

Release (eng.)

See also Relaxe (fr.)

### Summary

A man serves forty years of a life sentence for a murder he did not commit. The real killer confesses. Now, at seventy years of age, he quickly uses up the money paid to him by the authorities and all his relatives have died, so how will the freed man live?]

### Cast

Victor Davis 70 years old

Suzanne Croft 65 years old

Hank Gerber 40 years old

RELEASE text Act I only:

### ACT I Scene 1

The scene: A prison visitors' parlor. Off-center, stage left, a grill with a chair to the smaller side. Stage right, two chairs against the back wall. A third by the grill. The grill allows hands to pass through and the possibility of heads to pass through. The stage is empty. Then a woman enters and proceeds to the chair, but does not sit down. She peers expectantly. She is SUZANNE CROFT, a handsome woman of about 65 years of age. Her expectance is rewarded. A prisoner enters. He is a man of about 70 years of age. Erect and firm, almost military. He is VICTOR DAVIS. They simply look at each other for a moment. They are friends.

VICTOR

Suzanne! Ever faithful! How are you!

SUZANNE

Victor! God, am I glad to see you!

VICTOR

Something has happened.

SUZANNE

I've always come to try to buck you up, Victor. But today, I'm the one who needs a friend.

VICTOR

Bob?

SUZANNE

Yes.

VICTOR

You knew it would happen sooner or later, Suzanne.

SUZANNE

It's not that, Victor; Oh, yes, we knew he couldn't last forever.

VICTOR

He did his damndest to try.

SUZANNE

Yes, the poor guy. I suffered with him. Actually, I had learned to love him, I think.

VICTOR

You're a loving person, Suzanne.

SUZANNE

You know there is one person who I have loved all my life, Victor.

VICTOR

I know... You haven't had much luck, have you? One a murderer in prison for life; The other....

SUZANNE

That terrible disease! To see a healthy, active man reduced gradually to... to nothing more than a wilted vegetable! It was awful!

VICTOR

And yet you always managed to come and see me!

SUZANNE

I felt I was coming to give you courage, but now I realize you were the one giving me my strength. You had other visitors.

VICTOR

Only one. My old buddy Jerry. But he is never so regular. Good friend, though. That's nothing like you and me. But there's something else that's getting at you.

SUZANNE

Yes;

VICTOR

I can't imagine what it could be.

SUZANNE

You know, treatment for that multiple sclerosis that killed him...

VICTOR

Yes. Cost a lot, I know...

SUZANNE

You know that to get help you have to become an actual pauper.

VICTOR

You sold off all your savings, securities, stocks, bonds... all that. I know.

SUZANNE

It kept us going. Just. Then, when Bob died, I first had this great sense of relief. Like a big load had been lifted off my back. I felt guilty about feeling good, even while they lowered the coffin into the hole.

VICTOR

You shouldn't have, Suzanne. You've been a real saint through it all.

SUZANNE

But then when I turned away and started walking out of the cemetery, I suddenly realized something I should have been aware of... but I'd simply kept my eyes shut.

VICTOR

Your friends.

SUZANNE

Few and far between. No. Not that. That's bad enough. Victor! I don't have a cent, and the only income we had was cut off when he died! I don't know what I'm going to do!

VICTOR (ironical)

Your reward for giving your life.

SUZANNE

So I trust you. For one thing, I know that you've lost everything you had, too. I knew you'd understand.

VICTOR

The world is cruel. I don't know what to say, except that I've always loved you, Suzanne. You know that

SUZANNE (grasping his hands)

I know. I knew you'd tell me so again, as you've done so many times before. That's what I needed, Victor. Money. I guess I'll be able to find some kind of work. Can't imagine what.

VICTOR

Now you're free. We should look at it this way. You're free to do what you want. You could even hook some rich guy...

SUZANNE (smiling)

I already tried to substitute somebody for you, and look what it got me. No; I prefer to make it alone, because I'll know that I'm not alone. I can dream of how it could have been.

VICTOR

I don't like the idea of your sacrificing yourself for me.

SUZANNE

I can't stand the idea of your being here for something you didn't do.

VICTOR

How do you know?

SUZANNE

Don't say that Victor. I know you're no murderer!

VICTOR

You're the only one who does. Even I have wondered from time to time if maybe I did kill those people!

SUZANNE

Don't do that, Victor! You and I know you couldn't have, that you didn't! Jerry, too.

