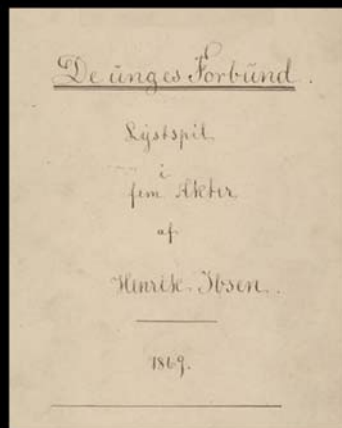


"He (Reel) keeps the action swift and sharp..
The result is splendid."

—The Soho Weekly

THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH



Arthur Reel

Adapted from the play by Henrik Ibsen

Norman Maine Publishing

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THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH

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**“When all heads are turned in one direction,
a left hand operates in another...”**

—Lundestad

THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH

SATIRE. This streamlined adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *The League of Youth* (1869) cuts the original play by one-third, allowing for Ibsen's humor and wit to be showcased rather than buried. The storyline focuses on the ambitious Stensgard, a two-faced social climber and opportunist, who decides to challenge the political forces in his town by forming a new radical party, The League of Youth. Stensgard, along with the power-hungry, Lundestad, make Bratsberg, the benevolent town elder, their prime target. Stensgard preaches egalitarian rhetoric to manipulate the townspeople so that he can achieve greater fame and social status for himself. The action is swift in this fresh, farcical play that pokes fun at politics and societal pretension.

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.

ABOUT THE STORY

When *The League of Youth* was first performed in 1869, it was perceived to be an attack on liberals in Norwegian politics. On the second night of the performance, audience members either booed, hissed, or applauded during the show. Things got so rowdy that the director had to silence the audience so that the performance could continue.

CHARACTERS

(10 M, 3 F, extras)

STENSGARD: Mid-30s, lawyer.

MONSEN: 55, businessman.

BASTIAN: 25, Monsen's son, a brawler.

ASLAKSEN: 40s, newspaper publisher.

DANIEL HEIRE: Elderly retired gentleman.

BRATSBERG: 60s, businessman/politician.

ERIK: 20s, Bratsberg's son, a romantic.

THORA: 20s, Bratsberg's daughter.

RINGDAL: House and groundskeeper.

SELMA: 20s, Erik's fiancée, rebellious.

ANDERS LUNDESTAD: 50s, wealthy property owner.

DOCTOR FIELDBO: 35, friend of the Bratsbergs'.

MADAM RUNDHOLMEN: 38, widowed hotel owner.

EXTRAS: As crowd.

SETTING

A town in Norway, late 19th century.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I: The grounds of Chamberlain Bratsberg. There are several wooden tables and long benches.

ACT II: Reception room, Bratsberg home.

ACT III: Same room, a few days later.

ACT IV: Drinking room in Madam Rundholmen's hotel. There is a staircase and miscellaneous furnishings including a table and chairs.

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PROPS

Wooden tables

Chairs

Benches

4 Bottles of champagne

Wine glasses

Bottle of wine

Woman's kerchief

Bundle of newspapers

Documents

Cigar

Letter

SOUND EFFECTS

Band music

ACT I
SCENE 1

(AT RISE: The grounds of Chamberlain Bratsberg's estate. Lundestad is heard speaking to a crowd offstage left. As he speaks, Stensgard, Aslaksen, Monsen, and Bastian enter.)

LUNDESTAD: *(Offstage.)* ...Therefore, friends and fellow citizens, I drink to our freedom. As we have inherited it from our fathers, so will we preserve it for ourselves and our children! Three cheers for the seventeenth of May!

(Offstage the Crowd cheers three times. A band strikes up.)

RINGDAL: *(Offstage.)* And one more cheer for Lundestad!

(Another cheer is heard. Band continues to play. Monsen enters and sits at one of the tables. Aslaksen enters.)

MONSEN: *(To Aslaksen.)* It's about time he retired.

(Aslaksen sits.)

ASLAKSEN: *(To Monsen.)* He's made that same speech year after year...

MONSEN: And always in that same rhythm. As if—

ASLAKSEN: It's not the rhythm that annoys me, it's the content.

MONSEN: Always the same, Aslaksen. *(Chuckles. Stensgard enters.)* Sit down, Mr. Stensgard. Enjoy the feast.

(Stensgard sits.)

STENSGARD: What feast? The tables are bare.

(Bastian enters.)

BASTIAN: So are the promises. *(Hits fist on table.)* Damn it!

ASLAKSEN: Easy, Bastian.

BASTIAN: I'm outraged. *(Hits table again.)* It's the same thing on every election—

MONSEN: You see, even my youngest son recognizes the deceit.

(Monsen musses Bastian's hair playfully. Bastian moves away from the table and paces.)

BASTIAN: How can I help it? I'm not deaf; I'm not blind—

(Enter Ringdal from SL. He observes the party.)

STENSGARD: *(Good naturedly.)* There's youth for you, always and forever rebellious.

BASTIAN: And thank God for that, Stensgard. We keep the fires burning.

ASLAKSEN: What fires are you speaking of, Bastian?

STENSGARD: I understand him. One might say the fires of...truth.

MONSEN: Honesty.

STENSGARD: Youth is always honest. But sometimes a little impetuous.

(Stensgard laughs. Ringdal approaches the table.)

RINGDAL: Excuse me, gentlemen, this table is reserved—

STENSGARD: Reserved? For whom?

RINGDAL: For Chamberlain Bratsberg's party.

(Stensgard rises with fervor.)

STENSGARD: Well, damn Chamberlain Bratsberg's party! Besides, they're not even here.

RINGDAL: We expect them any minute...

BASTIAN: Oh, get lost, Ringdal. You're acting like a lackey...as usual.

(Ringdal retreats and sits on a bench.)

ASLAKSEN: *(In a low voice to Stensgard.)* And that's just what he is.

(Lundestad enters and crosses to the table.)

MONSEN: Oh, Mr. Lundestad! And how are the capitalists doing? Heh-heh.

LUNDESTAD: The capitalists, Mr. Monsen, are cultivating the land, as they've always done. *(Smiles.)* But I must inform you, one capitalist to another, this property is restricted. *(Looks at the others.)* I hope you won't take it badly, gentlemen.

BASTIAN: *(Pacing.)* A free country. True democracy. Tsss. Phugh. Agh. *(He continues to pace and make odd noises.)*

LUNDESTAD: *(To Stensgard.)* It's not my doing, you see. It's the committee.

MONSEN: Yes, yes, of course. The committee.

LUNDESTAD: The Chamberlain has been very kind to throw open his park and garden this evening...

ASLAKSEN: *(Sneers.)* He always does that on the eve of an election.

STENSGARD: And all the other evenings?

BASTIAN: *(Still pacing.)* It's closed. Forbidden! Tsss. Fagh!

MONSEN: *(To Stensgard.)* That's the way of our rich. When they need you, you enter. When they don't—

BASTIAN: Blah! You can go to hell!

LUNDESTAD: *(Glances at Bastian, who is becoming more and more enraged.)* I'll tell you what I'll do, gentlemen. Champagne is on me. Ringdal, bring four bottles. The finest. *(Ringdal exits DR.)* When you've finished...

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(Lundestad bows, smiles, exits SL. Pause. Music continues in the background. Only Bastian is in motion, still muttering and hitting his fist into his hand.)

STENSGARD: *(To Monsen.)* Why on earth do you put up with all this?

MONSEN: The habit of generations, Mr. Stensgard.

ASLAKSEN: You're quite new to the district. If only you knew a little more of the local situation.

STENSGARD: What you're saying, Mr. Aslaksen, is that districts differ. How untrue—

BASTIAN: Nothing can be worse than conditions right here. Crack! *(Hits his fist on the table.)*

ASLAKSEN: Stop cracking—you'll break your hand.

