

MUSIC AT MIDNIGHT

A Play by

PETER HOWARD

and

ALAN THORNHILL

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Characters

THE FATHER
THE DAUGHTER—LENA
THE UNCLE
THE SON—NILS
THE AMBASSADOR
THE CHIEF MINISTER
HIS WIFE—MARGARET
HIS SON—STEPHEN
A NEWSPAPER OWNER—SOUTHSTREAM
A SECRETARY—FORBES
A WAITER
AN OFFICER
Patrons of Rossi's Restaurant

Act I

Scene One: A room in an occupied country. *Four a.m.*

Scene Two: The home of the Chief Minister in another country. *Morning.*

Act II

Scene One: Rossi's Restaurant. *Lunch.*

Scene Two: The home of the Chief Minister. *Afternoon.*

Scene Three: The room in the occupied country.
Midnight.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

The curtain rises on an upper room in an occupied country. The time is four a.m. You hear a clock chime and with it the sound of intermittent rifle shots and the chatter of machine-guns. At the back of the stage a window looks directly out upon the world. Beside the curtained window stands a man of about sixty. He holds a rifle in his hands. Beside the window hangs a bird in a cage. Now and again the bird sings. Two doors lead from the room—one, stage right, out to the staircase and the street, the other, stage left, to an inner room. As the curtain rises a young mother is sitting near a rocking-cot downstage. She is rocking the cot gently with her toe, and knitting.

The room is in near darkness. Outside can be seen the light of the moon and rooftops stretching away to the distance. The man carefully draws the curtain, goes across and turns on the lights, takes a look at the baby in the cot, then stands once more by the window.

The young mother sets aside her knitting and rises.

FATHER (*For the man by the window is her father*) For heaven's sake, Lena, can't you sit still? Why must you fidget around the room all the time? Why are you so restless?

(Lena goes to a drawer and pulls out a packet, carries it to the window)

FATHER What are you doing now?

LENA I forgot to feed the bird, Father.

(She climbs on to a chair and begins to put seed in the bird cage)

FATHER Feed the bird! Do you realise what's happening in the city?

LENA Yes, Father.

(Lena climbs down from the chair, returns immediately with a jug of water, climbs on the chair again and starts giving the bird water)

FATHER Do you understand that the tanks are coming—that they are going to put down the rising by force?

LENA Yes, Father.

FATHER Can't you see that with that fool brother of yours getting mixed up in politics, making his speeches, printing his mad pamphlets, leading the street fighting day after day—why, they'll come here first of all? *(Shouting)* And you forgot to feed the blasted bird!

LENA Don't shout so loud, Father. It's bad for you. Anyway, you're proud of Nils really, aren't you?

FATHER What's the good of being proud? Do you realise that bird may be the only one of us alive this time tomorrow?

LENA *(Climbing down from the chair)* It won't be alive if I don't give it food and drink.

FATHER Oh, I could shake you. *(He puts down his rifle)* Making silly jokes at a time like this. Fussing about the place so a man can't even think properly. Oh, I could shake you, shake you. *(He does so)*

LENA I know you could, Father. But do stop. If you go on much longer, you'll wake Baby. You may even wake Uncle—and believe me, that's a lot harder. (*Nodding towards the inner room*)

FATHER (*Letting her go, picking up his rifle again and sitting down*) I'm sorry, dear. Do you mean to say your uncle is asleep in there?

LENA (*Sitting, taking up her knitting, smiling*) Snoring.

FATHER Amazing! Disgraceful! Here am I worrying my head off. Dammit, he ought to be worrying, too! Oh, I wish I could sleep.

LENA You would if you weren't frightened, Father.

FATHER (*Angrily*) Me! (*Lena says nothing, but goes on knitting*) What makes you think I'm frightened?

LENA When some people are frightened they go all silent. Others rush about and talk a lot.

FATHER All right! All right! It's hard to sit still if you know you may be dead in the morning.

LENA When I was little, I never used to think *you* could be frightened. (*She goes to him and kisses him on the top of the head*) Somehow it makes it easier now to know you can be.

FATHER Aren't you frightened?

LENA Not tonight. I was terribly the night Paul was killed. I've somehow lost the secret since then. Nothing frightens me now. You helped me so much at that time. You seemed so solid, so safe. Do you remember?

FATHER O Lord, what frauds we fathers are! What

accursed frauds! When the children are little we pretend not to be scared, so they shan't be scared. But we are, most of the time, you know. Scared of being poor, of being bored, or being found out. Then as the children grow up, we pretend to have faith, so they shall have faith.

LENA Do you mean it's all a sham?

FATHER I had a faith once. Hope, too. I hoped for so much when we were married, your mother and I. The night your brother was born I stood by your mother's bedside and felt as if I had conquered the world. I suppose every father has felt that way. But each one thinks no other felt as he did. I felt I could laugh and sing and shout and cry all at the same time. When you were born, too, my dear. Such a tiny thing you were. You used to stand on my hand. Do you remember? Of course you don't. But those days were full of hope—and faith. Then came war. Then another war. And your mother . . . (*Turns away*)

LENA She had faith, hadn't she? The real thing?

FATHER (*Recovering himself*) Yes. Your mother believed it all—God, the Devil, Heaven and Hell, with saints and angels and the ten Commandments thrown in. Useful at times. We got round many a tricky corner on your mother's faith. Damned uncomfortable, all the same.

LENA Why?

FATHER Your mother was a gentle soul. She didn't say very much, but she had that old-fashioned idea that some things were right and some were wrong.

LENA I know. I'd come sneaking in at all hours of the night—and there she'd be, with a smile and a cup of coffee. And yet somehow I'd feel like hell.

FATHER I always needed four or five cups of coffee. But then you say to yourself, let her have her faith, dammit, and I'll have my fun.

LENA And did you?

(Father jumps up, grabs rifle, goes to the door)

FATHER I thought I heard footsteps on the stairs—false alarm.

(Comes back)

LENA Those stairs have creaked and squeaked ever since I was a child. Didn't you ever tell her the truth?

FATHER Who? Oh, yes. We were talking about . . .

LENA Mother. Didn't you ever tell her about your fun?

FATHER Good heavens, no. It would have killed her.

LENA I doubt it. Women don't die all that easy.

FATHER *(Turning away)* Anyway, your mother died—not from me, thank God—but from the bomb that blew her to bits and buried her in the rubble.

LENA She felt nothing.

FATHER No. But I did. The real hell was not the loss of her—*(Breaks off)* You're right about talking too much, damn it.

LENA What was it, Father?

FATHER *(With a new sincerity, really moved)* Well, that I'd not played straight with her, although I loved her.

We were so happy when we were young. I don't know what went wrong. I started drinking. First a little. Then a little more. Then it was other women. Well, everybody does it, your friends say. And so, in the end, you do it, too. Then your wife is blown to bits. You spend the rest of your life with a nail in your heart—a nail of bitterness at never having the chance to tell the woman you loved the truth which you were afraid to tell her when she was with you. That's hell. (*He turns away*)

(Enter from the inner room the Uncle. He is tousled, without shoes on, his shirt open at the neck, fresh roused from sleep, rubbing his eyes. He sees them and says)

UNCLE Boo!

FATHER You fool. How you startled me.

UNCLE I'm sorry. But think of how somebody might have startled *me*. There was I, sleeping the sleep of the just . . .

LENA I'd never thought of you as all that just, Uncle.

UNCLE A point well taken, my dear. A very good point. Sleeping the sleep of the unjust, then. Much more true to life according to my experience, now I come to think of it. Have you noticed, brother, how soundly the unjust sleep, while the just stay awake half the night worrying about other people's shortcomings?

FATHER You're nothing but a fool, and never have been.

UNCLE True, my dear brother, true. I was a fool to

go to sleep in there, relying on you to guard me against some wretched government spiv creeping in and slitting my throat. Why, I could have wandered in and slit yours, you were so occupied with your talking. Who'd have been the fool then, eh?

LENA (*Going into the inner room*) The kettle's boiling. I'll get you some coffee.

UNCLE (*Calling after her*) That's right, my dear. Bring coffee while you can. The first thing those tanks will do is to make for the power station. Then all the heat and light will go off. No coffee for days. Terrible. (*He is by now stretched out on a settee with his legs up and arms behind his head*) You know, brother, if we've got to die in the morning, we may as well make ourselves comfortable during the night. Don't you agree?

FATHER Nothing seems to make you grow up.

UNCLE If life hasn't made me grow up, I don't see why the approach of death should.

FATHER Can't you be serious?

UNCLE I'm very serious. Tonight is the best chance I ever had to put my philosophy to the test.

FATHER What is that?

UNCLE A firm belief that the things you are really afraid of never happen. Far the best course of action in most situations is to do absolutely nothing. It's unreal, of course. It's childish. But it works. If you keep quiet and say nothing, things turn out all right.

FATHER Not for us! Not this time.

(*Enter Lena with coffee*)

UNCLE If there's a worry, you're always somewhere in the middle of it. (*To Lena*) Did he ever tell you, my dear, of the time he was sure he would be black-mailed? He woke up in my house with a splitting headache, with a photograph of a remarkably fine-looking girl clasped in his hand, and smelling strongly of eau de Cologne.

FATHER Don't say another word. Shut up.

UNCLE You see? Still in a frenzy about it. Still worried to death. Well, after all these years, I'll put you out of your misery. You were so intolerably right that evening, my dear brother, so high and mighty, so hoity-toity, that I slipped a little something in your whiskey, put you to bed, sprinkled you with eau de Cologne, borrowed a photograph of my landlord's daughter, put it in your hands, and there you were.

FATHER (*Aghast*) You did what! You mean you . . . !
It's not true!

UNCLE As true as I sit here. When you woke up you couldn't remember a thing, and your guilty conscience made you fear the worst, my righteous brother. I told your wife all about it, too, and . . .

FATHER You did that!

UNCLE I did, and she laughed more than I did. A very sensible woman, she was, that wife of yours. The one thing which surprised her was that you never had the courage to tell her the truth.

(*The Father turns suddenly away to the window*)

LENA It was a beastly trick to play on him, Uncle.

And a beastly thing to talk about it tonight.

UNCLE Maybe, my dear. Maybe. But at least it's cured your father of his fear. Anger is an excellent cure for fear. At least it makes men forget it. You really forgot your fear, my dear brother, for a few minutes. (*Once more curled up on the settee and speaking to Lena*) And that, if you want to know the truth, is why I told you the story.

(*The outer door bursts open. There with a gun at the ready stands the rebel son, Nils. He is in uniform, but it is torn and ragged, open at the throat*)

NILS Are you all mad? Anybody could have come in. You might be dead by now.

UNCLE Nobody's going to come till morning—and probably not then.

FATHER (*Picking up his rifle*) I'm sorry, Nils. I was just trying to get some sense into your uncle.

LENA There's somebody behind you. Who is it?

(*Nils comes right in to the room and beckons to the Ambassador to enter. He shuts the door*)

NILS This is my friend. I should say our friend, the Ambassador from the West. He has news.

FATHER Welcome to our home, Excellency. May I present my brother, my daughter.

AMBASSADOR I wish I could come at a happier moment. My heart goes out to you all.

NILS From the beginning to the end of this business he's given us all the help he could. I wanted you all to meet him before he leaves our country.

UNCLE Have some coffee? It's good and fresh.

AMBASSADOR Thank you. I would like some. But I have to leave you almost immediately.

LENA What is your news?

AMBASSADOR First, will you please switch on the radio.

NILS What's the use?

AMBASSADOR My Chief Minister has been broadcasting from our capital for the last half-hour. We may get the end of it. I want to hear what he is saying. (*Uncle goes to the radio and switches it on. The Chief Minister's voice comes through*)

CHIEF MINISTER . . . at this moment, their blood pays the price of our freedom. It is hard to express the abhorrence, the disgust that decent people everywhere feel at the news of this butchery. But we can take courage. At this dark hour of human history let us remember that the lamps of liberty have never yet been quenched by the brutality of tyrants.

NILS (*Bursting out, shaking his fist at the radio*) Coward! You talk and do nothing.

ALL Sh!

CHIEF MINISTER (*Continuing*) Dimmed, yes. Darkened, yes. Extinguished, never. The blood of martyrs is the fuel of freedom. Let us then honour the brave, succour the destitute, learn the hard lesson of today to equip us for the hard tasks of tomorrow.

