

SNOWSTORM

A TRAGEDY

BY

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PERSONS REPRESENTED IN THE PROLOGUE

HERMANN, *an Old Woodcutter*

GRIZEL, *his Wife*

DANIEL, *Groom in the Stables of ERIK, Prince of Fiordland*

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PROLOGUE

The scene represents the cottage of the woodcutter. It is surrounded by an infinity of pine trees, giving an impression of great dreariness and monotony. The cottage, on the contrary, is extremely cheerful, almost gay. Loving care has been employed to decorate it and to keep it excellently tidy. There is only a very small clearing about the cottage, and a natural path through the wood.

The daylight is slowly fading throughout the scene.

Enter by the path the woodcutter and his wife, whose names are HERMANN and GRIZEL. They carry heavy loads of wood.

HERMANN. Terrible hard times. The days and the ways get longer, and the wood harder to cut, and harder to sell.

GRIZEL. Ay. But the fowls do well. And they do say the Prince may come to the lodge again soon.

HERMANN. For a day or two. What's that?

GRIZEL. And then there's always George.

HERMANN. Yes; he's head waiter now.

GRIZEL. I mistrusted the lad's going to the big town. Terrible dangerous are those cities for an honest boy.

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HERMANN. Oh! he's a good lad. He's doing well.

GRIZEL. He will soon have a beer-house of his own.

HERMANN. Ah! that's as may be.

[*They throw down their wood by the door of the cottage.*]

GRIZEL. He's our own good lad.

[*She goes in and busies herself with the fire, etc.*]

HERMANN. What's for supper to-night, lass?

GRIZEL. Peas and bacon. And some of the beer George sent us.

HERMANN. Good! Good!

It's a hard life, lass, woodcutting. Do you mind the day we wed?

GRIZEL. Nigh thirty years ago. Ye were going to be the Prince's Forester, I mind.

HERMANN. Ah, youth! Life is harder than our dreams tell us.

GRIZEL. That's you men. You must always be dreaming. Cowards, I call you.

HERMANN. No, lass, I see the hardness of life just as much as you do. There's only one thing good enough to take us through it. And that's love.

GRIZEL. Ay, lad.

HERMANN. We've never fallen out, lass?

GRIZEL. I mind the first day ye laid the shaft of the big axe to my back.

HERMANN. Summer lightning, lass. I gave ye no more than ye deserved.

GRIZEL. Ah!

HERMANN. To dance with a low blacksmith! Damn ye, ye were aye a forward wench.

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GRIZEL. And what of the fair at Stormwald last month?

[*She lights the lamp in the cottage.*]

HERMANN. Ay, in Stormwald the girls are fine.

GRIZEL. If I did clout ye with the fire-shovel, ye deserved it.

HERMANN. No harm, lass, no harm if the girls of Stormwald know a proper man.

GRIZEL. Bah! ye white-headed old sinner. Do ye think I'm afraid of them? And you no better than (*she comes out of the cottage*) this old bundle of wood. Drybones!

HERMANN. We've been happy, lass.

[*She sits on the bundle of wood by his side.*]

GRIZEL. Ay, lad, love's all in life.

HERMANN. It's something to look back on, now that the twilight gathers.

GRIZEL. With you, lad, I don't fear the dark.

HERMANN. George is a fine boy.

GRIZEL. If only Gretel had not died.

HERMANN. God knows best, dear lass!

GRIZEL. Ay, God knows best. But I wish he wouldn't interfere.

HERMANN. Lass! Lass!

GRIZEL. Ye don't understand. A man's aye ready with his God. A wife cares naught for God or for her man, but only for her bairns.

[*HERMANN is beginning to weep.*]

It's good you can weep still. You had a true heart, a woman's heart. Ye old fool!

[*She brushes away her own tears.*]

HERMANN. Always my own goodwife! Hark! There's a horse in the forest.

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GRIZEL. Some fool of a forester.

HERMANN. A forester wouldn't come here at this time o' night.

GRIZEL. Here he is, whoever it is.

[*A voice off.* "Hillo—ho! Goodman woodcutter, do you live underground?"]

HERMANN (*calling*). Take the path to your left. Tie up your horse at the turning.

GRIZEL. What did I tell you? The prince is coming to the lodge and we shall sell all our wood!

HERMANN. I hope we may. . . . Here he comes. You're right, maybe. It's the prince's livery. [*Enter* DANIEL.

DANIEL. Tum-ti-um-ti-um-tum! Good day and be damned to you, goodman!

HERMANN. Fine day, sir. What d'ye want?

DANIEL. Logs, wooden-head! Great, fat, roaring pine-logs, oozing with sap! Logs, by God, and ho! for the bonny winter!

HERMANN. Ay! so the Prince is come hunting.

DANIEL. No, you old rascal. Mind your own business! Do you think I am the trusted confidant of His Highness through blabbing his affairs?

HERMANN. Beg pardon, Excellency! I mistook your Excellency for that damned, cheating groom, Daniel.

DANIEL. You old ruffian! Well, shut your head, and bring the logs up.

HERMANN. When?

DANIEL. Now.

HERMANN. All right. (*Calls.*) Wife, shoulder the biggest bundle of logs up to the lodge.

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GRIZEL (*within*). All right.

HERMANN. And what's the news of the Court?

DANIEL. Nothing beyond the usual, goodman. The Princess is so-so—so-so. The Duke left last week. We've been dull, dull.

HERMANN. And what's the madcap Prince been up to?

DANIEL. Our good Prince is busied as ever with the high cares of the Fatherland.

GRIZEL. Nasty, tricky, little beast, I think I do! Always after the girls.

DANIEL. Insolent woman! His Highness is devoted as ever to the Princess Maud.

GRIZEL. None of your theatre girls, all legs, oh no!

HERMANN. Hold your scolding tongue, woman! Get the gentleman a glass of beer!

[*She puts down the load and goes in.*]

DANIEL. Thanks, good man. Well, between ourselves, man and man, I don't mind telling you, there's a fair old how-d'ye-do.

HERMANN. Ah! I thought that now.

DANIEL. A real jamboree! A good old buster!

HERMANN. Ha! Ha!

DANIEL. That's really what we're here for. I'm telling you. Oh yes, I'm telling you! Lord God Almighty! It's a rare old jinkytoodleray!

HERMANN. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

DANIEL. Three weeks ago we were on horseback.

HERMANN. Ay!

DANIEL. Outside the Opera.

HERMANN. Ho!

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DANIEL. In a dark little street off the Axelstrade.

HERMANN. Hillo-ho!

DANIEL. Masked.

HERMANN. Whew!

DANIEL. Jee! Armed.

HERMANN. Armed!

DANIEL. To the teeth.

HERMANN. Whew.

DANIEL. With a led horse.

