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HENRIK IBSEN'S LADY INGER

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translated by Charles Archer (1855 edition)
 adapted Mark Ewbank (first in London 2013, further adaptation 2022)

The setting is Austrått Manor, on the Trondheim Fjord. The year is 1528.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Character	Appearances
LADY INGER, widow of Nils Gyldenlove.	Acts 1, 2, 4, 5
ELINA GYLDENLOVE, her daughter.	Acts 1, 2, 3, 5
NILS LYKKE, Danish knight & councillor.	Acts 2, 3, 4, 5
OLAF SKAKTAVAL, an outlawed Norwegian noble.	Acts 1, 2, 4, 5
NILS STENSSON.	Acts 3, 4, 5
BJORN, Chief Steward at Austrått.	Acts 1, 4, 5

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

As written	Pronounced	As written	Pronounced
Austrått	Ost--rot	Nils	Plural of 'nil'
Inger	Sounds like - <i>ringer</i>	Lykke	Leek-a. To rhyme - <i>beaker</i>
Gyldenlove	Gill--den--love	Knut	Knoot. To rhyme - <i>boot</i>
Stensson	Stain-son	Sture	Sounds like <i>poor</i>

ACT ONE

SILENT EXPOSITION - **LADY INGER GYLDENLOVE** crosses, exeunt

BJORN and **ELINA** are sitting by a fireplace. The former is occupied in polishing. Armour and weapons lie near them

ELINA (after a pause). Who was Knut Alfson?

BJORN. Lady Inger says he was the last of Norway's knights.

ELINA. And the Danish killed him at Oslo?

BJORN. Ask any child of five if you don't know that.

ELINA. An empty helmet, an edgeless sword, a shield without a grip? There's the whole of Norway's glory for you. I can see that anyone would blame my mother for leaving such weapons to hang shiny and polished on the walls, instead of rusting them in Danish blood.

BJORN. Rubbish! Is there not peace in the land?

ELINA. Peace, yes, but now there is no knight left in our land; and where no man is, there must be women to order things; therefore...

BJORN. Therefore-- therefore I order you to hold your chatter! (*Rises.*) It grows late. Do you fear the dark Elina?

ELINA. I am not the only one. In the servant's quarters there is talk of many things. (*Lower*) They say that night by night a tall figure, draped in black, walks the Banquet Hall.

BJORN. Old wives' tales!

ELINA. Ah, but they all swear it is true.

BJORN. That I well believe.

ELINA. The strangest of all is that my mother thinks the same.

BJORN (*starting*). Lady Inger? What does she think?

ELINA. What my mother thinks no one can tell. But I can tell that she is restless. Don't you see how day by day she grows thinner and paler? (*Looks keenly at him.*) They say she never sleeps--and that, my friend, is all because of the dark figure.

BJORN. And you believe such stories?

ELINA. Perhaps. There are people who read things another way. But that may be pure malice, for sure.

The blast of a horn is heard from the right

BJORN. Hush--what is that?

ELINA. A horn. So, we are to have guests tonight!

BJORN (*at the window*). They are opening the gate. I hear the clatter of hoofs in the courtyard. It must be a knight.

ELINA. A knight? I doubt it!

BJORN. Why not?

ELINA. The last of our knighthood is dead and gone. (*pause*) Come, Bjorn, tell me one of your stories.

BJORN. A story? Now--so late in the evening----?

ELINA. If you count from the time when it grew dark at Austrått, it is late indeed.

BJORN. What's wrong with you? Is there anything the matter? You seem so restless. (*pause*) There is something the matter. I have hardly known you in the last six months....

ELINA. Six months have now passed since my sister Lucia died.

BJORN. That is not all, Miss Elina. It is not that alone that makes you thoughtful, white and silent, and ill at ease as you are tonight.

ELINA. You think so? Whyever not? Was she not gentle, pure and fair as a summer night? Bjorn, Lucia was dear to me as my own life. Have you forgotten how many times, as children, we sat on your knee in the winter evenings? You sang songs to us and told us tales.

BJORN. Aye, then you were carefree.

ELINA. Ah, then, Bjorn! Then I lived a glorious life in the fabled land of my own imaginings. Can it be that the seastrand was naked then as now? If it were so, I didn't know it. It was there I loved to go, weaving all my fair romances; my heroes came from afar and sailed again across the sea; I lived in their midst, and set forth with them when they sailed away... Now I feel so faint and weary; I can no longer live in my tales. They are only--*tales*. (*pause*)

Do you know what has made me sick?

A truth, a hateful, hateful truth, that gnaws at me day and night.

BJORN. What do you mean?

ELINA. Do you remember how sometimes you would give us good advice and wise proverbs? My sister Lucia followed them but I--ah!

BJORN (*consoling her*). There, there.

ELINA. I know it. I was proud and self-centred! In all our games, I would be the Queen, because I was then the tallest, the fairest, the wisest. I was terrible!

BJORN. *(laughs)* I certainly remember that to be true.

ELINA. Once you took me by the hand and looked earnestly at me and said: "Be not proud of your fairness, or your wisdom; but be proud as the mountain eagle as often as you think: I am Inger Gyldenlove's daughter!"

BJORN. You are a child no longer.

ELINA. No, indeed! But let me dream that I am. Come on, tell me a story!

BJORN. Once upon a time there was a high-born knight.

ELINA *(who has been listening restlessly in the direction of the hall, seizes his arm and breaks out in a vehement whisper).* Hush! No need to be so loud; I can hear well enough!

BJORN *(more softly)* Once upon a time there was a high-born knight, of whom there went the strange report...

ELINA *half-rises and listens in anxious suspense in the direction of the hall.*

BJORN. What's wrong?

ELINA *(sits down again)* Nothing. Please, do continue Bjorn.

BJORN. Well, as I was saying, when he looked straight into a woman's eyes, never could she forget it after. Her thoughts must follow him wherever he went, and she must waste away with sorrow.

ELINA. I have heard that tale many times before. It's no tale you are telling, for the knight you speak of is Nils Lykke, who sits in the Council of Denmark.

BJORN. Now it happened once...

ELINA *(rises suddenly).* Hush; be still!

BJORN. What now? What is the matter?

ELINA. It is there! Yes, by God it is there!

BJORN *(rises).* What is there? Where?

ELINA. It is her. In the hall. *(Goes hastily towards the hall)*

BJORN *(following).* How can you think---

ELINA. Hush; stand still! Do not move; do not let her see you! Wait, the moon is coming out. Can you not see the black-robed figure? Do you see? She turns a picture to the wall. It must look her too straight in the eye.

BJORN. Miss Elina, hear me!

ELINA (*going back towards him*). Now I know what I know!

BJORN (*to himself*). Then it is true!

ELINA. Who was it, Bjorn? Who was it? Whom did I see?

BJORN. You saw your mother.

ELINA (*half to herself*). Night after night I have heard her steps in there. I have heard her whispering and moaning like a soul in pain. And what says the song the folk outside sing---- Ah, now I know!

BJORN. Hush!

LADY INGER GYLDENLOVE enters rapidly from the hall, without noticing the others; she goes to the window and gazes out as if watching for someone on the high road; after a while, she turns and goes slowly back into the hall

ELINA (*softly*). White as a corpse----!

An uproar is heard outside the door.

BJORN. What can this be?

ELINA. Go out and see what is amiss.

OLAF SKAKTAVL, appears in the room

BJORN. What do you seek?

OLAF SK. Lady Inger herself.

BJORN. Lady Inger? So late?

OLAF SK. Late, but just in time.

At the same moment, LADY INGER appears in the doorway of the hall. A sudden silence.

LADY INGER. What do you want?

OLAF SK. We sought you, noble lady, to...

LADY INGER. Well, speak out!

OLAF SK. Why, I am not ashamed of my errand. I come to ask you for weapons and permission...

LADY INGER. Weapons and permission? For what?

OLAF SK. There has come a rumour from Sweden that the people of the Dales have risen against Sweden's King Gustav.

LADY INGER. The people of the Dales?

OLAF SK. Ay, so the tidings run, and they seem sure enough.

LADY INGER. Well, if it were so, what have you to do with the Dale-folk's rising?

OLAF SK. We will join them. We can help! In doing so we will free ourselves!

LADY INGER (*aside*). Can it have come time?

OLAF SK. From all our lands the peasants are pouring across to the Swedish dales. Even our Norwegian outlaws that have wandered for years in the mountains are venturing down to the homesteads again, and drawing men together, and whetting their rusty swords.

LADY INGER (*after a pause*). Tell me, have you thought well about this? Have you counted the cost, if King Gustav's men should win?

BJORN (*softly and imploringly*) Count the cost to the Danish if King Gustav's men should lose.

LADY INGER (*evasively*). That reckoning is not for me to make. You know that King Gustav is sure of help from Denmark. King Frederick is his friend and will never leave him in battle.

OLAF SK. But if the people were now to rise all over Norway's land? If we all rose as one, nobles and peasants together? Aye, Lady Gyldenlove, the time we have waited for is surely come. We must rise now to drive the Danish strangers from the land.

LADY INGER (*aside*). Ah, there is metal in them; and yet, yet...

OLAF SK. See you not, my noble lady, King Gustav **must** be dealt with first. Once his power is gone, the Danish cannot long hold Norway.

LADY INGER. And then?

OLAF SK. Then we shall be free. We shall have no more foreign masters, and can choose ourselves a king, as the Swedes have done before us.

LADY INGER A king for ourselves?

OLAF SK. They have swept bare our ancient houses. The best of our nobles are outlaws on the hill-paths, if they still live; nevertheless, it might still be possible to find one or other shoot of the old stems.

LADY INGER (*hastily*). Enough, enough! I have warned you as well as I can. I have told you how great the risk is you run. But if you are fixed in your purpose, it would be foolishness of me to forbid what I have no power to prevent.

OLAF SK. Then we have your permission to?

LADY INGER. You have your own firm will; take counsel with that. If it be as you say that you are daily harassed and oppressed. (*pauses*) I know little of these matters and would not know more. What can

I do? You should plunder the castle, there's many a good weapon on the walls. You are the masters at Austrått tonight. You must do as seems right to you.

Olaf sets out to fetch weapons

BJORN (seizes **LADY INGER'S** hand as she is going). Thanks, my noble and high-souled mistress! I have never doubted you.

LADY INGER. Oh hush, Bjorn. It is a dangerous game that I have ventured this night. The others stake only their lives; but I, trust me, a thousandfold more!

BJORN. How do you mean? Do you fear for your power and your favour with...?

LADY INGER. My power?

BJORN (*pulls out a letter*) Earlier today a messenger came from Trondheim with a letter for you.

LADY INGER. Let me see! (*Opening the letter*). From Trondheim? What can it be? (*Runs through the letter.*) Oh, dear god! From him and he is here in Norway. (*to herself*). He is coming here. He is coming tonight! Ay, then it is with our wits we must fight, not with the sword.

OLAF SK. (*returning*) Thank you my Lady. I've commanded the men to refit the walls of weapons. We will be well armed now and can set forth on our way.

LADY INGER (*with a sudden change of tone*) No man shall leave my house tonight!

OLAF SK. But the wind is fair, noble lady; we can sail up the fjord, and...

LADY INGER. (*firmly*) It shall be as I have said.

OLAF SK. Are we to wait till tomorrow, then?

LADY INGER. Till tomorrow, and longer still. No armed man shall go forth from Austrått.

OLAF SK: (*With forthright tone*) They will go anyway, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER (*advancing a step towards them*). **Who dares to move?**

(*A silence. After a moment's pause*)

I have thought for you. What do you know of the country's needs? How dare you judge of such things? You must bear these oppressions and burdens for a while longer. Why murmur at that, when you see that we, your leaders, are as ill-prepared as you? Tell your men to return our weapons to the hall. You shall know my further will hereafter. Go!

Olaf withdraws, Inger follows (far enough away from Elina and Bjorn)

ELINA (*softly to BJORN*). Do you still think I have sinned in misjudging my mother?

LADY INGER (*beckons to BJORN*). Have a guest chamber ready.

BJORN. Of course, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER. And let the gate stand open to all that knock.

BJORN. But----?

LADY INGER. The gate open!

BJORN. The gate open m'lady. (*Exeunt*)

LADY INGER (*to ELINA, who had been leaving*). Stay here Elina, my child, I have something to say to you alone.

ELINA. Of course.

LADY INGER. Elina. Do you think that I am wrong?

ELINA. I think, with sorrow, what your actions have forced me to think.

LADY INGER. You answer out of the bitterness of your heart.

ELINA. Who has filled my heart with bitterness? From my childhood I have been accustomed to look up to you as a great and high-souled woman. It was in your likeness I pictured the women we read of in the chronicles and the Book of Heroes. I thought the Lord God himself had set his seal on your brow and marked you out as the leader of the helpless and the oppressed. Knights and nobles sang your praise in the feast-hall, and the peasants, far and wide, called you the country's pillar and its only hope. All thought that *through you* the good times were to come again. All thought that *through you* a new day was to dawn over the land! The night is still here mother; and I no longer know if I dare look for any bright morning to come through you.

LADY INGER. It is easy to see where you have learnt such venomous words. You have let yourself give ear to what the thoughtless rabble mutters and murmurs about things it can little judge of.

ELINA. "Truth is in the people's mouths," was what you said when they praised you in speech and song.

LADY INGER. Maybe so. But if indeed I had chosen to sit here idle, though it was my part to act, do you not think that such a choice was burden enough for me, without your adding to its weight?

ELINA. The weight I add to your burden bears on me as heavily as on you. Lightly and freely I drew the breath of life, so long as I had you to believe in. For my pride is my life, and well had it become me, if you had remained what you once were.

LADY INGER. Elina, how can you know so surely that you are not doing your mother wrong?

ELINA (*vehemently*). Oh, that I were! (*turns to go*). Sleep well, my mother!

LADY INGER (*hesitates*). No, stay with me. Come nearer, you must hear me Elina. I know well that you often long to be gone from here. Austrått is too lonely and lifeless for you.

ELINA. It surprises me that you know this.

LADY INGER. It rests with you whether all this shall be changed.

ELINA. How so?