NILS For us there is no tomorrow.

CHIEF MINISTER (*Continuing*) We shall not fail, because

we dare not fail, to hold high the torch of freedom until its deathless rays illuminate the darkest corners of the earth.

RADIO ANNOUNCER You have been listening to the voice of the Chief Minister speaking from his home. This broadcast was recorded at midnight.

NILS Recorded at midnight. The hour for ghosts and ghouls who gibber and do nothing. He's got a tongue of gold, that man, and heart of putty. He loves to pin medals on the breasts of dead nations.

FATHER In the dark days of war we used to listen on that wavelength and find hope.

AMBASSADOR I shall be seeing that man today. What do you want me to tell him?

NILS Tell him everything! Tell him that he is such a hero in this country that if he arrived before dawn we would use our last bullets to shoot him, and gladly face the tanks with stones and our bare hands.

FATHER You shouldn't talk like that, son.

NILS Why not? It's too late for pretence. We are nothing to that man or his people. He urged us on to fight and deserted us when we began to do it. The only help he gives is endless sermons on the virtues of his people and the sins of the rest of us.

UNCLE Strange! Just what I've been trying to say for fifty years to your father.

NILS (*Suddenly quiet, turning to the Ambassador*) Tell the man the truth. Tell him we were born in a world of hate. As we grew up we were taught to march,

to sing, to obey, to praise our leaders and our party without discrimination. We hated, we marched, we sang, we obeyed. There was no end to it. At last we came to long for a freedom that we had never known. We risked our lives listening to the voice of your Chief Minister and his friends urging us to throw off tyranny, urging us to do this, to do that, to do the other. We've done it all. Now we are stuck in a room waiting for the tanks to come and finish us—and that voice of his goes on droning out the same old stuff from his home at midnight.

UNCLE I rather wish he could have heard that. Very few men talk that way to Chief Ministers. But if I were you I wouldn't have the Ambassador pass it on to him. He might manage the words, but he'd have forgotten the tune. It would be like a rehash of a nice hot dinner; it wouldn't taste the same by the time it was served up to him.

AMBASSADOR (*Disregarding the Uncle, to Nils*) I have to go now. Will you give them the news or shall I do it?

FATHER What is the news? Is it good?

UNCLE Tell us, Your Excellency.

NILS Please, you tell them.

AMBASSADOR The Chief Marshal himself has sent word that he will allow me to take the whole of my staff out of the city at dawn. He is making no military move until we are clear of the place. Special aeroplanes are waiting at the airport to fly us all to my country. We shall be there by lunch-time.

UNCLE Lunch-time. Think of it! I remember that marvellous restaurant, Excellency, near your Parliament Building where they make a speciality of roast duck, and that charming gipsy band. (*Hums a bar or two of a gay waltz*) How I would love to eat lunch with you there today.

AMBASSADOR Perhaps you can.

UNCLE What do you mean?

FATHER Can you take us out with you?

NILS For Heaven's sake, tell them!

AMBASSADOR I wish I could take all of you. I cannot. But I can take one of you. One of my staff flew home two days ago to carry a personal message to my Chief Minister. Apparently the tank commander does not know this. He has provided one more pass than I need for my people. In view of the courage of this young man, and the intimate connections he has with these events, I felt I would be right to take one of you with me.

FATHER (*Pointing at the mother and baby*) Not one and a baby?

AMBASSADOR Regretfully, I doubt it. It'll be hard enough as it is. That wouldn't be possible.

UNCLE Well, there's no question who should go. Take the girl. We'll look after the baby, my dear. And the bird, too. I certainly wouldn't want to come with you, Excellency, even for the sake of one of those delicious duck luncheons. Far too interesting to see what's going to happen here in the morning. My own conviction is that nothing much is going to

happen. It will all go on as before. You'll be back in a day or two. Mark my words.

FATHER Well, that's settled. She goes.

NILS I agree. She'll be in the way, too, when the fighting starts.

AMBASSADOR Very well, then. It will be an honour to escort you, Madame. But we must go at once, if you please.

LENA I'm not going.

AMBASSADOR I beg your pardon. What did you say?

LENA I said, "I'm not going."

FATHER Get your coat on and go, dear. It's for the best. Just do as you are told, there's a good girl.

NILS You must go. Go now.

LENA I'm not going to go like this.

UNCLE She doesn't want to leave her baby.

LENA Of course I wouldn't leave the baby. I'd smuggle him through somehow. (*With sudden passion*) And don't suppose I don't want to give him the chance. But this isn't the right way to take a decision. You all simply decide and push me off. I'm not going like that.

FATHER How else can we decide?

LENA It's something Mother believed in, Father, isn't it?

FATHER (*Guiltily*) Your mother believed in a lot of things.

NILS (*Impatiently*) Yes, and Mother's dead. So will you

be, unless you hurry.

LENA Mother's dead. But maybe her faith is what we need right now.

AMBASSADOR I'm sorry. I can't waste time listening to this sort of thing. Every moment counts. You must decide who is to come with me. I shall leave you now and wait in my car for exactly five minutes. Then, with or without one of you, I shall drive away.

FATHER Good-bye. Thank you. She will come. Look after her for us.

UNCLE Good-bye.

NILS Good-bye. Thank you. She will come.

LENA Good-bye. I shall pray for your country.

AMBASSADOR (*Halting in the doorway*) For my country?

LENA Yes.

(*The Ambassador goes. All the men turn on the girl*)

FATHER No more of this nonsense.

UNCLE Be a good girl. Please go.

NILS It's your sacred duty.

LENA You're fools. All of you. Lovable fools—but fools. Now, for once listen to me. We are not going to decide this thing by who has the loudest voice or the strongest arm or the worst temper. We are going to find out what is right.

NILS How?

LENA Mother knew something that Chief Minister badly needs to know. And we need to know it, too.

She used to say that when we listen God speaks to us. (*All the men make sounds and gestures of impatience*) I know. We all resisted it then as you resist it now. We think we're far too clever and complicated to do anything as simple as that. But all the clever and complicated people have got the world into a hopeless mess. Mother may have been wiser than we ever realised. She believed you can be still and that thoughts can come from the mind of God to the mind of man. Didn't she, Father?

FATHER (*Uncomfortably*) Some such thing, I dare say, some such thing.

LENA She made it practical. She made a note of these thoughts. She carried them out. And it worked. Isn't that so?

FATHER Yes, Lena. In a manner of speaking, you can say it worked. Too damned well at times for my comfort.

LENA Why don't we see if it will work now? If it doesn't, you can have your own way and either wrangle and fight until the Ambassador leaves alone, or else gag me and bundle me out of the country whether I want to go or not.

NILS That's right. We've just got three minutes to go.
(*He drags her towards the door*) Come on, Dad.

LENA (*With authority*) Nils! Let me go!

NILS Well!

LENA You've forgotten the most important thing of all, haven't you?

FATHER What's that?

LENA The important thing is not who leaves here, but who arrives there.

NILS What do you mean?

LENA That Chief Minister over there needs help.

NILS Help! He needs . . .

LENA All right! All right! But who's the one to give him what he needs? Someone must go who can help him bring sanity to the world. God may have had a plan when He sent that Ambassador here tonight. Let's ask Him who it is.

UNCLE You ask Him, my dear. I'm sure He's on much better terms with you than He is with me.

NILS There's no time, I tell you.

LENA There's no time to do anything else.

(Lena sits and is at peace. The rest look at each other, shrug, are finally quiet. The Father turns his back on them all and is at the window. The son strides up and down. The Uncle lies on the settee, stealing glances at them all, pretending to be asleep when any of them look at him)

NILS Two minutes left.

UNCLE *(Suddenly)* She's dead right, you know. I hate to admit that God has anything to do with it. But she's right. You're the one to do it, my boy. You can speak with the voice of our people. You go, boy. Talk turkey to the Chief Minister and eat duck afterwards with the Ambassador. No need to worry about leaving her behind either. Nothing's going to happen.

FATHER All I could think was, "Your wife knows everything and forgives everything."

LENA That's true, Father.

NILS (*To Lena*) You *must* go. You *must*.

LENA Is that honestly what you thought? (*He looks at her. Then drops his head*) I'll tell you what I thought. "Nils is the man to go. Go a free man, free from hate and all bitterness. Go as a man made new and he will make new nations."

(*There is a loud and repeated sound of a motor horn from outside in the street*)

FATHER One minute!

NILS I can't do it. It's the action of a coward.

LENA A coward would stay. But you are brave enough to go.

NILS But you! You can't refuse! You can't stay!

LENA Don't limit what women can or cannot do. They aren't always the weaker sex. Will you promise me to remember that when you get over there? And remember Mother. Her ways seem to me far better than the way of that old Chief Minister.

(*She goes and kisses him. He suddenly turns and rushes almost sobbing out of the room. The Father turns out the light, opens the curtain and window. You hear the sound of a car starting and driving off below. The first faint glimmer of dawn can be seen across the rooftops*)

FATHER (*To Lena*) He just made it! Bless you, my dear. It's nearly morning.

UNCLE The tanks won't start until the Ambassador's planes have left the ground. And if I know anything about planes, there'll be at least one of them that won't start. And by the time it's started there'll probably be some other news and the tank commander will change his mind. Amazing to think those two fellows will be seeing that Chief Minister today. I don't envy them that interview. I don't envy them the air trip. All I envy them is the duck dinner. *(He lies down on the settee as he speaks)*

FATHER What are you going to do?

UNCLE Sleep, of course. Good night, everybody, good night.

FATHER Good night, brother. Good morning, Lena.
(It is now almost full dawn)

LENA Is it really morning? Good morning, Father.
(She kneels by the side of her child's cot, and begins to pray. A gentle snore comes from Uncle. Then another. Then steadily. The Father on guard at the window with his rifle looks back into the room once or twice, then stands and looks towards the city, silhouetted against the morning sky. There is a sound of shooting and the bird starts to sing as the curtain falls)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

It is the first-floor room of the Chief Minister. There is space and beauty. It is a working-living room with a desk, comfortable chairs, flowers in it. A large window opens out on to a balcony with a balustrade.

Sitting in the room are Margaret, the wife of the Chief Minister, his son, Stephen, and Southstream, a newspaper-owner who is an old friend of the family. Stephen is dressed in an open-necked shirt, untidy trousers, long hair and all the tatterdemalion gait that betokens defiance of authority. He is smoking a cigarette. They are all watching a television set on which the Chief Minister is recording a speech in the next room.

CHIEF MINISTER (*On the television*) And so you see, my friends, unity is our need. We are in a storm and that's a bad time to rock the boat. We shall pull through if we pull together. Sometimes I marvel at the insanity of those who would risk the blood of nations for the sake of prestige or power or for a few cities in far-off lands. But through it all our people have been magnificent. In fact, they have behaved as our people always have behaved and always will behave in times of crisis.

(Southstream rises from his chair and turns off the voice—the picture still goes on, but there is no sound)

SOUTHSTREAM I'm sorry, Margaret. I just have to listen to that stuff in carefully regulated doses. Anyway, we can't print it until it's actually broadcast tonight.

MARGARET All the same, I wish you'd left the sound on. He always wants to know what I think of his speeches, and I feel such a hypocrite if I haven't really been listening.

STEPHEN You can still see him. Father's much more impressive if you don't actually hear what he's saying. (*He gives a silent imitation of his father speaking*) I bet that's the bit about how proud he is of the people of this great country.

SOUTHSTREAM Tell you the truth, the people aren't so proud of him, right now. The public are feeling thoroughly sour and frustrated.

STEPHEN Father has that effect on people.

MARGARET You ought to know, dear.

STEPHEN (*Imitating his father*) Me! I behave as I always have behaved and as I always will behave. Thunderous applause!

SOUTHSTREAM Well, you're in my today's edition again, Stephen. Your activities are getting almost as much space as your father's.

STEPHEN So I see! That'll make him mad.

MARGARET What have you been doing this time?

SOUTHSTREAM Just a candid shot of your son cavorting with the girls at some function called "Twist for Peace", wasn't it? After which they all went out and sat down in the middle of the street. Seriously, do you think your squatting antics will turn the Russians or Americans into nervous wrecks?