HERMANN. He! He!

DANIEL. And we stopped the carriage of pretty Nerissa Wadlstern, and kidnapped her — What d'ye think o' that?

HERMANN. Ye gay young devils! Well, I've done as much myself in my day.

DANIEL. So we dragged her off screaming, and have been keeping out of the way ever since. Oh! I tell you she was a tigress; but he made her love him, somehow. So we're coming back into society. A month's hunting at the Lodge here, for the first step.

[*Enter GRIZEL with the beer. They all drink.*]

HERMANN. And what does the Princess say to it?

DANIEL. Haven't heard. But I suppose she's about crazy mad.

GRIZEL. So she might be, with her waster of a husband.

HERMANN. Oh! he's a good Prince. But perhaps his wife's a Tartar like some I know!

DANIEL. Here, none of your insolence to their Highnesses! Thanks, goodman, I'll be off. Hurry up to the lodge with those logs!

[*Goes off.*]

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HERMANN. Ay! I'll load the mule now!

GRIZEL. What mule d'ye mean?

HERMANN. The cross-tempered, two-legged beast!

[He picks up bundle and puts it on her back. She drops it, and, catching up a faggot, belabours him. He ultimately gets it from her, and returns her blows. During the fight they interchange compliments.]

HERMANN. Old scarecrow!

GRIZEL. Cross-eyed old satyr!

HERMANN. Wizened witch!

GRIZEL. Pig-dog!

HERMANN. Humped old sow!

GRIZEL. I'll make ye grin the other side of your face, ye monkey!

HERMANN. Black-faced old scavenger!

GRIZEL. Pot-bellied beerswiller!

HERMANN. Ye blasted lying old whore! Take that!

GRIZEL. Dirty bastard! White-headed old crocodile!

[Both being out of breath, they sit down and begin to cry.]

HERMANN. I meant no harm, wife, but you angered me.

GRIZEL. Ay! it's always my fault.

HERMANN. No, lass. It was that filthy fellow from the lodge that came between us.

GRIZEL. The breath of a Court is ruin to simple happiness.

HERMANN. Well, kiss, lass!

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GRIZEL. There, lad! *[They kiss.*

And now, we'd better get the wood up to the lodge.

[They each shoulder a bundle and move amicably off.

And now, what was he telling you about the Prince?

HERMANN. Ah! that's a State secret!

[At corner of path.

GRIZEL. Well, you'll have to tell me! *[Exeunt.*

PERSONS REPRESENTED IN ACT I

ERIK, *Prince of Fiordland*

MAUD, *his Wife*

NERISSA, *a Violinist*

HEINDRIK, *a Captain of Infantry, attached to the person of the Princess*

FOUR OFFICERS, *junior to Heindrik*

GUSTAVE, *Confidential Servant to Erik*

DANIEL, *a Groom to Erik*

ACT I

WINTER

A northern country. A lodge in the forest. There is a glass outbuilding, luxuriously furnished and decorated. A dining-table with two chairs. Two lounge chairs and a smaller table.

PRINCE ERIC *and* NERISSA *have just finished dinner, and are chatting inaudibly, leaning across the table. He kisses her.*

The Steward GUSTAVE *enters with coffee and liqueurs which he places on the small table. He goes out.*

The PRINCE *takes* NERISSA *under his arm to the lounge chairs. On the way they pass the door, go into the garden, look up at the sky, and shiver.*

ERIK. Snow to-night, snow-maiden!

NERISSA. Yes.

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ERIK. But . . . [He points to the house.

NERISSA. Yes. [She laughs.

ERIK. Let us go in.

[He takes her to chairs, where they sit and drink coffee, etc.

Enter L., an officer in furs, HEINDRIK. He watches them for a while in silence, makes a sign of warning to some one in the background, and retires discreetly.]

[ERIK touches a bell. *Enter GUSTAVE.*

ERIK. Put out the big lights.

GUSTAVE. Yes, Highness.

[He goes out and does so. *In the balcony is only the rosy glow of shaded lamps in the roof.]*

[*Enter HEINDRIK, L. This time he beckons to his companions.*

[*Enter PRINCESS MAUD. She is muffled in dark furs. Four officers follow. They are among the pines.]*

HEINDRIK. Your Highness was perfectly right.

MAUD. I cannot see properly. I must see with my own eyes.

HEINDRIK. Your Highness should not venture nearer.

MAUD. I must see.

HEINDRIK. Then let us creep through the pines and watch from behind the fountain.

MAUD [*with a gesture of haughty disgust*]. Ah—h! . . .
Lead on. [They go through the pines and stand watching.

MAUD. I cannot see yet. Let us go to the doorway.

HEINDRIK. It is dangerous, Highness.

MAUD. I am dangerous. [She goes stealthily forward and kneels at the door, looking through. HEINDRIK follows her. He has drawn his sword. ERIK and NERISSA are now in each

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other's arms. MAUD nods and rises; they retire to the fountain.]

MAUD. So! I have seen. Is everything prepared?

HEINDRIK. Your Highness will find everything in order.

[A baying of great hounds.]

HEINDRIK. Back, Highness!

[They disappear among the pines, and go off L.]

ERIK. The dogs are uneasy to-night. I am uneasy. I am going to finish my cigar in the forest. No; you must not come. My snow-maiden will take cold.

[He kisses her and goes into the house, presently reappearing c. with three immense grey boarhounds on leash. He looses them; they scamper about and return at his whistle.]

ERIK. Gustave!

[Enter GUSTAVE C. ERIK throws the leash to him. GUSTAVE leashes them and goes off C. ERIK goes to window, and watches NERISSA, who is lying back half asleep. Then he opens door, and calls.]

ERIK. Nerissa! *[She jumps up.]*

NERISSA. Erik!

ERIK. Get your fiddle, dewdrop! I want you to play me the "Abendlied." *[She runs into house.]*

ERIK *[sings]*:

'Twas I that found the icicle on the lip of the crevasse:

'Twas I that found the gentian on the mountain pass:

'Twas I that found the fire to melt the maiden of the
snow:

'Twas I that plucked the flower—and I wear it, so!

[Placing his hand on his heart.]

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Nerissa drew the crystal spring from the music wells that slumbered ;

Nerissa drew my tears till the angels were outnumbered ;
And I with trapper's forest-lore, and fisher's craft and wiles,
Hunted the shy bird of her soul, a secret spring of smiles.

[Snow begins to fall slowly in the garden.]

The April dawn of love awoke Nerissa's snowy mountain ;
The sun of passion thawed at last the frozen fountain ;
And I, who shared a sterile throne, share now a blissful bower—
Nerissa, oh Nerissa! God preserve this hour !

[He sees NERISSA has returned and is standing at the door.]

ERIK. Go in, child! It is cold. See, the snow is beginning to fall.