LADY INGER. Listen. I am waiting for a guest tonight.

ELINA. A guest?

LADY INGER. A stranger, who must remain a stranger to all. None must know whence he comes or goes.

ELINA (*throws herself in her mother's arms and seizes her hands*). My mother! My mother! Forgive me, if you can, all the wrong I have done you!

LADY INGER. What do you mean? Elina, I do not understand you.

ELINA. Then they were all deceived. You are still true at heart!

LADY INGER. What do you mean?

ELINA. Do you think I don't know who the stranger is?

LADY INGER. You know?

ELINA. Do you think the gates of Austrått shut so tight that never a whisper of bad news can slip through? Do you think I don't know that the heir of many a noble line wanders outlawed, without rest or shelter, while Danish masters lord it in the home of their fathers?

LADY INGER. And what then?

ELINA. I know well that many a high-born knight is hunted through the woods like a hungry wolf. No hearth has he to rest by, no bread to eat.

LADY INGER (*coldly*). Enough! I understand you.

ELINA (*continuing*). And that is why the gates of Austrått must stand open by night! That is why he must remain a stranger to all, this guest of whom no one must know whence he comes or goes! You are ignoring the decree that forbids you to harbour our Norwegian heroes----

LADY INGER. Enough, I say! You make a mistake, Elina, it is not Norwegian outlaws that I am waiting on. Listen to me my child, but think as you listen; if indeed you can tame that wild spirit of yours. (*pause*) I have sought, so far as lay in my power, to keep you in ignorance of all our griefs and miseries. What could it help to fill your young heart with these things? It is not weeping and wailing that can free us from our evil lot; we need the courage and strength of the people.

ELINA. Who has told you that that I don't have that strength and courage?

LADY INGER. Hush, child, I might take you at your word.

ELINA. How do you mean, mother?

LADY INGER. I might call on you for both. But let me say my say piece first. The time seems now to be drawing nigh, towards which the Danish Council have been working for many a year—the time for them to strike a final blow at our rights and our freedom. Therefore, we must now...

ELINA (*eagerly*). Throw off the yoke, mother?

LADY INGER. No, we must gain breathing-time. The Danish Council is now sitting in Copenhagen, considering how best to aim the blow against Norway. Most of them are said to hold that there can be no end to dissensions till Norway and Denmark are one; for if we should still have our rights as a free land when the time comes to choose the next king, it is most likely that the feud will break out openly. Now the Danish Councillors would obstruct this----

ELINA. Yes, they would hinder it! But are we to endure such things? Are we to look on quietly while...

LADY INGER. No, we will not endure it. But to take up arms, to begin open warfare, what would come of that, so long as we are not united? And were we ever less united in this land than we are even now? No, if anything is to be done, it must be done secretly and in silence. We must have time to draw breath. In the South, a good part of the nobles are for the Danes but here in the North they are still in doubt. Therefore, King Frederick of Denmark has sent to us one of his most trusted councillors, to assure himself with his own eyes how we stand affected.

ELINA (*anxiously*). Well?

LADY INGER. He is the guest I look for tonight.

ELINA. He comes here tonight?

LADY INGER. He reached Trondheim yesterday by a trading ship. Word has just been brought that he is coming to visit me; he may well be here soon.

ELINA. Have you not thought, my mother, how it will endanger your reputation to receive a Danish envoy? Do the people not already regard you with distrustful eyes? How can you hope that, when the time comes, they will trust you ever again.

LADY INGER. Do not worry child. I have all this fully weighed out. There is no danger. His mission in Norway is a secret, he has come unknown to Trondheim, and unknown shall he be here at Austrått.

ELINA. And the name of this Danish lord?

LADY INGER. Denmark has scarce a nobler name. You will soon understand. Since we cannot trample on the serpent, we must bind him. It rests with you to tighten them as you will. I have long seen that Austrått is a cage to you. The young falcon chafes behind the iron bars.

ELINA. My wings are clipped. Even if you set me free it would reward me little.

LADY INGER. Your wings are not clipped, except by your own will.

ELINA. Will? My will is in your hands.

LADY INGER. Enough! Would it break your heart to leave Austrått?

ELINA. Maybe not, mother!

LADY INGER. You told me once, that you lived your happiest life in tales and histories. What if that life were to be yours once more?

ELINA. What do you mean?

LADY INGER. Elina, if a mighty noble were now to come and lead you to his castle, where you would find damsels and pages, silken robes and lofty halls awaiting you?

ELINA (*more softly, working it out*). And the Danish "noble" envoy comes here tonight?

LADY INGER. Tonight.

ELINA. I fear to read the meaning of your words.

LADY INGER. There is nothing to fear my child. Be sure that I would never force you to marry. You shall choose for yourself in this matter and follow your own counsel.

ELINA (*comes a step nearer*). Have you heard the story of the mother that drove across the hills by night with her little children by her in the sledge? The wolves were on her track; it was life or death with her; and one by one she cast out her little ones, to gain time and save herself.

LADY INGER. (*angry*) A mother would tear her heart from her breast before she would cast her child to the wolves!

ELINA. One by one you have cast out your daughters to the wolves. The eldest went first. Five years ago, Meredith left Austrått. Now she dwells in Bergen as an unhappy wife. Do you she is happy as a Danish noble's lady? Meredith has damsels and pages, silken robes and lofty halls; but the day has no sunshine for her, and the night no rest; for she has never loved him. He came here because she was the greatest heiress in Norway, and he needed to gain a footing in the land. I know it; I know it well! Meredith bowed to your will; she went with the stranger. But what has it cost her?

LADY INGER. I know my reckoning, and I fear it not.

ELINA. Your reckoning does not end here. Where is Lucia, your second child?

LADY INGER. Ask the God who took her!

ELINA. It is you that must answer for her young life. She was glad as a bird in spring when she sailed from Austrått to be Meredith's guest. A year passed, and she stood in this room once more; but her cheeks were white, and death had gnawed deep into her. You thought that the ugly secret was buried with her, but she told me everything. A courtly knight had won her heart. He would have wedded her. You knew that her honour was at stake, yet your will never bent--and your child had to die. You see, I know all!

LADY INGER. All? Then she told you his name?

ELINA. His name? No, his name she did not tell me. His name was a torturing horror to her.

LADY INGER (*relieved, to herself*). Ah, then you do **not** know all. Elina, it is true that the whole of this matter was well known to me. But there is one thing about it you seem not to have noted. The lord whom Lucia met in Bergen was a Dane. And his love was a lie. With guile and soft speeches, he had ensnared her.

ELINA. But she loved him; and if you had a mother's heart, your daughter's honour would have meant more to you than everything.

LADY INGER. Not more than her happiness. Do you think that, with Meredith's lot before my eyes, I could sacrifice my second child to a man that didn't love her?

ELINA. Your words may fool many, but they do not fool me. Do you think that I know nothing of all that is passing in Norway? I understand your advice too well. I know well that our Danish lords have no true friend in you. It may be that you hate them; but you fear them too. When you gave Meredith away the Danish held the mastery on all sides throughout our land. Three years later, when you forbade Lucia to wed the man she had given her life to, though he had deceived her, things were far different then. The Danish, by then, had shamefully misused the common people, and you didn't think it was wise to link yourself, and my sister Lucia, still more closely to the foreign tyrants. And what have you done to avenge her? (*firmly*) You have done nothing. Well then, I will act in your stead; I will avenge all the shame they have brought upon our people and our house.

LADY INGER. You? What will you do?

ELINA. I shall go my way, even as you go yours. What I shall do, I don't yet know but I feel within me a burning strength to risk it all for our righteous cause.

LADY INGER. Then you have a hard fight before you. I once promised as you do now and my hair will grow grey under the burden of that promise.

ELINA. Goodnight mother! Your guest will soon be here, and at that meeting I should be out of place! It may be there is yet time for you. Well, God strengthen you and guide your way! Don't forget that the eyes of Norway are fixed upon you. Remember Meredith, weeping over her wasted life. Think on Lucia, sleeping under this very floor. And one more thing, do not forget that at this gamble tonight, your stake is your last child!

Elina goes out

LADY INGER (*looks after her awhile*). My last child? But the stake is not my child alone. I am playing tonight for the whole of Norway. Has God a right to do this? To make me a woman and then to lay a King's duty upon my shoulders? For I have the welfare of the country in my hands. It is in my power to make them rise as one. They look to me for the signal; and if I don't give it now it may never be given. To delay? To sacrifice the many for the sake of one? Were it not better if I could...? No, no, no--I will not! I cannot!

Turns to the pictures on the wall

I can see them in there now. Pale spectres--dead ancestors-- fallen kinsfolk. Ah, those eyes that pierce me from every corner!

ACT TWO

The room at Austrått, as in the first Act. LADY INGER is seated by the window. OLAF is standing a little way from her. Their faces show that they have been engaged in an animated discussion.

OLAF SK. For the last time, Inger—you can't be moved from your decision?

LADY INGER. I can do nothing else. And my advice to you is do as I do. If it be heaven's will that Norway utterly perish, perish it must, for all we may do to save it.

OLAF SK. And do you think I can content myself with words like these? Shall I sit and look quietly on, now that the hour has come? Do you forget the reckoning I have to pay? They have robbed me of my lands and parcelled them out among themselves. My son, my only child, they have slaughtered like a dog. Myself they have outlawed and forced to lurk in the forest these last ten years. Once and again have folk whispered of my death; but this I believe - that they shall not lay me beneath the earth before I have seen my vengeance.

LADY INGER. Then is there a long life before you. What would you do?

OLAF SK. Do? How should I know what I will do? It has never been my job to plot and plan. That is where you must help me. You have the wit for that. I have but my sword and my two arms.

LADY INGER. Your sword is rusted, Olaf! All the swords in Norway are rusted.

OLAF SK. That is doubtless why some folk fight only with their tongues Inger. You used to have the heart of a King in your breast.

LADY INGER. Don't remind me of the past.

OLAF SK. That is the only reason I am here. You must hear me out!

LADY INGER. Fine, but be brief, for this is no place of safety for you tonight!

OLAF SK. (*sarcastic*) I have known that for a long time. (*firmly*) But you forget that I'm unsafe wheresoever I wander. (*Less firmly*) It is nearly thirty years since first I saw you. You were scarce more than a child then; yet you were bold as a falcon, wild and headstrong too. You cared for nothing, thought of nothing, but your country's great need.

LADY INGER. A frenzy had seized us all in those days.

OLAF SK. Call it what you will; but one thing I know - even the old and sober men amongst us did not doubt that it was written by God himself that you were the one to break our bonds and win us all our rights again. And more: you yourself thought as we did.

LADY INGER. It was a sinful thought, Olaf. It was my proud heart, and not the Lord's call, that spoke in me.

OLAF SK. You could have been the chosen one had you willed it. You have the noblest blood in Norway; power and riches at your feet; and you had an ear for the cries of anguish--then! Do you remember that afternoon when the Danish fleet anchored? The captains of the fleet offered terms of

settlement, and, trusting to the safe-conduct, Knut Alfson rowed on board. Three hours later, we dragged his body through the castle gate-- They killed him!

LADY INGER As a corpse. As a corpse

OLAF SK. The best heart in Norway burst, when they struck him down. I think I can still see the long procession that passed into the banquet-hall, heavily, two by two. There he lay on his pedestal, white as a spring cloud. I may safely say that the boldest men in Norway were gathered there that night. Lady Margaret stood by her dead husband, and we swore as one to venture lands and life to avenge this crime and all that had gone before. Inger Gyldenlove, who was it that burst through the circle of men? A maiden, then almost a child, with fire in her eyes and her voice half choked with tears. What was it she swore? Shall I repeat your words?

LADY INGER. And how did the others keep their promise? I speak not of you, Olaf, but of your friends, all our Norwegian nobles?

OLAF SK. I know what you would say. Why have they bent to the yoke, and not defied the tyrants to the last? Too true. But had they held together who knows what might have been? And you could have held them together, for before you, all had bowed.

LADY INGER. Let us leave speaking of what cannot be changed. Tell me what can I do for you? Do you need harbour? Well, I can try to hide you. If you would have anything else, please let me know.

OLAF SK. Do not dismiss me so easily Inger. For all these years have I been made homeless, a fugitive in my own country. I have been forced to live with wolves and bears. Lady Inger, I do not need you but both our nobles and our people stand in sore need of you.

LADY INGER. (*sarcasm*) That old burden.

OLAF SK. Yes, it sounds unpleasant in your ears, I know; yet hear it you must. Troubles are at hand: the Swedish dales are ready to rise against their King. This is our time to set Norway free. Peter Kanzler is with us, secretly, you understand?

LADY INGER (*starting*). Peter Kanzler? With us?

OLAF SK. It is he that has sent me to Austrått to convince you to join us, but perhaps you no longer know him?

LADY INGER (*half to herself*). Only too well! But tell me what message do you bring from him?

OLAF SK. When the rumour of the rising reached the border, where I then was, I set off at once into Sweden. It was not hard to guess that Peter had a finger in the game. I sought him out and offered to stand by him, he knew me of old and knew that he could trust me, so he has sent me here.

LADY INGER (*impatiently*). He sent you here to do what?

OLAF SK Lady Inger, a stranger comes to Austrått tonight.

LADY INGER (*surprised and confused*). What? You know about that?

OLAF SK. Assuredly. I know all. It was to meet a stranger that Peter sent me here.

LADY INGER. To meet him? This is impossible, Olaf, impossible! How would you even know about...?

OLAF SK. (*interrupts*) It is as I tell you. If he is not already here, he will be soon.

LADY INGER. Yes, I know; but...

OLAF SK. (*interrupts*) Then you know of his coming?

LADY INGER. Yes. He sent me a message. That was why they opened to you as soon as you knocked.

OLAF SK (*listens*). Hush! Someone is riding along the road. (*Goes to the window*) They are opening the gate.

LADY INGER (*looks out*). It is a knight. They are dismounting in the courtyard.

OLAF SK. Then it is he. His name?

LADY INGER. You don't know his name?

OLAF SK. Peter Kanzler refused to tell it me. He would only say that I should find him at Austrått the third evening after Martinmas. He was to bring a set of letters with him, and from them, and from you, I was to learn who he is.

