

A GAUNTLET

Bjornstjerne M. Bjornson

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A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

RIIS.

MRS. RIIS.

SVAVA, their daughter.

MARGIT, their maid.

CHRISTENSEN.

MRS. CHRISTENSEN.

ALFRED, their son, betrothed to Svava.

DR. NORDAN.

THOMAS, his servant.

HOFF.

The action of the play passes in Christiania.

ACT I

(SCENE. A room in RIIS' house. An open door at the back leads into a park and gives a glimpse of the sea beyond. Windows on each side of the door. Doors also in the right and left walls. Beyond the door on the right is a piano; opposite to the piano a cupboard. In the foreground, to the right and left, two couches with small tables in front of them. Easy-chairs and smaller chairs scattered about. MRS. RIIS is sitting on the couch to the left, and DR. NORDAN in a chair in the centre of the room. He is wearing a straw hat pushed on to the back of his head, and has a large handkerchief spread over his knees. He is sitting with his arms folded, leaning upon his stick.)

Mrs. Riis. A penny for your thoughts!

Nordan. What was it you were asking me about?

Mrs. Riis. About that matter of Mrs. North, of course.

Nordan. That matter of Mrs. North? Well, I was talking to Christensen about it just now. He has advanced the

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money and is going to try and get the bank to suspend proceedings. I have told you that already. What else do you want to know?

Mrs. Riis. I want to know how much gossip there is about it, my dear friend.

Nordan. Oh, men don't gossip about each other's affairs. By the way, isn't our friend in there (nodding towards the door on the right) going to be told about it? This seem, a good opportunity.

Mrs. Riis. Let us wait.

Nordan. Because Christensen will have to be repaid, you know. I told him he would be.

Mrs. Riis. Naturally. What else would you suppose?

Nordan (getting up). Well, I am going away for my holidays, so Christensen must look after it now. Was it a very grand party yesterday?

Mrs. Riis. There was not much display.

Nordan. No, the Christensens' parties are never very luxurious. But I suppose there were a lot of people?

Mrs. Riis. I have never seen so many at a private entertainment.

Nordan. Is Svava up?

Mrs. Riis. She is out bathing.

Nordan. Already? Did you come home early, then?

Mrs. Riis. At about twelve, I think. Svava wanted to come home. My husband was late, I think.

Nordan. The card tables. She looked radiant, I suppose, eh?

Mrs. Riis. Why didn't you come?

Nordan. I never go to betrothal parties, and I never go to Weddings never! I can't bear the sight of the poor victims in their veils and wreaths.

Mrs. Riis. But, my dear doctor, you surely think as we all do that this will be a happy marriage?

Nordan. He is a fine lad. But, all the same I have been taken in so often. Oh, well!

Mrs. Riis. She was so happy, and is just as happy to-day.

Nordan. It is a pity I shall not see her. Good-bye, Mrs. Riis.

Mrs. Riis. Good-bye, doctor. Then you are off to-day?

Nordan. Yes, I need a change of air.

Mrs. Riis. Quite so. Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself and, many thanks for what you have done!

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Nordan. It is I ought to thank you, my dear lady! I am vexed not to be able to say good-bye to Svava. (Goes out. MRS. RIIS takes up a magazine from the table on the left and settles herself comfortably on a couch from which she can see into the park. During what follows she reads whenever opportunity allows. RIIS comes in through the door to the right, in his shirt sleeves and struggling with his collar.)

Riis. Good morning! Was that Nordan that went out just now?

Mrs. Riis. Yes. (RIIS crosses the room, then turns back and disappears through the door on the right. He comes back again immediately and goes through the same proceeding, all the time busy with his collar.) Can I help you at all?

Riis. No thanks all the same! These new-fangled shirts are troublesome things. I bought some in Paris.

Mrs. Riis. Yes, I believe you have bought a whole dozen.

Riis. A dozen and a half. (Goes into his room, comes out again in apparently the same difficulties, and walks about as before.) As a matter of fact I am wondering about something.

Mrs. Riis. It must be something complicated.

Riis. It is it is. No doubt of it! This collar is the very Ah, at last! (Goes into his room and comes out again, this time with his necktie in his hand.) I have been wondering wondering what our dear girl's character is made up of?

Mrs. Riis. What it is made up of?

Riis. Yes what characteristics she gets from you and what from me, and so forth. In what respects, that is to say, she takes after your family, and in what respect after mine, and so forth. Svava is a remarkable girl.

Mrs. Riis. She is that.

Riis. She is neither altogether you nor altogether me nor is she exactly a compound of us both.

Mrs. Riis. Svava is something more than that.

Riis. A considerable deal more than that, too. (Disappears again; then comes out with his coat on, brushing himself.) What did you say?

Mrs. Riis. I did not speak. I rather think it is my mother that Svava is most like.

Riis. I should think so! Svava, with her quiet pleasant ways! What a thing to say!

Mrs. Riis. Svava can be passionate enough.

Riis. Svava never forgets her manners as your mother did.

Mrs. Riis. You never understood mother. Still, no doubt they are unlike in a great many things.

Riis. Absolutely! Can you see now how right I was in chattering to her in various languages from the beginning, even when she was quite tiny? Can you see that now? You were opposed to my doing it.

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Mrs. Riis. I was opposed to your perpetually plaguing the child, and also to the endless jumping from one thing to another.

Riis. But look at the result, my dear! Look at the result! (Begins to hum a tune.)

Mrs. Riis. You are surely never going to pretend that it is the languages that have made her what she is?

Riis (as he disappears). No, not the languages; but (His voice is heard from within his room) the language have done a wonderful lot! She has savoir vivre what? (Comes out again.)

Mrs. Riis. I am sure that is not what Svava is most admired for.

Riis. No, no. On the boat, a man asked me if I were related to the Miss Riis who had founded the Kindergartens in the town. I said I had the honour to be her father. You should have seen his face! I nearly had a fit.

Mrs. Riis. Yes, the Kindergartens have been a great success from the very first.

Riis. And they are responsible for her getting engaged, too aren't they? What?

Mrs. Riis. You must ask her.

Riis. You have never even noticed my new suit.

Mrs. Riis. Indeed I have.

Riis. I didn't hear as much as the tiniest cry of admiration from you. Look at the harmony of it all! the scheme of colour, even down to the shoes! what? And the handkerchief, too!

Mrs. Riis. How old are you, dear?

Riis. Hold your tongue! Anyway. how old do you think people take me to be?

Mrs. Riis. Forty, of course.

Riis. Of course ? I don't see that it is so obvious. This suit is a kind of Bridal Symphony, composed at Cologne when I got the telegram telling me of Svava's engagement. Just think of it! At Cologne not ten hours' journey from Paris! But I could not wait ten hours; I had risen too much in my own estimation in view of my approaching relationship with the richest family in the country.

Mrs. Riis. Is that suit all you have to show for it, then?

Riis. What a question! Just you wait till I have got my luggage through the custom-house!

Mrs. Riis. We shall be quite out of it, I suppose?

Riis. You out of it! When a very lucky daddy finds himself in Paris at a most tremendous moment

Mrs. Riis. And what did you think of the party yesterday?

Riis. I was quite delighted with the boat for being late so that I was landed in the middle of a fete champetre as by magic. And Naturally one had a tremendous welcome as the party was in honour of one's own only daughter!

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Mrs. Riis. What time did you come in last night?

Riis. Don't you understand that we had to play cards yesterday, too? I could not get out of it; I had to make a fourth with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that is to say, with our host, a cabinet minister, and old Holk. It was a tremendous honour to lose one's money to grand folk like that. Because I always lose, you know. I came home about three o'clock, I should think. What is that you are reading?

Mrs. Riis. The Fortnightly.

Riis. Has there been anything good in it while I have been away? (Begins to hum a tune.)

Mrs. Riis. Yes there is an article here on heredity that you must read. It has some reference to what we began to talk about.

Riis. Do you know this tune? (Goes over to the piano.) It is all the rage now. I heard it all over Germany. (Begins to play and sing, but breaks off suddenly.) I will go and fetch the music, while I think of it! (Goes into his room and comes out again with the music. Sits down and begins to play and sing again. SVAVA comes in by it, door on the left. RIIS stops when he sees her, and jumps up.) Good morning, my child! Good morning! I have hardly had a chance to say a word to you yet. At the party everyone took you away from me! (Kisses her, and comes forward with her.)

Svava. Why were you so long of coming back from abroad?

Riis. Why don't people give one some warning when they are going to get engaged?

Svava. Because people don't know anything about it themselves, till it happens! Good morning again, mother. (Kneels down beside her.)

Mrs. Riis. There is a delicious freshness about you, dear! Did you have a walk in the wood after your swim?

Svava (getting up). Yes, and just as I got home a few minutes ago Alfred passed the house and called up to me. He is coming in directly.

Riis. To tell you the truth and one ought always to tell the truth I had quite given up the hope of such happiness coming to our dear girl.

Svava. I know you had. I had quite given it up myself.

Riis. Until your fairy prince came?

Svava. Until my fairy prince came. And he took his time about it, too!

Riis. You had been waiting for him a long time, though hadn't you?

Svava. Not a bit of it! I never once thought of him.

Riis. Now you are talking in riddles.

Svava. Yes, it is a riddle to understand how two people, who have seen each other from childhood without even giving each other a thought, suddenly ! Because that was really how it happened. It all dates from a certain moment and then, all at once, he became quite another man in my eyes.

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Riis. But in every one else's, I suppose, he is the same as before?

Svava. I hope so!

Riis. He is more lively than he was, at any rate in my eyes.

Svava. Yes, I saw you laughing together last night. What was it?

Riis. We were discussing the best way of getting through the world. I gave him my three famous rules of life.

Mrs. Riis and Svava (together). Already!

Riis. They were a great success. Do you remember them, you bad girl?

Svava. Rule number one: Never make a fool of yourself.

Riis. Rule number two: Never be a burden to any one.

Svava. Rule number three: Always be in the fashion. They are not very hard to remember, because they are neither obscure nor profound.

Riis. But all the harder to put into practice! And thus is a great virtue in all rules of life. I congratulate you on your new morning frock. Under the circumstances it is really charming.

Svava. Under the circumstances means, I suppose, considering that you have had no hand in it.

Riis. Yes, because I should never have chosen that trimming. However, the under the circumstances is not so bad. A good cut, too yes. Aha! Just you wait till my portmanteau comes!

Svava. Some surprises for us?

Riis. Big ones! By the way, I have something here. (Goes into his room.)

Svava. Do you know, mother, he seems to me more restless than ever.

Mrs. Riis. That is happiness, dear.

Svava. And yet father's restlessness has always something a little sad about it. He is . (RIIS comes out of his room again.) Do you know what I heard a cabinet minister say about you yesterday?

Riis. A man of that stamp is sure to say something worth hearing.

Svava. We all always look upon your father, Miss Riis, as our Well-dressed man par excellence.

Riis. Ah, a bien dit son excellence! But I can tell you something better than that. You are getting your father a knighthood.

Svava. I am?

Riis. Yes, who else? Of course the Government has once or twice made use of me to some small degree in connection with various commercial treaties; but now, as our great man's brother-in-law, I am going to be made

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a Knight of St. Olaf!

Svava. I congratulate you.

Riis. Well, when it rains on the parson it drips on the clerk, you know.

Svava. You are really most unexpectedly modest in your new position.

Riis. Am I not! And now you shall see me as a modest showman of beautiful dresses that is to say, of drawings of dresses still more modest than the showman, from the latest play at the Francais.

Svava. Oh no, dad not now!

Mrs. Riis. We won't start on that till the afternoon.

Riis. One would really think I were the only woman of the lot! However, as you please. You rule the world! Well, then, I have another proposition to make, in two parts. Part one, that we sit down!

Svava. We sit down! (She and her father sit.)

Riis. And next, that you tell your newly–returned parent exactly how it all happened. All about that riddle, you know!

Svava. Oh, that! You must excuse me; I cannot tell you about that.

Riis. Not in all its sweet details, of course! Good heavens, who would be so barbarous as to ask such a thing in the first delicious month of an engagement! No, I of only I want you to tell us what was the primum mobile in the matter.

Svava. Oh, I understand. Yes, I will tell you that because that really means teaching you to know Alfred's true character.

Riis. For instance how did you come to speak to him?

Svava. Well, that was those darling Kindergartens of ours

Riis. Oho! Your darling Kindergartens, you mean?

Svava. What, when there are over a hundred girls there ?

Riis. Never mind about that! I suppose he came to bring a donation?

Svava. Yes, he came several times with a donation

Riis. Aha!

Svava. And one day we were talking about luxury saying that it was better to use one's time and money in our way, than to use them in luxurious living.

Riis. But how do you define luxury?

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Svava. We did not discuss that at all. But I saw that he considered luxury to be immoral.

Riis. Luxury immoral!

Svava. Yes, I know that is not your opinion. But it is mine.

Riis. Your mother's, you mean, and your grand mother's.

Svava. Exactly; but mine too, if you don't object?

Riis. Not I!

Svava. I mentioned that little incident that happened to us when we were in America do you remember? We had gone to a temperance meeting, and saw women drive up who were going to support the cause of abstinence, and yet were well, of course we did not know their circumstances but to judge from their appearance, with their carriages and horses, their jewellery and dresses especially their jewellery they must have been worth, say

Riis. Say many thousands of dollars! No doubt about it.

Svava. There is no doubt about it. And don't you think that is really just as disgraceful debauchery, in its town way, as drink is in its?

Riis. Oh, well !

Svava. Yes, you shrug your shoulders. Alfred did not do that. He told me of his own experiences in great cities. It was horrible!

Riis. What was horrible?

Svava. The contrast between poverty and wealth between the bitterest want and the most reckless luxury.

Riis. Oh that! I thought, perhaps . However, go on!