(Ringdal enters with bottles of champagne and wine glasses. He sets everything on the table and departs.)

MONSEN: *(Pours champagne.)* Here's to your welcome among us, Mr. Stensgard. A definite honor. *(Finishes pouring, raises glass.)* The newspapers have made us all familiar with your name. Why, Aslaksen's paper has carried such wonderful stories—

(Aslaksen stands.)

ASLAKSEN: Great gifts of oratory, Mr. Stensgard—

MONSEN: A warm heart for the public—

BASTIAN: *(Picks up glass to toast.)* For the common people—

ASLAKSEN: We trust you will enter with vigor into our local situation—

(Stensgard rises.)

STENSGARD: Whatever it is I do...I promise you—

MONSEN: Enough said! Your word is golden to us. To seal the bond...I drink!

BASTIAN: Here! Here!

(They all drink and then sit down.)

MONSEN: You must understand...things are not simple around here. In fact, quite complicated. It's not the Chamberlain himself who keeps everything under his thumb—

ASLAKSEN: Quite so. The old goat has that same gift which you possess, Mr. Stensgard.

MONSEN: The power of speech, the golden voice.

BASTIAN: *(Thumps skull.)* Not too much up here, but he looks damn good on his feet.

MONSEN: Of course, there's much more involved here. That Lundestad—he's the one who really drives the sled. A true representative of the bluebloods.

STENSGARD: I've heard about him. He's known throughout the country.

ASLAKSEN: Sure, he's worth millions.

MONSEN: Has capital invested in countless enterprises...

STENSGARD: But he's a liberal—

MONSEN: That's the word he spread. "I'm a liberal. I care for the poor, the wretched..."

BASTIAN: But the poor and the wretched remain poor and wretched. Have you seen the south side of our town? Ha! Crack! *(Brings his fist down on the table again.)*

ASLAKSEN: Shhh. Quiet down—

BASTIAN: How can I quiet down? Some of my boyhood friends, those who've married, can't even support their wives and children. Tsss. Fagh!

MONSEN: Sure, he professed liberalism in his younger days, but then he was elected to a seat in Parliament and...look out!

ASLAKSEN: Liberalism disappeared.

BASTIAN: Crack! (*Hits his fist on the table.*)

ASLAKSEN: Calm down. You'll knock over the bottles.

STENSGARD: (*In thought.*) Hmmm. There must be some way
to put a stop to all these abuses.

MONSEN: Yes, we're looking for just that sort of man.

ASLAKSEN: One with your gifts—

MONSEN: Not merely your voice—

ASLAKSEN: You're an excellent writer—

MONSEN: We're acquainted with your book on the political
ways of Western societies.

BASTIAN: We need somebody to wipe away the corruption—

MONSEN: The abuses—

(Aslaksen rises quickly with his glass in hand.)

ASLAKSEN: My paper is at your disposal, Mr. Stensgard! If
anything is to be done, it's to be done quickly—now—while
the iron is hot

BASTIAN: We must strike! (*Smashes his fist on the table.*)

MONSEN: The election takes place in one month.

ASLAKSEN: Everything depends on a change. The old guard
must be swept out!

(Bastian rises swiftly.)

BASTIAN: (*Beside himself.*) Yes, yes, swept out! Crack!

(An elderly man, Daniel Heire, appears U.R.)

STENSGARD: (*In thought.*) Hmmm. I see. And there'll be
good support?

MONSEN: Yes, excellent support. The majority of the
younger, go-ahead generation.

BASTIAN: Those who want a chance and have never had one.

ASLAKSEN: (*Spots Heire.*) Beware spies.

(Heire approaches.)

HEIRE: Oh, dear, champagne, I believe. Don't let me interrupt, gentlemen. *(Stares at Stensgard.)* A recent arrival, hmmm.

MONSEN: Quite right. Mr. Stensgard...Mr....Daniel Heire.

BASTIAN: A wealthy man.

(Heire sits.)

HEIRE: Not presently. It's all gone now...slipped through my fingers. Not that I'm entirely bankrupt. Please, don't think that. In fact, it's quite temporary. When I'm finished with all my suits...I'll have my revenge on old Reynard the Fox.

STENSGARD: Reynard the Fox?

HEIRE: Of course you all realize I'm referring to our illustrious Chamberlain Bratsberg.

STENSGARD: And here I believed that in money matters the Chamberlain was above reproach.

HEIRE: You think so? Hmmm. I say no more. My own dear father left me a great fortune. *(To Monsen.)* You recall my father? Old Hans Heire? Made his fortune as a ship owner, especially during the blockade.

MONSEN: They called him Gold Hans...gilded his chimney pots with gold.

HEIRE: Oh, he made money fly, he did. So did I, in my time. During my visit to the United States for instance, I took a prince's retinue with me.

STENSGARD: You're getting off the subject.

HEIRE: The subject, yes. *(Pause.)* Which subject?

STENSGARD: You were telling us about the Chamberlain.

HEIRE: Ah, yes. Complicated matter. When my father was riding high, things were going downhill for the Chamberlain. Terrible investment forced him to sell his best land.

STENSGARD: And your father bought it.

HEIRE: Exactly. And when I came into the property, I began to make improvements. As the years passed, the property became more valuable. Then one day, Reynard enters...and what do you suppose?

STENSGARD: What?

MONSEN: Repudiates the deal.

HEIRE: (*Snaps fingers.*) Just like that!

MONSEN: Of course, he fought it.

STENSGARD: Obviously he didn't win.

HEIRE: Certain formalities had been overlooked by my father. In any case, what can a man do without capital.

STENSGARD: Hmmm, so that's the way the Chamberlain operates.

BASTIAN: (*Pounds his fist on the table.*) Ooo, certain people! Certain people! If I only had them before me! Crack!

ASLAKSEN: Crack...yes...shhh.

MONSEN: One has a reason for such outbursts. Tell him, Bastian. He's a civil engineer. And who gets the town business?

BASTIAN: Crack!

MONSEN: In fact, in the entire county? Who?!

BASTIAN: If...only...I...could...just one! (*Cocks fist.*)

HEIRE: My, my, such enthusiasm. Well, it's there—all the evidence. Why, next week I'm going to summon the whole Town Council before the Commission.

STENSGARD: An investigation. Hmmm, very good.

HEIRE: It's my right. Remember, we are democratic. Freedom of speech, and all that stuff. It's too bad that some people might try to restrict it.

STENSGARD: Restrict? Who will do that?

HEIRE: Those who hold power. I say no more.

BASTIAN: Crack! Crack! Crack!

ASLAKSEN: Shhh. Please, control yourself.

HEIRE: Understand, I have nothing to say about the son or the daughter. Innocent victims. But the father...I say no more.

(*To Stensgard.*) I know you are rather friendly. Shhh, no more. (*Sips champagne.*)

(*Silence. All eyes are turned to Stensgard.*)

STENSGARD: Wait, you're accusing me? Of being friendly?

HEIRE: (*Matter-of-fact.*) You don't pay visits to enemies.

BASTIAN: (*Rising.*) Visits?

MONSEN: Did I hear correctly?

HEIRE: Ow, ow, ow, have I let the cat out of the bag?

BASTIAN: Visits...to that—

ASLAKSEN: Calm yourself—

MONSEN: (*To Stensgard.*) Have you been going to the Chamberlain's?

HEIRE: (*To Stensgard.*) Really, forgive...a most unhappy slip. But how was I to know it was a secret?

STENSGARD: (*Trying to calm them.*) Now just hold on. I have not spoken one word with any member of that family. I had a letter to deliver from a friend in Christiana...that was all.

(*Pause. They stare.*) I swear to you...not a word.

