see -- I have a mission to fulfil on God's beautiful earth; -- I am not to be deterred by nonsensical prejudices --

The Chamberlain.

Mr. Stensgard, there is the door.

Stensgard.

You show me -- ?

The Chamberlain.

The door!

Stensgard.

Don't do that!

The Chamberlain.

Out with you! You are an adventurer, an a -- a -- confound my memory!
You're a --

Stensgard.

What am I?

The Chamberlain.

You are -- that other thing -- it's on the tip of my tongue --

Stensgard.

Beware how you block my career!

The Chamberlain.

Beware? Of what?

Stensgard.

I will attack you in the papers, persecute you, libel you, do all I can to undermine your reputation. You shall shriek under the lash. You shall seem to see spirits in the air raining blows upon you. You shall huddle together in dread, and crouch with your arms bent over your head to ward off the strokes -- you shall try to creep into shelter --

The Chamberlain.

Creep into shelter yourself -- in a mad-house; that is the proper place for you!

Stensgard.

Ha-ha; that is a cheap retort; but you know no better, Mr. Bratsberg! I tell you the wrath of the Lord is in me. It is His will you are opposing. He has destined me for the light -- beware how you cast a shadow! -- Well, I see I shall make no way with you to-day; but that matters nothing. I only ask you to speak to your daughter -- to prepare her -- to give her the

opportunity of choosing! Reflect, and look around you. Where can you expect to find a son-in-law among these plodding dunces? Fieldbo says she is deep and steadfast and true. So now you know just how matters stand. Good-bye, Chamberlain -- I leave you to choose between my friendship and my enmity. Good-bye! [Goes out by the back.]

The Chamberlain.

So it has come to this! This is how they dare to treat me in my own house!

Fieldbo.

Stensgard dares; no one else would.

The Chamberlain.

He to-day; others to-morrow.

Fieldbo.

Let them come; I shall keep them off; I would go through fire and water for you --

The Chamberlain.

Yes, you who have caused all the mischief! -- H'm; that Stensgard is the most impudent scoundrel I have ever known! And yet, after all -- deuce take me if there isn't something I like about him.

Fieldbo.

He has possibilities

The Chamberlain.

He has openness, Dr. Fieldbo! He doesn't go playing his own game behind one's back, like so many other people; he -- he -- !

Fieldbo.

It's not worth disputing about. Only be firm, Chamberlain; no, and no again, to Stensgard -- !

The Chamberlain.

Oh, keep your advice to yourself! You may rely upon it that neither he nor anyone else --

Ringdal

[(enters by the door on the right).]

Excuse me, Chamberlain; one word -- [Whispers.]

The Chamberlain.

What? In your room?

Ringdal

He came in by the back way, and begs you to see him.

The Chamberlain.

H'm. -- Oh, Doctor, just go into the drawing-room for a moment; there's some one here who -- But don't say a word to Selma of Mr. Stensgard and his visit. She must be kept outside all this business. As for my daughter, I should prefer that you should say nothing to her either; but -- Oh, what's the use -- ? Please go now. [FIELDBO goes into the drawing-room. RINGDAL has, in the meantime, gone back to his office, whence MONSEN presently enters.]

Monsen

[(at the door).]

I beg ten thousand pardons, sir --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, come in, come in!

Monsen.

I trust your family is in good health?

The Chamberlain.

Thank you. Is there anything you want?

Monsen.

I can't quite put it that way. Thank heaven, I'm one of those that have got pretty nearly all they can want.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, indeed? That is a good deal to say.

Monsen.

But I've had to work for it, Chamberlain. Oh, I know you regard my work with no very friendly eye.

The Chamberlain.

I cannot suppose that your work is in any way affected by my way of regarding it.

Monsen.

Who knows? At any rate, I'm thinking of gradually withdrawing from business.

The Chamberlain.

Really?

Monsen.

The luck has been on my side, I may tell you. I've gone ahead as far as I care to; so now I think it's about time to slack off a little --

The Chamberlain.

Well, I congratulate both you -- and other people.

Monsen.

And if I could at the same time do you a service, Chamberlain --

The Chamberlain.

Me?

Monsen.

When the Langerud woods were put up to auction five years ago, you made a bid for them --

The Chamberlain.

Yes, but you outbade me, and they were knocked down to you.

Monsen.

You can have them now, with the saw-mills and all appurtenances --

The Chamberlain.

After all your sinful cutting and hacking -- !

Monsen.

Oh, they're worth a good deal still; and with your method of working, in a few years --

The Chamberlain.

Thank you; unfortunately I must decline the proposal.

Monsen.

There's a great deal of money in it, Chamberlain. As for me, -- I may tell you I have a great speculation on hand; the stakes are large; I mean there's a big haul to be made -- a hundred thousand or so --

The Chamberlain.

A hundred thousand? That is certainly no trifle.

Monsen.

Ha ha ha! A nice round sum to add to the pile. But when you're going into a great battle you need reserve forces, as the saying goes. There's not much ready money about; the names that are worth anything are rather used up --

The Chamberlain.

Yes, certain people have taken care of that.

Monsen.

It's a case of you scratch me, I scratch you. Well, Chamberlain, is it to be a bargain? You shall have the woods at your own figure --

The Chamberlain.

I will not have them at any figure, Mr. Monsen.

Monsen.

Well, one good offer deserves another. Will you help me, sir?

The Chamberlain.

What do you mean?

Monsen.

Of course I'll give good security. I have plenty of property. Look here -- these papers -- just let me explain my position to you.

The Chamberlain

[(waving the papers aside).]

Is it pecuniary aid you want?

Monsen.

Not ready money; oh, no! But your support, Chamberlain. Of course I'll pay for it -- and give security, and --

The Chamberlain.

And you come to me with such a proposal as this?

Monsen.

Yes, precisely to you. I know you've often let bygones be bygones when a man was in real straits.

The Chamberlain.

Well, in a way, I must thank you for your good opinion -- especially at a time like this; but nevertheless --

Monsen.

Won't you tell me, Chamberlain, what sets you against me?

The Chamberlain.

Oh, what would be the use?

Monsen.

It might lead to a better understanding between us. I've never stood in your way that I know of.

The Chamberlain.

You think not? Then let me tell you of one case in which you have stood in my way. I founded the Iron-works Savings Bank for the benefit of my employees and others. But then you must needs set up as a banker; people take their savings to you --

Monsen.

Naturally, sir, for I give higher interest.

The Chamberlain.

Yes, but you charge higher interest on loans.

Monsen.

But I don't make so many difficulties about security and so forth.

The Chamberlain.

That is just the mischief of it; for now we have people making bargains to the tune of ten or twenty thousand dollars, though neither of the parties has so much as a brass farthing. That is what sets me against you, Mr. Monsen. And there is another thing too that touches me still more nearly. Do you think it was with my good will that my son flung himself into all these wild speculations?

Monsen.

But how can I help that?

The Chamberlain.

It was your example that infected him, as it did the others. Why could you not stick to your last?

Monsen.

Remain a lumberman, like my father?

The Chamberlain.

Was it a disgrace to be in my employment? Your father made his bread honourably, and was respected in his own class.

Monsen.

Yes, until he'd almost worked his life out, and at last went over the waterfall with his raft. Do you know anything of life in that class, Chamberlain? Have you ever realised what the men have to endure who toil for you deep in the forests, and along the river-reaches, while you sit comfortably at home and fatten on the profits? Can you blame such a man for struggling to rise in the world? I had had a little more schooling than my father; perhaps I had rather more brains too --

The Chamberlain.

Very likely. But by what means have you risen in the world? You began by selling brandy. Then you bought up doubtful debts, and enforced them mercilessly; -- and so you got on and on. How many people have you not ruined to push yourself forward!

Monsen.

That's the course of business; one up, another down.

The Chamberlain.

But there are different methods of business. I know of respectable families whom you have brought to the workhouse.

Monsen.

Daniel Heire is not very far from the work-house.

The Chamberlain.

I understand you; but I can justify my conduct before God and man! When the country was in distress, after the separation from Denmark, my father made sacrifices beyond his means. Thus part of our property came into the hands of the Heire family. What was the result? The people who lived upon the property suffered under Daniel Heire's incompetent management. He cut down timber to the injury, I may even say to the ruin, of the district. Was it not my obvious duty to put a stop to it if I was able? And it happened that I was able; I had the law on my side; I was well within my rights when I re-entered upon my family property.

Monsen.

I, too, have always had the law on my side.

The Chamberlain.

But what about your sense of right, your conscience, if you have such a thing? And how you have broken down all social order! How you have impaired the respect that should attach to wealth! People never think of asking nowadays how such and such a fortune was made, or how long it has been in such and such a family; they only ask: how much is so-and-so worth? -- and they esteem him accordingly. Now I suffer by all this; I find myself regarded as a sort of associate of yours; people speak of us in one breath, because we are the two largest proprietors in the neighbourhood. This state of things I cannot endure! I tell you once for all: that is why I am set against you.

Monsen.

This state of things shall come to an end, sir; I will give up business, and make way for you at every point; but I beg you, I implore you, to help me!

The Chamberlain.

I will not.

Monsen.

I'm willing to pay you what you like --

The Chamberlain.

To pay! And you dare to -- !

Monsen.

If not for my sake, then for your son's!

The Chamberlain.

My son's!

Monsen.

Yes, he's in it. I reckon he stands to win some twenty thousand dollars.

The Chamberlain.

Stands to win?

Monsen.

Yes.

The Chamberlain.

Then, good God, who stands to lose all this money?

Monsen.

How do you mean?

The Chamberlain.

If my son wins, some one or other must lose!

Monsen.

It's a good stroke of business; I'm not in a position to say more. But I need a solid name; only just your endorsement --

The Chamberlain.

Endorsement! On a bill -- ?

Monsen.

Only for ten or fifteen thousand dollars.

The Chamberlain.

Do you suppose for a moment that -- ? My name! In such an affair! My name? As surety, no doubt?

Monsen.

A mere matter of form --

The Chamberlain.

A matter of swindling! My name! Not upon any consideration. I have never put my name on other men's paper.

Monsen.

Never? That's an exaggeration, Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain.

It is the literal truth.

Monsen.

No, not literal; I've seen it with my own eyes.

The Chamberlain.
What have you seen?

Monsen.
Your name -- on one bill at least.

The Chamberlain.
It is false, I tell you! You have never seen it!

Monsen.
I have! On a bill for two thousand dollars. Think again!

The Chamberlain.
Neither for two thousand nor for ten thousand! On my sacred word of honour, never!

Monsen.
Then it's a forgery.

The Chamberlain.
Forgery?

Monsen.
Yes, a forgery -- for I have seen it.

The Chamberlain.
Forgery? Forgery! Where did you see it? In whose hands?

Monsen.
That I won't tell you.

The Chamberlain.

Ha-ha! We shall soon find that out --

Monsen.

Listen to me -- !

The Chamberlain.

Silence! It has come to this then! Forgery. They must mix me up in their abominations! No wonder, then, that people bracket me with the rest of you. But it is my turn now!

Monsen.

Chamberlain -- for your own sake and for the sake of others --

The Chamberlain.

Off with you! Out of my sight! It is you that are at the root of it all! -- Yes you are! Woe unto him from whom offences come. Your home-life is scandalous. What sort of society do you get about you? Persons from Christiania and elsewhere, who think only of eating and drinking, and do not care in what company they gorge themselves. Silence! I have seen with my own eyes your distinguished guests tearing along the roads at Christmas-time like a pack of howling wolves. And there is worse behind. You have had scandals with your own maid- servants. You drove your wife out of her mind by your ill-treatment and debauchery.

Monsen.

Come, this is going too far! You shall pay for these words!

The Chamberlain.

Oh, to the deuce with your threats! What harm can you do to me? Me? You asked what I had to say against you. Well, I have said it. Now you know why I have kept you out of decent society.

Monsen.

Yes, and now I'll drag your decent society down --

The Chamberlain.

That way!

Monsen.