Svava. He did not sit looking quite indifferent and clean his nails.

Riis. I beg your pardon.

Svava. Oh, please go on, dear! No, he prophesied a great social revolution, and spoke so fervently about it and it was then that he told me what his ideas about wealth were. It was the greatest possible surprise to me and a new idea to me, too, to some extent. You should have seen how handsome he looked!

Riis. Handsome, did you say?

Svava. Isn't he handsome? I think so, at all events. And so does mother, I think?

Mrs. Riis (without looking up from her book). And so does mother.

Riis. Mothers always fall in love with their daughters' young men but they fall out again when they become their mothers-in-law!

Svava. Is that your experience?

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Riis. That is my experience. So Alfred Christensen has blossomed into a beauty? Well, we must consider that settled.

Svava. He stood there so sure of himself, and looking so honest and clean for that is an essential thing, you know.

Riis. What exactly do you mean by clean, my dear?

Svava. I mean just what the word means.

Riis. Exactly but I want to know what meaning attach to the word.

Svava. Well the meaning that I hope any one would attach to it if they used the word of me.

Riis. Do you attach the same meaning to it if it is used of a man, as you would if it were used of a girl?

Svava. Yes, of course.

Riis. And do you suppose that Christensen's son

Svava (getting up). Father, you are insulting me!

Riis. How can the fact of his being his father's son I an insult to you?

Svava. In that respect he is not his father's son! I am not likely to make any mistake in a thing of that sort!

Mrs. Riis. I am just reading about inherited tendencies. It is Not necessary to suppose that he has inherited all his father's.

Riis. Oh, well have it as you please! I am afraid all these superhuman theories of yours. You will never get through the world with them.

Svava. What do you mean? Mother, what does father mean?

Mrs. Riis. I suppose he means that all men are alike. And one must allow that it is true.

Svava. You do not really mean that?

Riis. But why get so excited about it? Come and sit down! And, besides, how can you possibly tell?

Svava. Tell? What?

Riis. Well, in each individual case

Svava. whether the man I see standing before me or walking past me is an unclean, disgusting beast or a man?

Riis. Etcetera, etcetera! You may make mistakes, my dear Svava?

Svava. No not any more than I should make a mistake about you, father, when you begin to tease me with your horrid principles! Because, in spite of them, you are the chastest and most refined man I know.

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Mrs. Riis (laying down her book). Are you going to keep that morning frock on, dear child? Won't you change your dress before Alfred comes?

Svava. No, mother, I am not going to be put off like that. By this time I have seen so many of my girl friends giving themselves trustfully to their fairy prince, as they think, and waking in the arms of a beast. I shall not risk that! I shall not make that mistake!

Mrs. Riis. Well, as it is, there is no occasion for you to get heated about it. Alfred is a man of honour.

Svava. He is. But I have heard of one shocking experience after another. There was poor Helga, only a month ago! And I myself I can speak about it now, for I am happy now and feel secure I can tell you now why I have been so long about it. For a long time I did not dare to trust myself; because I too have been on the brink of being deceived.

Riis and Mrs. Riis (together, starting up from their chairs). You, Svava?

Svava. I was quite young at the time. Like most young girls, I was looking for my ideal, and found it in a young, vivacious man I won't describe him more accurately. He had oh, the noblest principles and the highest aims the most complete contrast to you in that respect father! To say I loved him, is much too mild; I worshipped him. But I never can tell you what I discovered or how I discovered it. It was the time when you all thought I had

Mrs. Riis. something wrong with your lungs? Is it possible, child? Was it then?

Svava. Yes, it was then. No one could endure or forgive being deceived like that!

Mrs. Riis. And you never said a word to me?

Svava. Only those who have made such a mistake as I did can understand the shame one feels. Well, it is all over now. But this much is certain, that no one who has had such an experience once will make the same mistake again. (Meanwhile RIIS has gone into his room.)

Mrs. Riis. Perhaps it was a good thing for you, after all?

Svava. I am sure it was. Well, it is all done with now. But it was not quite done with till I found Alfred. Where is father?

Mrs. Riis. Your father? Here he comes.

Riis (coming out of his room, with his hat on, and drawing on his gloves). Look here, little girl! I must go and see what has happened to my luggage at the Customs. I will go to the station and telegraph. You must have all your things looking very nice, you know, because the King is coming here in a day or two and so it is worth it! Good-bye, then, my dear girl! (Kisses her.) You have made us very happy so very happy. It is true you have certain ideas that are not . Well, never mind! Goodbye! (Goes out.)

Mrs. Riis. Good-bye!

Riis (drawing off his gloves). Did you notice the tune I was playing when you came in? (Sits down at the piano.) I heard it everywhere in Germany. (Begins to play and sing, but stops short.) But, bless my soul, here is the music! You can play it and sing it for yourself. (Goes out, humming the air.)

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Svava. He is delightful! There is really something so innocent about him. Did you notice him yesterday? He was simply coruscating.

Mrs. Riis. You did not see yourself, my dear!

Svava. Why? Was I sparkling, too?

Mrs. Riis. Your father's daughter absolutely!

Svava. Yes, it is no use denying, mother, that however great one's happiness is, the friendliness of others increases it. I was thinking to-day over all the things that gave me so much happiness yesterday, and felt oh, I can't tell you what I felt! (Nestles in her mother's arms.)

Mrs. Riis. You are a very lucky girl! Now I must go and do my housekeeping.

Svava. Shall I help you?

Mrs. Riis. No, thank you, dear. (They cross the room together.)

Svava. Well, then, I will run through father's song once or twice and Alfred should be here directly. (MRS. RIIS goes out by the door on the left. SVAVA sits down at the piano. ALFRED comes in softly from the left, and bends over her shoulder so that his face comes close to hers.)

Alfred. Good morning, darling!

Svava (jumping up). Alfred! I did not hear the door!

Alfred. Because you were playing. Something very pretty, too!

Svava. I enjoyed myself so much yesterday!

Alfred. I do not believe you have any idea what an impression you made!

Svava. Just a suspicion. But you must not talk about that, because it would be most improper for me to confess it!

Alfred. Every one was singing your praises to me, and a mother and father too. We are all very happy at how, to-day.

Svava. So we are here! What is that you have got in your hand? A letter?

Alfred. Yes, a letter. Your maid who opened the door gave it to me. Someone has been clever enough to count upon my coming here some time this morning.

Svava. You don't think that was difficult to guess?

Alfred. Not particularly. It is from Edward Hansen.

Svava. But you can take a short cut to his house through our park. (Points to the right.)

Alfred. Yes, I know. And as he says it is urgent, and underlines the word

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Svava. you can have my key. Here it is. (Gives it to him.)

Alfred. Thank you, dear, very much.

Svava. Oh, it is only selfishness; we shall have you back again all the sooner.

Alfred. I will stay here till lunch time.

Svava. You will stay here a great deal longer than that. We have a frightful lot to talk about all about yesterday, and

Alfred. Of course we have!

Svava. And lots of other things as well.

Alfred. I have a most important question to ask you.

Svava. Have you?

Alfred. Perhaps you will find the answer by the time I come back.

Svava. It can't be so very difficult, then!

Alfred. Indeed it is. But sometimes you have inspirations.

Svava. What is it?

Alfred. Why did we two not find each other many years ago?

Svava. Because we were not ready for it, of course!

Alfred. How do you know that?

Svava. Because I know that at that time I was quite another girl from what I am now.

Alfred. But there is a natural affinity between those that love one another. I am sure of it. And it was just its much the case at that time, surely?

Svava. We do not feel the natural affinity as long as we are developing on different lines.

Alfred. Have we been doing that? And nevertheless we

Svava. Nevertheless we love one another. Our paths may be as unlike as they please, if only they lead together in the end.

Alfred. To the same way of thinking, you mean?

Svava. Yes, to our being such comrades as we are now.

Alfred. Such true comrades?

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Svava. Such true comrades!

Alfred. Still, it is just at moments like this, when I hold you in my arms as I do now, that I ask myself over and over again why I did not do this long ago.

Svava. Oh, I don't think about that not the least bit! It is the safest place in the world that is what I think!

Alfred. Perhaps before this year it would not have been so.

Svava. What do you mean?

Alfred. I mean well, I mean practically the same as you; that I have not always been the man I am now. But I must hurry away. The letter says it is something urgent. (They cross the room together.)

Svava. One minute won't make any difference, will it? because there is something I must say to you first.

Alfred (standing still). What is it?

Svava. When I saw you standing amongst all the others yesterday, I felt for the first moment as if I did not know you. Some change seemed to have come over you the effect of the others, perhaps anyway you really *were* actually different.

Alfred. Of course. People always are that, among strangers. When you came in with the ladies, it just seemed to me as if I had never observed you carefully before. Besides, there are certain things one cannot know till one sees a person amongst others. It was the first time I realised how tall you are and your way of bending just a tiny bit to one side when you bow to any one. And your colouring! I had never properly seen

Svava. Do be quiet, and let me get a word in!

Alfred. No, no! Here we are, back in the room and I *must* be off now!

Svava. Only just a moment. You interrupted me, you know! When I saw you standing there among the men for the first moment I felt just as if I did not know you. But at the same moment you caught sight of me and nodded. I don't know what sort of a transformation came over us both; but I felt myself blushing as red as fire. And it was some time before I had the courage to look at you again.

Alfred. Well, do you know what happened to me? Every time any one came to dance with you, didn't I envy him! Oh, not at all! To tell you the truth, I cannot bear any one else to touch you. (Clasps her in his arms.) And I have not told you the best part of it yet.

Svava. What is that?

Alfred. That when I see you amongst other people, and catch say a glimpse of your arm, I think to myself: That arm has been round my neck and round no one else's in the whole world! She is mine, mine, mine and no one else's! There, that is the best part of it all! Look here, here we are back again in the room! It is witchcraft! Now I must go. (Crosses the room.) Good-bye! (Lets her go, then catches hold of her again.) Why didn't I find my happiness many years ago? Good-bye!

Svava. I think I will come with you.

Alfred. Yes, do!

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Svava. No, I forgot I must learn this song before father comes back. If I don't learn it now, I expect you will take care I don't do so to-day. (A ring is heard at the front door.)

Alfred. Here is some one coming! Let me get away first. (Hurries out to the right. SVAVA stands waving her hand to him, then turns to the piano. The maid MARGIT enters.)

Margit. A gentleman has called, miss, who wants to know if

Svava. A gentleman? Don't you know who he is?

Margit. No, miss.

Svava. What is he like?

Margit. He looks rather

Svava. Rather suspicious?

Margit. No, far from it, miss a very nice gentleman.

Svava. Tell him my father is not at home; he has gone down to the station.

Margit. I told him so, miss, but it is you he wants to see.

Svava. Ask my mother to come in here! Oh, no, why should she! Let him come in. (MARGIT shows in HOFF, and goes out.)

Hoff. Is it Miss Riis I have the honour to ? Yes, I see it is. My name is Hoff Karl Hoff. I am a commercial traveller travel in iron.

Svava. But what has that to do with me?

Hoff. Just this much, that if I had been an ordinary stay-at-home man, a great many things would not have happened.

Svava. What would not have happened?

Hoff (taking a large pocket-book out of his docket, and extracting a letter from it). Will you condescend to read this? Or perhaps you would rather not?

Svava. How can I tell?

Hoff. Of course, you must first Allow me. (Gives her the letter.)

Svava (reading). To-night between ten and eleven that is to say, if the booby has not come home. I love you so dearly! Put a light in the hall window.

Hoff. The booby is me.

Svava. But I don't understand ?

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Hoff. Here is another.

Svava. I am full of remorse. Your cough frightens me; and now, when you are expecting But what in the world has this to do with me?

Hoff (after a moment's thought). What do you suppose?

Svava. Is it some one you want me to help?

Hoff. No, poor soul, she doesn't need help any more. She is dead.

Svava. Dead? Was she your wife?

Hoff. That's it. She was my wife. I found these and some other things in a little box. At the bottom were these notes there are more of them and some cotton wool on the top of them. On the top of that lay some earrings and things that had been her mother's. And also (producing some bracelets) these bracelets. They are certainly much too costly to have been her mother's.

Svava. I suppose she died suddenly, as she did not

Hoff. I cannot say. Consumptives never think they are going to die. Anyway she was very delicate and weak. May I sit down?

Svava. Please do. Are there any children?

Hoff (after a moment's thought). I believe not.

Svava. You believe not? I asked because I thought you wanted our Society to help you. This really is all very distressful to me.

Hoff. I thought it would be I thought as much. Besides, I am not really sure if I . You cannot understand this, then?

Svava. No, I cannot.

Hoff. No, you cannot.—I have heard so much good spoken of you for many years. My wife used to sing your praises, too.

Svava. Did she know me?

Hoff. She was Maren Tang who used to be companion to

Svava. to Mrs. Christensen, my future mother-in-law? Was it she? She was such a well-bred, quiet woman. Are you sure you are not mistaken? One or two notes, unsigned and undated what?

Hoff. Did you not recognise the handwriting?

Svava. I? No. Besides, isn't it a disguised hand?

Hoff. Yes, but not much disguised.

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Svava. I presume you had some more definite errand with me?

Hoff. Yes, I had but I think I will let it alone. You do not understand anything about this, I can see Perhaps you think I am a little crazy? I am not so sure you would not be right.

Svava. But there was something you wanted to say to me?

Hoff. Yes, there was. You see, these Kindergartens

Svava. Oh, so it was them, all the time?

Hoff. No, it was not them. But they are responsible for my having for a long time thought very highly of you, Miss Riis. If you will excuse my saying so, I had never before seen fashionable young ladies trying to do anything useful never. I am only a little broken-down tradesman travelling for a firm a worthless sort of chap in many ways, and one that very likely deserves what he has got but anyway I wanted you to be spared. Indeed thought it was my duty absolutely my duty. But now when I see you sitting there before me well, now I only I feel miserably unhappy. So I won't trouble you at all (Gets up.) Not at all.

