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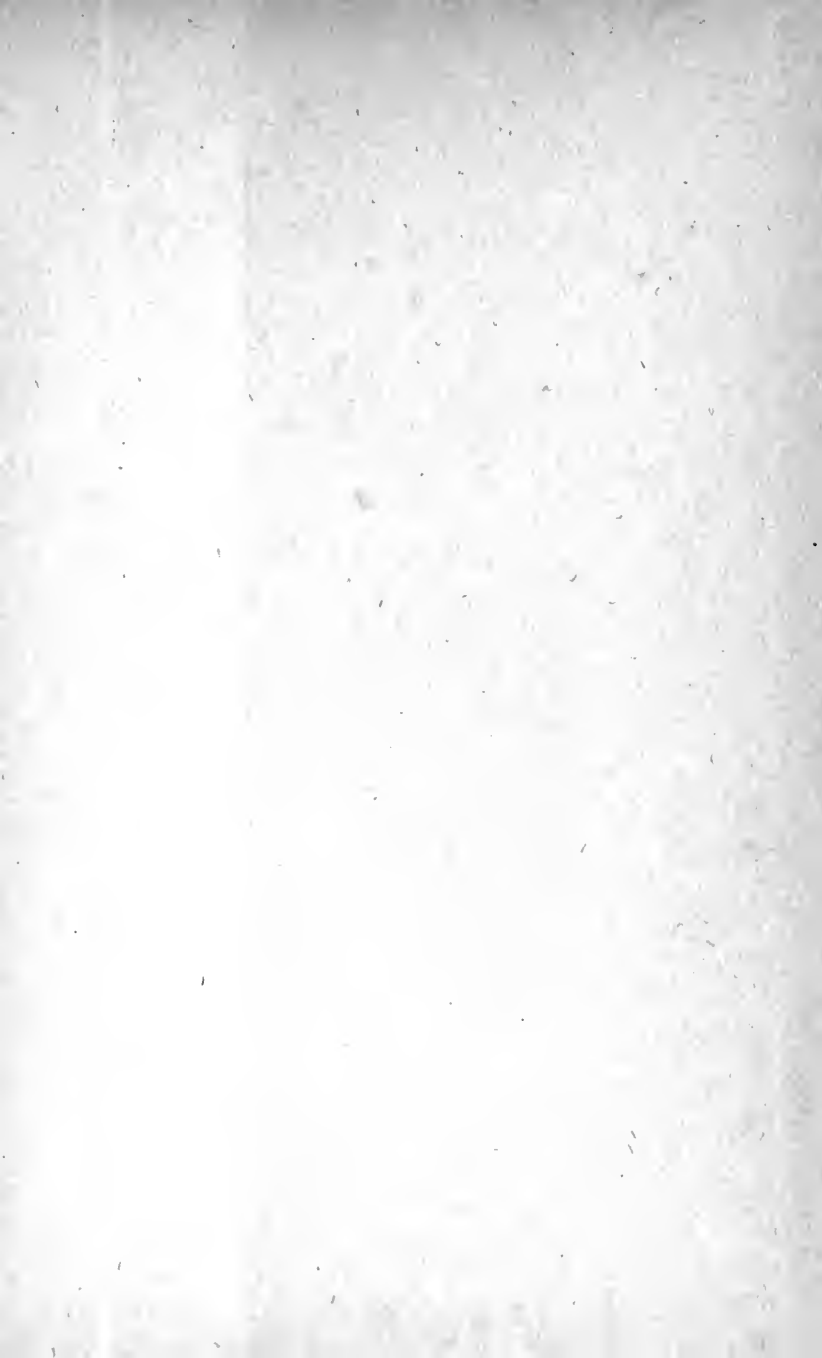
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ANNE PEDERSDOTTER

ANNE PEDERSDOTTER

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY
H. WIERS - JENSSEN

ENGLISH VERSION BY
JOHN MASEFIELD



BOSTON
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1917

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ANNE PEDERSDOTTER

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CHARACTERS

- ABSOLON PEDERSSON BEYER... Palace Chaplain, Bergen; 60 years
- MARTIN..... His son by former marriage; 25 years
- MERETE BEYER..... His mother; 80 years
- ANNE PEDERSDOTTER..... His wife; 22-23 years
- JENS SCHELOTRUP..... Bishop
- MASTER KLAUS..... Priest in Manger
- MASTER LAURENTIUS..... Priest in Fjeldberg
- MASTER JOHANNES..... Priest in Fane
- MASTER JORGEN..... Priest in St. Martin's Church, Bergen
- DAVID..... Choirmaster
- LEADER OF TOWN GUARDS
- HERLOFS-MARTE
- BENTE } Maid servants in Absolon Pedersson's house
- JORUND }
- SACRISTAN
- PRIESTS, OFFICIALS, GUARDS, CLERKS, MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN

The action takes place in Bergen in the year 1574: the first three Acts in Absolon's house, the last in the choir of the Cathedral.

ANNE PEDERSDOTTER

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE ONE

Bells at start. Garden at the back of Absolon Beyer's house. To the right (for the audience) the house, with porch before it; three or four steps lead up to this porch from the garden. Farther in the background is an outhouse. A narrow passage runs between the house and this outbuilding. To the left, in the foreground, a simple wooden table; behind it a bench, and at each end a chair. Trees. In the background a wall stretches across the stage; in the wall is a large gateway with a single, iron-studded wooden door. The arched gateway, as well as the whole wall, is capped with tiles. A couple of steps lead from the gate down into the garden. Outside the wall are seen the street, a mountain, and the sky. The wall extends to the left, where it can just be seen between the trees.

It is an afternoon in the early spring. Near the close of the first act the twilight falls. As the curtain rises, bells are heard ringing.

Anne Pedersdotter, Merete Beyer, Bente sit at the table to the left, mending clothes. From a large beer-jug they take a draught now and then. Anne sits farthest to the right. Merete and Bente on the bench. In the speeches of the two old women there is an undercurrent of venom far more bitter than the words they utter, and at the same time an anxious cautiousness lest they should venture too far.

MERETE (*holding a shift up to the light*)

This shift of yours is worn very thin, Anne Pedersdotter. It's no use putting in another patch. (*Lays it down. Begins on skirt*)

BENTE (*tentatively*)

Anne Pedersdotter has a fancy for that old shift.

MERETE

Ah? Why?

BENTE (*still working*)

It's one of the two she brought with her when she came here as a bride.

[*Anne bends lower over her work.*]

MERETE (*looks at Anne, and feeling that it is best to draw in her horns, says to Bente*)

Ah, be quiet, Bente. My son's wife came of good stock, though they were poor.

BENTE

Well, well. I say nothing against anybody. No shame in being poor. If only one has one's good name and that. (*Drinks*)

MERETE

If my son's wife were less of a suffering martyr, she'd snap your head off, Bente. You're too bitter with her. You nag her all day long. It's too much, Bente. Leave the girl alone, or you and I'll fall out.

BENTE

Tut, Merete Beyer. We've been friends these fifty years. You and I aren't going to quarrel for Anne Pedersdotter.

ANNE (*lays aside her work, and rising*)

Thank you for standing up for me, Merete. You needn't bother yourself. Bente's words don't concern me in the least.

BENTE

Why should they concern you? I've been used to say what was at the end of my tongue. (*To Merete*) When I was with your sainted husband — God rest his soul — and (*to Anne*) when the sainted Vibeke was mistress here, what I said wasn't so lightly held. Well, well. They say an old back doesn't fit new harness.

MERETE (*looks at Anne to see if she will retort. But she remains silent*)

That may be, Bente. But nor does a new wife fit an old house. Remember that, Bente.

[*Bente growls. Anne goes to back of S. Bells ring.*]

MERETE

Where are you going? (*Anne does not answer*) Did you hear me?

ANNE

Yes.

MERETE

Where are you going?

ANNE

Nowhere.

MERETE

Have you darned the hose yet?

ANNE

No.

MERETE

I don't leave my work unfinished.

ANNE

I must move about. The air's close. It's stifling.

BENTE

Spring air generally is.

ANNE

I wonder if the French grapes will ripen in the Bishop's garden this year.

MERETE

Perhaps you think, because the air's close, that I and Bente will darn your hose for you.

BENTE

Anne Pedersdotter probably thinks one can get help for anything one can't do oneself. (*In a low tone*) No matter what sort of help. That was her sainted mother's idea. And she was right.

ANNE (*has been listening to the noise outside, and has not heard Bente's words*)

What's that noise? They're shouting and crying.

MERETE

It's the Dutch stevedores fighting at the inn. Hardly a day passes but there's fights and bloodshed down there.

[*Cries are heard outside, but at a distance, only now and then increasing in strength.*]

ANNE

No. It's not from there. They're shouting on the common.

MERETE

Well, let them shout, in God's name. Let the drunken beasts shriek themselves hoarse. Then they'll be quiet, probably.

BENTE (*starts up in terror*)

Lord have mercy! Is it a fire? The wind's blowing straight here.

MERETE (*rising*)

In the name of Christ!

ANNE

No! No! Those are the bells for evening service.
No! Something else is the matter.

SCENE TWO

As before. Jorund enters.

JORUND (*rushing from the house before Anne has finished speaking, wailing*)

Lord have mercy on us! Satan is loose.

OTHERS (*hurrying towards her*)

What is it?

JORUND

I went to the door to hear what all the noise and running meant. Then Kristense, the tanner's —

OTHERS

— Yes? Well?

JORUND

They're going to take a witch on the common.

OTHERS

Lord a mercy!

JORUND

The guards are there, oh, and crowds. Kris said they could see the witch. She were out on the roof, calling the Devil. He may blast the guards with fire and brimstone. And us, too, God help us!

MERETE

Shall we never be rid of witches? We burnt six at the stake only two years back.

BENTE

God spare us. The Devil begets new ones. All round us.

MERETE (*folding up the clothes*)

Let's lock ourselves in and read the Bible. God'll guard us till Absolon comes back.¹

[*David, Choirmaster, enters, running into the garden from the back.*]

DAVID

The blessing of God on you. Is Master Absolon back yet?

MERETE

The blessing of God on you, David Choirmaster. No, Master Absolon is still at the castle with Sir Rosenkrantz.

DAVID

When'll he be back?

MERETE

Not before six. And we women are alone here, with the Devil of hell not a hundred yards away.

DAVID (*coming to chair C.*)

Gird up thy loins, Merete Beyer. The Devil will be beaten in the fight. Oh, my feet have been swift upon the mountains! (*Sits*)

[*Bente comes to right of seat. Merete to above seat. Bente pushes beer-jug respectfully towards him.*]

DAVID

Ah, no. Come. Great things are happening here. Strange things to the glory of God. (*Takes a deep draught of ale*) Thanks for God's good gifts. Well, they're arresting Herlofs-Marte.

¹ The fear and anxiety of the women must not at any point be made to appear ridiculous. They were fully justified in their terror by the idea of the time.

ANNE (*advancing*)

Herlofs-Marte? I know Herlofs-Marte. She lived on the common. Mother and I lodged with her.

[*The others look anxiously at her.*]

DAVID

I'd advise you not to say much about that just now, Anne Pedersdotter. The city guard and half the town are surrounding that house on the common. They're going to take it by storm. She'll be tried for the witch she is.

BENTE

So that's what it's come to. Jesus, Mary, and all the saints! (*Sits chair R.*)

DAVID (*starts up*)

Pah! Fie! Popish blasphemy. You may come to suffer in the cellar of the Council House for idolatrous talk like that.

BENTE

Ah! God forgive me, David. It's old habits. I am Lutheran at heart, but the tongue is wickedly popish, without God bridles it.

MERETE

What about Herlofs-Marte?

DAVID

She was formally accused this morning by three honourable women. And their husbands were present and swore to what was said. God be praised and glorified that we can rid the town of them that hate Him.

MERETE

Amen. Amen. Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

ANNE (*affected like the rest*)

What has she done?

DAVID

Well! What has she not done? Blasted Tolmer Piper's eldest; milked blood from Skrivers cow, and given a hard birth to two women in childbed. All because they wouldn't lend her butter, or something.

MERETE (*with great seriousness*)

That the Devil can have such power!

DAVID

And us with the true doctrines.

BENTE

He goes about like a roaring lion. (*Folds her hands and sings with strong but trembling voice*)

“But he that doth exalt the Lord
The Lord shall save away-a,
The moon by night him shall not smite,
Nor yet the sun by day-a.”

MERETE (*before Bente has finished singing*)

The Council lost no time.

DAVID

No. Thank God (*rises*) that they are prompt, those gentlemen, when it concerns God's kingdom. When they had heard the evidence, they ordered the guards to Marte's house at the double.

BENTE

Yes. You must pounce to catch fleas.

DAVID

Ah! He might have taken her confession. That man of Glad always had great power with witches. Can't we send for him?

