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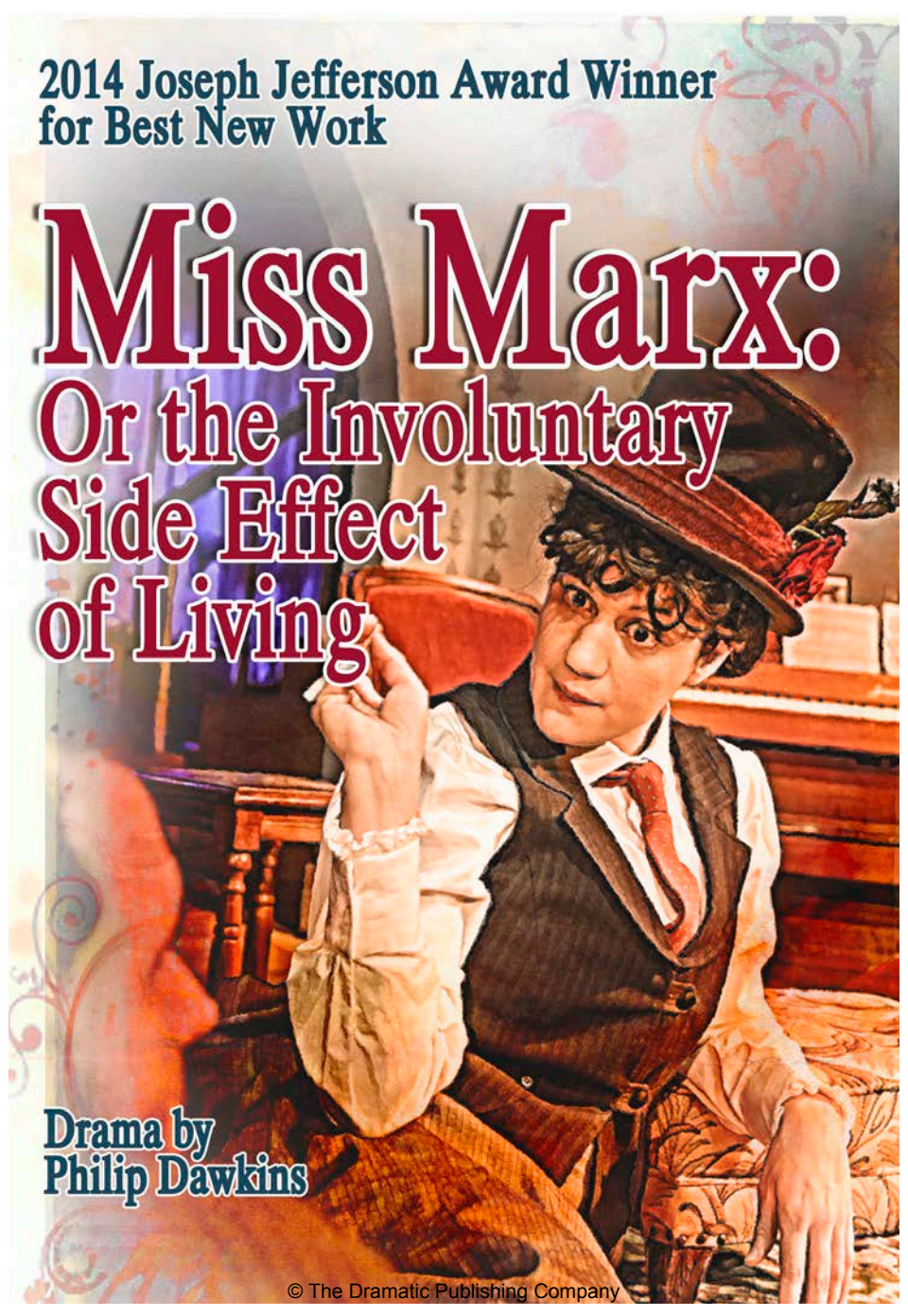
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for Best New Work

Miss Marx: Or the Involuntary Side Effect of Living

A man with curly hair, wearing a brown top hat with a red flower, a white shirt with ruffled cuffs, a brown vest, and a red tie, is sitting in a wooden chair. He is holding a lit cigarette in his right hand and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a warm, slightly blurred interior setting with a piano and a patterned rug.