HEIRE: Well, that proves it all.

STENSGARD: What? Proves what?

HEIRE: I say no more... (*Takes a sip.*) But it does prove it.

STENSGARD: I don't understand. What does it prove?

ASLAKSEN: Yes, tell us.

MONSEN: What?

BASTIAN: Well! Out with it!

HEIRE: Nothing...just a stupid comment. Almost as bad as the one he made about him.

STENSGARD: Me!

HEIRE: Yes, you. I'll not say anymore. "Adventurer," I think.

MONSEN: And me...what did he call me?

HEIRE: "Demagogue."

MONSEN: "Demagogue"!

BASTIAN: He called my father—

HEIRE: Actually he called you both.

MONSEN: Both!

HEIRE: I won't swear for the order.

(Monsen grabs him.)

MONSEN: You heard that...you really heard—

STENSGARD: "Adventurer," you say?

HEIRE: I think some other word too, but it escapes me now.

BASTIAN: How dare that bastard!

HEIRE: Shhh, hold your temper.

BASTIAN: I'd like to...one crack!

HEIRE: You can demand an explanation...tomorrow.

STENSGARD: What's tomorrow?

HEIRE: You've all heard of the great dinner party? *(They stare at him.)* Ow, ow, did I let another cat out of the bag?

MONSEN: Dinner...party...?

HEIRE: Yes, the Chamberlain is having a dinner party?

BASTIAN: Demagogue...adventurer.

HEIRE: You can ask him for an explanation.

ASLAKSEN: Yes, we must do that. It will be the proper thing.

STENSGARD: *(To himself.)* Adventurer? What can he be thinking about?

HEIRE: Tomorrow. You'll inquire tomorrow.

(Noise offstage.)

MONSEN: Come, Bastian. We better be going.

BASTIAN: I'd like to...just once! *(Makes fist.)*

(Monsen takes Bastian's arm. Noise grows louder. They exit.)

HEIRE: What more can I say? You go about being trustful, then all of a sudden...poff! *(Rises.)* I say no more.

(Heire exits as Chamberlain Bratsberg, Thora, and Dr. Fieldbo enter. Crowd enters with them.)

LUNDESTAD: Mr. Ringdal will speak! I say now, Mr. Ringdal—

(Ringdal rises from a bench.)

RINGDAL: Allow me.

(Stensgard rises from a bench.)

STENSGARD: No! Allow me! *(Loudly.)* I demand to be heard!

LUNDESTAD: Afterward! You'll have your say—

STENSGARD: I'll have it now!

RINGDAL: You can't speak now! It's my turn!

STENSGARD: *(To Crowd.)* I demand to be heard!

RINGDAL: Ladies and gentlemen! On behalf of a man...of great integrity! Of warm heart! Of open hand! A man we have looked up to as if to a father! A man who loves his country! A patriot!

STENSGARD: *(Scoffs.)* Patriot?

RINGDAL: Yes, I say patriot!

CROWD: A patriot!

RINGDAL: A free soul! A man of honor!

STENSGARD: *(Scoffs.)* Honor?

RINGDAL: Yes, honor!

CROWD: Honor! Honor!

RINGDAL: A man who believes in freedom!

CROWD: Yes, freedom.

RINGDAL: Long live our Chamberlain!

CROWD: Long live Chamberlain Bratsberg!

(Crowd shows great enthusiasm and cheers. Crowd presses around Chamberlain. He begins to shake hands.)

STENSGARD: I demand to be heard!

LUNDESTAD: The platform is yours, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: Listen to me...all! I say, listen to me!

(Crowd begins to turn toward him.)

LUNDESTAD: Listen to Mr. Stensgard!

(Crowd is silent.)

STENSGARD: I am a stranger among you! But this I swear! I have learned to love this community! I come to you with open heart! With enthusiasm! With deep feeling for each and every one of you! I see...I know what is happening around you! Most of you are unable to see it. You have lived in tyranny too long—

CROWD: Tyranny! What is he saying! Who is this man?!
(Etc.)

STENSGARD: They have gagged you! They have denied you the right of free speech! You may not know...you may not understand, but you are being led about like a flock of animals!

(Crowd reacts.)

BRATSBURG: *(To Fieldbo.)* Who is he? Who is this man?

FIELDBO: Mr. Stensgard...from Christiana!

THORA: How dare he—?!

STENSGARD: Let us put a stop to all this...mockery! Let us begin on this patriotic day with new visions, new thoughts! Let us destroy the deformities of our community. Let us demolish the corruption—

THORA: Corruption! Father—

BRATSBURG: *(To Fieldbo.)* What is he talking about, doctor?

STENSGARD: There is a devil among us! A spectre—

(Crowd reacts.)

THORA: A spectre—

BRATSBERG: Who is he speaking of?

FIELDBO: I suppose he means—

STENSGARD: A wickedness! A darkness which hangs like a thick cloud above us—

CROWD: What! What cloud! What darkness! (*Etc.*)

STENSGARD: (*Looking at Bratsberg.*) Am I to be shut up?! Am I not to be allowed to speak about it?!

BRATSBERG: What is he talking about?

LUNDESTAD: Answer him.

ASLAKSEN: No, don't. Let him speak.

STENSGARD: Am I to keep my thoughts—my observations—to myself!

CROWD: No, tell us! Speak! Hurrah! Speak! (*Etc.*)

THORA: Father, what is this? What does he mean—?

BRATSBERG: I don't know— (*Bratsberg looks around puzzled.*)

STENSGARD: If no one else will crush this spectre, I will! (*Raises both his arms.*) But I will need help! I will need the youth! The future of this country belongs to the youth! We must form a league! We must mold a new idea! A new hope! We must band together and strike down—

CROWD: Strike down! Yes, down! Down with the old! Down with those who— (*Etc.*)

STENSGARD: We must stick together. We are the young! We are the future of this great country. God is with us!

CROWD: God is with us!

STENSGARD: We must form our League of Youth!

CROWD: Hurrah! Three cheers! Youth! Our League!

STENSGARD: Let us hold together! Let us throw back the spectre! Let us raise the clouds!

CROWD: Raise the clouds! Form the League!

STENSGARD: God is with us!

CROWD: God is with us!

(Several young men in the crowd lift Stensgard onto their shoulders. He is carried off amidst wild enthusiasm. Only Bratsberg, Thora,

Fieldbo, Ringdal, Lundestad and Madam Rundholmen remain. Heire wanders on.)

MADAM: *(Wiping her eyes.)* Oh, Lord, how beautifully he speaks. Don't you feel as if you could kiss him, Mr. Heire?

HEIRE: Thank you, I'd rather not.

MADAM: I have never heard anyone speak so beautifully.

HEIRE: Perhaps you would like to kiss him, Madam Rundholmen?

MADAM: You dirty man. Horrid dirty man!

(Madame R. goes off. Heire looks at the others, chuckles, follows. Silence.)

BRATSBERG: *(Stunned.)* Spectre...what did he mean...? What has...happened...?

LUNDESTAD: I'm sorry, Chamberlain—

BRATSBERG: Was it I? Did he mean—?

RINGDAL: It happened so fast, Chamberlain.

THORA: I still don't understand, Father. You're always so kind. You've had nothing but good thoughts toward the people.

BRATSBERG: Intentions count...

LUNDESTAD: What?

BRATSBERG: Have my intentions—?

THORA: You've always intended for the best, Father.

BRATSBERG: The best for whom?

THORA: The people.

BRATSBERG: *(With great doubt.)* Which people?

LUNDESTAD: You've been fair...

RINGDAL: You've been honest...

BRATSBERG: Honest and fair...?

THORA: Do you doubt it, Father?

BRATSBERG: *(Swiftly.)* When one is accused of committing an injustice, one must move to explain. *(Starts to exit.)*

FIELDBO: Do you think now is the right time, Chamberlain?