MERETE

Disturb Sir Rosenkrantz at his prayers? No, David. [*Distant cries and heavy blows. Cries have also been*]

heard during the foregoing conversation. The speakers have then paused in their speeches, the tone of the whole being affected by the interruptions.

DAVID (*has risen*)

There! Hark! (*Turns and goes up stage*) They're storming her house.

[*All much affected.*]

JORUND (*at gate*)

And the witch. She's up by the skylight, calling fire out of the air.

BENTE (*up*)

And a south wind blowing.

MERETE

Is there no one there from the church to pray against her?

DAVID

Only Lucas, the organist. But the priest of St. Martin's has been sent for, and ought to be bringing Master Absolon. I mustn't wait longer. Tell Master Absolon the instant he comes from the castle. I must run. God save us all!

[*Goes out of the gate to L. and is heard going to the right.*]

MERETE (*calling after him*)

Wait, David. I'm coming. We can see her taken. There'll be no fire out of the air.

[*Throws a shawl about her.*]

BENTE (*hastily folding up her work*)

Beelzebub has power in the air.

MERETE

Are you coming too, Anne Pedersdotter?

ANNE

No, I'm not.

BENTE

No. Anne Pedersdotter has probably no great wish to see Herlofs-Marte caught.

ANNE

Some one must be here to tell Absolon when he comes.
[Merete and Bente hasten out through the gate, and are heard going to the R.]

JORUND *(can hardly stand still from fear and curiosity)*

May I go too, Anne?

ANNE

Yes. Go.

JORUND

Oh, what times we live in! Well, thank God, she'll be burned to a cinder.

[Exits. Anne shuts gate, then comes down to chair C.]

SCENE THREE

The same. Anne alone. Anne tries to arrange the garments, then throws them in disorder up into the large basket on the table. The foregoing scene has brought her into a condition of alarm and anxiety.

ANNE *(in a low voice)*

Burn Herlofs-Marte! Burn Herlofs-Marte!

[Herlofs-Marte appears in the passage between the house and outbuilding. A little woman, old and wrinkled, about 78 years old. Face wild and white with terror; clothes in rags; hands bloody. She glides a few steps silently forward, and speaks in a low voice.]

MARTE

Anne!

ANNE *(turning, looks in silent horror at Marte, and says half aloud)*

Herlofs-Marte!

MARTE (*at L. of wall; beckons her nearer*)

Help me, can you?

ANNE

I don't know.

MARTE (*coming nearer*)

You must. You can't drive me straight to death.

Anne. Help me. You must!

ANNE

How can I?

MARTE

Oh, you can. It's only just to show me a place. When they broke in, I went straight through the cellar and hid in the passage. They passed close to me when I was in the ditch. Then I got through the hedge. Look at my hands, Anne. (*Stretching out her hands, from which the blood is dripping*) Then I came here. I've been here ever since David came. God in heaven, have mercy! God sent them away. Anne, you must help me. I helped your mother. It's only just to hide me till dark. Anne! Anne! They'll burn me on North Point if you don't.

ANNE

Marte, I daren't. There's Absolon, my husband. Remember him.

MARTE

For the sake of Christ's dear wounds, Anne. Hark! They're shouting again. Anne! It's death. It's death. They'll burn me if they catch me. (*Almost kneeling, she entreats, catching hold of Anne's dress*)

ANNE

Will you swear by God's blessed death and Word that you're not a witch?

MARTE

Not a witch? (*A short pause; she glances from side to side in terror*) I don't know.

ANNE (*tearing herself free*)

God save us all!

MARTE (*rising*)

You hold your tongue. Do you know when the Devil may come to you? Do you know how he tempts? Do you know how he had your mother in his power? Do you know how he may get you?

ANNE

Get out of here, Marte. Or I'll call at the gate that you're here.

MARTE

You wouldn't? Anne, you can't. You do it, and I'll accuse you. Your mother got off because you were her child. But you shall burn too, if you give me up. (*She crawls towards steps at L.*) Oh, no, no, don't listen to me. I'm mad with terror. (*Sinks down*) I'm old. I've palsy. If they torture and burn me! [*Sinks on steps, staring with chattering teeth and hands clasped round her knees. Bells ring.*]

ANNE (*slowly*)

You say that my mother —

MARTE (*rousing herself*)

No, no. Don't listen to me. I'm mad. Let me hide. Don't call them. For God's sake! For God's precious blood and wounds! Have mercy, Anne. You may need mercy some day.

ANNE (*turned away*)

Hide, then. Get up the loft. It's dark there. They won't look here. God forgive my sin. But you were a true friend to my mother.

MARTE

God reward you. (*Going a little nearer her*) God repay you. (*When about to go up a few steps, her limbs fail her. She is near falling, but saves herself with her hands. In this position she says in an undertone to herself*) Satan blast the hounds for all they do to a poor old woman. I'm so afraid of death, Anne. I was by when they burned Maren Gjeit.

[*Anne cannot bring herself to help her. Marte sits a moment, with closed eyes, mumbling, with her face turned towards audience. Rises suddenly in terror and escapes into house, grasping the railing and door-post for support.*

Anne, left alone, crosses herself on forehead and breast and makes the sign of the cross where Marte sat. Her lips move in anxious prayer. Goes to table, seating herself heavily in chair to L. Her head sinks on her arms, and one sees how her excitement finds vent in tears. Starts up as the gate opens.

SCENE FOUR

The same. Martin, a somewhat pale young man, in dark traveling-dress, enters through gate. His appearance bears the marks of much study, his face being rather thin. But when he warms up, it may be seen that he possesses his father's strong temperament, and has also inherited his thirst for life. He remains standing a moment inside the gate. Anne has risen and looks inquiringly at him.

MARTIN (*approaching*):

Good day. Is Master Absolon in?

ANNE

No. But I expect him in every moment. He is at the castle.

MARTIN

I am his son Martin, from Copenhagen.

ANNE (*recovers little by little from the terror of the foregoing scene*)

You are Master Martin! Well, welcome back to your father's house. You hardly know me, I suppose. I am Anne Pedersdotter.

MARTIN

You are my father's wife?

ANNE

I have been Master Absolon's wife now going on five years.

MARTIN (*looks at her somewhat embarrassed at first, then grasps her hand*)

As I wrote to Father when he told me he was married, my father's wife will always find me a good, devoted son.

ANNE (*crosses to steps, bows*)

Won't you come in and leave your cloak? And your luggage?

MARTIN

It's not off the ship yet. It'll come. I was in such a hurry to reach home that I jumped ashore directly the ship was alongside the quay. Perhaps I was a little more excited than was right for a Master of Theology. (*Smiling*)

ANNE

But won't you —? (*Pointing to house*)

MARTIN

Oh, no, thanks. Let me sit here and wait for Father. [*They go together to table. He above her. They sit, he on the bench behind table, she, after removing the large basket from table.*]

MARTIN

When I was a schoolboy, I used to like to sit in this corner to learn my lessons. But Grandmother — is she —

ANNE

She's out too. (*Hastily; rises*) Shall I draw you some ale? We brewed yesterday.

MARTIN

There's some in the jug here. That'll do. (*Anne sits*) I don't really want any. (*Looking about*) The place hasn't changed much since I left. (*Moves*)

ANNE

And that's nine years ago.

MARTIN

Yes. It's nine years. And you are Anne Pedersdotter.

ANNE (*her manner becomes gradually freer*)

Yes. My father was Peder Gerhardson, priest in Selji. He is now at peace in God. When he died, Mother came to live here at Bergen, and Master Absolon was a great help to her. Of course, he was my father's great friend. My mother and I could never thank him enough for all he did for us.

MARTIN

Yes, God has made my father the instrument of much good to the widow and the fatherless.

ANNE

And then, when Mother died, and I was alone in the world, he brought me here as his wife.

MARTIN

Yes. He wrote me. He said he hadn't chosen his wife for her wealth, but for something far better, a

fear of God and pleasant conversation. (*A move from Anne; he becomes silent*)

ANNE

You had a good voyage?

MARTIN

Better than we dared hope. Only four weeks from Copenhagen.

ANNE

We weren't expecting you for a fortnight. You have seen a lot of the world.

MARTIN

Yes. Father let me do as he did. I've wandered far and long. Five years studying at Copenhagen. Then for four years more at Wittenberg. I took my degree at Wittenberg, like Father.

ANNE

He was so pleased when he got your letter saying that. We gave a thanksgiving feast, and all the canons of the chapter came. — Your father is very fond of you. (*Becomes silent*)

MARTIN

Are all friends and relations well?

ANNE

Yes, thank God. Your father and grandmother. They've kept well, though there was plague and other sickness about.

MARTIN (*looking at her*)

So it's five years since Father brought you here. He'd been a widower ten years. He must thank God for giving him so good a second wife. He is still a young man. And then, having no children to interest him —

ANNE

But he had you.

MARTIN

I was far away, Anne Pedersdotter. You were young then.

ANNE

I was seventeen. Now I'm twenty-two.

MARTIN

And I'm nearly twenty-six. I was seventeen when I entered the University. Father used to joke at me, calling me backward. I was a year later than he was. He was only sixteen when he went up.

[The remainder of the scene is coloured by the dawn of a love between these two, of which they are not conscious themselves. It sets its mark only in a slight degree on the contents and form of their speeches; but it must appear in the whole tone and feeling of the scene, and must be felt, as it is the groundwork of what happens later.]

ANNE (*rises*)

But shan't I draw you some fresh ale? The ale in the jug must be flat.

MARTIN

No. I don't drink, thank you. (*Rises*) D'you know, Anne Pedersdotter, the more I look at you, the more I seem to recognise you. And your voice too.

[Anne puts down jug and backs a step.]

ANNE

I can't help thinking that I've met you before, too, Master Martin. I can't think whether it's the face or the voice I recognise.

MARTIN

Didn't you live over there on the common, near Herlofs-Marte's house?

ANNE (*starts on hearing the name, but will not now speak of Herlofs-Marte*)

Yes. (*Backing a little more to C.*) We lived with her.

MARTIN

Then I have spoken to you. Twice. But you won't remember.

ANNE

No. I don't remember.

MARTIN (*laughing softly, coming C. to her*)

I was a boy then. We'd been having fun with a town guard who was drunk. He came after us, lashing out at us. He'd have locked us up if he could have caught us. The others dodged, but he nearly got me. There was a little girl at Herlofs-Marte's door. She called to me, and beckoned. So I rushed into the house, and before the guard could get me, she nipped me into a passage leading through the gardens. Leading right up to here. Just to where we're sitting. Do you remember that?

ANNE (*slowly*)

No. I don't remember that. It wasn't then.

MARTIN

Then you must remember the other time?

ANNE

When was that?

MARTIN

One Christmas, I'd disobeyed Father, and gone with the choir boys, singing carols. We went to Herlofs-Marte's house, to your mother. You gave me a

penny and some sweets, because you said I sang best. It must have been you. Do you recollect that now?

ANNE

Yes. I recollect that very well. So that was you?

MARTIN

Yes. I was eleven years old, then.

ANNE

I was eight. You sang carols in Norwegian and Latin. You had such a high, clear voice.

MARTIN

So you remember that still. I wonder if it's only fancy, or if —

ANNE

What?

MARTIN

It seems as if I'd remembered you ever since then. All the time.

ANNE

You can hardly have done that, Master Martin.

MARTIN

Well, I remembered the moment I heard you speak.

ANNE

Well, I knew you. But as for remembering you all the time —! Still, I've thought of you many, many times.

MARTIN

Thought of me?

ANNE

Very anxiously, Master Martin. Wondering how you'd behave to so young a stepmother. I've certainly brought neither riches nor honour to the house. (*Turns aside to hide the rising tears; speaks in a low voice*) As I hear often enough.

MARTIN (*rises and seizes her hand*)

Anne Pedersdotter, I don't know you. Not very well. But I believe you've made my father happy, which is more than my sainted mother did. You needn't be anxious about me. I shall help you and be as good a son to you as you can wish. I know it's hard for a young woman like you to be lady of the house here; but I promise I'll lighten your path all I can. So dry your eyes and welcome me home again. For now we know each other. Don't we? (*He pats her hand*)

ANNE (*looking long and warmly at him*)

You've kept your voice. It's as pleasant as when you went carol-singing. And now you're my son.

SCENE FIVE

The same. Absolon stands at gate. He is a strong man of about sixty years, with a clerical dignity that is not oppressive; accustomed to fill the place he occupies with the excessive engagedness and strong passion of the Renaissance. He enjoys talking, and talks well. Only occasionally is his daily conversation marked by a clerical tone; in him there is room for seriousness and laughter. In his joy over his son there is a pride and a vanity that he himself finds a trifle amusing. Now he stands in the gateway, looking at the two. The light falls in such a manner that he does not at once recognise his son.

ANNE (*turns, and hurries towards Absolon, almost as if seeking protection*)

Absolon. Here's your son.