Drama by
Philip Dawkins

"A brainy, witty, passionate and ingenious mash-up of love and death, as well as of revolutionary ideas and sexual politics." —Chicago Sun-Times

Miss Marx:

Or the Involuntary Side Effect of Living

Drama. By Philip Dawkins. *Cast: 3m., 4w., or 7 either gender. Miss Marx ... plays out the remarkably true story of Karl Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor. Known throughout Victorian England as an actress and political activist, Eleanor finds it far easier to fight for equality on a soapbox than in the bedroom. After falling into a tempestuous affair with a married man, can she follow her heart without abandoning the revolution? Flexible staging. Approximate running time: 2 hours. Code: MP8.*

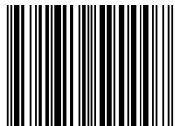
"Dawkins is one of the Chicago theater's most promising talents, a shrewd and eloquent playwright." —Chicago Tribune

"His intelligent plays are highly theatrical, and rich with witty verbal dexterity." —Windy City Times

"Dawkins' text, and the voices he bids flow from his characters, appear to the mind's ear like a latter-day Bernard Shaw." —Chicago Theatre Review

*Cover: Strawdog Theatre Company, Chicago, featuring (l-r) Benjamin Sprunger and Dana Black.
Photo: Chris Ocken. Cover design by Jeanette Alig-Sergel.*

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Miss Marx: Or The Involuntary Side Effect of Living

By

PHILIP DAWKINS



Dramatic Publishing Company

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“Originally produced by Strawdog Theatre Company, Chicago, Ill.,
Hank Boland, Artistic Director; Mike Mroch, General Manager.”

Miss Marx ... was premiered by Strawdog Theatre Company, Chicago, in the winter of 2014.

Cast:

Annie, Young Woman Sam Bailey
Eleanor Marx Dana Black
Nim, Theosophist Pamela Mae Davis
Aveling, Torvold John Ferrick
Eva, Musician Sarah Goeden
Engels, Young Man Matt Holzfeind
(Final week, Andy Lutz)
Freddie Benjamin Sprunger
Harry, Laura Justine Turner

Production:

Artistic Director Hank Boland
Director Megan Shuchman
Assistant Director Alex Lavelle
Set Design Mike Mroch
Light Design Jordan Kardasz, Aaron Weissman
Costume Design Izumi Inaba
Props Design Jamie Karas
Composer Mike Przygoda
Music Director Mike Przygoda
Sound Design Chris Kriz
Dialects Lindsay Bartlett, Eva Breneman
Technical Direction Jarrod Bainter
Dramaturge Lindsay Amer
Stage Manager Sarah Hoeflerlin
Ass't Stage Manager Alex Avery
Master Electrician John Kelly *
Production Manager Becky Mock

Miss Marx: Or the Involuntary Side Effect of Living

CHARACTERS

HARRY / LAURA

ELEANOR

NIM

FREDDY

ENGELS

AVELING

ANNIE BESANT

YOUNG WOMAN

EVA

TORVOLD

YOUNG MAN

THEOSOPHIST

PRODUCTION NOTES

Casting:

The roles of HARRY and LAURA are meant to be played by the same performer. There is an ensemble of actors who play various roles throughout. The size and shape of this ensemble can be as small as two using the following breakdown:

ACTOR ONE: Annie Besant, Young Woman, Eva.

ACTOR TWO: Torvold, Young Man, Theosophist.

This breakdown makes for a cast size of eight.

Staging:

The piece should move fluidly and rapidly from scene to scene. Changes in time and location are indicated in the script as “light shift.”

A / within a line of dialogue indicates the start of the next speaker’s line.

The characters are quick thinkers, big lovers, over-bookers and fast movers. They take pride and comfort in out-intellecting one another. Some families express their love through shouting, some through hugs and kisses; this family loves through wit. Life moves quickly for them. The furious circles these characters constantly spin around one another serve to hold them up, like centrifugal force. It’s only when they are forced to slow down that they collapse.

Miss Marx: Or the Involuntary Side Effect of Living

ACT I

(London. 1883. A production of A Doll House, by Henrik Ibsen. A door upstage. At lights up, we find ELEANOR, with suitcase in hand, standing at the door. A young actor playing TORVOLD pleads with her.)

