

AUGUST STRINDBERG

LUCKY PEHR

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Lucky Pehr

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August Strindberg

Lucky Pehr

CHARACTERS

OLD MAN IN THE TOWER.

PEHR.

LISA.

FAIRY.

ELF.

RATS [NILLA AND NISSE].

BUTLER.

ASSESSOR.

PETITIONER.

FIRST FRIEND.

SECOND FRIEND.

A WOMAN.

PILLORY.

STATUE.

WAGONMAKER.

SHOEMAKER.

CHIROPODIST.

STREET-PAVER.

RELATIVE.

BURGOMASTER.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

CHAMBERLAIN OF THE CALIPH.

AMEER.

COURT HISTORIAN.

COURT MULLAH.

GRAND VIZIER.

POET LAUREATE.

BRIDE.

SINGER.

DEATH.

WISE MAN.

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW.

SAINT LAURENCE.

BROOM.

PALL.

A VOICE.

Townpeople, Dancers, Viziers, Courtiers, Court Attendants, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I.—Room in a Church Tower.

ACT II.—[a] Forest—[b] Rich Man's Banquet Hall.

ACT III.—Public Square and Town Hall.

ACT IV.—[a] Caliph's Palace—[b] Seashore.

ACT V.—Country Church [Interior].

TIME: Middle Ages.

ACT ONE

SCENE: A Room in the Church Tower

Window shutters at back wide open, starlit sky is seen through windows. Background: Snow covered house-roofs; gable windows in the distance brilliantly illuminated. In room an old chair, a fire-pan and a picture of the Virgin, with a lighted candle before it. Room is divided by posts—two in centre thick enough to conceal an adult.

Chant, in unison, from the church below:

A Solis ortus cardine
Et usque terrae limitem
Christum canamus principem
Natum Maria Virgini.

[Old Man comes up tower steps and enters carrying a rat-trap, a barley-sheaf and a dish of porridge, which he sets down on the floor.]

OLD MAN. Now the elf shall have his Christmas porridge. And this year he has earned it honestly—twice he awakened me when I fell asleep and forgot the tower shutters; once he rang the bell when fire broke loose. Merry Christmas, Elf! and many of them. [Takes up rat-trap and sets it.] Here's your Christmas mess, Satan's rats!

A VOICE. Curse not Christmas!

OLD MAN. I believe there are spirits about to-night—Ugh! it's the cold increasing; then the beams always creak, like an old ship. Here's your Christmas supper. Now perhaps you'll quit gnawing the bell-rope and eating up the tallow, you accursed pest!

A VOICE. Curse not Christmas!

OLD MAN. The spooks are at it again! Christmas eve—yes, yes! [Places rat-trap on the floor.] There! Now they have their portion. And now comes the turn of the feathered wretches. They must have grain, of course, so they can soil the tin roof for me. Such is life! The church wardens pay for it, so it's not my affair. But if I were to ask for an extra shilling two in wages—that they couldn't afford. That wouldn't be seen! But when one sticks out a grain-sheaf on a pole once a year, it looks generous. Ah, that one is a fine fellow!—and generosity is a virtue. Now, if we were to share and share alike, I should get back my porridge, which I gave to the elf. [Shakes sheaf and gathers the grain into a bowl.]

A VOICE. He robs Christmas! He robs Christmas!

OLD MAN. Now I'll put this thing on the pole so that it will look like a symbol, and as a symbol it will also be of service—for it shows what is not to be found within. [He puts sheaf through window and hangs it on pole, then shakes his fist at town below.] Oh, you old human pit down there! I spit on you! [Spits through window; comes down and sees the burning candle before the Virgin's picture.] This must be the boy's doings! The times are not such that one burns up candles needlessly. [Snuffs out light and puts the candle into his pocket.]

A VOICE. Woe! Woe! [Head of Virgin shakes three times and a bright ray of light darts out from the head.]

OLD MAN. [Shrinking.] Is hell let loose to-night?

A VOICE. Heaven!

OLD MAN. Pehr, Pehr! Where are you? My eyes! Light the candles—My son, my son!