ABSOLON (*extending his arm*)

Mi fili. Delicium animae meae! A happy return to you! (*Martin hurries towards him. A long and hearty embrace. Absolon holds Martin from him*) Let me look at you. My dear, dear boy. How you've grown! The lad's become a man. A little pale after the voyage and the studying. You must eat and grow strong here. (*Anne comes down L.C.*) We must have you strong for labour in the Lord's vineyard. And what a surprise you've given us. We didn't expect you for a fortnight.

MARTIN

We had wonderfully fair winds. Skipper Gaute says it was the quickest passage he ever made.

ABSOLON

Well, well. Thank God for it. But haven't you had anything to eat and drink?

ANNE (*standing close to her husband*)

I asked him; but he refused.

ABSOLON *seizing her hand, says with strong emphasis*)

And this is my wife, Anne Pedersdotter. We've been married now nearly five years.

MARTIN

Yes. I've been talking to her. I wished you happiness in my letters. I wish it again now. Since I've seen my stepmother, I'm sure my wish for your happiness has been granted.

ABSOLON

Thanks. Thanks. My dear boy, how glad I am to hear you. Come. Sit down here by me. (*Martin sits at L. of table. Anne gets jugs, exit L. I. E.*) Anne will fetch us some ale. We brewed yesterday. Or would you rather go in? I like to — (*sits on bench*)

sit here. The air's so mild. *Mi fili*. It's as if you brought my youth back. From Copenhagen and Wittenberg. (*Absolon has now seated himself on bench. Martin on chair to L.*) *Magister theologiae, cum laude egregia*. And thanks for all your letters. I read every one before the Chapter. The good gentlemen were surprised at your learning. Most of it was a cut above them.

[*Anne has already been in and now returns with two tankards, and sets them on table.*]

ABSOLON

Eh? Ha, ha! There. Thank you, Anne. Now. Drink your welcome home with your father and mother. Welcome home again. And may the Lord God give you strength for your coming labours. (*They drink. Anne sits R. of table*) Ah! it's good to have a drink after the long sermon at the Castle.

MARTIN

You were preaching to the Castellan?

ABSOLON (*after motioning Anne to a place beside him*)

Preach? Yes. A sermon the good Sir Rosenkrantz will remember. He and his lawyers had designs on the school property. But I read him a lesson that made him jump. Oh, a rector here has more than his doctrines to think of in these bad times, my son.

MARTIN

Have you as good health for your work, Father?

ABSOLON

Yes. I am well, thank God. Detmar, the surgeon, says I must be careful with my heart. It won't bear overstrain or excitement. Well. It's borne my excitements in the past, and they've been plenty. So it will probably bear those still to come. Eh?

That conclusion was hardly *regulis logica, mi fili*. My son, my son. I feel so buoyant and happy just because you sit here beside me. We two students from Wittenberg. (*Changing his manner*) Do you know, thinking it over, I've wondered if it was wise, your going to Wittenberg. The spirit of Luther's gone, I'm afraid. The Philippists play a cunning game there where that man of God gave the clear light. It might have been better if you'd gone to Leipzig. Still, I couldn't grudge you Wittenberg. There is nothing so young and strong in all Germany as Wittenberg, nor any place so beautiful. When it's mild here, in Bergen, in spring, my old bones feel a longing to be off. And it's always towards Wittenberg. Wittenberg, eh? But here I stick. And it's as well. For I've more than I can do, what with the school and the church. God has been good to me. I'm at peace with the world and at home. Still, it's good to have some place to long for. (*Absolon has now and then stroked Anne's hand. Martin looks at the two with an annoyance he cannot account for. Anne has not responded to her husband's caress, but looks down*) But come. Eh! I'm running on. It's you who ought to be talking. You just back from abroad with all sorts of news —

MARTIN (*as if waking*)

I've letters and greetings to you from Wittenberg as well as Copenhagen. Professor Reuchlinus. . . .

ABSOLON

Is he alive still? Well, well. Why, he was on in years even in my time.

MARTIN

Still alive, and teaching. And Master Hemmingsen.

ABSOLON

Lord! Lord! To think. Here I sit shut in Bergen, and you come with messages from the world out there to shew that I'm not forgotten. My son, my son. This is a great day. Anne. My little Anne. What a son we have, eh? Eh? If I could only get out of school to-morrow, I'd sit at your desk, I would, and let you tell and tell.

[Noise and shouts heard from without.]

ABSOLON

What's that noise?

ANNE *(starts and springs up. Gets round above seat to L. of it)*

Oh, Absolon. Martin's coming back was such a surprise that I forgot a message to you. Herlofs-Marte over there on the common is accused as a witch.

ABSOLON *(rises, shaking)*

Herlofs-Marte!

[Absolon goes to C. Martin goes to R. below table.]

ANNE

The Council made the guards storm the house. David Choirmaster ran across to ask you to be present when they took her, in case she should confess, or accuse any one.

ABSOLON

And the Council has done that on its own responsibility. When will the confounded Council learn that it's the Church's work to deal with witches. And Marte's accused!

ANNE

They're storming the house. That's what the noise is. Merete ran there, with Bente and David.

ABSOLON (*turns to R.*)

But she's a dangerous woman, that Marte. It is strange, my son, how zealous the Devil has become. Far worse than he used to be. He hates our pure doctrines. He sends witches among us to rob us of the Truth.

SCENE SIX

As before. On the street are heard voices, that come nearer. At the same time voices are heard in the passage.

ABSOLON (*advancing to the middle of stage*)

What is all this? What do you want?

[*Guards and a couple of citizens emerge from the passage, torn and dusty.*

GUARD (*hastily*)

We're looking for Herlofs-Marte.

ABSOLON

Here?

[*Anne has now moved down R. Crowd stand by.*

GUARD

Yes, here. We've traced her here.

ABSOLON

One would think it enough that the Council sends you after witches without telling the Chapter. Now you force your way into a priest's house by a private gate. Do you think I harbour witches?

GUARD

God forbid, Master Absolon. But when we broke into her house it was empty, and there's the little passage here at the back, which she could have come by, and there were rags from her clothes in the hedge. [*Enter two men at back. In the meantime the gate has*

been opened. Merete, David, Bente, Jorand, Lucas, Master Jorgen, men, women, and children have crowded in. Over all, curiosity, excitement, and terror mixed with devotion. Frightened voices are heard: "Is she here?" Merete and Bente try as well as possible to welcome Martin. Absolon himself is so strongly affected by excitement that he makes no effort to assert his rights as master of the house. Wailings are heard. On the wall are seen boys who have climbed up.

ABSOLON (*in answer to the speech of the Guard*)

Well, she's not come here. For if she had, Anne . . . Have you seen anything?

[*Anne shakes her head.*]

GUARD (*roughly*)

And I say she has come here. She tore her hands in the hedge. There are marks of blood the whole way where she put out her hands to steady herself. You can see the blood yourself. Look here. Why, God save us, here's blood on the wall!

[*Crowd bursts in, all in great excitement; as many as can rush forward to see the traces of blood. Among the voices Guard is heard shouting.*]

GUARD

Stand back, you —

[*Drives the people back to L. A guard has in the meantime been up to the steps, where Herlofs-Marte sank down; looks closely, then cries out.*]

GUARD

Here! (*All thither. As the guards come down, the crowd start to come in*) She's been here. (*Upon the porch*) And here. See? She's put her hand on the latch. She's in the house.

[*Absolon and Anne hurry toward house.*]

ABSOLON

Who has given you the right to —

GUARD

Are you drunk, Master Absolon? Are you going to stop us take a witch? (*To his helpers*) Jost — Hendrik, come in here.

[*The three enter the house. On the stage all tremble with suspense.*]

ABSOLON (*in a low tone, earnestly to Anne*)

Don't you know if she is in there?

ANNE (*speaks with difficulty*)

I don't know. I'd work to do. I was alone.

ABSOLON (*sees that she is lying; controls himself and says aloud*)

If she is here, she's got here by the Devil's help. (*Looks sternly at Merete, who has come somewhat forward and looks at Anne as if to devour her. Turns suddenly to Jorgen*) Master Jorgen, are you a party to these proceedings? When did the Council get the right to carry on in this way?

JORGEN

Don't you preach to me, Master Absolon. The Council sent to the Bishop, and I'm here by Bishop's orders. It strikes me we'd better be praising God that the witch is taken than — I'm thinking it's a queer Chapter, when its notary talks as you do.

ABSOLON

Mind what you say, Master Jorgen. If any one has been zealous against witches and popery, it's I. We live in bad times when the Guard hunts for witches in the house of the palace chaplain.

[*A piercing cry is heard from house. It is Herlofs-Marte, who has been taken. A shock passes through all*]

on stage. Merete sinks down on bench. Bente rushes up to her. Martin draws near to Merete, but his eye seeks Anne. Anne tries to conceal herself behind Absolon; she now stands close to side of porch. The crowd has unconsciously moved back from the house. In the terrified stillness bells are heard ringing. Marte's screams and the heavy tramping of the guard on stairs. The door opens and Herlofs-Marte appears. A shudder passes through all on stage.

SCENE SEVEN

As before. Marte, mad with frantic terror, strikes in all directions, tears herself loose from the two guards, falls over steps, looks about like a hunted animal. Hair hanging about her face, cap torn off, clothes in rags.

The crowd has drawn back in fear, but not one shows any signs of pity. Some stand with folded hands, mumbling prayers. Guards stand about Marte, but not so as to hide her from those on stage.

MARTE (*rushes up to Absolon, and falls on knees*)

Oh, Master Absolon, save me! For God's sake!
 For Christ's sake! I am innocent. I won't be
 burned. Anne! Beg for me. God blast you all!
 God blot you out! Absolon! Absolon! (*Absolon
 does not answer. Guard grabs her. Marte starts up,
 hissing and spitting at him like a cat*) Fie! Get out.
 Out, you drunken dog! Satan take you! (*Wilder
 and wilder*) The Devil take you all! (*In despair*)
 Let me go. I won't be tortured. I'll confess.
 You needn't torture me. Yes. Yes. I've been
 with Satan. Oh, let me go! I won't be tortured.

I'll tell everything, everything. (*Guards again seize her and drag her away. In a last fit of fury she pushes the guards aside. Her eyes gleam hysterically, she pushes her hair back from her forehead*) You are all the Devil's. You're all the Devil's black dogs. I know you. Curse you, Absolon, for kicking me out. Curse you, Anne Pedersdotter. I see your eyes, Anne Pedersdotter. You'll come to what I've come to. Curse you all!

[*She grasps her throat as if to choke herself. Crowd cry out in terror. Guard seizes her. One of guards throws her over his shoulder and carries her to the gate. Prayers, noise, talk, singing of hymns. David's voice is heard: "Soli deo gloria!"*]

Anne has sunk down in Absolon's arms. Martin, during the foregoing, has gone over to her and his father. A highly excited scene. Marte lifted over the shoulder of the guard. About them the terrified noisy crowd. Boys on wall screaming and shouting.

Martin, Absolon, and Anne in foreground to R.; Merete, Bente, and David in foreground to L. Above the noise, cries, and psalm-singing are heard the booming strokes of church-bells.

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE ONE

Main or living-room in Absolon Beyer's house. To R. in foreground a large fireplace. Before it a large easy-chair with footstool. Nearer background against the wall a table on which stand two candles. To L., near foreground, a window. A bench with cushions against wall. On wall a picture of Luther. Bookcase. In the background, door; when open, one looks into a narrow hall with stairway leading up to L. To R. of door a large sideboard. To L. of door the wall extends toward foreground, and in it is a smaller door. Both doors are provided with hook or bar. In middle of floor, but somewhat nearer L. wall, is a large table. Between table and fireplace a rather large open space. At end of table, to L., a large armchair; to R., smaller armchairs. Behind table three chairs; before it a bench with cushions. The table, which is laid with cloth, is well provided with food and drink, beer and wine.

It is evening. Candles are burning in candlesticks on the large table, and on the table near R. wall. Seen with the eyes of the time, the room is lighted for a festival.

When the curtain rises, all are seen standing. Absolon at end of table to L.; back of table Claus, Johannes, Merete. At end of table to R., Anne. Before table, with backs to audience, Martin nearest Anne, Laurentius nearest Absolon. Bente and Jorund stand somewhat in the background. All stand with folded hands; grace has just been said.

ABSOLON (*after a short pause, giving up the devotional attitude*)

Thank you all for your company. May God's gifts be to your good, both body and soul.

[*During the whole of following scene Absolon gives the impression of absent-mindedness. When he joins in conversation it is with an effort that gives his words a strained effect.*

CLAUS (*immediately after Absolon's speech*)

Thank you, Master, from all of us, and you, too, Anne Pedersdotter.

LAURENTIUS

And you, Merete Beyer.

[*With these thanks they leave the table and seat themselves, temporarily, where it may happen. The women clear table, but leave beer-jugs standing. They go in and out. Martin helps Anne now and then. Merete, each time he does so, emphasizes it with a look.*

CLAUS (*while this work is being done*)

That was a fine fish you gave us, Master Absolon. I used to think that all fish like that got sent abroad. I know they don't come my way.