I know my way, Chamberlain! [Goes out by the back.]

The Chamberlain

[(opens the door on the right and calls).]

Ringdal, Ringdal -- come here!

Ringdal

What is it, sir?

The Chamberlain

[(calls into the drawing-room).]

Doctor, please come this way! -- Now, Ringdal, now you shall see my prophecies fulfilled.

Fieldbo

[(entering).]

What can I do for you, Chamberlain?

Ringdal

What prophecies, sir?

The Chamberlain.

What do you say to this, Doctor? You have always accused me of exaggerating when I said that Monsen was corrupting the neighbourhood.

Fieldbo.

Well, what then?

The Chamberlain.

We are getting on, I can tell you! What do you think? There are forgeries going about.

Ringdal
Forgeries?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, forgeries! And whose name do you think they have forged? Why, mine!

Fieldbo.

Who in the world can have done it?

The Chamberlain.

How can I tell? I don't know all the scoundrels in the district. But we shall soon find out. -- Doctor, do me a service. The papers must have come into the hands either of the Savings Bank or the Iron-works Bank. Drive up to Lundestad; he is the director who knows most about things. Find out whether there is any such paper --

Fieldbo.

Certainly; at once.

Ringdal

Lundestad is here at the works, to-day; there's a meeting of the school committee.

The Chamberlain.

So much the better. Find him; bring him here.

Fieldbo.

I'll go at once. [Goes out at the back.]

The Chamberlain.

And you, Ringdal, make inquiries at the Iron-works. As soon as we have got to the bottom of the matter, we'll lay an information. No mercy to the scoundrels!

Ringdal

Very good, sir. Bless me, who'd have thought of such a thing? [Goes out to the right. [The CHAMBERLAIN paces the room once or twice, and is then about to go into his study. At that instant ERIK BRATSBERG enters from the back.]

Erik.

My dear father -- !

The Chamberlain.

Oh, are you there?

Erik.

I want so much to speak to you.

The Chamberlain.

H'm; I'm not much in the humour for speaking to any one. What do you want?

Erik.

You know I have never mixed you up in my affairs, father.

The Chamberlain.

No; that is an honour I should certainly have declined.

Erik.

But now I am forced to --

The Chamberlain.

What are you forced to do?

Erik.

Father, you must help me!

The Chamberlain.

With money! You may be very sure that --

Erik.

Only this once! I swear I'll never again -- The fact is, I am under certain engagements to Monsen of Stonelee --

The Chamberlain.

I know that. You have a brilliant speculation on hand.

Erik.

A speculation? We? No! Who told you so?

The Chamberlain.

Monsen himself.

Erik.

Has Monsen been here?

The Chamberlain.

He has just gone. I showed him the door.

Erik.

If you don't help me, father, I am ruined.

The Chamberlain.

You?

Erik.

Yes. Monsen has advanced me money. I had to pay terribly dear for it; and now the bills have fallen due --

The Chamberlain.

There we have it! What did I tell you -- ?

Erik.

Yes, yes; it's too late now --

The Chamberlain.

Ruined! In two years! But how could you expect anything else? What had you to do among these charlatans that go about dazzling people's eyes with wealth that never existed! They were no company for you. Among people of that sort you must meet cunning with cunning, or you'll go to the wall; you have learnt that now.

Erik.

Father, will you save me or will you not?

The Chamberlain.

No; for the last time, no. I will not.

Erik.

My honour is at stake --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, let us have no big phrases! There's no honour involved in commercial success nowadays; quite the opposite, I had almost said. Go home and make up your accounts; pay every man his due, and have done with it, the sooner the better.

Erik.

Oh, you don't know -- SELMA and THORA enter from the drawing-room.

Selma.

Is that Erik's voice? -- Good heavens, what is the matter?

The Chamberlain.

Nothing. Go into the drawing-room again.

Selma.

No, I won't go. I will know. Erik, what is it? Tell me!

Erik.

It's only that I am ruined!

Thora.

Ruined!

The Chamberlain.

There, you see!

Selma.

What is ruined?

Erik.

Everything.

Selma.

Do you mean you have lost your money?

Erik.

Money, house, inheritance -- everything!

Selma.

Is that what you call everything?

Erik.

Come, let us go, Selma. You are all I have left me. We must bear the blow together.

Selma.

The blow? Bear it together? (With a cry.) Do you think I am fit for that, now?

The Chamberlain.

For heaven's sake -- !

Erik.

What do you mean?

Thora.

Oh, Selma, take care!

Selma.

No, I won't take care! I cannot go on lying and shamming any longer! I must speak the truth. I will not "bear" anything!

Erik.

Selma!

The Chamberlain.

Child, what are you saying?

Selma.

Oh, how cruel you have been to me! Shamefully -- all of you! It was my part always to accept -- never to give. I have been like a pauper among you. You never came and demanded a sacrifice of me; I was not fit to bear anything. I hate you! I loathe you!

Erik.

What can this mean?

The Chamberlain.

She is ill; she is out of her mind!

Selma.

How I have thirsted for a single drop of your troubles, your anxieties! But when I begged for it you only laughed me off. You have dressed me up like a doll; you have played with me as you would play with a child. Oh, what a joy it would have been to me to take my share in your burdens! How I longed, how I yearned, for a large, and high, and strenuous part in life! Now you come to me, Erik, now that you have nothing else left. But I will not be treated simply as a last resource. I will have nothing to do with your troubles now. I won't stay with you! I will rather play and sing in the streets -- ! Let me be! Let me be! [She rushes out by the back.

]

The Chamberlain.

Thora, was there any meaning in all that, or --

Thora.

Oh, yes, there was meaning in it; if only I had seen it sooner. [Goes out by the back.]

Erik.

No! All else I can lose, but not her! Selma, Selma! [Follows THORA and SELMA.]

Ringdal

[(enters from the right).]

Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain.

Well, what is it?

Ringdal

I have been to the Bank --

The Chamberlain.

The Bank? Oh, yes, about the bill --

Ringdal

It's all right; they have never had any bill endorsed by you --

[FIELDBO and LUNDESTAD enter by the back.]

Fieldbo.

False alarm, Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain.

Indeed? Not at the Savings Bank either?

Lundestad.

Certainly not. During all the years I've been a director I have never once seen your name; except, of course, on your son's bill.

The Chamberlain.

My son's bill?

Lundestad.

Yes, the bill you accepted for him early this spring.

The Chamberlain.

My son? My son? Do you dare to tell me -- ?

Lundestad.

Why, bless me, just think a moment; the bill for two thousand dollars drawn by your son --

The Chamberlain
[(groping for a chair).]
Oh, my God -- !

Fieldbo.
For heaven's sake -- !

Ringdal
It's not possible that -- !

The Chamberlain
[(who has sunk down on a chair).]
Quietly, quietly! Drawn by my son, you say? Accepted by me? For two thousand dollars?

Fieldbo
[(to LUNDESTAD).]
And this bill is in the Savings Bank?

Lundestad.
Not now; it was redeemed last week by Monsen --

The Chamberlain.
By Monsen -- ?

Ringdal
Monsen may still be at the works; I'll go --

The Chamberlain.
Stop here!

[DANIEL HEIRE enters by the back.]

Heire.

Good-morning, gentlemen! Good-morning, Chamberlain! Thank you so much for the delightful evening we spent yesterday. What do you think I've just heard -- ?

Ringdal

Excuse me; we are busy --

Heire.

So are other people, I can tell you; our friend from Stonelee, for example

The Chamberlain.

Monsen?

Heire.

Hee-hee; it's a pretty story! The electioneering intrigues are in full swing. And what do you think is the last idea? They are going to bribe you, Chamberlain! Lundestad. To bribe -- ?

The Chamberlain.

They judge the tree by its fruit.

Heire.

Deuce take me if it isn't the most impudent thing I ever heard of! I just looked in at Madam Rundholmen's to have a glass of bitters. There sat Messrs. Monsen and Stensgard drinking port -- filthy stuff! wouldn't touch it; but they might have had the decency to offer me a glass, all the same. However, Monsen turned to me and said, "What do you bet that Chamberlain Bratsberg won't go with our party at the preliminary election tomorrow?" "Indeed," said I, "how's that to be managed?" "Oh," he said, "this bill will persuade him -- "

Fieldbo.

Bill -- ?

Lundestad.

At the election -- ?

The Chamberlain.

Well? What then?

Heire.

Oh, I know no more. They said something about two thousand dollars. That's the figure they rate a gentleman's conscience at! Oh, it's abominable, I say!

The Chamberlain.

A bill for two thousand dollars?

Ringdal

And Monsen has it?

Heire.

No, he handed it over to Stensgard.

Lundestad.

Indeed!

Fieldbo.

To Stensgard?

The Chamberlain.

Are you sure of that?

Heire.

Quite certain. "You can make what use you please of it," he said. But I don't understand --

Lundestad.

I want to speak to you, Mr. Heire -- and you too, Ringdal. [The three converse in a whisper at the back.]

Fieldbo.

Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain.

Well?

Fieldbo.

Your son's bill is genuine, of course -- ?

The Chamberlain.

One would suppose so.

Fieldbo.

Of course. But now if the forged bill were to turn up -- ?

The Chamberlain.

I will lay no information.

Fieldbo.

Naturally not; -- but you must do more.

The Chamberlain

[(rising).]

I can do no more.

Fieldbo.

Yes, for heaven's sake, you can and must. You must save the poor fellow --

The Chamberlain.

In what way?

Fieldbo.

Quite simply: by acknowledging the signature.

The Chamberlain.

Then you think, Doctor, that we stick at nothing in our family?

Fieldbo.

I am trying to think for the best, Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain.

And do you believe for a moment that I can tell a lie? -- that I can play into the hands of forgers?

Fieldbo.

And do you realise what will be the consequences if you do not?

The Chamberlain.

The offender must settle that with the law.

[He goes out to the left.]

ACT FOURTH

[A public room in MADAM RUNDHOLMEN'S hotel. Entrance door in the back; a smaller door on either side. A window on the right; before it, a table with writing materials; further back, in the middle of the room, another table.]

Madam Rundholmen

[(within, on the left, heard talking loudly).]

Oh, let them go about their business! Tell them they've come here to vote and not to drink. If they won't wait, they can do the other thing.

Stensgard

[(enters by the back).]

Good-morning! H'm, h'm, Madam Rundholmen! (Goes to the door on the left and knocks.) Good-morning, Madam Rundholmen!

Madam Rundholmen

[(within).]

Oh! Who's there?

Stensgard.

It is I -- Stensgard. May I come in?

Madam Rundholmen.

No, indeed, you mustn't! No! I'm not dress'd.

Stensgard.

What? Are you so late to-day?

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, I can tell you I've been up since all hours; but one must look a little decent, you know. (Peeps out, with a kerchief over her head.) Well, what is it? No, you really mustn't look at me, Mr. Stensgard. -- Oh, there's some one else! [Disappears, slamming the door to.]

Aslaksen

[(enters from the back with a bundle of papers).]

Good-morning, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

Well, is it in?

Aslaksen.

Yes, here it is. Look -- "The Independence Day Celebrations -- From our Special Correspondent." Here's the founding of the League on the other side, and your speech up here. I've leaded all the abuse.

Stensgard.

It seems to me it's all leaded.

Aslaksen.

Pretty nearly.

Stensgard.

And the extra number was of course distributed yesterday?

Aslaksen.

Of course; all over the district, both to subscribers and others. Would you like to see it? [Hands him a copy.]

Stensgard

[(running his eye over the paper).]

"Our respected member, Mr. Lundestad, proposes to resign . . . long and faithful service . . . in the words of the poet: 'Rest, patriot, it is thy due!'"

H'm! "The association founded on Independence Day!: the League of Youth..... Mr. Stensgard, the guiding intelligence of the League..... timely reforms, credit on easier terms." Ah, that's very good. Has the polling begun?

Aslaksen.

It's in full swing. The whole League is on the spot -- both voters and others.

Stensgard.

