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THE SUB-CONTRACTOR

An Ibsen Play—Done Out of the Original Norwegian With an Axe

DRAMATIC PERSONAE

SLUMP A Builder
VAMP His Wife
DUMP A Professor of Thermodynamics
SIMP A Maid Servant
YOOP An Accountant
SCOOT His Sister
PASTOR GYMP A Pastor
CRAMP His Mother-in-law

and as many more with names of that kind and with occupations of that sort, as there is room for on the page. Some of them may not get into the play at all. But that doesn't



VAMP: "GOOD HEAVENS! WHAT IS THE MATTER?"
SLUMP: "BOW, WOW."

matter. An Ibsen Dramatis Personae is a thing by itself.

Scene: A room in Slump's house (There are flowers on the table.)
Slump: What beautiful flowers.

Vamp: Yes, they are fresh this morning.

(Slump and Vamp speak one after the other in short turns, like sawing wood with a crosscut saw. But there is no need to indicate which is speaking. It doesn't matter.)

Are they indeed?

Yes they are.

How sweet they smell.

Yes, don't they?

I like flowers.

So do I. I think they smell so beautiful.

It's a beautiful morning.

Yes, the spring will soon be here. The air is deliciously fresh.

Yes, it is, isn't it.

I saw a bobolink in the garden.

A bobolink already? Then the summer is soon here.

Soon indeed, the meadows are already green.

I like the green meadows.

Yes, isn't it.

The angle of the sun is getting higher.

I suppose it is. I noticed yesterday that the diameter of the moon was less.

Much less and the planets are higher than they were. Their orbit are elongating.

I suppose so.

Vamp: How I love the spring.

Slump: So do I. The evaporation of the air closes the pores of my skin.

This completes round number one. It is meant to show Norwegian home life, the high standard of education among the Norwegians and, just at the end the passionate nature of the Vamp.

The spring fills her with longings. It also shows where Slump stands. For him the spring merely opens the pores of his skin.

With this understanding we are ready for a little action.

(A bell rings. Then Slump the maid enters, showing in Dump, a Professor of Thermodynamics.)

Good morning Dump. Good morning, Slump. Good morning, Vamp. Good morning Dump.

Dump: The spring will soon be here.

Vamp: I saw a bobolink in the garden.

Dump: Yes, I saw a wagtail on the thatch of the dovecote.

Slump: Spring is coming.

Dump: It will do my cough good.

Vamp: Yes, you will soon be well.

Dump: Never well. (He coughs again.)

Slump: You think too much. You need pleasure. For me each time I finish a sub-contract, I like to take my ease and drink spott.

Dump: I can't drink spott. (He coughs.) I have a mortal disease.

Vamp: Don't say that.

Dump: In six years I shall be dead.

Slump: Nonsense. Come, drink a glass of spott.

No.

Have some yip?

No.

Take some pep?

No.

(Dump goes and sits down near a window; the others look at him in silence.)

This completes round two. It is intended to establish the fact that Dump has a mortal disease. There is nothing visibly wrong with Dump except that he looks bilious. But in every Ibsen play it is understood that one of the characters has to have a mortal disease.

Slump: Well, I must be about my work. Come, Slump, come and help me get my wallet and my compasses.

Simp: Yes, sir. (Simp and Slump go out. Vamp and Dump are left alone.)

No.

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Simp: Yes, sir. (Simp and Slump go out. Vamp and Dump are left alone.)

No.

Take some pep?

Round three is now complete. It is meant to show that Slump the sub-contractor is a man of terrible driving powers. He is filled with the "drang" of life. You have to call this "drang" simply "drang" because in English we don't have it. It means something the same as "pep" but not quite. Pep is intellectual; drang is bodily. It means, as all the critics of the play point out, that Slump represents the upsurge of elemental forces.

Slump (calling): Now then, Slump, my hat, my stick and a glass of spott. Where are you?

I am coming, master.

Simp comes in with a hat and stick and with a glass of spott in her hand.

Ha, give it me. I like my spott. It makes my eyes bulge. (He drinks greedily.)

You shouldn't drink so fast.

I like to drink fast. It inflates me. Ha! (He finishes the glass and puts it aside.) Ha! That's good. You're a pretty girl.

Oh!

Come and give me a kiss.

No.

Yes, you shall. (He takes hold of Slump and draws her to him.)

No.

Yes, I say. (He kisses Slump greedily three or four times.) There!

Simp: You shouldn't kiss me.

Why not?

I have a hereditary taint. My grandmother died of appendicitis.

Slump (staggering back, his hand to his brow): Appendicitis!

Simp: Yes, look, I have the marks of it.

(Simp raises her sleeve and shows a round red mark on her wrist.)

Slump: Great Heavens! Spott! Give me some more spott.

(He stands staring in front of him while Slump fetches another glass of spott. He drinks it eagerly.)

Simp: How do you feel now?

Slump: Bad. There are specks dancing in front of my eyes. What does it mean?

Simp: Appendicitis.

Slump: I am doomed! Give me more spott. Appendicitis! Spott!

The action of the play pauses here a moment to let the audience appreciate the full measure of retribution that has fallen upon Slump for kissing a Norwegian housemaid. Slump has sunk in to a chair and sits with his eyes staring in front of him. Slump stands looking at him unconcerned. Vamp and Dump come back.

Vamp: Good heavens! What is the matter?

Dump: What is it?

Simp: I don't know. I don't think he is well.

Slump: (beginning to bark like a dog): Wow. Wow.

Vamp: No, he is not well.

Dump: He is hardly himself.

Slump: Bow, wow.

Vamp: I should say that he is ill.

Dump: Yes, he seems poorly.

Slump: Wow.

Vamp: He appears in poor health.

Dump: Yes, he looks out of sorts.

(Slump takes the sticks of dynamite out of his pocket and begins to eat them.)

Vamp: What is he doing now?

Dump: I think he is eating dynamite.

Vamp: Will it hurt him.

Dump: Yes, presently.

Vamp: In what particular way.

Dump: After the warmth of his body warms it he will explode.

Vamp: How curious. How warm will it have to be?

Dump: About 90 degrees. It will take about a minute for each degree. He will explode in twelve minutes.

Vamp: Is it wise to stay near him?

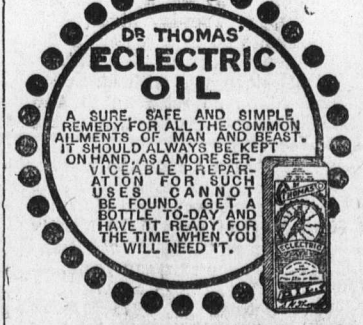
Dump: No, it is highly imprudent. We had better go. Slump had better gather up your things. We will go together. It is scarcely wise to linger.

Vamp: No, let us hasten.

Slump: Wow. Wow.

The curtain falls, leaving in usual after an Ibsen play a profound problem stated but not solved.

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