ELEANOR. ... Both you and I would have to be so changed that—Oh, it is no use. I no longer believe in the possibility of such wonderful things.

TORVOLD. But, I will believe for you! Tell me! We would have to be so changed that what?

ELEANOR. That our life together would be a real marriage. Goodbye. *(Exits, slamming the door.)*

TORVOLD. Empty! She is gone. Nora!!

(A curtain falls to enthusiastic applause. The curtain rises, and ELEANOR and TORVOLD bow. The curtain lowers once again. The applause dies. ELEANOR, carrying a case, parts the curtain and enters the forestage. HARRY, a young boy, runs onstage, followed by NIM, his grandmother, not far behind.)

HARRY. Tussy! Tussy!

(He jumps into her arms.)

ELEANOR. Oh, Harry, you did come, you little brick of a man! *(She bear hugs him.)* Grrrr.

HARRY (*giggling*). Stop it, Tussy! You tickle me awful.

ELEANOR. How was the play, then? Did you like it or did you sleep like your nasty father said you would?

NIM. I'm afraid his nasty father did most of the sleeping. Hello, Tussy, you broke my heart.

(She kisses ELEANOR and instinctively smacks HARRY gently on the behind.)

HARRY. Ouch! What for?

NIM. I'm certain you'll do something later. (*To ELEANOR.*) Tussy, really, a comedy next time, please.

ELEANOR. I'll try, Nim.

NIM. Harry! Harry! Off! Give the young woman a chance to breathe. She's just acted Ellen Terry off the boards. She'll want a rest.

ELEANOR. Oh, let him, Nim. I enjoy the attention.

HARRY. See? (*Sticks his tongue out at NIM.*)

NIM. Our Harry, always the gentleman. That's your influence, Miss Marx.

ELEANOR. Mine?

NIM. You were exactly the same at his age.

ELEANOR. Well, thankfully, I was never expected to behave like a gentleman.

NIM. No, you did that quite on your own.

HARRY. Your husband was a terrible cad. I hated him.

ELEANOR. He was a wastrel, wasn't he? Tell me, Harry, do you think Nora was right to walk out on him?

HARRY. I think *you* were right to walk out on him, Tussy.

FREDDY (*entering with a bouquet*). That's my boy.

ELEANOR. Oh, is that what proves it?

FREDDY. Bite your tongue.

ELEANOR. Where's my kiss, Freddy?

FREDDY (*kissing her cheek*). Eleanor. Mother.

NIM. Freddy.

FREDDY. These are yours, Ellie. (*The flowers.*) They're red—like the streak running through you. (*To HARRY.*) See now, Harry, you mustn't run so fast away from your gram. She's old and susceptible-hearted.

ELEANOR. I was beginning to think you sent your poor mother and son off to the theatre unaccompanied.

FREDDY. So sorry, Ellie. I thought I saw a chap I knew in the balcony, but it was—What am I yammering on about? Your performance was splendid! A ravishing turn, if I do say so.

ELEANOR. It isn't my performance that matters, Freddy. It's the work. The words of Ibsen *must* be heard. (*Beat.*) I was all right?

FREDDY. Ripping.

ELEANOR (*pleased*). Oh!

FREDDY. Congratulations, Ellie!

ELEANOR. Thank you, dear friend. It means so much. Ever since Jenny and mother died and father has taken so ill—in their absence—it means so much to me. I cherish you all as if you *were* my family.

NIM. Hush.

FREDDY. Don't be ridiculous. Even in the peak of health, your father would never waste perfectly good "capital" on actual *seats* to the theatre!

NIM. Thankfully he's paid his maid enough that she may sit. Much as I love your dramatics, Tussy, I wouldn't stand for them.

FREDDY. Yes, some of us are tired and frail.

NIM. Speak for yourself.

FREDDY. I was.

NIM. Which reminds me, I'd best be getting back to your father. It's time for his medicines.

HARRY. Can I come? I want to tell the Moor about the play.

NIM. Oh, no, Harry. It's much too late. Remember, Mr. Marx is not well. He needs his rest.

FREDDY. When he's well again, all right, Harry?

ELEANOR. When he's well, you can tell him all about it. I'll even help, if you like.