LAURENTIUS

A lot depends on how they're cooked. Merete Beyer was always famous for that.

JOHANNES (*has seated himself on bench to L. and taken his beer-jug with him. At this moment no women are in the room*)

Yes. You may thank your God, Master Absolon, that you've still got a mother to cook for you. Anne Pedersdotter is young yet to know how to cook. I say nothing against her. But a master and three prebends need some cooking. But, ha,

ha, ha! then she gives you what is nicer even than fish, eh?

[*Claus and Laurentius join in the laughter.*]

ABSOLON (*rises, looks at Martin, then says severely*)

My son is here, Master Johannes.

JOHANNES (*following round table to chair R.*)

What of that? He's not a boy. He knows about these things. He's not been in a monastery in Wittenberg, has he? Ha, ha, ha! We're not papists, thank God. We can be happy with our wives, and speak of it without shame.

[*The women come in, arrange room and table. Exeunt Bente and Jorund. Merete and Anne remain a short time.*]

JOHANNES (*continuing*)

Don't be snuffy, Master Absolon. It's this wine of yours. It's too strong, or something. (*Staggers with his beer-mug to end of table at L. and seats himself heavily in armchair R., setting mug beside him*) It's so devilish deceptive. I don't often have such wine, Anne Pedersdotter, and I drink it like — just like small beer. Now I feel that I'm a trifle tipsy.

ABSOLON

Perhaps you'd like to lie down on the bench in my study?

JOHANNES

Thank you very much. But I've stood as much as this before to-day, both at feasts and in the pul — I mean at weddings and funerals. Besides, there's beer here. Beer puts out fire — so 'sperienced people say.

MERETE (*coming a little forward*)

Well, I and Anne will say good night and go to bed. You men have probably a lot to settle.

[*Anne comes to L. of Absolon. Laurentius and Claus rise. Good nights with thanks and hand-shakings.*

JOHANNES (*has risen. When Anne goes to him, he strokes her cheek*)

Such a child. So young. So dainty. Eh? (*Noticing the others' severe looks*) It's that devilish wine. It's so deceptive. (*Resuming chair*) Well, I am tipsy.

[*Anne and Merete go out.*

CLAUS (*sitting at the middle of table, at back*)

Well, well. So this blessed Synod is at an end. And to-morrow we go back rejoicing to our parishes.

LAURENTIUS (*sitting on bench against wall*)

I doubt if old Cluf goes back rejoicing.

CLAUS (*indulgently, chuckling to himself*)

No. He didn't enjoy your cross-examination about his life and teachings.

ABSOLON (*has been walking up and down between the right foreground and door at back*)

One could shed tears of blood that a man like that should be a priest. Unread. Ignorant as a schoolboy. Leading a life of drunkenness and impurity. Worse than a popish monk with his trull. And we had to let it pass with reprimands and warnings. If we cast him out, there's nobody to take his place.

JOHANNES

His parishioners are very fond of old Cluf, though, all the same.

LAURENTIUS

He lets them go on with their popery. If we could drop in upon him some fine day, during service, I shouldn't wonder if we should hear him saying Mass, as well as prayers to the saints.

JOHANNES

I daresay. But that's good enough Christianity for old Cluf's lot.

LAURENTIUS (*starting up*)

Is the Devil talking through you, Master Johannes? Do you dare to call heathenish popery Christianity? You should pray God to bridle your tongue. (*Goes behind table over to R.*)

JOHANNES

There are many who should do that. Many who need the Lord to bridle their tongues. But there are many subtleties in doctrine. Maybe neither old Cluf nor his parishioners apprehend them yet. We must give them time and opportunity.

LAURENTIUS (*seats himself in chair to R. of table*)

Till Satan takes both flock and hireling? D'you think they'll be mildly judged on *that* day? No. The Lord will not be long-suffering on that day.

JOHANNES

Maybe, Master Lars. But maybe, too, He'll be more long-suffering than yourself. (*Drinks*)

LAURENTIUS

It's a sad sight to see you so drunk, Master Johannes.

JOHANNES

Drunk? Yes. I am drunk. But I don't think it is sad. And you haven't paid for the drink, anyway.

CLAUS (*leading the conversation over to more neutral subjects*)

Yes. Indeed, these have been serious days. Earnest days. Very edifying too. The catechisms. Then the beautiful ordination service. (*To Martin, sitting near fireplace*) Yes, my young brother, that was a fine sermon you gave after the Bishop had ordained

you. You should thank God, Master Absolon, for having so learned a son as assistant.

JOHANNES (*to Laurentius*)

Assistant priest in the Cathedral — that's the direct road to the Chapter, Master Lars.

[*Laurentius makes a sound like a spitting cat, then drinks.*]

CLAUS (*quickly*)

And then the witch who was burnt to-day. Perhaps that was the most edifying of all. Only once before has God allowed me to see a witch being burnt. Yes, yes. It was a special providence that it happened now, with all the clergy in the town come up for the Synod.

LAURENTIUS

And then the Lord letting the rain stop directly the faggots were lit, that was beautiful. It shewed that He was pleased.

JOHANNES

It went hard with the old beast.

LAURENTIUS

So it did in Gospel days. When devils were cast out, they struggled. They didn't go easily.

CLAUS

Did she denounce any one?

ABSOLON (*painfully affected by the conversation*)

No, no one.

LAURENTIUS

Not even when tortured?

ABSOLON

She was not tortured. She confessed as soon as the pincers were shown her. She said she had known Satan and borne devils to him. But that she had been alone in it.

LAURENTIUS

If she'd been tortured, she'd have accused her accomplices.

ABSOLON

The Lord will reveal them in His good time.

LAURENTIUS

Yes. But He employs men as a means thereto. I heard from Peter Espikom, who is just back from Hamburg, that in Germany they've made some grand invention for torturing witches. There's a wheel with ropes for stretching their limbs. It brought out the truth almost every time.

CLAUS

That's very clever, now.

LAURENTIUS (*to Martin*)

You must be able to tell us about that, Mr. Martin. You're just back from the Holy Roman Empire. But there you sit without a word.

ABSOLON

He hasn't quite got over this morning, seeing Herlofs-Marte burnt.

LAURENTIUS

That ought to have been a joy to a devout young priest.

ABSOLON

Well, he rejoiced. But still, it is painful for flesh and blood. Isn't that so, *mi fili*?

MARTIN (*rising*)

I'm not used to such things. I never before saw a person burnt. Though my heart rejoices over the defeat of Satan, her screams ring in my head.

LAURENTIUS

It's the Devil tempting you. You must pray against it, Mr. Martin.

CLAUS

Have you really never seen a witch burnt? Can it be that faith is getting lukewarm in Denmark and Germany?

MARTIN

While I was in Copenhagen a lot of witches were burnt in Jutland. But none in Zealand. Nor were any burnt in Wittenberg while I was there. Some people there even doubt Satanic possession altogether.

LAURENTIUS

Just what I expected. Those damned followers of Melancthon. (*To Absolon*) You must look well after your son, Mr. Absolon, lest he bring in those false doctrines here.

ABSOLON

Well, bodily possession is not the corner stone in Lutheran teaching.

LAURENTIUS

Not the corner stone, no. But a battering ram that can destroy the whole building. You don't see it, Mr. Absolon, because you won't see it. You've fallen away from your first zeal. (*All excited*) Oh, yes, you have. Did you proceed properly against that Herlofs-Marte? Did you force confession from her? Did you bid her denounce any one while she was burning? No. You drowned her words with prayers and psalm-singing. And instead of rejoicing at God's victory, you've grieved all day, as though you pitied the Devil because his prey was taken from him. [*All rise, much excited.*]

ABSOLON

Mind what you say, Master Lars. I don't want to quarrel. My zeal is well known.

JOHANNES (*stands; he is now quite drunk*)

Master Lars, if you don't shut your dirty mouth, may the Devil fly away with you.

LAURENTIUS

Shut my mouth? When I see God's agents halting? We should be like a storm beating down Satan under our feet, and here we are like hirelings that flee.

JOHANNES

Shut up, Master Lars. Let Mr. Absolon alone. He'll manage God and Satan his own way. Only shut your mouth.

LAURENTIUS

It's not for you to talk, Mr. Johannes. You've got two or three in your parish ripe for burning. But in your heart you're a papist. That's one for you.

JOHANNES

To hell with you and popery. That's one for you. If I do regret the Blessed Virgin now and again, what's that to you? I know you've done away with her, but she can be put back. She was Our Lord's mother, wasn't she? Eh? Are you aware of that? Perhaps you'll invent Him another.

LAURENTIUS

And a man like you is to teach the Truth! An idolater. A drunken papist.

[*Increasing excitement.*]

JOHANNES (*bending forward over table, so that the two priests stand, one at each end, like two fighting-cocks*)

Papist yourself. Who was *your* father, eh? Your father was a monk. Eh? When you were a lad, he turned Lutheran, and your mother made him marry her. I know you. You zealous, sneaking dog! Drivelling in the Cathedral for your bread-and-butter. You

ought to have been a Jesuit. You are a Jesuit. You are, I say. For all you gabble Luther's catechism. And to hell with you!

[*Strikes out with his hand; falls heavily over table. All excited.*]

LAURENTIUS (*trembling with passion*)

Do you allow this in your house, Mr. Absolon.

ABSOLON

You provoked him. (*Cross to below R. of table*) And he's drunk. He's drunk.

LAURENTIUS

And drunk in your house. The house of a minister of God.

CLAUS

We all offend in something.

LAURENTIUS

I will no longer be the butt for a drunken atheist. I wish you all good night. And God's blessings —
[*The others try in vain to soothe him. Laurentius hurries out R. at back.*]

JOHANNES (*at the same time*)

Cut. Get to hell with you. Eh? Did he go? Eh? The Jesuit!

ABSOLON

Yes. You drove him out with your disgusting language.

JOHANNES

Did I? Eh? Well, that's a comfort. I told him to his white, foxy face. "You're a devil," I said. You say that Johannes of Fane can't preach? Eh? Well, I shut up old St. Laurence, that time, anyway. (*Sits. Absolon goes to window*) I hope he'll never find it. (*Strikes table with his fist so that the beer splashes out*)

Eh? Come on, now. What's the matter with a good big mug of ale, to shew there's no ill-feeling?

ABSOLON

You ought not to have any more, Johannes.

JOHANNES

No more, Mr. Absolon? Well, well. Perhaps you're right. I suppose I must go to my lodgings. They're the other side of the town.

ABSOLON

You can't cross the town in your present state.

JOHANNES

What? You think I can't walk? D'you think I've never been drunker than this? Get away with you. (*Goes across the floor*) Just let me stick my head in the water barrel. And you'll see Master Johannes, minister, walks straight's a lord. Lend me your arm, Mr. Claus. We'll go together. Woa. Steady. Just prop me up, Mr. Martin. Only to the water barrel. Only just to the water barrel. All right after that. Don't want you further'n the water barrel. (*Leaving them, he goes over to Absolon*) Good night, Mr. Absolon. Thanks for the d'lightful evening. God bless you. Gobbless your home. Don't be angry. What's a man to do? Eh? How can I say No? Eh? When I get a chance to get drunk after labouring in the blurry vineyard. Well, well, (*to Claus*) we all offend in something. Come on, then. [Gimme your arm, Claus. Come, gimme your arm, Martinus, eh? Larrin for Marrin. [*Claus in the meantime takes leave of Absolon. Johannes between Claus and Martin goes out through door at back. They are heard noisily descending stairs. Johannes is heard talking the whole time about that Jesuit with the white fox face.*

SCENE TWO

The same. Absolon alone. A pause. He looks about. In the room are numerous traces of the theological dispute; overturned beer-mugs, beer dripping from table, the cloth nearly torn from table, chairs in disorder; and the like.

Absolon seats himself at right end of table, resting head in hands.

Martin enters. He is ashamed and shocked at the scenes he has been witness to; sets chairs in order.

ABSOLON (*looks up at him, guessing his thoughts*)

That's the best we have. But you mustn't judge them by this. That drunkard and Laurentius can't go near each other without quarrelling. Well, there, they're the best we've got.

MARTIN

Perhaps. I'm not judging them.

ABSOLON (*after a short silence*)

You've been to all the Synod's meetings; but you've hardly told me what you think.

MARTIN

What I had to say was so unpleasant that I thought I had better keep quiet.

ABSOLON

Tell me.

MARTIN

I've nothing to tell you, Father, except that I pity you sincerely. Forgive me if I speak as I should not. But I see that everything depends on you. And you are like the good sower sowing the good seed all day

long, and watering it with his heart's blood; and reaping only thistles and weeds.