STEPHEN Better than a lot of old men squatting at their

desks preparing for the next war. Anyway, I'm glad your bloody newspapers write stories about "Chief Minister's son among the squatters". It's the one thing that makes my father angry. I don't want to have him proud of me.

MARGARET That is *not* an immediate danger. Anyway, I wish you'd be quiet, both of you. He's got a crisis on his hands, a real crisis. I want him to find peace, at least in his own home.

STEPHEN Peace is the last thing he wants. Oh, Mother, you know Father loves a crisis.

SOUTHSTREAM He's had to deal with plenty. He's at his best in keeping people quiet when things are really dangerous. I'll admit that in stormy weather your husband still keeps some of his old master-touch. Unfortunately there's always another storm blowing up around the corner.

STEPHEN If he doesn't find one, he tries to create one. It makes him feel so big.

MARGARET If you say things like that, I shan't tell you what I had in mind to tell.

STEPHEN (*Watching screen*) There goes Father—a ringing peroration and a nice slow fade. What did you have in mind to tell me, Mother?

MARGARET (*To Stephen*) Only that *I* am proud of you, Stephen.

SOUTHSTREAM What?

MARGARET Yes, I am. I don't agree with your squatting, and I don't think I'd like to see you twisting for peace. I hate the sloppy way you wear your

clothes and your hair. Every time I see you I say to myself, "Heavens, people must think who on earth brought him up."

STEPHEN People must think . . . People must think . . . There you are. That's just it. That's all that everybody seems to worry about nowadays—what the neighbours think.

MARGARET That's why I'm proud of you. At least you have the courage to stand up for what you believe in.

SOUTHSTREAM Don't you mean sit down?

MARGARET (*Ignoring interruption*) No matter what your father or I or other people think—and I'm proud of you for that. I mean it.

SOUTHSTREAM Mothers are amazing. They always find something to be proud of in their sons. I suppose my mother must have been proud of me.

MARGARET (*With feeling*) Well, if she was, she must have been an amazing woman.

SOUTHSTREAM She was. But what have I done this time?

MARGARET You know very well what you've done. You're an old friend, one of the oldest friends we've got. You knew us when we were nobodies. We knew you when you were nothing. Now, at the time when he's trying to solve these ghastly problems that could end in war, you keep on attacking him in your papers.

SOUTHSTREAM My dear Margaret, that's not fair. We agreed years ago not to mix friendship with business, didn't we? If your husband found I'd been cheating

the income tax or smuggling gold watches into the country, he'd tell the authorities at once. He'd have to. His position demands it. In the same way, if your husband or you or your son, or any member of my family for that matter, does anything interesting, into my newspapers you go. My position demands it. I'll print everything, and be damned to the lot of them.

MARGARET (*Laughing*) You're not suggesting that my husband has been cheating the income tax or smuggling watches, are you?

SOUTHSTREAM Something far worse than that. He's been cheating all of us for years and years and years. He's been smuggling the facts of life past our very noses, making his speeches, while other men, far less scrupulous than he, make history. It's his job to do it. He's a democratic politician. He gets the public looking at him, listening to his speeches, mesmerised by his phrases, while the real things are done behind their backs all the time. It's like a conjurer. And he's a very good one. In my opinion his tricks have saved us at least three wars in the last two years. But nothing will stop me telling the public how he does them. It's my business. And I give you fair warning, I'm here on business now.

(*Enter the Chief Minister, mopping his brow*)

CHIEF MINISTER My, those lights are hot in there. They roast you like a pig. (*To Southstream*) Ah! I want to talk to you. (*He turns to his wife*) The speech went well, I hope. What did you think of it?

MARGARET The parts of it I heard were splendid,

darling. Have a drink. You must be thirsty after all that. (*She hands him a drink she has poured*)

CHIEF MINISTER Thank you, dear. But didn't you hear *all* my speech?

STEPHEN The visual effect was tremendous, Father. You'd have made a great actor—in the old, silent days.

(*The Chief Minister deliberately turns away to Southstream as he brandishes the newspaper which he carries*)

CHIEF MINISTER Look here! What do you know about this?

SOUTHSTREAM It's a damned good bit of writing, don't you agree?

CHIEF MINISTER Good writing, hell! Do you see what the man says—"The Chief Minister is like a barrage balloon—immobile, defensive, obsolete and full of gas."

MARGARET Oh no!

CHIEF MINISTER Oh yes! And there's a lot more in similar vein. I think you'll agree that I have been reasonable about such things all through the years. But it's become more than personally embarrassing. It's nationally dangerous. These editorials of yours are being picked up and repeated all over the world. At a time like this it's madness to have the Russians and the Americans and the Japanese and the Greeks and the Indians all reading how in my own country's Press I am being called a hypocrite. At a time like this, it's essential we preserve the appearance of national unity.

SOUTHSTREAM (*Shaking his head*) No go. I'm not going to gag my Press. I think too highly of you. It would be against all your own principles.

CHIEF MINISTER What on earth do you mean?

SOUTHSTREAM That speech you make every few months about the free men of the free Press, watchdogs of liberty, the guardians who growl and bark if there is any threat to our institutions.

STEPHEN Wuff, wuff, wuff.

SOUTHSTREAM It's the best thing you do. We put it on the front page every time.

CHIEF MINISTER I'm not asking you to stop the articles.

SOUTHSTREAM What do you want then?

CHIEF MINISTER I'd like to talk to the fellow who makes them.

SOUTHSTREAM What good will that do you?

CHIEF MINISTER I flatter myself I'd persuade him to change some of his more gross inaccuracies.

MARGARET Yes, I'd like to meet him, too.

SOUTHSTREAM No, my dear, no, no, no. Over my dead body. It's not fair. The Chief Minister would have no effect on him. None at all. The Chief Minister's wife would talk him round in no time. He'd start praising the Chief Minister and attacking me in my own newspapers.

MARGARET (*Laughing*) To do you justice, I think you'd print it.

SOUTHSTREAM Of course I would. It would interest the public enormously to see my own crowd after me.

Yes. It's an excellent idea. I must make a note of it.

MARGARET Yes, you do that! (*She goes out*)

SOUTHSTREAM Well, now that I've refused to do you a favour, will you do me one?

CHIEF MINISTER It depends. What do you want?

SOUTHSTREAM Tell me the truth. We have to bring out an edition in half an hour. Is there going to be peace or war? Are you going to do anything to help those poor devils who at this very moment, as we sit here in this pleasant room, are being hunted in the streets of their own city by a lot of tanks?

CHIEF MINISTER What is the latest on that?

SOUTHSTREAM Not a word. All communications have been cut since early morning.

CHIEF MINISTER You can tell the public that the Government is horrified at the bad faith and brutality of this assault, contrary to the most solemn treaty obligations, contrary to . . .

SOUTHSTREAM You're saying all that on T.V. tonight. Tell me the truth. I'm not going to quote you, of course. But I want to help. Would you like us to prepare people for sacrifice or surrender? Are you going to do anything about it or not?

CHIEF MINISTER We shall protest to the Chief Marshal with all the vigour at our command.

SOUTHSTREAM In other words, translating that from diplomatic terms into ordinary language, we'll do nothing.

M.M.-C

CHIEF MINISTER (*With deadly sincerity*) So you seriously want or expect me to launch this country and the world into the horrors of atomic war, do you?

SOUTHSTREAM You know I don't. No! I don't want you to do anything, except give us the facts. I don't have to run the country, thank God. I've got plenty on my hands running a newspaper. So it's to be peace?

CHIEF MINISTER Yes.

SOUTHSTREAM And their Chief Marshal and all those other fellows with the tanks smashing into that city today know that in spite of all your lectures and threats, nothing's going to happen?

CHIEF MINISTER Nothing. We've given them a clear hint. Bluff is too risky when there's a chance of war.

SOUTHSTREAM Good-bye. See you later. Oh, I took a taxi to get here. It costs money. I don't suppose you could let me have a car to take me to the office? I must get there fast.

(*Enter Margaret with freshly arranged flowers*)

Good-bye, my dear. If we could just arrange events the way you arrange flowers, what a glorious world it would be.

MARGARET If you could just make your newspaper smell a little more fragrant, we'd be grateful! Good-bye. (*Southstream goes*)

CHIEF MINISTER It's amazing how a man with all that money grudges even taking a taxi. (*To his son*) Can't

you drive the man to his office? At least that would be something useful. You sit there puffing a cigarette, smiling sarcastically and not contributing anything, not saying a word.

STEPHEN I said three words actually.

CHIEF MINISTER What were they?

STEPHEN I said, "Wuff, wuff, wuff." (*He leaves*)

(Chief Minister walks up and down. Then sits. He looks at his wife)

CHIEF MINISTER I don't know. They want me to run this country. Sometimes I think they expect me to run the world. But I don't even know how to cope with a wayward son. Oh, I'm sorry, dear. I know it upsets you when I talk about Stephen like that. But he gets more impossible every day. Can't you get him to cut his hair at least? He gets on my nerves. And I'm tired. Dead tired.

MARGARET I know. Can't you rest for a bit?

CHIEF MINISTER No. There's somebody coming now. They let our ambassador and his staff leave the city before they attacked at dawn. He brought one of the young rebel leaders with him. I've got to see them when they come. Then I've got a luncheon with the Cabinet. You really did think that speech was all right, didn't you?

MARGARET Yes, dear.

CHIEF MINISTER Sometimes I wonder what would happen if you said, "No, dear, it was terrible."

MARGARET I know just what would happen. I tried it

once. Remember?

CHIEF MINISTER No. What did happen?

MARGARET You curled up your lip like a boy who's fallen down and is trying not to cry—and you sulked for a week.

CHIEF MINISTER (*Laughing*) Secretly, you think I'm about ten years old, don't you?

MARGARET No, dear. At least twelve. (*Then with force*) No, I think you're a big man with a big job and carrying it like a giant. I think you're doing what nobody else could do half so well—something that is supremely important for us all.

CHIEF MINISTER Do you say that to convince me—or to convince yourself? It's what you always tell me. It's what I want to hear from you. It's what I cling to and depend on. But right down inside me I know it is a lie.

MARGARET Maybe I see you more clearly than you see yourself.

CHIEF MINISTER No. At a time like this I see myself as I am. I'm not a big man at all. Sometimes I wonder if anybody is really big. Taking big decisions doesn't make a man big. Talking big doesn't make a man big. But in my job you have to wear bigness like a mechanic wears overalls. It's part of your stock-in-trade. You have to pretend to be bigger than you are all the time. The people expect it of you. Even when they criticise you. They want to feel there is somebody there who is more full of wisdom and strength than themselves. And you have to believe

it yourself. Otherwise you'd never have the courage to take decisions that are really beyond the wisdom of any man to take by himself. Decisions that may literally affect the life and the death of millions of men and women. So I sign papers, give orders, push buttons, attend conferences, test the latest weapons, fly here, there and everywhere. But suddenly something inside me yells, "Stop! It's *you* doing this—you. With all your fears and with all your follies." Then I have to run to someone who will tell me how well I am doing, or I could not go on with it. And you are always there.

MARGARET You make me sound like your worst enemy.

CHIEF MINISTER Why do you say that?

MARGARET I don't want to make you a sham.

CHIEF MINISTER Oh, I don't know. Most people are. You have to be something of a sham to survive. People have got to have faith in someone in times like this. They would never have faith in a man who did not have faith in himself. And I'd never have faith in myself without you.

MARGARET It doesn't work with Stephen. I try to give him faith in something. But he hasn't got any in himself, or you, or me, or anybody. I'm worried about that boy.

CHIEF MINISTER You've worried about him for years. So have I, come to that.

MARGARET But it's been worse lately.

CHIEF MINISTER What could be worse? I complain

about the things they say of me in the Press. But think of him. Think of his public appearances in the newspapers in the last six months. Eloping with a ward-in-court. Thank Heaven the police stopped that one. Drunk in charge of a car. Caught gambling illegally in a midnight raid. Now this squatting and twisting.

MARGARET You forgot the time he was had up for hitting a man. He said it was because the man had said something rude about his father.

CHIEF MINISTER He says ruder things than that to me himself every day. No, it was probably just a cheap attempt to get me into the case and on his side. Stephen's more likely to cheer anyone who's rude to me.