[He joins her. They enter. He locks and bolts the door. ERIK throws himself into a chair.]

ERIK. Now, sweetheart, the "Abendlied."

[NERISSA plays. During her performance HEINDRIK has again entered stealthily, and watches.]

ERIK. And now!

[He takes NERISSA into house, and switches off light. HEINDRIK gives a warning sign to his companions. The light goes up in the room above. Enter c., GUSTAVE, advances quietly to fountain, and stands waiting. HEINDRIK whistles softly.]

GUSTAVE. Advance. All is safe.

[HEINDRIK advances. They greet each other, but without shaking hands.]

GUSTAVE. Have you the money?

HEINDRIK. Here.

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GUSTAVE. Let me count it.

[*He presses the spring of an electric torch, and examines the bag which HEINDRIK hands to him.*]

GUSTAVE. A thousand, two, three, four—no, five, six, seven. Don't be so suspicious, Captain, I shall not run away. Ten. Right. And the gold? Ah, the jolly rouleaux. It is in order.

HEINDRIK. The key.

GUSTAVE. Here it is. [*Gives it.*] And the stuff for the dogs?

HEINDRIK. Poor Tiger, and Baresark, and Odin!

[*Gives a packet.*]

GUSTAVE. One doesn't make omelettes without breaking eggs. I will be ready for you in ten minutes.

HEINDRIK. There are two cars on the road. Yours is the small one. Your passage is taken. That and your passports are with the driver.

GUSTAVE. Right. I will see to Daniel and the dogs. Keep out of sight.

HEINDRIK. I will wait among the pines.

[*He retires. GUSTAVE returns to house.*]

[*Enter NERISSA in her nightdress at window above, with her violin.*]

ERIK. Well, snow-maiden, are you still angry with me for stealing you?

NERISSA. I loved myself. But now I love you.

ERIK [*sings*]:

O who on the mountain
Would tremble and shiver?
The spray's on the fountain;
The sun's on the river.

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The fields are ablush,
And the valley's alight.
Come! let us crush
Out the wine of delight!

The thaw sends the torrent
Its Bacchanal dance;
The snows that the thaw rent
Glitter and glance.
The garden's a wonder
Of colour impearled;
The spring draws asunder
Its woe from the world.

Come, O my maiden,
Into the woods!
The flowers, dew-laden,
Shake light from their hoods.
Dance to the measure
Of Bacchus and Pan
Primæval, the pleasure
Of maiden and man!

[NERISSA *plays a love-song on her violin, then turns from the window. The light goes out.*]

ERIK. Nerissa!

[*Enter GUSTAVE C. with DANIEL, who is leading a horse, saddled.*]

GUSTAVE. Take this order to the merchant at Stormwald.
If you ride back at dawn you will be in plenty of time for
your work.

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DANIEL. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

GUSTAVE. Ride fast, Daniel.

DANIEL. Oh! I shall have to pull the old fellow out of bed.

GUSTAVE. Pull his house down, if you like, as long as we have the champagne in time for breakfast.

[DANIEL *leaps on the horse and rides off* R. GUSTAVE *waits a minute, then advances to pines* L. HEINDRIK *meets him.*]

GUSTAVE. All well.

HEINDRIK. Be off with you, then. And don't make too much of a splash in Paris with all that money.

GUSTAVE. I am not such a fool. And don't you be such a fool as to get slack with that little monthly cheque, you know.

HEINDRIK. Don't you be frightened about money.

GUSTAVE. You're a bit white. What are *you* frightened of?

HEINDRIK. Only ghosts.

GUSTAVE. Ah, they walk in your forests.

HEINDRIK. We are doing a vile thing. Necessary, as I suppose most vile things are.

GUSTAVE. Oh, you have a conscience! Consciences walk in your forests.

HEINDRIK. I've a heart as well as a sense of duty.

GUSTAVE. Yes, she's a pretty girl.

HEINDRIK. And it was never her fault.

GUSTAVE. It's never the woman's fault in your forests. O race of sentimentalists!

HEINDRIK. He took her as a hound catches a hare.

GUSTAVE. In France "Jugged Hare" is a concoction of cat.

HEINDRIK. Well, this is not France. France is where you belong, you.

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GUSTAVE. Good luck to your hunting!

HEINDRIK. Good luck!

GUSTAVE. I have it quite safe in your little bag. Good-bye, Heindrik. I suppose you despise me. [HEINDRIK *is silent.*] Well, you know, you too must wait for histories to be written before you get much praise.

HEINDRIK. My duty is clear. I am not asking for praise.

GUSTAVE. All my little need is money.

HEINDRIK. You have earned thirty pieces of silver. Be off! It is time to act.

[*Exit GUSTAVE, L. In a moment HEINDRIK gives a sign, and MAUD and the four officers re-enter from among the pines.*]

MAUD. Now!

HEINDRIK. Highness, your waiting is over.

MAUD. At last. This snow!

HEINDRIK. It hides our footsteps, Highness. May God's mercy cover our deeds.

MAUD. Insolent! This is the second time you have reproached me. A third, and I break you.

HEINDRIK. Pardon, Highness! I know my duty, and I shall do it.

MAUD. It is I who am wronged, is it not?

HEINDRIK. Ah, Highness, forgive me! I am your Highness's faithful servant. But—do we wipe out one wrong by doing another?

MAUD. It is right, what we do, by the law of God and man.

HEINDRIK. Then why do I feel it to be wrong?

MAUD. You are a weak fool. Do your duty!

HEINDRIK. I obey, Highness.

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MAUD. Without another word.

HEINDRIK. I obey, Highness. To the death.

[HEINDRIK and other officers go out c. MAUD paces the ground impatiently. The lights go up, above; there is a sound of oaths and scuffling, and a scream.]

MAUD. Ah! Ah! [raising her voice]. Is it done?

HEINDRIK [opens window wide]. We have the prisoners, Highness.

MAUD. Bring the girl here to me.

HEINDRIK. Yes, Highness.

[He reappears c. with NERISSA, who wears a cloak.

MAUD. Did I tell you to cloak her?

HEINDRIK [represses his speech]. No, Highness.

MAUD. Take it off.

[HEINDRIK hesitates. NERISSA advances, and flings her cloak upon the ground at MAUD'S feet. She is again in her nightdress.]

MAUD. You wretched vagabond! You gutter creature! Off to the woods with you! Off, baggage.

[NERISSA stands trembling.

There are plenty of street-corners in Stormwald. Off, you harlot! [She raises her hand to strike her.

[HEINDRIK interposes between them, draws himself up, and salutes MAUD stiffly.]

HEINDRIK. My duty to you, Madam!

