Pariah

August Strindberg

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TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH, WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY EDWIN BJORKMAN

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INTRODUCTION

Both "Creditors" and "Pariah" were written in the winter of 1888− 89 at Holte, near Copenhagen, where Strindberg, assisted by his first wife, was then engaged in starting what he called a "Scandinavian Experimental Theatre." In March, 1889, the two plays were given by students from the University of Copenhagen, and with Mrs. von Essen Strindberg as Tekla. A couple of weeks later the performance was repeated across the Sound, in the Swedish city of Malmo, on which occasion the writer of this introduction, then a young actor, assisted in the stage management. One of the actors was Gustav Wied, a Danish playwright and novelist, whose exquisite art since then has won him European fame. In the audience was Ola Hansson, a Swedish novelist and poet who had just published a short story from which Strindberg, according to his own acknowledgment on playbill and title−page, had taken the name and the theme of "Pariah."

Mr. Hansson has printed a number of letters (Tilskueren, Copenhagen, July, 1912) written to him by Strindberg about that time, as well as some very informative comments of his own. Concerning the performance of Malmo he writes: "It gave me a very unpleasant sensation. What did it mean? Why had Strindberg turned my simple theme upsidedown so that it became unrecognisable? Not a vestige of the 'theme from Ola Hansson' remained. Yet he had even suggested that he and I act the play together, I not knowing that it was to be a duel between two criminals. And he had at first planned to call it 'Aryan and Pariah'—which meant, of course, that the strong Aryan, Strindberg, was to crush the weak Pariah, Hansson, coram populo."

In regard to his own story Mr. Hansson informs us that it dealt with "a man who commits a forgery and then tells about it, doing both in a sort of somnambulistic state whereby everything is left vague and undefined." At that moment "Raskolnikov" was in the air, so to speak. And without wanting in any way to suggest imitation, I feel sure that the groundnote of the story was distinctly Dostoievskian. Strindberg himself had been reading Nietzsche and was—largely under the pressure of a reaction against the popular disapproval of his anti−feministic attitude—being driven more and more into a superman philosophy which reached its climax in the two novels "Chandalah" (1889) and "At the Edge of the Sea" (1890). The Nietzschean note is unmistakable in the two plays contained in the present volume.

But these plays are strongly colored by something else—by something that is neither Hansson−Dostoievski nor Strindberg− Nietzsche. The solution of the problem is found in the letters published by Mr. Hansson. These show that while Strindberg was still planning "Creditors," and before he had begun "Pariah," he had borrowed from Hansson a volume of tales by Edgar Allan Poe. It was his first acquaintance with the work of Poe, though not with American literature—for among his first printed work was a series of translations from American humourists; and not long ago a Swedish critic (Gunnar Castren in Samtiden, Christiania, June, 1912) wrote of Strindberg's literary beginnings that "he had learned much from Swedish literature, but probably more from Mark Twain and Dickens."

The impression Poe made on Strindberg was overwhelming. He returns to it in one letter after another. Everything that suits his mood of the moment is "Poesque" or "E. P−esque." The story that seems to have made the deepest impression of all was "The Gold Bug," though his thought seems to have distilled more useful material out of certain other stories illustrating Poe's theories about mental suggestion. Under the direct influence of these theories, Strindberg, according to his own statements to Hansson, wrote the powerful one−act play "Simoom," and made Gustav in "Creditors" actually CALL FORTH the latent epileptic tendencies in Adolph. And on the same authority we must trace the method of: psychological detection practised by Mr. X. in "Pariah" directly to "The Gold Bug."

Here we have the reason why Mr. Hansson could find so little of his story in the play. And here we have the origin of a theme which, while not quite new to him, was ever afterward to remain a favourite one with Strindberg: that of a duel between intellect and cunning. It forms the basis of such novels as "Chandalah" and "At the Edge of the Sea," but it recurs in subtler form in works of much later date. To readers of the present day, Mr. X.—that striking antithesis of everything a scientist used to stand for in poetry—is much less interesting as a superman in spe than as an illustration of what a morally and mentally normal man can do with the tools furnished him by our new understanding of human ways and human motives. And in giving us a play that holds our interest

as firmly as the best "love plot" ever devised, although the stage shows us only two men engaged in an intellectual wrestling match, Strindberg took another great step toward ridding the drama of its old, shackling conventions.