BRATSBERG: When else?

THORA: Father, you must win back their confidence.

LUNDESTAD: Yes, immediately!

RINGDAL: Positively!

BRATSBERG: Thank you, gentlemen. Stay with me. Come, Thora.

(Bratsberg, Thora, Ringdal and Lundestad exit. Fieldbo looks thoughtfully after them.)

FIELDBO: It's the beginning of a struggle for power in the community.

(Enter Aslaksen.)

ASLAKSEN: The new League is nearly founded. Sixty-eight have registered in the first half hour.

FIELDBO: Well, what's true is true. He's a rare one, that Stensgard.

ASLAKSEN: Great gifts, a great man.

(Heire enters. Aslaksen exits.)

HEIRE: Ah, youth will always have its way.

FIELDBO: Tell me, Mr. Heire, what interest have you in the matter?

HEIRE: I am entirely disinterested, doctor. An impartial observer.

FIELDBO: One can hardly remain impartial these days.

HEIRE: Why these days more than others?

FIELDBO: There seems to be more...at stake. More to lose.

HEIRE: There always is.

FIELDBO: What?

HEIRE: A great deal—

FIELDBO: Times have changed—

HEIRE: Money and property—

FIELDBO: More now than—

HEIRE: For those who have it—

FIELDBO: As if a cold wind—

HEIRE: Call it by any name. There will always be some who will say, "It's worse now." Can't be the same as before. But this I know: Life and spirit and such things must go forward. Frankly, I don't care either way—if the pig eats the dog or the dog the pig. *(Exits.)*

(Fieldbo stands in deep thought. Crowd shouts, "Long live Stensgard!" over and over. Bastian rushes in.)

BASTIAN: Oh, doctor, I feel so good this evening! Strength has come back to me! I must do something!

FIELDBO: What could that be?

BASTIAN: Crack! *(Swings at air.)*

FIELDBO: Whom will you crack?

BASTIAN: I'll go over to the dance hall and take on one or two.

(Bastian runs off. Stensgard enters.)

FIELDBO: *(To Bastian.)* Pick on someone smaller.

STENSGARD: Ah, it's good...good to see life returning. They are taking up a money collection. This is to be a campaign of the people—

FIELDBO: For the people.

STENSGARD: Exactly!

FIELDBO: You'll accept no support of the rich?

STENSGARD: What for? I'm for the common man. That vast majority out there who have very little to say. Those who have been silent and eager to burst out, to be heard! Come, doctor, join us! You are still young. You have been silent. It's time to speak out. I want to help those who have been silent all these years.

FIELDBO: And you want my support?

STENSGARD: Yes, your support! (*Fieldbo does not answer.*)
Think what this can mean! (*Turns.*) What a lovely night!
Listen to that music! Gay! Hopeful! The beginning of a new
life! I speak for those who have never had a life. I speak for
that majority who—

(*Loud outcry from Crowd, "Hurrah!" three times. Band music starts
up again.*)

FIELDBO: That majority who?

STENSGARD: I once had a vision—or was it a dream?
Whatever. I believed the Day of Judgment had come upon
the world. I could see the whole curve of the hemisphere.
There was no sun. A storm arose. It came rushing forward,
sweeping everything before it away. All...all of civilization!
All which man—free man—had accomplished with his hand
and brain. (*Touching him.*) Do you understand, doctor?

FIELDBO: No, not quite.

STENSGARD: Well, there was more to this dream...much
more, doctor. I can't remember it all, but this I do remember:
It dealt with all the nations of Europe. It dealt with my being
right in the middle of it, as if my whole life were being
changed. I had something directly to do with it. (*Reaching
for a thought.*) Yes! I was helping. I was assisting in the
order of man. I was assisting in restoring that order.

(*Pause.*)

FIELDBO: Come, my dear Stensgard, do you really believe
that you can—

STENSGARD: Absolutely, doctor!

FIELDBO: Restore order? Change the system?

STENSGARD: Who knows how far a storm may sweep.

FIELDBO: Am I really listening to you? Do you really think...?

STENSGARD: At first you may not believe it.

FIELDBO: I suppose I am too much of a cynic.

STENSGARD: This is no time to be a cynic, doctor.

FIELDBO: I've seen too much of life here, Stensgard. Monsen and the Stonelee gang got hold of you the moment you came here. They corrupted your thinking, led you to believe that Chamberlain Bratsberg is a despot, a tyrant. This is not true. Do you know why Monsen hates him?

STENSGARD: I'm not interested in common gossip.

FIELDBO: Do you think Mons Monsen is really your friend?

STENSGARD: What are friends, Dr. Fieldbo? Do you have friends?

FIELDBO: The people I live with.

STENSGARD: Ha! You will find out a little about human nature. We are friends only until our needs are met. I, too, am a realist, doctor.

FIELDBO: Then we understand each other. Mons Monsen and that Stonelee gang –

STENSGARD: Mr. Monsen has abilities. He is an educated man, and he has a keen sense for public affairs.

FIELDBO: As leader of the Stonelees, Monsen certainly has the abilities to recognize the talents in others.

(Pause.)

STENSGARD: What exactly are you getting at, doctor?

(Pause.)

FIELDBO: I believe...I've said enough...

STENSGARD: Ha, you were making a point...what is it? Do you think I'm being duped? *(Laughs.)*

FIELDBO: I never said you were being duped...

STENSGARD: But you implied. The expression you used..."that Stonelee gang." But such expressions fit everyone. It would be easy for me to say, "that Bratsberg gang," or "that Fieldbo gang." We paint our enemies

whatever color we wish, doctor. We also fit them out with motives which may or may not be true.

FIELDBO: You have a deep understanding of human nature.

STENSGARD: (*With humor.*) Careful now, your cynical disposition is beginning to show.

FIELDBO: Yes, I admit, I am just that.

STENSGARD: What...a cynic? Ha, then I understand you. If you look at the entire field, the broad landscape of politics, in this country or any country in the world today —

FIELDBO: What you're about to tell me, my dear Stensgard —

STENSGARD: (*Sharply.*) Please, I resent that.

FIELDBO: What?

STENSGARD: "My dear Stensgard." It's as if you're looking down —

FIELDBO: I don't mean to —

STENSGARD: This is a new era, doctor. The fact that you are of a different class than I does not make me any less intelligent. I am not blinded, not stupid. That you've been trying to tell me about Monsen and those he represents, the whole Stonelee group, well, let me put you to rest. There's nothing I don't already know. Remember, I'm an expert at local politics. I've written quite extensively. I know the machinery, I know the machinations, and I the evolutionary process in such matters since the beginning of time.

FIELDBO: You're quite a historian...

STENSGARD: (*Fervently.*) And I'll confess something else: I am an ambitious man. I must make my way in the world. I am already 30, and I am still on the first step of the ladder. In me there is something gnawing —

FIELDBO: And not with its wisdom teeth.

STENSGARD: There is the difference between us — possibly the only difference.

FIELDBO: Ambition?

STENSGARD: But I am sincere. I drive in the direction of truth. (*Music louder.*) I warn you, Fieldbo, don't attempt to make me feel empty or disgusted. If that is your way...

Well, it may be the way of many in this country. Emptiness has a way of inducing bitterness. *(They both stare at each other. Music louder. Shouts, cheers from Crowd.)* There! Listen! They are cheering for me. *(He heads toward exit.)* An idea takes hold of people and—

(Thora Bratsberg enters.)

FIELDBO: How are you now, Thora?

THORA: Better. Oh, Mr. Stensgard. *(Stensgard stops.)* I am Thora Bratsberg. I have a letter for you, from my father.

STENSGARD: For me?

THORA: *(Coldly.)* Take it, please.

