

Acting Edition

Creditors

by Jen Silverman

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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CREDITORS was originally produced by TOGETHER and Audible Theater and premiered at the Minetta Lane Theatre in May 2025. The production was directed by Ian Rickson, with set design by Brett J. Banakis and Christine Jones, costume design by Ásta Bennie Hostetter, lighting design by Isabella Byrd, sound design by Mikhaal Sulaiman, and props by Anna Dorodnykh. The production stage manager was Angela M. Griggs, and the assistant stage manager was Tiffanie Lane. The cast was as follows:

GUSTAV		Liev Schreiber
ADI		Justice Smith
TEKLA		Maggie Siff
GUSTAV UNDERSTUDY		Geoffrey Cantor
ADI UNDERSTUDY		Justin Withers
TEKLA UNDERSTUDY		Renata Friedman

CREDITORS was commissioned by Sonia Friedman Productions.

CHARACTERS

GUSTAV – Charismatic, drily witty, ruthless.

ADI – Vulnerable, charming, sincere.

TEKLA – Relentless, but in a way that makes you love her. Always in motion. Never settling.

SETTING

A seaside hotel. The front room.

TIME

The time period is in conversation with the time in which Strindberg's original play is set, but with a beady eye on the present.

Let's say: Then-ish.

ADAPTOR'S NOTES

(Words or sentences in parentheses) are an aside or a sub-thought.

The spacing is a gesture toward indicating rhythm: how thoughts change, escalate, or get supplanted by other thoughts as we talk. The line breaks often signal shifts, but do not indicate a beat or pause except where written.

No play about the past is ever really about the past, and so to me, this play uses the frame of Strindberg's moment to speak directly to all of us now. To those ends, in the premiere, we avoided glaring visual anachronisms onstage, but also worked to get away from any acting style or design language that felt stuffy or "museum-piece-y."

1.

(The front room of an off-season seaside hotel. Comfortable old furniture, newspapers from the past several weeks for guests to read. Evening.)

(GUSTAV and ADI have a glass of whiskey together.)

GUSTAV. She's not back yet.

ADI. I guess not.

GUSTAV. You don't mind that she stays out so late?

ADI. It's not *so* late.

GUSTAV. It's after dinner. If I hadn't come in, you'd have eaten alone.

ADI. Oh I don't mind that.

But I'm glad you joined me! This hotel is usually so empty at this time of year, I was delighted to find there was another guest staying here at all, let alone someone like you.

GUSTAV. *(With a smile.)* Like me.

ADI. This sounds a bit odd, I guess, but I don't really have a lot of male friends.

GUSTAV. Why not?

ADI. Oh, well – I guess I don't have a lot of friends, period.

(Laughs.)

ADI. That sounds worse than it is! I just mean, Tekla and I tend to be a bit of a...planet of two, if you know what I mean. When we're in the same place we just... She's the person I want to talk to, the one whose opinions I want to hear. After we got married, I had less and less interest in going out...and then, if you pass up enough invitations, friends kind of fall away. Men in particular, for some reason...

(A little embarrassed.) I should be better about it, I'm sure, but...

GUSTAV. And you don't get bored?

ADI. Oh, it's impossible to get bored when you're with her. You'll see! I'm excited for you two to meet – She's one of a kind.

GUSTAV. She must be.

(Lifts his glass in a cheers.)

To young love!

ADI. *(Laughs, clinks glasses.)* I've loved your company this week. I mean what you were saying yesterday – about sculpture instead of painting, how sculpture is the only real way to grasp – I could feel my whole soul wake up.

(GUSTAV smiles at him, but instead of replying to that –)

GUSTAV. You don't wonder who she's with?

ADI. I'm sorry?

GUSTAV. When she's out all night.

(ADI really didn't want to return to discussing his wife. But he can't be impolite.)

ADI. She's giving a reading.

GUSTAV. Sure, but maybe there was a dinner before, or drinks after...

ADI. I'm not a jealous man.

GUSTAV. Maybe you should work on that.

(**ADI** *laughs*. **GUSTAV** *doesn't*.)

(**ADI** *hastens, realizing it wasn't a joke*.)

ADI. I don't worry that she'd be – you know, *unfaithful*.

GUSTAV. “But”?

ADI. (*Slowly – he hadn't planned to go here.*) Well...there's no *but* exactly...but...

The way she can be with her friends... But it's a small thing!

GUSTAV. She's flirtatious?

ADI. Worse! She gets excited by their ideas, but she has no use for mine.

GUSTAV. No *use* for your ideas?

ADI. That sounds worse than I meant.

It's just...sometimes the way she talks to me...
She thinks I'm unserious.