MARGARET I don't know. He's a mixture. It can't be easy to be the son of someone who always has to seem so big. It must make you feel so small. But I've been particularly worried about him these last few weeks.

CHIEF MINISTER For Heaven's sake, what's he up to now?

MARGARET I don't know. He's so sour and moody. And he's spending so much money.

CHIEF MINISTER Why do you give him the money?

MARGARET I don't.

CHIEF MINISTER Don't tell me he's running into debt again. I tell you one thing. I'm just not going to pay his bills again. He'll have to learn to work for a change, even if it kills him. Has he asked you for money?

MARGARET No. He hasn't. And I'm far more worried when he doesn't ask than when he does.

(The Chief Minister's Secretary, Forbes, comes in)

SECRETARY Excuse me, sir, the Ambassador is here, with the other gentleman you expected.

CHIEF MINISTER Very well. Show the Ambassador in alone. I want a word with him first. *(Secretary goes)* I'll have to ask you to leave me for a bit, dear. But I'll have you back presently. I'd like you to meet this young revolutionary. He may be interesting.

MARGARET I'll be waiting. Stephen will be back soon. I'll take the chance to talk to him. I may get something out of him. We'll come up together when he gets back and see if you are still here.

CHIEF MINISTER *(Margaret is just going out of the door. He calls after her)* Dear. *(She stops in the doorway and looks back)* Was that speech really all right?

MARGARET *(Smiling at him)* It was perfect.

CHIEF MINISTER I can never make out whether you are smiling at me—or just smiling.

(She goes. The Secretary shows in the Ambassador)

I'm glad you are here. Did everything go well? *(The Ambassador nods)* No hold-ups? That's fine. I must say the Chief Marshal has kept his word in all the arrangements we have made with him. You've got this rebel leader with you? *(The Ambassador nods again)* What sort of fellow is he? Is he reliable?

AMBASSADOR Until this morning I thought he was the

bravest man I'd ever met in my life. Now, I'm not sure.

CHIEF MINISTER What happened?

AMBASSADOR All through these months he's been amazing—heart of iron, nerves of steel, brains like radar—with that rare knack of knowing what's going on the other side of the hill, and in the other fellow's mind. You know how it is with some people.

CHIEF MINISTER Yes. You need that sort of quality if you are to get to the top in politics.

AMBASSADOR (*Somewhat surprised*) Quite so. Quite so. Anyhow, there'd have been no revolution without him. He carried it all on his back. Dead honest over money, too. Never kept a penny for himself or his family of all the aid he was given.

CHIEF MINISTER Unusual.

AMBASSADOR Very. Early this morning I went round to their home. I offered to bring one of the family out. It was all I could manage. I only had one extra place.

CHIEF MINISTER I know all about that.

AMBASSADOR His sister was there, a young mother with a baby. They all seemed to agree that she should come with me. Then they got into some sort of a family discussion. I thought they might want to say good-bye privately, so I left them to it. In a minute or two this chap came running out of the house, jumped into the car and said, "Take me to the airport." I said, "Isn't your sister coming with me?" He shouted at me in the car as if I were a hundred

yards away from him. "No. No. It's me. I'm coming. It's all decided." We had to leave at once. There was no time for any further talk—so I brought him. I never imagined he could get into that kind of flap.

CHIEF MINISTER Do you mean he panicked?

AMBASSADOR It's difficult to say.

CHIEF MINISTER It doesn't sound too good. It would have made a far better impression on our people if he had sent his sister out and stayed there himself. The ordinary man understands that sort of thing and admires it. Never mind. It can't be helped now. Will there be any resistance in the city?

AMBASSADOR They've got nothing to resist with now except their fists.

CHIEF MINISTER What is the general position in the country?

AMBASSADOR Hopeless.

CHIEF MINISTER Do you mean taking the long-term or the short-term view?

AMBASSADOR Both. The decent elements there were in the revolt. They are the ones who will all be rounded up and killed. Every one of them. It will take a few weeks, but those other boys will do it. They're thorough. No doubt in the course of time our Embassy will reopen, we will start up what we call normal relations again. We'll decorate the streets to receive the thugs who run their show, and they'll order the crowds to cheer men like you when you are asked to visit them. We will buy their goods and sell

them ours. But I hope it will be another ambassador, not me, then. I've bitten off more than I can swallow. I feel sick.

CHIEF MINISTER That's bad luck. You've done fine work.

AMBASSADOR I've been a hired assassin. I've had to encourage people, even bribe some of them, to take a line that I knew could lead them to their death. And now it has. I've done it, because it suited the interests of my country to do so. I told them we'd support them, and they believed me. It was a gamble. We lost it. I love my country—but I love my friends there, too. And many of them will be killed unless I'm very much mistaken.

CHIEF MINISTER But you may be very much mistaken. Diplomats sometimes are.

AMBASSADOR If I am, I'll go into politics. That's where diplomats who make mistakes normally end up. I believe they do very well.

CHIEF MINISTER (*Standing up*) I think we'd better see your friend now, if you don't mind. Perhaps he'd find it easier if you went and brought him in?

AMBASSADOR Certainly. (*He leaves*)

(The Chief Minister straightens his tie in the mirror and begins to pour himself a drink as the door once more opens and the Ambassador and Nils come in. For a moment the two men face each other. Then the Chief Minister goes over with his hand outstretched and says)

CHIEF MINISTER Welcome to this country. I don't know your name.

NILS My name doesn't matter. You can call me Nils.

(Nils does not take the hand. He stares straight at the Chief Minister)

CHIEF MINISTER *(Sincerely)* I'm glad to see you, Nils.

NILS What sort of a man are you?

CHIEF MINISTER What exactly do you mean?

NILS I mean that the life of my nation, probably the life of your own nation, depends on the answer to that question.

AMBASSADOR Our friend is overtired. He's been passing through bitter days. It will be far better to sit down and talk things over quietly.

NILS They will have come to my home this morning—soon after I left. I wish you could see that home. There's a bird in a cage, a baby in a cot, a mother, two old men. By now they'll be smashed to bits, lucky to be butchered by the troops before the other devils get their hands on them and try their tricks of torture to see if they can find out anything fresh about me. It happens to be my home. But there are hundreds more like it. Do you know? Do you care?

CHIEF MINISTER Of course I know. Of course I care.

NILS I'm sorry. You must forgive me. It's true. I am overtired. I've fought them for seven days and seven nights—with guns and grenades—with knives and dynamite—with my brains, and with the muddy stuff that's left when you don't have brains any more.

But the worst is when you can't fight, and you can only imagine what's happening over there.

(The Chief Minister goes across to the sideboard, pours a drink and gives it to Nils, who takes it, looks at him, and drinks it)

CHIEF MINISTER Drink this. I understand all you're feeling. In fact, I'm feeling many of the same things. The world is full of men like you and me.

NILS I'm not like you. By God, I'm not.

CHIEF MINISTER Oh yes, you are. You're driving yourself and everyone around you frantic to do something—but you don't know exactly what to do.

NILS Do you know what to do?

CHIEF MINISTER I know what I'd like to do. I know what my people will let me do. And I know what can be done. If you add those three together, it often comes up short of what ought to be done. You see, in this country we've learned to be tolerant, not to force our views down other men's throats even if we know we're right. Men aren't alike. Nations aren't alike. What seems good to me may seem bad to others. Live and let live has become a way of life with us.

NILS Damn your tolerance. It's the thing you're most proud about and I hate it. It's the mark of a decadent society. You start by being tolerant of things you know are wrong. Then you start doing things you know are wrong. Then you begin to think right and wrong no longer exist. You end up by tolerating

anything that happens anywhere so long as it doesn't affect your comfort or your income or your reputation. You call it liberal. You'd let the whole world go to hell if you could be left in peace with a bag of gold under your pillow. And as for not forcing your ideas down other men's throats, you try and do it to men like me and nations like mine all the time.

CHIEF MINISTER That's nonsense and you know it. If you think that, why are you here? You claim you are on our side, don't you?

NILS The point is, whose side are you on? My family is being killed today. My nation is dying. What are you going to do about it?

AMBASSADOR Our country will do all it possibly can to help your people. You can be sure of that.

NILS You know, I think I chose the wrong side after all. Those others are devils. They stick at nothing. They will destroy anyone or anything that stands in their path. But at least they *have* a path. They know where they want to go. They have an end, even if the means are hellish. You are so proud of your means, your tolerance, your democracy, your decency. But you have no end at all. What is it? Where do you want to take the world? What do you stand for? You are one of those leaders who are lost, and dare not let anyone know about it.

(As he is speaking Margaret and her son, Stephen, come into the room. They are about to go out again when they find themselves in the midst of this sturdy talk, but the Chief Minister calls out to them with relief)

CHIEF MINISTER No. Come on in. Delighted to see you. (*To Nils*) I'd like to introduce you to my wife. This young man just calls himself Nils. (*Nils bows and kisses Margaret's hand*)

MARGARET But we know you over here. We've seen your picture in our papers. This is our son, Stephen.

STEPHEN That's right. At least, they've always told me so. (*Pointing to the Chief Minister and his wife*) And its quite possibly true. Who are you?

NILS Me! I am a man.

STEPHEN What a coincidence. So am I.

MARGARET (*To Nils—smoothing things*) I know your country. I've been there many times. I keep thinking of your people. I can imagine something of what you must be feeling. I'm sorry.

NILS I don't want sorrow.

MARGARET What do you want?

NILS I want someone with the courage to lead the world at a gallop to the place where it can get food, work and the hope of lasting peace. Somebody who will cut corners to get there fast. Somebody who will risk everything for it. Someone who would rather be dead than yellow.

CHIEF MINISTER Courage is one quality our people do not lack. Even our worst enemies have never accused us of cowardice.

NILS I'm not your enemy. But I accuse you of it. I've been accusing you of it ever since I came into the

room. I say you are standing aside while our people are being destroyed. Cowards! Cowards! Cowards!

AMBASSADOR You must stop this. You're doing yourself no good.

CHIEF MINISTER It's cheap to shout "coward". It costs nothing. You don't have to give orders that could plunge nations into war. You don't have to think before you shout. I do. You have the reputation for courage. I'm sure that you have done certain things to earn it. But what you did this morning wasn't very courageous, was it?

NILS (*Slowly and quietly*) What exactly do you mean?

CHIEF MINISTER You had the chance to send your sister to the safety of our country. Instead of that, you scrambled to safety yourself.

(Nils stands for a moment, then leaps at the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister stands unmoving. But Stephen with a rush grapples with Nils, who is halted and after pushing him away holds him at arm's length and looks at him as he struggles)

MARGARET No!

CHIEF MINISTER Stephen!

NILS Do you realise I know how to kill a man with my hands—and I've done it too. But you surprise me. You actually have a backbone. You can risk a fight.

STEPHEN My dear fellow. Don't be an ass. My father annoys me far more than he does you. But I suppose

there are times when you do things before you know why you're doing them. (*Embarrassed*) I lost my temper. Silly in a way.

NILS Not so silly. Anyway, it stopped me from being sillier. I want to thank you. It taught me a lesson.

STEPHEN What!

NILS Not to underestimate anybody. I certainly underestimated you.

STEPHEN Thanks.

MARGARET Supposing you two boys stop discussing each other and (*To Nils*) couldn't you tell us a few facts?

CHIEF MINISTER Look! I think you'd better leave this to us—

NILS No! I mean with your permission I would like to try and start all over again and tell Madame why I am the one who came here and not another one of my family.

MARGARET You want to tell me?

NILS I specially want to tell you. You see, someone asked me if I would—pay special attention to you—someone I love very much.

MARGARET I don't understand what you're saying, but I'm interested. Tremendously interested. And I'm sure of one thing. You're no coward.

NILS Thank you, Madame.

MARGARET Come and sit down.

NILS As you know, only one person could come here

in the plane. We all agreed it should be my sister—
except my sister.

CHIEF MINISTER You mean she refused to come.

NILS No! Not that. She said that we must decide the
question together.

MARGARET How did you decide?

NILS She told us that if we really wanted to know what
was right, God would tell us.

CHIEF MINISTER God would tell us!

AMBASSADOR I say, we shan't get very far with this sort
of thing, you know.