VIRGIN'S IMAGE. *My SON!*

OLD MAN. [Groping his way toward the stairs.] My eyes! Hell-fire! [He rushes down the steps.]

[Two rats, Nisse and Nilla, come on right, one behind the other. They have mourning veils swathed about their tails.]

NISSE. I say, it smells like roast pig!

NILLA. Oh, I promise you! Be careful, Nisse! I see the trap over there. [Sits on hind legs.] 'Twas in that very trap that our little ones were lost! O dear, dear, dear!

NISSE. If we could only hit upon some trick to play on the bad old man it would do my bowels good! Can you see if he has left anything about which he values?

NILLA. Suppose we gnaw the ropes so the bells will tumble down on his head—

NISSE. Why, Nilla! you know that I have only one poor tooth left in my head.

NILLA. But I have two—and where there's a will there's—but you, you have no feeling for your children!

NISSE. Come now! we shan't quarrel on Christmas Eve.

NILLA. Hush! What have we here?

NISSE. A dish of porridge—

NILLA. Which the old man has left—

NISSE. For the elf. He's afraid of him!

NILLA. Now I know! We'll eat up the porridge so—

NISSE. The elf will get after him—

NILLA. And he can raise the mischief when he gets angry. [They are over by the dish now, and eating.]

NISSE. Oh, move along and make room for me!

NILLA. Hush! It creaks in the stairs.

NISSE. Now I see the bottom of the dish; there's the lump of butter!

NILLA. Help me with this corner.

NISSE. Ah!—now we'll wipe our mouths and run. [They scurry off left.]

[Elf slides down bell-rope.]

ELF. [Walks about and searches.] Where's my Christmas porridge? I scented its aroma a long way off. It will taste good to me on a cold night, like this. I hope he has given me a big lump of butter this year, since I have been so good to him. [Loosens belt.] There! get you ready, my stomach. I'll let out two holes in the belt, which will make it about right. [He sees dish.] Ah, ha! what's this? Empty dishes! What has come over the old man-hater? Has he grown stingy and arrogant, or does he mock me, when he sets out an empty dish! There has been porridge here [smells]—butter, too! Well, well, old man! I'm sorry for you, but I shall have to punish you. The elf is for the purpose of punishing and rewarding. I must sit down and think out some *real* Christmas gift. [Sits in chair.] Let me see! The old man shuts himself up in this place with his son, whom he wishes to shield from the evils and shams of the world. The old man has seen much of the world, and hates it; the young one has never been beyond the church door and has seen the world only from the tower. But I know that it tempts him, just because he has seen it like this—from a bird's-eye view. The old man has but one wish in life—that his son shall succeed him and thus be spared the struggles of life and the cruelty of men. It is this wish which I shall cross; it is his only vulnerable point. Well and good! I'll call his godmother. She shall take the boy in hand and show him all the glories of the world; afterwards, there will be nothing more for the old man to do in the matter. The dreams of youth—I know their powers. Well, then! [Blows a whistle.]

[Fairy dressed like an old witch, with brown cloak and cane, emerges from behind a post.]

FAIRY. Good evening, lad.

ELF. Good evening, old lady. Can you corrupt a young man?—Oh! understand me aright.

FAIRY. That depends—

ELF. It won't go in that costume! You see, it's a question of the old man's son.

FAIRY. Our Pehr?

ELF. Just he! Hush, old lady, I'm talking now! The boy is very dear to my heart—that he has been ever since his birth. We—you and I—stood sponsor for him, and we each have our duties. His education is being neglected; he has seen nothing of the world, although he is fifteen to-day. I want him to go out and look around so he will be a credit to us. Have you anything against it?

FAIRY. Nothing. But I fear that he will meet with difficulties out there which we cannot adjust, since our power does not extend beyond these church walls.

ELF. True; and I must search my brain for another idea. Ah—I have it! We'll each give him his godgift, which can serve him in all conditions of life.

FAIRY. And what shall you give? Let us hear!

