

The New Teacher

School drama by Christian Lanciai



A school play from 1968

by Christian Lanciai

(2017, translated 2019)

The Characters:

Teachers at the school:
Bertrand
Amanda
Max
Dennis
Robert
Curt
Edward
Headmaster
Pupils
Peter, another pupil
Sylvester, a friend
Laila
A bartender
Stephen, another friend
Richard, Laila's husband

The action is in 1968.

Dedicated to the memory of my three best teachers,
Karl-Edvard Ydén, Vilhelm G. Ekman and Göran Michanek,
the first in religion and history, deceased the other year at 95,
the second in Latin languages,
and the third, deceased the other year at 92, in general humanism.

You can also trace influences from classic films like "The Blue Angel" with Marlene Dietrich on Heinrich Mann's novel "Professor Unrath", in the film "Mr Perrin and Mr Traill" the rivalry between teachers goes as far as an attempted murder by one teacher on another, and then we have Michael Redgrave's gripping resignation in "The Browning Version" and the more joyous "It's Great To Be Young" from 1956 with John Mills as the liberal teacher struggling with adversity.

Act I scene 1. The staff room.

Bertrand What do we really know about the new teacher?
Amanda Nothing.
Max Oh yes. We know a great deal.
Dennis They say he is just what our school needs.
Bertrand What?
Dennis New ideas. Reformism. A good hand with the young ones. Liberalism.
Robert What will Edward think about that?
Dennis He simply has to accept it.
Robert Will the new teacher be able to suit himself to Edward?
Dennis He doesn't need to. He will just drive on anyway. Above all he wants to promote sports.

Bertrand I don't think Edward will accept radical modern ideas and changes without second thoughts.

Robert I don't think any of us do.

Max Here is finally our man. Welcome, colleague!

Curt Thank you. I am aware that I bring some challenges with me, but that is what this school needs.

Max Exactly.

Bertrand I suppose you come directly from the headmaster?

Curt Yes. He greeted me with some fearsome awe.

Bertrand Fearsome awe? Why?

Curt The school is ancient with its routines and traditions. I have come to weather out the old cobwebs.

Amanda Do you think it can be done?

Curt It must be done. Or else the school will not survive.

Bertrand It has survived some centuries without your help.

Curt Dear colleague, my intention is to make it survive some centuries more in spite of myself.

Robert I don't think anyone of us will have anything against your modernism, except possibly Edward.

Curt I understand he is the oldest teacher here.

Max Not the oldest, but probably the one who has been here the longest.

Amanda Twenty-two years. He is like his own institution. He is the heart and soul of the school.

Curt What is his objection against reforms?

Bertrand That depends entirely on what expressions the reforms will take.

Curt I wish to do no harm, just bring the school more up to reality.

Max Here is Edward now. You had better confront him directly.

Curt I have been looking forward to meeting you. I hope we shall be friends.

Edward Why shouldn't we?

Curt I ask you the same.

Edward As long as you don't disturb anyone's routines and habits, no one will interfere with yours.

Curt I am sorry, but I will disturb them all. That's what I am paid for.

Edward At your own risk and your own responsibility in that case.

Amanda What did Headmaster say?

Curt He warned me against you, (*turning to Edward*) dear colleague, and begged me not to provoke you.

Bertrand No one can provoke Edward. He is immune to provocations.

Curt That pleases me.

Edward I hope you will like it here.

Curt I already do. There is so much to do.

Max Especially for someone like you, colleague, without doubt, with your capacity for energetic initiatives.

Dennis That's what this school needs.

Curt That's what all schools need.

Edward Still we managed all right for centuries without too much of that.

Curt But what is centuries old occasionally needs to be dusted off.

Max Without doubt.

Edward What do you intend to dust off?

Curt Everything, especially the music curriculum. It is way behind time.

Edward On the contrary. It is on a high traditional level.

Curt That's exactly what's wrong with it.

Edward Why is it wrong?

Curt By sticking to the old it excludes the present and closes the door to the future.

Edward Traditions exist to be preserved and continued.

Curt Yes, to be able to further development and progress.

Edward The classical music is fully developed.

Curt That's why it can't be developed any more while only alternative music can be developed.

Edward Such as?

Curt Jazz and rock.

Edward Jazz is just improvisations without melodies, and rock is only noise.

Curt That is still what young people prefer.

Edward That's why it's important to insist on better examples of music that sounds better.

Curt Youth finds the classical music outdated, old-fashioned and boring.

Edward The more loudspeakers and amplifiers the modern music needs, the more corrupt, unendurable and unmusical it becomes. Over-dimensional percussion battery will ruin any music transforming it to inhuman noise.

(The bell.)

Dennis Today's first lesson, gentlemen. You will have to settle afterwards.

Amanda Welcome, partner. You will be needed here.

Curt I am noticing it.

(All teachers leave to give lessons, except Edward, who is the last.)

Edward *(worried)* Someone like that was the last thing this school needed. *(leaves after the others.)*

Scene 2.

Curt He seems to be his own institution, this our learned colleague Edward.

Amanda He has been here for many years.

Curt How many?

Amanda Twenty-two years.

Curt Then he has had time to get established.

Amanda He has given the school a certain status of serious ambition and continuity. He is constructive, and there is nothing wrong with him.

Curt Of course not, but he is a fossil.

Amanda Do you have problems with him?

Curt No, but he has a problem with me.

Amanda No wonder.

Curt Doesn't he have a problem with everyone?

Amanda We got used to it. We keep our distance, which is the wisest way to handle him. But his greatest problem is with me.

Curt In what way?

Amanda He has long been in love with me, but he never dared to confess it.

Curt Why? Is he shy?

Amanda Probably, but his shyness finds almost absurd and extreme expressions.

Curt Why do you think he loves you?

Amanda He can't lie with his eyes. He can mask anything, but the eyes show what cannot be masked.

Curt But why then does he hold back? Is he married?

Amanda Not at all. He lives alone with his old incapacitated mother.

Curt Whom he can't leave. Poor devil.

Amanda You are the fresh breeze that's needed here in school.

Curt He can't stand me. My mere presence threatens him. He believes I will turn his whole world upside down.

Amanda That's maybe what he needs.

Curt What are your feelings for him?

Amanda Pity and tenderness. I waited for him for years, but he never made it the whole way.

Curt Are you encouraging him?

Amanda Not more than necessary.

Curt What does that mean?

Amanda That I never discourage him. There is no need. He will not make it anyway.

Curt Still you are the most attractive teacher at school. The pupils adore you, and you are the only one to be treated with some respect by the headmaster.

Amanda But Edward is the only one who dares to love me even if under cover.

Curt I also love you.

Amanda What are you saying?

Curt Amanda, all the teachers here are old fossil remnants and stale shipwrecks of knowledge and erudition that has decayed into superficial humdrum routine. You are the only live teacher here.

Amanda And you.

Curt I know.

Amanda But I can't turn poor old Edward down.

Curt And I can't turn you down.

Amanda Are you serious?

Curt Absolutely.

Amanda Is it a proposal?

Curt Next to it. I don't want to challenge fate and Edward.