Oh, deuce take the others -- between ourselves, of course. Well, you go down and talk to the waverers.

Aslaksen.
All right.

Stensgard.
You can tell them that I am pretty much at one with Lundestad --

Aslaksen.
Trust to me; I know the local situation.

Stensgard.
One thing more; just to oblige me, Aslaksen, don't drink to-day.

Aslaksen.
Oh, what do you mean -- !

Stensgard.
We'll have a jolly evening when it's all over; but remember what you, as well as I, have at stake; your paper -- Come, now, my good fellow, let me see that you can --

Aslaksen.
There, that's enough now; I'm old enough to look after myself. [Goes out to the right.

]

Madam Rundholmen
[(enters from the left, elaborately dressed).]
Now, Mr. Stensgard, I'm at your service. Is it anything of importance -- ?

Stensgard.
No, only that I want you to be good enough to let me know when Mr. Monsen comes.

Madam Rundholmen.

He won't be here to-day.

Stensgard.

Not to-day?

Madam Rundholmen.

No; he drove past here at four this morning; he's always driving about nowadays. What's more, he came in and roused me out of bed -- he wanted to borrow money, you must know.

Stensgard.

Monsen did?

Madam Rundholmen.

Yes. He's a tremendous man to get through money is Monsen. I hope things may turn out all right for him. And I say the same to you; for I hear you're going into Parliament.

Stensgard.

I? Nonsense. Who told you so?

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, some of Mr. Lundestad's people.

Daniel Heire

[(enters from the back).]

Hee-hee! Good-morning! I'm not in the way, am I?

Madam Rundholmen.

Gracious, no!

Heire.

Good God, how resplendent! Can it be for me that you've got yourself up like this?

Madam Rundholmen.

Of course. It's for you bachelors we get ourselves up, isn't it?

Heire.

For marrying men, Madam Rundholmen; for marrying men! Unfortunately, my law-suits take up all my time --

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, nonsense; you've always plenty of time to get married.

Heire.

No; deuce take me if I have! Marriage is a thing you've got to give your whole mind to. Well, well -- if you can't have me, you must put up with somebody else. For you ought to marry again.

Madam Rundholmen.

Now, do you know, I'm sometimes of the same opinion.

Heire.

Naturally; when once one has tasted the joys of matrimony -- Of course, poor Rundholmen was one in a thousand --

Madam Rundholmen.

Well, I won't go so far as that; he was a bit rough, and rather too fond of his glass; but a husband's always a husband.

Heire.

Very true, Madam Rundholmen; a husband's a husband, and a widow's a widow --

Madam Rundholmen.

And business is business. Oh, when I think of all I've got to attend to, I don't know whether I'm on my heels or my head. Every one wants to buy; but when it comes to paying, I've got to go in for summonses and executions, and Lord knows what. Upon my word, I'll soon have to engage a lawyer all to myself.

Heire.

I'll tell you what, Madam Rundholmen, you should retain Mr. Stensgard; he's a bachelor.

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, how you do talk! I won't listen to a word more. [Goes out to the right.]

Heire.

A substantial woman, sir! Comfortable and well-preserved; no children up to date; money well invested. Education too; she's widely read, sir.

Stensgard.

Widely read, eh?

Heire.

Hee-hee; she ought to be; she had charge of Alm's circulating library for a couple of years. But your head's full of other things to-day, I daresay.

Stensgard.

Not at all; I don't even know that I shall vote. Who are you going to vote for, Mr. Heire?

Heire.

Haven't got a vote, sir. There was only one kennel that would qualify in the market, and that you bought.

Stensgard.

If you're at a loss for a lodging, I'll give it up to you.

Heire.

Hee-hee, you're joking. Ah, youth, youth! What a pleasant humour it has! But now I must be off and have a look at the menagerie. I'm told your whole League is afoot. (Sees FIELDBO, who enters from the back.) Here's the Doctor, too! I suppose you have come on a scientific mission?

Fieldbo.

A scientific mission?

Heire.

Yes, to study the epidemic; you've heard of the virulent rabies agitatoria that has broken out? God be with you, my dear young friends? [Goes out to the right.]

Stensgard.

Tel me quickly -- have you seen the Chamberlain to-day?

Fieldbo.

Yes.

Stensgard.

And what did he say?

Fieldbo.

What did he say?

Stensgard.

Yes; you know I have written to him.

Fieldbo.

Have you? What did you write?

Stensgard.

That I am still of the same mind about his daughter; that I want to talk the matter over with him; and that I propose to call on him to-morrow.

Fieldbo.

If I were you, I should at least defer my visit. It is the Chamberlain's birthday to-morrow; a crowd of people will be there --

Stensgard.

That's all right; the more the better. I hold big cards in my hand, let me tell you.

Fieldbo.

And perhaps you have bluffed a little with your big cards?

Stensgard.

How do you mean?

Fieldbo.

I mean you have perhaps embellished your declaration of love with a few little threats or so?

Stensgard.

Fieldbo, you have seen the letter!

Fieldbo.

No, I assure you --

Stensgard.

Well, then, frankly -- I have threatened him.

Fieldbo.

Ah! Then I have, in a way, an answer to your letter.

Stensgard.

An answer? Out with it, man!

Fieldbo

[(shows him a sealed paper).]

Look here -- the Chamberlain's proxy.

Stensgard.

And who does he vote for?

Fieldbo.

Not for you, at any rate.

Stensgard.

For whom then? For whom?

Fieldbo.

For the Sheriff and the Provost.

Stensgard.

What! Not even for Lundestad?

Fieldbo.

No. And do you know why? Because Lundestad is going to propose you as his successor.

Stensgard.

He dares to do this!

Fieldbo.

Yes, he does. And he added: "If you see Stensgard, you can tell him how I am voting; it will show him on what footing we stand."

Stensgard.

Good; since he will have it so!

Fieldbo.

Take care; it's dangerous to tug at an old tower -- it may come down on your head.

Stensgard.

Oh, I have learnt wisdom in these two days.

Fieldbo.

Indeed? You're not so wise but that you let old Lundestad lead you by the nose.

Stensgard.

Do you think I haven't seen through Lundestad? Do you think I don't understand that he took me up because he thought I had won over the Chamberlain, and because he wanted to break up our League and keep Monsen out?

Fieldbo.

But now that he knows you haven't won over the Chamberlain --

Stensgard.

He has gone too far to draw back; and I've made good use of the time, and scattered announcements broadcast. Most of his supporters will abstain from voting; mine are all here --

Fieldbo.

It's a big stride from the preliminary election to the final election.

Stensgard.

Lundestad knows very well that if he fails me in the College of Electors, I'll soon agitate him out of the town Council.

Fieldbo.

Not a bad calculation. And, to succeed in all this, you feel that you must strike root here more firmly than you have as yet done?

Stensgard.

Yes, these people always demand material guarantees, community of interests --

Fieldbo.

Just so; and therefore Miss Bratsberg is to be sacrificed?

Stensgard.

Sacrificed? If that were so, I should be no better than a scoundrel. But it will be for her happiness, that I'm convinced. What now? Fieldbo, why do you look like that? You have some underhand scheme of your own --

Fieldbo.

I?

Stensgard.

Yes, you have! You are intriguing against me, behind my back. Why do you do that? Be open with me -- will you?

Fieldbo.

Frankly, I won't. You are so dangerous, so unscrupulous -- well, so reckless at any rate, that one dare not be open with you. Whatever you know, you make use of without hesitation. But this I say to you as a friend: put Miss Bratsberg out of your head.

Stensgard.

I cannot. I must extricate myself from these sordid surroundings. I can't go on living in this hugger- mugger way. Here have I got to be hail-fellow-well-met with Dick, Tom, and Harry; to whisper in corners with them, to hobnob with them, to laugh at their beery witticisms; to be hand in glove with hobbledehoys and unlicked cubs. How can I keep my love of the People untarnished in the midst of all this? I feel as if all the electricity

went out of my words. I have no elbow-room, no fresh air to breathe. Oh, a longing comes over me at times for exquisite women! I want something that brings beauty with it! I lie here in a sort of turbid eddy, while out there the clear blue current sweeps past me -- But what can you understand of all this!

Lundestad

[(enters from the back)]

Ah, here we are. Good-morning, gentlemen.

Stensgard.

I have news for you, Mr. Lundestad! Do you know who the Chamberlain is voting for?

Fieldbo.

Silence! It's dishonourable of you.

Stensgard.

What do I care? He is voting for the Sheriff and the Provost.

Lundestad.

Oh, that was to be expected. You went and ruined your chances with him -- though I implored you to play your cards neatly.

Stensgard.

I shall play them neatly enough -- in future.

Fieldbo.

Take care -- two can play at that game. [Goes out to the right.]

Stensgard.

That fellow has something up his sleeve. Have you any idea what it can be?

Lundestad.

No, I haven't. But, by-the-bye, I see you are flourishing in the paper to-day.

Stensgard.

I?

Lundestad.

Yes, with a nice little epitaph on me.

Stensgard.

Oh, that's that beast Aslaksen, of course --

Lundestad.

Your attack on the Chamberlain is in too.

Stensgard.

I don't know anything about that. If it's to be war between the Chamberlain and me, I have sharper weapons.

Lundestad.

Indeed!

Stensgard.

Have you ever seen this bill? Look at it. Is it good?

Lundestad.

Good, you say? This bill here?

Stensgard.

Yes; look closely at it.

Heire

[(enters from the right).]

Why, what the deuce can be the meaning of -- Ah, how interesting! Do remain as you are, gentlemen, I beg! Do you know what you irresistibly remind me of? Of a summer night in the Far North.

Lundestad.

That's a curious simile.

Heire.

A very obvious one -- the setting and the rising sun together. Delightful, delightful! But, talking of that, what the deuce is the matter outside there? Your fellow citizens are scuttling about like frightened fowls, cackling and crowing and not knowing what perch to settle on.

Stensgard.

Well, it's an occasion of great importance.

Heire.

Oh, you and your importance! No, it's something quite different, my dear friends. There are whispers of a great failure; a bankruptcy -- oh, not political, Mr. Lundestad; I don't mean that!

Stensgard.

A bankruptcy?

Heire.

Hee-hee! That puts life into our legal friend. Yes, a bankruptcy; some one is on his last legs; the axe is laid to the root of the tree -- I say no more! Two strange gentlemen have been seen driving past; but where to? To whose address? Do you know anything, Mr. Lundestad?

Lundestad.

I know how to hold my tongue, Mr. Heire.

Heire.

Of course; you are a statesman, a diplomatist. But I must be off and find out all I can about it. It's such sport with these heroes of finance: they are like beads on a string -- when one slips off, all the rest follow. [Goes out by the back.]

Stensgard.

Is there any truth in all this gossip?

Lundestad.

You showed me a bill; I thought I saw young Mr. Bratsberg's name upon it?

Stensgard.

The Chamberlain's too.

Lundestad.

And you asked me if it was good?

Stensgard.

Yes; just look at it.

Lundestad.

It's perhaps not so good as it might be.

Stensgard.

You see it then?

Lundestad.

What?

Stensgard.

That it is a forgery.

Lundestad.

A forgery? Forged bills are often the safest; people redeem them first.

Stensgard.

But what do you think? Isn't it a forgery?

Lundestad.

I don't much like the look of it.

Stensgard.

How so?

Lundestad.

I'm afraid there are too many of these about, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

What! It's not possible that -- ?

Lundestad.

If young Mr. Bratsberg slips off the string, those nearest him are only too likely to follow.

Stensgard

[(seizes his arm).]

What do you mean by those nearest him?

Lundestad.

Who can be nearer than father and son?

Stensgard.

Why, good God -- !

Lundestad.

Remember, I say nothing! It was Daniel Heire that was talking of failure and bankruptcy and --

Stensgard.

This is a thunderbolt to me.

Lundestad.

Oh, many a man that seemed solid enough has gone to the wall before now. Perhaps he's too good-natured; goes and backs bills; ready money isn't always to be had; property has to be sold for an old song --

Stensgard.