LADY INGER. Then let me lead you to your chamber. You have need of rest and refreshment. You shall soon get to speak with the stranger.

OLAF SK. As you will. (*Both go out*)

COUNCILLOR NILS LYKKE enters from the opposite side.

NILS LYKKE (*softly, to himself*). No one? (*Looks around*) I wonder if there is any way of leaving the castle but by the gate? Can one escape from Austrått unseen, while the castle gate is shut?

I fear that my Danish presence in the heart of Norway may end hideously. I have never loved digging at a badger's earth. All the way from Sweden I look for you Count Sture, you are nothing but a pretender. Your tracks point here towards Austrått, this ancient seat that Lucia, two years ago, told me so much of. (*pause*) Lucia. And now—now she is dead. (*Hums with a half-smile*) Blossoms plucked are blossoms withered... (*Looks round him again.*)

Austrått. It is as though I had seen it all before as though I were at home here. In there is the Banquet Hall. And underneath is the grave-vault. It must be there that Lucia lies.

In a lower voice, half seriously, half with forced gaiety

Were I fearful, I might well find myself thinking that when I set foot within Austrått she turned about in her coffin, as I walked across the courtyard she lifted the lid, and when I named her name this moment, it was as though a voice summoned her forth from the grave. Maybe she is, even now, climbing her way up the stairs.

Turns his head backwards over one shoulder

Come nearer, Lucia! Talk to me a little! Your mother keeps me waiting. It's tedious waiting, and you have helped me to while away many a tedious hour.

Takes one or two turns up and down

Ah, there! Right, right; (*looks down the hall*) somewhere in there is the sister Elina's chamber. Elina? Aye, Elina is her name. Can it be that she is so rare a being--so wise and so brave as Lucia drew her? Fair, too, they say. But for a wedded wife? I should not have written to Lady Inger so plainly.

Listens towards the hall

Count Sture **must** be here in Austrått, Inger has as many hiding-places as the fox, and more than one outlet to them. It must be the stranger who came in before me. I must outwit Lady Inger. She is clever and wily to boot. It will be no light matter to overcome her. But it must be done at any cost. If I get Count Sture alive, I will return to Denmark a hero.

LADY INGER GYLDENLOVE *enters from the hall*

LADY INGER (*coldly*). My greeting to you, Sir Councillor----

NILS LYKKE (*bows deeply*). Ah the Lady of Austrått!

LADY INGER. May I thank you that you warned me of your visit in the letter.

NILS LYKKE. I could do no less. I had reason to think that my coming might surprise you.

LADY INGER. In truth, Sir Councillor, you thought right there. Nils Lykke was certainly the last guest I looked to find at Austrått.

NILS LYKKE. And still less, maybe, did you think he would come as a friend?

LADY INGER. As a friend? You add insult to all the shame and sorrow you have heaped upon my house? After bringing my child to the grave, you still dare...

NILS LYKKE. With your leave, Lady Inger, on that matter we should scarce agree; for you count as nothing that which I lost by Lucia's passing. I was tired of my unbridled life, my thirtieth year was already past, I longed to settle with a good and gentle wife. Add to all this the hope of becoming your son-in-law.

LADY INGER. Beware, Councillor! I have done all in my power to hide my child's unhappy fate. But because it is out of sight, think not it is out of mind. It may yet happen...

NILS LYKKE. You threaten me, Lady Inger? I have offered you my hand in friendship; and you refuse to take it? Therefore, will it be open war between us?

LADY INGER. Was there ever anything else?

NILS LYKKE. I have never been your enemy, though as a subject of the King of Denmark I didn't lack good cause.

LADY INGER. It has not proved so easy as some of you hoped to lure me over into your camp. Yet I think you have nothing to complain about. My daughter Meredith's husband is your countryman, further I cannot go. My position is no easy one, Nils Lykke!

NILS LYKKE. That I can well believe. Both nobles and people here in Norway think they have an ancient claim on you, a claim, it is said, you have not fulfilled.

LADY INGER. I beg your pardon, Sir Councillor! I account for my life to none but God and myself. Please tell me why you are here.

NILS LYKKE. Gladly, Lady Inger! The purpose of my mission to this country isn't known to you?

LADY INGER. I know the mission that they have assigned you! Our Danish King would like to understand how the Norwegian nobles stand affected towards him. That is not why you visit Austrått?

NILS LYKKE. It is far from my purpose to demand any profession of loyalty from you.

LADY INGER. What then?

NILS LYKKE. You said yourself that your position is no easy one. You stand halfway between two hostile camps, neither of which dares trust you fully. However, you know that you need us. On the other hand, you are bound to the disaffected by the bond of nationality, and who knows, maybe by some secret tie as well.

LADY INGER (*mock disbelief*). A secret tie?

NILS LYKKE You must understand that your situation becomes impossible. However, imagine it lay in my power to free you from these embarrassments which...

LADY INGER. In your power, you say?

NILS LYKKE. First, Lady Inger, I would beg you to lay no stress on any careless words I may have used concerning that which lies between us two. I have not forgotten for a moment the wrong I have done you. Suppose, now, that I would want to make atonement where I had sinned. Suppose that were my reason for undertaking this mission.

LADY INGER. Speak your meaning more clearly, Sir Councillor; I beg you.

NILS LYKKE. I can't be mistaken in thinking that you, as well as I, know of the threatened troubles in Sweden. You know, or at least you can guess, that this rising is of far wider aim than is commonly supposed, and you understand therefore that our King cannot look on quietly and let things take their course. Am I not right?

LADY INGER. Go on.

NILS LYKKE (*searchingly, after a short pause*). There is one possible chance that might endanger King Gustav of Sweden's throne. The chance, namely, that there should exist in Sweden a man entitled by his birth to claim election to the kingship.

LADY INGER (*evasively*). The Swedish nobles have been as bloodily dragged down as our own, Sir Councillor. Where would you even look for----?

NILS LYKKE (*with a smile*). Look? The man is found already----

LADY INGER (*starts violently*). He is found?

NILS LYKKE. And he is too closely akin to you, Lady Inger, to be far from your thoughts at this moment... (*Looks at her.*) The last Count Sture left a son----

LADY INGER (*with a cry*). How would you know----?

NILS LYKKE (*surprised*). Be calm, Madam, and let me finish. This young man has lived quietly till now with his mother, Sten Sture's widow.

LADY INGER (*breathes more freely*). With----? Ah, yes--true, true!

NILS LYKKE. But now he has come forward openly. He has shown himself in the Dales as leader of the peasants; their numbers are growing day by day; and as perhaps you know they are finding friends among the peasants on this side of the border-hills.

LADY INGER (*who has in the meantime regained her composure*). Sir Councillor, you speak of all these things as though they must be known to me. What ground have I given you to believe so? I know, and wish to know, nothing. All my care is to live quietly within my own domain; I give no helping hand to the rebels; but neither must you count on me if it be your purpose to put them down.

NILS LYKKE (*in a low voice*). Would you still be inactive, if I proposed to stand by them?

LADY INGER. What?

NILS LYKKE. Have you not seen where I have been aiming all this time? You should know that the King and his Council see clearly that we can have no sure footing in Norway so long as the nobles and the people continue, as now, to think themselves wronged and oppressed. We fully understand that willing allies are better than sullen subjects; and we have therefore no heartier wish than to loosen the bonds that hamper us, in effect, quite as straitly as you. But you can't deny that the temper of Norway towards us in Denmark makes such a step too dangerous so long as we have no sure support behind us.

LADY INGER. And this support----?

NILS LYKKE. Should naturally come from Sweden. But King Gustav holds the helm; and his reckoning with Denmark is not settled yet, and maybe never will be. But a new king of Sweden, who had the people with him, and who owed his throne to the help of Denmark. Well, you begin to understand me? Then we could safely say to you Norwegians: "**Take back your old ancestral rights; choose you a ruler after your own mind; be our friends in need, as we will be in yours!**" Listen well, Lady Inger, as our generosity will strengthen us. And now I have opened my heart to you so fully, do you too cast away all mistrust. And therefore (*confidently*)--the knight from who came here an hour before me...

LADY INGER. Then you already know of his coming?

NILS LYKKE. Most certainly. It is him I seek.

LADY INGER (*to herself*). Strange! It must be as Olaf said. (*To NILS LYKKE.*) I pray you wait here, Sir Councillor! I go to bring him to you.

NILS LYKKE (*looks after her a while in exultant astonishment*). She is bringing Count Sture! Ay, truly-- she is bringing him! The battle is half won. I didn't think it would go so smoothly. She is deep in the counsels of the rebels; she started in terror when I named Sten Sture's son. And now? Hah! Since Lady Inger has been simple enough to walk into the snare, Count Sture will not make many difficulties. A hot-blooded boy, thoughtless and rash. With my promise of help he will set forth at once and the Swedes will snap him up, and maybe his neck, by the way and the whole rising will be nipped in the bud. And then? Once it is spread abroad that the young Count Sture has been at Austrått, that a Danish envoy has had audience of Lady Inger--that thereupon the young Count Nils has been snapped up by King Gustav's men-at-arms a mile from the castle. Let Inger Gyldenlove name among the people stand never so high, it will never recover from such a blow!

LADY INGER GYLDENLOVE enters from the hall along with **OLAF SKAKTAVL**

LADY INGER (*to NILS LYKKE*). Here is the man you seek.

NILS LYKKE (*aside*). What do you mean? Him?

LADY INGER. I have told this knight your name and all that you have imparted to me----

NILS LYKKE (*confused*). Ay? Have you so? Well----erm...

LADY INGER And I will not hide from you that his faith in your help is strong.

NILS LYKKE. Is it?

LADY INGER. Can you marvel at that? You know, surely, both the cause he fights for and his bitter fate.

NILS LYKKE. This man's? Ah--yes, truly----

OLAF SK (*to NILS LYKKE*). But seeing it was Peter Kanzler himself that has appointed us this meeting----

NILS LYKKE. Peter Kanzler----? (*Recovers himself quickly.*) Oh yes, right, I have come from Peter Kanzler----

OLAF SK. He must know best whom he can trust. So why should I trouble my head with thinking how----

NILS LYKKE. Oh yes, you are right, noble Sir; that was a mistake indeed.

OLAF SK. Rather let us come straight to the matter.

NILS LYKKE. Straight to the point; no beating about the bush--

OLAF SK. Then will you tell me your mission here?

NILS LYKKE. I think you can partly *guess* my errand----

OLAF SK. Peter Kanzler said something of papers that----

NILS LYKKE. Papers? Oh yes, true, the papers!

OLAF SK. Doubtless you have them with you?

NILS LYKKE. Of course; erm... safely bestowed; so safely that I cannot at once-- (*Appears to search the inner pockets of his doublet; says to himself*) Who the devil is he? What pretext shall I make? I may be on the brink of great discoveries— (*to the rest*) We could perhaps better talk of our affairs at the dinner table.

OLAF SK. As you will.

NILS LYKKE (*aside*). Saved by the skin of my teeth (*To LADY INGER with a show of great friendliness.*) And meanwhile we might learn what part Lady Inger Gyldenlove proposes to take in our plans?

LADY INGER. I? None. Noble Sirs, I do not gamble on a game where all is staked on one cast. And that, too, when none of my allies in Denmark or Sweden dare trust me.

NILS LYKKE. I trust you blindly, you can be assured of that.

OLAF SK. And who should believe in you, if not your countrymen?

LADY INGER. Truly, this confidence rejoices me.

Goes to fill two goblets with wine and hands a goblet to each

And since so it is, I offer you a cup of welcome to Austrått. Drink, noble knights! Pledge me to the last drop!

Looks from one to the other after they have drunk, and says gravely

But now I must tell you--one goblet held a welcome for my friend, the other - death for my enemy.

NILS LYKKE (*throws down the goblet*). Christ above, I am poisoned!

OLAF SK (*clutches his sword*). Have you tried to kill me woman?

LADY INGER (*to OLAF, pointing to NILS*) You see the Danish trust in Inger Gyldenlove--- (*To NILS LYKKE, pointing to OLAF SK.*) ---and likewise my countrymen's faith in me!

To both

The Lady of Austrått is not yet dead.

ELINA enters by the door

ELINA. I heard voices! What's going on?

LADY INGER (*to NILS LYKKE*). My daughter Elina.

NILS LYKKE (*softly*). Elina! My word. I had not pictured you like this.

ELINA catches sight of **NILS LYKKE**, and stands still, as in surprise, gazing at him

LADY INGER (*touches her arm*). My child--this knight is---

ELINA (*still looking intently at him*) There is no need! I see who he is. He is Nils Lykke.

NILS LYKKE (*approaches her*). Yes, Miss Elina Gyldenlove, you have guessed rightly. And as it seems that, in some strange sense, you know me. How beautiful you are. What a wonderful dinner companion for this evening.

Elina stares at Nils. Ensemble departs.

ACT THREE

*The Banquet Hall. In the middle of the hall, a table with the remnants of the evening meal. **Elina** moves slowly and in deep thought. At the window.*

ELINA. "How beautiful you are!" Had he whispered the words – I still would have heard them! How I hate him! How I have always hated him, this Nils Lykke! There lives not another man like him, it is said. He plays with women and treads them under his feet. And it was to him my mother thought to offer me! How I hate him! They say Nils Lykke is unlike all other men. It just isn't true! There are many, many like him! When Bjorn used to tell me his tales, all the princes looked as Nils Lykke looks. When I sat dreaming here in the hall, and my knights came and went, they were one and all like him. How strange and how good it is to hate! Never have I known how sweet it can be until tonight.

NILS LYKKE enters

NILS LYKKE (*to himself*). "Sleep well at Austrått, Sir Knight," said Inger Gyldenlove as she left me. Sleep well? Out there, sky and sea in tumult; below, in the grave-vault a young girl in her coffin because of me and the fate of the two kingdoms in my hand. Truly, I will not sleep tonight.

*Notices **ELINA**, who has left the window, and is going out on the left.*

There she is. Veiled with thought. (*aloud*) Miss Elina!

