

Judgment Day

(A Play in One Act)

By Kester Berwick

About This Play

"Judgment Day" was first produced at the Ab-intra Studio, Adelaide, South Australia in December 1933. There were five performances. It was programmed as being a play by Svetloff, a contemporary Russian playwright who, as far as I knew, did not exist. However, it was far from my intention to hoax an audience just for the fun of it. I wanted to get an unbiased opinion of a play which I myself had been writing. Personal friends would be disposed to be kind critics, I knew. Others, more objective, might find everything wrong with it.

Only several weeks afterwards was it discovered that "Judgment Day" was not by Svetloff but by myself. In the meantime there had been a certain amount of discussion as to who Svetloff was exactly, and what this play was about. In some quarters it had been welcomed as an example of the kind of thing that Russian dramatists were then turning out. One earnest and internationally-minded lecturer of the Adelaide University wrote to the Studio to say how much she personally had appreciated the play, and added that Adelaide should be grateful to the Studio for giving audiences an opportunity to see such works. (Needless to say, I for my part was grateful to her!) Another connected with the University, himself a Russian or from one of the Baltic countries, and regarded as an authority on Russian literature, affirmed that there was little doubt about "Judgment Day" being by a modern Soviet playwright, although he could not place Svetloff. When I asked him after a performance if he had liked it, he answered---with great perception, I thought---that it was possibly the kind of play more enjoyable to do than to watch.

That was the most useful opinion I had from anyone. In fact, rather to my disappointment, there were few other opinions of the constructive kind which I had hoped for. Maybe people hesitated at that time to express themselves on the subject of work by Soviet playwrights, or were awed by the name of Svetloff. True, we had enjoyed doing "Judgment Day"; but I was never to learn whether it should be left as it was, be re-written entirely or scrapped. And I still do not know! One thing is perhaps significant, however: some of those who saw it have not forgotten it, even after so many years.

K.B.

Corfu,

9/4/81

J U D G M E N T D A Y

(By Kester Berwick)

Cast

The Stage Manager

The Director

Hekla, the Leading Lady

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown

The Young Man

The Audience

The stage is apparently unset. Brightly painted ladders, chairs, screens etc. are lying about. In the usual way, the audience straggles into the auditorium, and among those who have come early are the Woman with the Remarkable Hat, the Woman with the Conspicuous Gown and the Young Man of a rather foppish appearance.

When as many people as can be hoped for have arrived, the Stage Manager---a clownish-looking little man in his late forties and in his shirt-sleeves---comes on the stage and peers about in all directions. Then he returns to the Leading Lady's dressing room to report what he has seen.

The Stage Manager. (Off) Yes; it's all right, Hekla. There's no one about. You needn't leave your fiddle-faddle just yet.

The Leading Lady. (Almost screaming with indignation.) Fiddle-faddle?

The Stage Manager. Sh! Old Bookworm doesn't like to hear us quarrelling.

The Leading Lady. Then, get out! ---and take that awkward thing with you.

(The Stage Manager, carrying a large camera attached to a tripod and complete

with a focussing hood, black on one side and red on the other, appears suddenly on the stage again. He puts the camera here and there in order to try different perspectives, adjusts it, focusses it by getting underneath the focussing hood and is seemingly just on the point of taking a photo of the auditorium, when the Director, wearing a business-suit and engrossed in an extremely large volume, enters.)

The Director. (Abruptly halting as he perceives the Stage Manager.) Now, Hold it! that is an idea! Just stop there a moment. You have suggested something that perhaps will help us out of our predicament.

The Stage Manager. You could find nothing suitable then?

The Director. I could not! Nothing at all! Why dramatists will not supply us with plays which are short and at the same time unusual is beyond my comprehension.

The Stage Manager. Different, off the beaten track, you mean?

The Director. Exactly. But what I was going to say is this:--- It occurred to me when I came in just now and saw you working with your camera that, if there were plays in which the audience could co-operate, it would greatly stimulate their interest.

The Stage Manager. Quite so, only that would mean that an audience would be indispensable.

The Director. Naturally. . . In any case, it is always indispensable.

The Stage Manager. Well---

The Director. Oh, I know what you are thinking; but remember there are some we can count on---the sheep, those regular supporters. Of course, I mean sheep

as distinct from goats. The sheep, they come again and again. I do not know what we would do without them. Yes, yes; I am very keen on a play in which---as I have said---they could co-operate.

The Stage Manager. And if they won't?

The Director. Then there would be only one thing to do.