VICTOR

Yes, Jerry! He always says so, but I have the feeling that even he has his doubts.

SUZANNE

Then there's your lawyer.

VICTOR (laughs sadly)

You know my old lawyer died just last year! It's getting to that point.

SUZANNE

Yes, that's true, but I mean his son.

VICTOR

His son is a good boy. But he has no conviction. He believes because his father did. That's not the same thing. How everybody could believe that I was capable of such a thing! A whole family... Then I wonder if I would have believed someone like me could have. I can see that I might have been as bad as the others. How many cases of these kinds of killings, where the guilty one really does turn out to be just your ordinary guy: friendly, courteous, always helping his friends. Even more ordinary than me!

SUZANNE

I knew that it couldn't be you, though.

VICTOR

You had faith, Suzanne. Still do have. Makes you all the more the wonder.

SUZANNE

There are things that bother me, too, about the evidence against you.

VICTOR

Pretty damning. I had no alibi.

SUZANNE

But something about it has always made me suspicious. I haven't said so to you, because I didn't want to hurt you by going over the scene again. But I smell something bad, Victor. What they call a set-up.

VICTOR

Pretty far-fetched, isn't it?

SUZANNE

I don't think so. Someone knew you well enough to know your every move, knew where you went and did what.

VICTOR

That would only narrow the game down to about 100 people, Suzanne.

SUZANNE

Maybe. But no one tried to look into those 100 people to see which one might have seemed suspicious.

VICTOR

Possibility. But I've also tried to figure out why someone, anyone, would be so angry that he would kill a whole family. Well, mother, father and son. Particularly they said that the twelve year old kid was hacked to pieces. Hacked to pieces! What's the point? Like savages!

SUZANNE

They were the Krantzes. I remember the name well. Tom Krantz was another nice guy and his wife was a pretty thing, too.

VICTOR

Worked for IBM, didn't he? Computers were just beginning, I remember.

SUZANNE

He was an elder at Third Presbyterian. You know what I think? I think Tom knew something about the murderer. Maybe they were even friends. But they had a lot of friends, just like you.

VICTOR

But what could they know that would make anyone turn into an insane butcher? If Tom had some inkling that the guy had been an embezzler and stole millions from the company or some bank or something... that might make him mad enough to shoot the guy. But hacking people after they're dead!...

SUZANNE

Bob and I talked about it often.

VICTOR

He think like you do?

SUZANNE

Not only that, but he was funny....funny odd. I'm always suspecting things, I guess, but I think Bob had definite suspicions. I think he knew more than he let on, even to me.

VICTOR

Your intuition.

SUZANNE

Call it suspicion. And I could be wrong, of course. Bob got worse and worse and we stopped talking about all that. But he felt, too, that you had been set up. Bob wasn't a big talker, you know.

VICTOR

Played with cards close to his chest. I know. I respected that. Didn't get to know him very well, but he seemed like a good sort.

SUZANNE

He was. And I actually came to learn to love him, in a way. Especially with his illness, of course.

VICTOR

No. There's only you who believe in me now, Suzanne. But what do you think you'll do?

SUZANNE

Well, the first thing I thought of was being a house-maid for someone. The pay is so low. My age... Or I could accompany an older person... older than me. I feel ancient, myself.

VICTOR

Cut it out. Besides, you're beautiful!

SUZANNE (smiling a bit)

That perks me up a bit. To hear you say that. Even though I know it isn't true. But keep it up, Victor! Don't stop!

VICTOR

You're beautiful. You're intelligent and you have a wonderful feeling for people.

SUZANNE (kisses him)

But the idea of being a companion might just be the easy way out. I'd be continuing my previous life. Would that be wise? I'd be attaching myself to someone again, even without being emotionally involved.

VICTOR

You'd do it well; Suzanne. It's true, it would be confining.

SUZANNE

Not too confining to keep coming to see you, Victor! Not too confining to dream...

VICTOR

Dreams! I dream a lot, too. I've never figured out why we didn't get married... back then.

SUZANNE

And I wondered why you suddenly went off and married that... shrew! She was a shrew, let's face it!

VICTOR

That probably wasn't my first mistake, but it sure was a dumb one! I was miffed, I think, because... because you never kissed me!

SUZANNE (vexed)

You were miffed! You were the one who didn't kiss me!