ELINA (*stops at the door*). Why are you pursuing me?

NILS LYKKE. You? I am not pursuing you. I am pursued myself!

ELINA. You?

NILS LYKKE. By too many thoughts, which is why I can't sleep.

ELINA. Go to the window, and there you will find pastime, a storm-tossed sea.

NILS LYKKE (*smiles*). A storm-tossed sea? That I may find in you as well.

ELINA. In me?

NILS LYKKE. No, not at all; yet I could wish to see you in a milder mood.

ELINA (*proudly*). Do you think that will ever be the case?

NILS LYKKE. I am sure of it. I have come here to tell you something.

ELINA. What is it?

NILS LYKKE. Farewell.

ELINA (*comes a step nearer him*). Farewell? You are leaving Austrått so soon.

NILS LYKKE. Tonight.

ELINA (*seems to hesitate for a moment; then says coldly*) Then take your leave, Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE. Elina, I have no right to keep you here; but it will be unlike your nobleness if you refuse to hear what I have to say.

ELINA. I'm listening Sir Knight.

NILS LYKKE. I know that you hate me.

ELINA. You *are* keen-sighted Sir.

NILS LYKKE. But I know, too, that I have fully merited your hate. Unseemly and insolent were the words I wrote of you in my letter to Lady Inger.

ELINA. Well that may be the case but my mother did not read the letter to me.

NILS LYKKE. But at least their purpose is not unknown to you; I know your mother has not left you in ignorance of the matter; at the least she has told you the hope I nursed----

ELINA. Sir Knight--

NILS LYKKE. I speak of it only to excuse what I have done. If my fame has reached you, you must needs know enough of my life not to wonder that in such things I should go to work something boldly. I have met many women, Elina; but not one have I found stubborn. Such lessons teach a man to be secure. He loses the habit of gadabout ways----

ELINA. Maybe so. I don't know which women you refer to. For the rest, you were wrong in thinking it was your letter to my mother that aroused my bitterness against you. It is much older than that.

NILS LYKKE (*uneasily*). Older? What do you mean?

ELINA. Well, it is as you have told me, your fame has gone before you to Austrått, and all the land. Your name is never spoken except at the same time as the name of some woman whom he has beguiled and cast off. Some speak it in venom, others with laughter and wanton jeering at those weak-souled creatures. But through the venom and the laughter and the jeers rings the song they have made of you, masterful and audacious as an enemy's song of triumph. This has formed my hate for you. You were ever in my thoughts, and I longed to meet you face to face, that you might learn that there are some women on whom your soft speeches are lost--if you should think to use them.

NILS LYKKE. You judge me harshly, if you judge from what rumour has told of me. Even if there be truth in all you have heard, you don't know what has made me what I am. As a boy of seventeen I began my course of pleasure. I have lived full fifteen years since then. Women granted me all that I would, even before the wish had shaped itself into a prayer; and what I offered them they seized with eager hands. You are the first woman that pours scorn at my feet. I don't judge you for this. Rather I honour you for it, as never before have I honoured women. But for this I reproach my fate-- and the thought is a gnawing pain to me--that I did not meet you sooner. Your mother has told me of you. While far from Austrått - life ran its restless course, and you went your lonely way in silence, living in your dreams and histories. Know, then, that once I too lived such a life as yours. I thought that when I stepped forth into the world, a noble and stately woman would come to meet me and would beckon

me to her and point me the path towards a lofty goal. I was deceived! Women came to meet me; but she was not among them. And now I come to full manhood, I had learnt to despise them all. Was it my fault? Why were the others not like you? I know the fate of your fatherland lies heavy on your soul, and you know the part I have in these affairs. It said of me that I am false as the seafoam. **Perhaps I am, but if I be, it is women who have made me so.** Had I sooner found what I sought, had I met a woman proud and noble and high-souled even as you, then my path might have been different indeed. At this moment, maybe, I could have been standing at your side as the champion of all that suffer wrong in Norway's land. For this I believe: a woman is the mightiest power in the world, and in her hand it lies to guide a man where God Almighty would have him go.

ELINA Can it be as you say? God no! There is dishonesty in your eyes and deceit on your lips.

NILS LYKKE (*coming closer, speaks low and more intimately*). How often, when you have been sitting here at Austrått, alone with your thoughts, have you felt your bosom stifling; how often have the roof and walls seemed to shrink together till they crushed your very soul. Then have your longings taken wing with you; then have you yearned to fly far from here, you knew not where. How often have you not wandered alone by the fjord; far out a ship has sailed by in fair array, with knights and ladies on her deck with song and music of stringed instruments; a faint, far-off rumour of great events has reached your ears; and you have felt a longing in your breast, an unconquerable craving to know all that lies beyond the sea. But you have not understood what ailed you. At times you have thought it was the fate of your fatherland that filled you with all these restless broodings. You deceived yourself, a maiden so young as you has other food for musing--! Have you never had visions of an unknown power--a strong mysterious might, that binds together the destinies of mortals? When you dreamed of knightly jousts and joyous festivals--did you never see in your dreams a knight, who stood in the midst with a smile on his lips and with bitterness in his heart, a knight that had once dreamed a dream as fair as yours, of a woman noble and stately, for whom he went ever seeking, and in vain?

ELINA. I despise myself for hearing you out. You seem to have the power to clothe my most secret thought in words. How can you tell me what I feel in my inmost soul and did not know myself? How do you know----?

NILS LYKKE. All that I have told you, I have read in your eyes.

ELINA. Never has any man spoken to me as you have. I have understood you dimly; and yet all, all seems changed since.

NILS LYKKE. There is one thing in the world that might drive a man to madness; and that is the thought of what might have been if things had fallen *this way or that*. Had I met you on my path while the tree of my life was green and budding.... But forgive me, noble lady! Our speech of these past few moments has made me forget how we stand one to another. It was as though a secret voice had told me from the start that to you I could speak openly, without flattery.

ELINA. You can.

NILS LYKKE. --and it may be that this openness has already reconciled us. But my hope is yet bolder. The time may come when you will think of this knight without hate in your soul. Don't misunderstand me! I mean 'not now'-- but some time, in the days to come. And that this may be less hard for you.

ELINA. Sir Knight----!

NILS LYKKE (*smiling*). Ah, I see the thought of my letter still scares you. Fear nothing on that score. I would, from my heart, say that I love you not, and shall never come to you. Fear nothing. (*Breaks off and bows respectfully.*) But I fear I keep the noble daughter of the house too long. We shall meet no more; for before daybreak I shall be gone. So now I bid you farewell.

ELINA. Farewell Sir Knight

(*A short silence.*)

You go to Denmark, did you say?

NILS LYKKE. Indeed.

ELINA. Can I see towards Denmark from this hall?

NILS LYKKE (*points*). Yes, from this window. Denmark lies there, to the south.

ELINA. And is it far from here? More than a hundred miles?

NILS LYKKE. Much more. The sea lies between you and Denmark.

ELINA (to herself). The sea? Thought has seagull's wings.

Elina exits

NILS LYKKE If I could but spare two days now--or even one--I would have her in my power, even as the others. And yet there is rare stuff in this maiden. She is proud.

Paces the room

I truly believe she has set my blood on fire. Who would have thought it possible after all these years? Enough of this! I must get out of the tangle I am entwined in here.

Sits in a chair

What is the meaning of it? Both Olaf and Lady Inger seem blind to mistrust, when it is rumoured that I am in their league. Or can Inger have seen through my purpose? Can she have seen that all my promises were designed to lure Count Sture from his hiding-place?

Springs up

Christ! Is it I that have been fooled? It is possible that Count Sture is not at Austrått at all? It may be the rumour of his flight was a manoeuvre. He may be safe and sound among his friends in Sweden.

Walks restlessly up and down

And to think I was so sure of success! If I should accomplish nothing? If Lady Inger should discover my designs—and shout them from the rooftop I would be a laughingstock both here and in Denmark! To have sought to lure Lady Inger into a trap and given her cause the help it most needed, strengthened

her in the people's favour! Ah, I could almost sell myself to the Devil, would he help me to lay hands on Count Sture.

The window in the background is pushed open. NILS STENSSON is outside. NILS STENSSON enters

NILS LYKKE (*clutches at his side for defence*). What's this?

NILS STENSSON (*jumps down on to the floor*). Ah; here I am at last then!

NILS LYKKE (*aside*). What is this?

NILS STENSSON. God's peace, master!

NILS LYKKE. Thanks, good Sir! I think you have chosen a strange mode of entrance tonight!

NILS STENSSON. But what the devil was I supposed to do? The bloody gate was shut. Folk must sleep like bears in this house!

NILS LYKKE. Thank God! Don't you know that a good conscience is the best pillow?

NILS STENSSON. Aye, it must be even so; for all my rattling and thundering, I said to myself: as you are bidden to be in Austrått tonight, if you must go through fire and water, you can at the least creep through a window.

NILS LYKKE Was it the utmost necessity that you should reach Austrått tonight?

NILS STENSSON. Ay, indeed it was. I don't like to keep people waiting, I can tell you.

NILS LYKKE. Aha, then Lady Inger Gyldenlove looks for your coming?

NILS STENSSON. Lady Inger Gyldenlove? Well I don't know about that (*with a sly smile*) but there might be some one else----

NILS LYKKE (*smiles in answer*). Ah, there might be someone else?!

NILS STENSSON. Tell me, are you 'of the house'?

NILS LYKKE. I? Well, in so far that I am Lady Inger's guest this evening.

NILS STENSSON. A guest? Is not tonight the third night after Martinmas?

NILS LYKKE. The third night after? Yes, you are right. Would you seek the lady of the house at once? I think she has not yet gone to bed. But won't you sit down and rest a while, young Sir? Come, sit down; you will do wisely to refresh your strength.

NILS STENSSON. That wouldn't be so bad! Why, you live like lords here! When one has slept, as I have, on the bare ground, and lived on bread and water for four or five days!

NILS LYKKE (*looks at him with a smile*). Aye, such a life must be hard for one that is not able to sit at the high-table in noble halls----but now can you take your rest at Austrått, if you like.

NILS STENSSON (*pleased*). Really? Then I am not to be asked to leave soon?

NILS LYKKE. Not that I know of!

NILS STENSSON (*softly*). Oh, the devil! (*Stretches himself in the chair*) Well, you see--it's not yet certain. I, for my part, wouldn't be loath to stay here awhile; but...

NILS LYKKE. ----But you are not your own master? There are other duties and circumstances?

NILS STENSSON. Aye, that is just the thing! Were I to choose, I would stay at Austrått through the winter; I have only led a soldier's life--- (pauses) I have been eager to see Lady Inger Gyldenlove, whose fame has spread so wide. She must be a queenly woman, you think?--The one thing I don't like about her, is that she backs away from open action.

NILS LYKKE. From open action?

NILS STENSSON. I mean she is so *loath* to take a hand in driving the foreign rulers out of the land!

NILS LYKKE. (*evasively*) Aye, you are right. But if you do your best now, you could change her position.

NILS STENSSON. I? God knows how I would change her position!

NILS LYKKE. Yet it is strange you should seek her here if you have so little hope.

NILS STENSSON. What do you mean? Do you know Lady Inger?

NILS LYKKE. Of course, I am her guest, and----

NILS STENSSON. Aye, but it does not follow that you know her. I too am her guest, yet have I never seen so much as her shadow.

NILS LYKKE. Yet you did speak of her.

NILS STENSSON. As all the common folk speak. Why should I not? And besides, I have often enough heard from Peter Kanzler.

NILS LYKKE laughs

NILS STENSSON. Why are you laughing?

NILS LYKKE. Nothing, good sir. (*approaches him*). Listen—is it not time to throw off your mask?

NILS STENSSON (*smiling*). What mask?

NILS LYKKE. Drop the charade (*smiles*). You are known, Count Sture!

NILS STENSSON (*with a laugh*). Count Sture? Not this again! Do you too take me for Count Sture? (*Rises from the table.*) You really are mistaken sir; I am **not** Count Sture!

NILS LYKKE. You are not? Then who are you?

NILS STENSSON. My name is Nils Stensson.

NILS LYKKE (*looks at him with a smile*). Hm! You are not Sten Sture's son? The name rings a bell at least.

NILS STENSSON. True enough but God knows what right I have to bear it. My father I never met; my mother was apparently a poor peasant woman, robbed and murdered in one of the old wars. Peter Kanzler was lucky enough to be there and took me into his care, brought me up, and taught me the trade of arms. As you know, King Gustav has been hunting Peter for many a year; and I have followed him faithfully, wherever he went.

NILS LYKKE. Peter Kanzler has taught you more than warfare it seems. Well, well; then you are not Count Sture. But at least you come from Sweden. Peter Kanzler has sent you here to find a stranger?

NILS STENSSON (*nods cunningly*). Who is found already perhaps?

NILS LYKKE (*somewhat uncertain*). And whom you do not know?

NILS STENSSON. As little as you know me; for I swear to you by God himself: I am not Count Sture!

NILS LYKKE. In sober earnest, Sir?

NILS STENSSON. As truly as I live! Why should I deny it if I were?

NILS LYKKE. Then where is Count Sture?

NILS STENSSON (*in a low voice*). Yes, that is just the secret.

NILS LYKKE (*whispers*). Is this known to you?

NILS STENSSON (*nods*). It is something which I must tell you.

NILS LYKKE. To me? Well then, where is he?

NILS STENSSON points upwards

NILS LYKKE. Up there? Lady Inger holds him hidden in the attic?

NILS STENSSON. No, no - you mistake me. (*Looks round cautiously*) Count Nils Sture is in heaven!

NILS LYKKE. Dead? And where?

NILS STENSSON. In his mother's castle, three weeks ago.

NILS LYKKE. You are deceiving me! It's only about five or six days since he crossed the frontier into Norway.

NILS STENSSON. Oh, that was me! And that seems to be the problem because I must look just like him.

NILS LYKKE. But just before that the Count had appeared in the Dales. The people were restless already, and on his coming they broke out openly and would have chosen him for king.

NILS STENSSON. (*laughs*) That was me too!

NILS LYKKE. You?