The Stage Manager. Go on. I'm listening.

The Director. Willy-nilly, they must be drawn into it, while we ourselves develop something which will demonstrate what this kind of play could be.

The Stage Manager. But jumping Josaphat! The number of rehearsals needed to train an audience into their parts! You know what audiences are.

The Director. Believe me, I have thought of that. It is just their intelligence, or rather their lack of it, that we shall exploit. You leave it to me. . . Now for a name for the play---a really suitable name.

The Stage Manager. Something snappy?

The Director. Certainly not! Have we not agreed that this play will be different? We want a title that crystalises the theme.

The Stage Manager. Crystalises it, eh? It will have to be--- Well, crystal clear.

The Director. Ha-ha, a crystal-clear crystallisation is, of course, highly desirable. Now, how do you like "The Sad Story of Arrested Development," or "Dew-drops Confronted by The Shining Sea," or even "Pastoral Symposium"?

The Stage Manager. Not that last one.

The Director. "Pastoral Symposium"?

The Stage Manager. It's poetic!

The Director. Symbolic rather.

The Stage Manager. Would anyone understand it?

The Director. "Ay, there's the rub." However, we shall not decide on any of them at present, significant though they be. Considering it more fully,

I am confident that the title will be apparent later.

The Stage Manager. (Turning back to his camera) Whatever you think. Oh, but---but what about the cast?

The Director. We can arrange that at once. You gave me the cue that perhaps with your camera you could act as my assistant in, let us say, some research work.

The Stage Manager. (Cautiously.) What kind of research?

The Director. (Tapping his volume.) Just the usual. You know of my interest in this sort of thing---of my philosophical explorations.

The Stage Manager. (Aghast.) You hope to embody the contents of a book of that size in a short play!

The Director. Not all of it, perhaps; but the material has numerous challenging subdivisions capable of dramatic treatment. For instance, I could incorporate the Leading Lady's word-games.

The Stage Manager. Thunder and lightning, are you serious? I haven't much opinion of Hekla's manias, you know.

The Director. That is merely professional jealousy. Besides, you make the mistake of being absorbed in your own subject to the exclusion of related ones. Wreng! Very wrong! There is more to Hekla's word-games than perhaps any of us imagine.

The Stage Manager. May be; but will she be willing to do them before an audience?

The Director. As far as the sheep are concerned, she will be quite willing. She is used to them, remember, and not easily daunted. If it so happens that the goats come too--- Then, that is another matter. Despite all you may say about her from time to time, our Leading Lady is a real artist---well past any chorus-girl nonsense.

The Stage Manager. Have it your way, of course. But---

The Director. What now?

The Stage Manager. What about the scenery?

The Director. True, there is that to be considered. The back-drop can be that thing we used last time in "Doctor Déspite Himself."

The Stage Manager. The one in large colored checks?

The Director. I see you remember it.

The Stage Manager. Holy saints, I do!

The Director. Are you being superstitious?

The Stage Manager. (Emphatically.) All I can say is that I hope this play won't be the dismal failure that ~~last~~ one was!

The Director. Come, come. It is most difficult to assess what is failure and what is not. (Again tapping his volume.) No method of doing it properly has yet been discovered. . . Now where is that back-drop? Handy? (The Stage Manager forages among the screens etc and brings out a broad roll of material in large, crazy checks. The letters E.R.I.S.D.E. read drunkenly across it.)

The Director. Good. We shall hang it up here, like this.

(The two of them suspend the material as a back-drop.)

The Stage Manager. (Standing back.) What do you think?

The Director. (Surveying the effect.) That will do nicely. It will be a huge decoration against which Hekla will work. I can see it already. Her seeking, reaching gestures over those colored squares will be most magnetic. Or do I mean "mesmeric"?

The Stage Manager. She will want some steps.

The Director. Yes; my scheme demands steps. Several of them.

The Stage Manager. I'll arrange them.

The Director. Please do; and so placed that Hekla can move over them as disposed. Also, put a screen with chairs to give the impression of a small consulting-room. For clients, you know. Over there on the right somewhere stand whatever ladders you think may be

necessary for focussing your camera. Of course, heighten the whole effect by suitable lighting.

(The Stage Manager quietly sets about following these instructions while the Director makes some notes.)

The Director. (To himself.) A delicate situation---delicate, delicate. Hm.

The Stage Manager. (Pessimistic.) Now is that all, I mean all before I switch on the lighting?

The Director. All for the moment. No; we must have your extension lens so that we can get detailed views of distant objects.