Svava. I really cannot understand

Hoff. Please don't bother about me! And please forgive my disturbing you. No, you really must not give me another thought! Just imagine that I have not been here that is all. (As he reaches the door, he meets ALFRED coming in. As soon as he sees that SVAVA is watching them, he goes hurriedly out. SVAVA sees the meeting between the two and gives a little scream, then rushes to meet ALFRED. But as soon as she is face to face with him, she seems terrified. As he comes nearer to take her in his arms she cries out: Don't touch me! and hurries out by the door on the left. She is heard locking and bolting it on the inside. Then a violent outburst of weeping is heard, the sound being somewhat deadened by the distance, but only for a few moments. Then the sound of singing is heard outside, and a few seconds later RIIS comes into the room. The curtain falls as he enters.)

ACT II

(SCENE. The same as in Act I. SVAVA is lying on the couch to the right, resting her head on one hand, looking out towards the park. Her mother is sitting beside her.)

Mrs. Riis. Decisions as hasty as yours, Svava, are not really decisions at all. There is always a great deal more to be taken into consideration than one realises at first. Take time to think it over! I believe he is a fine fellow. Give him time to show it; don't break it off immediately!

Svava. Why do you keep on saying that to me?

Mrs. Riis. Well, dear, you know I have never had the chance of saying anything to you till to-day.

Svava. But you keep harping on that one string.

Mrs. Riis. What note do you want me to strike, then?

Svava. The note your dear good mother would have struck quite a different one altogether.

Mrs. Riis. It is one thing to teach your child how to make a proper choice in life, but

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Svava. But quite another thing to put into practice what you teach?

Mrs. Riis. No; I was going to say that life itself is quite another thing. In daily life, and especially in married life, it is sometimes advisable to make allowances.

Svava. Yes, on points that do not really matter.

Mrs. Riis. Only on points that do not matter?

Svava. Yes personal peculiarities, and things like that, which after all are only excrescences; but not on points that concern one's moral growth.

Mrs. Riis. Yes, on those points too.

Svava. On those points too? But isn't it just for the sake of our own self-development that we marry? What else should we marry for?

Mrs. Riis. Oh, you will see!

Svava. No, indeed I shall not; because I do not intend to marry on such conditions.

Mrs. Riis. You should have said that sooner. It is too late now.

Svava (sitting upright). Too late? If I had been married twenty years, I would have done just the same! (Lies down again.)

Mrs. Riis. Heaven help you, then! You haven't an idea, not the smallest idea, what a net you are entangled in! But you will find it out, as soon as you begin to struggle in earnest. Or do you really want your father and me to throw away all that we have worked for here? to begin all over again in a foreign country? Because he has repeatedly said, during the last day or two, that he will not be mixed up in the scandal that would be the result of your breaking this off. He would go abroad, and I should have to go with him. Ah, you wince at the thought of that! Think of all your friends, too. It is a serious matter to have been set on such an eminence as you were at your betrothal party. It is like being lifted up high on a platform that others are carrying on their shoulders; take care you do not fall down from it! That is what you will do, if you offend their principles of right behaviour.

Svava. Is that sort of thing a principle of right behaviour?

Mrs. Riis. I do not say that. But undoubtedly, one their principles of right behaviour and perhaps the most important is that all scandal must be avoided. No one relishes being disgraced, Svava particularly the most influential people in a place. And least of all, by a long way, do people relish their own child being disgraced.

Svava (half raising herself). Good Lord! is it *I* that am disgracing him?

Mrs. Riis. No, of course, it is he himself

Svava. Very well, then! (Sinks down upon the couch again.)

Mrs. Riis. But you will never get them to understand that. I assure you, you won't. As long as what he has done is only whispered about in his family and amongst his intimate friends, they don't consider him disgraced at all. There are too many that do just the same. It is only when the knowledge of it becomes common property, that they consider it a disgrace. And if it became known that there was a formal breach between you the Christensens'

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eldest son ignominiously refused because of his past life they would consider it the most shocking scandal that could possibly overtake them! And we should feel the effect of it, in particular. And so would those that are dependent on us and they are not so few in number, as you know, because you have interested yourself in them, particularly in the children. You would have to give up all the interests you have made for Yourself here because you would have to go with us. I am certain your father is in earnest about that.

Svava. Oh! Oh!

Mrs. Riis. I almost wish I could tell you why I am so certain of that. But I cannot at all events not now. No, you must not tempt me to. Here comes your father. Only take time to reflect, Svava! No breaking of it off, no scandal! (RIIS comes in from outside, with an opened letter in his hand.)

Riis. Oh, there you are! (Goes into his room, lays down his hat and stick, and comes out again.) You have taken no serious step yet, I hope eh?

Mrs. Riis. No, but

Riis. Very well. Now here is a letter from the Christensens. If you won't receive either your dance or his letters, you will have to put up with his family's interference in the matter. Everything must come to an end sooner or later. (Reads.) My wife, my son and I will do ourselves the honour of paying you a visit between eleven and twelve o'clock. The only wonder is, that I have not had some such letter before this! I am sure they have been patient enough.

Mrs. Riis. Well, we have got no farther to-day, either.

Riis. What are you thinking of, child? Can't you see what it must all lead to? You are a good-hearted girl, I know I am sure you don't want to ruin us all absolutely? I certainly consider, Svava, that you have acted quite severely enough now in this matter. They have suffered a nasty shock to their self-confidence, both of them; you may be quite sure of that. What more do you want? If you are really determined to carry the matter farther well make your conditions! There is no doubt they will be agreed to.

Svava. For shame! For shame!

Riis (despairingly). What is the use of taking it in this way!

Mrs. Riis. What, indeed! You ought rather to try and make things a bit easier, Svava.

Riis. And you really might condescend, too, to consider who it is that you are throwing over a member of one of the richest families in the country, and, I venture to say, one of the most honourable too. I have never heard of anything so idiotic! Yes, I repeat idiotic, idiotic! What if he have made a false step or two well, good heavens

Svava. Yes, bring heaven into it, too!

Riis. Indeed I well may! There is good need. As I was saying, if he have made a false step, surely the poor fellow has been sufficiently punished for it now. Beside it is certainly our duty to be a little reasonable with one another it is a commandment, you know, that we are to be reasonable and forgiving. We must be forgiving! And more than that, we must help the erring we must raise up the fallen and set them in the right way. Yes, set them in the right way. You could do that so splendidly! It is exactly in your line. You know very well, my dear child, it is very seldom I talk about morals and that sort of thing. It doesn't sit well on me at all; I know that only too well. But on this occasion I cannot help it. Begin with forgiveness, my child; begin with that! After all, can you contemplate living together with anyone for any length of time without without well, without *that*?

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Svava. But there is no question of living with anyone, for any length of time, or of forgiveness because I do not mean to have anything more to do with him.

Riis. Really, this is beyond all bounds! Because he has dared to fall in love with some one before you ?

Svava. Some one?

Riis. Well, if there was more than one, I am sure I know nothing about it. No, indeed I do not! Besides, the way people gossip and backbite is the very devil! But, as I was saying, because he dared to look at some one before he looked at you before he ever *thought* of you is that a reason for throwing him over for good and all? How many would ever get married under those circumstances, I should like to know? Everybody confirms the opinion that he is an honourable, fine young fellow, to whom the proudest girl might confidently entrust herself you said so yourself, only a day or two ago! Do not deny it! And now he is suddenly to be thrown over, because you are not the first girl he has ever met! Pride should have some limits, remember! I have never heard of anything more preposterous, if you ask me.

Mrs. Riis. Men are not like that.

Riis. And what about girls? Are they like that? I am quite sure they do not ask whether their fiances have been married before observe, I said married. You can imagine he has been married. Well, why not? That is what other girls do you cannot deny it. I know you know it. You have been to dances; who are most in request there? Precisely those who have the reputation of being something of a Don Juan. They take the wind out of all the other fellows' sails. You have seen it yourself a hundred times. And it is not only at dances that this applied. Don't you suppose they get married and as a rule make the very best matches?

Mrs. Riis. That is true.

Riis. Of course it is true. And as a rule they make the very best husbands, too!

Mrs. Riis. Hm!

Riis. Oh, indeed they do! with some exceptions, of course, naturally. The fact is, that marriage has an ennobling influence, and provides a beautiful vocation for a woman the most beautiful vocation possible!

Svava (who has got up). I can just manage to listen to such things from you because I expected no better from you.

Riis. Thank you very much!

Svava (who has come forward). One would really think that marriage were a sort of superior wash-house for men

Riis. Ha, ha!

Svava. and that men could come there and take a dip when they please and in what state they please!

Riis. Oh, really !

Svava. I mean it! And it is flattering very flattering for me, as your daughter, to feel that you look upon me as so peculiarly suited for the washerwoman's post! None of that for me, thank you!

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Riis. But this is

Svava. No, just listen to me for a little! I don't think I have said too much, the last day or two.

Riis. No, we have not been allowed to say a word to you.

Svava. Look here, father. You have a fine supply of principles, for show purposes.

Riis. For ?

Svava. I do not mean by that, that they are not your own. But you are so good and so honourable, your whole life is so refined, that I do not attach the least importance to your principles. But to mother's I do attach importance, for hers are what have formed mine. And now just when I want to act up to them, she deserts me.

Riis and Mrs. Riis (together). Svava!

Svava. It is mother I am angry with! It is mother I cannot have patience with!

Riis. Really, Svava !

Svava. Because if there has been one point on which mother and I have been agreed, it has been on the subject of the unprincipled way men prepare themselves for marriage, and the sort of marriages that are the result. We have watched the course of it, mother and I, for many years; and we had come to one and the same conclusion, that it is *before* marriage that a marriage is marred. But when, the other day, mother began to turn round

Mrs. Riis. No, you have no right to say that! I am convinced that Alfred is as honourable

Svava. But when, the other day, mother began to turn round well, I could not have been more amazed if some one had come in and told me they had met her out in the street when she was actually sitting here talking to me.

Mrs. Riis. I only ask you to take time to consider! I am not contradicting you!

Svava. Oh, let me speak now! Let me give you just one instance. One day, before I was really grown up, I came running into this room from the park. We had just bought the property, and I was so happy. Mother was standing over there leaning against the door and crying. It was a lovely summer's day. Why are you crying, mother? I said. For some time she seemed as if she did not see me. Why are you crying, mother? I repeated, and went nearer to her, but did not like to touch her. She turned away from me, and walked up and down once or twice. Then she came to me. My child, she said, drawing me to her, never give in to what is not good and pure, on any account whatever! It is so cowardly, and one repents it so bitterly; it means perpetually giving in, more and more and more. I do not know what she referred to, and I have never asked. But no one can imagine what an effect it all had on me the beautiful summer day, and mother crying, and the heartfelt tones of her voice! I cannot give in; do not ask me to. Everything that made marriage seem beautiful to me is gone my faith, my feeling of security all gone! No, no, no! I can never begin with that, and it is wicked of you to want to make me believe I can. After such a disillusionment and such a humiliation? No! I would rather never be married even if I have to go away from here. I daresay I shall find something to fill my life; it is only for the moment that I am so helpless. And anything is better than to fill it with what is unclean. If I did not refuse that without hesitation, I should be an accomplice to it. Perhaps some people could put up with that. I cannot no, I cannot. Do you think it is arrogance on my part? Or because I am angry? If you knew what we two had planned and schemed, you would understand me. And if you knew what I have thought of him, how I have admired him you did the same yourselves and how wretched I feel now, how utterly robbed of everything! Who is it that is crying? Is it you, mother? (She runs to her mother, kneels down and buries her head in her lap. A pause. RIIS goes into his room.) Why cannot we three

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hold together? If we do, what have we to be afraid of? What is it that stands in the way? Father, what is it that stands in the way? But where is father? (Sees NORDAN outside the window.) Uncle Nordan! This is a surprise! (Hurries across the room, throws herself into NORDAN's arms as he enters, and bursts into tears.)

Nordan. Oh, you goose! You great goose!

Svava. You must come and talk to me!

Nordan. Isn't that what I am here for?

Svava. And I thought you were up in the mountains and could not hear from us.

Nordan. So I was. But when I got telegram after telegram, as long as they could reach me, and then one express letter after another and now the end of it all is well, I don't suppose I dare even mention his name here now? (RIIS comes in from his room.)

Riis. At last! We have been so anxious for you to come!

Mrs. Riis (who has at last risen and come forward). Thank you for coming, dear doctor!

Nordan (looking at her). There is something serious up, then?

Mrs. Riis. I have something I want to say to you.

Nordan. Yes, but just now away you go, you two! Let me talk to this booby. (MRS. RIIS goes out to the left. SVAVA follows her for a minute.)

Riis. I just want to tell you that in a little while

Nordan. the whole pack of Christensens will be here? I know that. Go away now.

Riis. Nordan! (Whispers to him.)

Nordan. Yes, yes! Quite so! No, of course not! (Tries to stop his whispering.) Do you suppose I don't know what I am about? Be off with you! (SVAVA comes in, as her father goes out.)

Svava. Dear Uncle Nordan! At last, somebody that will agree with me!

Nordan. Am I?

Svava. Oh, Uncle Nordan, you don't know what these days have been like!

Nordan. And the nights too, I expect? although, with all that, you don't look so bad.

Svava. The last night or two I have slept.

Nordan. Really? Then I see how things stand. You are a tough customer, you are!

Svava. Oh, don't begin saying a lot of things you don't mean, uncle.

Nordan. Things I don't mean!

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Svava. You always do, you know. But we haven't time for that now. I am all on fire!

Nordan. Well, what is this you have been doing?