The name of this play has sometimes been translated as "The Outcast," whereby it becomes confused with "The Outlaw," a much earlier play on a theme from the old Sagas. I think it better, too, that the Hindu allusion in the Swedish title be not lost, for the best of men may become an outcast, but the baseness of the Pariah is not supposed to spring only from lack of social position.

PARIAH
AN ACT
1889

PERSONS
MR. X., an archaeologist, Middle−aged man.
MR. Y., an American traveller, Middle−aged man.

SCENE

(A simply furnished room in a farmhouse. The door and the windows in the background open on a landscape. In the middle of the room stands a big dining−table, covered at one end by books, writing materials, and antiquities; at the other end, by a microscope, insect cases, and specimen jars full of alchohol.)

(On the left side hangs a bookshelf. Otherwise the furniture is that of a well−to−do farmer.)

(MR. Y. enters in his shirt−sleeves, carrying a butterfly−net and a botany−can. He goes straight up to the bookshelf and takes down a book, which he begins to read on the spot.)

(The landscape outside and the room itself are steeped in sunlight. The ringing of church bells indicates that the morning services are just over. Now and then the cackling of hens is heard from the outside.)

(MR. X. enters, also in his shirt−sleeves.)

(MR. Y. starts violently, puts the book back on the shelf upside− down, and pretends to be looking for another volume.)

MR. X. This heat is horrible. I guess we are going to have a thunderstorm.

MR. Y. What makes you think so?

MR. X. The bells have a kind of dry ring to them, the flies are sticky, and the hens cackle. I meant to go fishing, but I couldn't find any worms. Don't you feel nervous?

MR. Y. [Cautiously] I?—A little.

MR. X. Well, for that matter, you always look as if you were expecting thunderstorms.

MR. Y. [With a start] Do I?

MR. X. Now, you are going away tomorrow, of course, so it is not to be wondered at that you are a little "journey−proud."— Anything new?—Oh, there's the mail! [Picks up some letters from the table] My, I have palpitation of the heart every time I open a letter! Nothing but debts, debts, debts! Have you ever had any debts?

MR. Y. [After some reflection] N−no.

MR. X. Well, then you don't know what it means to receive a lot of overdue bills. [Reads one of the letters] The rent unpaid—the landlord acting nasty—my wife in despair. And here am I sitting waist−high in gold! [He opens an iron−banded box that stands on the table; then both sit down at the table, facing each other] Just look—here I have six thousand crowns' worth of gold which I have dug up in the last fortnight. This bracelet alone would bring me the three hundred and fifty crowns I need. And with all of it I might make a fine career for myself. Then I could get the illustrations made for my treatise at once; I could get my work printed, and—I could travel! Why don't I do it, do you suppose?

MR. Y. I suppose you are afraid to be found out.

MR. X. That, too, perhaps. But don't you think an intelligent fellow like myself might fix matters so that he was never found out? I am alone all the time—with nobody watching me—while I am digging out there in the fields. It wouldn't be strange if I put something in my own pockets now and then.

MR. Y. Yes, but the worst danger lies in disposing of the stuff.

MR. X. Pooh! I'd melt it down, of course—every bit of it—and then I'd turn it into coins—with just as much gold in them as genuine ones, of course—−

MR. Y. Of course!

MR. X. Well, you can easily see why. For if I wanted to dabble in counterfeits, then I need not go digging for gold first. [Pause] It is a strange thing anyhow, that if anybody else did what I cannot make myself do, then I'd be willing to acquit him—but I couldn't possibly acquit myself. I might even make a brilliant speech in defence of the thief, proving that this gold was res nullius, or nobody's, as it had been deposited at a time when property rights did not yet exist; that even under existing rights it could belong only to the first finder of it, as the ground−owner has never included it in the valuation of his property; and so on.

