

The Man Unseen (previously called The Hunchback)

Characters:

The Hunchback – The Prime Minister

Beatrice- His secretary

Paul- An under secretary

A butler

A delegation of three men, from the peasants

A representative of the capitalists

A nun, and her companion

The man unseen

The place is in a kingdom beyond the horizon.

The time is beyond today.

Scene: A room in the State Department, in the palace. There is a large door center back, and two windows on either side, back, and two windows on either side, back, right and left center door.

There is a door up right, and another up left. The tables, chairs, etc., are of princely magnificence.

At rise of curtain Beatrice is found at the great table left center. She is awaiting the arrival of the Prime Minister, pad and pencil in hand. On the other side, right center, Paul is seated. At right and left of the large door are guards in uniform standing at attention.

At the moment of the curtain rising the Prime Minister enters through the door center back. He is horrible deformed, a hunchbacked, withered limbed, exceedingly small man, with white distorted features. He comes with almost incredible creeping inch steps, his hanging arms almost touch the ground. He is perched upon the chair back of the great table, in the center, by the two guards who have left their places beside the door. The Prime Minister's hands are stretched out on the table before him, and they shake like dry twigs in the wind. If they were not for his deep powerful voice which seems to come from some giant being, unrelated to this misshapen body, one would deem him a mummy of something half human, half animal, moving by an imperfect mechanical devise.

But there is a light indescribable in his eyes. He is dressed in a conventional black with white collar etc.

Beatrice and Paul rise as he enters and remain standing.

Beatrice is a slender woman of thirty-three, with ivory white skin and Titian hair. She has the eyes of a visionary, though modeling of the rest of her face expresses a highly developed mind, and a sense of order.

Her mouth is exceedingly sensitive, but is none the less the mouth of one who has known deep pain, yet faced pain bravely. She is dressed in ivory white.

Paul is a man of forty, much concerned with all matters of dress and manners, to be handsome. (groomed, preened)

(Page 3 of the play is missing)

My dear Sir:

I am grateful for what is to me a quickening letter in regard to art in general and to your sense of beauty in particular. Please let me say, though I am neither a poet or an artist, that beauty sleeps indeed, in complete tranquility in the heart of all things, in the heart of life itself.

You and I cannot penetrate beyond the surface of this life. And should we do so, as if by miracle, I doubt that if in finding anything which even our wonder and surprise, would deem but beauty. And let us not forget, my friend, that beauty is character; it is a design delineated by the blessed finger of God, an autumn leaf that you hold in your hand, a rock whose contour against the sky arrests your eyes; a child, unperceived, dancing alone; an old man whose long day's work is done, gazing at the fire upon hearth.

And surely you will understand me when I say that beauty would sleep in the stillness of our souls until it is awakened by our long loving.

Much more would I say to you here, but it is better to wait until we meet again, for I fear if you will hold me longer I would turn poet rather than the servant to His Majesty, our King.

I beg you to remember me to your gracious wife, and I beg you again to tell her that it would delight me beyond ¿? To see her garden, and I am only prevented by the unwillingness of this body.

Believe me, Sir

Yours, faithfully.

(Pause)

P.M (Prime Minister): (to Beatrice) I have faith in that man. His conception of art is free from all his yesterdays. It rather hard, Beatrice, to write to him without becoming young again, and perhaps a little of a poet.

(Pause)

Let me see the other letter.

(B. hands him the next letter, and as he holds it, looking it over, a giant, radiant person, a man, it seems, beyond the race of men, walks from the door up left in paces measured and rhythmic, and with grace and magnetic beauty, across the room. Beatrice sees him, no one else does so. She rises, her pad and pencil fall to the floor. She outstretches her arms toward this amazing being, with wonder in his eyes, and speaks with the voice of one seeing a vision, a voice expressing a yearning, a heart desire, and yet adoration, a voice suddenly released.

Beatrice: O...o..Oh! (Following him with her eyes) O...o...Oh!

(the man unseen passes and disappears at door on right)

P.M.: (laying down the letter and looking in surprise at Beatrice)

What is it Beatrice?

Beatrice: (sitting down and recovering her composure somewhat)

It is... nothing. (She passes her hand over her face with a bewildered gesture)

That letter, sir ... you were going to say...

P.M.: (looking at her intently, then) Oh yes, yes. It is from our friend, a good man who doesn't know what to do with his goodness. He is like a rich man seeking those who would take of his goods, but finding no one.

(Pause)

Now, let us answer this letter.

(He dictates)

Dear Sir:

I have been mindful of your letter. It discloses much to me. But will you be generous enough to let me say this: The power of the state must rest on the status of its least developed member. No government can rise beyond the will and the inherent inclination of the governed.

The law which you are about to pass is not a law, it is an inhibition which, if enacted, will turn into a lawlessness, and eventually into rebellion. My heart is always with those who, in their white innocence –(to Beatrice)- did you say white, Beatrice?- my heart is always with those who, in their white innocence break laws made by those who are not innocent.