And of course this falls on -- falls on the children as well.

Lundestad.

Yes, I'm heartily grieved for Miss Bratsberg. She didn't get much from her mother; and heaven knows if even the little she has is secured.

Stensgard.

Oh, now I understand Fieldbo's advice! He's a true friend, after all.

Lundestad.

What did Doctor Fieldbo say?

Stensgard.

He was too loyal to say anything, but I understand him all the same. And now I understand you too, Mr. Lundestad.

Lundestad.

Have you not understood me before?

Stensgard.

Not thoroughly. I forget the proverb about the rats and the sinking ship.

Lundestad.

That's not a very nice way to put it. But what's the matter with you? You look quite ill. Good God, I haven't gone and blasted your hopes, have I?

Stensgard.

-- How do you mean?

Lundestad.

Yes, yes -- I see it all. Old fool that I am! My dear Mr. Stensgard, if you really love the girl, what does it matter whether she is rich or poor?

Stensgard.

Matter? No, of course --

Lundestad.

Good Lord, we all know happiness isn't a matter of money.

Stensgard.

Of course not.

Lundestad.

And with industry and determination you'll soon be on your feet again. Don't let poverty frighten you. I know what love is; I went into all that in my young days, A happy home; a faithful woman -- ! My dear young friend, beware how you take any step that may involve you in life-long self-reproach.

Stensgard.

But what will become of your plans?

Lundestad.

Oh, they must go as best they can. I couldn't think of demanding the sacrifice of your heart!

Stensgard.

But I will make the sacrifice. Yes, I will show you that I have the strength for it. Think of the longing multitude out there: they claim me with a sort of voiceless pathos. I cannot, I dare not, fail them!

Lundestad.

Yes, but the stake in the district -- ?

Stensgard.

I shall take measures to fulfil the demands of my fellow citizens in that respect, Mr. Lundestad. I see a way, a new way; and I will follow it up. I renounce the happiness of toiling in obscurity for the woman I love. I say to my fellow countrymen: "Here I am -- take me!"

Lundestad

[(looks at him in quiet admiration and presses his hand).]

You are indeed a man of rare gifts, Mr. Stensgard. [Goes out to the right. [STENSGARD paces the room several times, now stopping for a moment at the window, now running his fingers through his hair. Presently BASTIAN MONSEN enters from the back.]

Bastian.

Here I am, my dear friend.

Stensgard.

Where have you come from?

Bastian.

From the Nation.

Stensgard.

The Nation? What does that mean?

Bastian.

Don't you know what the Nation means? It means the People; the common people; those who have nothing, and are nothing; those who lie chained --

Stensgard.

What monkey-tricks are these, I should like to know?

Bastian.

Monkey-tricks?

Stensgard.

I have noticed lately that you go about mimicking me; you imitate even my clothes and my hand- writing. Be kind enough to stop that.

Bastian.

What do you mean? Don't we belong to the same party?

Stensgard.

Yes, but I won't put up with this -- you make yourself ridiculous --

Bastian.

By being like you?

Stensgard.

By aping me. Be sensible now, Monsen, and give it up. It's quite disgusting. But look here -- can you tell me when your father is coming back?

Bastian.

I have no idea. I believe he's gone to Christiania; he may not be back for a week or so.

Stensgard.

Indeed? I'm sorry for that. He has a big stroke of business on hand, I hear.

Bastian.

I have a big stroke of business on hand too. Look here, Stensgard, you must do me a service.

Stensgard.

Willingly. What is it?

Bastian.

I feel so full of energy. I have to thank you for that; you have stimulated me. I feel I must do something, Stensgard: -- I want to get married.

Stensgard.

To get married? To whom?

Bastian.

Sh! Some one in this house.

Stensgard.

Madam Rundholmen?

Bastian.

Sh! Yes, it's her. Put in a good word for me, do! This sort of thing is just the thing for me. She's in the swim, you know; she's on the best of terms with the Chamberlain's people, ever since her sister was housekeeper there. If I get her, perhaps I shall get the town-contracts too. So that on the whole -- damn it, I love her!

Stensgard.

Oh, love, love! Have done with that sickening hypocrisy.

Bastian.

Hypocrisy!

Stensgard.

Yes; you are lying to yourself, at any rate. You talk in one breath of town-contracts and of love. Why not call a spade a spade? There's something sordid about all this; I will have nothing to do with it.

Bastian.

But listen -- !

Stensgard.

Do your dirty work yourself, I say! (To FIELDBO, who enters from the right.) Well, how goes the election?

Fieldbo.

Excellently for you, it appears. I saw Lundestad just now; he said you were getting all the votes.

Stensgard.

Am I indeed?

Fieldbo.

But what good will they do you? Since you're not a man of property --

Stensgard

[(between his teeth).]

Isn't it confounded!

Fieldbo.

Well, you can't do two things at once. If you win on the one side, you must be content to lose on the other. Good-bye! [Goes out by the back.]

Bastian.

What did he mean by winning and losing?

Stensgard.

I'll tell you afterwards. But now, my dear Monsen -- to return to what we were talking about -- I promised to put in a good word for you --

Bastian.

You promised? On the contrary, I thought you said -- ?

Stensgard.

Oh, nonsense; you didn't let me explain myself fully. What I meant was that there is something sordid in mixing up your love with town-contracts and so forth; it is an offence against all that is noblest in your nature. So, my dear friend, if you really love the girl --

Bastian.

The widow --

Stensgard.

Yes, yes; it's all the same. I mean when one really loves a woman, that in itself should be a conclusive reason --

Bastian.

Yes, that's just what I think. So you'll speak for me, will you?

Stensgard.

Yes, with great pleasure -- but on one condition.

Bastian.

What's that?

Stensgard.

Tit for tat, my dear Bastian -- you must put in a word for me too.

Bastian.

I? With whom?

Stensgard.

Have you really not noticed anything? Yet it's before your very nose.

Bastian.

You surely don't mean -- ?

Stensgard.

Your sister Ragna? Yes, it is she. Oh, you don't know how I have been moved by the sight of her quiet, self-sacrificing devotion to her home --

Bastian.

Do you really mean to say so?

Stensgard.

And you, with your penetrating eye, have suspected nothing?

Bastian.

Yes, at one time I did think -- ; but now people are talking of your hanging about the Chamberlain's --

Stensgard.

Oh, the Chamberlain's! Well, Monsen, I'll tell you frankly that for a moment I did hesitate; but, thank goodness, that is over; now I see my way quite clear before me.

Bastian.

There's my hand. I'll back you up, you may be sure. And as for Ragna -- why, she daren't do anything but what I and father wish.

Stensgard.

Yes, but your father -- that's just what I wanted to say --

Bastian.

Sh! There -- I hear Madam Rundholmen. Now's your chance to speak for me, if she's not too busy; for then she's apt to be snappish. You do your best, my dear fellow, and leave the rest to me. Do you happen to have seen Aslaksen?

Stensgard.

He's probably at the polling-booth. [BASTIAN goes out by the back, as MADAM RUNDHOLMEN enters from the right.]

Madam Rundholmen.

Things are going as smooth as possible, Mr. Stensgard; every one is voting for you.

Stensgard.

That's very odd.

Madam Rundholmen.

Goodness knows what Monsen of Stonelee will say.

Stensgard.

I want a word with you, Madam Rundholmen.

Madam Rundholmen.

Well, what is it?

Stensgard.

Will you listen to me?

Madam Rundholmen.

Lord yes, that I will.

Stensgard.

Well then: you were talking just now about being alone in the world --

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, it was that horrid old Heire --

Stensgard.

You were saying how hard it is for an unprotected widow --

Madam Rundholmen.

Yes, indeed; you should just try it, Mr. Stensgard!

Stensgard.

But now if there came a fine young man --

Madam Rundholmen.

A fine young man?

Stensgard.

One who had long loved you in secret --

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, come now, Mr. Stensgard, I won't hear any more of your nonsense.

Stensgard.

You must! A young man who, like yourself, finds it hard to be alone in the world --

Madam Rundholmen.

Well, what then? I don't understand you at all.

Stensgard.

If you could make two people happy, Madam Rundholmen -- yourself and --

Madam Rundholmen.
And a fine young man?

Stensgard.
Just so; now, answer me --

Madam Rundholmen.
Mr. Stensgard, you can't be in earnest?

Stensgard.
You don't suppose I would jest on such a subject? Should you be disposed -- ?

Madam Rundholmen.
Yes, that I am, the Lord knows! Oh, you dear, sweet --

Stensgard
[(recoiling a step).]
What is this?

Madam Rundholmen.
Bother, here comes some one! RAGNA MONSEN enters hastily, and in evident disquietude, from the back.

Ragna.
I beg your pardon -- isn't my father here?

Madam Rundholmen.
Your father? Yes; no; -- I -- I don't know -- excuse me --

Ragna.
Where is he?

Madam Rundholmen.

Your father? Oh, he drove past here --

Stensgard.

Towards Christiania.

Ragna.

No; it's impossible

Madam Rundholmen.

Yes, I know for certain he drove down the road. Oh, my dear Miss Monsen, you can't think how happy I am! Wait a moment -- I'll just run to the cellar, and fetch up a bottle of the real thing. [Goes out to the left.]

Stensgard.

Tell me, Miss Monsen -- is it really your father you are looking for?

Ragna.

Yes, of course it is.

Stensgard.

And you didn't know that he had gone away?

Ragna.

Oh, how should I know? They tell me nothing. But to Christiania -- ? That's impossible; they would have met him. Good-bye!

Stensgard

[(intercepts her).]

Ragna! Tell me! Why are you so changed towards me?

Ragna.

I? Let me pass! Let me go!

Stensgard.

No, you shall not go! I believe Providence guided you here at this moment. Oh, why do you shrink from me? You used not to.

Ragna.

Ah, that is all over, thank God!

Stensgard.

But why?

Ragna.

I have learnt to know you better; it is well that I learned in time.

Stensgard.

Oh, that is it? People have been lying about me? Perhaps I am to blame too; I have been lost in a maze of perplexities. But that is past now. Oh, the very sight of you makes a better man of me. It is you I care for, deeply and truly; it is you I love, Ragna -- you and no other!

Ragna.

Let me pass! I am afraid of you --

Stensgard.

Oh, but to-morrow, Ragna -- may I come and speak to you to-morrow?

Ragna.

Yes, yes, if you must; only for heaven's sake not to-day.

Stensgard.

Only not to-day! Hurrah! I have won; now I am happy!

Madam Rundholmen

[(enters from the left with cake and wine).]
Come now, we must drink a glass for luck.

Stensgard.

For luck in love! Here's to love and happiness! Hurrah for to-morrow! [He drinks.]

Helle

[(entering, from the right, to RAGNA).]
Have you found him?

Ragna.

No, he is not here. Come, come!

Madam Rundholmen.

Heaven help us, what's the matter?

Helle.

Nothing; only some visitors have arrived at Stonelee --

Ragna.

Thanks for all your kindness, Madam Rundholmen --

Madam Rundholmen.

Oh, have you got visitors on your hands again?

Ragna.

Yes, yes; excuse me; I must go home. Goodbye!

Stensgard.

Good-bye -- till to-morrow! [RAGNA and HELLE go out by the back.
DANIEL HEIRE enters from the right.]

Heire.

Ha-ha! It's going like a house on fire! They're all cackling Stensgard, Stensgard, Stensgard! They're all plumping for you. Now you should plump for him too, Madam Rundholmen!

Madam Rundholmen.

Hey, that's an idea! Are they all voting for him?

Heire.

Unanimously -- Mr. Stensgard enjoys the confidence of the constituency, as the saying is. Old Lundestad is going about with a face like a pickled cucumber. Oh, it's a pleasure to see it all.

Madam Rundholmen.

They shan't regret having voted for him. If I can't vote, I can stand treat. [Goes out to the left.]

Heire.