(Thora hands Stensgard the letter. He walks off to open the envelope. Fieldbo comes close to her.)

FIELDBO: Come, I'll see you home.

THORA: I can go alone. *(Hurries off quickly, leaving Fieldbo.)*

FIELDBO: *(To Stensgard.)* Well, what is it? Important?

STENSGARD: *(Laughing.)* I didn't expect this.

(Voices are heard offstage, "Where is he?" "Here is our man!" "Where is our next leader?" Monsen enters.)

MONSEN: Mr. President!

(Aslaksen enters.)

ASLAKSEN: There he is! Three cheers!

(Crowd shouts, "Hurrah!" three times.)

MONSEN: The League of Youth will meet tomorrow at Stonelee!

ASLAKSEN: Three cheers!

(Crowd shouts, "Hurrah!" three times.)

MONSEN: We'll draw up our platform!

ASLAKSEN: Three cheers!

(Crowd shouts, "Hurrah!" three times.)

STENSGARD: Thank you! Thank you! I shall do what I can—

ASLAKSEN: Let's take him home in triumph!

(All crowd around Stensgard and lift him onto their shoulders.

Bastian enters, bruised.)

BASTIAN: Strike up! Music! I'm happy! *(To Fieldbo.)* I just
knocked out a fellow!

(Band music starts up from offstage.)

ASLAKSEN: Music, yes! Louder!

(Music gets louder. Stensgard is carried off amidst wild cheers.)

FIELDBO: A gallant procession.

LUNDESTAD: Yes...with a gallant leader. *(Runs off.)*

FIELDBO: *(Alone, to himself.)* And a gallant platform.

(Curtain.)

ACT II

(AT RISE: Bratsberg's home, reception room.)

FIELDBO: Well, at any rate you are certainly welcome for a chat at any time, Mr. Aslaksen.

ASLAKSEN: I didn't think the Chamberlain would still be eating his dinner. *(Burps.)*

FIELDBO: I suppose you've finished yours.

ASLAKSEN: Whatever there was to it.

FIELDBO: You've been drinking though, I see.

ASLAKSEN: What's the matter with drinking?

FIELDBO: Very little, if it doesn't bother others.

ASLAKSEN: Well, I've my own share of problems.

FIELDBO: We all have our share...

ASLAKSEN: A wife who is in bed, coughing, wasting away.

A child who will be a cripple the rest of his days. And you speak of drinking... What of your friends?

FIELDBO: My friends?

ASLAKSEN: Yes, the Chamberlain and the rest—aren't they in there drinking presently?

FIELDBO: The circumstances differ so...

ASLAKSEN: I never chose my circumstances.

FIELDBO: Nor did they.

ASLAKSEN: I suppose you'll tell me God chooses circumstances?

FIELDBO: Yes, I do believe he does...

ASLAKSEN: Men choose them. Daniel Heire chose when he took me from the printing house and sent me to college.

And Chamberlain Bratsberg chose, when he ruined Daniel Heire and sent me back to the printing house.

(Fieldbo rises.)

FIELDBO: That's not true, and you know it. The Chamberlain did not ruin Daniel Heire.

ASLAKSEN: Who then? Who ruined him?

FIELDBO: Daniel Heire ruined himself.

ASLAKSEN: Why should Daniel Heire ruin himself? Is he not a man of ability? Listen to them in there? Clinking glasses. Drinking to everyone's health. I wanted that sort of life, too.

FIELDBO: We can't all have the same lives.

ASLAKSEN: Yes, I wanted it...with all my power.

FIELDBO: Each of us wants—with all his power—what the other has.

ASLAKSEN: (*Sloppily.*) That's easily said. Turn it around any which way you like.

FIELDBO: I'm turning nothing—

ASLAKSEN: No, so you say. You turn it around to suit yourself.

FIELDBO: (*Starts to go.*) Well, far be it from me to judge you harshly.

ASLAKSEN: Are you leaving? Why? Have I offended the doctor? (*Stands before him and bows.*) Forgive me, doctor?! I must not offend my superiors. Pardon. Oh, what a jumble! A mess! My head aches. I've often thought of writing a book about it. I've often—

(*Noise from the other side of the door.*)

FIELDBO: Forgive me, I must—

ASLAKSEN: Ah, they're rising from the table. Here they come now...my superiors. I must scrape and bow before them.

(*The party of men and women pass from the dining room into the garden. Among the guests is Stensgard, with Selma on his right.*)

SELMA: You must come, Mr. Stensgard. It's positively beautiful in the garden. Positively enchanting.

STENSGARD: Thank you...thank you very much.

(They exit with the others.)

ASLAKSEN: That's the one I wanted to speak to...Mr. Stensgard.

(He starts after Stensgard. Daniel Heire appears with Erik Bratsberg.)

ERIK: Very good wine. Wouldn't you say?

HEIRE: Excellent. Excellent. I've tasted nothing like it since London, Erik.

ERIK: It's a pleasure to have you, Mr. Heire.

HEIRE: It's a pleasure to be here.

(They exit to the garden. Bratsberg and Lundestad enter.)

BRATSBURG: Violent, you say?

LUNDESTAD: Absolutely.

BRATSBURG: Possibly. However, the speech contained some fine phrases.

LUNDESTAD: Well, if you're pleased with it, Chamberlain...

BRATSBURG: Ah, here's the doctor. *(To Fieldbo.)* Starving, are you?

FIELDBO: The servants will feed me. I feel almost at home here, you know.

BRATSBURG: Now here's a man you may call an adventurer, Mr. Lundestad. Always moving ahead, eh doctor?

FIELDBO: Why, Chamberlain, I merely—

BRATSBURG: No arguments after dinner. It's bad for my indigestion. Come, coffee is being served outside. *(Bratsberg exits.)*

FIELDBO: Strange...he is behaving strangely...

LUNDESTAD: Who?

FIELDBO: Why, the Chamberlain...

LUNDESTAD: Yes, I noticed. Just before, at the table, he accused me...

FIELDBO: Of what?

LUNDESTAD: Calling Mr. Stensgard an adventurer.

FIELDBO: And did you?

LUNDESTAD: I? Never!

(Ringdal enters.)

RINGDAL: Ah, there you are, Lundestad. *(To Fieldbo.)*
Strange, isn't it?

FIELDBO: If you're referring to the list of guests...

RINGDAL: No, I mean the remarks. The Chamberlain has been saying—

LUNDESTAD: There, you see! I'm not the only one.

RINGDAL: It's as if...a new breath—

LUNDESTAD: Precisely!

RINGDAL: And the very appearance of Stensgard himself...

LUNDESTAD: He wasn't on the original list, you know.

FIELDBO: Perhaps the Chamberlain is afraid of him.

RINGDAL: Do you think so, doctor?

FIELDBO: There seems to be a new element here.

(Stensgard enters with Selma.)

LUNDESTAD: Shhh!

FIELDBO: *(Tactfully.)* Perhaps we better...

(Lundestad and Fieldbo exit.)

RINGDAL: About this new element...

(Ringdal and Fieldbo converse as they exit.)

SELMA: *(To Stensgard.)* If you look over the tops of the trees in the daytime you can see the church tower...

STENSGARD: Everything is beautiful here. The garden and the view...

SELMA: And the people...

STENSGARD: Especially the people.

SELMA: We have a large, showy house in the town, much finer than this. Sometimes I feel as though I were a princess, and the whole town is my castle. I move about freely. I love everyone, and they love me.

STENSGARD: Yes, you must be a princess.

(Erik enters from the garden.)

ERIK: Ah, there's my lady!

SELMA: Your lady is telling Mr. Stensgard the story of her life.

ERIK: And what part does her husband play in this story?

SELMA: The prince, of course.

STENSGARD: There must always be a prince.

(Erik embraces her.)