My love to you and to your dear mother, who was kindly enough to send me the jars of sweetmeats, precious to me, because I know that she has made them with her own tender hands.

I shall of course, write to her before this day is over.

Believe me, Sir,

Yours faithfully.

(Pause)

P.M.: (his head drooping heavily) I think I am a little weary now.

(Pause)

But there is more Beatrice?

Beatrice: (yearning over him in her look and voice)

There is this, sir, from the Bishop. Shall I read it to you, again?

P.M.: No, I remember what the dear old man said. However...

(he holds out his hand and she hands the letter to him. As he looks at it, The Giant, a radiant person, a man it seems beyond the race of men, walks from the door up left, in paces, measured and rhythmic, and with grace and majestic beauty across the room. Beatrice sees him, but no one else does. She rises her pad and pencil falling to the floor. She outstretches her arms toward this amazing being, with wonder in her eyes, and she

speaks with the voice of seeing a vision, a voice expressing heart desire, a yearning, and yet adoration, a voice of one suddenly released)

Beatrice: O..o...oh! (following him her eyes) O...o...oh!

(The man unseen passes on and disappears)

P.M: (laying down the letter and looking in surprise at Beatrice)

What is it Beatrice?

Beatrice: (sitting down and recovering her composure somewhat)

It is... nothing.

(she passes her hand over her face with a bewildered gesture)

That letter, sir; you were going to say...

P.M: (looking at her intently)

Are you tired, Beatrice?

Beatrice: Oh, no! I am never tired working with you.

P.M: (turning at her wearily)

Thank you my dear and now, the letter to the Bishop.

(he dictates)

Your Eminence:

I regret that I shall not be able to be with you and your congregation on next Ask Wednesday: and surely you would not inflict your friends with this one which they dream a man, a servant of the State, but who is taught save a horseless chariot.

I feel that you have not written to me, but to another man, one who visits me once in a while, the one whom I am but a hand, a withered hand. Yet surely your letter was addressed to me.

(Letter to Bishop concluded)

Please forgive me for not accepting your kind invitation, and I beg you to let me come in a spirit next Wednesday, and worship with you all.

I am your Emenence,

Most strictly yours.

P.M: (to Beatrice) I am weary my dear friend. I am a spent string in an ancient harp, but when the day is ended we shall have a little sleep and then the dawn of the second day will be upon us. And we shall be retuned to new music; who knows, perhaps to music not yet heard. But I am weary. I feel that my heart is a still lake where there is no wind to create a stir upon the surface, nor a throb in its depth.

Beatrice: Would it not please you to rest, now, and leave other matters until tomorrow?

P.M: Tomorrow? Tomorrow...what is tomorrow but today trying to escape from pain into hope

Butler: (a butler enters at center door, goes down right and bows to the Prime Minister)

Butler: A delegation from the North Country awaits upon you, sir.

P.M: Oh yes, the honest peasants. Bid them enter.

(Butler bows and exits. In a moment he returns ushering in threesome one preceding the other two. They all bow, and the butler exits)

(Paul now takes careful notes of all that transpires. Beatrice watches and listens)

P.M: What can I do for you my friends?

(the large man who entered first is the spokesman)

Spokesman: Your excellency, we represent the peasants of the North.

P.M: Yes, yes. I know. What is your grievance?

Spokesman: Until last year our land was justly taxed. But this year, sir, they have overtaxed every acre, the nonproductive as well as the productive. Our poor people feel that the new levy is unjust, and through us, the appeal to you.

P.M: That was not just. The government must not tax beyond your power of production.

(He thinks for a moment)

I have an idea. Go to your people and say this: The government is forcing us to pay for each square foot of ground that we possess. Let us make each square foot yield so much that the government will not deem itself for cheated. Say this to your people, if I may suggest, and say it this manner: we and the government are having a race. The government has authority, and we have sinews. Now let us run toward the goal and let us find who will win, labor that only resets when the sun would sleep, or government forever restless in palaces (Rising his withered hands and gesturing); palaces like this, my good friends.

Go to your people and bid them start the race. If I am here tomorrow, I shall receive the crown of laurel.

(The three men are deeply moved. They bow and exit)

(There is a silence)

(At this moment the Man Unseen enters from door up right, and walks majestically across the room. Again, Beatrice is the only one who sees him, and she rises in great agitation, outstretched, and speaks with a voice from the depths)

Beatrice: O...o... Oh...o...o...oh, Man above all men, turn to me but for a moment! Stay...stay, and let me see your face.

(The Man goes on across the room to door up your left and disappears. Beatrice drops her arms at her sides, and cries out)

Oh, he is gone ... again.

(The Prime Minister and Paul look upon her with great concern)

P.M.: Tell me, now, what is happening to you, my friend? What is it?

Beatrice: (raising her hands and brushing her eyes, as she drops into the chair)

No... it is nothing. Nothing.

(At this moment the butler appears and enters, announcing with a bow)

Butler: Prince Holdain awaits you with pleasure, sir.