Ah, you are the man for the widows, Mr. Stensgard! I'll tell you what -- if you can only get hold of her, you're a made man, sir!

Stensgard.

Get hold of Madam Rundholmen?

Heire.

Yes, why not? She's a substantial woman in every sense of the word. She'll be mistress of the situation as soon as the Stonelee card-castle has come to grief.

Stensgard.

There's nothing wrong at Stonelee, is there?

Heire.

Isn't there? You have a short memory, my dear sir. Didn't I tell you there were rumours of failure, and bankruptcy, and -- ?

Stensgard.

Well, what then?

Heire.

What then? That's just what we want to know. There's a hue and cry after Monsen; two men have come to Stonelee --

Stensgard.

Yes, I know -- a couple of visitors --

Heire.

Uninvited visitors, my dear young friend; there are whispers of the police and infuriated creditors -- there's something queer about the accounts, you must know! Talking of that -- what paper was that Monsen gave you yesterday?

Stensgard.

Oh, just a paper -- Something queer about the accounts, you say? Look here! you know Chamberlain Bratsberg's signature?

Heire.

Hee-hee! I should rather think I did.

Stensgard

[(produces the bill).]

Well, look at this.

Heire.

Give it here -- I'm rather short-sighted, you know. (After examining it.) That, my dear sir? That's not the Chamberlain's hand.

Stensgard.

Not? Then it is -- ?

Heire.

And it's drawn by Monsen?

Stensgard.

No, by young Mr. Bratsberg.

Heire.

Nonsense! Let me see. (Looks at the paper and hands it back again.)
You can light your cigar with this.

Stensgard.

What! The drawer's name too -- ?

Heire.

A forgery, young man; a forgery, as sure as my name's Daniel. You have only to look at it with the keen eye of suspicion --

Stensgard.

But how can that be? Monsen can't have known --

Heire.

Monsen? No, he knows nothing about either his own paper or other people's. But I'm glad it has come to an end, Mr. Stensgard! -- It's a satisfaction to one's moral sense. Ah, I have often glowed with a noble indignation, if I may say so, at having to stand by and see -- I say no more! But the best of it all is that now Monsen is down he'll drag young Bratsberg after him; and the son will bring the father down --

Stensgard.

Yes, so Lundestad said.

Heire.

But of course there's method even in bankruptcy. You'll see; I am an old hand at prophecy. Monsen will go to prison; young Bratsberg will

compound with his creditors; and the Chamberlain will be placed under trustees; that's to say, his creditors will present him with an annuity of a couple of thousand dollars. That's how things go, Mr. Stensgard; I know it, I know it! What says the classic? Fiat justitia, pereat mundus; which means: Fie on what's called justice in this wicked world, sir!

Stensgard

[(pacing the room).]

One after the other! Both ways barred!

Heire.

What the deuce -- ?

Stensgard.

And now too! Just at this moment!

Aslaksen

[(enters from the right).]

I congratulate you, chosen of the people!

Stensgard.

Elected!

Aslaksen.

Elected by 117 votes, and Lundestad by 53. The rest all nowhere.

Heire.

Your first step on the path of glory, Mr. Stensgard.

Aslaksen.

And it shall cost you a bowl of punch --

Heire.

Well, it's the first step that costs, they say.

Aslaksen

[(goes off to the left, shouting).]

Punch, Madam Rundholmen! A bowl of punch! The chosen of the people stands treat! LUNDESTAD, and after him several ELECTORS, enter from the right.

Heire

[(in a tone of condolence to LUNDESTAD).]

Fifty-three! That's the grey-haired patriot's reward!

Lundestad

[(whispers to STENSGARD).]

Are you firm in your resolve?

Stensgard.

What's the use of being firm when everything is tumbling about your ears?

Lundestad.

Do you think the game is lost?

Aslaksen

[(returning by the left).]

Madam Rundholmen stands treat herself. She says she has the best right to.

Stensgard

[(struck by an idea).]

Madam Rundholmen! -- has the best right to -- !

Lundestad.

What?

Stensgard.

The game is not lost, Mr. Lundestad! [Sits at the right-hand table and writes.]

Lundestad

[(in a low voice).]

Oh, Aslaksen -- can you get something into your next paper for me?

Aslaksen.

Of course I can. Is it libellous?

Lundestad.

No, certainly not!

Aslaksen.

Well, never mind; Ill take it all the same.

Lundestad.

It is my political last will and testament; I shall write it to-night.

A Maid-servant

[(enters from the left).]

The punch, with Madam Rundholmen's compliments.

Aslaksen.

Hurrah! Now there's some life in the local situation. [He places the punch-bowl on the middle table, serves the others, and drinks freely himself during the following scene. BASTIAN MONSEN has meanwhile entered from the right.]

Bastian

[(softly).]

You won't forget my letter?

Aslaksen.

Don't be afraid. (Taps his breast pocket.) I have it here.

Bastian.

You'll deliver it as soon as you can -- when you see she's disengaged, you understand.

Aslaksen.

I understand. (Calls.) Come, now, the glasses are filled.

Bastian.

You shan't do it for nothing, I promise you.

Aslaksen.

All right, all right. (To the servant.) A lemon, Karen -- quick as the wind! [BASTIAN retires.]

Stensgard.

A word, Aslaksen; shall you be passing here to-morrow evening?

Aslaksen.

To-morrow evening? I can, if you like.

Stensgard.

Then you might look in and give Madam Rundholmen this letter.

Aslaksen.

From you?

Stensgard.

Yes. Put it in your pocket. There now. To-morrow evening, then?

Aslaksen.

All right; trust to me. [The servant brings the lemon; STENSGARD goes towards the window.]

Bastian.

Well -- have you spoken to Madam Rundholmen?

Stensgard.

Spoken? Oh yes, I said a word or two --

Bastian.

And what do you think?

Stensgard.

Oh -- well -- we were interrupted. I can't say anything definite.

Bastian.

I'll take my chance all the same; she's always complaining of her loneliness. My fate shall be sealed within an hour.

Stensgard.

Within an hour?

Bastian

[(sees MADAM RUNDHOLMEN, who enters from the left).]
Sh! Not a word to any one! [Goes towards the back.]

Stensgard

[(whispers to ASLAKSEN).]
Give me back the letter.

Aslaksen.

Do you want it back?

Stensgard.

Yes, at once; I shall deliver it myself.

Aslaksen.

Very well; here it is. STENSGARD thrusts the letter into his pocket, and mixes with the rest.

Madam Rundholmen

[(to BASTIAN).]

What do you say to the election, Mr. Bastian?

Bastian.

I'm delighted. Stensgard and I are bosom friends, you know. I shouldn't be surprised if he got into Parliament.

Madam Rundholmen.

But your father wouldn't much like that.

Bastian.

Oh, father has so many irons in the fire. Besides, if Stensgard's elected, it will still be all in the family, I daresay.

Madam Rundholmen.

How so?

Bastian.

He wants to marry --

Madam Rundholmen.

Lord! Has he said anything?

Bastian.

Yes; and I've promised to put in a word for him. It'll be all right. I'm sure Ragna likes him.

Madam Rundholmen.
Ragna!

Lundestad
[(approaching).]
What is interesting you so deeply, Madam Rundholmen?

Madam Rundholmen.
What do you think he says? Why, that Mr. Stensgard's making up to --

Lundestad.
Yes, but he won't find the Chamberlain so easy to deal with.

Bastian.
The Chamberlain?

Lundestad.
He probably thinks her too good a match for a mere lawyer --

Madam Rundholmen.
Who? Who?

Lundestad.
Why, his daughter, Miss Bratsberg, of course.

Bastian.
He's surely not making love to Miss Bratsberg?

Lundestad.
Yes, indeed he is.

Madam Rundholmen.

You are quite sure of that?

Bastian.

And he told me -- ! Oh, I want to say a word to you! [LUNDESTAD and BASTIAN go towards the back.]

Madam Rundholmen

[(approaching STENSGARD).]

You must be on your guard, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

Against whom?

Madam Rundholmen.

Against malicious people who are slandering you.

Stensgard.

Why, let them -- so long as one person doesn't believe their slanders.

Madam Rundholmen.

And who may that one person be?

Stensgard

[(slips the letter into her hand).]

Take this; read it when you are alone.

Madam Rundholmen.

Ah, I knew it! [Goes off to the left.]

Ringdal

[(enters from the right).]

Well, I hear you have won a brilliant victory, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

Yes, I have, Mr. Ringdal, in spite of your noble chief's endeavours.

Ringdal

His endeavours? What to do?

Stensgard.

To keep me out.

Ringdal

Like other people, he has a right to vote as he pleases.

Stensgard.

It's a pity he is not likely to retain that right for long.

Ringdal

What do you mean?

Stensgard.

I mean, since his affairs are not so straight as they might be --

Ringdal

His affairs! What affairs! What have you got into your head?

Stensgard.

Oh, you needn't pretend ignorance. Isn't there a storm brewing? -- a great crash impending?

Ringdal

Yes, so I hear on all sides.

Stensgard.

And aren't both the Bratsbergs involved in it?

Ringdal

My dear sir, are you crazy?

Stensgard.

Oh, you naturally want to keep it dark.

Ringdal

What good would that be? That sort of thing can't be kept dark.

Stensgard.

Is it not true then?

Ringdal

Not a word of it, so far as the Chamberlain is concerned. How could you believe such nonsense? Who has been humbugging you?

Stensgard.

I won't tell you just yet.

Ringdal

Well, you needn't; but whoever it was must have had a motive.

Stensgard.

A motive -- !

Ringdal

Yes, just think: is there no one who has an interest in keeping you and the Chamberlain apart?

Stensgard.

Yes, on my soul, but there is though!

Ringdal

The Chamberlain in reality thinks very highly of you --

Stensgard.

Does he?

Ringdal

Yes, and that's why people want to make mischief between you. They reckon on your ignorance of the situation, on your impulsiveness and your confiding disposition --

Stensgard.

Oh, the vipers! And Madam Rundholmen has my letter!

Ringdal

What letter?

Stensgard.

Oh, nothing. But it's not too late! My dear Mr. Ringdal, shall you see the Chamberlain this evening?

Ringdal

In all probability.

Stensgard.

Then tell him to think no more of those threats -- he will understand; tell him I shall call to-morrow and explain everything.

Ringdal

You'll call?

Stensgard.

Yes, to prove to him -- Ah, a proof! Look here, Mr. Ringdal; will you give the Chamberlain this bill from me?

Ringdal

This bill -- ?

Stensgard.

Yes; it's a matter I can't explain to you; but just you give it to him --

Ringdal

Upon my word, Mr. Stensgard --

Stensgard.

And just add these words from me: This is how I treat those who vote against me!

Ringdal

I shan't forget. [Goes out at the back.]

Stensgard.

I say, Mr. Heire -- how could you go and palm off that story about the Chamberlain upon me?

Heire.

How could I palm it off on you -- ?

Stensgard.

Yes -- it's a lie from beginning to end.

Heire.

No! Is it indeed? I'm delighted to hear it. Do you hear, Mr. Lundestad? It's all a lie about the Chamberlain.

Lundestad.

Sh! We were on a false scent; it's nearer at hand.

Stensgard.

How nearer at hand?

Lundestad.

I know nothing for certain; but they talk of Madam Rundholmen --

Stensgard.

What!

Heire.

Haven't I prophesied it! She has been too much mixed up with our friend at Stonelee --

Lundestad.

He drove off this morning before daylight --

Heire.

And his family is out hunting for him --

Lundestad.

And the son has been doing all he knows to get his sister provided for --

Stensgard.

Provided for! "To-morrow" she said; and then her anxiety about her father -- !

Heire.

Hee-hee! You'll see he's gone and hanged himself, sir!

Aslaksen.

Has any one hanged himself?

Lundestad.

Mr. Heire says Monsen of Stonelee --

Monsen

[(enters from the back).]

A dozen of champagne!

Aslaksen

and Others. Monsen!

Monsen.

Yes, Monsen! Champagne-Monsen! Money- Monsen! Let's have the wine, confound it all!

