

**PER**

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A Play in Eight Scenes

by

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**PER**

**Cast of Characters**

**(In Order of Appearance)**

**PER NILSSON:** Age 20: A very disturbed young man.

**HANNAH JOHANSBOTTER:** Age 20: An innocent young woman.

**NURSE OLSSON:** Age 55: A caring nurse.

**FATHER LINDQUIST:** Age 60: The local parish priest.

**DR. STROBEL:** Age 60: A highly respected doctor.

**ANNA MANSBOTTER:** Age 48: Per's stern mother.

**MRS. ARNBORG:** Age 55: A neighbor.

One actor can play both DR. STROBEL and FATHER LINDQUIST.

One actor can play both NURSE OLSSON and Mrs. Arnborg.

**PER**

**SCENE 1**

**SETTING:** A small, dank, dark Medieval-looking stone-walled cell with a small window, a heavy metal sliding door, a rusty metal bed with an old stained mattress, and a metal chair.

**AT RISE:** HANNAH sits in the chair watching PER who is curled up on the mattress asleep.

**TIME:** Late evening, August 7, 1890

*(PER awakes to see HANNAH. HE SITS straight up. HE is terrified. HE looks around the cell to see if the door is open or if anyone else is there)*

**HANNAH**

Hello Per.

**PER**

No!!! What are you doing here!?!

**HANNAH**

And how are you?

**PER**

Go away! No! You can't be here!

**HANNAH**

That's your welcome? After all this time? After all we've been through...

**PER**

Go! You are not welcome here!

**HANNAH**

Oh, but Per...

*(PER is getting more and more upset)*

**PER**

Why are you here? You shouldn't be here! Why are you here?!?

**HANNAH**

I am here to see you, of course. I've come because I knew you must be lonely. Without me? Without her?

**PER**

I'm not. I'm not lonely! I am not in the least bit lonely!

**HANNAH**

How can that be? You've never been alone before...

**PER**

I'm still alone. You are not really here.

**HANNAH**

Nonsense! Of course I'm here.

**PER**

I'm just dreaming you. I'm imagining you. A hallucination. It's the stress from what I've been through. It's delirium. It's the medication.

**HANNAH**

Per! What nonsense.

**PER**

No! You are not here. You are dead!

**HANNAH**

But I *am* here Per. I'm here and I'm talking to you. And you are talking to me.

**PER**

I'm not going to talk anymore. I'm going to ignore you now.

*(HE curls into a fetal position with his back to her)*

**HANNAH**

You do know why I'm here... on this particular day...

*(Suddenly realizing she may be real, HE sits up again)*

**PER**

What?

**HANNAH**

I've come today because it is a very special day.

**PER**

It is, isn't it?

**HANNAH**

Then you know what day it is? You remembered?

**PER**

Yes. I know. Of course I remembered! It was to happen this morning. Today was the day.

**HANNAH**

Today was the day.

**PER**

And did it? Did it happen this morning?

**HANNAH**

Yes, it did. And after an impatient, endless night of eager expectation... when the sun finally did rise...it seemed to shimmer more brightly than usual. And when the birds finally began to sing their dawn chorus... their songs seemed louder...livelier. For indeed, today was the day. Only one thing was missing.

**PER**

What was that?

**HANNAH**

You, Per. I thought you'd be there.

**PER**

How? How could I be there when I'm here?

**HANNAH**

I thought they'd let you out for such an important event.

**PER**

No, then can never let me out. Did you go? Were you there?

**HANNAH**

I was.

**PER**

And?

**HANNAH**

And what?

**PER**

And what happened?

**HANNAH**

You know what happened!

**PER**

No, I don't know. But I want to know.

**HANNAH**

No, you don't. Believe me, you don't want to know.

**PER**

No but I do, Hannah. I want... I *need* to know every detail. I have tried to get a picture of it my head...but I can't get there. Tell me! Tell me every detail!

*(As SHE describes it, we see the whole event unfold in a shadowy silhouette from behind the scrim that is the back wall of the cell)*

**HANNAH**

Well, okay then. There was a huge crowd in the square awaiting her arrival. The whole town came to watch.

**PER**

I'm sure she was happy about that. It must have made her feel important. Go on.

**HANNAH**

Finally they brought her out. There were chains around her ankles and wrists that clanked and clanged as she walked and yet despite these nasty manacles, she was all done up like she was going to a party.

**PER**

She was?

**HANNAH**

She had a ribbon in her hair. Her face was all painted up..

**PER**

How do you mean?

**HANNAH**

Her lips were painted a bright red...

**PER**

What shade of red?

**HANNAH**

I don't know! Something between a radish and a fire engine.

**PER**

Okay, go on.

**HANNAH**

And her cheeks were rouged to give her the look of a blushing youth... even though she was anything but that. She wore her white party dress. You know the one... the white crinoline with the ruffle at the neck... the dress that fell so beautifully over her body.

**PER**

Yes, I know it. She bought it for my thirteenth birthday. It was her special occasion dress.

*(PER rises and begins to pace)*

**HANNAH**

Well then, it was certainly the right choice for today.

**PER**

Go on. So she arrived in her special white dress...her makeup on...

**HANNAH**

Her footsteps were unsecure...she seemed a little shaken.

**PER**

Yes, I'm sure she was. How could she not have been?

**HANNAH**

Her big, painted, vulgar eyes looked around nervously...like she was looking for someone to step in and save her.

**PER**

For me.

