

Miss Julie

By August Strindberg

English Adaptation by Robert Bethune

Characters

Miss Julie, the unmarried daughter of a Count who is a wealthy landowner.

Jean, the Count's valet.

Kristin, the Count's cook.

Setting

The action takes place in a room in the servant's of the Count's estate, and in Jean's bedroom. The scene in Jean's bedroom that appears in this text is not in the original; it has been added to this adaptation. A number of other liberties have been taken with the original text in an effort to more strongly convey the underlying emotionality of the characters and the action. The reader should not take this text as a literal rendering of the original wording of the play.

Note

This excerpt is the scene which I believe Strindberg would have written had he been willing to ensure that his play would never be staged. As he left it, the play begs a key question: what happens to Jean and Julie in the bedroom? They go in, they come out, and their whole relationship has changed. Times have changed; we can go where he could not. In this scene, I explore what happened in Jean's bedroom.

This text first appeared in a stand-alone form in the Actor's Theater of Louisville Ten-Minute Play Competition.

The footnotes at the end give additional information about the Swedish text and how I interpret it. Similar notes appear throughout the full text of the play.

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Miss Julie

It is Midsummer Eve in a room in the servant's quarters of the Count's estate.

A pool of light holds a table with one chair. There is a bed and a chair in a second area, in its own light. Jean's dress coat is on the bed. There is a third area in its own light, clearly separated from the other two areas. There is a vase of lilac sprigs on the table.

The people of the estate are celebrating this traditional Swedish holiday with a dance in the barn; music and voices can be heard. It is early evening.

We hear the sounds of people approaching from the barn, laughing and singing.¹

Julie

Nonsense! These are my people and they love me. Let them find us here! You'll see!

Jean

No, Miss Julie, they don't love you. They take your food, but they spit at it behind your back. God, listen to what they're singing! No—God, no, don't listen!

Julie

listening

What are they singing?

Jean

They've made up a nasty song about you and me!

Julie

Vile! Disgusting! Behind my back!

Jean

They're nothing but a bunch of cowards. But the only thing we can do is get away.

Julie

Get away? Where? We can't get out without them seeing us.

Jean

There's no choice, so do what you have to do. Come into my room, right here. Trust me. I'm your true friend. You know you can trust me, don't you?

Julie

But supposing...supposing they were to look for you in there?

Jean

I'll lock the door, and if they try to break in I'll break their heads open. Come on.

begging²

Please—come!

Julie

intensely

You promise?

Jean

I swear it!

Julie goes quickly into the area near the bed and Jean follows her.

In Strindberg's play, the servant's dance takes place here instead of the following scene.

Lights fade on the kitchen. During most of the rest of the scene, there is background sound of singing, dancing, drinking, talking, partying. Jean gives Julie a look; she avoids meeting his eyes. He moves to the chair and sits. Julie prowls around the room as if searching for a way out. Jean watches her.

Julie

May I sit down?

Jean

Gestures to the bed

Of course you may.

Julie

Annoyance

Oh.

With an air of command

I wish to sit down.

Jean

Then please, dear lady, sit! Make yourself completely at home.

Gestures to the bed again. At her look of disgust, he offers his lap. He laughs at her discomfort. Julie maintains her air of command.

Julie

A moment ago you kissed my foot and knelt to me. You adored me. Now you aren't even enough of a gentleman to give up your chair for a lady.

Jean

That was out there. This is in here.

Julie

How can I do that? How can I lower myself to your level?

Jean says nothing, but smiles ever so sweetly and gestures again to the bed.

Julie

Intolerable insolence!

Jean's smile disappears. She glares at him, then turns sullenly away. She moves to the opposite side of the bed, turns her back on him, and sits.

Jean

I wonder if you really should be so high and mighty. Consider your position. Suppose-- just suppose now--suppose I were to open the door?

Julie

You wouldn't.

Jean

Just suppose.

Julie

But if you did...

Jean

Yes. What if I did?

All those people.

Julie

What about them?

Jean

They would see.

Julie

What would they see?

Jean

You and I. Together. Here.

Julie

All those eyes.

Jean

Staring.