MR. Y. And probably it would be much easier for you to do this if the—hm!—the thief had not been prompted by actual need, but by a mania for collecting, for instance—or by scientific aspirations— by the ambition to keep a discovery to himself. Don't you think so?

MR. X. You mean that I could not acquit him if actual need had been the motive? Yes, for that's the only

motive which the law will not accept in extenuation. That motive makes a plain theft of it.

MR. Y. And this you couldn't excuse?

MR. X. Oh, excuse—no, I guess not, as the law wouldn't. On the other hand, I must admit that it would be hard for me to charge a collector with theft merely because he had appropriated some specimen not yet represented in his own collection.

MR. Y. So that vanity or ambition might excuse what could not be excused by need?

MR. X. And yet need ought to be the more telling excuse—the only one, in fact? But I feel as I have said. And I can no more change this feeling than I can change my own determination not to steal under any circumstances whatever.

MR. Y. And I suppose you count it a great merit that you cannot— hm!—steal?

MR. X. No, my disinclination to steal is just as irresistible as the inclination to do so is irresistible with some people. So it cannot be called a merit. I cannot do it, and the other one cannot refrain!—But you understand, of course, that I am not without a desire to own this gold. Why don't I take it then? Because I cannot! It's an inability—and the lack of something cannot be called a merit. There!

[Closes the box with a slam. Stray clouds have cast their shadows on the landscape and darkened the room now and then. Now it grows quite dark as when a thunderstorm is approaching.]

MR. X. How close the air is! I guess the storm is coming all right.

[MR. Y. gets up and shuts the door and all the windows.]

MR. X. Are you afraid of thunder?

MR. Y. It's just as well to be careful.

(They resume their seats at the table.)

MR. X. You're a curious chap! Here you come dropping down like a bomb a fortnight ago, introducing yourself as a Swedish−American who is collecting flies for a small museum—−

MR. Y. Oh, never mind me now!

MR. X. That's what you always say when I grow tired of talking about myself and want to turn my attention to you. Perhaps that was the reason why I took to you as I did—because you let me talk about myself? All at once we seemed like old friends. There were no angles about you against which I could bump myself, no pins that pricked. There was something soft about your whole person, and you overflowed with that tact which only well−educated people know how to show. You never made a noise when you came home late at night or got up early in the morning. You were patient in small things, and you gave in whenever a conflict seemed threatening. In a word, you proved yourself the perfect companion! But you were entirely too compliant not to set me wondering about you in the long run—and you are too timid, too easily frightened. It seems almost as if you were made up of two different personalities. Why, as I sit here looking at your back in the mirror over there—it is as if I were looking at somebody else.

(MR. Y. turns around and stares at the mirror.)

MR. X. No, you cannot get a glimpse of your own back, man!—In front you appear like a fearless sort of fellow, one meeting his fate with bared breast, but from behind—really, I don't want to be impolite, but—you look as if you were carrying a burden, or as if you were crouching to escape a raised stick. And when I look at that red cross your suspenders make on your white shirt—well, it looks to me like some kind of emblem, like a trade−mark on a packing−box—

MR. Y. I feel as if I'd choke—if the storm doesn't break soon—

MR. X. It's coming—don't you worry!—And your neck! It looks as if there ought to be another kind of face on top of it, a face quite different in type from yours. And your ears come so close together behind that sometimes I wonder what race you belong to. [A flash of lightning lights up the room] Why, it looked as if that might have struck the sheriff's house!

MR. Y. [Alarmed] The sheriff's!

MR. X. Oh, it just looked that way. But I don't think we'll get much of this storm. Sit down now and let us have a talk, as you are going away to−morrow. One thing I find strange is that you, with whom I have become so intimate in this short time—that yon are one of those whose image I cannot call up when I am away from them. When you are not here, and I happen to think of you, I always get the vision of another acquaintance—one who does not resemble you, but with whom you have certain traits in common.