ERIK: A prince and his princess.

STENSGARD: Soon to become a king and his queen.

ERIK: Quite. But too soon, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: One seldom understands the swiftness with which events move.

ERIK: At times they move rather slowly.

STENSGARD: Or stand still.

SELMA: Yes, that would be fine. I would prefer it that way.

STENSGARD: What way?

SELMA: Standing still.

STENSGARD: You mean to keep things as they are?

ERIK: *(Kissing her.)* My wife is a true princess.

(Bratsberg, Thora, and Fieldbo enter.)

BRATSBURG: Ah, here we are...the entire family.

THORA: It's not very polite to the guests.

BRATSBURG: Well, there is one guest here among us. How are you enjoying this...ah...little dinner party, Mr. Stensgard?

STENSGARD: Immensely.

BRATSBURG: Thora is right. It's not very polite to our guests. *(To Erik and Selma.)* Go outside and help entertain. *(To Stensgard.)* It's simply impossible to get these two separated.

ERIK: Come, princess. Father is right.

(They exit.)

THORA: Come, doctor... Shall we, Mr. Stensgard...? *(Offers him her hand.)*

BRATSBURG: No, no...there are some things I want to explore with him, dear...

THORA: Be brief. Promise me, Father.

BRATSBURG: I promise.

(Thora and Fieldbo exit.)

STENSGARD: You have a fine gathering here. By the way, I'm quite surprised to see Daniel Heire—

BRATSBURG: Why should you? Mr. Heire and I were old friends at college. Besides, we have a good deal to do with each other, even today...

STENSGARD: Yes, so I've heard.

BRATSBURG: Oh, really?

STENSGARD: Mr. Heire speaks quite openly...

BRATSBURG: Quite openly?

STENSGARD: He has a rather vile approach...

BRATSBURG: Nonsense, young man. Mr. Heire is my guest.

STENSGARD: Yes, forgive me. I didn't mean—

BRATSBURG: Besides, the man has been quite generous in the past.

STENSGARD: How do you mean? To the community?

BRATSBURG: I'm speaking about personal matters. He was very helpful to my daughter-in-law when she was a 10-year-old musical prodigy. Mr. Heire has always had a good eye for talent.

STENSGARD: It's strange.

BRATSBURG: What's strange?

STENSGARD: How interlocked we are with one another.

BRATSBURG: Yes, one thing does lead to another in life. In that way, I suppose, we become instruments.

STENSGARD: Then in a certain way Daniel Heire has been an instrument for good.

BRATSBURG: We are all instruments. You, like the rest of us...at times even, instruments of wrath.

STENSGARD: Don't speak of it, Chamberlain. I'm quite ashamed—

BRATSBURG: Oh, nonsense. Your form was perhaps open to criticism, but the intention was excellent.

STENSGARD: If you will permit me to speak frankly to you, Chamberlain—

BRATSBURG: Of course I will, and with no ill feelings.

STENSGARD: You're a man of honor—

BRATSBURG: I can see that matters have taken a turn for the worse here. Housing, civil matters... But what was I to do? I am only one man. And there are many adverse... Well, how, shall I say it?

STENSGARD: Anyway...

BRATSBURG: Influences. Of course, I am speaking of the negative sort. Revolutionary. Too much too soon. You understand.

STENSGARD: Yes, I believe so...

BRATSBURG: What is needed in this district—in the entire country, for that matter—is someone who can take the lead in reforms. Someone who can understand the nature of things, who can visualize, and who can move cautiously. You, Mr. Stensgard, have the proper qualifications.

STENSGARD: Thank you, Chamberlain. I am honored.

(Enter Ringdal and Heire from the garden.)

HEIRE: *(To Bratsberg.)* Oh, by the way, Anders Lundestad is going over to the Stonelee party. I say no more... Oh, don't doubt me. I have it from his own lips.

RINGDAL: Interesting...

HEIRE: Yes, isn't it? The man made a momentous announcement just three minutes ago. "I am retiring from political life on account of failing health." What do you say to that?

BRATSBERG: Failing health...?

HEIRE: Draw your own conclusions.

BRATSBERG: *(Disturbed.)* I must see him immediately. At a time like this—

(Exits quickly, Ringdal behind him. Fieldbo enters.)

HEIRE: *(To Stensgard.)* Well, what do you say to that?

FIELDBO: What is it? Why is the Chamberlain in such a state?

HEIRE: Great news, doctor. Lundestad is going to resign!

FIELDBO: Impossible!

HEIRE: Nothing is impossible in these matters.

STENSGARD: He must have a very good reason...

HEIRE: Yes, his health. *(Laughs.)* It's your League of Youth, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: Do you actually suppose?

HEIRE: First thing we'll see is our respectful citizen, Mons Monsen, in the government. Hee-hee. I say no more. *(Exits.)*

FIELDBO: Well, it appears as if changes are already beginning to take place.

STENSGARD: How do you explain this, Fieldbo?

FIELDBO: How do you explain your presence here, Stensgard?

STENSGARD: I was invited.

FIELDBO: And how could you accept the invitation?

STENSGARD: What was I to do?

FIELDBO: Refuse!

STENSGARD: But I couldn't insult these good people.

FIELDBO: You could speak out against them!

STENSGARD: It was just their principles I attacked in my speech!

FIELDBO: Yes, but doesn't it strike you as quite strange the way he and the others have avoided mentioning yesterday's scene?

STENSGARD: I suppose they have too much tact for that sort of thing.

FIELDBO: Now what will you do? Break with the Stonelee gang?

STENSGARD: I'll find a way to reconcile them—

FIELDBO: I advise you against that, Stensgard. You have Miss Monsen to consider.

STENSGARD: I-I...don't know....

FIELDBO: If you marry into a family, you marry the whole tribe.

STENSGARD: And Monsen is an underbred fellow—

FIELDBO: Interesting.

STENSGARD: What is?

FIELDBO: That you would come to such a conclusion *now*!

STENSGARD: (*Thinking aloud.*) Well, polish is not his strong point...

FIELDBO: Nowhere close to it.

STENSGARD: He speaks ill of his guests. All his rooms reek of stale tobacco

FIELDBO: How is it you hadn't noticed the stale tobacco before?

STENSGARD: I've been noticing many things.

FIELDBO: For instance?

STENSGARD: The sort of people.

FIELDBO: How do you mean?

STENSGARD: The contrast. Contrasts show you.
FIELDBO: What have the contrasts shown you?
STENSGARD: The sort of crowd I began to fall into.
FIELDBO: A clique, hey?
STENSGARD: If you'd call it that. I fell into the clutches of a
clique and they bewildered me.
FIELDBO: You mean the League.
STENSGARD: Not the League. Not the idea. The idea has a
broad enough base. It is needed here to counteract the past.
FIELDBO: Come, Stensgard, you can't mean the entire past.
We can't wipe away life as life has been. Not entirely.
STENSGARD: No, just certain influences. Noxious in
character.
FIELDBO: And do you think the "Youth" will see it the same
way?
STENSGARD: They'll have to learn.
FIELDBO: Who will teach them?
STENSGARD: I will. I see it clearly now. I will not be a tool.
FIELDBO: Instead?
STENSGARD: A foresight!
FIELDBO: And if they won't take you so?
STENSGARD: I am their leader. It is my right, as well as my
duty, to show superior insight!
FIELDBO: And if they fail to bow to this?
STENSGARD: They'll have to go their own way. *(Pause.)* You
don't suppose I'm going to let my life slip into the wrong
groove?
FIELDBO: It's quite simple to do that.
STENSGARD: Not with me. I have a goal!
FIELDBO: I'm trying to understand it.
STENSGARD: It's quite simple. I want to achieve the height of
politics.
FIELDBO: The national government?
STENSGARD: Exactly!
FIELDBO: And then?