Heire.

But, my dear sir --

Stensgard.

Why, where have you dropped from?

Monsen.

I've been doing a stroke of business, sir! Cleared a hundred thousand! Hei! To-morrow I'll give a thundering dinner at Stonelee. I invite you all. Champagne, I say! I congratulate you, Stensgard! I hear you're elected.

Stensgard.

Yes; I must explain to you --

Monsen.

Pooh; what does it matter to me? Wine, I say! Where is Madam Rundholmen? [Makes a motion to go out to the left.]

The Maid-

servant (who has just entered, intercepts him). No one can see the mistress just now; she's got a letter --

Bastian.

Oh, damn it all! [Goes out by the back.]

Stensgard.

Is she reading it?

Servant.

Yes; and it seems quite to have upset her.

Stensgard.

Good-bye, Mr. Monsen; dinner at Stonelee to-morrow -- ?

Monsen.

Yes, to-morrow. Good-bye!

Stensgard

[(whispers).]

Mr. Heire, will you do me a service?

Heire.

Certainly, certainly.

Stensgard.

Then just run me down a little to Madam Rundholmen; indulge in an innuendo or two at my expense. You are so good at that sort of thing.

Heire.

What the deuce is the meaning of this?

Stensgard.

I have my reasons. It's a joke, you know -- a wager with -- with some one you have a grudge against.

Heire.

Aha, I understand. I say no more!

Stensgard.

Don't go too far, you know. Just place me in a more or less equivocal light -- make her a little suspicious of me, for the moment.

Heire.

Rely upon me; it will be a real pleasure to me.

Stensgard.

Thanks, thanks in advance. (Goes towards the table.) Mr. Lundestad, we shall meet to-morrow forenoon at the Chamberlain's.

Lundestad.

Have you hopes?

Stensgard.

A three-fold hope.

Lundestad.

Threefold? I don't understand --

Stensgard.

You needn't. Henceforth, I will be my own counsellor. [Goes out by the back.]

Monsen

[(at the punch-bowl).]

Another glass, Aslaksen! Where's Bastian?

Aslaksen.

He's just gone out. But I have a letter to deliver for him.

Monsen.

Have you?

Aslaksen.

To Madam Rundholmen.

Monsen.

Ah, at last!

Aslaksen.

But not till to-morrow evening, he said; tomorrow evening, neither sooner nor later. Here's to you!

Heire

[(to LUNDESTAD).]

What the deuce is all this business between Stensgard and Madam Rundholmen?

Lundestad

[(whispers).]

He's courting her.

Heire.

I suspected as much! But he asked me to run him down a bit -- to cast a slur on his character --

Lundestad.

And you said you would?

Heire.

Yes, of course.

Lundestad.

I believe he says of you that your word is as good as your bond -- and no better.

Heire.

Hee-hee -- the dear fellow! He shall find out his mistake this time.

Madam Rundholmen

[(with an open letter in her hand, at the door on the left).]

Where is Mr. Stensgard?

Heire.

He kissed your chambermaid and went, Madam Rundholmen!

"Amtmanden og provsten." The "Amtmand" is the chief magistrate of an "Amt" or county; the "Provst" is an ecclesiastical functionary, perhaps equivalent to a rural dean.

Bastian now says "thou" (du) to Stensgard -- il le tutoie.

ACT FIFTH

[Large reception-room at the CHAMBERLAIN'S. Entrance door at the back. Doors right and left.]

[RINGDAL stands at a table looking through some papers. A knock.]

Ringdal

Come in.

Fieldbo

[(from the back).]

Good-morning.

Ringdal
Good-morning, Doctor.

Fieldbo.
All well, eh?

Ringdal
Oh, yes, well enough; but --

Fieldbo.
What?

Ringdal
Of course you've heard the great news?

Fieldbo.
No. What is it?

Ringdal
Do you mean to say you haven't heard what has happened at Stonelee?

Fieldbo.
No.

Ringdal
Monsen has absconded.

Fieldbo.
Absconded! Monsen?

Ringdal

Absconded.

Fieldbo.

Great heavens -- !

Ringdal

There were ugly rumours yesterday; but then Monsen turned up again; he managed to throw dust in people's eyes --

Fieldbo.

But the reason? The reason?

Ringdal

Enormous losses in timber, they say. Several houses in Christiania have stopped payment, and so --

Fieldbo.

And so he has gone off!

Ringdal

To Sweden, probably. The authorities took possession at Stonelee this morning. Things are being inventoried and sealed up --

Fieldbo.

And the unfortunate children -- ?

Ringdal

The son seems to have kept clear of the business; at least I hear he puts a bold face on it.

Fieldbo.

But the daughter?

Ringdal

Sh! The daughter is here.

Fieldbo.

Here?

Ringdal

The tutor brought her and the two little ones here this morning. Miss Bratsberg is looking after them, quietly you know.

Fieldbo.

And how does she bear it?

Ringdal

Oh, pretty well, I fancy. You may guess, after the treatment she has met with at home -- And, besides, I may tell you she is -- Ah, here's the Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain

[(from the left).]

So you are there, my dear Doctor?

Fieldbo.

Yes, I am pretty early astir. Let me wish you many happy returns of the day, Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain.

Oh, as for happiness, -- ! But thank you, all the same; I know you mean it kindly.

Fieldbo.

And may I ask, Chamberlain -- ?

The Chamberlain.

One word: be good enough to drop that title.

Fieldbo.

What do you mean?

The Chamberlain.

I am an ironmaster, and nothing more.

Fieldbo.

Why, what strange notion is this?

The Chamberlain.

I have renounced my post and my title. I am sending in my resignation to-day.

Fieldbo.

You should sleep upon that.

The Chamberlain.

When his Majesty was graciously pleased to assign me a place in his immediate circle, he did so because of the unblemished honour of my family through long generations.

Fieldbo.

Well, what then?

The Chamberlain.

My family is disgraced, just as much as Mr. Monsen's. Of course, you have heard about Monsen?

Fieldbo.

Yes, I have.

The Chamberlain
 [(to RINGDAL).]
Any further news about him?

Ringdal
 Only that he brings down with him a good many of the younger men.

The Chamberlain.
 And my son?

Ringdal
 Your son has sent me his balance-sheet. He will be able to pay in full; but there will be nothing over.

The Chamberlain.
 H'm. Then will you get my resignation copied?

Ringdal
 I'll see to it. [Goes out by the foremost door on the right.]

Fieldbo.
 Have you reflected what you are doing? Things can be arranged without any one being a bit the wiser.

The Chamberlain.
 Indeed! Can I make myself ignorant of what has happened?

Fieldbo.
 Oh, after all, what has happened? Has not he written to you, acknowledged his fault, and begged for your forgiveness? This is the only time he has done anything of the sort; why not simply blot it out?

The Chamberlain.
 Would you do what my son has done?

Fieldbo.

He won't repeat it; that is the main point.

The Chamberlain.

How do you know he will not repeat it?

Fieldbo.

If for no other reason, because of what you yourself told me -- the scene with your daughter-in-law. Whatever else comes of it, that will steady him.

The Chamberlain

[(pacing the room).]

My poor Selma! Our peace and happiness gone!

Fieldbo.

There are higher things than peace and happiness. Your happiness has been an illusion. Yes, I must speak frankly to you: in that, as in many other things, you have built on a hollow foundation. You have been short-sighted and overweening, Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain

[(stops short).]

I?

Fieldbo.

Yes, you! You have plumed yourself on your family honour; but when has that honour been tried? Are you sure it would have stood the test?

The Chamberlain.

You can spare your sermons, Doctor. Do you think I have not learnt a lesson from the events of these days?

Fieldbo.

I daresay you have; but prove it, by showing greater tolerance and clearer insight. You reproach your son; but what have you done for him? You have taken care to develop his faculties, but not to form his character. You have lectured him on what he owed to the honour of his family; but you have not guided and moulded him so that honour became to him an irresistible instinct.

The Chamberlain.

Do you think so?

Fieldbo.

I not only think, I know it. But that is generally the way here: people are bent on learning, not on living. And you see what comes of it; you see hundreds of men with great gifts, who never seem to be more than half ripe; who are one thing in their ideas and feelings, and something quite different in their habits and acts. Just look at Stensgard --

The Chamberlain.

Ah, Stensgard now! What do you make of Stensgard?

Fieldbo.

A patchwork. I have known him from childhood. His father was a mere rag of a man, a withered weed, a nobody. He kept a little huckster's shop, and eked things out with pawnbroking; or rather his wife did for him. She was a coarse-grained woman, the most unwomanly I ever knew. She had her husband declared incapable; she had not an ounce of heart in her. And in that home Stensgard passed his childhood. Then he went to the grammar-school. "He shall go to college," said his mother; "I'll make a smart solicitor of him." Squalor at home, high-pressure at school; soul, temperament, will, talents, all pulling in different ways -- what could it lead to but disintegration of character?

The Chamberlain.

What could it lead to, eh? I should like to know what is good enough for you. We are to expect nothing of Stensgard; nothing of my son; but we may look to you, I suppose -- to you -- ?

Fieldbo.

Yes, to me -- precisely. Oh, you needn't laugh; I take no credit to myself; but my lot has been one that begets equilibrium and firmness of character. I was brought up amid the peace and harmony of a modest middle-class home. My mother is a woman of the finest type; in our home we had no desires that outstripped our opportunities, no cravings that were wrecked on the rocks of circumstance; and death did not break in upon our circle, leaving emptiness and longing behind it. We were brought up in the love of beauty, but it informed our whole view of life, instead of being a side-interest, a thing apart. We were taught to shun excesses, whether of the intellect or of the feelings --

The Chamberlain.

Bless me! So that accounts for your being the pink of perfection?

Fieldbo.

I am far from thinking so. I only say that fate had been infinitely kind to me, and that I regard its favours in the light of obligations.

The Chamberlain.

Very well; but if Stensgard is under no such obligations, it is all the more to his credit that he --

Fieldbo.

What? What is to his credit?

The Chamberlain.

You have misjudged him, my good Doctor. Look here. What do you say to this?

Fieldbo.

Your son's bill!

The Chamberlain.

Yes; he has sent it to me.

Fieldbo.

Of his own accord?

The Chamberlain.

Of his own accord, and unconditionally. It is fine; it is noble. From this day forth, my house is open to him.

Fieldbo.

Think again! For your own sake, for your daughter's --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, let me alone! He is better than you in many ways. At any rate he is straightforward, while you are underhand in your dealings.

Fieldbo.

I?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, you! You have made yourself the master of this house; you come and go as you please; I consult you about everything -- and yet --

Fieldbo.

Well? -- And yet?

The Chamberlain.

And yet there's always something confoundedly close about you; yes, and something -- something uppish that I cannot endure!

Fieldbo.

Please explain yourself!

The Chamberlain.

I? No, it is you that ought to explain yourself! But now you must take the consequences.

Fieldbo.

We don't understand each other, Chamberlain. I have no bill to give up to you; yet, who knows but I may be making a greater sacrifice for your sake?

The Chamberlain.

Indeed! How so?

Fieldbo.

By holding my tongue.

The Chamberlain.

Holding your tongue, indeed! Shall I tell you what I am tempted to do? To forget my manners, use bad language, and join the League of Youth. You are a stiff-necked Pharisee, my good Doctor; and that sort of thing is out of place in our free society. Look at Stensgard; he is not like that; so he shall come here whenever he likes; he shall -- he shall -- ! Oh, what's the use of talking -- ! You must take the consequences; as you make your bed, so you must lie.

Lundestad

[(enters from the back).]

My congratulations, Chamberlain! May you long enjoy the respect and --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, go to the devil -- I'm almost inclined to say! That's all humbug, my dear Lundestad. There's nothing but humbug in this world.

Lundestad.

That is what Mr. Monsen's creditors are saying.

The Chamberlain.

Ah, about Monsen -- didn't it come upon you like a thunderbolt?

Lundestad.