Julie

Oh, yes, they'd stare all right.

Jean

Staring at me.

Julie

Staring at you.

Jean

You wouldn't do it.

Julie

Why wouldn't I?

Jean

They'd see you too. They'd be staring at you as much as at me.

Julie

Jean

Why would that matter?

Julie

The shame of it!

Jean

For you. Not for me.

Julie

You wouldn't be ashamed?

Jean

Not necessarily.

Julie

But how could you help it?

Jean

Things are different for the man.

Julie

For the man.

Jean

Yes. For the man. They'd be pretty impressed with me.

Julie

Because you're the man.

Jean

And because you're the woman. For you--pointing fingers and staring eyes, everywhere you go. For me--a chuckle, a grin, even a slap on the back when the women aren't around.

A moment of silence. Julie slowly stands up and comes to him. She hesitantly touches his shoulders and begins to massage them.

Julie

But then it would be over between us.

Jean

Yes. Over.

Julie

There would be no more times together. Soft times. Gentle times.

Jean

Quiet times. Alone in a room.

Julie

Alone in a room somewhere.

Jean

A little place.

Julie

A cottage.

Jean

By the sea.

Julie

With the sound of the surf.

Jean

And the cry of the gulls.

Julie

Alone and peaceful.

Jean

Relaxed and happy.

Julie

A time to touch.

Jean

A time to touch one's lover.

Softly touch.

Julie

To take the ribbon from her hair.

Jean

Gently pull it free.

Julie

Letting her hair down.

Jean

Loose and easy.

Julie

Easy and free.

Jean

As they speak, she undoes her hairpin and lets her hair fall. She stays behind him. He does not turn around to her yet.

Julie

Soft and flowing.

Jean

Silky on my hands.

Julie

And then...what?

Jean

Yes--what then?

Julie

Silly boy. Don't you know?

Jean

No. I don't.

Julie

Then my lover won't get far, will he?

Jean

Not without your help.

Julie

No. Not without my help.

Jean

turns around in his chair

Show me.

Julie

Show you what?

Jean

What happens next.

Julie

It buttons at the back.

Jean

Does it now.

Julie

And it ties at the waist.

Jean

Show me.

Julie

Show you which?

Jean

The buttons.

Julie

Like this one?

She reaches behind her neck and undoes the top button.

Jean

Like that one.

Julie

Satisfied?

Jean

No.

Julie

What else do you want to see?

Jean

You said it ties at the waist.

Julie

Yes, it does.

Jean

Show me.

Julie

Like this.

She turns three-quarters away from him and shows him the knot.

Jean

But there are still more buttons.

Julie

And ties.

Jean

You'll need help.

Julie

No. I don't think so.

Jean
You'll do it all yourself?

Julie
Or perhaps not at all.

Jean
My lover wouldn't stop.

Julie
Your lover never started.

Jean
She made me believe she did.

Julie
But you were wrong, you see.

Jean
I don't think so.

Julie
She changed her mind.

Jean
I didn't change mine.

Julie
She wants to listen to the sea.

Jean
The sea is far, far away from here.

Julie
Then so is my lover.

Jean
Your lover is here. With you. Now.

Julie

That's not what I want.

Jean

It's what I want.

Julie

No.

Jean

There's always the door.

He steps toward her. She shies away. He steps toward her again. She turns her back on him. He steps behind her and touches the back of her dress by the top buttons.

Julie

No!

Jean

Then do it yourself.

Julie

No. I won't.

Jean

There's always the door.

She moves away from him, huddling away, trying to protect herself from his presence.

Jean

Imagine his hands. His hands on you, on your clothing. But not soft. Not gentle. Hard. Strong. Ripping. Tearing. Stripping.

Her hands flutter back toward the fastenings of her dress.

Jean

Imagine him with those hard, strong hands. And imagine the door--open. All the time.

She begins undoing her dress.

Jean

People watching. His hands tearing. His eyes hungry. Their eyes watching. His mouth on your neck, on your throat, on your lips. You try to get away. He holds you. His arms are strong--too strong for you. You push and twist and kick, but you can't get away. He is your master.