ABSOLON

It seems so to me, sometimes. That I live in a dying land and time almost dead. And that my weak hands can save neither land nor faith. But I pray daily to be spared such thoughts. They only come when I'm weak and worried. My son, d'you know, I've dreaded your coming back, for I knew you'd not rejoice at what I've accomplished during all these years. Only thistles and weeds. And where you come from there are strong thoughts and great men. But we must pray for patience.

MARTIN (*goes up to him and grasps his hand*)

My dear Father, don't be vexed with me. I am young and too quick to judge. When I heard these priests at the Synod, ignorant, weak in doctrine, and of base life, then I felt miserable. These were the stones of which God's Church was built! I know I am wrong. Who am I to judge the labourers in the vineyard? The Lord is strong even in their weakness. And I've been in a strange state of mind since I came home; now melancholy, now almost too happy. I think it must be the surging life of the spring.

ABSOLON

My son, I am thankful that you've come home to me. I've been uneasy too, and yearning — for I've had no one to confide in since Bishop Gebble died. I've been very lonely since then. I've had my work, of course, and my mind runs more to action than to brooding. But a man like me needs a brother who can go in and out of his thoughts, and share his joys and troubles. I feel that I've got that in you.

MARTIN (*deeply moved*)

Pater carissime! I would thank God daily if I could be that to you.

ABSOLON (*holding his hands long and warmly*)

My son. My most dear son. (*Suddenly drawing back*) My God, what days, what times! A man begins in strength and faith, like the Lord's Anointed, thinking himself a chosen Sower. He works day in and day out, never caring for results, lest he should look back after laying hand to the plough. And at last, one day, when you're worn out, you sit down and look about you, and it's all thorns and weeds and thistles. The old church ruined, and no new one a-building. There's your life's work. (*Looks at Martin with a strange look*) And you ask yourself was the Lord with you, or did He leave you because you failed Him?

MARTIN

Failed Him?

ABSOLON

Yes, failed Him. (*Is about to speak; hesitates. At last, with a strong determination to throw off a heavy burden*) My boy, there's something on my conscience. It weighs on me so that I can hardly sleep. Mr. Laurentius touched on it when he said that I didn't rejoice enough at the death of Herlofs-Marte.

MARTIN

Did she denounce anybody, then, after all, and you concealed it?

ABSOLON

No. Not quite that. Nobody living.

MARTIN

Was she innocent, then?

ABSOLON

No. By rights she ought to have been burnt long ago. Oh, my son, I've laid a great sin on my soul. (*Seats himself in the chair to R. of table*) Mr. Laurentius was nearer the truth than he thought. I've become lukewarm. I've fallen from my first zeal. A sin against God and man.

MARTIN

Tell me about it, Father. Just as man to man or priest to priest.

ABSOLON (*after a short pause, rises*)

Call Anne. It concerns her too.

MARTIN

Concerns Anne?

ABSOLON

Yes. Call her. I hear her. She's not gone to bed. [*Martin goes. Absolon, alone, walks up and down floor in mental conflict.*]

SCENE THREE

The same. Martin and Anne enter from door to L.

ABSOLON (*stands now near window*)

You weren't in bed, Anne?

ANNE (*with guarded smile*)

No. You made such a noise, it was no good. You wished to say something to me, Absolon?

ABSOLON

Yes. My son and my wife, it'll seem strange, what I have to say, and that I say it. But it has tortured me long, and to-day worse than ever. I ask your forgiveness. I never cease to ask God's forgiveness. (*Has now seated himself on bench behind table. Anne*

takes the chair to L.C.; sits. Martin stands R. of seat at L.) It is now seven years since — No, I'll begin at the beginning. Your father was an old friend of mine; we were students together. When he was ordained, he married your mother. But he died soon afterwards. Before you were born, your mother was left a poor widow. She found a good friend in her trouble in another widow, Marte Herlofs.

MARTIN

Herlofs-Marte?

ABSOLON

Herlofs-Marte, yes. They lived for some years up in Selje, and then came here. Marte proposed the change. She had relations here; she thought they could help them. Times were bad in Bergen then. The two women only had what people gave them; I gave what I could. It wasn't much. I wasn't so well off in those days. If I had been — There! Well, seven years ago, Bishop Schelderup told me privately that the word went about that the two widows kept themselves by Satan's help. They weren't accused, but the word was going about. Would I look into the case? (*Anne and Martin listen with increasing horror*) I was zealous then. (*With a smile*) Even Mr. Laurentius would hardly have complained of me in those days. I went to Marte Herlofs and your mother, talked to them as God inspired me, and the two women confessed. Yes, (*goes over to L.*) they confessed. Without torture and to me alone. They had been there, hungry and forsaken. They had been starving on charity. So they fell into temptation and invoked the Devil. Marte had learned bad arts from the Finns. Satan

came when they called. He came in the form of a young lord. They signed a compact with him for body and soul, and he taught them how to make a living.

ANNE

And my mother?

ABSOLON

I fear she was the stronger of the two. For she could summon the quick and the dead. She could bind the wills of others. She could strike people sick. She told me herself she could do all these things, and more. Satan gives his servants the power. I know what I *should* have done. God's word is plain. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." But Satan came to me, too. D'you know what bait he used? He used you, Anne. You were barely sixteen then, but you were a woman. I had had no delight in women. Your mother (forgive me, my son) never moved me like that. But *you* were young and beautiful. I was not a young man. But my blood boiled in my veins each time I saw you. Had your mother been burnt, you would have gone the same road. The two women begged in the terror of death for pity. They swore on the Gospels to reform. I went to the Bishop and lied to him. I acted against my Christian duty and my oath as a priest. He knew I was zealous against God's enemies, and believed me. Then, six months later, your mother died. If she killed herself, or if Satan took her because she had cheated him, I don't know. I do know that I could have saved her soul. I could have made her burning her salvation. And now she burns in hell for ever. (*A pause. He goes from window to table, leaning on the back of a chair*

at the end of table. He continues) My fault! But if I had burned her, you would never have been my wife. I've suffered tortures of conscience for this. Not so much of late years. No. My mind's been quieter. You made me happy, Anne. I thought that a sign that God had forgiven me. But it all came back when Herlofs-Marte was taken. All the old terror. For when she was in prison she begged me to help her, as I helped your mother, and when I refused, she cursed me. While she stood at the stake to-day, she accused your mother as a witch and you as the witch's daughter. I drowned her words in loud praying and psalm-singing. The congregation did not hear them; but I heard them. I could bear it no longer, after that. (*Sinks down in chair to L. of table*) Now I've confessed. I've told my son that I've been false to my priestly oath. I've told my wife that I've thrust her mother's soul into hell. For ever! (*Pause*) My son. My boy. Speak to me.

MARTIN (*a half-step forward in fear and terror*)

I don't know. I don't know what to say. Father. It's so — so — No. I can't. I can't think. Don't look at me, Father. I can't talk. I'm only frightened. (*Absolon has risen*) No. I don't blame you. I can't see it. I can't think. I must be alone. I'll go to my room, and pray to God for guidance. I wish you — I wish you good night, Father. And you, too, Anne Pedersdotter. I — (*Tries to speak; cannot. Looks about, confused, then goes out at door in background to L.*)

SCENE FOUR

The same. Absolon looks at Anne. Anne puts her left hand up to her cheek.

ANNE (*after a short pause*)

Did you love me so fiercely that you couldn't do without me?

ABSOLON

Yes. It was like being drunk with your beauty.

ANNE

And so you took me, as payment for —

ABSOLON

I've been a good husband to you, Anne. And you've been a good wife to me.

ANNE

Yes, you've been a good husband. I couldn't have had a better. So she should have died at the stake by rights. My sainted mother! No, I suppose I mustn't call her that now.

ABSOLON

Do you blame me, little Anne?

ANNE

For loving me, and being merciful to Mother? No. I don't understand these things. And she made her own choice. I am wondering whether I may have inherited from her —

ABSOLON (*rises, comes below table to L. end of it, starts*)

God in His mercy forbid that! You've never felt tempted?

ANNE

Never. You say she could summon people, when

she wished, by her thought alone, and then they would come?

ABSOLON

So she said.

ANNE

That was a wonderful power to have. Master Absolon, have you loved me since we've been married? I mean, after the first?

ABSOLON (*comes to above Anne*)

Yes. You must believe that of me, Anne. I wasn't young when I married you. (*Takes her right hand*) I've lost the old madness. But you know that I've given you all the thought and care that I could spare from my work. No wife can ask more than that.

ANNE

No. Probably not. I do so pity my mother.

ABSOLON

For what I did?

ANNE

Oh, no. Not for that. How can I judge that? But she probably felt about things as I do — passionately.

ABSOLON

Do you feel passionately about things?

ANNE

You have known me for five years, and you ask that.

ABSOLON

But you've never shown me —

ANNE

If you had not told me of all this to-night I suppose I should never have shown you. But now — (*She stops, nods and smiles, as if to say, "Now there is much that becomes clear to me."* *Continues*) Yes, now —

ABSOLON

But aren't you aghast at what I told you?

ANNE (*clinging to his hand*)

Yes, yes, of course. Still, it's strange, isn't it? And what a great power to have! Oh, *I'll pray every day that I may never be tempted.*

ABSOLON

Pray there may be no passions in you to tempt. (*Takes her in his arms*) But I'll pray with you, my Anne. (*Holds her*)

ANNE (*excitedly*)

Yes, hold me fast, Absolon. Hold me to you. You must protect me against myself. For Satan's strong. And I'm young and passionate. I believe there's a fire hidden in me — a fire. If you would rouse it, Absolon, it would warm you back to youth again. (*Throws her arms about his neck*)

ABSOLON (*made anxious by her passion — the ageing man's displeasure at a warmth to which he cannot respond — draws back and gently removes her arms from his neck*)

Anne, Anne! We must pray to God that the fire may be the cold, clear fire of light, God's light. The fire of passion — the bad fire — is fire of hell.

ANNE (*with arms hanging loosely down*)

Yes. The bad fire is hell fire.

ABSOLON

Good night, now. I am going to my study to pray. May God forgive me as you've forgiven me. (*Strokes her gently over the forehead*) Good night, Anne.

ANNE (*coldly*)

I wish you good night, Mr. Absolon.
[*Absolon exits door to L.*]

SCENE FIVE

The same. Anne goes round, putting out candles. First the two on table near wall at R. Sets the mugs from the table on sideboard. All in an agitated manner. Stops and stares about in the midst of an action. Back from sideboard, putting out lights in one candlestick on table, then in the other, with one exception; this one she evidently blows at, but so weakly and absent-mindedly that it remains burning. One sees what goes on in her mind. Absolon's words have revealed alluring depths, have given an explanation and a predestined right to much. They have revealed her longing. It is another who has roused this longing; but in the foregoing scene she has tried to lead it to her husband; she has been repelled. And her mother had the power to summon, to call — she stops and says in a low tone, "Summon." The room is now lighted with only the one candle standing on the left end of table, together with moonlight from the window. Again Anne stands still, and repeats in low tone.

ANNE

She could summon — Mother could — summon, and then they would come. (*Goes to table, remains standing, with a beer-mug in her hand. Speaks half aloud, as if trying her power*)

Martin! (*Stands a moment, is afraid. Goes to chair at end of table. The light falls on her face as she speaks again*)

Martin! (*As she stands thus she produces the phenomenon called by witches to "summon" or to "call," and which our time calls hypnotic influence. One sees*

it in her face when the moment arrives that the power is called into action, how the will is concentrated and the message is sent. One also sees when the phenomenon is complete she sinks into the chair and whispers, half in joy, half in terror)

I can do it!

SCENE SIX

The same. Martin stands in the background and looks about, confused.

ANNE (*stretches out her arms to him*)

Martin!

MARTIN

Anne!

[Goes up to her, seizes her, and presses her to his breast, groaning in delirium.]

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT.

SCENE ONE

Decorations as in Act Two. Chair L. of table, set away to L.C. It is late autumn, about half a year since the foregoing Act. A wild storm is blowing outside.

It is evening. Two candles are burning on the large table. The room is fully lighted. A bright fire is burning in the fireplace. Now and then the wind is heard howling in the chimney.

Martin sits at end of table to L., reading from a thick book of sermons; the Bible lies beside him. Merete and Bente sit behind table. Anne at the end to R., Jorund on bench before table, with her back to audience.

MARTIN (*reads*)

Lord, preserve us and continue us in Thy holy keeping. Grant us our bread. Save us from plague and war. Deliver us from sudden death, from storm, heresy and schism. Keep us in the true faith, constant in prayer. Help us in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. Amen.

ALL

Amen!

[*He shuts the book. All breathe freer, rise and leave their places. A violent gust. Anne gets beer from up C., goes to fire with Jorund.*

BENTE (*rises*)

Hark at the wind.

MERETE

It's a north wind. They're always bad here.

BENTE

We shall hear of accidents after a night like this.

MERETE

Do we ever hear of anything else? (*Jorund goes back up C. Anne has gone to fireplace to set a jug of beer to warm. Jorund helps her*) Have you been to the gate, Bente? (*Rises*)

BENTE

Yes. It's locked. (*Coming round R.*)

MERETE

Are the lamps and fire out?