Amanda My friend, I think we could make out a good couple as teachers together, which could give the entire school the refreshment and revitalization it needs.

Curt It pleases me to find my own thoughts in you.

Amanda Then we are agreed.

Curt May I? (*kisses her. Enter Edward, stops immediately.*)

Edward What is this? Intimacy in the staff room?

Amanda Edward, Curt and I have just been engaged.

Edward (more shocked and upset than he can show) What does the school and Headmaster think about that?

Curt Edward, we don't care.

Edward You can't. You are both employed here.

Curt And what can you do about it?

Edward What do you mean?

Curt How could you stop two teachers from getting married?

Edward Are you getting married?

Curt (with an eye to Amanda) We both find it inevitable.

Edward (nervous) Pardon me, I just came here to get some books. (*fumbles, drops a few books, picks them up in a humiliating position, piles them up in his arms and hurries out.*)

Amanda He was shocked.

Curt So let him be shocked.

Amanda I feel sorry for him.

Curt He has only himself to blame. If he had you within reach for so many years without proposing, then it's his own fault.

Amanda Still, he is to be pitied.

Curt Yes, he is. (*kisses her*)

Scene 3. Class.

Pupil 1 Captain Fogey is beaten.

2 Not just that. He is done for.

3 He stands no chances against Curt Sport.

4 He has even laid hands on Miss Amanda.

2 It's about time someone did. Old Fogey could never get his gun.

3 If anyone could give her a shot it's Curt Sport.

1 Captain Fogey will never get cocky again.

2 Just as well.

1 Watch it! He's coming!

(All pupils rush to their benches. Enter Edward.)

Edward (in a bad mood) You are heard all the way out in the corridor with your gossip slander, you worthless delinquents. All you are good for is making fun of your teachers. You think you can do as you please in school, shirking whenever you feel like it, never taking your homework seriously. All you are good for is nonsense, you will never grow up to become men, your only interest in education is to become professional scoundrels if even that, and most of you are just rotten eggs.

5 Sir, we had no homework for today.

Edward How is it possible? Who told you so? Is it another of your shameless practical jokes?

5 It's a sporting day instead.

Edward Who told you so?

4 Headmaster announced it yesterday together with the new teacher. We are dismissed after the break and may go for football instead.

Edward That new teacher will ruin our entire school.

6 But everyone loves him. He is popular.

Edward Don't argue against me! He is a rogue!

6 But he knows his business.

Edward Shut up! Get out then to your bloody football! What am I doing then in this school any more?

5 Many wonder the same thing.

Edward What did you say?

5 Nothing.

Edward Get out, all of you, infernal parasites! (*All pupils are glad to leave.*) That's how far it has gone. Enforced sporting days without even informing the other teachers!

Headmaster (entering) There you are, Edward. I forgot to inform you, that we have introduced a sporting day today.

Edward I just heard it from my pupils. Had I known, I would not have troubled myself to come here.

Headmaster I am sorry.

Edward Wasn't it rather sudden?

Headmaster The young new dashing teacher thought it was about time, and the rest of us thought it a good idea, since the weather forecast was good.

Edward Will there be more improvised sporting days?

Headmaster Not without your being informed about it, I promise you.

Edward Mark my words, Headmaster, but if the new teacher is allowed to go on as he has started he will remake the entire school.

Headmaster It has long been needing reforms and fresh initiatives. He injects new life into our school.

Edward For good and for worse.

Headmaster For your part it seems to be more for worse.

Edward He disturbs the order of routines.

Headmaster Old patterns running in constantly the same circles will benefit from being refashioned.

Edward It could go too far, Headmaster.

Headmaster Take it easy and calm down. He will confine himself to what is reasonable.

Edward On the contrary. He constantly violates the limits of reasonability. I have warned you.

Headmaster You are not the headmaster.

Edward But I have been with this school for twenty-two years!

Headmaster That still doesn't make you a headmaster. Take it easy, Edward, and don't worry. We all need each other.

Edward No one needs him!

Headmaster Yes, we all do, except you. (*leaves*)

Edward (alone) The ruthless recklessness of the outrageous intruder makes the existence here every day more intolerable! (*throws his book angrily on the desk*)

(*enter Peter*)

What do you want? All the others have left.

Peter The headmaster sent me.

Edward What for?

Peter I am the one who wants to quit school.

Edward (immediately more friendly) Oh yes, I remember. Come in, Peter. Why on earth do you want to quit school?

Peter I have no choice. It's my only way of getting on.

Edward What do you mean?

Peter School can't teach me anything anymore.

Edward What exaggerated nonsense is that? In some subjects you are the best of all. You are interested in languages, aren't you? Your marks in English, French and German have always been the best possible.

Peter Other subjects interest me more.

Edward Which your school can't teach?

Peter History and religion.

Edward Your reports in those fields are also the best.

Peter But the subjects were corrupted by the new school reform.

Edward You noticed that?

Peter They are coloured by socialist propaganda which the school minister manipulated all education by, in issuing new textbooks to direct the entire school system towards socialism.

Edward There is a left wing movement advancing throughout the world, and you wish to oppose it?

Peter I don't want any of it. I don't want to be indoctrinated and programmed by stealthy brainwash.

Edward What do you want instead?

Peter Freedom to find my own way by private studies.

Edward In history and religion?

Peter Among other subjects.

Edward Peter, your school will miss you, and you will miss your school. There are other possibilities, but you are too young for the Adult Gymnasium, which I believe would suit you better than the formal school. You are not like all the others, you are not rowdy and mad about sports but prudent and serious, and Headmaster is right about worrying about you. What do your parents say?

Peter Mother understands me, but father wants to force me to go on.

Edward Will he do so?

Peter I have made up my mind. I can't go on. The new reformed system is worse than the old, and I only fall asleep on all worthless and wasted lessons.

Edward Yes, it happens that you fall asleep on sociology lessons. That's your weakest subject.

Peter Society is only about conformity and political correctness, programming and enforced adjustment, where no one is allowed to be better than the worst.

Edward That's socialism. But you will get nowhere without formal education. What will you do? Become a labourer?

Peter I will study the Bible and world history.

Edward That's a good and ambitious start, but are you disciplined enough for exclusively private studies?

Peter I could always start and then carry on.

Edward Peter, we are seriously worried about you, and not just your parents and teachers. At least keep in touch with us.

Peter I could try.

Edward Keep in touch with me. I want to follow your adventurous course. I see it as my responsibility, if my school wasn't good enough for you. I could always get you a tutor.

Peter Thank you, Sir.

Edward Consider it carefully. You can still change your mind. When do you intend to quit?

Peter At the end of the term.

Edward In the middle of the year?

Peter Yes.

Edward You are venturing on a dangerous course.

Peter I see no choice. *(leaves)*

Edward He is lost, and he was our best student, the only one who saw through the system and dared to think by himself, a currant among the blueberries and perhaps the only pearl among the swine, which now will get lost in the mud of the socialist society's discrimination of exceptions.

Act II, scene 1. The pub.

Sylvester Don't take it so hard, old man. You are not responsible.