The Stage Manager. (Brightening.) If you want the same as I always use---

The Director. The same; only if possible adjust your lens to their maximum sharpness, and when the right moment comes let us have something really intense from your flash-sheet.

The Stage Manager. (Warningly as he exits.) That last may need some preparation.

The Director. (Continuing with the notes.) Yes; it certainly is a delicate situation, and I take no pleasure in hurting feelings; but the lack of a solution has plagued me for so long that surely at last I can do something drastic.

(At that moment there is a blackout. The Stage Manager is doing the lighting. The scene suddenly becomes lit by a criss-crossing of brilliant shafts which make everything curiously askew.)

The Leading Lady. (On the way from her dressing ^{room} to the stage, and raising her voice in a crescendo of enquiry.) Six letters? Six letters? Six letters? (She enters wearing a light wrapper or peignoir and ballet shoes, and is drawing large letters in the air with a stick of grease-paint.)

A basic impulse spelt with six letters, the first being--- Now what would the first be? (Suddenly turning to run back to her dressing room.) Whoops! I've thought of something!

The Director. (Hurrying after her.) Here, Hekla! It is in connection with that that I wish to speak to you.

The Leading Lady. (Spinning round.) You can tell me? You know a basic impulse, spelt with six letters, the first being---

The Director. No, no; I mean in connection with your interest in word-games. As a little experiment, I want you to work at one on the back-drop.

The Leading Lady. Oh, how gorgeous! But first you will let me finish the one I was doing on the wall of my dressing room?

The Director. For the purposes of our play the back-drop will be much better. These notes I have just been making lead me to insist. Kindly transfer your current question to the letters already on the back-drop and see what it leads to.

(With a ballet-step or two the Leading Lady skips towards the back-drop.)

The Director. Stop! You have something to write with?

The Leading Lady. (Waving a stick or so of it at him.) I always find my grease-paint the most convenient.

The Director. Of course! Then go ahead.

(When the Leading Lady reaches the top of the steps, she stands there with her back to the audience, losing herself in contemplation of the letters. The Stage Manager returns. He is encumbered with what suggests a battered telescope and a flash-sheet in a holder of very home-made appearance.)

The Stage Manager. I think I've brought everything.

The Director. Good. Keep those objects close to the camera. We may need them at short notice.

The Stage Manager. I've been reflecting. . . Though you suppose we can manage without rehearsals with the audience, we'll want two or

three for ourselves, at least.

The Director. Not at all. Not at all. I assure you that, if you do exactly as I say, rehearsals of any kind will be entirely unnecessary. My plan is to let each one act as he is prone, and to dovetail the resultant individual expressions into a co-ordinated whole. You, for example, will simply experiment in perspective with your camera, as you are so often doing.

The Stage Manager. That suits me! And yourself?

The Director. I shall assume the role of some learned person, say Professor Theophrastus or Meister Solovjev, engaged, as mentioned before, in philosophical explorations.

The Stage Manager. But how shall we know what to say? No lines. No cues.

The Director. Dear, dear! Have you never heard of improvisation? Actually nothing could be easier. You will either give an appropriate answer to any question I ask you, or, if you cannot think of one, you will in the manner of so many people repeat my last words back to me. That can be quite impressive.

The Stage Manager. (Very dubious.) You really believe it will work? You are sure of it?

The Director. You may safely leave it to me---and to the audience---to manage the rest. Undoubtedly, it may at times rather tax our ability; but to help us out I shall avail myself of turns which used to be popular in vaudeville days. In fact, I shall re-turn them. You do not see what I mean? It will be apparent later.

The Stage Manager. Like the title.

The Director. Like the title!

The Stage Manager. Then there's no reason why I shouldn't go on with my perspective studies at once.

The Director. None at all. In fact there is no reason why we should not consider the play as having already started.

The Stage Manager. (Taking a festive false-nose from a pocket and about to put it on.) Yes; but---

The Director. Another "but"?

The Stage Manager. Well, haven't you forgotten something?

The Director. Nothing that I can remember.

The Stage Manager. Where's that audience you spoke of that was to take part in the play? You agreed it was indispensable

The Director. I fancied I got a whiff of it edging in on us.

The Stage Manager. So you might have; but my camera requires more than a whiff.

The Director. You infer visibility? Now, that is something that for a moment I did forget. My thoughts run on so. Well, climb the ladder, man, and look through your extension lens. Maybe there is someone in sight. (The Stage Manager hastily finishes putting on the false-nose and then does as bidden---surveying the audience through the lens.)