BENTE

Yes.

MERETE

Then you may both go to bed. It's late. It's after nine. Nearly half-past.

BENTE and JORUND (*coming below table and up C.*)

Good night, Mrs. Beyer. Good night, Mr. Martin. Good night, Anne Pedersdotter.

[*Exeunt both, C. to L.*]

SCENE TWO

The same. Anne at fireplace, Martin at table, turning over his books. Merete moves about, setting things to rights.

MERETE (*near sideboard*)

Absolon's out late.

ANNE

He told us not to wait for him. It was doubtful when he could get home.

MERETE

Ye-es. Alderman Gert was always a rough customer. God knows what sort of an end he'll make. But my son's not one to give up at a sinner's death-bed. He prays and he reads till Grace is vouchsafed. (*Walking forward to window — a violent gust of wind*) Hark at the wind. We do well to pray. Please God Absolon won't cross the bay, but go round.

MARTIN

He might have let me go instead. I asked him to let me.

MERETE

He might have let you. But he knows Gert better than you do. He'll probe the wicked heart easier. (*To Anne, whose movement near the fireplace she has followed with hurried, almost stolen, glances*) What are you doing, Anne?

ANNE

Mulling some ale for Absolon. If he's not too late.

MERETE

He may well want it, in weather like this. (*Goes to sideboard*) If only he doesn't catch his death. It seems to me that he's been failing all this autumn.

ANNE

I haven't noticed it.

[*Martin rises, crosses to window*]

MERETE

Oh, no. I daresay not.

ANNE

He's never complained, either.

MERETE

No, he wouldn't complain. He never will.

MARTIN (*at window*)

The bay's quite white. If I only knew which way he's coming, I'd go to meet him. I'm anxious. God grant that nothing will (*goes back to chair R.*) happen to him.

ANNE

There's not much use in your going to meet him. If you go round, you'll very likely find he's rowed across.

MERETE (*in a cutting tone*)

And if you row across, you'll find he's walked round. Anne Pedersdotter wants you to stay at home, Martin.

ANNE

Besides, he's got the parish clerk with him.

MARTIN (*sitting R.*)

Anne's right, grandmother. It's no good wandering about the town in a pitch-dark night like this. I'll wait in for him. I'll read the Bible. Shall I read aloud, grandmother?

[*Seats himself at table to L.*]

MERETE

Thank you. I think I'm too weary to profit by more to-day. But I'll sit up and wait for him, too. I can do that. (*Sits in chair to L. of table*) So we'll all three wait.

[*She folds her hands, looking straight before her. It is evident that she sits there that the two shall not be left alone.*]

ANNE

Will you sit up here?

MERETE

Yes. We shall.

ANNE

Then I'll go to bed, for I'm tired. (*Going up to door L. From the fireplace she goes back of table towards*

door on L. *A gust of wind. She stops behind table and says*) God have mercy on sailors to-night.

MERETE

And on anybody crossing the bay.

ANNE

You're thinking of Absolon?

MERETE

Yes. And of you, too, Anne Pedersdotter.

ANNE

Why of me? (*At L. of sideboard*)

MERETE

Oh, I suppose I'm free to think what I please about you. You can't stop me doing that much.

ANNE

No. They say "Thoughts don't kill."

MERETE

Oh. Sometimes they do.

ANNE

Well, then, I ought to have been in my grave long ago. Well. Well. I wish you both good night. You'll look after the ale, Merete?

MERETE

Yes. Good night.

MARTIN (*towards Anne*)

Good night, Anne.

ANNE

Good night.

[Exit door to L.

SCENE THREE

The same.

MERETE (*listening*)

She's bolting the door. So she's probably going to bed.

MARTIN (*going towards fireplace*)

Yes. She's tired.

MERETE (*in a low tone*)

Why should *she* be tired?

MARTIN

Won't you go to bed, too, (*rises, goes above table to above bench at L.*) Grandmother? You must be tired.

MERETE

I can't sleep till the house is quiet. Old people sleep lightly, you know.

MARTIN

Yes, Grandmother.

MERETE (*about to say something quite different from that which she utters*)

I haven't thanked you yet for your beautiful sermon yesterday.

MARTIN

No. You haven't.

MERETE

Well, thank you now. It was comforting, though much in it was too high for me.

MARTIN

Would God it might thrive and bear fruit.

MERETE

It will, my son. It was sound doctrine. I thanked God while you were preaching that He had let me see my grandson in the pulpit. I prayed for you, Martin. I prayed God to keep you from evil, body and soul.

MARTIN (*goes up to her and takes her hand*).

Thank you, Grandmother. The Scriptures say "The prayer of the just availeth much."

MERETE

If prayer could avail much, no harm would ever come to you — I know that. (*Strokes his cheek*) My boy, my boy. Where are you?

MARTIN

What do you mean, Granny? (*Goes to L. of bench below table*)

MERETE

I mean that you've withdrawn from us. You've drawn back into your shell. All summer and all autumn, you seem to wish to be alone. (*Martin sits*) You hardly talk even to your father. And he'd looked forward to your coming back, and to have you with him, so eagerly.

MARTIN

I've not much time for amusement.

MERETE

Oh. You have sometimes. (*Stops*) Martin, you ought to be looking out for a good wife. You're at an age when it isn't good for a man to be alone. A good wife, and children. The marriage state is well pleasing both to God and man. Marriage drives out Satan, and keeps a man's heart at home. Satan's always on the watch for a roving heart, Martin. He leads it astray. Into bad paths, Martin.

MARTIN

I've no wish to be married. God has kept me from the lusts of the flesh, so far.

MERETE (*looking at him*)

Yes, Martin? Yes? Then they are still to come. They will come. Satan won't spare you, be sure of that. Take care in time, Martin. Think of your father. (*As Martin turns away, she repeats — and there*

is a ring in the words expressing more than the words themselves) Think of your father, Martin. See you bring him joy, not sorrow. You have a rare father, Martin.

MARTIN

I have indeed, Granny. I thank God for such a father.

MERETE

You ought to, Martin. If sin should come — if you should be tempted — and if your young blood made you give way — he'd die, Martin, to think that you'd disgraced your calling.

MARTIN

You talk so strangely, Granny.

MERETE

It's because I think strangely. Old people do, Martin. One sees a lot in eighty years. One sees that one generation begins where the other ends. Yet the young are no wiser than the old. Not so wise. I love you, Martin. But I love your father better. God gave me the son of my heart in your father. I'll defend your father till I lie in my grave.

MARTIN

Don't you think that I would defend my father?

MERETE

I hope so, Martin. That's why I'm telling you, now, to take a wife. And soon, Martin. If you can't, alone by yourself, I'll help you to one. (*Cackles*)

MARTIN (*goes to chair at R. to Bible, to where his books are lying, and turns the leaves*)

Granny.

MERETE

Yes, Martin?

MARTIN

This. Are you fond of Anne Pedersdotter? (*Comes to above table to R. of Merete*)

MERETE

Am I fond of Anne Pedersdotter?

MARTIN

Yes. Are you fond of her?

MERETE

I'm not aware that I ever injured her by word or by deed.

MARTIN (*goes nearer to her, passing back of table*)

But are you fond of her?

MERETE

Though the only sorrow my son ever caused me was his taking her as his wife?

MARTIN

No. I know you are not fond of her. (*Goes over to fire again*)

MERETE (*rises, looks carefully to the door through which Anne went out. In a low voice, but trembling with a hate she can finally, with the best object in view, give vent to*)

Fond of? I? Fond of Anne Pedersdotter? No. I am not fond of her. I never shall be. That damnable woman!

MARTIN

Granny. Granny. She's father's wife —

MERETE

Yes, she is. God spare us. She is. She's in your sainted mother's place. At my son's table and my son's bed. And how she and her mother managed it, God alone knows. And the Devil, Martin. The Devil knows. God curb my tongue if it sins. I

know all the talk about her mother and Herlofs-Marte. Herlofs-Marte got her deserts. Anne's mother should have gone the same road. But, instead of that, my son takes her daughter to wife. To wife. Mistress would have been too good for her. And he took her as his wife —

MARTIN

Granny! This is sinful. This way of talking.

MERETE

It would be sinful to say nothing, Martin. That she should rule here, she! But she never has. I've but suffered her here in the house, these five years. God has given me patience, and I've neither shaken nor struck her. I've not even spoken harshly to her, though my tongue has burned to tell her that I know her. I know her! And (*a move to chair at C.*) I quake with terror of her, Martin. She is so quiet. But look at her eyes. Look at her eyes. They burn, Martin. Her mother left her the Devil's powers — though it's all she did leave her.

MARTIN

You mustn't talk like this. (*Comes below settle at L.*)

MERETE (*striking the arm of chair*)

But I will. It's the truth. I don't denounce her for a witch, but, Martin, my boy, we have hell fire hidden in the house here. I tell you, so that you may guard yourself. God keep you from her, Martin. I hate her and fear her. I don't know whether I hate her or fear her most.

[*A pause.*]

MARTIN

God forgive you, Granny. You are angry because father married again, and Satan has turned your

heart. Otherwise you'd never talk so against an innocent woman.

MERETE

Innocent! You're a child. (*Martin goes up to back. Merete is again seized with anger*) You may be a learned priest, Martin. I'll listen to you when you preach. But don't try to teach me the truth about things like this. Well, (*moves to above L. of table*) there, I've said my say. I'll go to bed. (*Goes up to him and says gently*) Good night, Martin. (*Pats him on back*) Your granny loves you, Martin. More than you think. Good night. God keep you, Martin. Now and always.

[*Martin takes a step to her, and she comes to him. She exits door at back.*]

SCENE FOUR

The same. Martin comes to settle at L.C; sits. Alone. A pause. Then he speaks.

MARTIN

It is not true!

[*Anne comes cautiously in through door at L. She has taken off her cap; is otherwise fully dressed. When she sees that Martin will talk, she hushes him. She stands near her door, and looks up, listening. Martin jumps up.*]

ANNE

There. She's locked her door.

[*She goes softly toward door R. in background, with motions more soft and swaying than one has seen in her before; smiles cunningly and bolts door with greatest*

care. Comes forward towards Martin. It is evident she expects him to hurry towards her. When he stands still, and looks at her, she speaks.

ANNE

Why are you staring at me?

MARTIN

I am thinking what brutes they've been to you.

ANNE

Who?

MARTIN

Granny and the others. How they've trodden you under foot. How they lie about you.

ANNE

Oh! But they don't trouble me, when you are good to me. Martin! (*Martin goes to her. They kiss — a wild embrace*) Don't pity me. Only love me. Then there's nothing to pity.

[*A long, silent embrace; then they go to above fire.*]

MARTIN

Anne! How is this to end?

ANNE

We needn't think of that.

MARTIN (*with no whining or complaining tone, here or later*)

I must, Anne. Some day our sin will burst out and cry to Heaven.

ANNE

Don't think of that day. A lot may happen before that day.

MARTIN

That day may be to-morrow, Anne. I feel as if they must read my sin in my face.

ANNE

What has your grandmother been saying? Does she know anything?

MARTIN

No. She only hates you. And lies.

ANNE

Kiss me! (*When he looks away*) Then I'll kiss you.
(*Kisses him passionately*)

MARTIN

How has this come about? How could it!

ANNE

It was written so. You and I were meant for each other from eternity. It is wrong to interfere with what is meant.

MARTIN

You believe God meant this? To damn us?

ANNE

I believe — I believe I love you. Very tenderly and very passionately. I didn't live before I met you. Five long years, Martin. With an old man. And I'm young. With my blood crying out in me.

MARTIN

How your lips burn! *And your eyes!*

[*A violent blast. They draw closer to each other, listening to sounds overhead.*

Anne seats herself on lower end of settle, draws him down to her feet. She smiles the whole time, and one can hear her laugh quietly, now and then. She passes her fingers through his hair.

ANNE

When you are away, and I'm thinking of you — And I'm always thinking of you — (*pulling him round and on his knees*) you seem pale to me. But

when we are together, you are like a red flame of passion. Do you remember the first time? That night?

MARTIN

It's in my mind night and day. And the days before that, I used to go about trembling. Since I took your hand and felt the blood throb in it. You were in my heart whenever I prayed. Always! Everywhere!

ANNE

You have never known a woman before me?

MARTIN

Never! Your love came over me like a raging storm. You called me, you drew me to you. And I cried out to you.

ANNE

And you came!

MARTIN

I had to. It was stronger than I. Anne, Anne! How we have sinned, we two! And yet, if it were all undone, I'd come back to you. To your love. (*Throwing himself down, with his head in her lap*) God pity me, poor sinner!

ANNE (*passionately, her face on his head*)

I love you. I love you.

MARTIN (*lifts his head a little*)

Why must we be so unhappy? Because our love is so great? Because I could love only you? Because you could love only me? That is the greatest sin in the world.