Edward But I have been with the school for twenty-two years! No one else has been there that long, not even the headmaster. I made it my school and my spirit its dominating character with an accomplished style of serious taste and morals. And then a young cad comes along as an impertinent bully ruining everything by his vulgarity and enforced impositions.

Sylvester It's not your fault.

Edward But I am damaged by it, the school is damaged, its spirit is lost, and I felt responsible for it.

Sylvester You didn't have to.

Edward But I did.

Sylvester That's your fault. Then you have to get hurt and feel affected when something happens.

Edward Of course.

Sylvester Have another double. Be my guest.

Edward Thank you. (*They are served.*)

Sylvester Why don't you apply for another job?

Edward But it's my school!

Sylvester You are too attached to it. You have got stuck in it.

Edward It houses my whole life's work!

Sylvester As you see, it is immediately forgotten. The world is like that.

Edward He even took my sweetheart away from me!

Sylvester Was she really your sweetheart?

Edward I loved her but never proposed.

Sylvester That's another thing you have to blame yourself for.

Edward But she knew that I loved her and still gave herself away to that adventurer.

Sylvester Is he really that bad? The boys appear to adore him. He is very sporting and allows them class parties and school concerts with music they are allowed to choose themselves.

Edward Yes, he is a school populist who drowns all serious culture in popular vulgarity.

Sylvester Welcome, Laila. (*to a lady, who just entered*)

Edward Do you know her?

Sylvester She is a legendarily liberal lady. She was a female equivalent to your Curt and tried to reform the entire curriculum and was sacked as too inconvenient.

Edward She looks beautiful.

Sylvester She has been through a great deal.

Laila (at the bar) A double, please.

Sylvester You could find much to learn from her.

Edward Could you introduce me?

Sylvester Of course. Laila, this is Edward, a good friend of mine, teacher at the Orchard school. He is gradually getting sacked.

Laila How interesting. Laila. (*shakes hands with him*)

Edward Why were *you* sacked?

Laila It's a long story. I couldn't accept bullying and expert idiocy. I turned out too much of a challenge to the authorities.

Edward Just because of your teacher's attitude?

Sylvester Look at her, the most beautiful teacher of that school. Everyone was provoked by her mere presence. And she was totally honest and sincere. Of course she was fired.

Laila Why were *you* dismissed?

Edward I haven't been sacked yet.

Laila Will they do it?

Edward Hardly, unless I want it myself.

Laila Do you wish for it?

Edward No.

Laila Then you will be.

Sylvester She knows what she is talking about. She has experience. She has been a teacher all her life. It was her life's only calling. And look what they did to her.

Edward What did they do to her?

Sylvester They fired her, from every school.

Laila I have always been fired sooner or later.

Edward Why?

Laila I wonder that as well.

Sylvester Look at her, Edward. Do you need to ask?

Edward Your personality could never be a reason for dismissal.

Laila No?

Sylvester It was always the only reason in her case.

Edward Was it?

Laila I was too good. In our time and this country, over-qualification is taboo and an offence.

Edward I understand. You have to be like everybody else.

Laila If you are not politically correct according to the guidelines of the authorities, you are *persona non grata* and fair game branded as an outlaw for anyone to bring down for anything.

Edward Mobbing, that is.

Laila No, discrimination by the right of power of authority.

Edward Could our democratic society really be like that?

Laila No, our socialistic society is like that.

Sylvester This is 1968. Democracy was something of the old days.

Edward I understand. Then, Miss Laila, we are apparently colleagues.

Laila Welcome out to the outlaws.

Edward I am not fired yet.

Laila Just you wait. You will be, since you know me.
Edward How do you support yourself if you no longer work as a teacher?
Laila (looking luridly at him) Come and see.
Sylvester She works at an institution.
Edward The university?
Sylvester No, a different kind of institution.
Laila There are other worlds than the official one.
Sylvester Like there are other politics than the politically correct, and it's usually the other way that shows the way.
Edward You seem to be on a rather intimate standing with Laila.
Sylvester Not at all. I am just one of her many admirers. But I suspect that her school could be the right one for you.
Edward Does she run a school of her own?
Sylvester You'll see.

Scene 2. They enter an odd place.

Edward What place is this?
Sylvester They call it the Opium Den.
Edward Do they smoke opium here?
Sylvester Not quite, but plenty of other stuff.
Laila I come here when I need some weed or LSD.
Edward Are you using that kind of stuff?
Sylvester She delivers.
Edward Is that what you live on?
Sylvester Not only. She is also a performer.
Edward As what?
Laila A sort of actress. When I may not teach my students any more I have to find students elsewhere.
Edward Among customers like these?
Laila Why not? They are also human and beautiful as well.
Sylvester Not all of them.
Edward May we see you as a performer?
Laila That's why you are invited.
Sylvester You will be surprised, Edward.
Edward That remains to be seen.
Sylvester It's your turn soon, isn't it, Laila?
Laila In a few minutes.
A pupil (in another part of the joint) Isn't it Captain Fogey over there?
2 And watch his company!
1 I never thought that of him.
2 Do you think he is one of her regulars?

1 No, he only needs to be comforted. As you know, Curt Sport drove him over with Miss Amanda.

2 He has no chance with someone like Laila.

1 Don't count on it. She could take on anyone.

Laila (to the barkeeper) Give him something to strengthen him, Fergus, you know what. (twinkles, leaves them for the stage, walks by it to the other side while a spotlight follows her as she sits down at a piano.)

2 What will it be tonight, Laila? Blues?

Laila Better still! Rachmaninov! (*plays variation 18 from the Paganini variations.*)

Sylvester (after a while) Well, what do you think?

Edward But this is divine.

Sylvester To say the least.

Edward Who is she really?

Sylvester Search me. No one really knows. She is rather mysterious but has been married.

Edward There is something awesomely seductive and spellbinding about her.

Sylvester She has a reputation of being a dangerous woman, but there is nothing wrong with her music.

Edward She must be a professional pianist.

Sylvester She was on her way of becoming one when there was a quarrel with the conservatory. She became a music teacher instead and then added other subjects. She started as an excellent free lance piano teacher.

Edward I should think so. A teacher like that is what our school would need.

Sylvester Do you think your school would dare to employ her? I don't think so. The limit of what your school can stand should be set by your latest acquisition.

Edward Don't talk about him.

Sylvester He would probably try his ways with Laila as well, but then he would meet his superior.

Edward In what way?

Sylvester She has been married and is considered a security risk for men. She is a Scorpion.

Edward That explains it. She is irresistible.

Sylvester Yes, isn't she?

Laila (has a break) What do you wish to hear now, boys?

1 Boogie-woogie!

2 Jazz!

3 Mozart!

4 Bill Evans!

5 Bach!

Laila Bach it is then. (*pulls off with a fugue.*)

Edward She is amazing.

Sylvester I think she could have something to teach you.

Edward She turns me absolutely lyrical.

Sylvester Just take it easy.

Edward Who was her husband?

Sylvester A jealous bastard. She drove him mad, they say.

Edward How so?

Sylvester He tried to murder her.