Oh, you have often prophesied it, Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain.

H'm, h'm; -- yes, to be sure I have. I prophesied it only the day before yesterday; he came here trying to get money out of me --

Fieldbo.

It might have saved him.

Lundestad.

Impossible; he was too deep in the mire; and whatever is, is for the best.

The Chamberlain.

That is your opinion? Was it for the best, then, that you were beaten at the poll yesterday?

Lundestad.

I wasn't beaten; everything went just as I wanted. Stensgard is not a man to make an enemy of; he has got what we others have to whistle for.

The Chamberlain.

I don't quite understand what you mean -- ?

Lundestad.

He has the power of carrying people away with him. And then he has the luck to be unhampered by either character, or conviction, or social position; so that Liberalism is the easiest thing in the world to him.

The Chamberlain.

Well, really, I should have thought we were all Liberals.

Lundestad.

Yes, of course we are Liberals, Chamberlain; not a doubt of it. But the thing is that we are Liberal only on our own behalf, whereas Stensgard's Liberalism extends to other people. That's the novelty of the thing.

The Chamberlain.

And you are going over to these subversive ideas?

Lundestad.

I've read in old story-books about people who could summon up spirits, but could not lay them again.

The Chamberlain.

Why, my dear Lundestad, how can a man of your enlightenment -- ?

Lundestad.

I know it's mere popish superstition, Chamberlain. But new ideas are like those spirits: it's not so easy to lay them; the best plan is to compromise with them as best you can.

The Chamberlain.

But now that Monsen has fallen, and no doubt his crew of agitators with him --

Lundestad.

If Monsen's fall had come two or three days ago, things would have been very different.

The Chamberlain.

Yes, unfortunately. You have been too hasty.

Lundestad.

Partly out of consideration for you, Chamberlain.

The Chamberlain.

For me?

Lundestad.

Our party must keep up its reputation in the eyes of the people. We represent the old, deep-rooted Norse sense of honour. If I had deserted Stensgard, you know he holds a paper --

The Chamberlain.

Not now.

Lundestad.

What?

The Chamberlain.

Here it is.

Lundestad.

He has given it up to you?

The Chamberlain.

Yes. Personally, he is a gentleman; so much I must say for him.

Lundestad

[(thoughtfully).]

Mr. Stensgard has rare abilities.

Stensgard

[(at the back, standing in the doorway).]

May I come in?

The Chamberlain

[(going to meet him).]

I am delighted to see you.

Stensgard.

And you will accept my congratulations?

The Chamberlain.

With all my heart.

Stensgard.

Then with all my heart I wish you happiness! And you must forget all the stupid things I have written.

The Chamberlain.

I go by deeds, not words, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

How good of you to say so!

The Chamberlain.

And henceforth -- since you wish it -- you must consider yourself at home here.

Stensgard.

May I? May I really? [A knock at the door.]

The Chamberlain.

Come in. Several LEADING MEN of the neighbourhood, TOWN COUNCILLORS, etc., enter. THE CHAMBERLAIN goes to receive them, accepts their congratulations, and converses with them.

Thora

[(who has meantime entered by the second door on the left).]

Mr. Stensgard, let me thank you.

Stensgard.

You, Miss Bratsberg!

Thora.

My father has told me how nobly you have acted.

Stensgard.

But -- ?

Thora.

Oh, how we have misjudged you!

Stensgard.

Have you -- ?

Thora.

It was your own fault -- No, no; it was ours. Oh, what would I not do to atone for our error.

Stensgard.

Would you? You yourself? Would you really -- ?

Thora.

All of us would; if we only knew --

The Chamberlain.

Refreshments for these gentlemen, my child.

Thora.

They are just coming. [She retires towards the door again, where a SERVANT at the same moment appears with cake and wine, which are handed round.]

Stensgard.

Oh, my dear Lundestad! I feel like a conquering god.

Lundestad.

So you must have felt yesterday, I suppose.

Stensgard.

Pooh! This is something quite different; the final triumph; the crown of all! There is a glory, a halo, over my life.

Lundestad.

Oho; dreams of love!

Stensgard.

Not dreams! Realities, glorious realities!

Lundestad.

So brother Bastian has brought you the answer?

Stensgard.

Bastian -- ?

Lundestad.

Yes, he gave me a hint yesterday; he had promised to plead your cause with a certain young lady.

Stensgard.

Oh, what nonsense --

Lundestad.

Why make a mystery of it? If you haven't heard already, I can give you the news. You have won the day, Mr. Stensgard; I have it from Ringdal.

Stensgard.

What have you from Ringdal?

Lundestad.

Miss Monsen has accepted you.

Stensgard.

What!

Lundestad.

Accepted you, I say,

Stensgard.

Accepted me! And the father has bolted!

Lundestad.

But the daughter hasn't.

Stensgard.

Accepted me! In the midst of all this family trouble! How unwomanly! How repellant to any man with the least delicacy of feeling! But the whole thing is a misunderstanding. I never commissioned Bastian -- How could that idiot -- ? However, it doesn't matter to me; he must answer for his follies himself.

Daniel Heire

[(enters from the back).]

Hee-hee! Quite a gathering! Of course, of course! We are paying our respects, propitiating the powers that be, as the saying goes. May I, too --

The Chamberlain.

Thanks, thanks, old friend!

Heire.

Oh, I protest, my dear sir? That is too much condescension. (New GUESTS arrive.) Ah, here we have the myrmidons of justice -- the

executive -- I say no more. (Goes over to STENSGARD.) Ah, my dear fortunate youth, are you there? Your hand! Accept the assurance of an old man's unfeigned rejoicing.

Stensgard.

At what?

Heire.

You asked me yesterday to run you down a little to her -- you know --

Stensgard.

Yes, yes; what then?

Heire.

It was a heartfelt pleasure to me to oblige you --

Stensgard.

Well -- and what happened then? How did she take it?

Heire.

Like a loving woman, of course -- burst into tears; locked herself into her room; would neither answer nor show herself --

Stensgard.

Ah, thank goodness!

Heire.

It's barbarous to subject a widow's heart to such cruel tests, to go and gloat over her jealous agonies! But love has cat's eyes -- I say no more! For to-day, as I drove past, there stood Madam Rundholmen, brisk and buxom, at her open window, combing her hair. She looked like a mermaid, if you'll allow me to say so. Oh, she's a fine woman!

Stensgard.

Well, and then?

Heire.

Why, she laughed like one possessed, sir, and waved a letter in the air, and called out "A proposal, Mr. Heire! I'm engaged to be married."

Stensgard.

What! Engaged?

Heire.

My hearty congratulations, young man; I'm inexpressibly pleased to be the first to announce to you --

Stensgard.

It's all rubbish! It's nonsense!

Heire.

What is nonsense?

Stensgard.

You have misunderstood her; or else she has misunderstood -- Engaged! Preposterous! Now that Monsen's down, she'll probably --

Heire.

Not at all, sir, not at all! Madam Rundholmen has solid legs to stand on.

Stensgard.

No matter! I have quite other intentions. All that about the letter was only a joke -- a wager, as I told you. My dear Mr. Heire, do oblige me by not saying a word to any one of this silly affair.

Heire.

I see, I see! It's to be kept secret; it's to be a romance. Ah, youth, youth! it's nothing if not poetical.

Stensgard.

Yes, yes; mum's the word. You shan't regret it -- I'll take up your cases -
- Sh! I rely upon you. [He retires.

]

The Chamberlain

[(who has meanwhile been talking to LUNDESTAD).]
No, Lundestad -- that I really cannot believe!

Lundestad.

I assure you, Chamberlain -- Daniel Heire told me so himself.

Heire.

What did I tell you, may I inquire?

The Chamberlain.

Did Mr. Stensgard show you a bill yesterday?

Heire.

Yes, by-the-bye -- ! What on earth was the meaning of all that?

The Chamberlain.

I'll tell you afterwards. And you told him --

Lundestad.

You persuaded him it was a forgery?

Heire.

Pooh, a mere innocent jest, to bewilder him a little in the hour of triumph.

Lundestad.

And you told him both signatures were forged?

Heire.

Oh, yes; why not both while I was about it?

The Chamberlain.

So that was it!

Lundestad

[(to the CHAMBERLAIN).]

And when he heard that --

The Chamberlain.

He gave the bill to Ringdal!

Lundestad.

The bill that was useless as a weapon of offence.

The Chamberlain.

He shams magnanimity! Makes a fool of me a second time! Gains admission to my house, and makes me welcome him and thank him -- this -- this -- ! And this is the fellow --

Heire.

Why, what are you going on about, my dear sir?

The Chamberlain.

I'll tell you all about it afterwards. (Takes LUNDESTAD apart.) And this is the fellow you protect, push forward, help to rise!

Lundestad.

Well, he took you in, too!

The Chamberlain.

Oh, I should like to -- !

Lundestad

[(pointing to STENSGARD, who is speaking to THORA).]
Look there! What will people be fancying!

The Chamberlain.

I shall soon put a stop to these fancies.

Lundestad.

Too late, Chamberlain; he'll worm himself forward by dint of promises and general plausibility --

The Chamberlain.

I, too, can manoeuvre, Mr. Lundestad.

Lundestad.

What will you do?

The Chamberlain.

Just watch. (Goes over to FIELDBO.) Doctor Fieldbo, will you do me a service?

Fieldbo.

With pleasure.

The Chamberlain.

Then turn that fellow out of my house.

Fieldbo.

Stensgard?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, the adventurer; I hate his very name; turn him out!

Fieldbo.

But how can I -- ?

The Chamberlain.

This is your affair; I give you a free hand.

Fieldbo.

A free hand! Do you mean it? Entirely free?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, yes, by all means.

Fieldbo.

Your hand on it, Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain.

Here it is.

Fieldbo.

So be it, then; now or never! (Loudly.) May I request the attention of the company for a moment?

The Chamberlain.

Silence for Doctor Fieldbo!

Fieldbo.

With Chamberlain Bratsberg's consent, I have the pleasure of announcing my engagement to his daughter. [An outburst of astonishment. THORA utters a slight scream. THE CHAMBERLAIN is on the point of speaking, but refrains. Loud talk and congratulations.]

Stensgard.

Engagement! Your engagement --

Heire.

With the Chamberlain's -- ? With your -- What does it mean?

Lundestad.

Is the Doctor out of his mind?

Stensgard.

But, Chamberlain -- ?

The Chamberlain.

What can I do? I am a Liberal. I join the League of Youth!

Fieldbo.

Thanks, thanks -- and forgive me!

The Chamberlain.

Associations are the order of the day, Mr. Stensgard. There is nothing like free competition!

Thora.

Oh, my dear father!

Lundestad.

Yes, and engagements are the order of the day. I have another to announce.

Stensgard.

A mere invention!

Lundestad.

No, not a bit of it; Miss Monsen is engaged to --

Stensgard.

False, false, I say!

Thora.

No, father, it's true; they are both here.

The Chamberlain.

Who? Where?

Thora.

Ragna and Mr. Helle. They are in here -- [Goes towards the second door on the right.]

Lundestad.

Mr. Helle! Then it's he -- !

The Chamberlain.

Here? In my house? (Goes towards the door.) Come in, my dear child.

Ragna

[(shrinking back shyly).]

Oh, no, no; there are so many people.

The Chamberlain.

Don't be bashful; you couldn't help what has happened.

Helle.

She is homeless now, Chamberlain.

Ragna.

Oh, you must help us!

The Chamberlain.

I will, indeed; and thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Heire.

You may well say engagements are the order of the day. I have one to add to the list.

The Chamberlain.

What? You? At your age? -- How rash of you!

Heire.

Oh -- ! I say no more.

Lundestad.

The game is up, Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

Indeed? (Loudly.) I have one to add to the list, Mr. Heire! An announcement, gentlemen: I, too, have cast anchor for life.

The Chamberlain.

What?

Stensgard.