MARGARET We haven't got very far without it, have
we? (*To Nils*) What exactly did your sister suggest
you do?

NILS It was something my mother believed in: to lay
aside all our own points of view and listen. My sister
insisted on us trying it together. I'd known about it at
home for a long time and didn't think much of it.
This morning my sister seemed so sure of herself.
There seemed nothing else to do.

MARGARET What happened?

NILS I'll tell you what happened to me. I felt quite
clearly I was the one who ought to go. I hated the
idea. With all my heart I hated it; it was the last
thing I wanted to do.

CHIEF MINISTER I thought nothing could ever surprise
me any more. But the thing which surprises me is
that I believe this man. He's telling the truth.

NILS I knew men like you might think I was a coward.

But then each one of us had the same thought, including my sister. She said to me, "You are brave enough to go. You can give that Chief Minister something that he needs." So I came.

(There is silence)

AMBASSADOR I'm sorry. You see, I thought you had run away. I gave the Chief Minister that impression.

CHIEF MINISTER So that was how you decided?

NILS Yes.

CHIEF MINISTER It must have seemed a terrible choice.

NILS It was the hardest decision I ever took in all my life.

CHIEF MINISTER What do you suppose she meant by saying you could give me something that I need?

NILS I'm not quite sure myself, yet—

CHIEF MINISTER "Lay aside all our points of view and listen." If only we could get the answer as simply as that.

MARGARET Why not?

CHIEF MINISTER You don't know my Cabinet.

MARGARET I do. But I wasn't thinking of them.

STEPHEN Who were you thinking of?

MARGARET Our family.

AMBASSADOR *(To Nils)* Do you think you took the right decision?

NILS As I talk about it again and look at it straight, I'm sure it was right. I was right to come.

CHIEF MINISTER I admire your confidence. I admire your courage. But it doesn't solve my problem.

NILS What's that?

CHIEF MINISTER This country feels deeply for your country. We have old ties of friendship. But short of starting an atomic war we can do nothing. You know that. God knows I understand your feelings. But what *can* we do? And yet the world expects something of us. They'll all be listening to me tonight. And later I've even got to try and talk to your people again—on the foreign radio.

NILS Yes—we heard you last night.

CHIEF MINISTER What did you think of it?

NILS You have a very good bedside manner, Mr. Chief Minister. Unfortunately, when the patient is dying . . . (*He shrugs his shoulders*)

CHIEF MINISTER I understand. (*Breaking off*) Could I ask you to meet me again later in the day? I have to see some of my Cabinet colleagues almost immediately. They all want to know what to do—and all want to tell me what not to do.

STEPHEN Would you care to come and lunch with me?

CHIEF MINISTER (*To Nils*) Go with him if you like—or I can give you lunch here privately—whichever you prefer.

NILS I'll go with your son. He interests me. Can I go as I am? I've nothing else.

STEPHEN I'll lend you something if you want.

MARGARET If Stephen can go as he is, you can go in anything.

NILS I wish you'd come too, Madame.

MARGARET Me? Why?

NILS Well, maybe I'll tell you over lunch.

MARGARET Then I'd like to come with you. I'll just go and get my hat and coat. (*She goes*)

STEPHEN I know where we'll go. There's a restaurant here, a good one, near the Parliament Building.

NILS Roast duck! And the gipsy band.

STEPHEN Yes. How did you know?

NILS Oh, I remember someone speaking to me about it ages ago. Someone I was fond of. Someone who would like to come with us today if he could . . .

(*Nils goes*)

CHIEF MINISTER Stephen! (*Calling him back. They look at each other*) It's a funny thing to say—but I felt grateful when you tried to hit that man just now. I always want to hit people who hate me—but it's bad politics. Anyway, thank you.

STEPHEN (*Again surly*) Don't mention it.

CHIEF MINISTER Tell me, feeling the way you do about me, why on earth did you do it?

STEPHEN (*Over his shoulder, as he goes*) Oh, go to hell!

(*The Chief Minister looks after him in hurt annoyance and bewilderment*)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE I

An elegant lunch-table in a corner of Rossi's restaurant. Off-stage we hear the tinkle of a gipsy orchestra playing light music. A waiter hovers in the background and at the table are seated Margaret, Stephen and Nils. There is an atmosphere of stiffness and gloom. Nils, sitting very erect, is tackling the remains of a duck. Stephen, lounging with his leg over the arm of the chair, is smoking a cigarette and reading a newspaper. Margaret is in between making the best of the situation.

As the curtain rises a Press photographer comes in, takes a quick flash and goes. A number of the clientele of the restaurant are present during this scene.

NILS That's the third. I wish to hell they'd leave us alone.

STEPHEN (*Without looking up*) Oh, don't bother. They take pictures of me all the time.

MARGARET Don't be silly, darling, it isn't you this time. It's him. (*To Nils*) They've all seen your picture in our papers. They recognise you.

STEPHEN Young hero comes to town and all that.

NILS Don't be an idiot. I've never felt less like a hero. Look at me—my nation crushed, my comrades shot down. I'm not a hero. I'm a traitor.

MARGARET Don't say it. You mustn't say it. You came to this country because you felt it was right. You're only a traitor if you run away from that now.

NILS God! I can't believe it's real, all this. It's so

remote from the real things of life. I'd like to wake them up somehow—to bang on the table and yell.

STEPHEN (*Casually*) Go ahead.

NILS Do they realise what time it is, all these blind comfortable people with their elegant white linen, their tinkley little band? I want to shout at them all, "You're as plump and soft and ripe for plucking as those ducks were a day or two ago. You think as far ahead as they did and talk as much sense as they did, and will come to the same end as they did."

STEPHEN Splendid. Go right ahead. I'll call for silence.

(*He picks up his spoon*)

MARGARET (*Hastily*) You'll do nothing of the kind.

STEPHEN Do 'em good. I spend a large part of my life yelling, heckling, making rude noises in public, refusing to stand for the National Anthem and generally trying to wake people up.

NILS Why do you refuse to stand for your National Anthem?

STEPHEN It means nothing to anybody any more. It's bunk.

WAITER (*Coming forward*) I hope everything has been to your satisfaction, Madam?

MARGARET Everything has been perfect. That is—the food has been.

WAITER Is there anything further you require?

MARGARET I'll just have a cup of coffee.

NILS Bring me one, too, please.

STEPHEN Bring me a large brandy.

(Waiter clears the table)

There doesn't seem to be anything new in this paper about your country. They just say all communications with the capital have been cut and there's no report.

NILS There is only one report possible now. The end. Finish.

MARGARET Do let me look. *(She takes newspaper)* I'll see if I can find anything.

(Waiter goes)

NILS *(To Stephen)* You know, it's strange. I hate your guts, I despise everything you seem to stand for, yet somehow I can get along with you. Why do you think that is?

STEPHEN I think I can say much the same about you. Of course, mind you, basically I've far more sympathy with your enemies than I have with you people.

NILS *(Bristling)* You actually dare say that.

STEPHEN Oh, they make their mistakes, I grant you.

NILS Mistakes! You should experience some of their mistakes! *(He leaps up in rage. Then as a waiter comes forward he realises he is attracting attention. He sits hurriedly)*

STEPHEN But at least they are creating something new. If I had to choose between what they are doing in the world today and all the plushy unreality that is the hallmark of our so-called democracy, I wouldn't hesitate.

NILS Under their Order, looking and talking the way you do, you'd survive about ten minutes.

STEPHEN I used to think we were fighting a lie over there with a half-truth here. Now I've come to the conclusion we're fighting a half-truth there with a lie here.

MARGARET That's rather good, dear. (*Looking up*) Unfortunately it's not original. It's in an article here in this paper. You must have just read it.

STEPHEN (*Taken aback for a moment*) So I must! Oh well, everybody quotes all the time. The art is to quote the right people at the right time.

MARGARET It's from that perfectly horrible article all about your father.

STEPHEN Oh, that! I wouldn't worry about that. They churn it out by the yard. (*Turning back to Nils*) Mind you, I have to admit if I was in your shoes, in your country, I should probably be on your side.

NILS Well, if I was in your country and my father was the Chief Minister, I'd probably be squatting in the streets, getting scooped up by the police. At least it would be something to embarrass him.

STEPHEN Interesting that you understand why I do it. My father never understands anything as simple as that.

MARGARET I know why you two understand each other. You are both fighters in your different ways. You are both rebels against the Powers that be.

NILS Yes, and both our rebellions seem just about equally futile.

STEPHEN The Powers that be win every time.

MARGARET If your father is one of them, I'm not sure. This wretched article is perfectly beastly. "Burst that balloon!" Honestly, I could ring that Southstream's neck.

STEPHEN Good old Ma! You've joined the frustrated rebels, too, I see.

(Enter Waiter with coffee)

WAITER *(To Nils)* Excuse me, sir, but on behalf of the staff here, we just wanted to say, "Welcome to this country."

NILS You actually know me?

WAITER Naturally, sir. I came from your country many years ago—before you were born. And some of the fellows in the band, too. We've not forgotten.

NILS Well, thanks. I'm glad to see you. Please thank the others very much.

WAITER I will. We're pleased to have you with us, sir.

(He goes)

NILS They know who I am. They seem to care.

MARGARET I think our people feel very deeply what's happening in your country. You find it everywhere. It's like a rising tide. The trouble is they just don't know what to do.

NILS They're exactly like me. I don't know what to do either.

MARGARET (*Roused*) It's not true. If you say that again, I shall think you really are a coward after all.

NILS What do you mean?

MARGARET Have you forgotten your sister and her faith that you were meant to be the one to come over here to do something for all of us?

NILS No, I haven't forgotten. But what? I've thrown my weight around, behaved like a boor, blown off steam at the Ambassador and the Chief Minister, but it hasn't had the slightest effect.

STEPHEN It never does.

MARGARET (*With growing conviction*) You know, I'm just realising we're all alike. We all know whom we hate. (*To Nils*) For you it's the dictators. (*To Stephen*) For you, it's what they call the Establishment. For me, it's the people who hurt your father. This article makes me furious. We know what we hate and we hate it passionately. We know what we're fighting against. If only we knew what we were fighting for. Anyway, whatever it is we are fighting for it is far, far too small.

NILS Would you call the freedom of your country small?

MARGARET No, of course not. But what kind of freedom do you really want? To do what you like? Freedom just like ours?

NILS Good God. I don't want to live like this.

(*He indicates all the things he hates in the world around him*)

MARGARET But unless you fight for something greater, this is what you'll get. This or something worse.

STEPHEN She's right there. Life in your country before the revolution was pretty much like this. Look what came of it.

MARGARET (*Turning to Stephen*) And as for what you're fighting for, I don't believe you know what it is either. Whatever it is, it looks pretty drab and messy to me and I don't believe any sensible person would care for it at all.

NILS Madame, you couldn't put it better.

STEPHEN (*To Margaret*) Well, you're simply fighting for your own comfort—the *status quo*, peace at any price. Your husband's success and to hell with all the others.

MARGARET (*Slowly*) You know, you're right. It's true. But I've been wondering what could happen if only there was something great and all-inclusive that we could each of us fight for together.

STEPHEN Such as . . . ?

MARGARET I don't know yet. I can't put it into words. But supposing some army from Mars invaded the world.

STEPHEN O Lord, Mother, let's keep to this world.

MARGARET I mean, wouldn't we all unite together to save ourselves from common destruction?

NILS We would, you know.

STEPHEN But there is no army from Mars. We're simply destroying ourselves.

MARGARET Can't we think of something big enough to

need all of us?

NILS What?

MARGARET It has to do with the thing your sister did in your home last night. There must be a way of deciding things for the world that's bigger than any of us or our point of view, bigger than the East or the West. We're all meant to be part of a world free from hate and fear and the selfishness that is destroying us. We are meant to take on the job of building that world together.

STEPHEN You're talking like one of Father's speeches. I do believe you write them, Mother.

MARGARET We need a common goal, a common theme, a common strategy.

NILS What kind of strategy?

MARGARET Take today. Everybody knows it's crucial in the life of the world. It could bring atomic war. My husband doesn't know what to do. Nor do our Allies. I doubt if those people who are trying to crush you know fully what to do. They have their difficulties and divisions, too. But you've come over here and there must be something we're meant to do.