**HANNAH**

Yes, most likely. Yes, she was probably looking for you.

*(Getting more and more upset, HE pounds his fist on the wall. Then HE tries to regain his composure)*

**PER**

Yes, go on...

**HANNAH**

As she approached the scaffold, she made no attempt to resist what was happening...or what was about to happen.

**PER**

What would be the point?

**HANNAH**

She knelt down at the block, looking one last time at her executioner who had hidden the axe behind his back.

**PER**

And then...

*(PER moves back to the bed sitting on the edge of it)*

**HANNAH**

The executioner's assistant tried to blindfold her, but she pushed his hand away. She didn't want to be blindfolded.

**PER**

She wanted to see it...to stay in control...

**HANNAH**

She laid her head down on the cold stone block and began sobbing like a child.

**PER**

She cried?

**HANNAH**

Like a child.

**PER**

I never saw her cry.

**HANNAH**

She cried on our wedding day.

**PER**

Yes, that's right. She did. I do remember now. Go on...

**HANNAH**

Then just before the blow, she lifted her head and moaned something.

**PER**

What? What did she moan?

**HANNAH**

I couldn't quite hear, but I think she was calling for you.

*(PER stands and begins to pace faster, again pounding the wall, getting more upset)*

**PER**

Oh no! Okay! Stop! I don't want to hear anymore.

**HANNAH**

But you said you wanted to hear it all. Every detail.

**PER**

But now I don't.

**HANNAH**

It's too late for that. I've already started. The executioner's assistant had to press her head back into position.



**PER**

Oh no!

**HANNAH**

As the axe came down a squishing sound could be heard.

**PER**

Noooooo!

**HANNAH**

Much such a sound as one would hear in a slaughterhouse...

**PER**

No, please stop!

**HANNAH**

Then her un-blindfolded head rolled forward while a hammering volcanic eruption of blood sprayed from her neck which now looked yellow...like the skin of a goose.

**PER**

No more! Please stop!

**HANNAH**

The blade had struck her right under her ears, cleaved through her tongue and went right through her mouth, leaving her chin with her body.

**PER**

No stop! I will call the guard! I don't want to hear this!

**HANNAH**

Seconds after her head fell a medical student examined it. For one minute her eyes seemed blank and alive as if they could see.

*(PER runs to the door screaming for help)*

**PER**

Guard! Guard! Help me!

**HANNAH**

Her body was quickly removed and undressed for scientific studies.

**PER**

Please stop! Please someone! Help me!

**HANNAH**

Her heart was removed while it was still beating. I could see it beating.

**PER**

Guard! Help! Guard!

*(The metal door opens. NURSE OLSSON enters and HANNAH exits through the same door)*

**NURSE OLSSON**

Per, what is it!?! What are you screaming about?

**PER**

She was here again. She was here to torment me.

*(SHE takes a hypodermic needle from the pocket of her uniform and prepares to give HIM a sedative)*

**NURSE OLSSON**

Per, no one was here.

**PER**

But she was! She walked right by you!

**NURSE OLSSON**

Per, why were you screaming for a guard?

*(SHE gives PER a shot)*

**PER**

Because I am in a prison.

**NURSE OLSSON**

No. You are in a special hospital to help you.

**PER**

I am? What hospital? Where?

**NURSE OLSSON**

You are at the Konradsberg Asylum in Stockholm, Sweden. There are no guards here. There are only nurses and doctors who are here to help you. Now lie down and try to rest.

*(PER lies in her arms)*

**PER**

But her head...and her special dress and...

*(HE falls asleep)*

**(BLACKOUT)**

**END OF SCENE 1**

**SCENE 2**

**SETTING:** The modest living room of Anna Månsdotter. The furnishings are sparse and simple. There is a stone fireplace dominating one wall. A wooden door at stage-right leads to the unseen outside and another at stage-left leads to the unseen bedroom.

**AT RISE:** FATHER LINDQUIST sits waiting. PER enters with tea.

**TIME:** Two years earlier, 1888.

*(PER enters with a tray with a teapot, cups, a sugar bowl and creamer, etc. HE puts the tray down on the table and pours FATHER LINDQUIST a cup of tea)*

**PER**

Here you are Father Lindquist.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

Thank you Per. Much appreciated.

**PER**

Cream and sugar?

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

No, thank you Per. No tea for you?

**PER**

Oh no. Mother says the caffeine makes me jumpy. She doesn't like me jumpy.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

Well, mothers know best I suppose.

**PER**

I suppose.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

And when do you expect your mother to be home?

**PER**

Mother should be home soon. She finishes work at five o'clock. Then she takes the Kristianstad tram and then transfers to the Tollarp tram. She should be here soon.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

My, my, my...look at you Per, all grown up. It seems like just yesterday you were a just a little boy and here you are... already a man.

**PER**

Well not yet a man I guess. Nearly...but not yet.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

And so how are you doing, Per?

**PER**

How do you mean?

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

Well, I never see you anymore.

**PER**

No, I suppose not.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

Nobody really sees you.

**PER**

I don't get out very much.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

And why is that?

**PER**

I guess I pretty much prefer staying to myself.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

But you must have friends.

**PER**

Not really.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

Some cronies you like to chum around with?

**PER**

No, I don't really have many friends...or any friends for that matter. And certainly no cronies.

**FATHER LINDQUIST**

But what about the neighborhood lads? Jimmy Andersson and Johnny Larsson?

*(PER is getting very uncomfortable with this line of questioning. HE begins to pace)*