MR. Y. Who is he?

MR. X. I don't want to name him, but—I used for several years to take my meals at a certain place, and there, at the side−table where they kept the whiskey and the otter preliminaries, I met a little blond man, with blond, faded eyes. He had a wonderful faculty for making his way through a crowd, without jostling anybody or being jostled himself. And from his customary place down by the door he seemed perfectly able to reach whatever he wanted on a table that stood some six feet away from him. He seemed always happy just to be in company. But when he met anybody he knew, then the joy of it made him roar with laughter, and he would hug and pat the other fellow as if he hadn't seen a human face for years. When anybody stepped on his foot, he smiled as if eager to apologise for being in the way. For two years I watched him and amused myself by guessing at his occupation and character. But I never asked who he was; I didn't want to know, you see, for then all the fun would have been spoiled at once. That man had just your quality of being indefinite. At different times I made him out to be a teacher who had never got his licence, a non− commissioned officer, a druggist, a government clerk, a detective− −and like you, he looked as if made out of two pieces, for the front of him never quite fitted the back. One day I happened to read in a newspaper about a big forgery committed by a well−known government official. Then I learned that my indefinite gentleman had been a partner of the forger's brother, and that his name was Strawman. Later on I learned that the aforesaid Strawman used to run a circulating library, but that he was now the police reporter of a big daily. How in the world could I hope to establish a connection between the forgery, the police, and my little man's peculiar manners? It was beyond me; and when I asked a friend whether Strawman had ever been punished for something, my friend couldn't answer either yes or no—he just didn't know! [Pause.]

MR. Y. Well, had he ever been—punished?

MR. X. No, he had not. [Pause.]

MR. Y. And that was the reason, you think, why the police had such an attraction for him, and why he was so afraid of offending people?

MR. X. Exactly!

MR. Y. And did you become acquainted with him afterward?

MR. X. No, I didn't want to. [Pause.]

MR. Y. Would you have been willing to make his acquaintance if he had been—punished?

MR. X. Perfectly!

(MR. Y. rises and walks back and forth several times.)

MR. X. Sit still! Why can't you sit still?

MR. Y. How did you get your liberal view of human conditions? Are you a Christian?

MR. X. Oh, can't you see that I am not?

(MR. Y. makes a face.)

MR. X. The Christians require forgiveness. But I require punishment in order that the balance, or whatever you may call it, be restored. And you, who have served a term, ought to know the difference.

MR. Y. [Stands motionless and stares at MR. X., first with wild, hateful eyes, then with surprise and admiration] How—could—you− −know—that?

MR. X. Why, I could see it.

MR. Y. How? How could you see it?

MR. X, Oh, with a little practice. It is an art, like many others. But don't let us talk of it any more. [He looks at his watch, arranges a document on the table, dips a pen in the ink−well, and hands it to MR. Y.] I must be thinking of my tangled affairs. Won't you please witness my signature on this note here? I am going to turn it in to the bank at Malmo tomorrow, when I go to the city with you.

MR. Y. I am not going by way of Malmo.

MR. X. Oh, you are not?

MR. Y. No.

MR. X. But that need not prevent you from witnessing my signature.

MR. Y. N−no!—I never write my name on papers of that kind—

MR. X.—any longer! This is the fifth time you have refused to write your own name. The first time nothing more serious was involved than the receipt for a registered letter. Then I began to watch you. And since then I have noticed that you have a morbid fear of a pen filled with ink. You have not written a single letter since you

came here—only a post−card, and that you wrote with a blue pencil. You understand now that I have figured out the exact nature of your slip? Furthermore! This is something like the seventh time you have refused to come with me to Malmo, which place you have not visited at all during all this time. And yet you came the whole way from America merely to have a look at Malmo! And every morning you walk a couple of miles, up to the old mill, just to get a glimpse of the roofs of Malmo in the distance. And when you stand over there at the right−hand window and look out through the third pane from the bottom on the left side, yon can see the spired turrets of the castle and the tall chimney of the county jail.—And now I hope you see that it's your own stupidity rather than my cleverness which has made everything clear to me.