NILS It doesn't sound very practical.

MARGARET No, but your sister made it practical, didn't she?

NILS How?

MARGARET Well, you are here today. We are talking together. I don't know if God planned it. I certainly didn't.

NILS Nor did I.

MARGARET We might be able to find out the next step if we really wanted to take it together.

NILS I see what you mean—be silent here in this restaurant like we were in my home last night?

MARGARET You say you found out what to do then. We might find out what to do now—for your country and for ours.

STEPHEN My dear Mother, I'm perfectly ready to sit on my backside in the street, blaspheme or go to gaol. But I'm not prepared to meditate in a public restaurant over the carcass of a dead duck.

MARGARET You're just worried what people might think.

STEPHEN (*Indignantly*) I never worry what people might think. All right, go ahead, go ahead. Don't mind me.

MARGARET (*To Nils*) What about you? You know you have a mission to perform over here. You need to find out how to perform it. Isn't it common sense? If we fail, we haven't lost anything, and if we succeed . . .

NILS Madame, may I say you remind me very much of my mother and my sister. You have the same tenacity, the same irresistible conviction.

STEPHEN I bet you never listened to your mother.

NILS Nor to my sister—until this morning.

MARGARET Women are worth listening to sometimes.

NILS I'm beginning to believe it. (*He raises his glass*) I would like to propose a toast to you and my mother,

my sister—all of you. To the weaker sex!

(As he raises his glass the orchestra strikes up a martial tune. Suddenly he puts his glass down, leaps to his feet and stands to attention)

MARGARET But how wonderful of them! It's his National Anthem.

(She stands. She turns to her son with ferocious conviction)

Get up. If you want me ever to speak to you again, get up.

(Slowly he does so, and putting out his cigarette he stands at attention as the curtain falls)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Later the same afternoon in the Chief Minister's room. The Ambassador is in a chair, the Chief Minister standing. The large windows are open and we hear the subdued murmur of a crowd outside in the street. The Secretary steps into the room from the balcony and closes the doors.

SECRETARY I made the announcement to the crowd, sir, exactly as you instructed me.

CHIEF MINISTER And what was the response?

SECRETARY It's rather odd, sir. There was practically no audible response at all. A few cheers, and a few boos. (*As the Chief Minister says nothing*) I think on the whole there were more cheers than boos, sir.

CHIEF MINISTER Forbes, you don't have to encourage me.

SECRETARY Most of them are silent.

CHIEF MINISTER How many are there?

SECRETARY More than a hundred. More seem to be coming all the time.

CHIEF MINISTER You told them I had no intention of appearing or speaking until my speech over the television tonight?

SECRETARY Yes, but still they just stay.

CHIEF MINISTER I don't like it.

AMBASSADOR I remember certain occasions in the war when the crowds were like that. They sensed something was going to happen. They didn't know what,

but they had a feeling it was big. So they would stand around the Palace or the Chief Minister's house.

CHIEF MINISTER Well, they're wrong. They're wrong. Nothing's going to happen. We have just been three hours in Cabinet and there's absolutely nothing to be done, except protest, of course. We will do that forcefully. (*To Secretary*) All right, Forbes, you may go, but keep me in touch with all Press and radio reactions and anything you get about any demonstrations of public opinion—good, bad or worse.

SECRETARY Yes, sir. (*He goes*)

AMBASSADOR That crowd out there want action.

CHIEF MINISTER Of course they want action. I want action. The trouble is if they don't get action they'll be wanting blood, too—my blood.

AMBASSADOR Something very deep has been stirred in them by the heroism of those Freedom Fighters over there and the ruthless way they have been mown down by tanks and guns.

CHIEF MINISTER I know. They're a warm-hearted people, and they hate injustice. Unfortunately with Southstream stirring them up all the time in the Press they want to take it all out on me. Have you seen his latest editorial? On the front page. Do they normally print editorials on the front page?

(*Hands him article*)

AMBASSADOR I'm not an expert on the Press. But I imagine the answer is No.

CHIEF MINISTER Then why in heaven's name do they

print it on the front page today?

AMBASSADOR (*As he skims through it*) Again I can't give you an accurate answer. My guess, speaking as an ordinary member of the reading public, would be that they want to draw attention to it on this day of crisis. (*The Chief Minister stops and looks with suspicion at the Ambassador*)

CHIEF MINISTER You don't seem to be taking this thing seriously. It's a very serious matter, saying I'm the architect of a policy that's failed. It's a damned lie. (*Ambassador says nothing*) Look, don't you agree?

AMBASSADOR You put me in a difficulty, Chief Minister. I did send constant warning in my despatches that our policies were bound to fail unless we were willing to back them by force. It's true that you seem to have disregarded what I have told you. No, I don't think I could go so far as to call it a damned lie. Perhaps an ordinary sort of lie, but not a damned one.

(*The Ambassador hands back the paper without comment. The Chief Minister looks at him*)

CHIEF MINISTER I say it's outrageous. Since when have the Press sunk to that kind of stuff?

AMBASSADOR If that's a serious question, I should say ever since you and I could remember.

CHIEF MINISTER Anyway it's a damned lie. (*He looks at the Ambassador*) All right! If it makes you any happier—it's a lie.

(*Enter Secretary*)

SECRETARY Mr. Southstream, Chief Minister.

M.M.—E

CHIEF MINISTER Yes, bring him at once. (*Secretary goes*)
I have got to stop this sort of publication somehow. It's damaging to the country as well as to myself. I have known this man for years. I always thought he was a friend of mine, but he owns this rag and allows this sort of thing to continue. I have got to find out who's responsible for it.

AMBASSADOR Perhaps your friend writes the stuff himself.

CHIEF MINISTER No. That's one thing I can be sure about. Can't write to save his life.

AMBASSADOR I have often wondered what were the real qualifications for running a newspaper. Now I know.
(*The Secretary opens the door, shows in Southstream and leaves*)

SOUTHSTREAM (*Coming briskly forward*) Sorry to butt in on you again. But I thought you ought to take a look at this before you see it in the paper. What's going on out there, anyway?

CHIEF MINISTER You ought to know. You're largely responsible. What have you dug up now?

SOUTHSTREAM Just a candid shot in a neighbouring restaurant.

(*He hands a Press photograph to the Chief Minister*)

CHIEF MINISTER My wife and son and this rebel leader fellow. They look like soldiers on parade. What are they doing?

SOUTHSTREAM This young fellow was evidently recognised in Rossi's as the man whose heroic exploits

everybody's been reading about. The band played his national Anthem. Then the whole crowd in there cheered and applauded like mad. All the men wanted to shake hands with him and the girls wanted to kiss him. One of my men happened to be there and wanted an interview, of course. But they gave him the slip. Old Rossi let them out by a side door and they disappeared.

CHIEF MINISTER Where did they go?

SOUTHSTREAM Don't know. That was three hours ago and nobody's tracked them down since. But it's quite a story and quite a picture. It looks as if your wife and even your son are lined up with this young man.

CHIEF MINISTER And you're going to print it?

SOUTHSTREAM Of course I am going to print it. The public are very interested in your family just now. It looks as if they are very interested in this young man.

CHIEF MINISTER And thanks largely to you they are out to get me. I want you to know I intend to find out who wrote that article of yours today and I intend to deal with him, if it's the last thing I do.

SOUTHSTREAM It may be the last thing you do as Chief Minister. I flatter myself I understand the tides of public opinion and at the moment it looks as if they are running out pretty fast for you. And it's not us causing the tide. We never do, though we like to think we do. We're just part of it.

CHIEF MINISTER You have your job to do. I have mine. But these articles of yours go too far.

SOUTHSTREAM It's my responsibility to judge that.

CHIEF MINISTER I hope you understand your responsibility. It is easy to write editorials damning me.

SOUTHSTREAM Is it? There are very few who can do it well. This man does it very well.

CHIEF MINISTER It's just a lot of dirty personal abuse—put together cleverly, I grant you—but calculated to weaken my position and at the same time calling for me to take a strong line. I happen to be the person who has to decide policy. Do you suppose I wouldn't like to be thought forthright and daring—a man of action? Of course I would. I am tempted to do it every day. It's cheap, easy and dangerous. I happen to have the lives of millions of people in my hands. And when I seem to twist and turn and prevaricate, to say much and do little, believe me, it is of those millions that I am thinking.

SOUTHSTREAM I think of the millions, too, those millions who buy my paper. I love every one of them. Bless their woolly little minds. Sometimes, like the Government, they need a darn good jolt.

(They are interrupted by loud cheers from the crowd outside)

CHIEF MINISTER What are they up to now? *(He starts for the window)* No, I had better not go. I will send for Forbes. He can go out and look.

AMBASSADOR I will go out. Nobody knows me. They will just think I am one of the hired hands. *(Muttering as he goes)* And so I am, by Jove, so I am.

SOUTHSTREAM The crowd are excited all right. I

haven't heard them like that for years.

AMBASSADOR (*Speaking to them from the window*) It's your wife, Mr. Chief Minister, and the young man, Nils. They are trying to get into the house, but the crowd have recognised him and they won't let him go. They are cheering like mad and practically mobbing the fellow. It looks as if the police are making a way for them now.

CHIEF MINISTER What about my wife?

AMBASSADOR She's all right. She looks fine. She is smiling and waving. To tell you the truth she looks as if she is thoroughly enjoying the whole thing.

(*We hear the crowd singing "For he's a jolly good fellow"*)

They've just got inside. The police are holding the crowds back. There's hundreds of them now. It's an amazing demonstration of something.

CHIEF MINISTER Of course it's an amazing demonstration of something—but of what?

AMBASSADOR I don't know.

CHIEF MINISTER Shut the window. They might get a glimpse of me. Heaven knows what they'd start singing then.

(*Enter Nils and Margaret. She looks radiant*)

CHIEF MINISTER What have you been doing?

MARGARET Oh, darling! We've had such a time. We were practically torn in pieces by the crowd. It's the first time I've been in the centre of it all. You've always been with me before.

CHIEF MINISTER Where on earth have you been all this time?

MARGARET If you really want to know, we've been to the zoo.

CHIEF MINISTER You have been to the zoo!

MARGARET Yes. It's easy to explain really. There was quite a commotion at Rossi's at lunch when they discovered who Nils was. They played his National Anthem.

CHIEF MINISTER I know all about that—thanks to the alertness of my friend here—(*Indicating Southstream*) It will all be appearing in the Press with your photograph.

SOUTHSTREAM But that's not the real story, I'm sure of it. Why did you go to the zoo?

MARGARET We had to get away somewhere. We didn't want any more excitements and we were afraid of reporters.

CHIEF MINISTER You were right to be afraid of reporters.

AMBASSADOR But the zoo's full of them. They keep them in cages there.

MARGARET Besides, we wanted to be quiet and think, so we all rushed out of Rossi's, grabbed a taxi, and when the driver asked "Where to, lady?" I simply said, "To the zoo."

CHIEF MINISTER (*With colossal restraint*) And why did you say the zoo?

MARGARET Because it is the very best place in the

world to disappear. Didn't you know that?

CHIEF MINISTER No.

MARGARET Nobody ever notices people at the zoo. The animals are so much more interesting.

CHIEF MINISTER I see.

MARGARET So in a quiet and remote corner of the reptile house, I think it was . . .

NILS The insect house.

MARGARET You're right. The insect house. We all three of us sat down and . . . but that's a story in itself. Nils had better tell it.

SOUTHSTREAM I would very much like to hear that story, young man.

CHIEF MINISTER (*Intervening*) Wait a minute. Don't say a word. I am sure you would very much like to hear that story. But you have heard quite enough and done enough harm already. You get back to your newspaper, or at any rate leave us alone here. This young man stays here with me and he doesn't say a word to the Press or anybody else until he has talked to me.

NILS Yes, sir. I think you are quite right.

SOUTHSTREAM I think he is quite right, too. (*To Nils*) But when he does let you go, don't forget the story is mine, exclusively.

CHIEF MINISTER We will see about that. Meanwhile you can take the Ambassador with you. He will give you some background material for your newspaper.