She lets her dress fall and stands huddled in her shift.

Julie

What then?

Jean

Yes, what then?

Julie

softly

He picks me up.

Jean

And then?

Julie

He carries me to the bed.

Jean

Yes.

Julie

I'm helpless.

Jean

You can't move.

Julie

He lays me down. On the bed.

Jean

Yes.

A moment of silence.

Jean

Do it.

Julie

I can't.

Jean

You have to.

Julie

I won't.

Jean

Or I'll do it for you.

Julie

The door.

Jean

Yes. The door.

Julie

And then?

Jean

Yes. And then. Everything else. That's how it will be.

Stiffly and awkwardly, she lowers herself onto the bed. Jean moves to the side of the bed and stands over her.

Jean

Lie down.

Still stiffly, she lies down on the bed, not knowing where to put her hands and feet.

Jean

Your lover is here.

Julie

Here?

Jean

Like a warm, bright sun.

Julie

Shining on the seashore.

Jean

And the sound of the waves.

Julie

Warm and strong.

Jean

You stretch in the sun like a cat, soft and warm.

Julie

Soft and warm.

She goes limp. He leans over her, putting his hands on either side of her. She lies with her eyes closed.

Jean

Where is your lover now?

Julie

Here.

Jean

What will he do?

Julie

Whatever he likes.

A moment of silence. She lies with her eyes closed, painfully anticipating his touch. He makes no move to touch her.

Julie

Where is my lover?

Jean

You don't have a lover.

She starts and opens her eyes and looks at him.

Julie

But I do. Here by the sea.

Jean

You are not by the sea and you don't have a lover. And I have what I want.

Julie

You won't?

Jean

No. I won't. I don't have to.

Julie

Don't you want to?

Jean

No. Not very much.

Julie

Then what do you want? The door?

Jean

What I have, Julie.

Julie

How dare you call me by my given name.

Jean

I'll call you anything I want. Oh, don't worry. I'll be proper. When there are people around. When there's a reason. Even though it won't matter.

Julie

It will matter. I don't want them to know.

Jean

They know, Julie. They all know. I don't have to say a word. They know I was here. They know you came in. They know you didn't leave. They know everything they need to know. And you'll see it in their eyes every time they look at you.

Julie

Then why not make it true? You have me. Take me.

Jean

Why should I give you the satisfaction?

A short silence. A sudden light of victory comes into her face.

Julie

Because you can't, that's why.

A short silence. He does not respond.

Julie

I see it now. You're not able. You're less than a man. You're only a gelding. A big, strong gelding. Ready to be ridden wherever I want to go.

Jean

stands up

Do you believe that?

Julie

viciously

Yes. I believe it.

Jean stands directly before her, legs spread.

Jean

Then you may verify your supposition at your convenience, Miss Julie.

She starts to move her hand towards him, stops, tries again, stops. She can't do it. She suddenly twists away from him and curls into a ball, pulling her shift around her. She may be crying. Jean watches her for a little while. Then he moves away from her, weary, disgusted, but satisfied.

Jean

Get dressed.

He picks up her dress and tosses it onto the bed beside her. She lies still for a moment.

Julie

You mustn't watch me.

Jean

I'll watch you if I feel like it.

He watches as she pulls her dress on. She struggles with the buttons. Finally she goes to him and turns her back, her hands at her sides. He finishes fastening her dress for her. The sounds of revelry have faded off into the distance.

They leave the bedroom and return to the kitchen.

Jean

wound up

Now you know. And you know they also know. You see you can't stay. It's impossible.

¹ *Kören nalkas sjungande:*

I skip the song; there is no point in having Julie stand around waiting to reply to Jean while people sing offstage, especially when we're not going to bring them onstage. It is much better if Julie snaps her reply right back at him over sounds, without words, of people partying. The pressure that will push her into Jean's bedroom must be immediate and unrelenting, or the forward movement of the scene is lost.

² *677 på knä*

Literally, "on his knees." Last thing we want him to do is actually get on his knees; it will slow him down and keep him too still just when we need a swirl of action from him. But begging is certainly the right emotional attitude.