STENSGARD: I will give my talents. I will benefit my fellow countrymen.

FIELDBO: And that will make you a happy man?

STENSGARD: Yes, that and marriage.

FIELDBO: You will marry into a family of means and position?

STENSGARD: Intelligence. Breeding. *(Pause.)* Oh, don't take me wrongly. I intend to reach the goal by my own hand. *(Pause. Chatter and music drifts in.)* The atmosphere, the way of life...one must have that. One must move in a circle where life is conducive.

FIELDBO: Such as the life here.

STENSGARD: *(Warmly.)* Culture, understanding, intelligence. One can receive that only in the proper places. Not with the sort of ruffraff—

FIELDBO: I understand you—

STENSGARD: Oh, yes, when I think of Monsen and his money, I begin to see piles of sordid notes, greasy mortgages. But here!

FIELDBO: Shimmering silver.

STENSGARD: Look at the Chamberlain. What a well-bred man.

FIELDBO: He is indeed.

STENSGARD: And the son...Erik. Alert, straightforward, capable!

FIELDBO: I'll vouch for that.

STENSGARD: And the daughter-in-law, what an intelligence!

FIELDBO: Yes, extremely intelligent.

STENSGARD: And Thora—Miss Bratsberg—deep, steadfast.

FIELDBO: Oh, you don't know how deep.

STENSGARD: I am very attracted to her.

FIELDBO: Why, just yesterday it was Miss Monsen.

STENSGARD: Oh, I was hasty about that.

FIELDBO: I advise you, my dear Stensgard, to stop thinking about her.

STENSGARD: I see. You yourself are thinking of throwing the...ah...handkerchief to her.

FIELDBO: I assure you, that's not—

STENSGARD: Well, it doesn't matter. I can take competition.
(Laughs.) After all, nothing deters me when I want something.

FIELDBO: I'm just offering my advice—

STENSGARD: *(Aggressively.)* That's a little on the pretentious side...wouldn't you say, my dear Fieldbo?

FIELDBO: *(Defensively.)* I have at least that right...as a friend.

STENSGARD: Nonsense! That sort of talk won't do with me.
I understand your game, Fieldbo.

FIELDBO: What is my "game"?

STENSGARD: You fancy yourself cock-of-the-walk in this house.

(Stensgard smiles. There is a long pause. Music and chatter continues in the background.)

FIELDBO: Careful, Stensgard, you are standing on hollow ground here.

STENSGARD: Ho-ho, my dear fellow! What will you have? Some intrigue?

FIELDBO: I don't understand—

STENSGARD: Don't play the innocent with me.

FIELDBO: What innocent—

STENSGARD: I know you, Fieldbo. You are my enemy, the only one I have here.

FIELDBO: But I never—

STENSGARD: Don't lay it on. I know you, I do. Who are you, Fieldbo? What are you capable of? Nothing. Oh, perhaps a little tea-time witticism, spreading gossip, strutting. Ha-ha, but what more? *(Comes closer as if to dare.)* What more?

(Pause.)

FIELDBO: I've saved something for you, Stensgard.

STENSGARD: Oh, a little surprise?

FIELDBO: If you want to call it that.

STENSGARD: Well, let's hear it.

FIELDBO: There is someone waiting for you outside.

STENSGARD: For me? Who?

FIELDBO: Aslaksen.

STENSGARD: Aslak –

FIELDBO: You do remember him?

STENSGARD: What does he want?

FIELDBO: Ask him yourself.

(Fieldbo goes to the door and calls him. As Aslaksen enters, Fieldbo exits to the garden.)

ASLAKSEN: *(To Stensgard.)* Yes, I've been waiting...a long time. I must speak to you. You promised me...yesterday...just yesterday –

STENSGARD: Well, what? Out with it.

ASLAKSEN: Sure-surely...yesterday...an account of the founding.

STENSGARD: What founding?

(Aslaksen stumbles forward.)

ASLAKSEN: The...League! Don't you –

(Stensgard retreats.)

STENSGARD: I can't give it to you now.

ASLAKSEN: *(Pursuing.)* I must have it now. The paper comes out tomorrow morning.

STENSGARD: Well, I can't... Besides, it has to be altered.

ASLAKSEN: Altered? What d'you mean?

STENSGARD: The matter has entered a new phase. New forces have come into play. What I said about the Chamberlain—

ASLAKSEN: Oh, I see.

STENSGARD: You don't understand, Aslaksen.

ASLAKSEN: *You* don't understand. That part...that part...is already in print...in type.

STENSGARD: (*Loudly.*) Then take it out of type!

ASLAKSEN: You-you mean— (*Stares at him.*)

STENSGARD: Why do you stare at me? Don't you think I know how to manage the affairs of the League?

ASLAKSEN: I don't doubt— But—

STENSGARD: No arguing about it, Aslaksen. Do what I tell you.

ASLAKSEN: Do what...you...tell... (*Straightening up and thrusting forward again.*) You are taking the bread out of my mouth, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: I? By changing—

ASLAKSEN: Yes, you don't understand what will happen—

STENSGARD: Look, man, I've merely asked you—

ASLAKSEN: I know what you asked me! It will destroy me! You've led me into a trap, Mr. Stensgard!

STENSGARD: I...a trap?

ASLAKSEN: If you remember, last winter, before you came here, my paper was looking up. I was my own editor, but I edited on principle. I believed that when things were bettered, my paper would thrive even more. So when you came and brought your ideas along, the paper took on new color. But, alas, Lundestad's supporters all fell away. It backfired. It was your ideas...your ideas, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: I agree...your paper has become a good one.

ASLAKSEN: I can't live on a good paper.

STENSGARD: What do you expect me to do? Go out to the street and sell them for you?

ASLAKSEN: It's not a joking matter, Mr. Stensgard. You were to make things lively...grapple with abuses, attack the smug rich.

STENSGARD: Well, I've done it!

ASLAKSEN: Yes, but now you leave me on a limb...a damned limb!

STENSGARD: That's your problem, Aslaksen.

ASLAKSEN: You won't drive me out of business. If you do...

STENSGARD: Yes?

ASLAKSEN: You'll regret it.

STENSGARD: Oh? And how do you propose that?

ASLAKSEN: I'll make my paper pay...one way or another...

STENSGARD: Let me tell you this, Aslaksen, if you go one single step beyond my orders and try to exploit the movement for your own dirty interests, I'll go to the opposition printer and start a new paper. I'll bring your rag to ruin within one week.

ASLAKSEN: You wouldn't do that!

STENSGARD: Try me!

(Pause.)

ASLAKSEN: I'll – I'll go to Chamberlain Bratsberg.

STENSGARD: *(Chuckling.)* What will that solve?

ASLAKSEN: You see, I know why you were invited here. It's because he is afraid of you. And you're taking advantage of that. Well, if he's afraid of you, he'll be even more afraid of me when I tell him about the dirt I will print about him and his family –

STENSGARD: You bastard!

ASLAKSEN: Yes, I'll show you. If your speech is to be kept out of my paper, the Chamberlain will pay me well for that.

STENSGARD: You drunken –

ASLAKSEN: I'll fight like a lion before I go down!

STENSGARD: *(Moves toward him.)* Get out of this house! Immediately!

ASLAKSEN: (*Backing off.*) One day. I'll give you one day—

STENSGARD: One day, eh?

ASLAKSEN: Yes, one day!

(*Aslaksen exits by back way. Lundestad enters.*)

LUNDESTAD: Mr. Stensgard!

STENSGARD: Ah, Mr. Lundestad!

LUNDESTAD: Some difficulty?

STENSGARD: Never mind. Nothing.

LUNDESTAD: I should like to have a little talk with you.

STENSGARD: Gladly.