[He draws his revolver, and shoots himself, tumbling at her feet upon NERISSA'S cloak. NERISSA, terribly frightened, screams and runs off into the forest. MAUD spurns the body of HEINDRIK with her foot. The lights above go out. A pause, MAUD waiting in stern

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silence. Enter the four officers with PRINCE ERIK bound and gagged.]

MAUD. Take that gag out! [*They obey.*] Now, Erik, you are coming back to the Palace.

ERIK. What have you done with Nerissa?

MAUD. Pah! The wench ran into the woods—to look for men, I suppose. There were none in the garden.

ERIK. You she-devil! Oh God! God, help me to avenge this night on you!

MAUD. Vengeance! You paltry creature; one new pretty face is enough. Next week you'll have forgotten all about your—fiddle—prostitute.

ERIK. God help me to avenge this night on you!

MAUD [*to the officers*]. Take him to the car! You can come back here and hide this fool's folly.

[She turns HEINDRIK over with her foot.

THE OFFICER. Yes, Highness!

[They go out. The four officers return, and lift the corpse of HEINDRIK, which they cover with NERISSA'S cloak. They go out. A pause. The snow ceases to fall. The moon rises c. through the pines. In the distance is heard the howling of a lonely wolf.]

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE I: *The Capital of Fiordland. Two years and six months later.*

PRINCE ERIK

OLAF AND KARL, *two Nobles*
Officers of his Suite

THE PRINCESS MAUD. HELENA, *her companion*
Promenaders, Beer-drinkers. A Flower Girl

NERISSA

*A number of people are enjoying the afternoon sunshine.
Some walk and chat, others sit and drink.*

A DRINKER. [*Sings.*] The North has a thousand beauties, and
the South has only one.

But we have borrowed a splinter from the spear of
Captain Sun.

We have trees as green as their trees ;

We have apple trees and pear trees !

We have girls as sweet as their girls ;

We have flaxen girls and fair girls—

And chestnut girls and auburn girls—

And darker girls with raven curls !

We do not envy their monotony

Of a nigger for love and a palm-tree for botany !

[*The guests of the beer-house stamp and beat the tables.*]

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2 DRINKER. Bravo! Bravo!

4 DRINKER. Hullo! Here comes Prince Erik.

3 DRINKER. With Karl and Olaf; I was with them at Heidelberg.

4 DRINKER. Oh! we know you're the dear friend of everybody with a title. But how shortsighted your friends are!

[ERIK, OLAF, and KARL *pass over chatting.*

FLOWER GIRL. A pansy for your button-hole, my prince!

ERIK. [*Smiles and accepts it.*] Heart's-ease to you, my child.

[OLAF *hands her a florin.*

FLOWER GIRL [*curtseys*]. Thanks, noble prince. [*To OLAF.*] A thousand thanks, my lord.

[*She runs off, laughing, to other customers.*

2 DRINKER [*slaps 3 DRINKER on back*]. But you were really intimate with that Italian Count, Conte Alcesto—or was it Alcestissimo?—Rigo de Righi de Righissimo. Where is he now?

4 DRINKER. “Where are the snows of yester-year?”

2 DRINKER. “All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.”

3 DRINKER. I must be going to the Kurhaus. [*Exit.*

2 DRINKER. Mr Count cost him more florins than he could count!

1 DRINKER [*sings*]. A bumble-bee buzzed in my ear:

You cannot drink honey; drink beer!

Now the wise men of earth

Cannot measure the girth

Of the brain of that brilliant bee!

Bring a bock! bring a bock!

Hang sherry and hock!

Light Lager's the tipple for me!

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THE WAITER. Hush, sir. The Princess is coming down the street. The second verse won't do.

1 DRINKER. Oh, we'll keep the second verse for after dinner.

THE WAITER. And here's the blind fiddler, coming down yonder to the bridge. [Point off L.]

2 DRINKER. What, the girl?

THE WAITER. Yes, Snowstorm.

A GUEST [*speaking with a marked foreign accent*]. Why, she is quite a young girl. But her hair is as white as your skies.

THE WAITER. Yes, sir, that's why we call her Snowstorm. But it wasn't always white—it was gold, the pale gold of our Fiordland sun; and her blind eyes were pale and blue and sparkling as our Fiordland seas.

GUEST. And as treacherous, perhaps.

WAITER. No, sir. She was a good girl. These gentlemen will tell you there was never a word against her.

1 DRINKER. Why, who was she? I don't recognise her at all.

2 DRINKER. Nor I.

4 DRINKER. Nor I. I seem to know her walk.

WAITER. Ah, she only came here two days ago. But I know her story. No, sir, I had better not say all I know. But I'll tell you this. A jealous woman threw her into the forest at night in a snowstorm, with only a rag of a night-gown on her back. My father was a woodcutter. He found her in the morning, exhausted in the snow. And when she saw him she got up and ran, screaming. She took him for a wolf.

2 DRINKER. Good God!

WAITER. But he took her to the hut, and my mother tended

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her for over a year. I saw her last summer. When Father found her the hair was just as it is now; but it was the long illness that left her blind.

I DRINKER. Good God! What a chilly story! Can she play the fiddle at all?

WAITER. You shall hear her and judge for yourself, sir.

2 DRINKER. There she comes, over the bridge.

[*Enter R., the PRINCESS MAUD and HELENA with two waiting-women and L., the PRINCE with KARL, OLAF, and his officers. They meet and chat amicably. MAUD nods, rather furtively, to HELENA, who slips away, and presently finds herself in front of stage with OLAF. They have their backs to the audience.*]

HELENA. I always love that old house [*pointing*].

OLAF. That one? [*pointing*].

[*Meanwhile she has passed a note from her right hand to his left behind their backs.*]

HELENA. Yes, that one.

OLAF. So do I.

[*MAUD has taken ERIK'S arm and walked off with him L., They follow.*]

2 DRINKER. Thank God! We can stretch our legs again.
[*They make themselves comfortable.*]

I DRINKER. And here comes your fairy fiddler!

[*Enter NERISSA, L., groping her way. Reaching C., she takes her fiddle and begins to play a jig. All rise and dance round her, the drinkers with the peasant women and cocottes. The flower girl, in front of stage, does a pas seul. 2 and 4 DRINKERS join her, and a peasant girl makes the fourth in an eccentric and*

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outrageous quartette. The music stops. All stop, laughing and joking.

1 DRINKER. Well played, little girl! A ripping dance!

2 DRINKER. Topping, by Jove.

4 DRINKER. Now, gentlemen, here's my hat. Florins for little what's-her-name?—little Snowstorm.

THE WAITER. Make it up to a thousand florins, gentlemen.

1 DRINKER. A thousand florins!

WAITER. She could earn that, once.

1 DRINKER. By Diogenes, you're as drunk as David's sow!

WAITER. Play us something else, Snowstorm. Play us your best.