(Lights up elsewhere on ENGELS speaking at a meeting hall.)

HARRY. Can I tell Uncle Engels?

ENGELS. Esteemed colleagues—

ELEANOR. Oh, heavens! Engels!

ENGELS. Members of the Social Democratic Federation—

FREDDY. What is it, Ellie?

ENGELS. It is with great honor that I introduce our speaker for this evening. *(Looking around for ELEANOR.)*

ELEANOR. I near forgot! I promised Engels I'd come straight away.

ENGELS. A very fine speaker—

ELEANOR. So sorry, all. *(Hurried kisses.)* Thank you for coming—

ENGELS. Who is scheduled to speak here at this moment, / erm—

ELEANOR. I'm speaking on my latest translation of Father's *Kapital*.

ENGELS. A working educator, translator, speaker—

FREDDY. Can't the working classes read your father's book for themselves?

ELEANOR. No, Freddy, they *can't*.

ENGELS. A woman whose passion and concern for justice are matched only by her lack of both for punctuality—

ELEANOR (*running off*). Kiss the Moor for me. Thank you for bringing Harry. (*She is gone.*)

ENGELS. A fellow Socialist who not only happens to be—

FREDDY. So much for tea and cake then.

ENGELS. But who *deserves* to be—

FREDDY. Ellie has to save the world.

ENGELS. The daughter of my dear friend, Karl Marx.

(*Beat. NIM, HARRY and FREDDY are gone. The stage now belongs to ENGELS.*)

ENGELS (*cont'd*). A woman who—

ELEANOR (*running on quickly*). I'm here, I'm here! So sorry, sorry!

ENGELS (*quickly*). Ladies and gentlemen, Eleanor Marx! (*Promptly gives her the stage and exits.*)

ELEANOR (*places her case on the ground and steps on it, making her own soapbox*). Thank you, Mr. Engels! I must admit, it feels odd to address you as such, when most often it's as Uncle Engels that I refer to you, so close are you to my father's heart. So close are you to mine. And so close are you to the heart of our cause. That which is the cause of all working people who seek justice. I have just come from the theatre where I—as well as some of my comrades—were employed in a playing of Henrik Ibsen's *A Dollhouse*. No doubt, you've heard rumor of the scandalous plot, and I assure you every whispered lambaste is true. But I urge you to judge for yourselves. Mr. Ibsen's play concerns the very topic on which I am bound to touch this evening, the matter

of “holding women in common,” as the Capitalists have so accused us. Indeed, such an idea is possible only in a state of society that looks upon woman as a commodity, a thing to be “held” by another person. Today, alas, woman has only too often to sell her womanhood for bread, as if she were a product. But to the Socialist, a woman is a human being—*imagine!*—and can no more be “held” in common than a Socialistic society could recognize slavery. Furthermore, I ask you, who are these supposed virtuous men who speak of our wanting to hold women in common? I tell you, they are the very men who own and sell your wives and sisters and daughters. Have you ever reflected, you workingmen, that the very riches you work to place in the pockets of the bourgeoisie are used to debauch your own sisters and daughters, even your little children? They are robbing the worker to rape his family. And so we *must* cry out, “No! A woman is *not* property! A woman is a human being! And as such, she cannot be held by *anyone!*”

(A croquet ball rolls onto the stage. HARRY runs on after it.)

HARRY. It’s mine! It’s mine! I’ve got it! *(He picks up the ball and runs off.)*

ELEANOR. Such, then, is our position on “holding women in common.”

FREDDY *(offstage, yelling)*. Leave it where it lay, Harry!

ELEANOR. We believe in the freedom of *all*, and never *some!*

FREDDY *(entering with two croquet mallets and a tumbler)*.

Oo, that was well-nigh through the loop wasn’t it?

ELEANOR. For ‘*Freedom’s battle once begun / Bequeathed from bleeding Sire to Son / Though baffled oft, is ever won!*’

(Lights shift. We are outdoors in a park.)

FREDDY. It won't work, Ellie.

ELEANOR. What? *(She steps down off her case fully into the new scene.)*

FREDDY. Your theories. They rely too heavily on the basic decency of the human race. *(Hands her a mallet.)* It's your hit.

