

## MISS JULIE

### August Strindberg

MISS JULIE: You don't mean what you say – and besides: everybody knows my secrets. You see, my mother was not an aristocrat by birth. She came of quite simple stock. She was brought up in conformity with the ideas of her generation: equality of the sexes – the emancipation of women – and all that sort of thing. She looked upon marriage with downright aversion. Therefore, when my father proposed marriage to her, she replied that she would never be his wife – but she married him just the same. I came into the world – against my mother's wishes, as I have learned; and now I was to be reared by my mother as a child of nature and in addition was to be taught all the things a boy has to learn, all in order to prove that a woman is quite as good as any man. I had to wear boy's clothes, had to learn how to handle horses, but I was never allowed in the cattle barn. I had to groom, harness and saddle my horse and had to go hunting – yes, I even had to try my hand at farming! And the farmhands were given women's chores to do, and the women did the men's work – and the upshot of it was that the estate almost went to rack and ruin, and we became the laughing-stock of the whole countryside ... At last my father seems to have come out of his inertia, for he rebelled; and after that all went according to his will. My mother took sick – what the sickness was I never learned – but she frequently had spasms, shut herself up in the attic, or secluded herself in the garden – and sometimes she stayed out all night. Then came the great fire which you have heard about. The house, the stables, and the cattle barns burned down, and under suspicious circumstances that pointed to arson. The disaster happened, namely, the day after the quarterly insurance period had expired; and the insurance premium, that my father had forwarded by a messenger, had arrived too late because of the messenger's negligence or indifference.

*She fills up her glass and drinks.*

JEAN: You mustn't drink any more!

MISS JULIE: Ah, what do I care! – We were left with nothing, and we had no place to sleep, except in the carriages.

MISS JULIE: (*seats herself*) How priceless!

JEAN: Yes, you may call it that! It was preposterous! – You see – it was that incident I was loath to tell you about, a moment ago – but now I shall ... Do you know how your world looks from below? No, you don't. Like hawks and falcons – whose backs we rarely see because they are always soaring high up in the sky ... I lived in my father's little shack with seven brothers and sisters and one pig out in the grey, barren fields where not even a tree grew. But from the windows I could see the wall enclosing the count's park, with the apple trees rising about it. That was to me the Garden of Eden; and it was protected by a multitude of fierce angels with flaming swords. In spite of their presence, I and some other boys found our way to the tree

of life ... Now you despise me, don't you?

MISS JULIE: Heavens, no – all boys steal apples!

JEAN: You say so now, but you have contempt for me just the same ... Well – one time I went into the Garden of Paradise with my mother, to weed the onion beds. Near the vegetable garden there was a Turkish pavilion standing in the shade of jasmine, and overgrown with honeysuckle. I had no idea what it could be used for; but I had never seen such a beautiful building ... People went inside, then came out again; and one day the door was left open. I sneaked in and saw the walls were covered with pictures of emperors and kings; and, hanging at the windows were red curtains with tassels. Now you understand where I was ... I ... (*he breaks off a spray of lilac and holds it close to her nostrils*) I had never been inside the castle, and had never seen any place as grand as the church, but this was if anything more beautiful. And no matter which way my thoughts went, they always returned to - to that place ... And gradually it developed into a yearning to experience some day all of its splendour and charm. - Enfin, I stole inside, gazed and admired, but just then I heard someone coming! There was only one exit for cultivated people - but for me there was another; and I had no choice but to take it ...

*MISS JULIE, who meanwhile has accepted the lilac. Spray from JEAN, lets it drop on the tape.*

JEAN: ...And then I took to my heels, plunged through a raspberry hedge, dashed across the strawberry patches and found myself on the rose terrace. There I gazed at a figure in pink dress and white stockings - it was you. I hid underneath a heap of weeds and lay there - lay there, imagine, with thistles pricking me and under dank, stinking earth. If it is true that a thief can get to heaven and be with the angels, why should it be impossible for a poor peasant child here on God's earth, to get into the castle park and play with the count's daughter ...