P.M: Bid him enter. (As if to himself) Now we will have a word with gilded royalty. Poor drowning thing, clinging to driftwood, but it would not raise its head above the foam.)

(Prince Holdain preceded by butler, appears in door)

Butler: The Prince Holdain!

(The Prince enters and butler exits)

P.M.: (Pointing to a chair near his table. The Prince seats himself.)

You have come to tell me your trouble with the working men.

Prince: Yes, and I have much to say.

P.M.: You need not say it! Listen to me, should you care to listen, to what I am about to tell you, otherwise you must continue to hear the humming of the bees gathering honey for a queen bee.

Prince: I am listening, sir.

P.M.: (thoughtfully) Let every capitalist take every laborer into partnership, and in course of time every laborer shall become a shareholder through the amount of wealth he produces, and in course of time you capitalists will receive back all the oil and salt you have put into the pot, and surely you will be content; and the laborers will find all the meat which between sunrise and sunset that have put into the pot, and they also shall be content.

Your Royal Highness, I have nothing more to say. I trust you have heeded my words. Good evening to you.

(The Prince rises, bows stiffly, and exits)

P.M.: Beatrice, my friend, I am weary. I have my bow, but my quiver is empty.

(He looks about)

The day is almost done. What is left to do?

Beatrice: I believe that the two nuns to whom you granted an audience are now in waiting. But if you would rest, surely they will understand and will come again.

P.M.: Oh, Sister Clemontine!

(As she speaks the butler again enters)

Butler: The Mother Superior of the nunnery and her companion are in waiting.

P.M.: Beg them to come in.

(The butler goes to the door and motions the two nuns who are immediately, without, to enter.

Enter sister Clemontine and her companion. Exit the Butler)

P.M.: Please be seated, and I pray that you will forgive this body not to rise. In spirit I rise to you.

(The two nuns are seated)

Sister Clemontine: It is most noble of you, sir, to say this.

P.M.: And now, what would you have for me? I hope it will be within my power to grant it.

Sister Clemontine: It is most noble of you, sir, to say this.

P.M.: And now, what do you have for me? I hope it will be within my power to grant it.

Sister C.: Beside our nunnery there is a land which we would have for our orphans, and for the children whom men and women would not claim, children of chance, children of the night. But to our sorrow Prince Holdain would have it, though he holds no title to it. We want it sir, for our needs. He would have it to add to this plenty, his vast property. For this we came with you.

(He rests his face for a moment upon his hand.)

P.M.: Dear, dear women, mothering other women's children. You should be given ample space for cradles. My heart with those who would love tenderly and yet know not anyone upon whose head to pour their love. But my dear Sisters, you are indeed fortunate to have found objects for your love and your tenderness.

(He pauses)

The land shall be given to you. Let me think for a moment. Let me think. There is a law the gist of which is this: A field, a vineyard or an orchard which has been abandoned for fifteen years, not tilled, seeded, unimproved or husbanded, shall become again the property of the crown.

P.M: (He looks at Sister Clemontine)

I shall see that the crown bestows it upon you, in recognition of your service to the State.

(Turning to Paul)

Go to the library and look under the caption of "deeds and transactions" I believe you will find that from seventy-seven is what we want in this case. Make a copy of it together with the Royal decree. I mean the usual one. Go now.

(Paul rises, bows and exits)

P.M.: (To sister Clemontine and her companion)

Be at peace, dear Sisters, dear mothers of other women children. I am happy to serve you.

(They both rise)

Sister C: Thank you sir. I thank you from the depths of my heart.

P.M: I should be the grateful one. You have given me the privilege of being a father for a passing moment.

(The two nuns make the sign of the Cross)

Sister C.: May Mary, the Virgin, the Mother of us all protect you. May our Lord Jesus and our Shepard lead you onto the blessed pasture.

(The Prime Minister is too deeply moved for words. He bends his hand receiving their benediction)

(The nun exit)

P.M.: (after a deep silence)

Dear women, begging bread for other women's hunger. But we are all beggars and the gate, and for each other's hunger.

(A long pause)

P.M.: Oh, Beatrice, I am weary!

(He makes a gesture dismissing the two guards at the door. They go closing the great doors behind them. He is alone with Beatrice.)

It is getting dark. (He brushes his withered hands over his face.)

(Beatrice gets up instantly and lights several candles about the room. She goes back and stands beside him.)

Now, this day's work is done, and now you will find rest.

(Pause)

But there is another day. Oh Beatrice, my friend, I am weary of this day.

(He stretches his hands out on the table before him, lays down his head, sighs deeply, and is still. He is dead.)

(At this moment the Man Unseen enters from the door up left and with rhythmic pace walks across the room, this time toward the Prime Minister, and comes and stands behind him, placing his hand on the Prime Minister's shoulder gazing into space.)

(Beatrice sees him. She opens her arms, and with face transfigures and a thrilling voice)

Beatrice: O...o...Oh! I have always known you were like this. Oh my friend, my friend! Would that all the world could see what I see, and know what I know!

(Slow curtain)