2 DRINKER. Yes! Play another dance!

NERISSA. Life isn't all dancing, sir.

2 DRINKER. No, by Jove, I suppose your life isn't.

4 DRINKER. Thunder! Nobody's is!

NERISSA. I will play you from Bach.

[She plays. All are hushed in admiration. At the last few bars re-enter L., ERIK with KARL and two officers. They stand and listen. ERIK grips KARL'S shoulder and staggers. She ends. All applaud.]

KARL. What is it, sir.

ERIK. Nothing. Tell that girl to play again.

KARL *[advancing]*. Mademoiselle, you have the honour to be commanded to play before His Highness.

NERISSA. I will play—I will play for the Prince!

[She is seized with a storm of emotion. Mastering herself, she begins the "Serenade." But she trembles so violently that the music is marred. As she goes on she recovers herself, when suddenly her E string snaps.]

THE EQUINOX

NERISSA. I am so sorry, your Highness. My E string is broken.

[ERIK *is not very near her, or he might recognise her voice.*

ERIK. Never mind ; another time. Give her a gold piece,
Karl. [KARL *gives her money.* ERIK *moves off with him.*

ERIK. She can't play at all, Karl ! Funny ; that first piece sounded so well in the distance. [They go off R.

NERISSA [*in a faint voice*]. Erik !

THE WAITER. Look out, gentlemen, she is going to faint.
[*He comes forward, just in time to catch her in his arms.*

He carries her into the beer-house as the CURTAIN falls.]

SCENE II: *The same afternoon.* THE GROUNDS OF THE PALACE.

It is a formal garden, with box hedges. There are Japanese cypresses, and roses in bloom.

Behind, a terrace with balustrade, and steps leading to garden.

A summer-house in one corner. Statuary. In the background, the Palace walls.

PRINCE ERIK

KARL

OLAF

PRINCESS MAUD

HELENA, *waiting-woman to the Princess*

In the summer-house are MAUD and HELENA, smoking cigarettes.

HELENA. Is not this dangerous, madam ?

MAUD. To see Olaf here ? Pshaw ! It is nothing. I do things a thousand times more dangerous.

SNOWSTORM

HELENA. But why do it at all?

MAUD. It is farewell. The man bores me. And he begins to give himself airs.

HELENA. He begins to expect.

MAUD. Which is the psychological moment to disappoint. Oh, Helena! if you knew my heart! It is impossible to understand me. It is Erik that I love. Erik is the only man I ever cared for—so much! [*She snaps her fingers.*] These boys! Damn them all, and their homage and their impudence. It is only Erik that I love.

HELENA. Yes, Madam.

MAUD. I know you think I am lying. I know you only understand flirtation. You do not understand revenge and despair.

HELENA. I have not a Queen's heart, madam.

MAUD. Do you understand? I never forget that my father is an emperor. Erik does not love me. In all his boyish follies I believe he had one love—that fiddling harlot that I threw to the wolves. Ah! that was my night of perfect passion.

HELENA. I understand love. I do not understand hate.

MAUD. Then you do not understand love. . . . Why is Olaf late?

HELENA. There is someone on the terrace, now.

[ERIK and KARL enter L. on terrace.]

MAUD. Look!

HELENA [*peeps through roof of summer-house, standing on the seat*]. It is the Prince and Count Karl.

MAUD. Hush then! Let us be smoking!

[*They light fresh cigarettes.*]

ERIK. I tell you, Karl, I am sick. I am sick of life.

THE EQUINOX

KARL. You were merry enough at tennis.

ERIK. And then I saw that blind girl. It was a memory. For half a second her playing reminded me of something—that—that—I have—forgotten. Karl! I am a prince. I have been treated like a dog; and I have never avenged myself—and the woman I loved.

KARL. Avenge yourself now!

ERIK. She is too strong for me. There is no weak point in her armour.

KARL. She?

ERIK. Can you not guess? It is the Princess.

KARL. Highness!

ERIK. I hate her—and I am a doll in her hands.

KARL [*dropping on one knee*]. Highness! I beg you to believe that I am your most devoted servant. . . .

ERIK. Why, yes! I never doubted it. What is it?

KARL. I dare not tell your Highness.

ERIK. Yes, speak! I command you to speak.

KARL. I am not sure—I have thought—things have happened. . . .

ERIK. What things?

KARL. Oh, forgive me! It touches your Highness's honour.

ERIK. The more reason I should know.

KARL. It is . . . some of us think that her Highness forgets her duty. . . .

ERIK. Impossible! She is madly jealous of me.

KARL. I was sure I was wrong, your Highness. But—

ERIK. But!

KARL. The Lady Helena blabs.

SNOWSTORM

ERIK. A silly, gossiping fool.

KARL. Not in words, Highness. But she bears herself as if she held great secrets.

ERIK. So do all those in whom princes put their trust. Or—don't put their trust!

KARL. A lover of hers went very suddenly to the Embassy in Madrid.

ERIK. Well? Ah!— . . . Hush! There goes Olaf.

[OLAF enters R., and descends steps, bowing formally to ERIK as he passes.]

I see. And then?

KARL. Watch, Highness. Murder will out.

ERIK. I spy on my wife? I have my honour to consider.

KARL. A two-edged sword.

ERIK. I can confide only in you. . . . If you should see or hear anything . . . tell me. Let me think. The Chancellor is a safe man: we must tell him . . . I will go now to his apartment; do you wait for me in the garden.

KARL. Yes, Highness. . . . I trust your Highness will forgive me.

ERIK. You have given me hope. [*He gives KARL his hand. KARL falls on one knee and kisses it. ERIK goes out, L. KARL waits moodily upon the terrace, sunk in thought. Meanwhile OLAF has made his way deviously to the summer-house. He bows and kisses the hand of MAUD.*]

MAUD. Keep guard, Helena! [*HELENA goes out and up the path.*] Come, Olaf! [*She draws him to her, and takes him in her arms. They kiss.*]

OLAF. Queen! Queen!

MAUD. This is farewell.

THE EQUINOX

OLAF. I was afraid it was dismissal.

MAUD. Only a holiday. But I love you too much. I am getting reckless. People are beginning to talk.

OLAF. It is my fault. I cannot control myself when I look at you.

MAUD. I have got you the best command in the South. You will come up on leave; we can meet sometimes.

OLAF. God help me. An hour's absence is torture.

MAUD. A week's absence will cure that.

OLAF. Don't think it. Don't think it!

MAUD. Kiss me! You must go now. This is dreadfully dangerous. Karl is there on the terrace.

OLAF. Is there no hope for . . .

MAUD. Not till you come back! Hush. Helena signals. [HELENA gives a hissing "St!" as KARL descends steps.] Kiss me. Again. Now go. One last kiss. Oh, go! Farewell, my own Olaf!