Svava. Ah, you see, you are beginning again!

Nordan. Beginning again? Who the devil has put the idea into your head that I ever say anything but what I mean? Come and let us sit down. (Brings a chair forward.)

Svava (bringing her chair close to his). There now!

Nordan. Since I was here last, I believe you have promulgated a brand-new law on the subject of love? I congratulate you.

Svava. Have I?

Nordan. A superhuman, Svava-woven one derived from seraphic heights, I should imagine! There shall be only one love in a man's life, and it shall be directed only to one object. Full stop!

Svava. Have I said anything like that?

Nordan. Is it not you that have thrown over a young man because he has had the audacity to fall in love before he saw you?

Svava. Do you take it in that way, too?

Nordan. In that way? Is there any other way for a sensible man to take it? A fine young fellow honesty, adores you; a distinguished family throw their doors wide open to you, as if you were a princess; and then you turn round and say: You have not waited for me ever since you were a child! Away with you!

Svava (springing up). What, you too! You too! And the same talk! The same stupid talk!

Nordan. I can tell you what it is; if you do not give consideration to everything that can be said on the other side, you are stupid. No, it is no use going away from me and marching up and down! I shall begin and march up and down too, if you do! Come here and sit. Or *daren't* you go thoroughly into the question with me?

Svava. Yes, I dare. (Sits down again.)

Nordan. Well, to begin with, do you not think there must certainly be two sides to a question that is discussed by serious men and women all over the world?

Svava. This only concerns me! And as far as I am concerned there is only one side to it.

Nordan. You do not understand me, child! You shall settle your own affairs ultimately, and nobody else of course. But suppose what you have to settle is not quite so simple as you think it? Suppose it is a problem that at the present moment is exercising the minds of thousands and thousands of people? Do you not think it is your duty to give some consideration to the usual attitude towards it, and to what is generally thought and said about it? Do you think it is conscientious to condemn in a single instance without doing that?

Svava. I understand! I think I have done what you are urging me to do. Ask mother!

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Nordan. Oh, I daresay you and your mother have chattered and read a lot about marriage and the woman question, and about abolishing distinctions of class now you want to abolish distinctions of sex too. But as regards this special question?

Svava. What do you consider I have overlooked?

Nordan. Just this. Are you right in being equally as strict with men as with women? Eh?

Svava. Yes, of course.

Nordan. Is it so much a matter of course? Go out and ask any one you meet. Out of every hundred you ask, ninety will say no even out of a hundred women!

Svava. Do you think so? I think people are beginning to think otherwise.

Nordan. Possibly. But experience is necessary if one is to answer a question like that.

Svava. Do you mean what you say?

Nordan. That is none of your business. Besides, I always mean what I say. A woman can marry when is sixteen; a man must wait till he is five-and-twenty, or thirty. There is a difference.

Svava. There *is* a difference! There are many, many times more unmarried women than men, and they exhibit self-control. Men find it more convenient to make a law of their want of self-control!

Nordan. An answer like that only displays ignorance. Man is a polygamous animal, like many other animals a theory that is very strongly supported by the fact that women so outnumber men in the world. I daresay that is something you have never heard before?

Svava. Yes, I have heard it!

Nordan. Don't you laugh at science! What else we to put faith in, I should like to know?

Svava. I should just like men to have the same trouble over their children that women do! Just let them have that, Uncle Nordan, and I fancy they would soon change their principles! Just let them experience it!

Nordan. They have no time for that; they have to govern the world.

Svava. Yes, they have allotted the parts themselves! Now, tell me this, Dr. Nordan. Is it cowardly not to practise what you preach?

Nordan. Of course it is.

Svava. Then why do you not do it?

Nordan. I? I have always been a regular monster. Don't you know that, dear child?

Svava. Dear Uncle Nordan you have such long white locks; why do you wear them like that?

Nordan. Oh, well I have my reasons.

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Svava. What are they?

Nordan. We won't go into that now.

Svava. You told me the reason once.

Nordan. Did I?

Svava. I wanted, one day, to take hold of your hair, but you would not let me. You said: Do you know why you must not do that? No, I said. Because no one has done that for more than thirty years. Who was it that did it last? I asked. It was a little girl, that you are very like, you answered.

Nordan. So I told you that, did I?

Svava. And she was one of your grandmother's younger sisters, you said to me.

Nordan. She was. It was quite true. And you are like her, my child.

Svava. And then you told me that the year you went to college she was standing beside you one day and caught up some locks of your hair in her fingers. You must never wear your hair shorter than this, she said. She went away, and you went away; and when, one day, you wrote and asked her whether you two did not belong to one another, her answer was yes. And a month later she was dead.

Nordan. She was dead.

Svava. And ever since then you dear, queer old uncle you have considered yourself as married to her. (He nods.) And ever since the evening you told me that and I lay awake a long time, thinking over it I wanted, even when I was quite a young girl, to choose some one I could have perfect confidence in. And then I chose wrong.

Nordan. Did you, Svava?

Svava. Do not ask me any more about that. Then I chose once again, and this time I was certain! For never had truer eyes looked in mine. And how happy we were together! Day after day it always seemed new, and the days were always too short. I dare not think about now. Oh, it is sinful to deceive us so! not deceit in words, it is true, but in letting us give them our admiration and our most intimate confidences. Not in words, no and yet, it is in words; because they accept all we say, and are silent themselves, and by that very fact make our words their own. Our simple-mindedness pleases them as a bit of unspoilt nature, and it is just by means of that that they deceive us. It creates an intimacy between us and an atmosphere of happy give-and-take of jests, which we think can exist only on one presupposition and really it is all a sham. I cannot understand how any one can so treat the one he loves for he did love me!

Nordan. He does love you.

Svava (getting up). But not as I loved him! All these years I have not been frittering away my love. Besides, I have had too high an ideal of what loving and being loved should be; and just for that reason I felt a deep desire to be loved I can say so to you. And when love came, seemed to take all my strength from me; but I felt I should always be safe with him, and so I let him see it and gloried in his seeing it. That is the bitterest part of it to me now because he was unworthy of it. He has said to me: I cannot bear to see any one else touch you! and When I catch a glimpse of your arm, I think to myself that it has been round my neck mine, and no one else's in the world. And I felt proud and happy when he said so, because I thought it was true. Hundreds of times I had imagined some one's saying that to me some day. But I never imagined that the one who would say it would be a

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man who oh, it is disgusting! When I think what it means, it makes me ready to hate him. The mere thought that he has had his arms round me has touched me makes me shudder! I am not laying down rules for any one else, but what I am doing seems to me a matter of course. Every fibre of my being tells me that. I must be left in peace!

Nordan. I see that this is more serious, and goes deeper, than I had any suspicion of. None of them understand it that way, Alfred least of all. He is only hurt distressed and hurt at the thought that you could distrust him.

Svava. I know that.

Nordan. Yes well don't take up such a high and mighty attitude! I assure you that is how it will appear to most people.

Svava. Do you think so? I think people are beginning to think otherwise.

Nordan. Most people will think: Other girls forgive things like that, especially when they love a man.

Svava. There are some that will answer: If she had not loved him, she might have forgiven him.

Nordan. And yet, Svava? and yet?

Svava. But, uncle, do you not understand? I do not know that I can explain it, either; because, to do that, I should have to explain what it is that we read into the face, the character, the manner of the man we love his voice, his smile. That is what I have lost. Its meaning is gone.

Nordan. For a while, yes till you have had a breathing space.

Svava. No, no, no! Do you remember that song of mine, about the beloved one's image? that one always sees it as if it were framed in happiness? Do you remember it?

Nordan. Yes.

Svava. Very well I cannot see it like that any longer. I see it, of course but always with pain. Always! Am I to forgive that, because other girls forgive it? What is that they have loved, these other girls? Can you tell me that? Because what I loved is gone. I am not going to sit down and try to conjure it up in my imagination again. I shall find something else to do.

Nordan. You are embittered now. You have had your ideal thoroughly shattered, and as long as you are smarting from that it is no use reasoning with you. So I will only beg one thing of you one single little thing. But you must promise me to do it?

Svava. If I can.

Nordan. You can. There are things to take into consideration. Ask for time to think it all over!

Svava. Ah! mother has been writing to you!

Nordan. And if she has? Your mother knows what depends upon it.

Svava. What depends upon it? Why do you speak so mysteriously, as if we were not on secure ground? Aren't we? Father talks about giving up this place. Why?

A GAUNTLET

Nordan. I suppose he thinks it will be necessary.

Svava. Father? On grounds of economy?

Nordan. Not in the least! No, but all the gossips in the place will be at you. What you propose to do is a regular challenge, you know.

Svava. Oh, we can stand criticism! Father has some queer principles, you know; but his own life . Surely no one has any doubt about that?

Nordan. Listen to me, my child. You cannot prevent people inventing things. So be careful!

Svava. What do you mean?

Nordan. I mean that you ought to go for a stroll in the park and pull yourself together a little, before the Christensens come. Try to be calm; come in calmly, and request time to think it over. That is all you have to do! They will make no difficulty about that, because they must agree. Nothing has happened yet, and all ways are still open. Do as I ask!

Svava. I *have* thought it over and you will never get me to do anything else.

Nordan. No, no. It is only a matter of form.

Svava. What? You mean something more than that, I know.

Nordan. What an obstinate girl you are! Can you not do it then, let me say, for your mother's sake? Your mother is a good woman.

Svava. What will they think, if I come in and say: Will you not give me time to consider the matter? No, I cannot do that.

Nordan. What will you say, then?

Svava. I would rather say nothing at all. But if I absolutely must say something

Nordan. Of course you must!

Svava. Well, I will go out now and think it over. (Turns to go, but stops.) But what you want can never be.

Nordan. It must be!

Svava (standing by the door). You said just now: Your mother is a good woman. It sounded almost as if you laid stress on the word mother ?

Nordan. Suppose I did?

Svava. Is father not that, too?

Nordan. Your father a good woman?

Svava. Why do you try to turn it off with a joke?

A GAUNTLET

Nordan. Because it is serious, confound it all!

Svava. Can I not believe father ?

Nordan. Hush!

Svava. Father? Is it possible that he too ? Do people say that? (NORDAN does not answer, and does not move.) Shameful! Impossible! I say it is impossible! (Rushes out. RIIS comes in from the right.)

Riis. What is the matter with Svava?

Nordan (coming forward). There was nothing else for it.

Riis. Nothing else for it? What do you mean?

Nordan. No, devil take it! there was nothing else for it.

Riis. Quite so but what?

Nordan. What do you say?

Riis. No, what were you saying ?

Nordan. What was I saying?

Riis. You said there was nothing else for it. You alarm me.

Nordan. Do I? Then you did not hear right. (Moves away from him.)

Riis. Didn't hear right? You were swearing about it too!

Nordan. That I certainly did not.

Riis. Very well then, you didn't. But how did you get on with Svava? Won't you answer me?

Nordan. How did I get on with Svava?

Riis. Why are you so preoccupied? Are things so bad, then?

Nordan. Preoccupied? Why should I be that?

Riis. You ought to know best. I was asking about Svava how you got on with Svava and I think I have the right to know.

Nordan. Look here, Riis.

Riis. Yes? (NORDAN takes him by the arm.) What is it?

Nordan. Did you see Svava?

Riis. Hurrying away out through the park? Yes. My dear chap, what was it?

ACT II

A GAUNTLET

Nordan. It was the Greek tragedy.

Riis. The Greek ?

Nordan. Only the name only the name! Well, you know what the word means, don't you?

Riis. The Greek ?

Nordan. No, no not Greek, but tragedy ?

Riis. Something mournful ?

Nordan. Far from it! Something amusing! It came to Greece with the worship of Dionysus, in whose train there was a goat

Riis (draws his arm away). A goat? What on earth ?

Nordan. Yes, you may well be surprised because it sang!

Riis. Sang?

Nordan. Yes and is still singing, of course! And paints! There are pictures by him in every exhibition. And works in bronze and marble! Wonderful! And such a courtier as he is, too! It is he that designs ball-dresses and arranges entertainments

Riis. Have you gone raving mad?

Nordan. Why do you ask that?

Riis. I am waiting patiently here till you have done talking such damned nonsense! We are accustomed to something of the sort when you are in one of those humours, but to-day I can't understand a blessed word of what you are saying.

Nordan. Don't you, my dear fellow?

Riis. Can you not tell me what my daughter said? Isn't it ridiculous that I cannot get that out of you! Now, briefly and intelligibly, what did she say?

Nordan. Do you want to know?

Riis. He asks that!

Nordan. She said she pitied all the innocent young girls that, generation after generation, disappear

Riis. Where to?

Nordan. That is just it where to? She said: They are brought up in pious ignorance, and finally the unsuspecting creatures are wrapped up in a long white veil that they shall not be able to see distinctly where they are being taken to.

Riis. Now you are talking your mythology again. Am I not to

A GAUNTLET

Nordan. Be quiet! It is your daughter that is speaking. But I will not do that, she said. I will enter confidently into the holy estate of matrimony, and sit down by the hearth in the land of my fathers, and bring up children in the sight of my husband. But he shall be as chaste as I; for otherwise he stains my child's head, when he kisses it, and dishonours me. There, that is what she said, and she looked so splendid as she said it. (A ring is heard at the bell.)

Riis. They are upon us! They are upon us! What in the world is going to happen? We are in a muddle of the most preposterous theories! The whole heathen mythology is buzzing round in my head! (Hurries to the door to meet MR. and MRS. CHRISTENSEN, whom MARGIT is showing in.) I am so happy to see you! so very happy! But your son?

Christensen. We could not get him to come with us.

Riis. I am very sorry! At the same time, I quite understand.

Christensen. I admire the beauty of this place afresh every time I see it, my dear sir!

Mrs. Christensen. This beautiful old park! I wanted once . Oh, good morning, doctor! How are you?