NILS STENSSON. I will tell you how it came about. One day Peter Kanzler called me to him and let me know that great things were coming up. He told me to set out for Norway and go to Austrått, where I must be on a certain fixed day.

NILS LYKKE (*nods*). The third night after Martinmas.

NILS STENSSON. I was to meet a stranger there----

NILS LYKKE. (*eyes widening*) Perhaps I am he!

NILS STENSSON. The Stranger was to tell me what more I had to do. Furthermore, I was to let him know that the Count was dead, but that as yet this was only known to his mother, Peter Kanzler and a few old servants of the family.

NILS LYKKE. Ahh, I see, I understand. The Count was the peasants' rallying- point. Were the tidings of his death to spread, they would fall to pieces, and the whole project of the uprising would come to nothing.

NILS STENSSON. Maybe so. I know little of such matters.

NILS LYKKE. But how did you come to pretend to be the Count?

NILS STENSSON. How do I know?! I've pulled many pranks in my day, but I was not in on it! Wherever I appeared in the Dales, the people crowded round me and greeted me as Count Sture. Deny it as I pleased, it was wasted breath on them! The Count had been there two years before, they said-- but somehow, they thought I was he. Well, be it so, I thought; Never again will I be a Count in this life; why not see what it's like for once? (*laughs*)

NILS LYKKE. What else did you do?

NILS STENSSON. I ate and drank and relaxed! It was always a pity to leave these places, but when I set forth across the frontier--ha-ha-ha--I promised them I would soon be back with three or four thousand men. I don't even know how many I said!

NILS LYKKE. Did you not think you were acting rashly by saying these things?

NILS STENSSON. Well, yes... maybe... afterwards; but by then it was too late.

NILS LYKKE. I grieve for you, my young friend; but you will soon come to feel the effects of your foolishness. Let me tell you that you are pursued. A troop of Swedish men-at-arms are out after you.

NILS STENSSON. After me? (*laughs*) Impossible! When they come and think they have Count Sture in their clutches? (*laughs*)

NILS LYKKE (*gravely*). ----Then it will be farewell to your life.

NILS STENSSON. (*In equal tone*) But I am not Count Sture.

NILS LYKKE. You have called the people to arms! You have given seditious promises and raised trouble in the land.

NILS STENSSON. Ay, but it was only in jest!

NILS LYKKE. King Gustav will scarce look on the matter in that light!

NILS STENSSON. Maybe there is something in what you say. To think I could be such an idiot---- Well I'm not a dead man yet! You will protect me; and besides--the men-at-arms can hardly be at my heels.

NILS LYKKE. But what else have you to tell whoever you were to meet here?

NILS STENSSON. I? Nothing. Well, I need to give you this packet...

NILS LYKKE (*unguardedly*). The packet?

NILS STENSSON. Of course, surely you know----?

NILS LYKKE. Oh yes... right, right; the papers from Peter Kanzler.

NILS STENSSON. See, here they all are.

Takes out a packet, and hands it to NILS LYKKE

NILS LYKKE (*aside*). Letters and papers for Olaf Skaktavl. (To **NILS STENSSON.**) The packet is open, I see. Do you know what it contains?

NILS STENSSON. No, good sir; I never learned to read.

NILS LYKKE. I understand (*Sits down and runs through the papers.*) Aha! Here is light enough (*grabs candle*) This small letter tied with a silken thread (*Examines the address.*) This too for **Olaf**. (*Opens the letter, and glances through its contents.*)

From Peter Kanzler.... I thought as much. (*Reads under his breath.*) "**I am hard pressed, for----; ay, sure enough; here it is, --"Young Count Sture has been gathered to his father up in heaven, but it is still the time for the rebellion to break forth"--"--and all yet may come good----"**

What now? (*Reads on in astonishment.*) "**You must know, then, Olaf, that the young man who brings you this letter is the son of----"** Heaven and earth--can it be so?

(*Glances at Nils*) Can he be----? (*Reads on.*) "**I have nurtured him since he was a year old; but up to this day I have refused to give him back, holding him as hostage for Inger Gyldenlove's faithfulness to us and to our friends. Yet in that respect he has been of but little service to us. You may marvel that I didn't tell you this secret when you were with me here of late; therefore, I will confess freely that I feared you might seize upon him, as I had done. But now, when you have seen Lady Inger, and have doubtless assured yourself how loath she is to have a hand in our rebellion, you will see that**

it is wisest to give her back her own son. It might it come to pass that in her joy and security and thankfulness--" ----she might join our rebellion – which would be our last hope."

Sits for a while as though struck dumb with surprise; then exclaims in a low voice

What a letter! Gold would not buy this!

NILS STENSSON. It seems I have brought you an important letter there! Peter Kanzler has many irons in the fire, folk say.

NILS LYKKE (to himself). What to do with all this? A thousand paths are open to me. Suppose I-? No, it would be too risky! But if--ah, if I? (*Put papers inside his doublet*) A word, my friend!

NILS STENSSON. Well, your reaction say that things are looking up for you!

NILS LYKKE. By heaven's light it is, young sir. You have given me a hand of nothing but face cards, kings and queens and jacks.

NILS STENSSON. But what about me? Whilst I have brought these good tidings, do I have nothing else to do?

NILS LYKKE. You? Oh yes. Oh yes good sir. **You belong to the game.** You are a king; and king of hearts too.

NILS STENSSON. I, a king? Oh, now I understand; you are thinking of my masquerade as Count Sture. If King Gustav's men got me in their clutches!

Makes a motion to indicate hanging

NILS LYKKE. Of course, but don't let that worry you! It now lies with yourself alone whether within a month you shall have a noose or a chain of gold about your neck.

NILS STENSSON. A chain of gold? Then tell me what I should do.

NILS LYKKE. I will. But first you must swear me a solemn promise that no living creature in the whole wide world shall know what I am about to tell you.

NILS STENSSON. Is that all? You shall have promises ten times over if you want.

NILS LYKKE. Not so lightly, young Sir! It is no joking matter.

NILS STENSSON. I am serious enough.

NILS LYKKE. In the Dales you called yourself Count Sture, right?

NILS STENSSON. Don't start on that again - haven't I not made a free confession to you!

NILS LYKKE. What you said in the Dales was the truth.

NILS STENSSON. The truth? What do you mean by that?

NILS LYKKE. First your promise. The holiest, the most inviolable promise you can swear.

NILS STENSSON. "On the holiest Mother I swear..."

NILS LYKKE. No, let us not play about. I can show you a saint that will seal the oath. (*Points to a picture hanging on one of the panels.*) Come here and swear that you will be silent until I release your tongue--silent, as you hope for Heaven's salvation for yourself and for the man whose picture hangs there.

NILS STENSSON (*approaching the picture*). I swear it--so help me God's holy word! (*Falls back a step in amazement.*) But--Christ save me----!

NILS LYKKE. What now?

NILS STENSSON. The picture----! It looks so like me!

NILS LYKKE. 'Tis old Sten Sture, as he lived and moved in his youthful years.

NILS STENSSON. Sten Sture! And the likeness----? I have it, I have it! I am---

NILS LYKKE. You are Sten Sture's son, good Sir. **Count Sture's half-brother!**

NILS STENSSON (*with the quiet of amazement*). **Sten Sture's son!**

NILS LYKKE. On the mother's side too your blood is noble, **Lady Inger is your mother.** Peter Kanzler did not tell you the truth when he said that a poor peasant woman was your mother.

NILS STENSSON. How strange, how can I believe this?

NILS LYKKE. You should believe all I tell you. But remember, all this will be your ruin and downfall, if you should forget what you swore to me.

NILS STENSSON. Forget it? No, you can be sure I never will. But you, to whom I have given my word, tell me who are you?

NILS LYKKE. My name is Nils Lykke.

NILS STENSSON (*surprised*). Nils Lykke? Surely not the Danish Councillor?

NILS LYKKE. Even so.

NILS STENSSON. And it was you? How strange. Why would Peter Kanzler be sending letters to a Dane, of all people.

NILS LYKKE. To be receiving messages from Peter Kanzler? You marvel at that? I've met him countless times.

NILS STENSSON. Well I cannot deny it sir. He has named you as our most bitter enemy.

NILS LYKKE. And therefore, you don't trust me?

NILS STENSSON. Well not wholly that; but, well, stranger things have happened!

NILS LYKKE. Well said. Though if you go your own way, you will be sure of the noose, as you would be sure of a Count's title and a chain of gold if you trust in me.

NILS STENSSON. Then trust you I will, especially given those are my two choices. My hand, and life, upon it, dear Sir! Will you help me with advice if I need you; when advice gives place to being chased by the Swedes, I shall look to you!

NILS LYKKE. Of course. But what you must now do is promise me that until I say otherwise, you are to assume the identity of the full Count Sture once again, like you did in the Dales, your half-brother. You will come to know how vitally important this is when you realise my plan to support you and your battle - my friend. Lady Inger must not yet know your true identity as her son.

*Goes out. Stensson goes out after **NILS LYKKE***

ACT FOUR

The Banquet Hall, as before. BJORN enters carrying a candle, and lighting in LADY INGER and OLAF SK. LADY INGER has a bundle of papers in her hand

LADY INGER (to **BJORN**). And you are sure my daughter spoke with the knight, here in the hall?

BJORN Sure as I can possibly be. I met her as she stepped into the passage.

LADY INGER. And she seemed greatly moved, did you say?

BJORN. She looked all pale and disturbed. I asked if she were sick, she answered no, but said: "Go to mother and tell her the knight sets forth from here at daybreak. If she has letters or messages for him, beg her not to delay him needlessly." And then she added something that I didn't hear properly.

LADY INGER. Did you not hear it at all?

BJORN. It sounded to me as though she said: "I almost fear he has already stayed too long at Austrått."

LADY INGER. And the knight? Where is he?

BJORN. In his chamber, in the gate-wing.

LADY INGER. Fine. What I must send to him is ready. Go to him and say I await him here in the hall.

BJORN goes out

OLAF SK. Know this, Lady Inger, it is true that in such things I am blind as a mole; yet seems it to me as though...

LADY INGER. Well?

OLAF SK. ----as though Nils Lykke loved your daughter.

LADY INGER. Then it seems that you are not so blind after all; I am the more deceived if you are mistaken. Did you not notice at supper how eagerly he listened to the littlest thing I said concerning Elina?

OLAF SK. He forgot his food and drink.

LADY INGER. And our business as well.

OLAF SK. Ay, and what is more--the papers from Peter Kanzler. Where are they?

LADY INGER. And from all this you conclude----?

OLAF SK. From all this I conclude that, as you know Nils Lykke and the name he bears, especially as concerns women...

LADY INGER. ----I should be glad to see him outside my gates?

OLAF SK. Aye. And as soon as possible!

LADY INGER (*smiling*). No--the case is just the contrary, Olaf!

OLAF SK. How do you mean?

LADY INGER. If things be as we both think, Nils Lykke must in no way depart from Austrått yet.

OLAF SK (*looks at her with disapproval*). Are you beginning to have mischievous plans Lady Inger? What scheme do you have in your mind? Something that may increase your own power at the cost of our----

LADY INGER. Oh this blindness that makes you unfair to me! You think I propose to make Nils Lykke my daughter's husband? Was such a thought in my mind, why had I refused to take part in what is going on in Sweden, when Nils Lykke and all the Danish crew seem willing to support the rebellion?

OLAF SK. Then if it isn't your wish to win him and bind him -what would you do with him?

LADY INGER. In a letter to me, Nils Lykke has spoken of the high fortune it would be to be allied to our house and I do not say but, for a moment, I let myself think of the matter.

OLAF SK. Ah I see you!

LADY INGER. To wed Nils Lykke to one of my house would doubtless be a great step toward reconciling many opposing forces in our land.

OLAF SK. It seems your daughter Meredith's marriage might have taught you the cost of such a step as this. Scarce had my lord gained a firm footing in our midst, when he began to make free with both our goods and our rights.

LADY INGER. I know it too well, Olaf! But there are times when my thoughts are manifold and strange. I cannot impart them fully either to you or to anyone else. Often I don't know what would be best for me. And yet, a second time to choose a Danish lord for a son-in-law, nothing but the uttermost need could drive me to that, and heaven be praised things have not yet come to that!

OLAF SK. I am no wiser than before, Lady Inger. Why would you keep Nils Lykke at Austrått?

LADY INGER (*softly*). Because I owe him an undying hate for what he has done to this country and my daughter Lucia. Nils Lykke has done me deadlier wrong than any other man. I shall never rest until I am avenged on him. Don't you see? Say that Nils Lykke were to love Elina --as it seems. I could persuade him to remain here; he shall learn to know Elina well. She is both fair and wise. If he should one day come before me, with deep love in his heart, to beg for her hand! Then I would chase him away like a hound; drive him off with jibes and scorn and make it known all over the land that Nils Lykke had come to Austrått in vain! I tell you I would give ten years of my life to see that day!

OLAF SK. So, is this your intention towards him?

LADY INGER. This and nothing else, as sure as God lives! Trust me, Olaf, I try my utmost for my countrymen, but I am in no way my own master. There are things which must be kept hidden, or it would be a deathblow.

OLAF SK (*shakes her by the hand*). I am loath indeed to think evil of you. Yet, knowing your design towards this knight, I think it is a dangerous game you are playing. What if you have misjudged this? What if your daughter doesn't reciprocate? Can no woman stand against this subtle devil?

LADY INGER. My daughter? No, have no fear of that; I know Elina well. All she has heard of his renown has but made her hate him the more. You saw with your own eyes.

OLAF SK. Ay, but a mind is shifting ground to build on. You should be careful to watch what happens.

LADY INGER. That will I, be sure; I will watch them narrowly. But even were he to succeed in luring her to him, I have but to whisper two words in her ear, and----

OLAF SK. What then?

LADY INGER. ----She will shrink from him as though he were sent by the devil himself. (pauses) Ah, Olaf! Here he comes. Now be cautious.

NILS LYKKE enters

NILS LYKKE (approaches **LADY INGER** courteously). My noble hostess has summoned me?

LADY INGER. I have learned through my daughter that you are minded to leave us tonight.

NILS LYKKE. Indeed, to my sorrow, since my business at Austrått is over.