MR. Y. This means that you despise me?

MR. X. Oh, no!

MR. Y. Yes, you do—you cannot but do it!

MR. X. No—here's my hand.

(MR. Y. takes hold of the outstretched hand and kisses it.)

MR. X. [Drawing back his hand] Don't lick hands like a dog!

MR. Y. Pardon me, sir, but you are the first one who has let me touch his hand after learning—

MR. X. And now you call me "sir!"—What scares me about you is that you don't feel exonerated, washed clean, raised to the old level, as good as anybody else, when you have suffered your punishment. Do you care to tell me how it happened? Would you?

MR. Y. [Twisting uneasily] Yes, but you won't believe what I say. But I'll tell you. Then you can see for yourself that I am no ORDINARY criminal. You'll become convinced, I think, that there are errors which, so to speak, are involuntary—[twisting again] which seem to commit themselves—spontaneously—without being willed by oneself, and for which one cannot be held responsible— May I open the door a little now, since the storm seems to have passed over?

MR. X. Suit yourself.

MR. Y. [Opens the door; then he sits down at the table and begins to speak with exaggerated display of feeling, theatrical gestures, and a good deal of false emphasis] Yes, I'll tell you! I was a student in the university at Lund, and I needed to get a loan from a bank. I had no pressing debts, and my father owned some property—not a great deal, of course. However, I had sent the note to the second man of the two who were to act as security, and, contrary to expectations, it came back with a refusal. For a while I was completely stunned by the blow, for it was a very unpleasant surprise—most unpleasant! The note was lying in front of me on the table, and the letter lay beside it. At first my eyes stared hopelessly at those lines that pronounced my doom—that is, not a death−doom, of course, for I could easily find other securities, as many as I wanted—but as I have already said, it was very annoying just the same. And as I was sitting there quite unconscious of any evil intention, my eyes fastened upon the signature of the letter, which would have made my future secure if it had only appeared in the right place. It was an unusually well− written signature—and you know how sometimes one may absent− mindedly scribble a sheet of paper full of meaningless words. I had a pen in my hand—[picks up a penholder from the table] like this. And somehow it just began to run—I don't want to claim that there was anything mystical—anything of a spiritualistic nature back of it—for that kind of thing I don't believe in! It was a wholly unreasoned, mechanical process—my copying of that beautiful autograph over and over again. When all the clean space on the letter was used up, I had learned to reproduce the signature automatically—and then—[throwing away the penholder with a violent gesture] then I forgot all about it. That night I slept long and heavily. And when I woke up, I could feel that I had been dreaming, but I couldn't recall the dream itself. At times it was as if a door had been thrown ajar, and then I seemed to see the writing−table with the note on it as in a distant memory—and when I got out of bed, I was forced up to the table, just as if, after careful deliberation, I had formed an irrevocable decision to sign the name to that fateful paper. All thought of the consequences, of the risk involved, had disappeared—no hesitation remained—it was almost as if I was fulfilling some sacred duty—and so I wrote! [Leaps to his feet] What could it be? Was it some kind of outside influence, a case of mental suggestion, as they call it? But from whom could it come? I was sleeping alone in that room. Could it possibly be my primitive self—the savage to whom the keeping of faith is an unknown thing− −which pushed to the front while my consciousness was asleep— together with the criminal will of that self, and its inability to calculate the results of an action? Tell me, what do you think of it?

MR. X. [As if he had to force the words out of himself] Frankly speaking, your story does not convince

me—there are gaps in it, but these may depend on your failure to recall all the details— and I have read something about criminal suggestion—or I think I have, at least—hm! But all that is neither here nor there! You have taken your medicine—and you have had the courage to acknowledge your fault. Now we won't talk of it any more.