He will write you a feature article. And I hope it's as dull as his despatches. (*The Ambassador goes*)

SOUTHSTREAM Well, at least he can give us some facts. That'll be a welcome change. Good-bye. I'll be back later. (*He goes*)

CHIEF MINISTER Yes, I'm afraid he will. When times are difficult, these fellows from the Press are always back later. Now, young man, you had better explain yourself, and you will have to do it pretty well, I warn you. Sit down.

NILS First of all I want to say, sir, that I came here under false pretences.

CHIEF MINISTER I thought as much. You were running away after all. All that stuff about your sister was nonsense.

MARGARET It is not nonsense. It's the whole point.

CHIEF MINISTER You keep quiet and let him explain.

MARGARET Sorry, darling.

NILS It's all true about my sister and why I came. But my purpose was to enlist you to fight for us. I couldn't do it. It made me savage with anger.

CHIEF MINISTER Yes.

NILS But now I see the real purpose of my coming is far, far bigger. I was just a young rebel filled with hate—hate against our enemies, of course, but also hate against your people, above all hate against you. I felt, perhaps unfairly, that you had led us on, roused our hopes, and left us flat. Of course, we fight for our liberation and I believe you ought to help us. But

hate is too small a thing on which to build national policy. My hate clouded my thinking. It made it impossible to think in terms of statesmanship, or consider any interests except our own. I was ready to destroy your nation, even to risk plunging the world into war, to have you do what we want. Well, today, this afternoon with your wife and your son, Stephen, I shed my hate for ever. I shed it for ever.

MARGARET And I, too. You know, dear, I have hated the people who attacked you and it has confused everything. Now it's like suddenly becoming young again. It's like the gift of a new heart and a new spirit and a new hat in spring.

CHIEF MINISTER The food in Rossi's is always good, but it sounds to me as if the drink was the trouble today. Did you have too many cocktails?

MARGARET Not one.

NILS We agreed this afternoon that the world situation was such that something entirely new is called for in the way of statesmanship. Human wisdom has failed—in your country and mine, and in the countries the other side of the curtain. The wisest of their leaders know it. So we decided to see what God would have us do—how to give up our own plans and find His plan, not only for ourselves but for our nations.

CHIEF MINISTER For Heaven's sake. We can't give up our plans.

MARGARET I thought you said before lunch you hadn't got a plan.

CHIEF MINISTER Be quiet. This is a waste of time. It's impractical. It's nonsense.

NILS Your plans, such as they are, always seem impractical to us—and nonsense. But during this afternoon I saw how wrong it was and how unreasonable to blame you for everything. Whatever has happened in our country, we ourselves are mostly to blame. We are just as selfish as you are. We lived selfishly and blindly and decadently for years and years before our enemies took over.

CHIEF MINISTER But I don't regard my country as selfish. We have done our best so far as we have seen it.

(There is a knock and the Secretary enters hurriedly)

SECRETARY I thought you ought to know, sir, that the crowd outside has doubled in the last hour. They are still very quiet, but it is definitely a hostile crowd.

CHIEF MINISTER What makes you say that?

SECRETARY We have had people out among them. There seems to be a lot of toughs stirring them up. They're looking for trouble.

CHIEF MINISTER Nothing else?

SECRETARY Well, one odd thing is that they are handing out balloons. All sorts of people are carrying balloons. There are dozens of them.

(Enter Stephen. He has brushed his hair, has put on a tie and is much neater)

CHIEF MINISTER What do you want?

STEPHEN It's only me, Father. But never mind about me. I have been moving around in that crowd. There are people out there among them with a definite plan. Some I know. Some I don't know.

CHIEF MINISTER I don't know what you're talking about.

STEPHEN They are spreading rumours and all kinds of lies. Believe me, Father, they are not out to pull down a government, they are out to destroy the nation. They are the ones giving everybody balloons. It is a considered plan to undermine you.

CHIEF MINISTER Balloons? I think I understand. Anyway, what is the matter with you? I should have thought you would have been out there with them. You usually are when there's trouble around.

STEPHEN You have got to listen to me. This is much more than a personal attack. Since talking with Nils today I have understood that the same forces which are mowing down his friends with tanks and guns are endlessly working to divide and destroy us with lies and smears. I've been completely blind to them and have been used by them.

CHIEF MINISTER I dare say you are right, but what has it all got to do with you?

STEPHEN It's got everything to do with me. You have got to try and understand. I wrote that article about you today.

MARGARET No!

CHIEF MINISTER You did what?

STEPHEN I wrote it and I have written all the articles like it in that paper for the last three months. I have been working for Southstream.

CHIEF MINISTER You? You can't write. You aren't capable of doing it.

NILS Perhaps you have made the same mistake, sir, that I first did—of underestimating your son.

MARGARET Is that how you got all the money you have been spending lately?

STEPHEN Yes, Mother. I earned every penny of it.

MARGARET Oh! I'm so relieved.

CHIEF MINISTER Relieved! Relieved! Do you realise what he is saying? I still don't believe a word of it. But if it is true, *if* it is true I say, what in Heaven's name made you do it?

STEPHEN You were always telling me to get a job, weren't you?

CHIEF MINISTER A job, yes. But not a traitor's job.

STEPHEN I felt I was entitled to my opinions, too, and to express them if I could. I don't regret any of that even now. Many of those opinions I still hold. But this afternoon I have realised the real reason why I took the job and wrote those articles. I felt I simply had to prove to someone, even if only to myself, that I was a man, too. I have spent my whole life so far failing to measure up to what you expected of me. I have been a disappointment to you again and again.

I have hated myself for it and then I have hated you. If I couldn't make you love me, I wanted to hurt you for it. I fought to protect you one moment and tore you to bits the next. It seemed the only way to make you understand that I was a person, a being, a man with a life of his own—not just the son who had to live as if he belonged to you, to be robbed of the sunlight under your shadow all his days.

CHIEF MINISTER If you really wrote those articles, you didn't even have the decency to sign your own name.

STEPHEN I didn't want to embarrass you, Father. And I hadn't the guts to tell you.

CHIEF MINISTER Embarrass me? You have made me an object of hate and contempt from one end of the land to the other. You have jeered at me and sneered at me and even printed details about me that were private. I never want to see you again.

STEPHEN All right. You are entitled to say it. But before I go I would like to tell you that I learned something today that neither you nor Mother ever taught me. I have learned the rottenness and wrongness of a life given only to proving something about myself. It's damned selfish. It's hurt you terribly.

CHIEF MINISTER Is that all you have to say? If that's all, get out!

STEPHEN All right, Father.

(For the first time we hear the roar of the crowd outside. We hear the words shouted, "Resign! Resign!" "We want the balloon!" "Burst that balloon!" The son stops and everyone in the room is still)

MARGARET (*To the Chief Minister*) It sounds as if they are telling you to get out, too. (*Pausing, as shouting continues, "Resign! Resign!"*) Are you going to do it?

CHIEF MINISTER What do you think? The country is at stake. I will fight them if it's the last thing I do.

MARGARET (*Turning to Stephen*) Your father is not going to give up. Are you going to give up?

STEPHEN (*Coming back into the room*) No, I think I'll stay.

MARGARET We all desperately need each other.

CHIEF MINISTER Now you shut up and leave things to me. I've got to think.

MARGARET (*Quietly*) No, I will not shut up. I am going to fight now as I never have that you be a real father to your son and a real father to your country.

CHIEF MINISTER I am not going to change my mind whatever you say.

MARGARET I don't want you to change your mind. I want you to change everything—your motives, your aims, your habits. I want you to change your country—not only your country but the world. How foolish I've been! For years I've been trying to keep the peace between you and your son and you are both exactly alike.

CHIEF MINISTER and STEPHEN Rubbish!

MARGARET It is not rubbish. You are both out to prove to the world how big you are. And all I do is to please you and pat you and spoil you. And I'm never going to do it again.

CHIEF MINISTER But Margaret!

(We hear the crowd again)

MARGARET No! I won't be a cushion and I won't be your comfort, when you are doing something that is absolutely wrong.

CHIEF MINISTER What the hell do you want me to do?

MARGARET *(Slowly and carefully)* You must stand like a man, as our son at last is trying to do. Don't cling to me. Stand like a man before God.

STEPHEN Right now, Father, I think the country needs you. And you, strangely enough, seem to need me.

(Stephen steps out on to the balcony, and there is a burst of booing. Then Nils steps out and suddenly a tremendous cheer rises from the crowd. As the cheering continues Southstream comes into the room)

STEPHEN *(Speaking to crowd)* My father wants me to tell you he is not going to speak to you now. Please, will you listen to me. He has tremendous decisions on his shoulders, decisions that can mean life or death for all of us, even for the whole world. Our friend Nils is here to help solve these problems, but my father needs quiet at this time. *(Boos from the crowd)* And if you will give me your attention, I would like to say this: I believe he needs, above all, your help and your faith. He will be speaking on the air to the whole world tonight. *(Voice from the crowd, "Burst that balloon!")* Maybe. But if you turn on the National Television you may see the balloon go up.

(There is laughter from the crowd and some cheering. Stephen turns back into the room and closes the windows.)

There is a moment's silence.)

SOUTHSTREAM Would someone kindly explain to me just what the hell is going on here.

(No one answers. No one seems to know how to answer)

(To Chief Minister) I always knew you were a sly one when it comes to getting out of a tight corner, but I'll admit this beats the lot. Getting your son to speak for you. That was clever. How the hell did you make him do it?

CHIEF MINISTER I didn't make him. I've never been able to make him do anything. But . . . something's happened that I don't understand. He came to my help just when I needed him most. *(To Stephen)* I know that I ought to say to you that I'm sorry, Stephen. But somehow, in view of all that has been between us, that seems too easy, too small. I think I'd rather just say thank you. And can we—could we . . . well, continue together?

MARGARET I've always known that if you two got together you could do anything. It's what I've always longed for.

NILS This is what the whole world long for. We have a Chief Marshal in our country. He has a son, too. I know him well. We were at military school together. He hates his father and his father hates him. You're finding the very thing he needs—and the thing he wants.

CHIEF MINISTER If we really had something they want, perhaps we could do something worthwhile together.

MARGARET We could, if we just began to live the things we've always talked about—our faith as a Christian nation.

STEPHEN It's what I've despised and hated.

MARGARET Because people like us have made it a hollow sham. But it could be real, as it's real with us today.

CHIEF MINISTER You know, I've never thought of winning my enemies. Only of beating them. For the first time I'm facing the fact that we've got to think and plan unselfishly, for the world. My God! That speech I recorded for tonight won't do. It's nothing but hot air. It won't do. Forbes! (*Goes to door*) Forbes! Where the devil are you?

SECRETARY (*Entering*) Yes, sir?

CHIEF MINISTER Oh, there you are. Look, Forbes, ring the National Broadcasting immediately and tell them they'll just have to cancel that speech. Hurry!

SECRETARY Yes, sir! That's going to cause quite an upheaval.

CHIEF MINISTER I know, I know. But that speech has got to be withdrawn. Tell them I'll be in touch with them later. (*Forbes goes*)

STEPHEN I promised those people that the balloon would go up tonight, Father.

CHIEF MINISTER Yes—and for the first time, I don't know what to say.

SOUTHSTREAM That's encouraging. I've always known exactly what you were going to say.

CHIEF MINISTER It's not a new speech we need, or even a new policy. It's a new purpose in everything we do. It will mean changing everything in me and all I have stood for—it would mean starting again.

MARGARET Exactly. Just that. A simple decision to be governed by God.

NILS And for men governed by God to govern the world.

CHIEF MINISTER Is it practical?

STEPHEN We could make it practical.

SOUTHSTREAM How?

NILS By finding out together what is the right thing to do for my nation and for the world tonight—something that will give something new to everybody on earth—a challenge to your Cabinet and to mine.

CHIEF MINISTER It's too late to save your people.

MARGARET It's not too late.

NILS It has worked so far.

MARGARET Let's try and see.

NILS That is what my sister said to all of us only this morning. "Let's try and see."

SOUTHSTREAM I don't get all this. I'm off.

CHIEF MINISTER I've always wanted you to go. Now, oddly enough, I'd like you to stay.

SOUTHSTREAM Not me. I've got to catch my edition.

STEPHEN (*Looking at his watch*) You've got two hours yet.

SOUTHSTREAM Don't contradict me, young man. If you do, you'll be out of a job.

MARGARET Why do you really want to go?