ELF. Life is rather ticklish, as you know, and the boy is young! He has not as yet, through proper training, had time to learn all the arts by which one gains one's wishes. Now, I ask nothing more of life, for I know what it gives; therefore he shall have my wish-ring. And you?

FAIRY. I daresay that gift is a good one, but when once he has got all that he wished for, he will have made his journey like the blind; therefore I shall give him a gift which will show him matter's face value—I shall give him good company on the way.

ELF. Feminine?

FAIRY. Naturally.

ELF. You're a wise one! No—now you shall take charge of the lad and see that he gets away.

FAIRY. But how? He fears and obeys his father.

ELF. Fiddlesticks! Do your hokus-pokus and show him all the glories down there, in the Christmas-bedecked homes. Then it will go fast enough!

FAIRY. Do you think so?

ELF. I know the young. Here's my ring—and now to business!

FAIRY. Is it right to play with human destiny?

ELF. We only play with human beings, their destinies we do not control. Soon or late, the boy will go out into the world, and he is better equipped than many who have faced life before him. When his journey is over, we can discuss the subject more at length. Are you ready?

FAIRY. [Going toward post.] Immediately. [Fairy disappears.]

ELF. Then I'll whistle. [Disappears behind the other post.]

[Pehr comes down steps leading from top of tower.]

PEHR. Who's there?

FAIRY. [Appears suddenly, dressed in white.] Your godmother, Pehr. Don't you know me?

PEHR. Ah! you are the one who caught me in your arms that time, when I fell from the tower. What do you want of me to-day?

FAIRY. I want to give you a Christmas gift.

PEHR. A gift? What is that?

FAIRY. Something that gives one pleasure.

PEHR. Pleasure?

FAIRY. Fulfillment of one's wishes.

PEHR. Wishes! Now I begin to understand.

FAIRY. When standing out there on the balcony, have you never felt as if something were drawing you—sort of enticing you down?

PEHR. Yes, that I have felt. You see the black streak over there, where light and darkness meet? In the daytime it looks different; and when the wind blows, it moves.

FAIRY. The forest.

PEHR. What is it like in the forest?

FAIRY. It is cool and delightful.

PEHR. That's well! Thither I am drawn, sometimes, so powerfully that I want to rush through the tower window and soar, like the birds in the air!

FAIRY. Beyond the borders of the forest?

PEHR. Is there something beyond?

FAIRY. There lies the world.

PEHR. The world! What is that?

FAIRY. Would you like to see it?

PEHR. Is it pleasant?

FAIRY. Some say it is; the majority say it is not. Come over here and I will show you some pictures from that checkered panorama which people call life. [Transparency curtain.]

Do you see the great house on the square, where all the windows are lighted? The rich man lives there. Now look into the rooms. On the table there is a lighted Christmas-tree laden with all kinds of gifts: the golden fruits of the tropics from across the seas; earth's hidden treasures, to which people bend the knee and which in their dazzling settings reflect the lights. But, do you see the light in the faces of the little children? That is the earth-life's sun—that is *happiness*—which is something you do not know, poor child! But you shall know it. You want to, do you not?

PEHR. Who is the good fairy that walks about and gives the children the golden fruits?

FAIRY. That is the mother.

PEHR. Mother?—I don't understand.

FAIRY. You, too, had a mother, but she died when you were very young.

PEHR. And the old man in the corner, with the mild look in his eyes?

FAIRY. He is the father, who in memory is living over his childhood.

PEHR. The father! But he looks so pleasant.

FAIRY. Yes, for he loves some one besides himself.

PEHR. And the youth who puts his arm around the young girl's waist—[Eagerly.] Now he presses his face against hers—their lips meet—what does that mean? Does one speak like that in life?

FAIRY. That is love's way of speaking.

PEHR. Love! Then it must be glorious to see it all!

FAIRY. Wait! Now look up there, in the gable window—a single candle burns, a poor, wretched light. [Tableau.]

PEHR. Poverty! That I know. Show me something pretty!

FAIRY. [Regarding him.] You are pleasure loving. Very well!—Look again up there, around the same Christmas light—it shines dimly but warmly on the contented table of poverty.

PEHR. No! I want to see something beautiful.