The Director. Well?

The Stage Manager. Nothing.

The Director. Keep on looking.

The Stage Manager. (Suddenly wildly excited.) Thing-un-a-jig preserve us! Well I never!

The Director. What is the matter?

The Stage Manager. Rows and rows of straining faces!

The Director. You are sure?

The Stage Manager. Yes; out there in the auditorium. And they've been there all the time!

The Director. (Taken aback.) Have they indeed!

The Stage Manager. Wonderful! Miraculous! They've come again. Even more of them than last time!

The Director. Wonderful and miraculous, as you say. But so many present indicates that the goats are here as well. This greatly complicates matters.

Now our play will somehow have to include them both---be a double-inclusion.

The Leading Lady. (Turning for the first time.) "Double-inclusion"? You said "double-inclusion"? Is there any clue for me in that?

The Director. There could be, my dear. Perhaps easily. And I see now that today I must not fail to take advantage of it---to take advantage, I mean, of the combined presence of the two species. Can I manage it? I shall do my best. Look again through your extension lens and see if there is any one you know.

The Stage Manager. (Sweeping the audience with his lens and then bringing it to rest on the Woman with the Remarkable Hat.) Oh, spare me! Still wearing the same hat and with the parasol to match. She is pushing herself in front of the others.

(The Woman with the Remarkable Hat is coming through the audience. She goes through a door at the side of the proscenium; but does not yet appear on the stage.)

The Director. Ah, your wife! Well, that can hardly surprise you. Anyone else?

The Stage Manager. (Bringing his lens to rest on the Woman with the Conspicuous Gown.) I believe your legal spouse is there, too.

The Director. My legal spouse? Oh, pregnant utterance! Has she still the same gown? Let me look.

The Stage Manager. (Waving him away.) She is just the same as she always is. No need to look.

(The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown, who like the other woman has a parasol to match, has risen and is directing her steps to the same door at the side of the proscenium.)

The Leading Lady. (Descending the steps and coming forwards like a

sonambulist.) A word of six letters, denoting a basic impulse, denoting a fundamental? Basic! Fundamental! Always the same word, the first letter being? The first letter being? (Suddenly alert.) Oh, I have a presentiment, a premonition, that the first letter is---

The Director. Shush, Hekla, lest you speak too soon. Your presentiment or premonition may not be supported by later clues. Have a look yourself through the extension lens.

The Leading Lady. (Seizing the lens and making a wild survey.) Ooh, la-la! Yes; I was right. The first letter is "D." Now we are getting somewhere. It began with "double-inclusion" and I see out there my Dodo, my poor moon-calf. "D" is for "double-inclusion and also for "Dodo."

(She rushes back to the back-drop and draws a bold circle around "D." Beneath it she adds the figure I in another color. Meanwhile

The Young Man---carrying a silver-mounted cane---advances through the audience and passes through the door at the side of the proscenium. A loud, peremptory knocking is heard, made by the three knocking at once.)

The Director. There they are! (Raising his voice.) Step this way, please. This way!

(The two woman and the Young Man enter ^{sideways} from up-stage, keeping their bored faces turned fully to the audience. A slight pause.)

The Young Man. (To the two women.) Poor Hekla. Still the same. If only she could be induced to give up this sort of thing, she would be just as normal as you and I are... Hekla, have you forgotten your Dodo, your petit Dodo?

The Leading Lady. (To herself.) Yes; "D" is my first, but what of my second?

The Young Man. You see? She takes no notice. There's no improvement whatever.

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat. (Staring at the Stage Manager who is pointing his camera in various directions from a place he has crawled to on his ladders.) I should say no improvement! There like a human fly

with that vice of his. That camera! No light has yet been granted him in his darkness.

The Young Man. Yes; they both seem much the same as on other occasions.

The Director. Come, come. Never mind about other occasions. What are you three doing here today?

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat. We thought we would come along to find out how you are getting on, We often do, you know, Albert. Just for old time's sake

The other two. (More or less together.) For old time's sake. For old time's sake.

The Young Man. You don't mind our coming on stage before the play starts, do you?

The Director. But the play has started.

All three of them. Oh, no!

The Director. It has, and now you are in it. So each of you take a seat. Take a seat at once, and let us proceed.

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown (As she and the others are being thrust into their chairs.) And in you, too, Albert, I see no improvement either.

The Director. Nor I in you. But these superficial observations are pointless. What we need is insight. Insight, mark you; and Judgment Day is no judgment day; without it. It is my earnest wish that we all keep this in mind.