Edward Ah! A *crime passionel!*

Sylvester Next to it. The law separated them, and she is under the strictest police protection by secret identity and the ex-husband being forbidden to ever see her again.

Edward Is it that bad?

Sylvester Or else she wouldn't have lived much longer.

Edward I don't think I ever met a more interesting woman.

Sylvester Do you want her?

Edward Would it be possible?

Sylvester You could always try. She gives everyone a chance but lets no one reach her. (*She stops. Applause by everyone: "More! More!" but she returns to the gentlemen.*)

Laila Well, was it all right?

Edward It was overwhelmingly all right.

Laila Thank you.

Sylvester (*lays his arm around Edward*) This teacher, Laila, has struggled for his school for twenty-two years and has now been ditched and brushed aside by a young upstart of an impertinent colleague half his age who has even robbed him of his sweetheart.

Laila How rude.

Sylvester Yes, isn't it? Can you help him?

Laila What does he need?

Sylvester A friend.

Laila I could always try him on until further. Like all beginners he has to be tested first.

Edward I would be grateful for your gracious friendship, Miss Laila.

Laila No problem, since we are already colleagues.

Edward Are we?

Laila As discarded teachers.

Sylvester Then I leave you two together. Good luck, Edward. (*leaves*)

Laila What nonsense has he been telling you about me?

Edward That you have been married and are a drug dealer.

Laila I am no dealer, but I sometimes offer. I only smoke weed and take LSD myself. It's good for the esoteric connections with the universe. Did you notice anything special about your drink?

Edward I don't know if I was enlivened by that or more liberated by your playing.

Laila It was probably both. It was spiced.

Edward You are supreme.

Laila I know. That's what's wrong with me. No one can stand it at length.
Edward I can put up with it at least so far.
Laila We'll see how long it lasts.
Edward I don't give up very easily.
Laila We can't talk in here. This is a public place. Shall we carry on our conversation at my place?
Edward A good suggestion.
Laila Let's go then. *(They leave together.)*
1 There he takes her out. Do you think it might lead to something?
2 We must tell this to the others at school.
1 They will soon know it all.
2 Especially Miss Amanda.
1 And the headmaster. *(They giggle and carry on like boys.)*

Scene 3. Laila's home, a typical teacher's flat with many books and a piano.

Laila What is your problem with school?
Edward I have lost it.
Laila In what way?
Edward I thought my life was safe there. I thought I had succeeded in making it an ideal home for the rest of my working life. And then the new teacher comes along and turns everything upside down.
Laila In what way?
Edward In every way. He insists on reforms and wants to do away with everything old. He doesn't care about our traditions. He wants to enforce modern elements and methods that don't fit the style of our school at all. He corrupts the pupils.
Laila How?
Edward He gives them irresponsible liberties with licence to liberal class parties with rock music and dancing, where even drugs may be involved.
Laila They are in all connections with rock music. It's unavoidable. It's the new age.
Edward But it is abominable.
Laila In what way?
Edward It's against our culture.
Laila What culture?
Edward Rock music works like brainwash, paralysing, benumbing and sillifying like all the brainwash of mass media. You are blocked from thinking by yourself, your natural and critical alertness is drowned in deafening noise, and you even ruin your hearing.
Laila You never had problems with your students?
Edward Never before. Now I do.
Laila In what way?

Edward They have become dispersed and disinterested, talking during class, backbite the teachers and grow insolent. They were never impertinent and rude before.

Laila And it's all because of the new teacher?

Edward It started with him.

Laila I am sorry about you. You have nothing more to do with that school. Leave it to its own destiny. It's just as well. The tendency in education is that the only possibility for the pupils to at all learn anything is for them to find it out for themselves. Private studies of their own is almost their only chance of getting real knowledge. The schools are constantly being more polluted by disorder and noise, and it's not the fault of the teachers but of school politics, that constantly have been lowering the standard of learning. A student without self-discipline will never learn anything.

Edward I can't just leave my school without further notice.

Laila Then you will get sacked sooner or later, and until then your existence there will constantly grow more difficult and unbearable.

Edward You offer me a future of a constantly exacerbated nightmare scenario.

Laila I am realistic. That's why I am no teacher any more. Welcome home and down to hell. That's the basics of all existence. If you stand securely with your own two feet on the bottom level and deepest ground of society you will not until then have a firm foothold. Before reaching down there to that stage you will always lose your way and balance and foothold all the time. Then you must constantly get into trouble in the free fall of life, which no one can save you from but yourself by reaching and standing on the bottom of the pit. Until you hit the bottom level of the gutter, life is nothing but a free fall.

Edward How do you support yourself?

Laila I give private lessons as a tutor.

Edward And you entertain by performances. Do they pay you for it?

Laila Not in cash. I get free weed and LSD. It's ideal. I never cared about money. It's just a necessary evil that you should avoid as much as possible.

Edward Sylvester was right. I have much to learn from you. How long have you known Sylvester?

Laila Only a few years, but we are at ease with each other.

Edward Do you have a relationship?

Laila Do you want a relationship?

Edward Honestly speaking, I wouldn't mind.

Laila I must warn you. I have a reputation of being risky.

Edward I know. There must be many who love you.

Laila All the world. Honestly speaking, I don't know, but those who love me usually get into trouble. That's why I avoid relationships, for their own good.

Edward I have nothing against a platonic and spiritual relationship.

Laila Then you are welcome.

Edward Thank you. I don't know why I succeeded in getting so relaxed and candid in your company. I used to always be terribly awkward and restricted in shyness and over-sensitivity in the presence of ladies.

Laila It's just empathy. You are an empath. That's the best human asset you can have, but it implies much pain and suffering.

Edward I know. Maybe the spiced drink helped me to come out of myself?

Laila It certainly helped. Do you want another?

Edward I'd love to.

Laila All inebriation is healthy as long as you keep the initiative and your control. It's not until when you lose control that it becomes harmful.

Edward I believe you. Show me your way, and I will always follow you wherever you might lead me.

Laila (pours him a drink, another for herself) Welcome. *(They drink to each other.)* As I said, welcome to my hell, but it is only realism.

Edward I am not afraid of any realism.

Laila Are you afraid of anything at all?

Edward I am afraid of relationships, but in your company I am not afraid of anything any more.

Laila Good for you. *(They drink.)* Drink it up. You may stay here for the night, if you want to.

Edward I thank you.

Pause

Act III scene 1. Class.

1 Is it true? Is he visiting the Opium Den?

2 Regularly. He is with that Laila.

3 Isn't she a satanist?

2 Yes.

1 I'll be damned! Who could have thought that about our old Fogey!

3 Is it true that she is a satanist?

2 That's what they say. She is notorious all over town.

1 For what?

2 She is regarded as a dangerous woman. She pushes drugs and makes proselytes.

1 Blyme! Isn't she a criminal then?

2 On the contrary. She is under direct protection of the law. She has a secret identity since her husband tried to kill her.

3 And that's the witch our old orderly Fogey has got mixed up with!

1 Watch it! He is here! *(All run to their benches.)*

Edward (enters, puts his books on the desk.) I know what is going on, you incorrigible villains, but let me tell you, that whatever slander you are spreading, you have no right to speak ill of any lady.