FAIRY. Really! Is there anything more beautiful than—but, wait! you shall see—Now look over yonder—toward the castle, where the King lives. [Tableau.]

PEHR. Oh!

FAIRY. Do you see the beautiful robes, the glittering jewels? Do you see how the walls reflect the brilliant lights and how in the middle of winter real roses and blue lilies are in bloom?

PEHR. Oh!

FAIRY. And the young girls, with the flowing locks, who serve wine in silver goblets—

PEHR. *There* I want to be!

FAIRY. And now stewards, in white, carry on the dishes.

PEHR. Oh!

FAIRY. The heralds rap on the floor with their staves—the trumpets sound—[Three strokes of a bell are heard; the tower chamber takes on its former appearance.] Alas! the time is up. Pehr, do you wish to go out and taste of life?

PEHR. Yes, yes!

FAIRY. Good and bad?

PEHR. Bad? That I think I know; the good I would learn to know.

FAIRY. You think so? But you shall soon see that all which seems good is not good, and all that seems bad is not bad.

PEHR. Only let me get out—and away from here!

FAIRY. You may go; but first I want to give you, as a help on your journey, a gift which will be of service to you. When you have it, you will have been given more than others, and therefore more will be required of you at some future time.

PEHR. Let me see it!

FAIRY. This ring has the power to grant you all your wishes—to your credit, but to no one's harm.

PEHR. That's a fine ring! But what will the old man say?

FAIRY. He is only going to meet with his just punishment—punishment for his selfishness.

PEHR. Yes, that is just. All the same I feel sorry for him.

FAIRY. Do not grieve for him; I shall watch over his sorrow.

PEHR. Sorrow! Nothing else? Sorrow, he says, is the one pleasure in life. Let him sit and enjoy it then. I shall probably furnish him with opportunities.

FAIRY. And lastly, young man, will you take provisions from the Wise Man?

PEHR. What should they be?—Good advice?

FAIRY. Yes.

PEHR. Alas, I have such quantities of that!

FAIRY. I know that, and I know its fate. Farewell then! May life so teach you to live that when your journey is over you shall be—whether great or obscure; successful or unsuccessful; learned or ignorant—a man, and above all, a manly man. Farewell! [Fairy disappears in column.]

PEHR. [Alone.] Well, Pehr, you are going out into life! Others before you have probably done likewise. But is it, then, so difficult out there? To be sure I have stood on the church roof and watched the throngs of people down in the street crawl around each other, going and coming. To me they appear so quiet and orderly, and I don't see that they trample on one another, although they are as thick as gnats. That dogs and apprentices fight sometimes, that I have seen, but grown folk—never! The old man and I never fight, although we pass each other on the stairs ten times a day. True, he has beaten me, but I have never beaten him; and other people may not be so bad either, if the truth were told. Wasn't there a fire the other day in the house of a rich merchant and didn't a lot of poor wretches come running from all directions, and didn't they go up to the rich man's place and save his goods? Oh, yes, I saw how they took silver pieces from his table and carried them far out of the city, where they hid them behind haystacks so the silver wouldn't be burned up. Wasn't that kind of them? We shall see, we shall see! Meanwhile, my dear Pehr, you shall go out and have a look at the world and make use of your gifts. [Examines ring.] Let's see! What shall I wish for first?

[Old man enters as if through wall.]

PEHR. Oh! so the old man is here. I did not hear your footsteps on the stairs. Which way did you come?

OLD MAN. [Alarmed.] Did you see?

PEHR. No.

OLD MAN. Let me look at you! [Gazes fixedly at him.] Something has happened here—

PEHR. Nothing—nothing whatever!

OLD MAN. My son, it will soon be midnight. Don't you want to retire to your room so that I may lock you in?

PEHR. You always want to shut me in! Tell me, Father, have you never meant to let me out in the world? Surely you cannot have thought that I should sit here forever, and dry up!

OLD MAN. I have seen life; I know its Sodom apples—therefore I wish to shield you.

PEHR. But life is not as sour as you say, perhaps.

OLD MAN. What do you know about it?