OLAF. God preserve your Highness—and keep her love for me.

MAUD. Always. Go now.

OLAF. Good-bye. [HELENA comes back. OLAF steals off.]

HELENA. Danger. Karl is coming down into the garden.

MAUD. Damn! . . . Oh! . . . What fun! Helena, hide yourself. Let him find me here.

HELENA. Oh! . . . Suppose the Prince comes back?

MAUD. Go round the summer-house. Knock if he comes out on the terrace.

[HELENA obeys. KARL comes slowly down the garden, deep in thought. He reaches the summer-house.]

SNOWSTORM

MAUD. Come in, Count! [KARL *starts violently.*

KARL. I crave your Highness's pardon. I had no idea. . . .

MAUD. Boys never have.

KARL. Have? [*He is still quite confused and embarrassed.*

MAUD. Any ideas. Come in and sit down.

[*He obeys, awkwardly enough.*

KARL. I am flattered, Highness, to think that I thought of coming into the summer-house, exactly as your Highness did.

MAUD. Count, you are paying compliments. One day you will be old enough to know that women like to be bullied.

KARL. Your Highness is laughing at me.

MAUD. Of course, but not as you think. That is the meaning of the Woman's Emancipation movement. Men left off beating their wives—and the germs of discontent were sown.

KARL. Your Highness is merry.

MAUD. I am quite serious. The women cannot get their husbands to beat them any more, or cannot get husbands at all. So they force the police to arrest them, and force the doctors to feed them in prison.

KARL. Your Highness is laughing at me.

MAUD. On my honour, I am serious.

KARL. Then your Highness insults my understanding!

MAUD. Exactly. I am trying to get you to slap my face.

KARL. I strike your Highness?

MAUD. Is it not a smooth cheek—and in your heart wouldn't you love to smack it?

KARL. I would kill the scoundrel who offered to lift . . .

MAUD. Quite, quite. But it is I who am offering. Won't you box my ears? Just one little one?

THE EQUINOX

KARL. Highness! Highness! You don't know what you are saying.

MAUD. Just once! . . . You men have no courage.

KARL. I dare do all that a man should; if I dared to do more, I should be less.

MAUD. That is Shakespeare, and quite spoilt. Come! If you daren't touch my cheek with your hand, do you dare with your lips?

KARL. I trust I know my duty too well to insult your Highness.

MAUD. Poor Highness! What is a Queen to do who wants a silly boy to kiss her? You would be forward enough with a pretty flower girl. . . . I know you. I suppose I am not pretty enough.

KARL. Your Highness is God's rose.

MAUD. Then why not pick it? One little kiss—just there—you may.

KARL. Your Highness, I may not.

MAUD. Perhaps you don't care for women at all?

KARL. I will love my lady.

MAUD. But I am not your lady, my lord?

KARL. Before God and within my honour—and your Highness's honour—you are my lady and I your humble servant.

MAUD. You are short-sighted.

KARL. I cannot see beyond my duty.

MAUD. Your lady will find you a most dreadful prig! . . . We pay a heavy price for our crowns. Are you not ashamed of yourself? You entrap me into making love to you!

KARL. Before God, Madam. . . .

SNOWSTORM

MAUD. Hush! Hush! You mustn't swear. So you rob me of all my modesty . . . you make me kiss you. [*With a swift movement she draws his face to hers, and kisses him on the mouth. She lets him go, and laughs distractedly at his confusion.*]

KARL [*sobbing and stammering*]. Madam, it is high treason. [MAUD *continues to laugh.*]

[HELENA *gives a series of sharp knocks on the woodwork.*]

MAUD. So it is! And here's the Prince coming. Run for it!

KARL. I . . . I . . . [MAUD *pushes him out.*]

MAUD. You fool! Do you want to ruin me?

[KARL *sees the danger, and glides away along the path.*]

Helena! Come back quick.

[HELENA *darts into the summer-house.*]

MAUD. Oh, what a fool! Did you ever see such a fool?

HELENA. I am terrified for your Highness. It is madness.

MAUD. No, it's only Maraschino.

HELENA. People have got drunk on Maraschino.

MAUD. I should love to see him drunk.

HELENA. I think you did.

MAUD. What? Do you really think so? Really?

HELENA. There isn't a man alive who wouldn't go mad—on the wine of your vintage. Only the flattery of it is enough, if he were an icicle.

MAUD. Yes, but if you melt an icicle, it only drips away. He's only a prig.

HELENA. And if you take away all his ideas of faith and honour—if you shatter his belief in the goodness of woman . . .

THE EQUINOX

MAUD. There's nothing left. You're wrong. He loves me no more than—than—than I love him!

HELENA. Oh, it's impossible. There aren't such men.

MAUD. We shall see. . . Are they gone?

HELENA. No. They've just met. They're going up the steps together. I think the Prince notices something.

MAUD. Keep still, then. I wish they'd go. It's cold here.

HELENA. As the mooncalf observed, your Highness is pleased to jest.

MAUD. How dare you? Hush!

[ERIK, *on terrace, turns and holds KARL by the shoulder and looks sharply in his face.*]

ERIK. What's the matter?

KARL. I daren't say. Oh. . . .

ERIK. Who is in the garden? Answer me.

KARL. Her Highness is in the garden.

ERIK. Yes? What has happened?

KARL. Oh, sir, she has made a jest of me!

ERIK. Tell me all. What did she do?

KARL. She pretended, your Highness. . . .

ERIK. Answer me, sir! Pretended what?

KARL. She pretended to be . . .

ERIK. To be what?

KARL. To be in l . . . To be fond of me, Highness.

ERIK. Truth? What did she say?

KARL. Oh, just laughing at me. I do not understand what it all meant.

ERIK. Did she do anything?

KARL. Yes—oh!

SNOWSTORM

ERIK. What?

KARL. She kissed me.

ERIK. And you?

KARL. I told her it was high treason.

ERIK. She meant it! She meant it every word! You were right with your gossip. Please God, we'll have her. Look here, boy, run back. Tell her you thought she was testing you; tell her you're madly in love, and if you die for it, you must have another kiss. I'll be near—No! She'd hear me or see me. Test her. Get her to make an assignation. Then we'll trap her.

KARL. Oh, sir, my honour!

ERIK. Your honour is in my keeping—and by God! mine is in yours!

KARL. Sir.

ERIC. Go! I am your officer. It is an order. Carry it out as I would have you. It is the honour of Fiordland that is at stake!

KARL. I obey, Highness. *[He moves off.]*

ERIK. Nerissa! If your spirit still haunts this earth, come! Hover! Witness that your lover strikes at last. Revenge—revenge upon that tigress, that barren she-wolf . . . devil! devil! devil! Nerissa! angel . . . angel whom I dragged from the empyrean, saint whom I tore from your niche, white dove whose wings I soiled . . . be near me! aid me! aid me to my vengeance!