1 (*rising*) Excuse me, Sir, but this is about a lady whose honour is generally questionable. The whole school is discussing her, and the headmaster knows about your connection. Are you aware yourself that she pushes drugs and is a satanist?

Edward That has nothing to do with school, and you have nothing to do with her.

1 Pardon me, Sir, but we know her since of old.

Edward As a teacher?

1 No, as a drug provider.

Edward Shut up and sit down, malicious villain! (*The boys keep on whispering with repressed giggles.*)

Edward (strikes the desk hard with his pointer) No gossiping, you wicked scamps! If you speak at all about her you don't know what you are talking about! You are hopeless idiots all of you, you worthless gossips and stillborn rotten eggs, who will never amount to anything but as parasites on society, unless you turn into politicians by your opportunism, who are the worst social bloodsuckers who only thrive on corrupting and poisoning society, like you already do, you hopeless cases of uneducable lousy idiots!

Headmaster (enters) A word with you, master Foglethorpe.

Edward (self-possessed at once) Shall I come with you?

Headmaster No, I might as well bring it up here in front of your pupils. There have been complaints against you above all from your pupils' parents for harassing them and scolding them instead of educating them. I was standing here outside overhearing your latest scolding lecture. Master Foglethorpe, I am surprised. We can't have this in our school, especially since you always were the best example of our high standards of guiding our students.

Edward With respect, Headmaster, but my pupils have no right to prey into my private life and spread rumours about my acquaintances.

Headmaster Unfortunately the whole school is discussing it. It's not just your pupils. You frequently visit a disreputable place where a notorious woman appears in public rumoured to be a satanist. The whole town talks about it. It will not do, master Foglethorpe. I am surprised at you.

Edward She is just another teacher.

Headmaster Is she? Why then does she give performances at a notorious nightclub called the Opium Den? Hasn't she been discarded as a teacher? Do you want to follow the same path?

Edward With respect, Headmaster, but a lady's reputation is not always according to reality but is more often than not motivated by malicious scandalization. Have I no right to defend a calumniated woman?

Boys Bravo!

Headmaster If she is really just calumniated you have every right in the world to defend her. But you are warned. The spreading of reputations might harm both you and our school. Think about it, and be careful. (*walks out*)

Boys (again, applauding) Bravo, Sir!

Edward Can we return to order now? Open your books, please, on page 82 about Emily Brontë. What is the case of Heathcliff really all about? Is the 19th century view of gipsies still relevant today? Any views? Max, you were the first to raise your hand.

Scene 2. At Laila's.

Laila You are the most sensual lover I ever had.

Edward Do you mean that?

Laila Yes. But you never want to enter me. Why?

Edward It's because of a natural defect.

Laila Of what kind?

Edward I can never have a sperm release without pain and a bleeding risk.

Laila Blood in the sperm? I never heard about that before.

Edward Still you are an experienced woman.

Laila So you never penetrated a woman?

Edward No.

Laila That's maybe your salvation. Does it hurt very much?

Edward It hurts, but when I first observed blood in my semen I was only confused to say the least.

Laila Have you checked it?

Edward Only in the books. It's nothing to worry about. If it doesn't happen every time and doesn't bleed profusely, it's no bother.

Laila So you can't have children?

Edward I never tried. Who wants to risk spurting blood into a uterus? There could be all kinds of weird germs in bloody sperm.

Laila You haven't taken any risks.

Edward No.

Laila That's why your shyness always stopped you from taking the risk of making children.

Edward Yes.

Laila Then you suit me perfectly. Neither will I ever take that risk. I don't want to submit children to the world we have today. If I refrain I am innocent of contributing to the population explosion, which is ruining the planet.

Edward You are right. Neither will I.

Laila Then we are agreed.

Edward Perfectly.

(*They make love.*)

Scene 3. The Opium Den.

Peter Isn't Laila here?
Bartender She will come.
Peter She hasn't been here much lately.
Bartender You should know something about it. Weren't you at that school?
Peter What has she got to do with my school?
Bartender She keeps regular company with one of the teachers there.
Peter Which one?
Bartender An elderly teacher called Captain Fogey.
Peter That's my teacher.
Bartender I thought so.
Peter Is he also coming here?
Bartender Sometimes.
Peter Then perhaps they will come together.
Bartender It's possible.
Laila (enters) Peter! What are you doing here? You shouldn't come here.
Peter I am finished with school. I have left it.
Laila What will you do instead?
Peter Learn something at last.
Laila What?
Peter That's why I come to you. You can guide me. You could teach me in all the secret doctrines.
Laila Isn't it enough that you get stuff from me?
Peter I want to be initiated in your mysteries.
Laila What mysteries?
Peter I want to be an initiated adept.
Laila You don't know what you are talking about.
Peter In that case I wouldn't talk about it.
Laila What do you think you could gain by that?
Peter Anything. Personal development. Knowledge. Spiritual enlightenment. Power and control of my own destiny.
Laila You demand the impossible.
Peter No, I don't. I know what I am asking for.
Laila The question is if you do.
Peter Here is my teacher. He has always helped me. He could speak for me.
Edward Peter! What are you doing here?
Peter Continuing my education.
Edward Are you a student of Laila's?
Peter I want to be.
Edward There is nothing wrong in that, is there, Laila?

Laila He is too young and immature. He wants to test drugs and doesn't know what he is in for.

Edward Are you using drugs, Peter?

Peter Only moderately. Laila has taught me. I watch the limits.

Edward So they all think they do, until they allow themselves to cross the limits, and then there is no return.

Peter I want to go further than that. I want to become a satanist.

Edward Not you as well, Peter. I am no satanist.

Peter I never thought so either.

Edward Do you have Peter on your responsibility, Laila?

Laila Partly.

Edward Have you seduced him?

Laila No.

Edward Peter is young and immature, not even seventeen, but he is a brilliant student and knows what he wants but has a tendency to blend with bad company. Spare him, Laila.

Laila That's what I am trying to do.

Peter Pardon me, Sir, I didn't know you were intimate with each other. Then the rumour is true, which everyone talks about at school, that our best teacher has turned a satanist.

Edward No, it's not true.

Peter Why else would you associate with satanists?

Edward I am acquainted with no satanist except Laila.

Peter But she is leading. She allures everybody to follow her. No one can resist her influence.

Edward I agree with you, but that doesn't make me a satanist.

Peter Good luck, Sir. I will be back. (*leaves*)

Edward Has he been following you for long?

Laila Since a few years, since the beginning of puberty.

Edward He was my best student.

Laila And he left school?

Edward Yes.

Laila Well done.

Edward Do you supply him with drugs from here?

Laila Only in emergencies. He has problems with his family.

Edward His father?

Laila Yes.

Edward He wanted to force him to stay on at school, and the risk is that he will be lost if he doesn't.

Laila I will take care of him.

Edward Can you save him?

Laila Of course.

Edward How?