PEHR. Oh, I can see things from my high place! Come here and I will show you.

OLD MAN. What can you show me that I do not already know?

PEHR. [Leads Old Man to the window.] Look! Do you see the great house on the square?

OLD MAN. Yes; but make haste! Before the clock strikes twelve, you must be in bed.

PEHR. Do you see the Christmas-tree, with its gold and silver?

OLD MAN. Only paper, boy!

PEHR. And the golden fruits of the tropics?

OLD MAN. Worm-eaten—

PEHR. And the sun—Happiness—how it shines on the children's faces!

OLD MAN. Between times distorted by envy—

PEHR. And the old man who sits there, contented and happy—

OLD MAN. It's a lie! He trembles in his heart for the house rent, which must be paid on the new year—

PEHR. He—the rich man?

OLD MAN. Hides his approaching downfall!

PEHR. And those young people—Do you see how he stretches his arm—

OLD MAN. After the father's money bag!

PEHR. Shame on you! Their lips meet—

OLD MAN. In lust!

PEHR. What is that?—Ah! Now look up there, at the gable window, with the single light—

OLD MAN. Prompted by caution, which demands darkness—

PEHR. By the glow of contentment's calm light—

OLD MAN. Which they stole from the spice stall, and their delight is in planning the next expedition to the city market. I know it, do you hear! And up there, in the palace, where the lights glisten by the thousands and mirror themselves in the wines' sour streams—there they roll—empty heads and empty hearts—who say that they think and feel for the people's welfare! There they roll, between bottles and dishes—

PEHR. Why do you talk so fast? Let me continue—

OLD MAN. No! Away with you and obey, boy!

PEHR. Yes, away from here! I want to go out and see the world. I want to see child-faces—even if they can be clouded by envy's cankerworm! I want to taste the fruit of the tropics even if it is worm-eaten! I would drink the wine though it were gall, and I want to put my arm around a maid's waist, even if a bankrupt father does sit at the hearth stone! I want silver and gold—if in the end it is nothing but dross!

OLD MAN. Hell-fire! who's been here?

A VOICE. Curse not Christmas!

PEHR. What can this mean? It is so strange here to-night—stranger than usual. Father, look at me! Why, that's not his face!

OLD MAN. [Kneeling.] My son! Listen to your father—obey the old man, who wishes you only good; remain within these peaceful walls!

PEHR. It is too late!

OLD MAN. What do I see?—that ring! who gave it to you? [Tries to take the ring from Pehr.]

PEHR. Who are you? You are not my father!

OLD MAN. Your guilty, your unhappy father, who is bound by the witchcraft of the Powers! [Old Man is transformed into a big black cat.]

PEHR. Jesu Maria, help! [Bright rays dart out from Virgin's image; clock strikes twelve.]

PEHR. The witch! The witch! Away, unclean spirit! [Cat vanishes.] And now—[opens tower shutters] for life! [Fingers ring.] To the forest. [Going through window.] *Out!*

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Snow-clad woods; diagonally across stage is an ice-covered brook. Dawn. Wind blows through the trees as curtain rises. Pehr on.

PEHR. So this is the forest, whither my thoughts have so often flown through the clear air, and this is the snow! Now I want to throw snowballs, as I've seen school boys do. It is supposed to be something uncommonly amusing. [He takes up some snow and casts a few snowballs.] H-m! That's not so wonderful! Once again—I think it almost stupid.

But what is it that plays up in the tree tops? The wind—Ah, it sounds rather well. Zoo, zoo, zoo! But one grows sleepy if one listens to that long. Zoo, zoo, zoo! Now it sounds like the gnats on a summer's evening. Strange how short everything is out here in Nature! The dullness in the tower—that was long! Now it's not at all pretty or amusing. [Sees brook.] Why, what is this? Ice! What pleasure can one get from that? Ah, now I remember—one can skate on it. I must try that! [He goes out on the brook; slides; ice cracks; he falls from fright and lies there, stunned.]

[Enter Lisa.]