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat. (Prodding him with her parasol.) Pray, what Judgment Day can you be referring to?

The Director. Why, any one. This one! You probably imagine that it is just another of our regular matinee performances.

The Young Man. (Languidly.) The Cassandra Folk-company. Every Wednesday from two to five.

The Director. This time there will be no "Twelfth Night," nor "Uncle Vanya," nor adaptations from Molière.

The Young Man. Something new then? Bravo!

The Director. (Ominously.) You will see. Now, without further delay, I

shall begin in a blunt way with a few blunt questions. My object is not to try to distinguish between the sheep and the goats---that has been attempted so often.---but to show their sameness. By a little deft interrogation I hope to prove that each of you, as representatives of the crowd out there, is identical, and that---whether a sheep or a goat---no more individuality exists between you than is found between these Siamese monstrosities. (To the Stage Manager.) If I can do this, then we may have advanced a trifle my philosophical explorations.

The Leading Lady. That word of such import, people have of it as yet a very limited understanding. ^{Something tells me that.} Of its six letters I still need the second.

The Director. (Anxiously to the Stage Manager.) Are you certain the camera is ready for instant action?

The Stage Manager. Ready for instant action!

The Young Man. (Indicating the Director.) As we might have expected, he is on his hobby-horse again.

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. (Con conversationally to the others.) It was once diagnosed as intellecte paranoecia. (Quite incurable. And dreadful amnesia!

The Director. I implore you: Do not try to wriggle out of this by plastering unfriendly jargon-labels on me.

The Young Man. (Placatingly.) Quite so, old man. Quite so.

The Director. Now will subject number one on the left, my legal spouse, step forward.

(There is a dead silence, then suddenly the Stage Manager nearly falls off the ladders which he has so arranged that they form an archway---a step-ladder at each end, and a short ladder joining them.)

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat. (With a little shriek.) Do---do be careful!

The Young Man. Rather structural really. Awfully intriguing!

The Director. (More firmly) Will subject number one please step forward!

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. Oh, very well. Anything to humor you ,
Albert. What do you want me to say now that I haven't said before?

The Director. The truth! It is understood that, in order that my ex-
plorations may not be distorted by small, personal considerations, I must ex-
port truthful answers to vital questions. (To the Stage Manager.) Truth
is imperative.

The Stage Manager (Still with his camera on the archway of ladders.) Im-
perative! Imperative!

The Director. Then, tell me, my legal spouse, how you come to stand in
your singular relationship to me.

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. You know, Albert, you have asked me
that over and over again. Don't you yet know the answer?

The Director. I do; but I trust I may always hear you admit it.

The Leading Lady. "Espousals!" La! That's it. "E" stands for
"espousals." For the first and second of my six-letter word I now have
"D.E." (She draws a circle around "E" as before and put the figure 2 under it.)

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. (after re-acting to the Leading Lady
with a sniff of disdain.) Well, my dear, perhaps it seems an odd thing
to be saying now; but it was because I loved you.

The Director. Not odd at all. Not odd. It is precisely what you should
be saying. There comes a day when it is best to face things.

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. (Protesting.) My dear!

The Director. Not now. There is not time. Let us progress to the next
point. . . Did you feel that your love for me would give you what you
sought in life---happiness, shall we call it?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. Naturally, Albert; and I believed
I could make you happy too. And I would have done, if you hadn't--- Well, got
mixed up with such peculiar people.

The Director. Yes; that is a way of seeing it. What leads you to believe that your assumptions are reasonable?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. I have my feelings to go by.

The Director. Oh, feelings?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. Does that mean nothing to you?

The Director. One cannot reason with feelings. (A quick glance into his volume.)

I shall try another line. Now, will you tell me why it was important for you to assume your legal status?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. Really, Albert, you should know better than to repeat yourself so often. Haven't I explained there was society to consider---conventions hallowed by centuries of observance!

The Director. Is it too much to ask what particular benefits are to be derived from such observance?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. There are always advantages in being respectable.

The Director. Smug, hypocritical, commercial advantages for the most part ---that propping up of a narrow egotism.

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. Egotism?

The Director. Your love can be reduced to egotism. Do not think I am blaming you; but one might have hoped for something with a prettier name.

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. You silly man! You men are like children. We women never make any bones about things like that. We know what we need for self-protection.

The Director. Ah! And may I add for self-preservation?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. It comes to the same thing.