Laila Satan is the ultimate protection. Who confides in Satan with his life will get through everything. What doesn't kill you will only make you stronger.

Edward You think so?

Laila I know it.

Edward Sometimes I wonder who you really are.

Laila If only someone could know that much of himself, but the ultimate insight and wisdom could very well lie in the certitude that you can never really know who you really are.

Edward Do you call that wisdom?

Laila No, supreme awareness and realism.

Act IV scene 1. The headmaster's room.

Curt I assure you, that it was never my intention to cause any division and turbulence in the leadership of the school.

Headmaster It's not your fault.

Curt I never wanted to disturb his routine.

Headmaster That he felt disturbed was his own problem, and that he went wrong himself in getting really disturbed is his own business.

Curt I never wished him to resign. Could nothing make you retry his case?

Headmaster He has made himself impossible. We can't have our teachers running after whores at nightclubs so demonstratively that they shame the entire school by some pupils with a taste for mischief and scandals finding their own teacher at the most scabrous possible nightclubs for gays and lesbians and other prostitutes, spreading his chase on lurid and fallen women all over the school and town. I am surprised at him. If he insists on this most improper public behaviour we can't keep him. He may serve to the end of the semester, but we can keep him no longer than that.

Curt It will be difficult for him at his age to find another employment.

Headmaster That's his problem. He should have thought of that before he freaked out.

Curt He hasn't freaked out. He is still our best teacher.

Headmaster Yes, he has freaked out, and then it doesn't matter how good a teacher he is.

Curt You are hard in your judgement.

Headmaster No, I am only realistic. We must adapt to what the pupils need, and they don't need a bad example of an old fogey on the brink to dementia who neglects his duties towards his school to chase notorious nightclub queens.

Curt It's not as you think.

Headmaster How do you think it is then?

Curt I know that she is a previously dismissed teacher who no one ever found any reason to complain of.

Headmaster Why was she discarded then?

Curt Everyone wonders about that, but she was too attractive.

Headmaster For twenty-two years our good Edward has been our paragon example of morals and good standards, and then he falls for such a dame. The entire school is making fun of him. If he only could be more discreet about it.

Curt She depends for her livelihood on an employment at a doubtful nightclub, which unfortunately is popular with the whole town and especially with our students.

Headmaster It will not do. We must cut him off.

Curt No retrial?

Headmaster He has already been retried enough.

Scene 2. The Opium Den.

Sylvester Don't take it so hard, Edward. It was inevitable anyway. And you are not sacked yet. The board still has time to collect its wits to avoid tragedies and scandals.

Edward But I have been with that school for twenty-two years! It's almost my life's work! It is the greatest and most important part of my life!

Sylvester But you have actually won Laila instead.

Edward And who is Laila if not a fallen teacher who has changed sides and now devotes herself to the opposite of education, like an anarchist who methodically aims at seducing young people and leading them on an antisocial course! She is a greater danger than Curt Sport!

Sylvester Still she is constructive in all her dark ways. She has found an alternative way to what society excluded her from. It's her privilege, and she is making the best of it.

Edward Yes, she seduces everyone who comes her way to satanism.

Sylvester Be grateful. You are the only one who owns her. All others must envy you. Make the best of it, like she does.

Laila (joins them) Is he wallowing in his misery again?

Sylvester He doesn't want to leave his school.

Laila He didn't have to. He can still remain.

Sylvester Yes, if he disconnects from you.

Laila He may if he wants to. I can leave town if he wants me to. I could return to France and Italy. The last thing I want is for him to feel tied to me.

Sylvester Do you hear, Edward? She lets you free. You may keep your school.

Edward Then I still prefer you, Laila, to all my intolerable uneducable rotten eggs of lousy students.

Sylvester I knew it.

Laila Have another drink, Edward, and let's go home.

Edward Yes, I need it.

Sylvester You know what he needs, Laila.
Laila I spoil him.
Stephen (entering suddenly) Laila, you have a call.
Laila By whom?
Stephen Your husband has found you.
Laila Not again!
Stephen I am afraid he has found out your address.
Laila (finishes her drink and gets up) I must go home at once. He mustn't break in and smash my apartment again.
Edward Who is your husband?
Laila Be glad that you don't know him. You are safe only as long as you don't. You had better stay here.
Edward Can you manage home all right?
Laila I always manage. *(leaves in haste)*
Edward Is that the man who tried to murder her?
Sylvester I am afraid so.
Edward What will she do?
Sylvester I hope she goes directly to the police.
Stephen No, she will first go home to protect it.
Edward Can she make it?
Sylvester That remains to be seen.
Edward I had better hurry after her, in case she needs help. *(leaves at once.)*
Sylvester Edward! It's no use!
Stephen He is gone.
Sylvester Edward is the last man to cope with a brute like Richard.
Stephen I hope he doesn't meet him.
Sylvester If Richard sees them together they could both be lost.
Stephen Yes. *(pours himself a drink and Sylvester. They drink.)*

Scene 3. Laila's apartment.

Richard (enters, outside) So this is where she lives. This is her hideout, as if she thought she could get away and escape me, the false bitch. I wonder how many lovers she has been driving out of their minds in here. But quiet, someone's coming. *(hides)*
Edward (enters, rings the doorbell) Laila, it's me.
Laila (from inside) You shouldn't have come here. I expect a break-in from Richard at any moment.
Edward Haven't you called the police?
Laila I was just going to, when you rang.
Edward Let me in, and we'll do it at once.
(Laila is heard unchaining the door. Richard steals forth and puts a gun to the back of Edward)

Richard Not a sound, if life is dear to you.

Edward Laila, don't open! *(She has already opened. Richard immediately forces Edward in and has them both at gunpoint.)*

Richard So this is your new lover, Laila, your new victim, a scrapped pathetic school-teacher who has nothing to expect from his connection with you than dismissal. Ha-ha-ha! What fun we shall have!

Laila You will never get away, Richard.

Richard This time it's you that won't get away, Laila. Don't move! Now we shall have some fun! At last I may have a settlement! Hands behind, you miserable crock! *(starts pinioning him with a cord. Laila suddenly attacks. Richard gives her a hard and brutal knockout. She passes out immediately and falls.)* That should keep her quiet, the damned witch! Now I can plaster you nicely, you ridiculous fool!

Edward You'll get prison for this.

Richard I have never been here. You have been here. Everybody knows that you have been visiting her regularly. I am here for the first time and will vanish without a trace. You will be her only possible murderer. *(Gags him and binds the gag with isolation tape, then binds his hands to the leg of a table and also ties up his feet with a cord.)*

There, Laila, now we shall have some fun like in old times! It's time to wake up to reality, sweet little Mistress Slut! *(hits her hard on her cheeks. She wakes up, looks around, sees the entirely incapacitated Edward.)*

Laila What will you do to us?

Richard Shut up! *(advances, hits her and subjects her)* He shall witness my pleasure of raping and killing you!

Laila The police will get you.