Nordan. So, so!

Riis (to MARGIT). Please tell Mrs. Riis. And oh, there she is. (MRS. RIIS comes in by the door at the left.) And tell Miss Svava.

Nordan. She is out in the park (pointing) out that way. (Exit MARGIT.)

Riis. No, this way! That's right! Go straight on till you find her.

Mrs. Christensen (who meantime has come forward with MRS. RIIS). I have been thinking so much about you the last day or two, my dear! What a tiresome business this is!

Mrs. Riis. Do you mind my asking if you knew anything about it before?

Mrs. Christensen. What is there that a mother and a wife escapes the knowledge of nowadays, my dear! She was in my service, you know. Come here! (Tells MRS. RIIS something in a whisper, ending with something about discovery and dismissal.)

Riis (offering the ladies chairs). Won't you sit down? Oh, I beg your pardon! I did not see . (Hurries to CHRISTENSEN.) Excuse me, but are you really comfortable in that chair?

Christensen. Thank you, I am just as uncomfortable here as anywhere else. It is the sitting down and getting up again that bothers me more than anything else. (Looks round.) I have just been to see him.

Riis. Hoff?

Christensen. Honest fellow. Stupid.

Riis. So long as he holds his tongue

Christensen. He'll do that.

A GAUNTLET

Riis. Thank heaven for that! Then we have only ourselves to consider. I suppose it cost you a bit?

Christensen. Not a penny!

Riis. You got out of it cheap, then.

Christensen. Yes, didn't I? Still, as a matter of fact, he has cost me quite enough already although he knows nothing about that.

Riis. Indeed? When he failed, I suppose.

Christensen. No, when he married.

Riis. Oh, I understand.

Christensen. And I didn't think I should hear any more about it after that. You ladies seem to be having a fine game of whispering! (MRS. CHRISTENSEN comes forward. RIIS places chairs for her and his wife.)

Mrs. Christensen. I was telling Mrs. Riis about the Miss Tang affair. She really seems to have risen from her grave!

Christensen. Is your daughter at home, may I ask?

Riis. I have sent to fetch her.

Mrs. Christensen. I hope the last few days have taught her a lesson too, poor girl! She suffers from a fault that unusually clever people are very liable to I mean self-righteousness.

Riis. Exactly! You are perfectly right! But I should call it arrogance!

Mrs. Christensen. I should not like to say that but presumption, perhaps.

Mrs. Riis. Why do you say that, Mrs. Christensen?

Mrs. Christensen. Because of various conversations I have had with her. I was speaking to her once about a man's being his wife's master. In these days it is a good thing to impress that on young girls.

Christensen. Yes, indeed!

Mrs. Christensen. And when I reminded her of certain words of St. Paul's, she said: Yes, it is behind those bars that we women are still shut up. Then I knew that something would happen. Pride goes before a fall, you know.

Christensen. Oh, come, come! That won't do at all! Your chain of reasoning isn't sound!

Mrs. Christensen. How?

Christensen. It is not. Because in the first place it was not Miss Riis that fell, but your precious son. And in the second place his fall was not a consequence of Miss Riis's pride, because of course it happened many years before Miss Riis showed any of her pride. So that if you knew that his fall would happen as a consequence of Miss Riis's pride, you knew something that you certainly did not know.

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Christensen. Oh, you are making fun of me!

Christensen. I ought to be at a committee meeting punctually at one. May I ask what has become of your daughter?

Riis. Indeed I am really beginning to wonder (During the foregoing, NORDAN has remained in the background, sometimes in the room and sometimes outside in the park. MARGIT now goes fast the window outside, and NORDAN is heard speaking to her.)

Nordan. Have you only just found her?

Margit. No, sir I have been down once already to take Miss Riis her hat, gloves and parasol.

Nordan. Is she going out?

Margit. I don't know, sir. (Goes out.)

Christensen. Dear me!

Riis. What does it mean? (Turns to go and fetch her.)

Nordan. No, no! Do not you go!

Mrs. Riis. I expect I had better go

Riis. Yes, you go!

Nordan. No, I will go. I am afraid I am responsible for . (As he goes) I'll answer for it I will bring her back!

Christensen. Dear me!

Mrs. Christensen (getting up). I am afraid, my dear Mrs. Riis, we have come at an inconvenient time for your daughter?

Riis. Ah, you must be lenient with her! I assure you it is these high-flown ideas this reading, that her mother has not been nearly firm enough in keeping her from.

Mrs. Riis. I? What are you talking about?

Riis. I say that this is a very important moment! And at moments like this one sees very clearly, very well, that is what happens!

Christensen. Your husband, Mrs. Riis, has suddenly had the same sort of revelation as our parson had lately I should say, my wife's parson. It was one day just after dinner after an extremely good dinner, by the way a moment when a man often has very bright ideas. We were talking about all the things a woman has to learn now, as compared with the old days, and how some people say it is mere waste of time because she will forget it all again when she marries. Yes, said parson, looking very pleased, my wife has completely forgotten how to spell; I hope she will soon forget how to write, too!

Mrs. Christensen. You imitate people so well, that one cannot help laughing although it isn't right. (CHRISTENSEN looks at his watch.)

A GAUNTLET

Riis. It doesn't look as if they were coming back? Will you go, or shall I?

Mrs. Riis (getting up). I will go. But you could not expect them already

Riis (coming close up to her and speaking in an undertone). This is your doing! I see it clearly!

Mrs. Riis. I do not think you know what you are saying. (Goes out.)

Riis (coming forward). I really must apologise most humbly! It is the last thing I should ever have expected of Svava because I pride myself that the obligations of courtesy have never been disregarded in my house before.

Mrs. Christensen. Perhaps something has happened?

Riis. I beg your pardon? Good heavens!

Mrs. Christensen. Oh, do not misunderstand me! I only mean that young girls are so easily agitated, and then they do not like to show themselves.

Riis. All the same, Mrs. Christensen, all the same! At such a moment as this, too! You really must excuse me, I shall have no peace till I find out for myself what has happened! (Hurries out.)

Christensen. If Alfred had been here, I suppose he would have been running about all over the park after these females, too.

Mrs. Christensen. Really, my dear!

Christensen. Aren't we alone?

Mrs. Christensen. Yes, but still !

Christensen. Well, I say, as a certain famous man said before me: What the devil was he doing in that galley?

Mrs. Christensen. Do have a moment's patience! It is really necessary.

Christensen. Bah! Necessary! Riis is more afraid of a rupture than any of us. Did you see him just now?

Mrs. Christensen. Yes, of course I did, but

Christensen. She has already gone much farther than she has any right to.

Mrs. Christensen. So Alfred thinks, too.

Christensen. Then he should have been here now, to say so. I asked him to come.

Mrs. Christensen. He is in love, and that makes a man a little timid.

Christensen. Nonsense!

Mrs. Christensen. Oh, that passes off when one is in love as often as you are. (Gets up.) Here they come! No, not Svava.

A GAUNTLET

Christensen. Is she not with them?

Mrs. Christensen. I don't see her.

Riis (appearing at the door). Here they are!

Mrs. Christensen. And your daughter too?

Riis. Yes, Svava too. She asked the others to go on ahead of her. I expect she wanted to collect herself a little.

Mrs. Christensen (sitting down again). Ah, you see, it was just what I thought, poor child!

Mrs. Riis (coming in). She will be here in a moment! (Goes up to MRS. CHRISTENSEN.) You must forgive her, Mrs. Christensen; she has had a bad time of it.

Mrs. Christensen. Bless my soul, of course I understand that! The first time one has an experience of this kind, it tells on one.

Christensen. This is positively beginning to get amusing!

[Enter NORDAN.]

Nordan. Here we are! She asked me to come on little ahead of her.

Riis. She is not going to keep us waiting any longer, I hope?

Nordan. She was just behind me.

Riis. Here she is! (Goes to the door to meet her; NORDAN and MRS. RIIS do the same from the other side of the room.)

Christensen. One would think she were the Queen of Sheba.

(SVAVA comes in, wearing her hat, and with her gloves and parasol in her hand. CHRISTENSEN and MRS. CHRISTENSEN get up from their seats. She bows slightly to them, and comes to the front of the stage on the right-hand side. All sit down in silence. NORDAN is at the extreme left, then MRS. RIIS, MRS. CHRISTENSEN and CHRISTENSEN. At the extreme right, but a little behind the others, is RIIS, who is sitting down one minute and standing the next.)

Mrs. Christensen. My dear Svava, we have come here to well, you know what we have come for. What has happened has distressed us very much; but what is done cannot be undone. None of us can excuse Alfred. But all the same we think that he might be granted forgiveness, especially at the hands of one who must know that he loves her, and loves her sincerely. That makes it a different matter altogether, of course.

Christensen. Of course!

Riis. Of course!

Nordan. Of course!

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Christensen. And, even if you don't quite agree with me about that, I hope you will agree with me about Alfred himself. I mean to say, that we consider his character, my dear Svava, should vouch to you for his fidelity. I know that, if you require it, he will give you his word of honour that

Mrs. Riis (getting up). No! No!

Mrs. Christensen. What is the matter, my dear Mrs. Riis?

Mrs. Riis. No words of honour! He has to take an oath when he marries, anyway.

Nordan. But surely two make it all the safer, Mrs. Riis?

Mrs. Riis. No, no! No oath! (Sits down again.)

Christensen. I was struck with our friend Dr. Nordan's remark. Tell me, my dear sir, do you also take it for granted that the sort of thing my son has done ought to be an absolute bar to marriage with an honourable woman?

Nordan. Quite the contrary! I am quite sure it never prevents any one getting married and remarkably well married. It is only Svava that is behaving in an extraordinary manner in every respect.

Mrs. Christensen. I would not go so far as to say that; but there is one thing that Svava has overlooked. She is acting as if she were free. But she is not by any means free. A betrothal is equivalent to a marriage; at any rate, I am old-fashioned enough to consider it so, And the man to whom I have given my hand is thereby made my master and given authority over me, and I owe to him as to a superior authority my respect, whether he act well or ill. I cannot give him notice, or run away from him.

Riis. That is old-fashioned and sensible. I thank you heartily, Mrs. Christensen!

Nordan. And I too!

Mrs. Riis. But if it is too late after the betrothal . (Checks herself.)

Mrs. Christensen. What do you mean, dear Mrs. Riis?

Mrs. Riis. Oh, nothing nothing at all.

Nordan. Mrs. Riis means that if it is too late after the betrothal, why do people not speak out before they are betrothed?

Riis. What a thing to say!

Christensen. Well, it wouldn't be such a bad thing, would it? I imagine proposals in future being worded somewhat in this way: My dear Miss So-and-So, up to date I have had such and such a number of love affairs that is to say, so many big ones and so many little ones. Don't you think it would be a capital way to lead the conversation on to

Nordan. to assuring her that she is the only one you have ever loved?

Christensen. Well, not exactly that, but

Riis. Here comes Alfred!

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Riis. Alfred?

Mrs. Christensen. Yes, it really is he!

Riis (who has gone to the door to meet ALFRED). Ah, that is right! We are so glad you have come!

Christensen. Well, my boy?

Alfred. When it came to the point, I could not do anything else I had to come here.

Christensen. I quite agree with you.

Riis. Yes, it was only the natural thing to do. (ALFRED comes forward and bows respectfully to SVAVA. She bows slightly, but without looking at him. He steps back again.)

Nordan. Good morning, my boy!

Alfred. Perhaps I have come at an inconvenient moment.

Riis. Not a bit of it! Quite the contrary!

Alfred. At the same time, it seems evident to me that my presence is not welcome to Miss Riis. (No one answers him.)

Mrs. Christensen. But it is a family council we are holding isn't it, my dear girl?

Riis. I assure you, you *are* welcome! And we are all particularly anxious to hear what you have to say!

Christensen. That is so.

Alfred. I have not succeeded in getting a hearing yet, you know. I have been refused admittance repeatedly both in person and when I wrote. So I thought that if I came now, perhaps I should get a hearing.

Riis. Of course. Who can object to that?

Nordan. You shall have your hearing.

Alfred. Perhaps I may take Miss Riis's silence to mean permission? In that case well it is nothing so very much that I have to say, either. It is merely to remind you that, when I asked for Miss Riis's hand, it was because I loved her with all my heart her and no one else. I could not imagine any greater happiness, and any greater honour, than to be loved by her in return. And so I think still. (He pauses, as if he expected an answer. They all look at SVAVA.) What explanation I could have given of my own free will indeed what explanation, under other circumstances, I should have felt impelled to give I shall say nothing about now. But I *owe* no explanation! My honour demands that I should make point of that. It is my future that I owe to her. And with regard to that I must confess I have been hurt deeply hurt by the fact that Miss Riis could doubt me for a moment. Never in my life has any one doubted me before. With all respect, I must insist that my word shall be taken. (They are all silent.) That is all I have to say.

Mrs. Riis (getting up unwillingly). But, Alfred, suppose a woman, under the same circumstances, had come and said the same thing who would believe her? (They are all silent. SVAVA bursts into tears.)

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Christensen. Poor child!

Riis. Believe her?

Mrs. Riis. Yes, believe her. Believe her if, after past like that, she came and assured us that she would make an honest wife?

Christensen. After a past like that?

Mrs. Riis. Perhaps that is putting it too harshly. But why should you require her to believe a man any more readily than a man would believe her? Because he would not believe her for a moment.

Riis (coming up behind her). Are you absolutely mad?

Christensen (half rising). Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen; the two young people must settle the affair now! (Sits down again.)

Alfred. I must confess I have never thought of what Mrs. Riis has just said, because such a thing never could happen. No man of honour would choose a woman of whose past he was not certain. Never!

Mrs. Riis. But what about a woman of honour, Alfred?

Alfred. Ah, that is quite different.