The Director. (With explosive animation.) Indeed, how right you are! At last we have reached a fundamental. Fundamental self-preservation!

The Stage Manager. Fundamental self-preservation!

The Director. Exactly! Turn round, woman, so that we may see your true face.

(He rushes to her and brusquely turns her about. An expressionless mask attached to the back of her head is revealed. The parasol, which she is now holding with her hands behind her, strengthens the impression that she is normally facing one and that the mask is natural.)

The Young Man. I say! That's a real old showman's trick, that is! Delightful! I'll wager that she has never been so neatly sized-up before.

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat. (Piously.) This could be how Master Himself sees her. The Divine Hand has surely used her Albert as a rod of chastening.

The Leading Lady. (Screaming.) Divorce! (Then to herself.) No; that can't be right. "Divorce" starts with "D.", and I already have "D" as my first. Yes; "D" is my first. "E" is my second. Then what is the third of that six-letter word? Alas, I must ponder further.

The Director. (Panting from his exertions.) Step forward subject number two. The Young Man in the middle.

The Young Man. (Affectedly.) Oh, no. Not me. Please! I thought it would be clear to you that I'm on your side.

The Director. All sides are the same to you, providing that you can go your own way undisturbed. But events overtake us.

The Young Man. Of course they do. I have always said so.

The Director. Now will you kindly answer my questions. Perhaps we can learn where you really stand.

The Young Man. But this is unnecessary, I assure you!

The Director. You were intimate with the Leading Lady. Her friend perhaps. Am I right?

The Young Man. (With a deep sigh.) Well, if you gather that much, you ought to realise that the matter is painful and too private to discuss.

The Director. I repeat: You were intimate with the Leading Lady. Her friend perhaps. Am I right?

The Young Man. (Resignedly.) You know you are right. I was more than a friend, and would be still, if Hekla had not--- How shall I put it?

The Director. We are waiting.

The Young Man. I have in mind the exaggerated manner in which Hekla came to regard our relationship.

The Director. Indeed? And whose fault was that?

The Young Man. Certainly not mine.

The Director. You think so?

The Young Man. I wasn't the only one. She has had other friends as well.

The Director. They did not fail her as you did.

The Young Man. I don't understand you.

The Director. Those others---in Hekla's company---expanded and ripened.

The Young Man. And I didn't?

The Director. You could not. You are her great failure, like something incomplete and unfinished that one cannot get out of ~~the~~ system.

The Young Man. Listen, old man! Are you blaming me for my detachment? Everybody knows that I have always striven for detachment---especially in my social contacts.

The Director. Everybody knows, as you say. We know also what has come of it. Because you never really committed yourself to Hekla, you easily dropped her. (Several "boos" from the audience.) You hear? No one ever admires this kind of treatment.

The Young Man. (Defensively to the audience.) But there was never any question of it being a binding arrangement. Hekla could equally well have dropped me. I approved of her having the fullest freedom!

The Director. Tut-tut. As enlightened as that may sound, it was not what she needed. She had anticipated a meaningful reciprocation.

The Young Man. But if I couldn't give it? If it was not in my nature?

The Director. Then, had you been kinder, you would not have lured her on. That was the evil. A poet has said: "Some things, when awakened, take all too long to put to sleep again." It is not without significance that with Hekla's disillusionment her passion for word-games began.

(A hushed silence, during which Hekla, oblivious of what they have been saying, goes on working on the back-drop.)

The Director (Resuming.) I may be wrong; but I can take the facts as they appear to be and make them support my contentions. You are the kind who wears asbestos underclothing.

The Young Man. (Shocked.) Asbestos underclothing?

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. (The one already turned.) I don't think underclothing is a nice thing to talk about. Not in public!

The Director. (Ignoring her.) It is, of course, invisible; but it effectively insulates you from whatever flames you may stir up in others.

The Young Man. (Indignant.) You amaze me! My underclothing is of good-quality silk or cambric. Must I endure more of this?

The Director. For just another moment or so. . . . Already I have scented here the odor that became so quickly evident in the last case. Your vaunted detachment is rooted in self-protection. Then by one quick step we arrive at the inevitable self-preservation. . . . Self-preservation, Assistant. Another sad example.

The Stage Manager. Self-preservation! Another sad example!

(The Young Man shrugs his shoulders.)

The Woman with the Conspicuous Gown. Here! Turn him about! I can't abide this isolation.

(She savagely pulls the Young Man around. An identical expressionless mask is revealed. Pause.)

The Woman with the Remarkable Hat. There! Thus are those who do not lean on the