One is now and then forced to play a double game, to conceal one's true intentions. I regard this as permissible when the general weal is at stake. My life- work lies clear before me, and is all in all to me. I consecrate my whole energies to this district; I find here a ferment of ideas which I must strive to clarify. But this task cannot be accomplished by a mere adventurer. The men of the district must gather round one of themselves. Therefore I have determined to unite my interests indissolubly with yours -- to unite them by a bond of affection. If I have awakened any false hopes, I must plead for forgiveness. I too am engaged.

The Chamberlain.
You?

Fieldbo.
Engaged?

Heire.
I can bear witness.

The Chamberlain.
But how -- ?

Fieldbo.
Engaged? To whom?

Lundestad.
It surely can't be -- ?

Stensgard.
It is a union both of the heart and of the understanding. Yes, my fellow citizens, I am engaged to Madam Rundholmen.

Fieldbo.
To Madam Rundholmen!

The Chamberlain.
The storekeeper's widow!

Lundestad.
H'm. Indeed!

The Chamberlain.
Why, my head's going round! How could you -- ?

Stensgard.

A manoeuvre, Mr. Bratsberg!

Lundestad.

He has rare abilities!

Aslaksen

[(looks in at the door, back).]

I humbly beg pardon --

The Chamberlain.

Oh, come in, Aslaksen! A visit of congratulation, eh?

Aslaksen.

Oh, not at all; I wouldn't presume -- But I have something very important to say to Mr. Stensgard.

Stensgard.

Another time; you can wait outside.

Aslaksen.

No, confound it; I must tell you --

Stensgard.

Hold your tongue! What intrusiveness is this? -- Yes, gentlemen, strange are the ways of destiny. The district and I required a bond that should bind us firmly together; and I found on my path a woman of ripened character who could make a home for me. I have put off the adventurer, gentlemen, and here I stand in your midst, as one of yourselves. Take me; I am ready to stand or fall in any post your confidence may assign me.

Lundestad.

You have won.

The Chamberlain.

Well, really, I must say -- (To the MAID, who has entered from the back.)
Well, what is it? What are you giggling about?

The Servant.

Madam Rundholmen -- ?

The Company.

Madam Rundholmen?

The Chamberlain.

What about her?

The Servant.

Madam Rundholmen is waiting outside with her young man --

The Company

[(to each other).]

Her young man? Madam Rundholmen! How's this?

Stensgard.

What nonsense!

Aslaksen.

Yes, I was just telling you --

The Chamberlain

[(at the door).]

Come along, come along! BASTIAN MONSEN, with MADAM RUNDHOLMEN on his arm, enters from the back. A general movement.

Madam Rundholmen.

I hope I'm not intruding, sir --

The Chamberlain.

Not at all, not at all.

Madam Rundholmen.

But I couldn't resist bringing up my young man to show him to you and Miss Bratsberg.

The Chamberlain.

Yes, I hear you are engaged; but --

Thora.

We didn't know --

Stensgard

[(to ASLAKSEN).]

How is all this -- ?

Aslaksen.

I had so much in my head yesterday; so much to think about, I mean --

Stensgard.

But I gave her my letter, and --

Aslaksen.

No, you gave her Bastian Monsen's; here is yours.

Stensgard.

Bastian's? And here -- ? (Glances at the address, crumples the letter together, and crams it into his pocket.) Oh, curse you for a blunderer!

Madam Rundholmen.

Of course I was willing enough. There's no trusting the men-folk, I know; but when you have it in black and white that their intentions are honourable -- Why, there's Mr. Stensgard, I declare. Well, Mr. Stensgard, won't you congratulate me?

Heire

[(to LUNDESTAD).]

How hungrily she glares at him.

The Chamberlain.

Of course he will, Madam Rundholmen; but won't you congratulate your sister-in-law to be?

Madam Rundholmen.

Who?

Thora.

Ragna; she is engaged, too.

Bastian.

Are you, Ragna?

Madam Rundholmen.

Indeed? Yes, Bastian told me there was something in the wind. I wish you both joy; and welcome into the family, Mr. Stensgard!

Fieldbo.

No, no; not Stensgard!

The Chamberlain.

No, it's Mr. Helle; an excellent choice. And, by-the-bye, you may congratulate my daughter, too.

Madam Rundholmen.

Miss Bratsberg! Ah, so Lundestad was right, after all. I congratulate you, Miss Thora; and you, too, Mr. Stensgard.

Fieldbo.

You mean Doctor Fieldbo.

Madam Rundholmen.

What?

Fieldbo.

I am the happy man.

Madam Rundholmen.

Well, now, I don't in the least know where I am.

The Chamberlain.

And we have just found out where we are.

Stensgard.

Excuse me; I have an appointment --

The Chamberlain

[(aside).]

Lundestad, what was the other word?

Lundestad.

What other?

The Chamberlain.

Not adventurer, but the other -- ?

Lundestad.

Demagogue.

Stensgard.

-- I take my leave.

The Chamberlain.

One word -- only one word, Mr. Stensgard -- a word which has long been on the tip of my tongue.

Stensgard

[(at the door).]

Excuse me; I'm in a hurry.

The Chamberlain

[(following him).]

Demagogue!

Stensgard.

Good-bye; good-bye! [Goes out by the back.]

The Chamberlain

[(coming forward again).]

Now the air is pure again, my friends.

Bastian.

I hope you don't blame me, sir, for what has happened at home?

The Chamberlain.

Every one must bear his own burden. Bastian. I had really no part in it.

Selma

[(who, during the preceding scene, has been listening at the second door on the right).]

Father! Now you are happy; -- may he come now?

The Chamberlain.

Selma! You! You plead for him? After what happened two days ago --

Selma.

Oh, two days are a long time. All is well now. I know now that he can go astray --

The Chamberlain.

And that pleases you?

Selma.

Yes, that he can; but in future I won't let him.

The Chamberlain.

Bring him in then. [SELMA goes out again to the right.]

Ringdal

[(enters by the foremost door on the right).]

Here is your resignation.

The Chamberlain.

Thanks; but you can tear it up.

Ringdal

Tear it up?

The Chamberlain.

Yes, Ringdal; I have found another way. I can make atonement without that; I shall set to work in earnest --

Erik

[(enters with SELMA from the right).]

Can you forgive me?

The Chamberlain

[(hands him the bill).]

I cannot be less merciful than fate.

Erik.

Father! I shall retire this very day from the business you dislike so much.

The Chamberlain.

No, indeed; you must stick to it. No cowardice! No running away from temptation! But I will stand at your side. (Loudly.) News for you, gentlemen! I have entered into partnership with my son.

Several Gentlemen.

What? You, Chamberlain?

Heire.

You, my dear sir?

The Chamberlain.

Yes; it is a useful and honourable calling; or at any rate it can be made so. And now I have no reason to hold aloof any longer.

Lundestad.

Well, I'll tell you what, Chamberlain -- since you are going to set to work for the good of the district, it would be a shame and disgrace if an old soldier like me were to sulk in his tent.

Erik.

Ah, what is this?

Lundestad.

I cannot, in fact. After the disappointments in love that have befallen Mr. Stensgard to-day, Heaven forbid we should force the poor fellow into the

political mill. He must rest and recover; a change of air is what he wants, and I shall see that he gets it. So if my constituents want me, why, they can have me.

The Gentlemen

[(shaking hands with him enthusiastically).]

Thanks, Lundestad! That's a good fellow! You won't fail us!

The Chamberlain.

Now, this is as it should be; things are settling down again. But whom have we to thank for all this?

Fieldbo.

Come, Aslaksen, you can explain -- ?

Aslaksen

[(alarmed).]

I, Doctor? I'm as innocent as the babe unborn!

Fieldbo.

What about that letter, then -- ?

Aslaksen.

It wasn't my fault, I tell you! It was the election and Bastian Monsen, and chance, and destiny, and Madam Rundholmen's punch -- there was no lemon in it -- and there was I, with the whole responsibility of the press upon me --

The Chamberlain

[(approaching).]

What? What's that?

Aslaksen.

The press, sir?

The Chamberlain.

The press! That's just it! Haven't I always said that the press has marvellous influence these days?

Aslaksen.

Oh, Chamberlain --

The Chamberlain.

No false modesty, Mr. Aslaksen! I haven't hitherto been in the habit of reading your paper, but henceforth I will. I shall subscribe for ten copies.

Aslaksen.

Oh, you can have twenty, Chamberlain!

The Chamberlain.

Very well, then; let me have twenty. And if you need money, come to me; I mean to support the press; but I tell you once for all -- I won't write for it.

Ringdal

What's this I hear? Your daughter engaged?

The Chamberlain.

Yes; what do you say to that?

Ringdal

I am delighted! But when was it arranged?

Fieldbo

[(quickly).]

I'll tell you afterwards --

The Chamberlain.

Why, it was arranged on the Seventeenth of May.

Fieldbo.
What?

The Chamberlain.
The day little Miss Ragna was here.

Thora.
Father, father; did you know -- ?

The Chamberlain.
Yes, my dear; I have known all along.

Fieldbo.
Oh, Chamberlain -- !

Thora.
Who can have -- ?

The Chamberlain.
Another time, I should advise you young ladies not to talk so loud when I am taking my siesta in the bay window.

Thora.
Oh! so you were behind the curtains?

Fieldbo.
Now I understand!

The Chamberlain.
Yes, you are the one to keep your own counsel --

Fieldbo.

Would it have been of any use for me to speak earlier?

The Chamberlain.

You are right, Fieldbo. These days have taught me a lesson.

Thora

[(aside to FIELDBO).]

Yes, you can keep your own counsel. All this about Mr. Stensgard -- why did you tell me nothing?

Fieldbo.

When a hawk is hovering over the dove-cote, one watches and shields his little dove -- one does not alarm her. [They are interrupted by MADAM RUNDHOLMEN,]

Heire

[(to the CHAMBERLAIN).]

I'm sorry to tell you, Chamberlain, that the settlement of our little legal differences will have to be adjourned indefinitely.

The Chamberlain.

Indeed; Why so?

Heire.

You must know I've accepted a post as society reporter on Aslaksen's paper.

The Chamberlain.

I am glad to hear it.

Heire.

And of course you'll understand -- with so much business on hand --

Madam Rundholmen

[(to THORA).]

Yes, I can tell you he's cost me many a tear, that bad man. But now I thank the Lord for Bastian. The other was false as the sea-foam; and then he's a terrible smoker, Miss Bratsberg, and frightfully particular about his meals. I found him a regular gourmand.

A Servant

[(enters from the left).]

Dinner is on the table.

The Chamberlain.

Come along, then, all of you. Mr. Lundestad, you shall sit beside me; and you too, Mr. Aslaksen.

Ringdal

We shall have a lot of toasts to drink after dinner!

Heire.

Yes; and perhaps an old man may be allowed to put in a claim for the toast of "Absent Friends." Lundestad. One absent friend will return, Mr. Heire.

Heire.

Stensgard?

Lundestad.

Yes; you'll see, gentlemen! In ten or fifteen years, Stensgard will either be in Parliament or in the Ministry -- perhaps in both at once.

Fieldbo.

In ten or fifteen years? Perhaps; but then he can scarcely stand at the head of the League of Youth.

Heire.

Why not?

Fieldbo.

Why, because by that time his youth will be -- questionable.

Heire.

Then he can stand at the head of the Questionable League, sir. That's what Lundestad means. He says like Napoleon -- "It's the questionable people that make politicians"; hee-hee!

Fieldbo.

Well, after all is said and done, our League shall last through young days and questionable days as well; and it shall continue to be the League of Youth. When Stensgard founded his League, and was carried shoulder-high amid all the enthusiasm of Independence Day, he said -- "Providence is on the side of the League of Youth." I think even Mr. Helle, theologian as he is, will let us apply that saying to ourselves.

The Chamberlain.

I think so too, my friends; for truly we have been groping and stumbling in darkness; but good angels guided us.

Lundestad.

Oh, for that matter, I think the angels were only middling.

Aslaksen.

Yes; that comes of the local situation, Mr. Lundestad.

THE END

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