GUSTAV. *Unserious.*

ADI. But I'll hear other people say things all the time – maybe even something I said a moment ago, an idea they're just repeating – and when she hears it from *them*, she nods, she smiles, she absorbs that thought like a hungry little plant drinking sunlight. And later, she'll say it back to me, my own idea! But if I try to explain that it came from me first, she just *bats* it away again.

(*A beat. Under GUSTAV's gaze, ADI wilts.*)

It's trivial, I know.

GUSTAV. It's not trivial.

ADI. (*Blossoming at being taken seriously.*) Isn't it?

GUSTAV. It's a serious thing, for a man's wife to reject his ideas. It's a bad sign.

(*Now GUSTAV is taking this too seriously and it makes ADI nervous.*)

ADI. Of what?

GUSTAV. (*Instead of answering.*) I read her book.

ADI. You did?

GUSTAV. I did.

ADI. What did you think? Everyone liked it, the critics all liked it. I mean it's flying off the shelves –! What did you think?

GUSTAV. It's...compelling.

ADI. Yes, everyone said so.

(*Rethinks Gustav's choice of words, finds it odd.*)

Compelling?

GUSTAV. The ex-husband is a piece of work.

ADI. He really is.

GUSTAV. Have you met him?

ADI. Oh, no! No, I just meant from the book – from what I read...

GUSTAV. But you've never actually met him.

ADI. No, he was out of the country when we met.

We met here, actually!

(*GUSTAV is oddly taken aback by this.*)

GUSTAV. You did?

ADI. She'd come here to get away, do some writing, and I was staying in a little room in the back. I'd come from the city, my first major exhibit, and all the reviews were bad – I'd been sick all winter.

(Laughs.)

But when I saw her, I felt a *lot* better.

GUSTAV. But she was still married?

ADI. Technically, technically – things had ended between them, the marriage was just a technicality.

(GUSTAV reacts to the word "technicality.")

GUSTAV. She said that?

ADI. Well... I mean... You got that idea...

(A half beat. Then:)

GUSTAV. So why did she marry him? Did she ever say? The way she describes him, you have to wonder what she saw.

ADI. Well, she didn't really know him. It takes a while to get to know someone.

GUSTAV. In that case, you should never marry a person you haven't already married.

(The MEN laugh together. GUSTAV stops laughing before ADI does.)

So he wasn't all bad.

ADI. Nobody is *all* bad, are they?

(GUSTAV sees he means this, and is struck by the optimism of it.)

GUSTAV. Hmm.

ADI. What?

GUSTAV. Nothing. That's just...sweet.

ADI. Tekla says that sometimes too – in exactly that way – but when she does, it's not a compliment.

(He smiles, inviting GUSTAV to smile.)

(Instead:)

GUSTAV. You're a little afraid of her, aren't you?

ADI. I wouldn't say that!

(A beat.)

She's just...larger than life. When you're with her, you feel like you won something you never expected to win. Like a major prize, something I didn't even know I was in the running for.

GUSTAV. She *makes* you feel that way?

ADI. *(Uncertainly.)* No no! You just – one just...*feels*...

(But maybe it's her fault?)

I mean there are moments when it feels a little like she thinks she's doing me a favor. I don't like that, when it happens, but...

(Abruptly –) When she's away, I feel the light go out of my life, I really do. So maybe she *is* doing me a favor. A woman like that, she could have anyone.

GUSTAV. I'm sure that's true.

They say she's very beautiful.

ADI. It's more than that, it's her *spirit*, her spark, the way she sees the world as a place of endless potential, whereas most people see it as a series of expectations that, one by one, over time, get shattered. *I* saw it that way, until I met her. And she influences me, I don't mind admitting that. She –

(Suddenly, irritated.) If she was a man, they wouldn't talk about her looks.

GUSTAV. Isn't she beautiful?

ADI. She is, but that's not – If she was a man, they'd talk about her book, what she wrote – or at the very least how well it sold, whether or not she's rich –

GUSTAV. (*With a shrug.*) You'd rather they talk about your finances than her beauty?

ADI. I hate being talked about. *She* doesn't care, I think she finds it amusing, but...

GUSTAV. Well, it's a bit different isn't it.

ADI. What is?

GUSTAV. What they say about her. And what they say about you.

(*A beat.*)

ADI. ...What do they say about *me*?

GUSTAV. I thought you knew, I thought that was your whole / point –

ADI. My point was that they pretend to care about her words, but really they all crowd into the readings to stare at her –

(*He makes the last-second decision not to say the word "tits" and instead –*)

What were *you* talking about?

GUSTAV. No, never mind. I shouldn't have...