LUNDESTAD: I...wanted to...ah...clarify a few things.

STENSGARD: What for instance?

LUNDESTAD: I've held seat a long time, some 20 years, and

I'm beginning to see that it's time I were relieved—

STENSGARD: Relieved?

LUNDESTAD: I want to retire, you see. Times change, new problems arise. Problems the younger are better suited to deal with than the older. Do you understand?

STENSGARD: Not exactly.

LUNDESTAD: What is needed is a new force...a younger man...one who can deal with—

STENSGARD: But if you give up your seat, you give it to Monsen. He is by no means new—

LUNDESTAD: Do you really suppose Monsen would be elected?

STENSGARD: Well...I haven't looked into the matter that deeply...

LUNDESTAD: Never, Mr. Stensgard. My people would hardly vote for him. I mean the men of property, the old families, the established landowners. They'll have nothing to do with Mons Monsen. No, he has no chance, Mr. Stensgard. There is, however, another—

STENSGARD: Another?

LUNDESTAD: In simple words...for I am one of simple words. Why not make the jump yourself, Mr. Stensgard?

STENSGARD: Myself?

LUNDESTAD: Into Parliament.

STENSGARD: You really think so?

LUNDESTAD: Directly! Show a little ambition, man.

STENSGARD: Directly...into Parliament?

LUNDESTAD: If you don't seize the opportunity, someone else will.

STENSGARD: And do you really think I have a chance...?

LUNDESTAD: You'll have my support, and the Chamberlain's. And then there is the youth.

STENSGARD: Yes...the youth...

LUNDESTAD: You have a very good chance, if you ask me.

STENSGARD: (*With sudden resolve.*) I place myself entirely at your disposal, Mr. Lundestad!

(Lundestad extends his hand. Stensgard takes it.)

LUNDESTAD: You will not regret it, Mr. Stensgard. Now, for the next step. I have great power, especially in the electoral college, but you must bring your oratory into play. There is where the true power lies!

STENSGARD: But wait. How am I to bridge the gap between your people and mine? The interests of the old and the young are not the same, you know.

LUNDESTAD: Simple. An old trick of the trade, as they...ah...say, "Remember that the young always want to share in the properties that the old maintain." That is where you come in, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: I'm beginning to see...

LUNDESTAD: Your oratory. Why, you have the talent—

STENSGARD: To hang the carrot before the rabbit—

LUNDESTAD: So to speak.

STENSGARD: So to speak.

LUNDESTAD: Of course you don't make the move from one party to another until you are entrenched. And even then...politics is a brutal game, Mr. Stensgard.

STENSGARD: *(Wisely.)* It's card playing...

LUNDESTAD: Poker, I would suspect.

STENSGARD: And I must play each card...

LUNDESTAD: Each card...with the proper attitude.

STENSGARD: You've opened wide vistas to me, Mr. Lundestad.

(As Stensgard grips Lundestad's hand again, Bratsberg, Selma, Erik, and Heire begin to drift in from the garden.)

SELMA: Mr. Stensgard, you must join us. We are going to play some games inside.

STENSGARD: With pleasure.

(They move off. Erik Bratsberg passes through with Daniel Heire.)

ERIK: I didn't quite understand what my father said about Mr. Stensgard.

HEIRE: You will know soon enough.

ERIK: Has Mr. Stensgard broken with Mr. Monsen?

LUNDESTAD: Not only broken, but—

HEIRE: Sssh. Say no more. *(To Erik.)* Wait until tomorrow. You'll have the entire story in Aslaksen's paper.

LUNDESTAD: I'm an old weather prophet: "There has been a change in the wind. Rather than be ousted from office, one should give way gracefully."

(Bratsberg appears, listens.)

ERIK: Nonsense. Who in the world will oust you?

LUNDESTAD: I suppose you don't know what I've done?

BRATSBERG: Yes, I've just heard that you are resigning.

LUNDESTAD: More than that. I've convinced Mr. Stensgard...to follow in my footsteps.

ERIK: Convinced?

BRATSBERG: To follow?

LUNDESTAD In fact, it would be proper for Mr. Stensgard to make a speech—

(Fieldbo enters.)

ERIK: A speech?

BRATSBERG: At this time?

HEIRE: Why, that would be just fine...fine. I say no more. Now is the time for a new onslaught.

ERIK: An onslaught?

HEIRE: Yes, against all the corruption. No more! All the swindling.

(Thora enters.)

THORA: Father! You must join us. They've begun the game.

BRATSBERG: Not now, Thora.

THORA: It isn't fair to our guests.

HEIRE: He must make another speech.

ERIK: What sort of speech?

HEIRE: Why, declaring... Let's see, what is it he will declare?

LUNDESTAD: Well, shall we go in and inquire?

ERIK: Inquire? You mean now? Before everybody?

HEIRE: Why not? Hee-hee. It's the best time.

BRATSBERG: *(To Lundestad.)* But can we count so confidently on his breaking with that crew?

LUNDESTAD: Mr. Stensgard must be supported. And how are we to support him if we don't know exactly how he stands?

ERIK: Yes, I agree with you, Father. We must know how Mr. Stensgard stands.

BRATSBERG: You know, I'm quite distressed about all this...this changing—

LUNDESTAD: The political field has changed much, Chamberlain.

HEIRE: It is interesting to see how one may support one side and then switch to another. Hee-hee-hee.

BRATSBERG: Very well, I suppose it's best now—

THORA: Then you'll play, Father?

BRATSBERG: We shall have Mr. Stensgard say something.
(He starts to exit.)

THORA: We must not disrupt the game, Father.

BRATSBERG: I'm sorry, my dear. We shall play and drink afterward.

(Bratsberg exits. Erik and Thora follow Bratsberg out.)

HEIRE: Excellent! A very satisfying evening.

LUNDESTAD: One that bears many fruits.

HEIRE: Imagine! Asking that young whelp to a state dinner, and then—I say no more. Why, that's the best thing I've heard in a long time.

LUNDESTAD: Sssh! Remember your promise. The Chamberlain is your old schoolmate.

HEIRE: Schoolmate? Hee-hee. I'll pay him back with interest for what he's done to me.

LUNDESTAD: Take care! The Chamberlain is powerful. Don't play tricks in the lion's den.

HEIRE: Where is the lion? Hee-hee. I see a lot of blockheads. I hear taunts. But roars? What? Where?

(Applause from the next room.)

LUNDESTAD: *(Starts.)* He is about to speak.

STENSGARD: *(Offstage.)* Yes, I shall make a speech!
(Applause. Shouts of "Bravo!") Fill your glasses, ladies and gentlemen! I am going to make a speech which shall open

new vistas! (*Applause. Shouts of "Bravo!"*) I shall begin with a fable!

HEIRE: I can tell you the name of that fable. It's the one about the woodpecker and the gamecock. Do you know that one, doctor?

FIELDBO: No, I don't believe I've heard that one.

HEIRE: Well, you see, the woodpecker was old, and he kept pecking away at a tree, while the gamecock kept strutting, and then, as if from nowhere, a young cuckoo appeared and began to join in the cackling—

STENSGARD: (*Offstage.*) ... And so, Chamberlain Bratsberg, I stand before you...and I beg your forgiveness for last night. Those were senseless words. I had no idea, no understanding...

(*Curtain begins to fall.*)

HEIRE: The cuckoo cackles and the woodpecker pecks. Hee-hee.

STENSGARD: (*Offstage.*) In me you have henceforth a faithful champion...a man of principle...

HEIRE: I forgot the gamecock...

STENSGARD: (*Offstage.*) ... I will stand at the edge of the mountain...and defend against...

HEIRE: He who struts. Hee-hee.

(*Heire winks at Fieldbo, as Stensgard continues to talk. The curtain has fallen. Intermission.*)

[End of Freeview]