



Fair Haven and Foul Strand

August Strindberg

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The quarantine doctor was a man of five-and-sixty, well-preserved, short, slim and elastic, with a military bearing which recalled the fact that he had served in the Army Medical Corps. From birth he belonged to the eccentrics who feel uncomfortable in life and are never at home in it. Born in a mining district, of well-to-do but stern parents, he had no pleasant recollections of his childhood. His father and mother never spoke kindly, even when there was occasion to do so, but always harshly, with or without cause. His mother was one of those strange characters who get angry about nothing. Her anger arose without visible cause, so that her son sometimes thought she was not right in her head, and sometimes that she was deaf and could not hear properly, for occasionally her response to an act of kindness was a box on the ears. Therefore the boy became mistrustful towards people in general, for the only natural bond which should have united him to humanity with tenderness, was broken, and everything in life assumed a hostile appearance. Accordingly, though he did not show it, he was always in a posture of defence. At school he had friends, but since he did not know how sincerely he wished them well, he became submissive, and made all kinds of concessions in order to preserve his faith in real friendship. By so doing he let his friends encroach so much that they oppressed him and began to tyrannise over him. When matters came to this point, he went his own way without giving any explanations. But he soon found a new friend with whom the same story was repeated from beginning to end. The result was that later in life he only sought for acquaintances, and grew accustomed to rely only upon himself. When he was confirmed, and felt mature and responsible through being declared ecclesiastically of age, an event happened which proved a turning-point in his life. He came home too late for a meal and his mother received him with a shower of blows from a stick. Without thinking, the young man raised his hand, and gave her a box on the ear. For a moment mother and son confronted each other, he expecting the roof to fall in or that he would be struck dead in some miraculous way. But nothing happened. His mother went out as though nothing had occurred, and behaved afterwards as though nothing unusual had taken place between them.

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