ADI. No, what?!

GUSTAV. I'm sure you don't care about gossip! You're happily married, who cares what anybody thinks?

(*ADI cares very much what's said about him.*)

ADI. (*Trying to be casual and failing.*) No, of course, I mean, of course! I mean

ADI. no
of course.

(A beat.)

GUSTAV. I haven't known you long – but we connected very quickly, didn't we?

ADI. We *did*!

GUSTAV. And every night for the last three nights – here we are! Drinking together, like old friends. You'd think a rising star of the art world –

ADI. *(Re this description of himself.)* As if!

GUSTAV. Star! – Might get bored of some old guy like me, but –

ADI. No, come on. I love talking to you.

GUSTAV. *(Struck by his sincerity.)* Do you?

ADI. Not to embarrass you, but I've never met a man like you – the way you think, the way you encourage me to think – it feels like standing in a bracing wind.

(He smiles at GUSTAV. GUSTAV studies him.)

GUSTAV. *(Carefully, but with warmth.)* They think you're a sucker, Adi.

ADI. What? Who...?

GUSTAV. Everyone. The men. Everyone. Women too.

ADI. *Everyone* thinks I'm a sucker?

GUSTAV. They see the way your wife runs around. How Tekla does what she wants, how you stand in the background and sort of...wave admiringly as she trots by.

ADI. That's not –
That's not...!
Everyone thinks that?

GUSTAV. And I want you to know, I defended you. On principle, before even knowing you.

ADI. You did?

GUSTAV. Without thinking we might ever meet, I said: Look at this man's paintings. Look at his grasp of space, his *muscularity* of shape, his *dignity* of color. This is a sophisticated mind, I said, this is a man who grasps nuance. He's not a sucker, he's not a loser, he's not some dumb cuck who doesn't care which beds his wife slips in and out of. How can you say that about him?

ADI. They say that about me?

GUSTAV. I said to them all, You're wrong!
But... Now that I've met you...

ADI. Now that you've met me, what?!

(A beat.)

GUSTAV. *(Very gently.)* It seems possible that she...takes advantage. Of you.
That's all.
That's just how it seems.

(This touches a nerve because it is a deeply suppressed fear that ADI does not let himself unearth.)

(ADI has a whole series of emotions. He suppresses them too.)

ADI. Let's not talk about Tekla.

Let's talk about art. I preferred when we were talking about art.

GUSTAV. I apologize if –

ADI. No no

Don't apologize, no, I appreciate that you
I appreciate

ADI. but
I, please
can we *please* –

GUSTAV. Of course! Of course, whatever you want.

(A beat. ADI gathers himself, or tries to.)

(Across this speech about sculpture, ADI's thinking about the previous conversation, and Tekla, and he's sort of breaking down.)

ADI. Last night after you left I was thinking about
sculpture
what you said about
sculpture
how it's the art form of the future
now more than ever
how we need artists to dream new shapes
build new figures, figures that the world can arrange
itself around
and how painting can only fail because
it doesn't rearrange our lives, it doesn't *require* –
and I felt sure that you were wrong, I thought how can
a man talk about painting like that,
so I got out of bed and I went to my easel
and I waited for the *feeling*
like your spine becomes a hollow tube
and something pours through you –
I waited for that. And it didn't come.

GUSTAV. *(Impassive.)* Didn't it?

ADI. Instead, I felt like my spine was filling with concrete.
So I started to imagine a three-dimensional form, a
figure that might hold the future.
And I kept trying again and again and again, but each
time...

It was three o'clock in the morning, and she was
sleeping in our bed
and the only form I could imagine...
was hers.

(His voice trails off.)

(He sits in profound silence.)

GUSTAV. She possesses you.

ADI. Maybe possession and inspiration are the same thing.
It's hard to explain but
sometimes I can't tell where she ends and where I begin.
Like over time the border between us has sort of
collapsed
and we've spilled over into each other.
Like I'm more than myself now, I'm myself-plus
myself-plus-her
like she sort of...lives inside me. Even when she's
somewhere else.

GUSTAV. Would you rather be the parasite or the host?

ADI. *(Laughing, protesting.)* That's not -!

GUSTAV. Heads-up, the host usually gets eaten.

ADI. It's not parasite-host it's... One creature, instead of two.

GUSTAV. Does she feel that way too?

ADI. *(Honest, and this is a little painful.)* ...I don't know.

(A beat.)

GUSTAV. I don't want to be hard on you. But you remind
me of my younger brother.

ADI. You have a younger brother?

GUSTAV. Also artistically inclined, though not a real artist,
like you. But sensitive. And he... When it came to
women... He made dangerous choices.

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