Richard Shut up! *(gags her and locks her arms. Edward fights desperately but hopelessly to get free.)* Don't resist, any of you, or you will only make it worse for yourselves! You are both done for, and I might kill you both, but it would be better if I could make your fool of an impotent lover your murderer. *(pulls off her panties)* Enjoy life now, Laila! Enjoy feeling alive while you're still alive! Are you happy now, you damned bitch of hell, when you have brought down so many men and made your own husband your final murderer! You will be grateful, and for a companion down to hell I send along with you your latest victim, a pathetic old failure of a teacher, all rotten and burst open with worthless knowledge and complacency, which you have dragged down with you in your own eternal damnation with all his irrevocably scandalized, ruined and corrupted school, as an extra trophy on your course of perdition constantly further down into the eternal damnation abyss! Do you wish to say something, you infamous plague contamination and deadly parasite? *(tears off her gag)*

Laila I can only pity you, you poor pathetic psychopath of a wreck of an aborted ruffian! You never succeeded in anything and will not even be able to carry through any murder, no matter how hard you try!

Richard You are right, you accursed cow and sow of a vampire of plague and bloodsucker and parasite on the souls of men! The only thing in life I was successful

in was turning you into a satanist and for good, and that is my only lasting credit. Only for that I will ever get famous, for that I succeeded with beyond all expectation! You will be the most efficiently proselytizing satanist for all times, and that only because and thanks to me, your murderer and eternal ravisher! (*rapes her brutally. Suddenly he collapses. She is surprised, gets free, throws him over, removes her gag and liberates Edward.*)

Edward What happened?

Laila He must have had a stroke. Good for him.

Edward Shall we call an ambulance?

Laila No, let him die. He worked for it. He worked himself up and went to extremes once too much. He asked for it. He couldn't have died more unblessed, and perhaps that's what he wanted, so let him have it. What happened was entirely on his own responsibility.

Edward (examines him) He is actually dead. He has no pulse any more.

Laila Then you can call both the police and the ambulance. But we should clean up here first. They don't have to know it all.

Edward Are you all right? Did you manage?

Laila He never succeeded in anything and least of all in what he most bragged about. Although he made himself my lawful wedded husband he never got to know me. He could never understand me, only misunderstand me.

Edward Poor devil.

Laila To say the least.

Edward (at the phone) Police, please. We wish to report an accident. A man here just had a lethal stroke... Yes, you should send an ambulance. (*hangs on*)

Laila There is only the corpse left of him. They can do whatever they will with it. We are rid of him and unaccountable.

Edward (embraces her) Laila, you appear so untouched and unhurt.

Laila He couldn't surprise me any more.

(They embrace and kiss.)

Act V scene 1. The headmaster's room.

Headmaster I am sorry, but he has no choice.

Curt But he is completely innocent.

Headmaster Of what?

Curt Of everything he is blamed for.

Headmaster Is he innocent of frequenting a pub which only the worst school rogues visit in a morbid desire of the forbidden and criminal, and of courting a notorious nightclub artist of doubtful reputation, who only the other day was found with a dead body in her bed, and whom he still won't let go of his compromising contact with? Is he innocent of purposely giving both himself and his school a bad reputation?

Curt Yes, he is.

Headmaster Curt, you surprise me.

Edward (enters) You called me, Headmaster. *(to Curt)* It doesn't surprise me that you are here, my principal foe at school.

Curt We only wish you well, Edward.

Headmaster Edward, I am sorry, but we have no choice. I warned you before, but still you persisted in keeping an open relationship with perhaps the most disreputable woman in town. Not even the fact that the police found her with a corpse in her bed and you present in this scandalous situation has made you break off the most scabrous relationship ever heard of in this school.

Edward Pardon me, Headmaster, but it is easy to jump to conclusions. That corpse was not found in her bed. It was lying on the floor, and we lifted it up into a sofa. It was only a visitor.

Headmaster Wasn't it a customer?

Edward No, it was her husband.

Headmaster And you were there when her husband visited her and had a stroke? My good Edward, it will not do. I expect your resignation at the shortest possible notice.

Edward Is then an innocent individual to be blamed and punished for the unpredictable interference of fate?

Headmaster You were there. You knew her. Her husband died in front of your eyes. Didn't you do anything to help him?

Edward We called the ambulance.

Headmaster Edward, it's not just you. We can't allow our pupils to visit a place like the Opium Den and there meet their own teacher in intimate contact with nightclub singers, drug dealers, a seductress and maybe a murderess. It will not do. A school is a school, and we are here for the protection of our pupils, not for their corruption.

Edward Pardon me, Headmaster, but it is school that corrupts them.

Headmaster What do you mean?

Edward I mean that school is corrupted all through by its political manipulation in a socialist direction by policies from our school minister and becoming prime minister, which is why more and more pupils are dropping off school voluntarily.

Headmaster Our school stands above all politics.

Edward Not our school books.

Headmaster So you oppose the entire system?

Edward Yes, in solidarity with my best pupils.

Headmaster Did you ever hear such a thing, Curt? You are the perfect teacher, you give the students what they want, lightens up the curriculum with sporting days and class parties and enliven the music lessons with jazz and modern music, while this fellow takes sides with the extremists, the buccaneers, the misfits and all lost outsiders. Didn't I send Peter to you to persuade him to stay on at school? How did you succeed with that? He has left. Did you instead talk him into realizing his threat?

Edward No, I tried to make him carry on, but he was right and did right in quitting.

Headmaster So you take a stand for anarchism.

Edward No, for the critical and quiet opposition against the politicizing of education for the defence of culture and the personal initiative.

Headmaster You are a political outlaw.

Edward Yes, I am.

Curt School can't fire him, Headmaster. Teachers like him will always be needed in every school.

Headmaster But does he have to go to that nightclub and be so indiscreet about a relationship with such a disreputable lady? I am thinking of our school, its status and the protection of our pupils. Can't you break up with that woman?

Edward What man can do without a woman?

Headmaster You would in this case if you thought of yourself.

Edward I must think more of her.

Headmaster I deplore you, Edward. You were our best teacher until you lost your way, and not even Curt can defend you any more. He will be our new best teacher. I don't demand your resignation, but I expect you to file it yourself.

Edward I shall think about it, Headmaster.

Headmaster Please do. You may leave. (*Edward leaves.*)

Have you anything more to say for his defence?

Curt No one can replace him, and least of all myself.

Headmaster I shall take your statement into consideration, but it will be the board to decide the matter, and they have to think only of what's best for our school.

Curt No one does that more than Edward, Headmaster.

Headmaster That's what he doesn't do any more.

Scene 2. At Laila's.

Edward How did Richard manage to make you a satanist, Laila?

Laila You don't want to know.

Edward Yes, I do want to know, because I want to know you.

Laila That's what Richard wanted as well. He never succeeded.

Edward Do I have the same bad prospects?

Laila I want to spare you, Edward. You are of a different kind. Richard was brutal and insensitive in total egoistic ruthlessness, but you are empathic and vulnerable in delicate oversensitivity. Your bleeding semen is a typical symptom. You can't love without becoming a sufferer.

Edward Can anyone?