SOUTHSTREAM I'm not too keen on all this. I'll write about it. It's a good story. And I'll listen to that speech tonight with considerable interest. But this business of being governed by God. It sounds too much like taking orders. I gave that up years ago. I'm the one who gives orders now. I like it that way—and that's the way I'm going to stay. Good night.
(*To the Chief Minister*) Good luck. (*He goes*)

MARGARET And that's part of the real story. Millions of people who do the wrong thing because they are too proud or too afraid to do what in their heart they know to be right.

CHIEF MINISTER I seem to have been doing the wrong things all my life. It's no good brooding about that now. I want to find out what to say tonight.

NILS (*Slowly*) I want to find out what to do.

MARGARET You will. You will.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE III

Back in the room in the occupied country. It is midnight. The family are there as before: the Uncle asleep on the couch, the daughter in her rocking-chair, the baby asleep in the cot, the father standing near the window. The bird is in its cage, but does not sing. At the door is a young Officer. His uniform is smart and trim. He has a revolver in his hand. There is silence as he paces across the room, picking up odd belongings, including the army cap left behind by Nils. He goes over to the Father, speaking firmly but not too roughly)

OFFICER Where is your son?

(No one replies. The Officer opens the door, looks out into the passage, closes it again and turns back to the Father)

Where is your son Nils? There's his cap. Where is he?

FATHER *(Wearily)* He's not here.

OFFICER Where's he hiding?

(He goes over to the Uncle, shaking and waking him)

(More harshly) Wake up. No sleep for any of you till you tell what you know.

(Shouting) Wake up!

UNCLE *(Waking up with a series of snorts and groans)*
What's that? Oh, it's you, Captain. You don't know what you did then, Captain. You interrupted the most beautiful dream.

OFFICER Wake up, or I'll see you get nightmares.

(*He shakes him again*)

UNCLE (*Sitting up*) I was dreaming of roast duck. Do you know, I could smell that delicious gravy. There was wild rice with it and those little pieces of orange, and fresh green peas.

OFFICER (*Shaking him hard*) Where is Nils?

UNCLE I wouldn't be surprised if he isn't enjoying just such a dish now—a late supper—a good wine.

OFFICER Be quiet. I warn you. You'd better cooperate. It won't be long before the Secret Police arrive. They have their ways of getting information. As an old friend of Nils, I'd like to spare you that. (*To Lena*) You know where he is.

LENA Yes, we do. We may as well tell him, Father. Nils is out of the country—in the West.

OFFICER That's a lie. How would he get there?

LENA He left with the Ambassador whose safe-conduct your people arranged early this morning. There was an extra place and Nils filled it.

OFFICER The Ambassador who left with the special planes? You're lying. I know your brother. We were at military school together. He would never have done that.

UNCLE Why not?

OFFICER He would never have left his comrades on a day like today. Nils is a fool, a fanatical fool, but he's not a coward.

UNCLE Who said my nephew was a coward?

OFFICER Why would he run away?

FATHER Who said he ran away?

LENA My brother went to the West for one reason. To fight more effectively for his country, our country.

UNCLE And, incidentally, to see the Chief Minister over there and try to talk some sense into him.

OFFICER Ah! Now we're getting somewhere. You're still lying, but at least your lies mean something. So he went to see the Chief Minister—to get help, I suppose.

FATHER To give help, I'd say. Don't you think those people over there need help?

OFFICER They are past help—decadent, finished.

LENA I agree. Unless they find something entirely new over there, they are finished. So, incidentally, are we.

OFFICER You'll be finished, all of you, unless you stop lying. The Secret Police won't be as patient as I am. You're asking me to believe that your brother fled this morning, left his friends to die, just to . . .

FATHER To continue to fight for freedom.

OFFICER Does he really think those divided decadent Western powers are going to help his mutiny? If so, he's more of a fool than I thought. Words, oh yes, plenty of words! Did you hear that Chief Minister speak last night? We heard him with my men in camp outside the city, and we laughed. We laughed and jeered and joked about him as we got our guns and ammunition ready for the morning. (*He spits*) That's what our soldiers thought of that Minister and his frothy speech.

UNCLE There were a few jokes here, too, I remember.

OFFICER He's speaking again tonight. We're making our men listen—the whole army—as part of their ideological training, so they'll know at first hand the sound of men who talk big and live small, who mouth threats and promises and do absolutely nothing, men who in face of our all-conquering ideology have no ideology at all. Why, it's better than hours of our own propaganda.

LENA Look, it's nearly midnight. Why don't we listen to him here now?

OFFICER Waste of time, pure waste of time.

UNCLE Aren't you interested in our ideological training? You ought to be.

LENA Besides, he *might* have something new to say.

OFFICER That man's had nothing new to say for ten years.

UNCLE Oh, come on. If his speeches are so funny, let's all have one good laugh together before the Secret Police arrive.

FATHER You're not afraid to listen, by any chance?

OFFICER Afraid! We could eat six of him before breakfast and not even know it. If you people are counting on him, God help you.

UNCLE Did you say God?

OFFICER I mean . . . I don't believe a damned word of what you're saying.

LENA I have a feeling he may say something new.

OFFICER That'll be the day.

UNCLE Would you like to bet? I'll bet a real good box

of cigars that that poor, benighted—er, gentleman over there says something new and worth saying tonight. Don't tell me a nephew of mine has been there all day and not knocked some sense into the fellow.

LENA They may even announce his arrival in the news or something.

OFFICER They won't.

UNCLE Then you get a perfectly good box of cigars.

FATHER Tell me, Officer, what would you do with Nils, if you did find him?

OFFICER Nils is a traitor to the Revolution. We were friends once, but I'd shoot him like a dog.

(The Father had switched on the radio. We hear the sound of the victory signal)

UNCLE Always supposing you didn't miss him. Some of you officers are so badly trained nowadays. I doubt if you'd even hit a dog.

FATHER *(at radio)* Here it comes!

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER Ladies and Gentlemen, from the nation's capital, speaking in a special broadcast to the world—the Chief Minister.

VOICE OF CHIEF MINISTER Friends all over the world—and I mean victor and vanquished, Communist and anti-Communist, East and West alike—I am not going to make a speech. I have made too many and they have meant too little. In fact, before I say anything to you, I want you to hear a young man, a young rebel leader, I would say a patriot leader, who

arrived in our capital from an occupied country. This is his voice, recorded today. I will simply call him Nils—my friend Nils.

(The Uncle with a broad smile and chuckle has reached for the cigar box and nonchalantly lit up)

UNCLE Have a cigar.

(They crouch intently over the radio)

VOICE OF NILS Some of you listening now know me. You've read of me and my comrades and our fight for the freedom of our country. Some of you have fought alongside me, some of you have fought against me. I'm Nils, the rebel, the soldier who has manned the barricades, thrown the grenades, dynamited the railways, fought and sweated and bled in our national revolution.

(At this point Nils comes into the room. He stands unnoticed watching the scene as his voice continues)

I'm glad I fought for freedom. I would do it again. The blood poured out today has not been in vain. But all of you who can hear me now, listen—my comrades. Yes, and my enemies. Some of you are good men, sincere men, who have given your brains, your strength and your skill for a New Order. But you need help. We all of us need help. *(The Officer switches off the radio)*

NILS That's true, you know. *(They all swing round)*

FATHER AND UNCLE Nils!

(The Officer raises his revolver)

NILS It's me all right. I'm not a ghost. These days you can move fast. Your voice can be in one place and you in quite another. (*He moves forward*)

OFFICER Stay where you are!

NILS Don't worry. I could have shot you six times over if I'd wanted. (*He goes over to Lena*)

OFFICER What are you doing here?

NILS I want you to take me to the Chief Marshal immediately. I've got urgent news for him.

OFFICER You're a traitor. He'd order you killed on the spot—that is if I don't do it myself.

FATHER Hadn't you better hear his news first?

LENA Nils, why have you come back?

NILS For exactly the same reason as I left. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to return. But I knew I had to. So they got me back in.

OFFICER What's this news you talk about?

NILS There's a revolution beginning over there—only just beginning, but it could be far-reaching. The Chief Minister is affected.

OFFICER That man will never change.

NILS Something has already happened in his family that has shaken him. Do you know one of the things troubling him most? His son. He and his father could agree on nothing. Now they are working together as one.

OFFICER What the hell does all that matter?

NILS Just that the Chief Marshal has a son. You and I know him.

OFFICER The Marshal's son is a loyal soldier of the Revolution.

NILS And he hates his father like hell. We know it. Don't pretend. His father is the head of a ruthless machine that can conquer the world, but he can't conquer the heart of his own son, whom he hates and yet, strange to say, he loves. That's why I must see him.

OFFICER You're wasting time. This isn't home sweet home. It's war.

NILS Of course. But we haven't fought the real war, yet, any of us.

OFFICER What d'you mean?

NILS Today I've been in two worlds. I've been in our world here, with its tanks in the streets, its arrests and its killings, its worship of human gods. I've also been in their world, the so-called free, Christian world. It's a soft, corrupt place. It's produced two great wars. It's bred Fascism and Communism. It feeds on the fat of the land and still lets millions go hungry. Don't you see, we have the same need, their world and ours: we face the same enemy.

OFFICER What enemy?

NILS You can call it materialism, or selfishness if you like, or just plain human nature. It's the spirit of anti-Christ. It puts profits and power before people. Unless we face that enemy, we'll all go down together.

OFFICER It's fine theory, but it's hot air.

NILS Hot air never changed a living soul. I've found a power that does. It can work with lightning speed. It has today. I'll fight and I'll die that our country grasps it.

OFFICER Is that why you came back—truthfully?

NILS Yes. Twenty-four hours ago I was here—in this room. My sister felt I should go. She suggested we ask God about it. I said it was hot air, just like you. But I made the experiment. I obeyed the voice that was deepest in my heart. And look what's happened, in just one day.

(There is a sound of trucks stopping outside)

OFFICER *(Looking out)* I'll tell you what's happening now—the Secret Police!

FATHER The Secret Police!

OFFICER They're probably coming here to this room. I warned you.

(The Officer is clearly troubled at the prospect)

NILS And what are you going to do?

OFFICER *(Defiantly, struggling with himself)* Hand you over, of course. What d'you think? It's my duty.

FATHER Very well. *(He rises)* You can tell them I'm ready.

UNCLE *(Also rising)* It's a damned uncivil time to call, but you can tell 'em I'm ready, too.

(Lena rises. You hear the tramp of feet up the stairs. Suddenly the Officer goes to the door and locks it)

NILS (*Quietly*) It's your move, Captain.

OFFICER (*With deep realisation and sincerity*) My God, there is something here. I've never seen it before. I've got to know what it is.

(*There is a loud knock and the door is tried*)

VOICE OUTSIDE Let us in.

OFFICER (*Playing for time*) I am a Captain of the Central Command. Who are you? What do you want?

VOICE Inspector Kulah of the Special Police, Captain. We're here to arrest these people. Let us in, please.

OFFICER One moment, Inspector. I have the rebel leader here—the man they call Nils.

VOICE (*Less certain*) I see, That's good. We'll look after him, too.

OFFICER (*Taking the plunge*) Listen, Inspector. I'm under orders to take this man personally to the Chief Marshal himself.

VOICE Whose orders, Captain?

OFFICER You'd better co-operate, Inspector, or explain yourself personally to the Chief Marshal tonight. These are my prisoners—four of them. They are extremely dangerous. I want you to follow my instructions precisely.

VOICE Yes, Captain.

(*Lena picks up the baby from the cot*)

OFFICER Stay where you are. Guard the stair and the front entrance. I'll send the prisoners out one at a time. Take care of them. See that no one interferes

with them. The rebel leader Nils I will take personally to Staff Headquarters immediately. Are you ready?

VOICE Yes, Captain.

OFFICER I'm going to open the door. (*He does so. In turn he motions to Lena, the Father and the Uncle to leave. Each gives him a look of thanks and recognition as they go*)

NILS Thank you, Captain.

OFFICER (*Quietly*) Am I taking you or are you taking me?

NILS I'm under your orders, Captain.

OFFICER We go to see my father together.

(*Nils goes, followed by the Officer. The room is empty. The bird sings and sings, and the curtain falls*)

CURTAIN