OLAF SK. Not before I have the papers, of course!

NILS LYKKE. Certainly. I had almost forgotten the biggest part of my errand. It was the fault of our noble hostess. With such pleasant skills did she keep her guests in conversation at the table.

LADY INGER. That you no longer remembered what had brought you here? Wonderful! For that was my plan. I thought that if my guest, Nils Lykke, were to feel at ease in Austrått, he must forget.

NILS LYKKE. What, lady?

LADY INGER. First, his errand, and then all that had gone before it.

NILS LYKKE (*to OLAF SK, while he takes out the packet and hands it to him*). The papers from Peter Kanzler. You will find them a full account of our rebellious partisans in Sweden.

OLAF SK. With thanks.

Sits down by the table on the left, where he opens the packet and examines its contents

NILS LYKKE. And now, Lady Inger I can't see anything else which is keeping me here.

LADY INGER. Were it things of state alone that had brought us together, you might be right. But I am loath to think so. I would say that it was not alone as a Danish Councillor or as the ally of Peter Kanzler that Nils Lykke came to be my guest. Do I mistake that you may have intentions to have closer acquaintance with the Lady of Austrått?

OLAF SK (*turning over the papers*). Strange. No letters at all!

NILS LYKKE. Lady Inger's fame is all too widely spread that I have always been eager to meet you face to face.

LADY INGER. So I thought. But what, then, is an hour's talking at the supper-table? Let us try to sweep away all that has separated us till now; it may well happen that the Nils Lykke I know may wipe out the grudge I bore. Extend your stay here a few days, Sir Councillor! I dare not persuade Olaf similarly, since his mission with the rebels calls him. But as for you, doubtless your judgment has placed all things beforehand in such train, that your presence can scarce be needed. Trust me, your time shall not pass tediously with us, at least you will find me and my daughter heartily keen to do all we may to entertain you.

NILS LYKKE. I doubt neither your goodwill toward me nor your daughter's, of that I have had full proof. But despite your kindness, I must declare my longer stay at Austrått impossible.

LADY INGER. You must know, Sir Councillor, were I wickedly disposed, I might think you had come to Austrått to try a battle with me, and that, having lost, you don't like to linger on the battlefield among the witnesses of your defeat.

NILS LYKKE (*smiling*). There might be some show of reason for such a reading of the case; but I don't think the battle is lost.

LADY INGER. Be that as it may, it might at any rate be retrieved, if you would stay some more days with us. I am still doubting and wavering at the parting of the ways, persuading my formidable assailant not to quit the field. Well, to speak plainly, the thing is this: your alliance with the disaffected in Sweden still seems to me somewhat, ay, what shall I call it? Somewhat miraculous, Sir Councillor! I tell you this frankly, dear Sir! The thought that has moved the Danish King's Council to this step is in truth most politic; but it is strangely at odds with the deeds of certain of your countrymen in bygone years. Don't be offended, then, if my trust in your fair promises needs to be somewhat strengthened here, in order that I can place my whole welfare in your hands.

NILS LYKKE. A longer stay at Austrått would scarce help towards that end since I don't propose to make any further effort to shake your resolution.

LADY INGER. Then must I pity you from my heart. Ay, Sir Councillor, it is true I stand here a lonely widow, yet may you trust my word when I prophesise that this visit to Austrått will line your future path with thorns.

NILS LYKKE (*with a smile*). Is that your anticipation, Lady Inger?

LADY INGER. Truly it is! What can one say dear Sir? It is a dangerous age. After half a year is out, you will be all men's fable. People will stop and gaze after you on the high roads; it will be: "Look, look; there rides Sir Nils Lykke, that fared north to Austrått to trap Inger Gyldenlove, and was caught in his own nets." No, No, why so impatient, Sir Knight! It is not that I think so; I do but forecast the thought of the malicious and evil-minded; and of them, alas! There are many. Ay, it is a shame; but so it is-- you will reap nothing but mockery--mockery, because a woman was craftier than you. "Like a cunning fox," men will say, "he crept into Austrått; like a beaten hound he slunk away." --And one thing more: don't you think that Peter Kanzler and his friends will renounce your alliance, when it is known that I will not venture to fight under a standard with you?

NILS LYKKE. You speak wisely, Lady Inger! And so, to save myself from mockery--and further, to avoid breaking with all our dear friends in Sweden--I must needs depart.

LADY INGER (hastily). Prolong your stay at Austrått?

NILS LYKKE. No, my noble lady. I need to bring you to terms within this hour.

LADY INGER. But what if you should fail?

NILS LYKKE. I shall not fail.

LADY INGER. You don't lack confidence, it seems.

NILS LYKKE. What could we bet that you wouldn't ally yourself with myself and Peter Kanzler?

LADY INGER. Austrått Castle

NILS LYKKE (points to himself and jokingly) Olaf --here stands the new owner!

LADY INGER. Sir Councillor----!

NILS LYKKE (to **LADY INGER**). Of course, I don't accept the bet; for in a moment you would gladly give Austrått Castle, and more to boot, to be freed from the trap wherein we are tangled.

LADY INGER. Your joking becomes unbearable.

NILS LYKKE. It will be funnier yet, at least for me. You boast that you have overreached me. You threaten to heap on me all men's scorn and mockery. Ah, beware that you don't stir up my vengefulness. For with a few words I can bring you to your knees at my feet.

LADY INGER. (*laughter*). And the words, Nils Lykke? --the words?

NILS LYKKE. ----The secret son of Sten Sture. I believe you will be well aware.

LADY INGER (*wordless, shocked reaction*)

OLAF SK. Inger Gyldenlove's *son*?

LADY INGER (*half kneeling to NILS LYKKE*). Mercy! oh be merciful ----!

NILS LYKKE (*raises her up*). Collect yourself and let us talk calmly.

LADY INGER (*in a low voice, as though bewildered*). Did you hear it, Olaf? Or was it but a dream? Did you hear you what he said?

NILS LYKKE. It was no dream, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER. And you know it! You, you! Where is he then? Where have you got him? What would you do with him? (*Screams*) Do not kill him, Nils! Give him back to me! Do not kill my child! This fear, this torturing dread! Through all these years it has been ever with me, and then all fails at last, and I

must bear this agony! Oh Lord my God, is it right of you? Was it for this you gave him to me? Nils -- tell me without delay. Where have you got him? Where is he?

NILS LYKKE. With his foster-father.

LADY INGER. Still with Peter Kanzler. Oh, that merciless man----! Forever to deny my prayers. But it must not go on like this! Help me, Olaf!

OLAF SK. I?

NILS LYKKE. There will be no need, if only you----

LADY INGER. Listen to me, Sir Councillor! What you know you shall know well. And you too, my friend. Tonight, you bade me call to mind that fatal day when Knut Alfson was slain at Oslo. You bade me remember the promise I made as I stood by his corpse amid the bravest men in Norway. I was scarce full-grown then; but I felt God's strength in me, and I thought, as many have thought since, that the Lord himself had set his mark on me and chosen me to fight in the forefront for my country's cause. Was it vanity? Or was it a calling from on high? That I have never clearly known. But woe to him that has a great mission laid upon him. For seven years I have not feared to say that I kept my promise faithfully. I stood by my countrymen in all their miseries. All my friends were now wives and mothers. I alone could give ear to no man--not to one. Then I saw Sten Sture for the first time. Fairer man had never met my sight.

NILS LYKKE. Ah, now it grows clear to me! Sten Sture was then in Norway. We Danes were not to know that he wished your friends well.

LADY INGER. Disguised as a serving-man he lived a whole winter under one roof with me. That winter I thought less and less of the country's welfare. So fair a man had I never seen, and I had lived twenty-five years. Next autumn Sten Sture came once more; and when he departed again he took with him, in all secrecy, a little child. It was not folk's evil tongues I feared; but our cause would have suffered had it got out the Sten Sture stood so near to me. The child was given to Peter Kanzler to rear. I waited for better times, and they never came. Sten Sture took a wife two years later in Sweden, and, dying, left a widow----

OLAF SK. ----And with her a lawful heir to his name and rights.

LADY INGER. Time after time I wrote to Peter Kanzler and besought him to give me back my child. But he was deaf to my prayers. "***Cast in your lot with our Swedish rebels once for all,***" he said, "***and I send your son back to Norway; not before.***" But I dared not do. We were then ill regarded by many folk. If they had got news of how things stood--oh, I know it! I would be destroyed. Besides that, the Danes were active. They spared neither threats nor promises to force me to join them.

OLAF SK. It was reason above all. The eyes of all men were fixed on you as the vane that should show them how to shape their course.

LADY INGER. Then came a revolt. Do you remember that time, Olaf? Was it not as though the whole land was filled with the sunlight of a new spring. Mighty voices summoned me to come forth; yet I dared not. I stood doubting, far from the strife, in my lonely castle. At times it seemed as though the Lord God himself were calling me; but then would come the killing dread again to paralyse my will. "Who will win?" that was the question that was ever ringing in my ears.

It was a short spring that had come to Norway. Our countrymen were broken on the wheel during the months that followed. None could call me to account; yet there were threats from Denmark. What if they knew the secret? At last, I thought that they must know; I did not know how else to understand their words. It was in that time of agony that Gyldenlove came here and sought me in marriage. Let any mother that has feared for her child think herself in my place and homeless in the hearts of my countrymen.

Then came the quiet years. There was now no whisper of revolt. Our masters ground us down. There were times when I loathed myself. What had I to do? Nothing but to endure terror and scorn and bring forth daughters into the world. My daughters! God forgive me if I have had no mother's heart towards them. My wifely duties were as slavery to me; how then could I love my daughters? Oh, how different with my son! He was a child of love, of my very soul. He was the one thing that recalled the time **when I was a woman and nothing but a woman**--and him they had taken from me! He was growing up amongst strangers, who might sow in him the seed of destruction! Olaf --had I wandered like you on the lonely hills, hunted and forsaken, in winter and storm--if I had held my child in my arms, trust me, I had not sorrowed and wept so sore as I have sorrowed and wept for him from his birth even to this hour.

OLAF SK. I have judged you too harshly, Lady Inger! I know what it is to sorrow for a child.

LADY INGER. Yours was slain by bloodthirsty men. But what is death to the restless terror of all these long years?

NILS LYKKE. Mark, then—it is in your power to end this terror. You have only to reconcile the opposing parties, and neither will think of seizing on your child as a pledge of your faith.

LADY INGER (*to herself*). This is the vengeance of Heaven. (*Looks at him*) In one word, what do you demand?

NILS LYKKE. I demand first that you shall call the people of the northern districts to arms, in support of the disaffected in Sweden.

LADY INGER. And next----?

NILS LYKKE. ----that you do your best to advance young Count Sture's ancestral claim to the throne of Sweden.

LADY INGER. His? You demand that I----?

OLAF SK (*softly*). It is the wish of many Swedes, and it would serve our turn too.

NILS LYKKE. You hesitate, lady? You tremble for your son's safety. What better can you wish than to see his half-brother on the throne? (*Looks at her sharply*). Unless there be other plans afoot---

LADY INGER. What do you mean?

NILS LYKKE. Inger Gyldenlove might have a mind to be a—a king's mother?

LADY INGER. No, no! Give me back my child and let those that want them have the crowns. But how do you know that Count Sture would be willing to claim his ancestral right?

NILS LYKKE. Of that he will himself assure you.

LADY INGER. Himself?

NILS LYKKE. Count Sture is in Austrått.

OLAF SK. Here?

NILS LYKKE (to LADY INGER). You have doubtless been told that another rode through the gate along with me? The Count was my attendant.

LADY INGER (softly). I am in his power. I have no longer any choice. *(to Nils)* Very well, Sir Councillor--I assure you completely of my support.

NILS LYKKE. In writing?

LADY INGER. As you will.

Goes to the table on the left, sits down, and takes writing materials from the drawer

NILS LYKKE (aside, standing by the table on the right). At last, then, I win!

LADY INGER (after a moment's thought, turns suddenly in her chair to OLAF SK and whispers). Olaf -- I am certain of it now--Nils Lykke is a traitor!

OLAF SK (softly). What? You think----?

LADY INGER. He has treachery in his heart

OLAF SK. And yet you would give him a written promise that may be your ruin?

LADY INGER. Hush; leave me to act. No, wait and listen first----

Talks with him in a whisper

NILS LYKKE (softly, watching them). Ah, take counsel together as much as you wish! All danger is over now. With her written consent in my pocket, I can denounce her when I please. A secret message to Denmark this very night. I can tell then the truth that the young Count Sture is not at Austrått. And then tomorrow, when the road is open--to Trondheim with my young friend, and then by ship to Copenhagen with him, her son, as my prisoner. Once we have him safe, we can dictate to Lady Inger what we will. And I----? I think that after this the Denmark will reward me kindly.

LADY INGER (still whispering to OLAF SK). Well, you understand me?

OLAF SK. Ay, fully. Let us risk it.

Goes out by the back. NILS STENSSON comes in unseen by LADY INGER, who has begun to write.

NILS STENSSON (in a low voice). Sir Knight, Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE (*moves towards him*). Rash boy! What the hell are you doing here? Did you not hear me when I told you to wait until I called you?

NILS STENSSON. How could I? Now you have told me that Inger Gyldenlove is my mother, I thirst more than ever to see her face to face. Oh, it is she! How proud and lofty she seems! Even thus did I ever picture her. Fear not, dear Sir, I shall do nothing rashly. Since I have learnt this secret, I feel, as it were, older and wiser. I will no longer be wild and heedless. Tell me, knows she that I am here? Surely you have prepared her?

NILS LYKKE. Aye, sure enough; but...

NILS STENSSON. Well?

NILS LYKKE. ----She will not own you for her son.

NILS STENSSON. Will not own me? But she is my mother. Oh, if there is no other way (*takes out a ring which he wears on a cord round his neck*) show her this ring. I have worn it since my earliest childhood; she must surely know its history.