ANNE

Don't say that! Don't think it! Only feel that we

are married, body and soul, blood and spirit. Closer than any lovers.

MARTIN

And that you are my father's wife!

ANNE

His wife! (*Turns toward back of settle*) When was I his wife? Have I borne him children? Have I been mistress in his house? I'm not his wife. I've been a bought slave, and he has paid too dear for me. Can I help that? Can you?

MARTIN

You are stronger than I. You don't fear sin. But your love makes me afraid — afraid and remorseful. For even now, in your arms, I am thinking of him. (*Rises*) How is this to end, Anne? Do you never wonder?

ANNE

Oh, yes. Now and then. I think: "Suppose he were dead, and we were far away from here, where no one knew us!"

MARTIN (*not understanding*)

Do you wish he were dead?

ANNE

Wish it? No, I have never wished it. I only think: "Suppose he were." (*She pulls him down below her*) And we far away! Little Martin, so pale and so afraid! (*Rises, takes his head in her hands, kisses him*) If I could burn you in such a flame of passion that you would be blind! And forget — forget all, except that we belonged to each other, body and soul, blood and mind!

MARTIN (*starts up*)

Shall we kill ourselves? Both together? Death can

set us free. It's not worse than what we are doing now. Hell is waiting for me, whether I live or die.

ANNE

You would still be mine. Even in hell. I would keep you. (*Presses him wildly to her. Releases him*) There he comes! (*Martin looks about in confusion. Anne points to his books; sits R. of table. Martin goes over to them. Anne orders almost brutally*) Sit down. (*Points to books. Goes to sideboard at back*) Is it you, Master Absolon?

ABSOLON (*without*)

Yes. Aren't you in bed yet?

ANNE (*outside*)

No. Martin and I are sitting up for you.

[*Goes back to above fire.*]

SCENE FIVE

The same. Absolon enters. He is pale and weary, noticeably changed since former Act.

MARTIN (*rises, and goes to meet him*)

Good evening, Father. You're late.

[*Takes his books. Absolon looks at them both; tries to make his look appear accidental.*]

ABSOLON

Good evening. Thank you both for sitting up for me.

ANNE

Will you have some ale?

ABSOLON

Please. Has Mother been in bed long?

[Sits above table. Anne has poured ale into a mug, and brings it to him below settle.

ANNE

A minute or two. (*Goes to below sideboard*)

ABSOLON

So? I was mistaken. I thought I saw a light in her room when I was at the head of the bay. (*Has seated himself behind table; drinks*)

MARTIN (*at bookcase*)

Has Alderman Gert passed away?

ABSOLON

Yes. I trust he has entered into his rest. (*Bows his head. The others do likewise*) It was a sad death-bed.

MARTIN

He confessed, and received the sacrament, didn't he?

ABSOLON

Yes. God granted that. He died with a sigh, just as the clock struck nine.

MARTIN

Then you've been staying to comfort the widow?

ABSOLON

Only a short time.

MARTIN

But it is long past ten.

[Anne is now standing in the background, near sideboard.

ABSOLON

Is it so late? Well, you see — many thoughts came over me when I came out in the dark. I wanted to think them out. I sent the clerk on ahead. It's bad weather out there. It blows so that the boats are

breaking adrift. But the sky's the strangest. It's like a scrawled scroll, all letters and signs. God's finger's writing again, as it wrote at Belshazzar's feast. But where is the Daniel to interpret?

MARTIN (*goes up to Absolon*)

Father, you are tired. Won't you go to bed?

ABSOLON

Yes, my son, I'm tired; but I can't rest. I'm come from a dead man, Martin. I've taken his last confession. (*Rises and goes to above settle at fire, warms himself*) I've taken many in my time, Martin. A priest sits by many death-beds in thirty-five years. And his wasn't the worst, though he was a hard character. (*Sits*) My God, what is this life, after all? When it goes by, and the accounts are made up? Sin and vice, open and secret. A moment's joy, paid for by years of remorse. If I could add together all the wailing from those death-beds, it would go up like a cry to heaven: "Lord, why didst Thou let me be born?" (*Below chair*)

MARTIN (*coming over to back of settle, to Absolon*)

Father, you should have let me go to the Alderman, as I begged you.

ABSOLON

No, my son. I couldn't allow that. When you grow older, you'll find black depths in yourself which you will have to go down to in fear and pain. Down to the very depths. You won't be able to help men in the anguish of death till you have gone down those deep places in your own soul — and come up again to the light. And when you have been that journey, you'll have been sorely tried. Perhaps you'll long for rest yourself.

MARTIN

Father, you're talking very strangely to-night. Are you ill?

ABSOLON

Not bodily. But I feel a sort of fearful expectation over me. We should always think of death. But sometimes we feel that he came close by us — and plucked our sleeve.

MARTIN

Is that how you feel to-night?

ABSOLON

Perhaps it was coming from the death-bed in such wild weather. And then that strange sky. But as I was crossing the bay — (*Anne comes down to back of table and follows his words with strange excitement*) it seemed as if a message came to me. From the Lord of Life and Death. I didn't hear anything. There was no sign. I felt it in my inmost soul. "Now my death is determined. Now my death is determined."

MARTIN

Father! My dear Father! You mustn't talk like that. You're tired and ill. Let me help you to bed.

ABSOLON

No, I'm not ill. But I am going to die soon. And it's a mercy of God to warn me. (*Rises*) Well. Now we'll all go to bed. Good night, my boy. Thank you for sitting up.

MARTIN

Good night, Father. I hope you'll have a good night's rest, and get rid of these thoughts. I wish I could lift them from you.

ABSOLON

Oh — you have your own troubles. Each age has its own to bear. God knows whether youth's are the easiest. Good night, my dear boy. (*Comes down below settle to Bible at R. Standing*)

MARTIN

Good night, Anne Pedersdotter.

ANNE

Good night, Martin.

[*Goes up C; gets extinguisher. Martin takes leave once more, and goes out at door in background C. to L.*]

SCENE SIX

The same. Anne puts out one of the candles on table, so only the one on L. remains burning. Sets a beer-jug on sideboard.

Absolon, waiting for her to be ready, goes to table, where the Bible lies open after Martin's reading.

ABSOLON (*at Bible*)

Was this Martin's text this evening?

ANNE

Yes. (*Near sideboard*)

ABSOLON

It's a beautiful text. "Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption. Sown in dishonour, raised in glory."

[*Anne is through with putting to rights. She remains standing with back to sideboard.*]

ANNE

You shouldn't think so intensely about death, Absolon. At night, on such a night as this, it makes one so anxious.

ABSOLON

No. But I can't get away from it. (*In low tone repeating several times*) Now my death is determined.

ANNE (*coming forward*)

But who would wish you dead?

ABSOLON (*a little wonderingly*)

Wish me dead? No, who indeed? Do you wish me dead, Anne?

ANNE

I! Why?

ABSOLON (*moving a little from her*)

No — why? (*Comes to L. of chair at C.*) For I've been a good husband to you, Anne. But I sometimes feel as though you might have reason to wish me dead. Since that evening in spring, when I told you about your mother, I have had so many strange thoughts. And then, you have changed so. That's why I've been thinking — (*Comes to R. of chair; sits*)

ANNE (*excited, almost curious*)

What have you been thinking?

ABSOLON

First, that I've done you a great wrong. Did I ask you to marry me? I bought you and paid for you because I was blinded by your beauty. I've been like King David when he was old. When he took a young wife. (*Anne stands back of table; her face lighted by the candle, is turned to audience. And while Absolon talks, his words have on her an effect just the opposite of that intended. For his words justify to her her thoughts. At last he also has seen what wrong has been done to her. Now she nods slowly, but says nothing*) Nor have I been as good a husband as I should have been. My mother has been too managing

about the house. It's only lately I've begun to use my eyes. Perhaps she hasn't always been kind to you?

ANNE

No. But I haven't minded that much.

ABSOLON

No. No. — But I took your youth without payment. Since Martin came home — since I've heard you two together, I know how different your words and voice have been. I know what an old man I am beside you. (*Anne casts a glance at him*) One day this summer, I was down in the garden. I heard you laugh. It went through me like a knife. "That's the first time I've heard her laugh!" You hadn't much joy with your mother. You've had none with me. But I can't undo that wrong, Anne. So that was why I asked, "Do you never wish me dead?" (*Anne does not answer — only looks at him. He draws back in his chair before her look*) Yes, I've much cause to ask you to forgive me.

ANNE (*who is driven by his words to a desperation full of hate, says, looking straight at him*)

And shall I, Master Absolon — shall I forgive? For you're right in every word you say. You stole my youth that it might cool your old man's fever of love — for nothing else. You robbed me of joy. Joy. Oh, you've been a good husband to me. (*Laughs. Comes slowly towards him*) You've never beaten me. Never pulled my hair. Never once. But have you given me one happy moment? (*With increasing vehemence, but without raising her voice*) I've burnt with passion. (*Comes slowly down to L. end of table, facing him*) I've cried out for some one to love. Any one. Even a little child. You didn't even give me that.

To wither away — to dry-rot — that was the fate you marked out for me. That I might be burned dry by the fire in my blood. Yes, Mr. Absolon. I have wished you dead. Often. A hundred times. Wished you dead when you fondled me. Wished you dead going from me and coming back to me. And I've wished it most since your son has come home. Now you know it! Now you know it! I've given myself to your son. Now you know it! (*Staring intensely into his face, as if she would pierce him to death, and saying to him quietly and terribly*) I wish you dead. I wish you dead.

[*Absolon has sat as if petrified by her words and look. At her words "I have given myself to him", he starts up, grasps convulsively at his heart, then sinks with a heavy fall into the chair again. His eyes stare, wide open; then the body bends forward, a deep sigh, and the body sinks down, the arms hang loosely down outside the chair. Anne stands looking at him for a moment; does not at once grasp what has happened. Then terror seizes her, as she understands and looks into the glazing eyes. She tries to cry out, but can produce no sound. At last she cries out.*

ANNE

Help!

SCENE SEVEN

The same. Martin appears a moment after in the door at the back; rushes forward down to L. The door is left open.

MARTIN

What is it?

[*Anne rushes to him and clings to him.*

ANNE

Dead. He's dead!

MARTIN

O God in Heaven!

[He will go to his father. Anne prevents him. The two now stand out on stage to R. of table, she clinging to him.]

During the foregoing, which is played with feverish haste, Merete is seen hurrying down the stairs. She comes in. Looks around in confusion. Moves forward, before the table, to Absolon. Understands. Does not cry out. Draws herself to her full height, turns towards the two, and says to Anne.

MERETE

You've murdered him, Anne Pedersdotter. For you . . . and he . . . *(points to Martin)* you two . . .
Oh, Jesus, Mary!

[Sinks down on the bench beside her son's body.]

CURTAIN

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE ONE

Choir in Bergen's Cathedral.

Seen on face as if the main hall of the theater were the nave. To R. and L. in foreground the choir widens out, with low doors on each side. In background the altar with altarpiece. Before it the communion rails and steps. Before the altar steps are placed benches and chairs in a row. The altar and place before it are raised three or four steps above the floor. On both sides stained-glass windows. In middle of stage Absolon's bier — not casket. This is placed on an elevation of three or four steps, so that the head of the deceased — apparently — is towards footlights. Over the body a black pall decorated with silver, covering the body and the whole bier, and falling on both sides down to the steps. One chair on each side in the foreground.

It is morning, and the church is half-dark. The only light is a torch stuck into the wall to the right.

Martin kneeling on steps before altar. Anne comes in cautiously through door at L.

ANNE

Martin! (*Goes up to him, passing as far as possible from the bier. Talks hurriedly in low tone*) I must speak to you. I can't bear it any longer.

MARTIN (*has risen and approaches Anne. They stand in the foreground at R. Light from the torch*)

Nor can I. But I dread what we have to say.

ANNE

I know you do. You shun me everywhere.

MARTIN

I shun everybody; myself most. I can only find peace here, by Father's body. I can forget my thoughts here by praying for forgiveness. Praying to God and him. Anne, we two ought to grovel down here, to beg for mercy.

ANNE

Why ought I to beg *him* (*points*) for forgiveness? We've nothing to fear from the dead. But the living, Martin —

MARTIN

Merete?

ANNE

Yes. Merete Beyer. You remember what she said that night? She's said it again to me since. She says I killed him. And more than that. She's mad with hate of me, Martin. She wants my life, Martin. You protect me. She can't do anything against his son. But if you fail me —

MARTIN (*seizes her by the wrist and leads her to foreground at R.*)

Anne. He *is* dead, now.

ANNE

Yes. Yes.

MARTIN

You remember what you said, "Suppose he were dead."

ANNE

Martin!

MARTIN

Did you wish him dead, Anne?

ANNE

I didn't love him. He stood in my way. Can you

wonder if I wished him out of my way? I can't be blamed for every wish which passes in my mind.