ELEANOR. But, I believe in that decency.

FREDDY. Oh, that's bunkum and you know it. Where's the decency in that petty "*bourgeoisie*" you're constantly on about?

ELEANOR. Within all human beings is the capacity for both decency and indecency. Even within—though it pains me to say it—*(Swings.)* the *bourgeoisie*. Oh, just off.

FREDDY. You hold much too high an opinion of mankind, Ellie. If you ask me—hold this *(His drink.)*—If you ask me, it's that very capacity for both good and bad that—don't drink any!

ELEANOR. I wasn't—

FREDDY. It's that very capacity that renders your philosophy defunct. *(Swings. Watches. ELEANOR takes a sip.)* Ugh.

ELEANOR. Dear Freddy, if I had no faith in man, I could have no faith in myself. That's logic.

FREDDY. Beware of logic; it will drive you straight out of your head. *(Begins preparing a cigarette. Calling off.)* Harry, leave that stuck in the ground! I mean it!—Where is my mum?

ELEANOR. That's a lovely cigarette case, Freddy. New?

FREDDY. I didn't buy it. It was a gift.

ELEANOR. What's his name?

(FREDDY makes a "hell if I know" expression.)

ELEANOR *(cont'd)*. Secrets, Freddy? Even from me?

FREDDY. Even from myself.

ELEANOR (*takes the cigarette from his mouth and smokes it herself. Sits on the ground*). You're going to be found out one of these days, you know.

FREDDY. Lord, let us hope so. Perhaps then my wife would get it up to leave me. Which reminds me, she sends her regards.

ELEANOR. Oh? How is she?

FREDDY. I have no idea. (*Preparing a new cigarette. Sitting down beside her.*)

ELEANOR. You are allowed to leave her, you know?

FREDDY. My friend, unlike you, I have deep respect for the sacrament of marriage. Besides, I am afraid that leaving my wife would severely hamper my lifestyle of habitual buggery. One mustn't crusade unmasked, you know.

ELEANOR. Quite the opposite, Freddy. We must be unabashed concerning our personal lives. How should we expect to rid society of its injustices without we attach human faces to its victims?

FREDDY. And therein lies the single difference between you and I. Anyway, I could never leave Harry. I know what it is to be illegitimate.

ELEANOR. Oh, don't be so dramatic. You've not had it so bad. After all, Christ was illegitimate.

FREDDY. Yes, and look what happened to him. (*Beat.*) God, it's beautiful today. You'd hardly know it's London. I read an editorial recently which claimed that life is nothing more than sex and fresh air, unless one lives in London, in which case life is only sex.

ELEANOR. Unless it's my life, in which case life is only "and."

FREDDY. Still?

ELEANOR. Always.

FREDDY. Well, better to be single than saddled, eh? You could wind up like me, trapped in matrimonial charade.

ELEANOR. Or I could end up in bliss like my father when Mother was alive.

FREDDY. Yes, he was keen on your mum, wasn't he? How is the old man, anyway? This air must be doing him some good.

ELEANOR. He comes and he goes. The doctors have prescribed "no work." Can you imagine telling my father, "I'm sorry, Karl Marx, you mustn't work." (*Beat.*) Your mother looks after him. Honestly, Freddy, she is a constant source of goodness to my family, especially Father. I don't know where we'd be without her.

FREDDY. Certainly not sitting here with me.

ELEANOR. What do you mean?

FREDDY. Your father has very outspoken opinions on my extracurricular pursuits.

ELEANOR. I suppose you're right. I doubt father would have much to do with you if you didn't belong to our dear Nim. She's been with our family so long, it wouldn't do to think of you as anything less than kin.

FREDDY. In any case, your father has always treated me decently.

ELEANOR. My father is nothing if not kind. He always does what he thinks is right.

FREDDY. Of course he does. Only madmen go about doing what they think is wrong. (*Rising.*) Is it my go or yours?

ELEANOR. I don't know.

FREDDY. Oh, toss it. It's clear I've won, anyhow. (*Yelling off.*) No help from Harry!

ELEANOR. Help me up.

FREDDY (*he does*). Listen, it's such a fine day. Let's laze about indoors and champagne ourselves into a steaming oblivion.

ELEANOR. Freddy, that sort of behavior is very unbecoming of a lady.