[Exit L. KARL has reached the summer-house. He falls on his knees. MAUD and HELENA exchange smiles.]

KARL. Pardon, Highness.

THE EQUINOX

MAUD. This gentleman may have some private communication for me. Leave us, Helena!

[HELENA goes out and keeps guard as before.

KARL. Oh, your Highness, how can you pardon me? I thought you were testing me—perhaps you are testing me—but if I perish, I love you. I am mad. I love you madly, madly. Now kill me! Call the guards. I love you. Let me once touch the tips of your fingers and then. . . .

MAUD. Karl! my Karl! my own dove. I meant it. I love you. Come to me! Kiss me! I want to feel your strong arms round me.

[*She embraces him. They kiss. He almost faints, for he must allow and return the caress.*]

I cannot bear it! You are killing me. Be quiet; Helena will hear. Go now; leave me; I am faint.

KARL. And when shall I . . .

MAUD. At midnight, at the vestry door of St Hildebrand's.

KARL. I will be there. My Princess!

MAUD. Karl! Karl! Go quickly. The last kiss—till midnight. Send Helena to me. [*He kisses her, and goes up terrace and off L.*]

[HELENA returns.

MAUD. Well?

HELENA. Tara-diddle-iddle-doodle-oodle-ay!

MAUD. I smell a rat; I see him brewing in the air; come, let us nip him in the bud. Just the sort of foolish trick Erik would try on me—to send a boy like that who can no more lie than fly. I soiled him, though!

HELENA. So your Highness will not patronise St Hildebrand!

MAUD. Indeed, we shall be two pilgrims. The fool will

SNOWSTORM

hatch some foolish plot—and I shall vindicate my innocence. And I think I can go one better than that! Come; we must dress for dinner.

HELENA. Our appetites are whetted.

MAUD. Yours, I suppose, for love; mine, for some sharper sweetmeat!

[They go out, through garden, and up steps, and off R. A pause. Re-enter KARL and ERIC, L., arm in arm, and walk up and down.]

ERIK. Very good, boy. Excellent. And now just one touch to the masterpiece! We are much of a size . . . I think I will see how I look in a lieutenant's uniform.

KARL. Oh yes, Highness, that will be much better.

ERIK. So I shall be master of the situation, however things turn out.

KARL. Your Highness is a Bismarck! Always master of the situation!

[They go off L., laughing, as the CURTAIN falls.]

PERSONS REPRESENTED

PRINCE ERIK

KARL

PRINCESS MAUD

HELENA

THE FOUR DRINKERS, *with Women, Elsie, Carlotta, and two others*
An old gigantic Priest

THE CHANCELLOR

A Corporal's File

NERISSA

A Neighbour to NERISSA

ACT III

The same day—11.30 p.m.

At the back of the Stage is the Palace. The Prince's apartment is in brilliant light. The other windows are dark. R. is the church of St Hildebrand, the vestry door being well up stage; parallel with the wall runs an avenue of yews. L. a row of houses, and a similar avenue. The whole character of the scene is one of Gothic Gloom.

Enter the Priest L. with two acolytes and enters church. Various townspeople, going home, cross stage. Hymn from within church.

All ye tottering crags that thrust
Tortured foreheads from the dust,
Palaces of fear wherein
Lurk the sacraments of sin,

SNOWSTORM

Be abased before the nod
Of our one Almighty God!
Crag and pinnacle and spire
Hear our hymn!
Disrupt, dislimn!
God is a consuming fire.

Dwellers of the darkness, flee!
Leave the night to grace and gree!
Whether sleep dissolves the soul
Or vigil gains the godly goal,
Be the Lord a puissant aid
To his children undismayed!
Crag and pinnacle, etc.

[*Enter NERISSA and a neighbour R.*

NEIGHBOUR. That's the Palace, on the right, dearie. There's a light in Prince Erik's room. He's just going to bed, I suppose. Now you're coming along to have a bit of supper with me, lamb, and then you shall go to bed, too.

NERISSA. I don't think I shall sleep much to-night. I think I shall wander about a little, and play tunes to the breezes and the nightingales.

NEIGHBOUR. The owls are the only birds abroad. And there are burglars, lamb. It's very late now.

[*Enter 1st and 3rd DRINKERS L., with three companions, and a group of women of the town, noisily.*]

I DRINKER. Hullo! Here's our little blind fiddler girl. Come along, dear. I'll mend your fiddle for you.

NEIGHBOUR. Go away; you're drunk.

THE EQUINOX

ELSIE. So sorry, dear, we won't interfere with you. We're only going home. [NERISSA and neighbour go off L.]

I DRINKER. We're not going home. I swear it. I call to witness yon bright star. [*Apostrophizes Castle window.*]

3 DRINKER. You fool, it isn't a star. It's the moon. It's the beautiful moon.

ELSIE. It's the window of the Castle.

I DRINKER. I tell you it's a star. It isn't the right colour for the moon.

3 DRINKER. It's too big to be a star.

A COMPANION. Boys, it's the sun. The rising sun. It's not the right shape for a window.

I DRINKER. So it is. Well, didn't I say so? The rising sun—the star of day!

CARLOTTA. Oh come along and sleep it off!

I DRINKER. Sleep in the beautiful sunshine? Oh, Carlotta, how wicked you must be! This is the time when respectable people get up, and enjoy the cool air of the morning. Let us go into the fields and pick buttercups!

3 DRINKER. Buttercups and daisies!

I DRINKER. Let's sing a hymn of gladness on this bright and beautiful morning!

3 DRINKER. I tell you it's the moon. Elsie, it's the moon, isn't it? You may kiss me. Now that's the moon. What a plump, pretty face you've got. I'm going to be the man in the moon.

[*He kisses her several times. The others are reeling about the square, except one man who is leaning, in despair, against a tree.*]

CARLOTTA. Come along, dear!

SNOWSTORM

I DRINKER. Why should I come along ?

CARLOTTA. You're drunk.

I DRINKER. You're a liar. I'm not too drunk to stand. I'm not too drunk to sing (*sings*):

There's nothing like beer
One's courage to cheer,
A soldier is certain to tell you ;
And the militant one
With his sword and his gun
Is always a jolly good fellow !

3 DRINKER. Oh, that's a rotten song. Strike me ! I do believe there's the man in the moon !

[PRINCE ERIK *is seen for a moment at the lighted window.*
He is in the uniform of a lieutenant.]

I DRINKER. You're as drunk as it's humanly possible for a gentleman to be. It's the sun, you owl ; there never was a man in the sun. There couldn't be ; it's against human nature.