MARTIN

Don't harden your heart, Anne. Listen to me, just as you would to some one dying. For I'm almost dying. Or going mad. (*Goes to R. of bier*) Since God called him, I've been ground between the mill-stones. Our sins have ground me, body and soul, till there's no life left in me. There's nothing but terror and remorse in me. While he was alive I could wrong him. I could see that I was right, up to a point. I didn't trouble about him, while I was with you. (*Anne coming slowly C.*) But now he is right. He has all the right. He is up before God as my accuser. (*Leans his head against the bier, sobbing*) He stood in our way, you said. Can we ever get past him? (*Touches bier*) Past this?

ANNE

Will you give me up? (*Her hands out*)

MARTIN (*coming to her*)

We can't give each other up! We're mingled, you and I. But we shall never come together. And never be free of this. (*A step to R. of bier*) But, Anne, there's something else. (*Anne draws back*) You've wished his death. Did you wish it, I mean, so as to kill him?

ANNE

Martin! (*Her voice breaks with fear*)

MARTIN

Had you the power for that, Anne? Answer me. Can't you? For God's sake, answer! Answer me just as though he stood here.

ANNE

Martin, are you calling me — what Merete called me?

MARTIN

Yes. (*A step to R.*) It's eaten into my heart. Anne, what if we three — what if we'd been a three against him? — I, and you, and Satan?

ANNE (*in feverish haste*)

Martin. Look here, Martin. Rouse yourself; you're talking craziness. You've not slept for four nights. You're wild with grief and trouble, or you'd not talk like that. Look at me, Martin. I love you. That's my only crime. That's the only thing I've done wrong. I didn't kill him. God took him. Yes, I wished it. But that couldn't kill him. Martin, you mustn't give me up. It's death. It's torture. I swear to you I never killed him. (*In terror*) I shall be burnt if you fail me, Martin! (*Forces herself to quiet*) Don't drive me mad. I love you. That's all. I loved you. And you loved me. If we sinned together, we must stand together. Martin, I didn't kill him. I didn't. I'm telling the truth. I couldn't have. I hadn't the power. I never wanted the power. Believe me, Martin. (*Takes his hand*)

MARTIN

Annie, Annie dear! I'm tired, so tired. But when I'm near you, and you talk to me, I believe you. Look me in the eyes, Annie. You're not lying. Tell me. By the coffin here. Say that, whatever we may have done, you've not done that. Not called Hell to help us.

ANNE (*in terror, tries to speak solemnly; but it becomes only the eagerness of fear. She goes past him to the body*)

I swear by all that's holy, with my hand on the coffin. (*Stretches out her hand towards bier, but does not touch it; she draws back her hand as though it were*

burnt) Oh, oh, you must believe me! You must be good to me, whatever the others say.

MARTIN

I promise you that.

ANNE

Don't despair, Martin. He'd have forgiven us. I know he would. He knew what love can be.

MARTIN

Father! Father!

ANNE

He's not accusing you to God. He prays for us. He sees how we suffer. Wait. You'll see. There'll be brighter days for us. We can't believe it now. But there will be.

MARTIN

Would to God I lay where he lies!

[*The bells begin to ring softly; subdued organ music, as though the organist tried the tones.*]

ANNE (*listening*)

They'll all be here now, soon. (*In fear, but with a ring of menace in her voice*) You won't betray me?

MARTIN

If I betray you, I betray myself. Would to God we were through with this!

[*Looks at her. Exits R. foreground.*]

SCENE TWO

The same. Anne alone.

Muffled organ music, low tolling of bells.

ANNE (*stands first looking after Martin. Then her whole appearance changes. She goes to the bier, and up the steps. About to remove the pall, but does not do so.*)

She bends over the bier, talks interruptedly, in a low tone, facing audience)

Absolon, Absolon! My husband and master! If you hear me, forgive me. If I'm guilty. You took me, when you loved me. I took myself back when I loved some one — not you — in my turn. That was just. You were always just. You must be just now that you're dead. And if I'm guilty, you must be merciful. For I'm young, Absolon. You took five years of my youth. You mustn't revenge yourself. I didn't kill you. (*Words will no longer come. Goes from the bier, down the steps, looking half backwards, as if afraid the dead should rise and call her liar*) I didn't call the Devil, nor any Satan's art, I didn't. (*Comes down on the floor and a little from the bier, then turns suddenly in fear and defiance, and shakes her fist at the dead*) You did it. You did it yourself. Telling me of the power that Mother had. (*Suddenly changing her manner and sinking on her knees*) Jesus, save me! I won't die! Merete mustn't speak, and Martin mustn't fail me! Jesus! Have pity!

SCENE THREE

The same.

Sacristans come in from L. One of them sets a lighted torch in the wall at L. Others light all the candles, see that chairs and benches are in order; then go out again.

Anne steals, half kneeling, to the bier when the Sacristans appear; lies there praying half aloud, crouching and trembling.

Merete, leaning on a stick, followed by Martin, enters from R. Goes towards Anne, looks at her. Anne rises; the two women measure each other.

Merete passes the bier, bowing as she does so, then seats herself in the foreground to L.

Anne and Martin stand to R. of the bier to receive those who come.

SCENE FOUR

As before. Bishop Jens Skjelderup, Priests, among them Jorgen, Johannes, Claus, Laurentius; Aldermen, Feudal Lord, Higher Officials, and their wives enter on R., greet those present, and arrange themselves according to rank on benches and chairs before the altar. A few women on a bench near Merete.

Anne goes to a chair in foreground to R. Martin stands nearer the bier to R. David, singing-master, and his choristers (schoolboys dressed in black) march in. David arranges them round the bier, and directs with quiet motions the singing of the following hymn. During the march and arranging of the choristers, the organ has played a prelude. There has been soft music during Anne's monologue. After entrance and arranging of places and singers, and all have risen, a moment's silence follows. Then follows the psalm, sung by all on the stage, accompanied by organ and wind instruments.

Jam maesta quiescat querela,
Lacrymas suspendite matres,
Nullus sua pignora planget
Mors haec separatio vitae est.

Veniant mode tempora justa,
Spem Deus impleat omnem,
Reddas patefacta necesse est
Qualem tibi trade figuram.

All seat themselves. The choirmaster and choristers (these may be omitted) retire.

Martin comes forward to the bier. At first his words have the softness natural to accepted forms, but at the same time he is deeply affected and trembling.

MARTIN

Friends! Brothers! Right Reverend Bishop and reverend Brothers in God! As son and heir of our dead brother here, I thank you for coming here, to this holy place, to follow him to his grave. It is not for me to praise him and tell of him. My heart is too full of sorrow for him. I know what I have lost in him. I know what he has been to me. I thank God for all he was to me. I ask forgiveness if I've done anything to offend him. (*His talk loses more and more its formal character, and becomes a heartfelt confession*) Father was greater and better than most men. You were such a father to me that all my life should be a thanksgiving to you. Now that you are dead, my heart is pierced by the memory of all I've done wrong. And griefs I've caused you. If you were only alive again I'd be a better son, Father. My brothers, reverend brothers, I'm talking in a way — not a usual way here. Forgive it. You knew my father. You know what he was to you; you'll know what he must have been to me. You'll forgive me giving more thought to him than to you, who come here out of love for him.

BISHOP (*forward from his place*)

My son! We all understand. We know what you've lost, and what the Church and the land have lost in your dead father here. Go now to his wife and

mother, to comfort them in their sorrow, and we will pray here before we carry him to the grave.

[*Merete has risen and gone a step towards the bier; seems to pierce Martin with her eyes.*

MARTIN (*collects himself*)

May I say one thing more, my Lord Bishop?

BISHOP (*a little surprised*)

If you wish, my son. (*Steps back*)

MARTIN (*whose words are followed with breathless interest by Anne and Merete. Merete has again seated herself*)

The ways of the Lord are inscrutable. We thought that if any one should have been granted a peaceful death, as a crowning mercy, it would have been my poor father here, but the Lord willed it otherwise. He was taken suddenly, by a sudden death. Without confession and without sacrament. It is not for us to weep. God's ways are not ours. But evil reports must be hindered. So I come forward according to the Church's custom, and the law of the land, to make my declaration. I, the son and heir of this dead man, make oath and say: Let you, the clergy, lords and commons of this diocese, bear witness. As God sees me and as men hear me, no human being is to blame for my father's sudden death. (*Merete has risen and goes a step or two towards him. Anne breathes heavily, and sends a glance towards Merete. All the others remain unmoved; it is evident they have listened only to a well-known formula. Martin speaks with rising intensity. He would with his words form a wall round Anne, against Merete*) He died suddenly — his heart failed — in the presence of his wife, Anne Pedersdotter. His mother, Merete Beyer, and I were with him before his eyes closed. I have said it once. I

now repeat it. He died peacefully. And a third time. I ask you all to bear witness. He died peacefully. May he rest in peace. (*Comes down to L.C.*)

BISHOPS, ETC.

Amen.

[*Bishop about to approach the bier.*

MERETE (*stops him with a wave of the hand*)

No, Bishop Jens. You must wait a moment. I'll speak now. (*All rise in astonishment*) If the son won't defend his father, the mother shall. (*Under increasing horror on the part of all present, she goes to the bier, up the steps, and standing near the head, she says*) What Martin has said there is a lie. It's a lie. My son did not die peacefully. My dead son here was murdered. Murdered by a witch and the Devil's help. (*Horror and alarm. Solemnly*) I declare before heaven and earth that this dead man was cut off in the midst of his days. I say it once, twice, three times. He was murdered. Murdered by witchcraft. Murdered by his wife, Anne Pedersdotter. Murdered by her there. (*Bishop comes slowly down L. of bier*) I ask life for life, death for death, blood for blood. Death and the stake for the witch there.

[*Sensation. The women go forward round her. All is now confusion. Martin has drawn near Anne. Anne seizes his right hand.*

BISHOP (*voice heard over the noise*)

Peace in God's House.

MARTIN

Don't listen to her. She's mad. (*Continues with loud voice*) I will answer for Anne Pedersdotter. She had no part in Father's death.

BISHOP (*coming forward*)

You ought to be ashamed, Merete Beyer, for acting like this. Hate and sorrow have driven you mad. But to lie like that in God's House, by your own son's coffin!

MERETE (*freeing herself from the women*)

I'm not lying, Bishop Jens. God strike me dead if I'm lying.

MARTIN

Don't listen to her. Is it likely that I'd leave my father unavenged in order to defend my stepmother?

MERETE

Yes, very likely. For you're in her power, too. (*To the others*) I'll tell you why he defends her. She has bewitched him, too. I denounce her as a witch. She killed the father. She has seduced the son. Let her deny it if she dare.

[*The stillness of death. Martin and Anne look at each other.*]

BISHOP (*low voice heard in the stillness*)

Lord, Lord!

MARTIN (*draws slowly back, says in a low tone, in horror*)

By witchcraft! By witchcraft!

ANNE (*cries out*)

Martin!

[*Martin drawing near the foot of the bier. Anne stands quite alone on R. side; all have unconsciously drawn away from her.*]

BISHOP (*forward to L. side of bier*)

Anne Pedersdotter. What do you say to this, Anne Pedersdotter?

ANNE (*looking not at the Bishop but at Martin; in a dull voice*)

It — is — all a lie. I haven't. No, I haven't.

BISHOP (*looks about in horror from Anne to Martin and Merete. His glance falls on the bier. An idea strikes him. He says slowly and with emphasis*)

This is an unusual case. We may go unusual ways. And expect a sign from God. You have heard the accusation, Anne Pedersdotter. The dead man is lying here in his coffin. All the power and dominion of this diocese is present here. I pronounce that you prove your guilt or innocence by the test of touching the dead. We will pray God to bring us to the truth. (*All indicate approval*) If any one here disapprove of the test, let him come forward and give his reasons. (*Pause*) If anybody here will refuse to accept such a test as decisive, let him speak. (*Pause*) Anne Pedersdotter, are you ready and willing to be tried by such a test?

ANNE (*still looking at Martin*)

Yes.

[*All draw back. For a moment they look in silence at Anne.*

The bells begin to ring with heavy strokes. The sun comes up over the mountain, shining through the window. Anne approaches the bier.

All in great excitement. They come slowly forward to R. and to L., in order to be able to see the result of the test. To L., in foreground, are the Bishop and Merete. Martin has sunk down at the back edge of bier.

Anne goes up the steps, is about to raise the pall from the face, but does not do it. Stands upright.

ANNE

Absolon, my husband and master. I have — I have — you know it — you know it. (*With her hand on the forehead of the corpse*) I bear witness. I bear

witness. (*Sits and talks to corpse, quite mad*) So you got your revenge, Absolon. Now I've no one. Yes. I murdered you by witchcraft. And I bewitched your son. I got your son into my power. By witchcraft. — Now you know it. Now you know it.

[*Straightens up, sits on the edge of bier, and smiles. From a window high up a sunbeam falls on her pale face.*

CURTAIN

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