NILS LYKKE. Hide the ring, man! Hide it, I say! You are mistaken! Lady Inger doesn't doubt that you are her child; but look about you; look at all this wealth; look at these mighty ancestors and kinsmen whose pictures deck the walls both high and low; look lastly at her, the proud Lady Inger, the highest noblewoman in the kingdom. Can you think that she would take a poor ignorant youth by the hand before everyone and say: Behold this is my son!

NILS STENSSON. Aye, you are right, I am poor and ignorant. I have nothing to offer her in return for what I crave. Oh, never have I felt my poverty weigh on me till this hour! But tell me, what do you think I should do to win her love? Tell me, Sir, you must know!

NILS LYKKE. You must win your father's kingdom. But until that, don't wound her ears by hinting at kinship or the like. It will be as though she believed you to be the real Count Sture, until you have made yourself worthy to be called her son.

NILS STENSSON. Oh, but tell me!

NILS LYKKE. Hush; hush!

LADY INGER (*rises and hands him a paper*). Sir Knight, here is my promise.

NILS LYKKE. I thank you.

LADY INGER (notices **NILS STENSSON**). Ah, this young man is----?

NILS LYKKE. Ay, Lady Inger, this is **Count Sture**.

LADY INGER (*aside, looks at him stealthily*). Feature for feature, ay, by God, --it is Sten Sture's son!

Approaches him and says with cold courtesy

I bid you welcome under my roof, Count! It rests with you whether we shall bless this meeting a year hence.

NILS STENSSON. With me? Oh, do but tell me what I must do! Trust me, I have courage and good-will enough.

NILS LYKKE (*listens uneasily*). What is this noise and uproar, Lady Inger? There are people pressing hitherward. What does this mean?

LADY INGER (*in a loud voice*). It is the spirits awakening!

OLAF, BJORN, enter

LADY INGER (to **OLAF SK**). Have you told them what is in hand?

OLAF SK. I have told them all they need to know.

LADY INGER . Aye, now, you must now instruct Austrått to arm themselves as best they can. What I forbade the men at arms to do this evening - they now have my fullest blessing to do so. And here I present to you the young Count Sture, the coming ruler of Sweden--and Norway too, if God will it so.

NILS LYKKE (*softly and uneasily*). The spirits awakening, she said?

LADY INGER (to **NILS STENSSON**). I will give you the first earnest of our service--thirty mounted men, to follow you as bodyguard. Trust me, you will reach the frontier and many hundreds will have ranged themselves under my banner and yours. Go, then, and God be with you! Go to Sweden and claim your ancestral throne.

NILS STENSSON. Thanks, Lady Inger! Thanks, and be sure that you shall never have cause to be ashamed. If you see me again, I shall have won my father's kingdom.

NILS LYKKE (to himself). Ay, if she sees you again!

OLAF SK. The horses wait, good fellows! Are ye ready?

NILS LYKKE (*uneasily, to LADY INGER*). What? You mean not tonight, even now----?

LADY INGER. This very moment, Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE. No, no, impossible!

LADY INGER. It shall be as I have said.

NILS LYKKE (*softly, to NILS STENSSON*). Don't listen to her!

NILS STENSSON. How can I otherwise? I will. I must! She is my mother!

NILS LYKKE (*authority*) And me?

NILS STENSSON. I shall keep my word, be sure of that. The secret shall not pass my lips till you yourself release me, but she is my mother!

NILS LYKKE (*back to Lady Inger*). Please wait until tomorrow!

LADY INGER (to **NILS STENSSON**). Count Sture, do you obey me or not?

NILS STENSSON. To horse! (*Goes up towards the background*).

NILS LYKKE (*aside*). Jesus! He knows not what he does. (To **LADY INGER**.) Well, since so it must be, farewell!

Bows hastily, and begins to move away

LADY INGER (detains him). No, stay! Not so, Sir Knight, not so!

NILS LYKKE. What do you mean?

LADY INGER (*in a low voice*). Nils Lykke--you are a traitor! Hush! Let no one see there is dissension in the camp of the leaders. You have won Peter Kanzler's trust by some devilish cunning that as yet I cannot see through. You have forced me to rebellious acts, such as supporting the Swedish rebellion, not to help our cause, but to further your own plots, whatever they may be. I can draw back no more. But don't you dare think that you have conquered! I shall contrive to make you harmless.

NILS LYKKE (*lays his hand involuntarily on his sword*). Lady Inger!

LADY INGER. Be calm, Sir Councillor! Your life is safe. But you will not leave gates of Austrått until we have won victory!

NILS LYKKE. Excuse me?

LADY INGER. It won't help you to resist. So, take some rest; it will be your wisest course.

NILS LYKKE (*to himself*). Heavens. She has been craftier than I. (*A thought strikes him*) But if I yet---?

LADY INGER (*to OLAF*). Ride with Count Sture's troops to the frontier; then without pause to Peter Kanzler and bring me back my child. Now has he no longer any cause for keeping me from my son.

Adds, as OLAF is going

Wait, a token. He that wears Sten Sture's ring is my son.

OLAF SK. By all the saints, you shall have him! (*Exeunt*)

LADY INGER. Thanks, thanks, my faithful friend!

NILS LYKKE (*to himself*) The Swedes are in ambush two miles hence. The Swedish Commander doesn't know that Count Sture is dead. The young man cannot be touched. His young life is incalculable to me.

LADY INGER (*who has meanwhile been watching NILS LYKKE*). And now go, all of you; go with God! (*Points to NILS LYKKE*) This noble knight cannot find it in his heart to leave his friends at Austrått so hastily. He will abide here with me till the tidings of your victory arrive.

NILS LYKKE (*to himself*). Damnation!

NILS STENSSON Trust me my dear Lady, you shall not have long to wait! (*exeunt*)

Olaf, Nils Stensson, Bjorn EXIT

LADY INGER (*passes close to NILS LYKKE as she exits*). Who wins?

NILS LYKKE (*remains alone*). Who? Your victory will cost you dear. I wash my hands of it. It is not I who will be killing your son outside these gates. Yet my prey is escaping me none the less; and the revolt will grow and spread! --Ah, it is a frantic game I have been playing here!

Listens at the window

There they go clattering out through the gateway. Now it is closed after them and I am left here a prisoner. No way of escape! Within half-an-hour the Swedes will be upon him. It will be life or death. But if they should take him alive after all? Were I free, I could overtake the Swedes before they reach the frontier and make them deliver him to me. (*Goes towards the window in the background and looks out.*) Damnation! Guards outside on every hand. Can there be no way out of this? (*Comes quickly forward again; suddenly stops and listens.*) What is that? Music and singing. It seems to come from Elina's room. Ay, it is her that is singing. Then she is still awake----

A thought seems to strike him

Elina! Ah, if that could be! If it could but----And why should I not? Am I not still myself?

Elina shall set me free!

Goes quickly to exit

ACT FIVE

*The Banquet Hall. It is still night. The hall is but dimly lit by a candle on the table. Having entered, **LADY INGER** is sitting by the table, deep in thought.*

LADY INGER (*after a pause*) They call me keen-witted beyond all others in the land. I believe they are right. The keenest-witted. No one knows how I became so. For more than twenty years I have fought to save my child. That is the key to the riddle. Ay, that sharpens the wits! My wits? Where have they flown tonight? What has become of my forethought? There is a ringing and rushing in my ears. I see shapes before me, so life-like that I think I could lay hold on them.

Springs up

Lord Jesus, what is this? Am I no longer mistress of my reason? Is it to come to that?

Presses her clasped hands over her head; sits down again.

Nay, it is nothing. It will pass. There is no fear, it will pass. How peaceful it is in the hall tonight! No threatening looks from forefathers or kinsfolk. No need to turn their faces to the wall. Yes, it was well that I took heart at last. We shall conquer, and then I am at the end of my struggle. I shall have my son back again.

Takes up as if to go but stops.

At the end? The end? To get him back? Is that all? Is there nothing further? That heedless word that Nils Lykke threw forth at random. How could he see my thoughts?

More softly

A king's mother? A king's mother, he said----Why not? Haven't my forefathers ruled as kings, even though they didn't bear the king's name? Has my son not as good a title as the other to the rights of the house of Sture? In the sight of God, he has, if there is justice in Heaven. And in an hour of terror, I have signed away his rights. I have recklessly squandered them, as a ransom for his freedom. If they could be recovered? Would Heaven be angered, if I----? Would it call down fresh troubles on my head if I were to? Who knows! It may be safest to refrain. I shall have my child again. That must suffice me. I will try to rest. All these desperate thoughts, I will sleep them away.

A king's mother!

Goes out slowly

*After a short pause, **NILS LYKKE** and **ELINA** enter. **NILS LYKKE** has a small lantern in his hand*

NILS LYKKE. (*Throws the light from his lantern around, to search the room*). All is still. I must be gone.

ELINA. Oh, let me look but once more into your eyes, before you leave me.

NILS LYKKE (*embraces her*). Elina.

ELINA (*after a short pause*). Will you come to Austrått again?

NILS LYKKE. How can you doubt that I will come? Are you not my betrothed? But will you be true to me, Elina? Will you not forget me before we meet again?

ELINA. Do you ask if I will be true? Have I any will left? Have I power to be untrue to you? You came by night; you knocked upon my door and I opened to you. You spoke to me. What was it you said? You gazed in my eyes. What was the mystic might that turned my brain and lured me, as it were, within a magic net? (*Hides her face on his shoulder*) Oh, do not look at me, Nils Lykke! You must not look upon me after this. Do you not own my heart? I am yours; I must be yours--to all eternity.

NILS LYKKE. Now, by my knightly honour, when the year be past, you shall sit as my wife in the hall of my fathers.

ELINA. No vows, Nils Lykke! No promises to me.

NILS LYKKE. What do you mean? Why do you shake your head so mournfully?

ELINA. Because I know that the same soft words that have turned my mind, you have whispered to so many before me. (*With guilt*) No, no, I must not be angry, my beloved! In nothing do I reproach you, as I did while, yet I didn't know you. Now I understand how high above all others is your goal. How can love be anything to you but a pastime, or woman but a toy?

NILS LYKKE. Elina, please hear me!

ELINA. As I grew up, your name was ever in my ears. I hated the name, for it seemed that all women were dishonoured by your life. And yet, how strange. When I built up in my dreams the life that should be mine, you were my hero, though I didn't know it. Now I understand it all, now I know what it was I felt. It was a foreboding, a mysterious longing for you, you only, for you that were one day going to come and glorify my life.

NILS LYKKE (*aside, putting down the lantern on the table*) How is it with me? This dizzy fascination. If this is love, then have I never known it till this hour. Is there not yet time? Oh Christ--Lucia!

Sinks into a chair

ELINA. What ails you? So heavy a sigh----

NILS LYKKE. It is nothing, nothing! I will now confess all to you. I have beguiled many with both words and glances; I have said to many a one what I whispered to you this night. But trust me----

ELINA. Hush! No more of that. My love is no exchange for that you give me. No, I love you because your every glance commands it like a king's decree.

Sits down at his feet

Oh, let me once more stamp that kingly message deep into my soul, though I well know it stands imprinted there for all time and eternity. Dear God--how little I have known myself! It was tonight I said to my mother: "*My pride is my life.*" And what is my pride? Is it to know that my countrymen are free, or that my house is held in honour throughout the lands? Oh, no, no! My love is my pride. The little dog is proud when he sits by his master's feet and eats breadcrumbs from his hand. Even so am

I proud, so long as I may sit at your feet, while your looks and your words nourish me with the bread of life. Therefore, I say to you, "*My love is my life;*" for therein lies all my pride, now and evermore.

NILS LYKKE (*raises her up*). No, no--not at my feet, but at my side is your place. Ay, you have led me into a better path and if it be granted to me some day to atone by a deed of fame for the sins of my reckless youth, the honour shall be yours as well as mine.

ELINA. I have read in my books of the unimaginable lives in far-off lands. To the sound of horns the knight rides forth into the wood, with his falcon on his wrist. Your name rings out before you wherever you fare. All that I desire of your glory, is to rest like the falcon on your arm. I too was blind to light and life, till you took the hood from my eyes and set me soaring high over the leafy treetops. But, trust me, bold as my flight may be, I shall ever turn back to my cage.

NILS LYKKE (*rises*). Then I bid defiance to the past! Take this ring and be mine before God and men (*pauses*) though it should trouble the dreams of the dead.

ELINA. You make me afraid. What is it?

NILS LYKKE. It is nothing. Come, let me place the ring on your finger, now are you my betrothed!

ELINA. I Nils Lykke's bride! It seems a dream, all that has befallen this night. Oh, but so fair a dream! My chest is so light. No longer is there bitterness and hatred in my soul. I will atone to all whom I have wronged. I have been terrible to my mother. Tomorrow I will go to her; she must forgive me my actions.

NILS LYKKE. And give her consent to our love.

ELINA. That she will. Oh, I am sure she will. My mother is kind, all the world is kind, I can feel hatred no more for any living soul, save one.

NILS LYKKE. Save one?

ELINA. Ah, it is a sad history. I had a sister.

NILS LYKKE. Lucia? (*Instantly and abruptly turns, having acknowledged her name*)

ELINA. Wait, did you know of Lucia?

NILS LYKKE. No, no. Though I have heard her name.

ELINA. She too gave her heart to a knight. He betrayed her and now she is dead.

NILS LYKKE. And you?

ELINA. I hate him with all my force.

NILS LYKKE. You shouldn't hate in such a way! If there be mercy in your heart, forgive him his sin. Trust me, he bears his punishment in his own breast.

ELINA. Him I will never forgive! I cannot, even if I would; for I have sworn so dear an oath----
(*Listening.*) Hush! Can you hear?

NILS LYKKE. What? Where?

ELINA. Far off. The noise of horsemen on the high road.

NILS LYKKE. Ah, it is they! And I had forgotten. They are coming here. Then the danger is great. I must be gone!

ELINA. But where? What are you hiding?

NILS LYKKE. Tomorrow, Elina, for as God lives, I will return then. Quickly now, where is the passage you told me of?

ELINA. Through the grave vault. There is a trap door.

NILS LYKKE. The grave-vault! (*To himself.*) I can't think about that, he must be saved!