3 DRINKER. Well, let's dance, Elsie, turn the band on again !

I DRINKER. No, it's absurd. Respectable people don't dance at four o'clock in the morning ! But I'll sing. I'll wake the birds. I'll make the cock crow, like poor old Peter did. Poor old Peter

3 DRINKER. I leave all that to Elsie. Elsie, my dear, I want a lark. Just make up one for me, will you ?

ELSIE. I'm so tired. I want to go home to bed.

I DRINKER (*sings*):

Give rum to the sailor !
It's always a failure ;

THE EQUINOX

He tosses about on the breast of the ocean.
He is clumsy and stout,
And a booby, a lout,
For his life's a perpet—a perpetual motion !

[*All chorus 3 last lines of each verse.*]

The Temperance crank
Gets his booze from the tank,
A liquor less fit for a man than a frog.
His mind is a fog,
And he lives in the bog—
You may bet you can always find him in the bog !

[*Chorus.*]

But the soldier's a chap
That can laugh at mishap ;
He finds room in Dame Fortune's and Marian's lap.
And why, do you think ?
It's a question of drink.
He knows what is good when his stomach might sink !

[*Chorus.*]

Now this is the reason
His foe he can freeze on,
And defend his good monarch from malice or treason.
His heart's full of cheer
And his belly of beer,
And he never—he never runs off to the rear !

Chorus.

It may sound very queer,
But the truth is quite clear.
He never—He never runs off to the rear.

SNOWSTORM

[*During this song all are marching about the Square, some arm-in-arm, some embracing. The light in the Palace goes out.*]

2 DRINKER. Oh my goodness! The sun's gone out.

1 DRINKER. It's only an eclipse, you fool.

3 DRINKER. Elsie wants me to come home. Now what I say is. . . .

1 DRINKER. It's very dangerous to be out of doors in an eclipse. I'm going home. Come along, Carlotta; I want you to teach me cat's cradle.

CARLOTTA. Not at this time of the night, stupid. I'm going to tie your nose to the knocker, and run away!

[*They all reel off, R. A short pause. As their voices die away—one breaks out, off, into the last chorus—other voices are heard, off, L. They approach. Enter ERIK as a Lieutenant, with an old man, the Chancellor.*]

ERIK. Come over here, Chancellor. You will not be seen behind these trees. I need not ask you to watch closely, and report truthfully, what may occur.

CHANCELLOR. I cannot believe that your Highness is justified.

ERIK. Your eyes must be your judge. If I drop this handkerchief, you will come forward and make the arrest. The men will be concealed in these doorways.

[*The organ plays a voluntary. ERIK and CHANCELLOR uncover and keep silence.*]

CHANCELLOR. It is a dangerous game, your Highness.

ERIK. I have picked devoted men. The succession is at stake.

CHANCELLOR. Highness, I am an old man, and I know much of successions! It is always best to be dumb, and very nearly always best to be blind.

THE EQUINOX

ERIK. You have wandered too much among the tombs.

CHANCELLOR. I wished to see if ghosts walked.

ERIK. And do they?

CHANCELLOR. Only when madmen call them up! Let the dead alone.

ERIK. On every wind one ghost calls to me.

CHANCELLOR. Ah! There is more in this than the honour of Fiordland. I was sure I knew all about successions!

ERIK. Yes, silence serves their turn. But what if the Blood of Abel crieth from the ground?

CHANCELLOR. Sir, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. But not by vengeance upon the murderers.

ERIK. Chancellor, it is useless to dissuade me. I have not slept well for a long while.

CHANCELLOR. And so your judgment is clouded.

ERIK. My judgment shall be the forked flash of heaven!

CHANCELLOR. Beware whom it may strike!

ERIK. You always bode.

CHANCELLOR. I have lived long enough to fear calamity. My daughter caught the chill that killed her on the fairest day of summer.

ERIK. Yes, it is your age that speaks. Is it not just as true that storm purifies the air? . . . But enough. Here comes Karl with his men.

[*Enter KARL with corporal's file. CHANCELLOR conceals himself.*]

ERIK. Get your men into the doorways. [*He consults his watch, with great difficulty; for it is now very dark.*] It is nearly time. Enough now. Not a sound.

SNOWSTORM

[KARL has concealed himself and the soldiers in the doorways of the houses. ERIK in centre of stage, listening. After a long pause he seems to catch a sound; for he smiles, raises his finger as a sign, and goes into the shadow of the vestry porch. Another pause. Footsteps are heard, and low voices. The footsteps stop. Then HELENA enters, behind Church, with great discretion. She looks and listens keenly.]

HELENA. It is all right.

MAUD [off]. Then stay under the trees. They are there?

[HELENA nods, with a little laugh, and goes back among the trees. MAUD enters quietly, and slips round by the vestry.]

ERIK [imitating the voice of KARL]. We are alone, my beautiful. Come; the car is at the back of the houses.

[MAUD and ERIK come out into the square.

ERIK. My darling! [He puts his arms about her neck.

MAUD. What does this mean? How dare you insult your Princess? Do you think I should come here, and not know how to defend myself?

[With a little dagger she strikes him in the throat. He falls dead.]

CHANCELLOR [rushing out]. By God, Madam, you have killed the Prince!

MAUD. The Prince! Erik! I have killed Love itself! Death! What have I done? Madman! Oh then, what is left for me to do? Erik! Why do you look at me like that? Come home to the Palace!

[She is now up by Exit R.

HELENA. Madam, I pray you . . .

THE EQUINOX

MAUD. Silence, you fool! I will show you how a queen can die. [*She thrusts the dagger into her side, and falls, off.*] Eric!

[*All are now grouped round the corpse of the Prince. The vestry door opens suddenly. A gigantic priest, with a terrible beard, long and snow-white, brandishing a huge cross of rough wood, rushes out.*]

PRIEST. Begone, revellers! Disturb not the sacred night with your cries! Children of the devil, I am at my prayers, my prayers for your lost souls! Accursèd are ye, accursèd of God! Begone!

[*He retires into the vestry, and slams the heavy door.*]

A SOLDIER. He is right! We are accursèd. The place is accursèd.

[*Panic seizes them all, and they rush off R., spurning the corpse of the Princess, and crying "Accursèd! The curse of God is upon us! We are accursèd!"*]

[*The cries die away. Absolute silence reigns. After a long pause NERISSA is seen among the trees, L. She feels her way from tree to tree.*]

NERISSA. This is the square. I wonder if his window is still lighted. He will come to me if he is awake.

[*She is now near centre of stage, almost touching the corpse of PRINCE ERIK.*]

[*She takes her violin and plays "Abide with Me" (or, as an alternative, the Serenade). At the end she waits, then gives a sigh.*]

I suppose he has gone to sleep. I will go back. Perhaps to-morrow! [*She turns back and goes out.*]

CURTAIN.

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THE EQUINOX

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