MR. Y. Yes, yes, yes, we must talk of it—till I become sure of my innocence.

MR. X. Well, are you not?

MR. Y. No, I am not!

MR. X. That's just what bothers me, I tell you. It's exactly what is bothering me!—Don't you feel fairly sure that every human being hides a skeleton in his closet? Have we not, all of us, stolen and lied as children? Undoubtedly! Well, now there are persons who remain children all their lives, so that they cannot control their unlawful desires. Then comes the opportunity, and there you have your criminal.—But I cannot understand why you don't feel innocent. If the child is not held responsible, why should the criminal be regarded differently? It is the more strange because—well, perhaps I may come to repent it later. [Pause] I, for my part, have killed a man, and I have never suffered any qualms on account of it.

MR. Y. [Very much interested] Have—you?

MR. X, Yes, I, and none else! Perhaps you don't care to shake hands with a murderer?

MR. Y. [Pleasantly] Oh, what nonsense!

MR. X. Yes, but I have not been punished,

ME. Y. [Growing more familiar and taking on a superior tone] So much the better for you!—How did you get out of it?

MR. X. There was nobody to accuse me, no suspicions, no witnesses. This is the way it happened. One Christmas I was invited to hunt with a fellow−student a little way out of Upsala. He sent a besotted old coachman to meet me at the station, and this fellow went to sleep on the box, drove the horses into a fence, and upset the whole equipage in a ditch. I am not going to pretend that my life was in danger. It was sheer impatience which made me hit him across the neck with the edge of my hand—you know the way—just to wake him up—and the result was that he never woke up at all, but collapsed then and there.

MR. Y. [Craftily] And did you report it?

MR. X. No, and these were my reasons for not doing so. The man left no family behind him, or anybody else to whom his life could be of the slightest use. He had already outlived his allotted period of vegetation, and his place might just as well be filled by somebody more in need of it. On the other hand, my life was necessary to the happiness of my parents and myself, and perhaps also to the progress of my science. The outcome had once for all cured me of any desire to wake up people in that manner, and I didn't care to spoil both my own life and that of my parents for the sake of an abstract principle of justice.

MR. Y. Oh, that's the way you measure the value of a human life?

MR. X. In the present case, yes.

MR. Y. But the sense of guilt—that balance you were speaking of?

MR. X. I had no sense of guilt, as I had committed no crime. As a boy I had given and taken more than one blow of the same kind, and the fatal outcome in this particular case was simply caused by my ignorance of the effect such a blow might have on an elderly person.

MR. Y. Yes, but even the unintentional killing of a man is punished with a two−year term at hard labour—which is exactly what one gets for—writing names.

MR. X. Oh, you may be sure I have thought of it. And more than one night I have dreamt myself in prison. Tell me now—is it really as bad as they say to find oneself behind bolt and bar?

MR. Y. You bet it is!—First of all they disfigure you by cutting off your hair, and if you don't look like a criminal before, you are sure to do so afterward. And when you catch sight of yourself in a mirror you feel quite sure that you are a regular bandit.

MR. X. Isn't it a mask that is being torn off, perhaps? Which wouldn't be a bad idea, I should say.

MR. Y. Yes, you can have your little jest about it!—And then they cut down your food, so that every day and every hour you become conscious of the border line between life and death. Every vital function is more or less checked. You can feel yourself shrinking. And your soul, which was to be cured and improved, is instead put on a starvation diet—pushed back a thousand years into outlived ages. You are not permitted to read anything but what

was written for the savages who took part in the migration of the peoples. You hear of nothing but what will never happen in heaven; and what actually does happen on the earth is kept hidden from you. You are torn out of your surroundings, reduced from your own class, put beneath those who are really beneath yourself. Then you get a sense of living in the bronze age. You come to feel as if you were dressed in skins, as if you were living in a cave and eating out of a trough—ugh!

MR. X. But there is reason back of all that. One who acts as if he belonged to the bronze age might surely be expected to don the proper costume.