ELINA (*by the window*). The horsemen have reached the gate----

Hands him the lantern

NILS LYKKE. Well, now I go----

ELINA. Go forward along the passage till you reach the coffin with the black cross; it is Lucia's.

NILS LYKKE (*retreats hastily*). Lucia's! Oh Christ above!

ELINA. What did you say?

NILS LYKKE. Nay, nothing. I just feel a little dizzy.

ELINA. Oh god, they are hammering at the gate!

NILS LYKKE (*lets the lantern fall*). Ah! too late----!

BJORN enters hurriedly

ELINA (*goes towards him*). What is going on, Bjorn? What is it?

BJORN. An ambush! Count Sture...

ELINA. Count Sture? What of him?

NILS LYKKE. Have they killed him?

BJORN (to **ELINA**). Where is your mother?

LADY INGER GYLDENLOVE enters

LADY INGER. I know all. Down with you to the courtyard! Keep the gate open for our friends but closed against all others!

BJORN goes out again

LADY INGER (to **NILS LYKKE**). So that was the trap, Sir Councillor!

NILS LYKKE. Inger Gyldenlove, trust me----!

LADY INGER. An ambush that was to snap him up, as soon as you had got the document signed and the promise to support the rebellion which would destroy me!

NILS LYKKE (*takes out the paper and tears it to pieces*). Here is your promise. I keep nothing that can bear witness against you.

LADY INGER. What will you do now?

NILS LYKKE. From this hour I am your champion. If I have sinned against you, by Heaven I will strive to repair my crime. But now I must leave, if I have to claw my way through the gate! **Elina**-- tell your mother everything! And you, Lady Inger, let our reckoning be forgotten! Be generous, and silent! Trust me, as the day dawns you shall owe me a life's gratitude.

Goes out quickly

LADY INGER Well--?

ELINA. He knocked upon my door and set this ring upon my finger.

LADY INGER. And he loves you with all his heart?

ELINA. My mother, you are so strange. Oh, I know, it is my hateful ways that have angered you.

LADY INGER. Not so, dear Elina! You are an obedient child. You have opened your door to him, you have listened to his soft words. I know full well what it must have cost you, for I know your hatred.

ELINA. But mother--

LADY INGER. Hush! We have played into each other's hands. What wiles did you use, my subtle daughter? I saw the love shine out of his eyes. Hold him fast now! Draw the net closer and closer about him, and then... Ah, Elina, if we could but rend his perjured heart within his breast!

ELINA. What are you saying?

LADY INGER. Don't let your courage fail you. Listen to me. I know a word that will keep you resolute. Know this... (Listening.) They are fighting outside the gate. Courage! Now comes the pinch!

Turns again to Elina.

Know this, Nils Lykke was the man that brought your sister Lucia to her grave.

ELINA (*with a shriek*). Lucia!

LADY INGER. As truly as there is a God above us!

ELINA. Oh, mother. Oh, you cannot mean this!

LADY INGER (*appalled*). Elina----?!

ELINA. I am his bride in the sight of God.

LADY INGER. What have you done!

ELINA (*in a toneless voice*). Made a shipwreck of my soul. Goodnight, my mother!

She goes out

LADY INGER. It goes down-hill now with Inger Gyldenlove's house. There went the last of my daughters. Why could I not keep quiet? Had she known nothing, it may be she would have been happy. It was to be so. It is written up there in the stars that I am to break off one green branch after another, till the trunk stand leafless at last.

(pauses)

I cannot think of such things! I am to have my son again.

NILS STENSSON (*offstage*). Shut the gate!

LADY INGER. Count Sture's voice----!

NILS STENSSON (*rushes in, unarmed*). My lady.

LADY INGER. What have you lost?

NILS STENSSON. My kingdom and my life!

LADY INGER. And the peasants? My servants? Where are they?

NILS STENSSON. You will find their bodies along the highway. Who has the rest, I have no idea.

OLAF SK (*offstage*). Count Sture! Where are you?

NILS STENSSON. Here, here!

OLAF comes in. Hand wrapped in a cloth.

LADY INGER. Alas Olaf, you too!

OLAF SK. It was impossible to break through.

LADY INGER. You are wounded, I see!

OLAF SK. A finger the less; that is all.

NILS STENSSON. Where are the Swedes?

OLAF SK. At our heels. They are breaking open the gate.

NILS STENSSON. Oh, Jesus! No, no! I cannot, I will not die.

OLAF SK. A hiding-place, Lady Inger! Is there no corner where we can hide him?

LADY INGER. But if they search the castle?

NILS STENSSON. Ay, ay; they will find me! And then to be dragged to prison or strung up! Oh no, Inger Gyldenlove, I know full well, you will never make me suffer that fate!

OLAF SK (*listening*). They have just burst the lock.

LADY INGER (*at the window*). Men are rushing in.

NILS STENSSON. And to lose my life now! Now, when my true life was beginning! Now, when I have so lately learnt that I have something to live for. No, no, no! Please don't think I am a coward.

LADY INGER. I hear them now in the hall below. He must be saved, cost what it will!

NILS STENSSON (*seizes her hand*). Oh, I knew it; you are noble and good!

OLAF SK. But how? Since we cannot hide him

NILS STENSSON. Ah, I have it! I have it! The secret!

LADY INGER. The secret?

NILS STENSSON. Even so, yours and mine!

LADY INGER. Christ in Heaven, you know it?

NILS STENSSON. From first to last. And now when 'tis life or death. Where is Nils Lykke?

LADY INGER. Fled.

NILS STENSSON. Fled? Then God help me, for only he can unseal my lips. But what is a promise against a life! When the Swedish captain comes...

LADY INGER. What then? What will you do?

NILS STENSSON. I will purchase life and freedom, tell him everything I know.

LADY INGER. Oh no, no. please be merciful! You can't tell them we are involved.

NILS STENSSON. Nothing else can save me. When I have told him what I know

LADY INGER You will be safe?

NILS STENSSON. Ay, safe! Nils Lykke will speak for me. You see, it is the last resort.

LADY INGER (*composedly, with emphasis*). The last resort? Right, right the last resort stands open to all. (*Points.*) See, meanwhile you can hide in there.

NILS STENSSON (*softly*). Trust me, you will never regret this.

LADY INGER (*half to herself*). God grant that you speak the truth!

NILS STENSSON goes out hastily.

OLAF SK is following; but LADY INGER detains him

LADY INGER. Did you understand his meaning?

OLAF SK. The bastard! He would betray your secret. Count Sture would sacrifice your son to save himself.

LADY INGER. When life is at stake, he said, we must try the last resort too. It is well, Olaf, let it be as he has said.

OLAF SK. What do you mean?

LADY INGER. Life for life! One of them must perish.

OLAF SK. Ah, you wouldn't?

LADY INGER. If we don't close the lips of him, he will speak with the Swedish, and then my son will be lost to me. But if he be swept from my path, when the time comes, I can claim all his rights for my own child. Then you shall see that Inger has metal in her yet. And be assured you will not have long to wait for the vengeance you have thirsted after twenty years. Listen! They are coming up the stairs! Olaf, it lies with you whether tomorrow I shall be a childless woman, or--

OLAF SK. So be it! I have one sound hand left yet. (*Gives her his hand.*) Inger Gyldenlove--your name shall not die out through me.

Follows NILS STENSSON exit

LADY INGER (*pale and trembling*). But do I dare?

A noise is heard in the room; she rushes towards the door

No, no, it can't be!

A heavy fall is heard within; she covers her ears with her hands and hurries back across the hall with a wild look. After a pause she takes her hands cautiously away

Now it is over. All is still within. Olaf was too swift of hand.

OLAF SK returns

LADY INGER (*after a pause, without looking at him*). Is it done?

OLAF SK. You don't need to fear him anymore; he will betray no one.

LADY INGER (*as before*). Then he is gone?

OLAF SK. Six inches of steel in his breast. I felled him with my left hand.

LADY INGER. Ay, the right was too good for such work.

OLAF SK. Then now to Sweden. Peace be with you! When next we meet at Austrått, I shall bring your son with me.

Goes out

LADY INGER. Blood on my hands. Then it was to come to that!

BJORN returns

LADY INGER. Is it Count Sture they seek?

BJORN: The same.

LADY INGER. You must tell them that he has taken his own life. Show them the body. You will find him in there. And since he already stands before another judge, it is my prayer that he may be borne hence with all the honour that befits his noble birth. Bjorn, you know my own coffin has stood ready this many a year in the antechamber. I pray that in it you will bear Count Sture's body to Sweden.

BJORN. As you wish.

BJORN exits

LADY INGER (*moves about for a time in uneasy silence*). If Count Sture had not said farewell to the world so fast, within a month he would have hung on the gallows or had sat for all his days in a dungeon. Had he been better served with such a lot as this, at my hand? Or else he had bought his life by betraying my child into the hands of my foes. Is it I, then, that have slain him? Does not the wolf defend her cubs? (*change of tone*) Who dare condemn me for striking my claws into him that would have reft me of my flesh and blood? **It had to be.** No mother would reproach me for what I had to do. But there is no time for idle musings now. I must work.

Sits down by the table

I will write to all my friends throughout the land. They will rise as one to support this new great cause. A new king, regent first, and then king----

Begins to write, but falls into thought

Whom will they choose in the dead man's place? A king's mother--- (*softly*) a king's murderer?

She rises

I will make good what I have taken. My son shall be king!

She sits down again and begins writing, but pushes the paper away again, and leans back

There is no comfort in a house where lies a corpse. 'Tis therefore I feel so strangely. Why else should it be? Is there such a great gulf, then, between openly striking down a foe and slaying one, thus? Soldiers cleft many a head with their sword; yet their own heads can be as peaceful as a child's. Why then do I ever see this (*makes a motion as though striking with a knife*) this stab in the heart--and the gush of red blood after?

Rings bell and goes on speaking while shifting about her papers.

From now on I will have none of these ugly sights. I will work both day and night. And in a month- my son will be here.

BJORN (*entering*). Did you strike the bell, my lady?

LADY INGER (*writing*). Bring more lights. See to it in future that there are many more lights in the room

BJORN goes out again

LADY INGER (*after a pause, rises*). No, no, no. I cannot guide the pen tonight! My head is burning and throbbing.

Startled, listens. Goes up and down once or twice; then opens the window.

How long does it take for a body to begin to rot? All the rooms must be aired. It does not feel right here until that is done.

BJORN comes in from with two candles, which he places on the table

LADY INGER (*who has begun on the papers again*). Do not forget what I have said. Many lights on the table! What are they doing now in there?

BJORN. They are preparing the coffin my Lady.

LADY INGER (*writing*). Will they be screwing it down tight?

BJORN. As tight as needs be.

LADY INGER. Ay, ay--who can tell how tight it needs to be? Do see that it is well done.

Goes up to him with her hand full of papers

Bjorn, you are a faithful man; but one piece of advice I will give you. Be on your guard against all men, both those that are dead and alive. Now go in, go in and see to it that they screw the lid down tightly.

BJORN (*softly, shaking his head*). What is happening to her?

Exits again

LADY INGER (*begins to seal a letter but throws it down half- closed; walks up and down awhile*) Were I a coward I would never have done it, never to all eternity! Were I a coward, I would have shrieked to myself.

Her eye falls on Sten Sture's picture; she turns to avoid seeing it

He is laughing down at me as though he were alive!

Turns the picture to the wall

Why are you laughing? Was it because I killed your son? But the other, **our** son, is he not your son too? He is mine as well, think of that! You loved me. I loved you.

Glances stealthily along the row of pictures

So wild as they are tonight, I have never seen them like this. Their eyes follow me wherever I may go. (*Stamps on the floor.*) I will not have it! (*Begins to turn all the pictures to the wall.*)

She draws her breath heavily and continues in ever-increasing distraction

There was no one to see what was done in there. There is none to bear witness against me.

Suddenly stretches out her hands

My son! My beloved child! Come to me! Here I am! Hush! I will tell you something: They hate me up there, beyond the stars, because I bore you into the world. It was meant that I should bear the Lord God's standard over all the land. But I went my own way. Therefore I have had to suffer so much and so long.

BJORN (*returns*). My lady, I must tell you... (*notices that she has climbed upon a chair*). What are you doing my Lady?

LADY INGER (*has climbed up onto the seat*). Hush! Hush! I am the King's mother. They have chosen my son king. The struggle was hard, but it came to this.

NILS LYKKE (*comes in breathless*). He is saved! I have the Swedish Commander's promise Lady Inger. Know that...

LADY INGER. Peace, I say! (*imagining*) Look how the people swarm. There comes the procession. What a throng! All bow themselves before the King's mother. Ay, ay; has she not fought for her so, even till her hands grew red? Where are my daughters? I can't see them.

NILS LYKKE. God's blood! What has happened here?

LADY INGER. My daughters--my fair daughters! I have none anymore. I had one left, and her I lost as she was getting into her bridal bed. (*Softly*) Lucia's corpse lay in it. There was no room for two.

NILS LYKKE. Ah, it has come to this! The Lord's vengeance is upon me.

LADY INGER. Can you see him? Look, look! It is the King. It is Inger Gyldenlove's son! I know him by the crown and by Sten Sture's ring that he wears round his neck. Hark, what a joyful sound! He is coming! Soon will he be in my arms! Who conquers, God or I?

(Clutches at her head and shrieks). The corpse! *(Whispers.)* Lord it is a hideous dream. *(Sinks back into the seat.)*

BJORN Lady Inger. You must let me speak. The Swedish Commander has seen the body as you commanded, and he said that it is not the Count Sture they sought. All he possessed was this ring around his neck.

NILS LYKKE *(seizes Bjorn's arm and sharply).* Be still!

LADY INGER *(long pause, realisation, starts up).* A ring? **The** ring?

Rushes up and snatches the ring from him

Sten Sture's ring! *(With a shriek.)* Oh, Lord God —Oh Almighty God! My son!

Throws herself down, prostrate, on the floor

NILS LYKKE. Lady Inger Gyldenlove's son.

BJORN *(trying to raise her up).* Someone help. Help! My lady, what ails you?

LADY INGER *(in a faint voice, half raising herself).* What ails me? That I lack another coffin and a grave beside my child!

Sinks again, grasping at the ring.