Laila That depends on what you mean by love. Is it only for self-satisfaction? In that case it is self-destructive. Is its only purpose to further and propagate life? In that case it demands constant self-sacrifice. In both cases the suffering must constantly accelerate until it becomes unbearable. But the empath must suffer more, for his suffering is doubled by his compassion.

Edward You are so wise, Laila, but at the same time so destructive. Why must drugs be part of your life? The school demands of me to refrain from my engagement with you for the sake of your reputation.

Laila You are free to do so.

Edward You know I can't. You are like that. No man who has learnt to know you can do without you with less than killing you, like Richard.

Laila Murder me then and be rid of me, and I will be rid of my reputation.

Edward I loved my school, Laila. It was my whole life, until you entered the picture.

Laila Had I done so if Curt hadn't ruined your school for you?

Edward I don't think so.

Laila So you love your school more than me. Kill me then, like Richard, and you can go on living for your school.

Edward I could never harm anyone.

Laila Not even me?

Edward You least of all.

Laila Still I am your perdition. I have ruined your life by my reputation. What if it was intentional? What if I took care of you just to ruin you and your life?

Edward I can't believe that.

Laila What if all I wanted was your soul and that I wanted to use you and suck you to make you dependent on me and my drugs as yet another hooked satanist?

Edward Spare me, Laila.

Laila What if all your love of me was just a self-deception?

Edward What made your husband so mad? Was it jealousy? Did you provoke him to lose his mind?

Laila What if I did it intentionally?

Edward Laila, you can't have taken possession of me just for an experiment to use me and see how far you could drive me by the folly of passion like another guinea-pig just for the fun of your manipulation?

Laila And what if that was precisely the case? Don't fool yourself, Edward. Try some realism in your view of me.

Edward Everybody loves you. I can see how the audience devours you with their looks when you perform. You give them yourself by your music, but you never give yourself to me. Why may I not love you?

Laila I wish to spare you.

Edward By torturing me?

Laila By saving you from learning to know me.

Edward But if I insist? Could you really be evil inside?

Laila Do you know why I married Richard?

Edward No.

Laila To get power over him, to see how far I could drive him by my manipulations. I accepted his love to begin with, but I never loved him. He became

aware of it eventually. Our love ended from the beginning. Then he just wanted to murder me because he could never get rid of me in his thoughts. He demanded liberation and thought he could reach it by murdering me. Will you end up the same way?

Edward Are you asking me to murder you?

Laila I give you the choice of that freedom opportunity.

Edward Laila, you don't know what you are suggesting.

Laila You want to keep your school. Then you must exclude me. So exclude me, if you want to keep your school.

Edward I would rather murder you.

Laila Murder me then. My life here is without consequence anyway.

Edward (grabs her by the throat with both his hands) It is so easy to murder a woman. Already Othello showed that. It's just to squeeze, and she is paralyzed, and with the throat paralyzed and without strength she can do nothing, since all her strength is lost. It takes time to strangle a woman, but it is the safest method. An entire sect in India turned into a leading political movement by selecting and strangling suitable victims at random. Laila, you have had many customers, and anyone could have had reason to strangle you. Even I would have a reason, since I am forced to choose between my school and you, and I have to choose my school. Still I can't refrain from you. I must bring you with me into my own destruction. *(strangles her, but cold sweat breaks forth on him, he is agonised and loses his grip, lets her go and collapses.)*

I am sorry, Laila. I can't harm you in any way.

Laila Then you are innocent. You should be glad. You can return to your work.

Edward I can't do without you.

Laila No, you can't.

Edward The school demands it.

Laila Then I shall have to seduce the school.

Edward How?

Laila I must speak with Curt.

Come, my friend. Every night we have together could be the last one.

Scene 3. The headmaster's room.

Headmaster Curt, I wish to thank you for your outstanding contributions to the revitalization of our school.

Curt Nothing to thank me for. It was just natural for me to do what I could.

Headmaster Your program has been so successful, so I have decided to follow your experimental direction.

Curt So you don't have to fire Edward? *(enter Edward)*

Headmaster Edward, you couldn't have come in a better moment. We have to thank your rival here for having robbed you of your sweetheart and almost forced you out of school.

Edward So you stick to demanding my resignation?

Headmaster On my and Curt's recommendation the board has accepted to continue following Curt's line and instead of a dismissal employ a new teacher who could bring the development of our school even further.

Edward You don't mean...

Headmaster Yes, I do. Come in, Laila Ruth. (*She enters.*) Our school has realized the possible advantage of having a fresh innovative teacher like you on staff. So you are employed from this coming autumn by your colleague Curt's recommendation. We had decided to engage a new teacher anyway in music and English.

Laila I am very grateful. I never dared to apply for the situation.

Headmaster You were discovered, for which we are to thank our colleague Edward Foglethorpe. Without him we would never have accepted you.

Laila So Edward is allowed to remain?

Headmaster No teacher has served our school longer and more faithfully than he. Continuity must always be encouraged and rewarded, especially as it is so rare in these days.

Curt I congratulate the school to a wise decision. Edward, could we make peace? (*offers his hand*)

Edward Curt, you are impertinent and unbearable, but I liked you from the start. (*accepts it*)

Headmaster Welcome to our school, Laila Ruth.

Laila If there is any contribution I could make, I think it would be to school discipline. With Edward and Curt here we could boost both efficiency and standards of the school most considerably, since the last problem I ever had with any school was with my pupils.

Edward Laila is phenomenal in inspiring concentration and attention.

Headmaster Then I think we have resolved all the immediate problems of our good old school. Knowledge and education is all that matters, against which everything else is only minor issues. May I invite you for some coffee, my friends? We must then start planning the end of the term. (*lays his hands around them, and they walk out together to the refreshment room.*)

The End.

*Finland (Virhamn) 12-15 June 2017,
translated 3-7 April 2019.*

Comment

The entire plot of this play has had no equivalent in reality, except that the Swedish original actually reflects the school crisis of Sweden in the 1960s.

The teacher Karl-Edvard Ydén is mentioned in the dedication. The only thing he had in common with the Edward of the play was, that he used to scold his pupils in the same way, and we loved him for it.

He had a very interesting and for us pupils totally unknown past, though, which showed up some years after his departure, when I had a mail from Belgium researching about him. Here are some notices:

“In 1946, Karl-Edvard Ydén was a field secretary for the YWMC in Belgium. In that function he visited the Prisoner of War Camps for German soldiers in Belgium.”

“Karl-Edvard Ydén is mentioned in a report by the World Alliance of the YMCA’s War Prisoners Aid : ‘One year in Belgium. March 1945 – March 1946’.

He joined the Brussels Office in Januari 1946. And he was responsible field worker for the British PoW-Camps nrs. 2226, 2227 in Zedelgem and 2224 in Jabbeke for approx. 30.000 German and Baltic PoW’s.

I don’t know what his previous job was or how he got involved in the YMCA field work. Through the Church of the Brethren maybe?

I would be very interested in the text of the play about him or other interesting facts.”

These facts showed up almost simultaneously with my working on the play, making his presence almost spiritually evident. I only knew him as a teacher, though, and the play reveals nothing except perhaps giving a glimpse of him as a teacher.

April 8th 2019