LISA. [Runs up to Pehr.] There he is! Ah—he sleeps! [Sees something that glitters.] What is that? [Picks up ring, which Pehr dropped when he fell.] A ring! He is sleeping in the snow! What can have happened? He is hurt! What can I do? In the very heart of the forest and right in the snow! Not a human being comes this way. He'll freeze to death if he cannot get away. The good fairy sent me here to look up that boy, but she did not tell me that I should find him half dead in a snow drift! If only it were summer, with the sun shining on the green grass-carpet—

[Lisa fingers ring. Transformation: Landscape is changed from winter into summer; brook loses ice-cake and runs forth between the stones; sun shines on the whole.]

LISA. What can be the meaning of this! [Amazed, glances in all directions. Pehr awakens.]

PEHR. [Rubbing his eyes.] Why, what is this—I fly from the church tower, come into a forest of snow, throw snowballs, skate, bump my head on the ice, lose my senses—then I wake up and find that it is summer! Have I been lying here under the snow six months? No, it doesn't seem likely. [Looks at himself in the brook.] I'm as red as a rose. [Bends over water.] But what do I see down in the deep—A blue sky, green trees, white water-lilies, and right in their midst—a girl!—just like the one the youth had his arm around in the Christmas-home: flowing hair, a mouth like a song, eyes like the dove's!—Ah! she nods to me—I'm coming, I'm coming! [About to plunge into the brook, when Lisa gives a cry. He turns.] There she is! A moment ago she was down here.

LISA. So it seems, but do not always believe your eyes.

PEHR. A strange world, this! But let me see if it is the same girl? [Stares at her.] Yes, it is she. [Starts to run toward her, then catches sight of ring.] What! my ring? You robbed me while I lay senseless! Oh, do not believe your eyes, you said. No! for now I have my first lesson—I wanted to embrace an angel, and I find a thief.

LISA. Do not always believe your eyes, Pehr; investigate before you judge.

PEHR. You are right. I shall do so. Girl, who are you? What is your name?

LISA. Lisa is my name, but who I am you must not know until the time is fulfilled. I came here and found you senseless—on the ice I found your ring, the powers of which I did not know.

PEHR. You have saved me from certain death in the snow. Forgive me! Lisa, you shall go with me on my journey, and you shall see a jolly life.

LISA. You are traveling, you say—What is the object of your journey?

PEHR. I seek—like all the rest—happiness.

LISA. You seek happiness! That is a fleeting thing.

PEHR. Ah, say not so! I can have all that I wish for. Have we not been given the most delightful summer in the middle of winter? See how gloriously the sun shines up in the pines! You must know that all this is new to me. Oh, look! [Picks up a few spruce-cones.] What are these?

LISA. The fruit of the trees.

PEHR. Then it is good to eat.

LISA. No; but children play with it.

PEHR. Play—that I have never done! Shall we play, Lisa?

LISA. Yes—but what? Shall we play a game of tag?

PEHR. How does it go?

LISA. Watch me! [She runs behind a tree and throws cones at Pehr.] Now catch me!

PEHR. [Running after her.] But that's not so easily done! [Steps on a cone and hurts his foot.] The damned spruce apples!

LISA. Mustn't curse the fruit of the trees!

PEHR. One can do without such fruit! I prefer the kind I saw on a Christmas-tree. If this spruce could bear such fruit, then—[Instantly spruce bears oranges.] Look, look! Let us taste. [They pick fruit and eat.]

LISA. Well, what think you?

PEHR. Oh! it's rather good—but not quite what I had fancied.

LISA. So it is always—all through life.

PEHR. My dear girl, how wise you are! Lisa, may I put my arm around your waist? [A bird in the tree begins to sing softly.]

LISA. Yes; but what for?

PEHR. May I kiss you also?

LISA. Yes—there's no harm in that, surely. [Bird sings louder.]

PEHR. I'm so warm after the play, Lisa! Shall we bathe in the brook?

LISA. [Covers her eyes with her hands.] Bathe!

PEHR. [Throws off coat.] Yes!

LISA. [Hides behind a tree.] No, no, no! [Bird sings.]

PEHR. Who is that screech-owl up in the tree?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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