FREDDY. Good job I'm not a lady then. Come on. I'll drop Harry off on Mum.

ELEANOR. No, really, I cannot. I have somewhere I have to be.

FREDDY. I should have known. It's nothing but go go go with you. Eleanor Marx, always on the move.

ELEANOR. I supposed that's why they call it a movement.

FREDDY. Yes, but how will you know when to stop?

ELEANOR. When at last all people are free.

FREDDY. No immediate holiday in your future then?

ELEANOR. My family are my holiday. But for now I'm off to Annie's.

FREDDY. Annie Besant?

ELEANOR. She has a new "lodger." I'm intrigued.

FREDDY. Dear god.

ELEANOR. A lecturer from King's College, I think, a Dr. Aveling.

(Elsewhere, lights come up on AVELING at a desk amending his lecture on a typewriter.)

AVELING. In support of my position, I offer the following points.

FREDDY. New lodger? What happened to Shaw?

ELEANOR. Oh she's done with Shaw. He doesn't bathe.

AVENLING. Point one:

FREDDY. It's beyond me what all these gentlemen see in that insufferable bore.

AVELING. That there is no God.

ELEANOR. Annie Besant is not a bore. Annie Besant is a friend.

FREDDY. Of *yours*.

AVELING. Point two:

FREDDY. She's constantly on about atheism and secularism and teetotalism. Honestly, I've never known a woman to chatter on so much about what she does *not* believe.

AVELING. That, as there is no God, there are no morals.

ELEANOR. You say that as if you weren't an atheist.

FREDDY. I'm not.

ELEANOR. Since when?

AVELING. Point three:

FREDDY. I cannot rightfully be an atheist. I hardly know a thing about the people in the Bible, though I do know quite a few people Biblically.

AVELING. That there are only feelings and rights.

ELEANOR. Well, then, we shall leave it at that.

AVELING (*correcting*). No, rights and feelings. No, *instincts*!

(*ELEANOR kisses FREDDY's cheek.*)

AVELING (*cont'd*). Point four:

ELEANOR (*calling off*). Cheerio, Harry!

AVELING. Morals are distinct from *instincts*.

ELEANOR (*to FREDDY on her exit. A goodbye.*) Friend.

AVELING (*correcting*). No, too much "*stincts*."

FREDDY (*calling off*). Harry, you brute! Get away from there! Oh, I shall be ever glad when Marx heals, and my mother can return to the duty of raising my son. (*Exits.*)

AVELING (*as ELEANOR crosses into his study*). Point five: As morals do not exist, neither does the possibility for amorality.

ELEANOR. Do you believe that?

AVELING. What?! Oh, good evening. Can I help you?

ELEANOR. Yes. What you write there, do you believe it?

AVELING. I wrote it.

ELEANOR. You do not acknowledge the existence of morals?

AVELING. I recognize that morals exist relative to purpose.
And you?

ELEANOR. I believe morals are relative in so much as siblings are relatives. Either one has them, or one does not.
Out of curiosity, Doctor, into which category do you fall?

AVELING. Oh, I have siblings, thank you.

ELEANOR. And what about morals? Have you any of those?

AVELING. Relatively speaking. And my relatives aren't speaking. (*Pleased with his little joke.*) Please, will you sit?

ELEANOR. I prefer to stand.

AVELING. Very well. Your name please?

ELEANOR. I'm sorry, I must have missed your name.

AVELING. No, I haven't offered it.

ELEANOR. Ah ha! You tell on yourself. You must be without morals to ask for a woman's name before offering your own.

AVELING. We are in *my* study.

ELEANOR. And it is *my* name.

AVELING. Very well. What is it your father does?

ELEANOR. I am afraid, Doctor, in this case, that is very equivalent to giving you my name.

EDWARD. Then, I'm sorry. I shall have to ask you to leave.
(*Starts to sit.*)

ELEANOR. Do you now go so far as to sit in the presence / of a lady?!

AVELING (*rising*). Well, what do you suggest I do? You will not sit. You will not give me your name—

ELEANOR. I suggested, Doctor, that you give me yours.

AVELING. I shall not.

ELEANOR. Then, we shall both remain standing.

AVELING. So, it's a stand-still, is it?