Nordan. To put it precisely: a woman owes a man both her past and her future; a man owes a woman only his future.

Alfred. Well, if you like to put it that way yes.

Nordan (to SVAVA, as he gets up). I wanted you to postpone your answer, my child. But now I think you ought to answer at once. (SVAVA goes up to ALFRED, flings her glove in his face, and goes straight into her room. ALFRED turns and looks after her. RIIS disappears into his room on the right. Every one has risen from their seats. MRS. CHRISTENSEN takes ALFRED by the arm and goes out with him; CHRISTENSEN follows them. MRS. RIIS is standing at the door of the room which SVAVA has locked after her.)

Nordan. That was throwing down a gauntlet, if you like!

Mrs. Riis (calling through the door). Svava!

Christensen (coming in and speaking to NORDAN, who has taken no notice of him and has not turned round). Then it is to be war? Well, I fancy I know a thing or two about war. (Goes out. NORDAN turns round and stands looking after him.)

Mrs. Riis (still at the door). Svava! (RIIS comes rushing out of his room, with his hat on and his gloves and stick in his hand, and follows the CHRISTENSENS.) Svava!

ACT III

A GAUNTLET

SCENE I

(SCENE. DR. NORDAN'S garden, behind his neat one-story house. He is sitting on a chair in the foreground reading. His old servant, THOMAS, opens the door and looks out.)

Thomas. Doctor!

Nordan. What is it? (ALFRED comes into sight in the doorway.) Oh, it is you! (Gets up.) Well, my boy? You don't look up to much!

Alfred. No, but never mind that. Can you give me a bit of breakfast?

Nordan. Have you had no breakfast yet? Have you not been home then? not been home all night? not since yesterday? (Calls) Thomas!

Alfred. And when I have had something to eat, may I have a talk with you?

Nordan. Of course, my dear boy. (To THOMAS, who has come out of the house) Get some breakfast laid in that room, please (pointing to a window on the left).

Alfred. And may I have a wash too?

Nordan. Go with Thomas. I will be with you directly. (ALFRED and THOMAS go into the house. Then a carriage is heard stopping outside.) There is a carriage. Go and see who it is, Thomas. I won't see any patients! I am going away to-morrow.

Thomas. It is Mr. Christensen. (Goes into the house again.)

Nordan. Oho! (Goes to the window on the left.) Alfred!

Alfred (coming to the window). Yes?

Nordan. It is your father! If you do not want to be seen, pull down the blind. (The blind is dulled dawn.)

Thomas (showing in CHRISTENSEN). Will you come this way please, sir. (CHRISTENSEN is in court dress protected by a dustcoat, and wears the cross of a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Olaf.)

Christensen. I hope I do not disturb you, doctor?

Nordan. Not at all! In full dress! I congratulate you.

Christensen. Yes, we newly-fledged knights have to go to Court to-day. But do you mind if I spend a minute or two here with you before I go on to the palace? Any news from over there? From the Riis's?

Nordan. No. They are sitting waiting for the war to begin, I expect.

Christensen. They shall not have to wait long, then! I have made up my mind to begin it to-day. Has she come to her senses, by any chance? Women usually feel things like that very acutely. But they usually get over it, too.

Nordan. I do not think so. But I bow before your experience.

A GAUNTLET

Christensen. Thank you! I should think that, as an old hand at playing the buffer in family jars, you had a much greater experience. Yesterday she was like an electric eel! And she gave her shock, too! The boy has not been home since. I am almost glad of that; it shows he has some sense of shame. I was beginning to doubt it.

Nordan. It is the coming war that interests me.

Christensen. Oh, you are anxious to see that, are you? Very well. As a matter of fact there is no need to draw up a plan of campaign. That affair of Mrs. North's can be taken up again any day, my dear fellow! It is in the hands of the bank, you know.

Nordan. But what has that to do with your son engagement?

Christensen. What has it to do with it? Miss Riis gives my son his dismissal because she cannot tolerate his conduct before marriage. Her own father indulges in the same sort of conduct when he is well on in married life! Tableau vivant tres curieux! to use a language Mr. Riis is very fond of.

Nordan. It is a shame to talk like that because your son is the only one to blame in this matter.

Christensen. My son is not in the least to blame in the matter! He has not done the slightest thing that could harm or discredit the Riis's not the slightest thing! He is a man of honour, who has given Miss Riis his promise and has kept it. Will any one dare to contradict that? Or to suggest that he will not keep his promise? If any one doubts him, it is an insult. Dr. Nordan! In this matter the alternatives are either an apology and peace or war. For I am not going to put up with this sort of thing; and if my son puts up with it, I shall despise him.

Nordan. Oh, I quite believe your son had every honourable intention when he gave his promise. And very likely he would have kept it, too; I cannot say for certain, because I have learnt to doubt. I am a doctor I have seen too much and he did not appear to great advantage yesterday. You really must forgive my saying so but after the liveliness of his young days, coupled with the tendencies he has inherited, do you think he really had any right to be surprised if people doubted him? if his fiancee doubted him? Had he really any right to feel insulted, or to demand apologies? Apologies for what? For having doubted his virtue? Just consider that!

Christensen. Why, what ?

Nordan. One moment! I was only half done. You said something about a reconciliation, you know; of course by that you meant a marriage. If your son is willing to marry a woman who distrusts him, then I shall despise him.

Christensen. Really !

Nordan. Yes, indeed I shall. Our opinions are as different as all that. To my way of thinking, your son's only course is to submit and wait; to keep silence, and wait always supposing, of course, that he still loves her. That is my view of it.

Christensen. Well, I imagine that there are very few candidates for matrimony who have not been guilty of what my son has been guilty of; indeed, I am sure of it. And I imagine, too, that they have the same unfortunate hereditary tendencies an expression on which you laid stress out of special friendship for me. But is that any reason why girls who are betrothed should behave as Miss Riis has been doing? scream, and run away, and create a scandal? We should not be able to hear ourselves speak! It would be the queerest sort of anarchy the world has ever seen! Why, such doctrines as that are contrary to the very nature and order of things! They are mad! And when, into the bargain, they are thrown at our heads as if they were decisions of a High Court of Morality well, then I strike! Good-bye! (Starts to go, but turns back.) And who is it that these High Court of Morality's decisions would for the most part affect, do you suppose? Just the ablest and most vigorous of our young men. Are we

A GAUNTLET

going to turn them out and make a separate despised caste of them? And what things would be affected, do you suppose? A great part of the world's literature and art; a great part of all that is loveliest and most captivating in the life of to-day; the world's greatest cities, most particularly those wonders of the world teeming with their millions of people! Let me tell you this: the life that disregards marriage or loosens the bonds of marriage, or transforms the whole institution you know very well what I mean the life that is accused of using the weapons of seduction in its fashions, its luxury, its entertainments, its art, its theatre that life is one of the most potent factors in these teeming cities, one of the most fruitful sources of their existence! No one who has seen it can have any doubt about it, however ingenuous he may pretend to be. Are we to wish to play havoc with all that too? to disown the flower of the world's youth, and ruin the world's finest cities? It seems to me that people wish to do so much in the name of morality, that they end by wishing to do what would be subversive of all morality.

Nordan. You are certainly embarking on your little war in the true statesmanlike spirit!

Christensen. It is nothing but sound common-sense, my dear sir; that is all that is necessary, I am sure. I shall have the whole town on my side, you may be certain of that!

Thomas (appearing at the house door). Doctor!

Nordan (turning round). Is it possible! (Hurries to the doorway, in which MRS. RIIS appears.)

Mrs. Riis. May I ?

Nordan. Of course! Will you come out here?

Mrs. Riis (to CHRISTENSEN, who bows to her). My visit is really to you, Mr. Christensen.

Christensen. I am honoured.

Mrs. Riis. I happened to look out into the street just as your carriage stopped and you got out. So I thought I would seize the opportunity because you threatened us yesterday, you know. Is that not so? You declared war against us?

Christensen. My recollection of it is that war was declared, Mrs. Riis, but that I merely accepted the challenge.

Mrs. Riis. And what line is your campaign going to take, if I may ask the question?

Christensen. I have just had the honour of explaining my position to the doctor. I do not know whether it would be gallant to do as much to you.

Nordan. I will do it, then. The campaign will be directed against your husband. Mr. Christensen takes the offensive.

Mrs. Riis. Naturally! because you know you can strike at him. But I have come to ask you to think better of it.

Christensen (with a laugh). Really?

Mrs. Riis. Once many years ago now I took my child in my arms and threatened to leave my husband. Thereupon he mentioned the name of another man, and shielded himself behind that for it was a distinguished name. See how lenient that man's wife is, he said. And, because she is so, all her friends are lenient, and that will be all the better for their child. Those were his words.

A GAUNTLET

Christensen. Well, as far as the advice they implied was concerned, it was good advice and no doubt you followed it.

Mrs. Riis. The position of a divorced woman is a very humiliating one in the eyes of the world, and the daughter of such a woman fares very little better. The rich and distinguished folk who lead the fashion take care of that.

Christensen. But what ?

Mrs. Riis. That is my excuse for not having the courage to leave him. I was thinking of my child's future. But it is my husband's excuse, too; because he is one of those who follows the example of others.

Christensen. We all do that, Mrs. Riis.

Mrs. Riis. But it is the leaders of society that set the example, for the most part; and in this matter they set a tempting one. I suppose I can hardly be mistaken in thinking that I have heard your view of this matter, all along, through my husband's mouth? Or, if I am mistaken in that, I at all events surely heard it more accurately yesterday, when I heard your voice in everything that your son said?

Christensen. I stand by every word of what my son said.

Mrs. Riis. I thought so. This campaign of yours will really be a remarkable one! I see your influence in everything that has happened, from first to last. You are the moving spirit of the whole campaign on both sides!

Nordan. Before you answer, Christensen may I ask you, Mrs. Riis, to consider whether you want to make the breach hopelessly irreparable? Do you mean to make a reconciliation between the young people quite impossible?

Mrs. Riis. It is impossible, as it is.

Nordan. Why?

Mrs. Riis. Because all confidence is destroyed.

Nordan. More so now than before?

Mrs. Riis. Yes. I will confess that up to the moment. When Alfred's word of honour was offered yesterday up to the moment when he demanded that his word of honour should be believed I did not recognise the fact that it was my own story over again. But it was word for word my own story! That was just the way we began; who will vouch for it that the sequel would not be the same as in our case?

Christensen. My son's character will vouch for that, Mrs. Riis!

Mrs. Riis. Character? A nice sort of character a man is likely to develop who indulges in secret and illicit courses from his boyhood! That is the very way faithlessness is bred. If any one wants to know the reason why character is such a rare thing, I think they will find the answer in that.

Christensen. A man's youth is by no means the test of his life. That depends on his marriage.

Mrs. Riis. And why should a man's faithlessness disappear when he is married? Can you tell me that?

Christensen. Because then he loves, of course.

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Riis. Because he loves? But do you mean that he has not loved before then? How absolutely you men have blinded yourselves! No, love is not the least likely to be lasting when the will is vitiated. And that is what it is vitiated by the life a bachelor leads.

Christensen. And yet I know plenty of sensual men who have strong wills.

Mrs. Riis. I am not speaking of strength of will, but of purity, faithfulness, nobility of will.

Christensen. Well, if my son is to be judged by any such nonsensical standard as that, I am devoutly thankful he has got out of the whole thing before it became serious indeed I am! Now we have had enough of this. (Prepares to go.)

Mrs. Riis. As far as your son is concerned . (Turns to NORDAN.) Doctor, answer me this, so that his father may hear it before he goes. When you refused to go with us to the betrothal party, had you already heard some thing about Alfred Christensen? Was what you had heard of such a nature that you felt you could not trust him?

Nordan (after a moment's thought). Not altogether, certainly.

Mrs. Riis (to CHRISTENSEN). There, you hear! But will you let me ask you this, doctor: why did you not say so? Good God, why did you not speak?

Nordan. Listen to me, Mrs. Riis. When two young people, who after all are suited to one another for they are that, are they not?

Christensen. They are that, I admit.

Nordan. When all of a sudden they fall madly in love with one another, what are you to do?

Christensen. Oh, rake up all sorts of stories and exaggerations create a scandal!

Nordan. Indeed, I must confess what as a matter of fact I have said that I have become accustomed to things not being exactly as they should be in that respect. I looked upon these young people's engagement in the same light as I have looked on others on most others that is cruel to say, as a lottery. It might turn out well; on the other hand it might turn out very badly.

Mrs. Riis. And you were willing to risk my daughter, whom you are so fond of for I know you are fond of her in a lottery? Could one possibly have a clearer proof of the real state of things?

Nordan. Yes, certainly! You yourself, Mrs. Riis what did you do?

Mrs. Riis. I ?

Christensen. Bravo!

Nordan. You knew what Hoff had said and more too. (CHRISTENSEN laughs quietly.) Nevertheless you helped your husband, if not actually to try and get her to overlook it, at all events to smooth things over.

Christensen. Bravo!

Nordan. And you called in my help to induce her to take time to think it over.

A GAUNTLET

Christensen. Mothers observe a considerable difference between theory and practice in these matters, I notice.

Nordan. It was only when I saw how deeply it affected Svava what a horror she had of it that my eyes were opened. And the longer I listened to her, the more sympathy I felt for her; for I was young myself once and loved. But that was such a long time ago and I have grown tired

Mrs. Riis (who has sat down at the little table). My God!

Nordan. Yes, Mrs. Riis. Let me tell you candidly it is the mothers, and no one else, that by degrees have made me callous. Mothers look upon the whole thing so callously. The fact is that as a rule they know what is what.

Christensen. That they do, the dear creatures! And Mrs. Riis is no exception to the rule. You must admit, my dear madam, that you did all you could to hold on to a young man who had had a lively past? Not to mention the fact that this same young man had an extremely good social position a thing I only allude to incidentally.