MR. Y. [Irately] Yes, you sneer! You who have behaved like a man from the stone age—and who are permitted to live in the golden age.

MR. X. [Sharply, watching him closely] What do you mean with that last expression—the golden age?

MR. Y. [With a poorly suppressed snarl] Nothing at all.

MR. X. Now you lie—because you are too much of a coward to say all you think.

MR. Y. Am I a coward? You think so? But I was no coward when I dared to show myself around here, where I had had to suffer as I did.—But can you tell what makes one suffer most while in there?− −It is that the others are not in there too!

MR. X. What others?

MR. Y. Those that go unpunished.

MR. X. Are you thinking of me?

MR. Y. I am.

MR. X. But I have committed no crime.

MR. Y. Oh, haven't you?

MR. X. No, a misfortune is no crime.

MR. Y. So, it's a misfortune to commit murder?

MR. X. I have not committed murder.

MR. Y. Is it not murder to kill a person?

MR. X. Not always. The law speaks of murder, manslaughter, killing in self−defence—and it makes a distinction between intentional and unintentional killing. However—now you really frighten me, for it's becoming plain to me that you belong to the most dangerous of all human groups—that of the stupid.

MR. Y. So you imagine that I am stupid? Well, listen—would you like me to show you how clever I am?

MR. X. Come on!

MR. Y. I think you'll have to admit that there is both logic and wisdom in the argument I'm now going to give you. You have suffered a misfortune which might have brought you two years at hard labor. You have completely escaped the disgrace of being punished. And here you see before you a man—who has also suffered a misfortune—the victim of an unconscious impulse—and who has had to stand two years of hard labor for it. Only by some great scientific achievement can this man wipe off the taint that has become attached to him without any fault of his own—but in order to arrive at some such achievement, he must have money—a lot of money—and money this minute! Don't you think that the other one, the unpunished one, would bring a little better balance into these unequal human conditions if he paid a penalty in the form of a fine? Don't you think so?

MR. X. [Calmly] Yes.

MR. Y. Then we understand each other.—Hm! [Pause] What do you think would be reasonable?

MR. X. Reasonable? The minimum fine in such a case is fixed by the law at fifty crowns. But this whole question is settled by the fact that the dead man left no relatives.

MR. Y. Apparently you don't want to understand. Then I'll have to speak plainly: it is to me you must pay that fine.

MR. X. I have never heard that forgers have the right to collect fines imposed for manslaughter. And, besides, there is no prosecutor.

MR. Y. There isn't? Well—how would I do?

MR. X. Oh, NOW we are getting the matter cleared up! How much do you want for becoming my accomplice?

MR. Y. Six thousand crowns.

MR. X. That's too much. And where am I to get them?

(MR. Y. points to the box.)

MR. X. No, I don't want to do that. I don't want to become a thief.

MR. Y. Oh, don't put on any airs now! Do you think I'll believe that you haven't helped yourself out of that box before?

MR. X. [As if speaking to himself] Think only, that I could let myself be fooled so completely. But that's the way with these soft natures. You like them, and then it's so easy to believe that they like you. And that's the reason why I have always been on my guard against people I take a liking to!—So you are firmly convinced that I have helped myself out of the box before?

MR. Y. Certainly! MR. X. And you are going to report me if you don't get six thousand crowns?

MR. Y. Most decidedly! You can't get out of it, so there's no use trying.

MR. X. You think I am going to give my father a thief for son, my wife a thief for husband, my children a thief for father, my fellow−workers a thief for colleague? No, that will never happen!− −Now I am going over to the sheriff to report the killing myself.

MR. Y. [Jumps up and begins to pick up his things] Wait a moment!

MR. X. For what?

MR. Y. [Stammering] Oh, I thought—as I am no longer needed—it wouldn't be necessary for me to stay—and I might just as well leave.

MR. X. No, you may not!—Sit down there at the table, where you sat before, and we'll have another talk before you go.

MR. Y. [Sits down after having put on a dark coat] What are you up to now?