Nordan. Exactly. Rather than not give their daughters a prospect of what they call a good marriage they straightway forget all that they have suffered themselves.

Mrs. Riis. You see, we do not know that it will turn out the same in their case.

Nordan. You don't know it?

Mrs. Riis. No, I tell you that I did not think so! We believe that the man our daughter is going to marry is so much better. We believe that in their case there are stronger guarantees that the circumstances are altogether different. It is so! It is a kind of illusion that takes hold of us.

Christensen. When there is a prospect of a good marriage, yes! I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Riis for the first time. Moreover, I think there is another side to it. Isn't it possible that women have not suffered so much after all from the fact that men are men? What? I fancy the suffering has been more acute than serious something like sea-sickness; when it is over well, it is over. And so when it is the daughters' turn to go on board, the dear mothers think: Oh, they will be able to get over it too! Only let us get them off! For they are so anxious to get them off, that is the truth!

Mrs. Riis (getting up and coming forward). Well, if it is so, surely it is nothing to make fun of! It only shows what a woman can sink to, from living with a man.

Christensen Indeed!

Mrs. Riis. Yes because each generation of women is endowed with a stronger and stronger aspiration for a pure life. It results unconsciously from the maternal instinct, and is intended as a protection for the defenceless. Even worthless mothers feel that. But if they succumb in spite of it, and each generation of married women in its turn sinks as deep as you say, the reason of it can only be the privilege that men enjoy as part of their education.

Christensen. What privilege?

Mrs. Riis. That of living as they please when they are bachelors, and then having their word of honour believed in when they choose to enter the married state. As long as women are powerless to put an end to that horrible privilege or to make themselves independent of it, so long will one half of the world continue to be sacrificed on account of the other half on account of the other half's lack of self-control. That one privilege turns out to be more powerful than all the striving for liberty in the world. And that is not a laughing matter.

A GAUNTLET

Christensen. You are picturing to yourself a different world from this, and different natures from ours, Mrs. Riis. And that if you will excuse my saying so is obviously all the answer that is necessary to what you say.

Mrs. Riis. Well, then, give that answer openly! Why do you not openly acknowledge that as your standpoint?

Christensen. But don't we?

Mrs. Riis. No not here, at all events. On the contrary, you range yourselves ostensibly under our banner, while all the time you are secretly betraying it. Why have you not the courage to unfurl your own? Let these bachelor customs of yours be sanctioned as entirely suitable then we should be able to join issue with you. And then every innocent bride would be able to know what it is she is entering upon and in what capacity.

Nordan. That would be simply nothing more or less than abolishing marriage.

Mrs. Riis. Would not that be more honest, too? Because now it is only being corrupted, long before it begins.

Christensen. Oh, of course it is all the men's fault! It is the fashion to say that now it is part of the struggle for freedom. Down with man's authority, of course!

Mrs. Riis. The authority his bachelor life has won for him!

Nordan. Ha, ha!

Mrs. Riis. Do not let us cover up the real issue with phrases! Let us rather speak of the desolate hearth that the poet writes of. Marriage laid in ruins is what he means by that; and what is the cause of it? What is the cause of the chilly, horrible commonplace of every-day life sensual, idle, brutish? I could paint it even more vividly, but I will not. I will refrain, for instance, from bringing up the subject of hereditary disease. Let the question be thrashed out openly! Then perhaps a fire will be kindled and our consciences stirred! It must become the most momentous question in every home. That is what is needed!

Christensen. Our conversation has soared to such heights that it really seems quite an anti-climax for me to say that I must go to a higher place ! but you must excuse me all the same.

Mrs. Riis. I hope I have not delayed you?

Christensen. No, there is plenty of time. I am only longing fervently you really must not be offended to get away from here.

Mrs. Riis. To your equals?

Christensen. What a remarkable thing that you should remind me of them! And, by the way, that reminds me that I am scarcely likely to meet you or your family in future.

Mrs. Riis. No. Our acquaintance with you is at an end.

Christensen. Thank God for that! All I hope now is that I shall succeed in apportioning the ridicule with some degree of justice.

Mrs. Riis. You need only publish your autobiography!

A GAUNTLET

Christensen. No I think it should rather be your family principles, madam! They are really very quaint. And when I relate the manner in which they are put into practice by yourselves, I rather think that people will be quite sufficiently amused. To speak seriously for a moment I mean to attack your husband's reputation in private and in public, until he quits the town. I am not the sort of man to accept a humiliation like this without returning the compliment. (Turns to go.)

Nordan. This is shocking!

Alfred (appearing in the doorway of the house). Father!

Christensen. You here? How ill you look, my boy! Where have you been?

Alfred. I came here at the same time as you did, and have heard everything. Let me tell you this at once, that if you take another step against the Riis's, I shall go round and tell every one the reason why Miss Riis threw me over. I shall tell them exactly what it was. Oh, it is no use looking at me with that mocking expression! I shall do it and at once, too.

Christensen. I think you may spare yourself the trouble. The gossip about a broken engagement will get all over the town quicker than you could spread it.

Nordan (going up to ALFRED). One word, my boy do you still love her?

Alfred. Do you ask that because she has been unjust to me? Well, now I know quite well what led to it and inevitably led to it. I understand now!

Christensen. And forgive her? Without anything more?

Alfred. I love her more than ever whatever she thinks of me!

Christensen. Well, upon my word! What next, I should like to know? You claim your right to resume the role of lover, and leave us and other honest folk to put the best face we can on the muddle you have made! I suppose you are going across the road now to tell her how much you enjoyed yourself yesterday? or to ask for a respite till to-morrow, to give you time to pass decently through a process of purification? May I ask where you are going to find it and what it is going to consist of? Oh, don't look so melodramatic! If you can put up with what you got from Riis's girl yesterday and her mother to-day, surely you can put up with a little angry talk or a little chaff from your father. I have had to put up with the whole affair the betrothal and the breaking it off as well! And then to be sprinkled with essence of morality into the bargain! Good Lord! I hope at least I shall not smell of it still when I get to the palace. (Goes towards the house, but turns back at the door.) You will find some money in the office to pay for a trip abroad. (Exit.)

Nordan. Does that mean banishment?

Alfred. Of course it does. (Appears very much agitated.)

Mrs. Riis. Doctor, you must come over to our house with me and at once!

Nordan. How is she?

Mrs. Riis. I don't know.

Nordan. You don't know?

SCENE I

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Riis. She wanted to be alone yesterday. And to-day she went out early.

Nordan. Has anything happened, then?

Mrs. Riis. Yes. You told me yesterday that you had given her a hint about her father.

Nordan. Well?

Mrs. Riis. And so I felt that it could not be concealed any longer.

Nordan. And you have ?

Mrs. Riis. I have written to her.

Nordan. Written?

Mrs. Riis. It seemed the easiest way and we should escape talking about it. All yesterday afternoon and last night I was writing, and tearing it up, and writing again writing writing! It was not a long letter, when all was done, but it took it out of me.

Nordan. And has she had the letter?

Mrs. Riis. When she had had her breakfast this morning and gone out, I sent it after her. And now, my dear friend, I want to beg you to go and have a talk with her then you can let me know when I may go to her. Because I am frightened! (Hides her face in her hands.)

Nordan. The moment you came I saw something serious had happened. You argued so vehemently, too. Well, matters have developed, and no mistake!

Mrs. Riis. You mustn't go away, doctor! Don't go away from her now!

Nordan. Oh, that is it, is it? Thomas!

[Enter THOMAS.]

Thomas. Yes, sir.

Nordan. You need not pack my things.

Thomas. Not pack, sir? Very good, sir. (Gives the doctor his stick and goes to open the house door for them.)

Nordan. Allow me, Mrs. Riis. (Offers her his arm.)

Alfred (coming forward). Mrs. Riis! May I speak to her?

Mrs. Riis. Speak to her? No, that is impossible.

Nordan. You heard, my boy, what she has to think about to-day.

Mrs. Riis. And if she would not speak to you before, it is not likely she will now.

A GAUNTLET

Alfred. If she should ask to speak to me, will you tell her I am here? I shall stay here till she does.

Mrs. Riis. But what is the use of that?

Alfred. Well, that will be our affair. I know she wants to speak to me, just as much as I do to her. Only tell her I am here! That is all I ask. (Goes away into the farther part of the garden.)

Nordan. He does not know what he is talking about.

Mrs. Riis. Dear Dr. Nordan, let us go! I am so frightened.

Nordan. Not more than I am, I think. So she knows it now, does she! (They go out.)

SCENE II

(SCENE. The same as in Acts I. and II. SVAVA comes into the room slowly and looks round; then goes to the door and looks round outside the house, then comes in again. As she turns back, she sees NORDAN standing in the doorway.)

Svava. You! Oh, Uncle Nordan! (Sobs.)

Nordan. My child! My dear child! Calm yourself!

Svava. But haven't you seen mother? She said she had gone across to see you.

Nordan. Yes, she is coming directly. But look here suppose you and I go for a good long walk together, instead of talking to your mother or anyone? Along quiet walk? Eh?

Svava. I can't.

Nordan. Why?

Svava. Because I must make an end of all this.

Nordan. What do you mean?

Svava (without answering his question). Uncle ?

Nordan. Yes?

Svava. Does Alfred know this? Did he know it before?

Nordan. Yes.

Svava. Of course every one knew it except me. Oh, how I wish I could hide myself away from every one! I will, too. I see the real state of things now for the first time. I have been like a child trying to push a mountain away with its two hands and they have all been standing round, laughing at me, of course. But let me speak to Alfred!

Nordan. To Alfred?

A GAUNTLET

Svava. I behaved so wrongly yesterday. I ought never to have gone into the room but you gave me no choice when you came to me. I went with you almost unconsciously.

Nordan. I suppose it was thinking of your father of what I told you about him that made you

Svava. I did not understand all at once. But, when I was by myself, it all flashed across me mother's strange uneasiness father's threats about leaving the country all sorts of expressions, and signs lots and lots of things I had never understood and never even thought twice about! I chased them out of my mind, but back they came! back and back again! It seemed to paralyse me. And when you took me by the arm and said: Now you must go in! I hardly had strength to think. Everything seemed to be going round and round.

Nordan. Yes, I made a regular mess of it both on that occasion and the time before.

Svava. No, it was all quite right quite right! We certainly went a little off the lines, it is true. I must speak to Alfred; the matter must not rest as it is. But, except for that, it was all quite right. And now I have got to make an end of it all.

Nordan. What do you mean?

Svava. Where is mother?

Nordan. My dear girl, you ought not to try and do anything to-day. I should advise you not to speak to anybody. If you do well, I don't know what may happen.

Svava. But I know. Oh, it is no use talking to me like that! You think I am simply a bundle of nerves to-day. And it is quite true I am. But if you try to thwart me it will only make me worse.

Nordan. I am not trying to thwart you at all. I only

Svava. Yes, yes, I know. Where is mother, then? And you must bring Alfred here. I cannot go to him, can I? Or do you think he has too much pride to come, after what happened yesterday? Oh, no, he is not like that! Tell him he must not be proud with one who is so humiliated. (Bursts into tears.)

Nordan. But do you think you are able for it?

Svava. You don't know how much I can stand! Anyway, I must get done with it all, quickly. It has lasted long enough.

Nordan. Then shall I ask your mother ?

Svava. Yes! and will you ask Alfred?

Nordan. Presently, yes. And if you should

Svava. No, there is no if about it!

Nordan. if you should want me, I won't go away till you are done with it all, as you say. (SVAVA goes up to him and embraces him. He goes out. After a short pause MRS. RIIS comes in.)

Mrs. Riis (going to SVAVA). My child! (Stops.)

A GAUNTLET

Svava. No, mother, I cannot come near you. Besides, I am trembling all over. And you don't understand what it is? It has not dawned upon you that you cannot treat me like this?

Mrs. Riis. Treat you like this, Svava? What do you mean?

Svava. Good heavens, mother! letting me live here day after day, year after year, without letting me know what I was living with? Allowing me to preach the strictest principles, from a house like ours? What will people say of us, now that everything will be known!

Mrs. Riis. Surely you would not have wished me to tell my child that

Svava. Not while I was a child. But when I had grown up, yes under any circumstances! I ought to have been allowed the choice whether I would live at home under such conditions or not! I ought to have been allowed to know what every one else knew or what they may get to know at any moment.

Mrs. Riis. I have never looked at it in that light.

Svava. Never looked at it in that light? Mother!

Mrs. Riis. Never! To shield you and have peace in our home while you were a child, and peace afterwards in your studies, your interests and your pleasures for you are not like other girls, you know, Svava to ensure this, I have been almost incredibly careful that no hint of this should come to your ears. I believed that to be my duty. You have no conception what I have stooped to for your sake, my child.

Svava. But you had no right to do it, mother!

Mrs. Riis. No right?

Svava. No! To degrade yourself for my sake was to degrade me too.

Mrs. Riis (with emotion). Oh, my God !

Svava. I do not reproach you for anything, mother! I would not do that for the world my dear mother! I am only so infinitely distressed and appalled at the thought of your having to go about carrying such a secret with you! Never able to be your real self with me for a moment! Always hiding something! And to have to listen to my praises of what so little deserved praise to see me putting my faith in him, caressing him oh, mother, mother!

Mrs. Riis. Yes, dear, I felt that myself many and many a time. But I felt that I dared not tell you. It was wrong so very wrong! I understand that now! But would you have had me leave him at once, as soon as I knew of it myself?

Svava. I cannot take upon myself to say. You decided that for yourself. Each one must decide that for herself according to the measure of her love and her strength. But when the thing went on after I was grown up ! Naturally that was why I made a second mistake. I had been brought up to make mistakes, you see. (RIIS is heard outside the window, humming a tune.)

Mrs. Riis. Good heavens, there he is! (RIIS is seen passing the left-hand window. When he reaches the door, however, he stops and, with the words, Oh, by the bye! turns back and goes hurriedly out.)

Mrs. Riis. You look quite changed, my child! Svava, you frighten me! Surely you are not going to ?

A GAUNTLET

Svava. What is it that is in your mind, mother?

Mrs. Riis. The thought that, as I have endured so much for your sake, you might make up your mind to endure a little for mine.

Svava. A little of this? No, not for a moment!

Mrs. Riis. But what are you going to do?

Svava. Go away from here at once, of course.

Mrs. Riis (with a cry). Then I shall go with you!

Svava. You? Away from father?

Mrs. Riis. It has been for your sake that I have stayed with him. I won't stay here a day without you! Ah, you don't want me with you!

Svava. Mother, dear I must have time to accustom myself to the changed state of things. You have quite changed in my eyes too, you see. I have been mistaken in you, and I must get accustomed to that idea. I must be alone! Oh, don't look so unhappy, dear!

Mrs. Riis. And this is the end of it all this is the end of it!

Svava. I cannot act otherwise, dear. I must go away now to my Kindergartens and give up my life entirely to that work. I must, I must! If I cannot be alone there, I must go farther afield.

Mrs. Riis. This is the cruellest part of it all the cruellest part! Listen, is that ? Yes, it is he. Do not say anything now! For my sake say nothing now; I cannot bear anything more on the top of this! Try to be friendly to him! Svava do you hear me! (RIIS comes back, still humming a tune; this time he has his overcoat over his arm. SVAVA comes hurriedly forward, and after a moment's hesitation sits down with her back half turned to him, and tries to busy herself with something. RIIS puts down his overcoat. He is in court dress and wears the Order of St. Olaf.)

Riis. Good morning, ladies! Good morning!

Mrs. Riis. Good morning!

Riis. Here is the latest great piece of news for you: Who do you think drove me from the palace? Christensen!

Mrs. Riis. Really?

Riis. Yes! Our wrathful friend of yesterday! Yes! He and one of my fellow-directors. I was one of the first persons he greeted when he got to the palace. He introduced me to people, chatted with me paid me the most marked attention!

Mrs. Riis. You don't mean it?

Riis. Consequently nothing really happened here yesterday! No gloves were thrown about at all, least of all in his eldest son's face! Christensen, the worthy knight of to-day's making, feels the necessity for peace! We ended by drinking a bottle of champagne at my brother's.

A GAUNTLET

Mrs. Riis. How amusing!

Riis. Therefore, ladies smiles, if you please! Nothing has happened here, absolutely nothing! We begin again with an absolutely clean slate, without a smear upon it!

Mrs. Riis. What a piece of luck!

Riis. Yes, isn't it! That rather violent outburst of our daughter's has unburdened her mind and cleared the ideas in other people's heads. The general atmosphere is agreeably clear, not to say favourable.

Mrs. Riis. And what was it like at the palace?

Riis. Well, I can tell you this when I looked round at our batch of new-fledged knights, it did not exactly impress me that it is virtue that is rewarded in this world of ours. However, we were all confronted with an alarmingly solemn document. It was about something we swore to preserve I fancy it was the State or perhaps the Church I am really not sure, because I didn't read it. They all signed it!

Mrs. Riis. You, as well?

Riis. I, as well. Do you suppose I was going to be left out of such good company? Up at those exalted heights one obtains a happier and freer outlook upon life. We were all friends up there. People came up and congratulated me and after a bit I wasn't sure whether it was on my daughter's account or on my own; and, what is more, I never knew I had so many friends in the town, let alone at Court! But in such brilliant company and such an atmosphere of praises and compliments and general amiability, one was not inclined to be particular! And there were only men present! You know you ladies must excuse me there is sometimes a peculiar charm in being only with men, especially on great occasions like that. Conversation becomes more pointed, more actual, more robust and laughter more full of zest. Men seem to understand one another almost without the need of words.

Mrs. Riis. I suppose you are feeling very happy to-day, then?

Riis. I should think I am! and I only wish every one were the same! I daresay life might be better than it is; but, as I saw it under those circumstances from those exalted heights, it might also be much worse. And, as for us men oh, well, we have our faults, no doubt, but we are very good company for all that. It would be a dull world without us, I am sure. Let us take life as it comes, my dear Svava! (Comes nearer to her. She gets up.) What is the matter? Are you still in a bad temper? when you have had the pleasure of boxing his ears with your own gloves, before the whole family circle? What more can you reasonably ask of life? I should say you ought to have a good laugh over it! Or is there something up? What? Come, what is the matter now?

Mrs. Riis. The fact is

Riis. Well, the fact is ?

Mrs. Riis. The fact is that Alfred will be here in a moment.

Riis. Alfred here? In a moment? Hurrah! I quite understand! But why didn't you tell me so at once?

Mrs. Riis. You have talked the whole time since you came in.

Riis. I do believe I have! Well, if you are going to take it seriously, my dear Svava, perhaps you will allow your knightly father to take it lightly? The whole thing amuses me so tremendously. I was put into good spirits to-day the moment I saw, from Christensen's face, that there was nothing in the wind. And so Alfred is coming

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here directly! Then I understand everything. Hurrah, once more! I assure you that is the best of all the good things that have happened to-day. I really think I must play a festal overture till he comes! (Goes towards the piano, singing.)

Mrs. Riis. No, no, dear! Do you hear? No, no! (RIIS plays on, without listening to her, till she goes up to him, and stops him, pointing to SVAVA.)

Svava. Oh, let him play, mother let him play! It is the innocent gaiety that I have admired since I was a child! (Bursts into tears, but collects herself.) How hateful! How horrible!

Riis. My dear child, you look as if you wanted to be throwing down gauntlets to-day too! Isn't that all done with?

Svava. No, indeed it is not!

Riis. You shall have the loan of my gloves, if you haven't

Mrs. Riis. Oh, don't say those things to her!

Svava. Oh, yes, let him! Let him mock at us, mother dear! A man of his moral earnestness has the right to mock at us!

Riis. What are you talking about? Does it show a lack of moral earnestness not to be in love with old maids and sour-faced virtue?

Svava. Father, you are

Mrs. Riis. No, Svava!

Riis. Oh, let her say what she wants! It is something quite new to see a well-brought-up girl throw her gloves in her fiance's face and accusations in her father's! Especially when it is all done in the name of morality!

Svava. Don't talk about morality! Or go and talk to Mrs. North about it!

Riis. Mrs. North? What has she to do with?

Svava. Be quiet! I know everything! You have

Mrs. Riis. Svava!

Svava. Ah, yes—for mother's sake I won't go on. But, when I threw down my much discussed gauntlet yesterday, I knew about it then. That was why I did it! It was a protest against everything of the kind, against its beginning and its continuation, against him and against you! I understood then your pious zeal in the matter, and the show of scandalised morality you allowed mother to be a witness of!

Mrs. Riis. Svava!

Svava. I understand now, for the first time, what your consideration, your politeness to mother which I have so often admired all meant! Your fun, your good temper, your care of your appearance! Oh, I never can believe in anything any more! It is horrible, horrible!

Mrs. Riis. Svava, dear!

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Svava. All life seems to have become unclean for me! My nearest and dearest all soiled and smirched! That is why, ever since yesterday, I have had the feeling of being an outcast; and that is what I am an outcast from all that I prized and revered and that without my having done the slightest thing to deserve it. Even so, it is not the pain of it that I feel most deeply; it is the humiliation, the shame. All that I have so often said must seem now to be nothing but empty words all that I have done myself must seem of no account and this without its being my fault! For it is your fault! I thought, too, that I knew something about life; but there was more for me to learn! I see that you wanted me to give way to such an extent that I should end by acquiescing in it. I understand now, for the first time, what your teaching meant and the things that you invoked mother and heaven to witness. But it is of no use! I can tell you that it is about as much as one can stand, to have the thoughts I have had yesterday last night to-day. However, it is once and for all; after this, nothing can ever take me by surprise again. To think that any man could have the heart to let his child have such an experience!

Mrs. Riis. Svava look at your father!

Svava. Yes but if you think what I am saying now is hard, remember what I said to you before I knew this no longer ago than yesterday morning. That will give you some idea of how I believed in you, father and some idea of what I am feeling now! Oh!

Riis. Svava!

Svava. You have ruined my home for me! Almost every other hour in it has been corrupted and I cannot face a future like that.

Riis and Mrs. Riis (together). But, Svava !

Svava. No, I cannot! My faith in you is destroyed so that I can never think of this as a home again. It makes me feel as if I were merely living with you as a lodger from yesterday onwards, merely a lodger in the house.

Riis. Don't say that! My child!

Svava. Yes, I am your child. It only needed you to say it like that, for me to feel it deeply. To think of all the experiences we two have had together all the happy times we have had on our travels, in our amusements and then to think that I can never look back on them again, never take them up again! That is why I cannot stay here.

Riis. You cannot stay here!

Svava. It would remind me of everything too painfully. I should see everything in a distorted light.

Mrs. Riis. But you will see that you cannot bear to go away, either!

Riis. But I can go!

Mrs Riis. You?

Riis. Yes, and your mother and you stay here? Oh, Svava !

Svava. No, I cannot accept that come what may!

Riis. Do not say any more! Svava, I entreat you! Do not make me too utterly miserable! Remember that never, until to-day I never thought to make you . If you cannot bear to be with me any more if you cannot then let me go away! It is I that am to blame, I know. Listen, Svava! It must be I, not you! You must stay here!

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Mrs. Riis (listening). Good heavens, there is Alfred!

Riis. Alfred! (A pause. ALFRED appears in the doorway.)

Alfred (after a moment). Perhaps I had better go away again?

Riis (to ALFRED). Go away again? Go away again, did you say? No, not on any account! No! No, you could not have come at a more fortunate moment! My boy, my dear boy! Thank you!

Mrs. Riis (to SVAVA). Would you rather be alone ?

Svava. No, no, no!

Riis. You want to speak to Svava, don't you? I think it will be best for me to leave you together. You need to talk things over frankly with her to be alone naturally! You will excuse me, then, if I leave you, won't you? I have something very important to do in town, so you will excuse me! I must hurry and change my clothes so please excuse me! (Goes into his room.)

Alfred. Oh, but I can come some other time.

Mrs. Riis. But I expect you would like to talk to her now?

Alfred. It is no question of what I would like. I see and I heard Dr. Nordan say that Miss Riis is quite worn out. But I felt it my duty, all the same, to call.

Svava. And I thank you for doing so! It is more far more than I have deserved. But I want to tell you at once that what happened yesterday I mean, the form my behaviour took yesterday was due to the fact that, only an hour before then, something had come to my knowledge that I had never known before. And that was mixed up with it. (She can scarcely conceal her emotion.)

Alfred. I knew that to-day you would be regretting what happened yesterday you are so good. And that was my only hope of seeing you again.

Riis (coming out of his room partly dressed to go out). Does any one want anything done in town? If so, I shall be happy to see to it! It has occurred to me that perhaps these ladies would like to go away for a little trip somewhere what do you two say to that? When one's thoughts are beginning to get a little what shall I call it? a little too much for one, or perhaps I should rather say a trifle too serious, it is often a wonderful diversion to go away for a little change. I have often found it so myself often, I assure you! Just think it over, won't you? I could see about making plans for you at once, if you think so eh? Well, then, good-bye for the present! And think it over! I think myself it is such an excellent plan! (Goes out. SVAVA looks at her mother with a smile, and hides her face in her hands.)

Mrs. Riis. I must go away for a few minutes and

Svava. Mother!

Mrs. Riis. I really must, dear! I must collect my thoughts. This has been too much for me. I shall not go farther away than into my room there (pointing to the room on the left). And I will come back directly. (SVAVA throws herself into a chair by the table, overcome by her emotion.)

Alfred. It looks as if we two were to have to settle this matter, after all.

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Svava. Yes.

Alfred. I daresay that you will understand that since yesterday I have done nothing else but invent speeches to make to you but now I do not feel as if it had been of much use.

Svava. It was good of you to come.

Alfred. But you must let me make one request of you, and that from my heart: Wait for me! Because I know now what will show me the way to your heart. We had planned out our life together, you and I; and, although I shall do it alone, I shall carry out our plans unflinchingly. And then perhaps, some day, when you see how faithful I have been. I know I ought not to worry you, least of all to-day. But give me an answer! You need scarcely say anything but just give me an answer!

Svava. But what for?

Alfred. I must have it to live on and the more difficult the prize is to attain, the better worth living will life be to me. Give me an answer!

Svava (tries to speak, but bursts into tears). Ah, you see how everything upsets me to-day. I cannot. Besides, what do you want me to do? To wait? What would that mean? It would mean being ready and yet not ready; trying to forget and yet always having it before my mind. (Is overcome again by her emotion.) No!

Alfred. I see you need to be alone. But I cannot bring myself to go away. (SVAVA gets up, and tries to regain control over herself. ALFRED goes to her and throws himself on his knees beside her.) Give me just one word.

Svava. But do you not understand that if you could give me back once more the happiness that complete trust gives do you think I should wait for you to ask anything of me then? No, I should go to you and thank you on my knees. Can you doubt that for a moment?

Alfred. No, no!

Svava. But I have not got it.

Alfred. Svava!

Svava. Oh, please !

Alfred. Good-bye good-bye! But I shall see you again some day? I shall see you again? (Turns to go, but stops at the door.) I must have a sign something definite to take with me! Stretch out a hand to me! (At these words SVAVA turns to him and stretches out both her hands to him. He goes out. MRS. RIIS comes in from her room.)

Mrs. Riis. Did you promise him anything?

Svava. I think so. (Throws herself into her mother's arms.)