MR. X. [Looking into the mirror back of MR. Y.] Oh, now I have it! Oh−h−h!

MR. Y. [Alarmed] What kind of wonderful things are you discovering now?

MR. X. I see in the mirror that you are a thief—a plain, ordinary thief! A moment ago, while you had only the white shirt on, I could notice that there was something wrong about my book−shelf. I couldn't make out just what it was, for I had to listen to you and watch you. But as my antipathy increased, my vision became more acute. And now, with your black coat to furnish the needed color contrast For the red back of the book, which before couldn't be seen against the red of your suspenders—now I see that you have been reading about forgeries in Bernheim's work on mental suggestion—for you turned the book upsidedown in putting it back. So even that story of yours was stolen! For tins reason I think myself entitled to conclude that your crime must have been prompted by need, or by mere love of pleasure.

MR. Y. By need! If you only knew—

MR. X. If YOU only knew the extent of the need I have had to face and live through! But that's another story! Let's proceed with your case. That you have been in prison—I take that for granted. But it happened in America, for it was American prison life you described. Another thing may also be taken for granted, namely, that you have not borne your punishment on this side.

MR. Y. How can you imagine anything of the kind?

MR. X. Wait until the sheriff gets here, and you'll learn all about it.

(MR. Y. gets up.)

ME. X. There you see! The first time I mentioned the sheriff, in connection with the storm, you wanted also to run away. And when a person has served out his time he doesn't care to visit an old mill every day just to look at a prison, or to stand by the window—in a word, you are at once punished and unpunished. And that's why it was so hard to make you out. [Pause.]

MR. Y. [Completely beaten] May I go now?

MR. X. Now you can go.

MR. Y. [Putting his things together] Are you angry at me?

MR. X. Yes—would you prefer me to pity you?

MR. Y. [Sulkily] Pity? Do you think you're any better than I?

MR. X. Of course I do, as I AM better than you. I am wiser, and I am less of a menace to prevailing property rights.

MR. Y. You think you are clever, but perhaps I am as clever as you. For the moment you have me checked, but in the next move I can mate you—all the same!

MR. X. [Looking hard at MR. Y.] So we have to have another bout! What kind of mischief are you up to now?

MR. Y. That's my secret.

MR. X. Just look at me—oh, you mean to write my wife an anonymous letter giving away MY secret!

MR. Y. Well, how are you going to prevent it? You don't dare to have me arrested. So you'll have to let me go. And when I am gone, I can do what I please.

MR. X. You devil! So you have found my vulnerable spot! Do you want to make a real murderer out of me?

MR. Y. That's more than you'll ever become—coward!

MR. X. There you see how different people are. You have a feeling that I cannot become guilty of the same kind of acts as you. And that gives you the upper hand. But suppose you forced me to treat you as I treated that coachman?

[He lifts his hand as if ready to hit MR. Y.]

MR. Y. [Staring MR. X. straight in the face] You can't! It's too much for one who couldn't save himself by means of the box over there.

ME. X. So you don't think I have taken anything out of the box?

MR. Y. You were too cowardly—just as you were too cowardly to tell your wife that she had married a murderer.

MR. X. You are a different man from what I took you to be—if stronger or weaker, I cannot tell—if more criminal or less, that's none of my concern—but decidedly more stupid; that much is quite plain. For stupid you were when you wrote another person's name instead of begging—as I have had to do. Stupid you were when you stole things out of my book—could you not guess that I might have read my own books? Stupid you were when you thought yourself cleverer than me, and when you thought that I could be lured into becoming a thief. Stupid you were when you thought balance could be restored by giving the world two thieves instead of one. But most stupid of all you were when you thought I had failed to provide a safe corner−stone for my happiness. Go ahead and write my wife as many anonymous letters as you please about her husband having killed a man—she knew that long before we were married!— Have you had enough now?

MR. Y. May I go?

MR. X. Now you HAVE to go! And at once! I'll send your things after you!—Get out of here!

(Curtain.)