VICTOR

I was always afraid that if I tried, you'd get mad.

SUZANNE

I was afraid of being too... too forward. How stupid you are when you're young! Then I was stupid again to marry Bob. I did it out of spite.

VICTOR

You did!?

SUZANNE

I should have had the sense to wait. But you had your first child. I thought it would be for keeps, I guess. Then you had a daughter. They were nice kids, I have to admit.

VICTOR

Pretty selfish, though. And then when I was nailed for the murders, they all deserted me right off the bat.

SUZANNE

Maybe the plane crash was some kind of divine retribution.

VICTOR

If it was, over a hundred people paid for it as well.

SUZANNE

I know. It's stupid to make those remarks.

VICTOR

Anyway, she married Jerry. Didn't do her much good, did it? She was pretty sick just before the plane accident.

SUZANNE

Even your parents died sort of young.

VICTOR

They pretended to believe I was innocent, but I know they were like everyone else. After a few years, everybody assumed that I was guilty. I thought I'd go crazy. If it hadn't been for you...

SUZANNE

You're too strong. You couldn't have. I know you, Victor. You did things. You still keep your sanity by reading for the blind, and things like that.

VICTOR

Yes, that's true. And some of the books I get to do are quite helpful.

SUZANNE

Distracting, I suppose.

VICTOR

Yes. But even more than that, some of them. They get me thinking about things I wouldn't have otherwise. Like about life. (He laughs sadly) I guess I know a lot about life, don't I!

(Curtain on Act I, Scene 1)

ACT I

Scene 2

A prison yard where prisoners are allowed to circulate freely. At first we see no one, but VICTOR, standing alone, bored. He has an old tennis ball that he bounces disconsolately from tie to time. Then he is hailed in familiar tone by a younger prisoner, HANK GERBER, about 40 years old. Scrubby beard. Both are in prison garb.

HANK

Hey, old-timer! How ya doin'?

He slaps VICTOR on the back. VICTOR responds with sad but smiling Irony.

VICTOR

Old-timer!

HANK

Pretty good joke, hey?... Pretty bad one, I guess. Sorry about that.

VICTOR (smiling)

That's O.K..... "Hank" isn't it?

HANK

That's me. Back for my winter training.

VICTOR

I'd never thought of the meaning of old-timer like that before. What did you do to get in this time?

HANK

Wasn't easy, Vic. I'm getting too good at it.

VICTOR

At getting in?

HANK

Hell, no! At heisting! I'm so good they don't catch me when I want them to! Made quite a little pile for myself.

VICTOR

Bank it?

HANK

Sure did. Followed your advice. Won't need it here. All bills are paid her. Stole a Mercedes and unloaded it for five thousand.

VICTOR

That did it, eh?

HANK

No! See what I mean? Never caught me. Did a few other jobs to pay for food. Pulled off a computer printer. Brand new. In the store! Didn't catch me at that, either!

VICTOR

You must have played a few tricks.

HANK

Finally, I tried to walk out of a store with a whole computer in its big box. I knew they'd check me at the door. Instead, young guy just waved me through. I was desperate. Weather's been getting cold. I put the box down and started looking for my bill.

VICTOR

They still thought you'd paid, though.

HANK

Yeah, but they just said, "Let's see! Hewlett Packard! I'll go get the salesman." Comes back with the salesman. I sez, "Don't you remember?" the salesman was a little sharper. Knew damned well what I was up to. "Yeah, I remember! You hung around for a long time and just tried to walk out with this!" And he called the cops. I looked at my shoes. Cops thought I looked suspicious. So they booked me.

VICTOR

So you got what you wanted.

HANK

Yeah. Four months. But what a job! I'm ready for a rest!

VICTOR

Still sleep ou in the open?

HANK

Most of the time. Except when it rains. Then I go under the elevated. I can sleep most anywhere.

VICTOR

You look healthy.

HANK

So do you. Read any good books lately?

VICTOR

Read one on religion. No. A novel, but with lots of talk. Blind folks seem to run to religion, you know?

HANK

I run the other way. You too?

VICTOR

This one I did last week the guy makes a difference between religion and belief in God.

HANK

I don't get it.

VICTOR

Well, like he says everyone is free to believe what he wants. Believe in God or whatever.

HANK

Or nothin' at all.

VICTOR

Right, or nothing at all. But free. Nobody can stop you from believing.

HANK

Just don't talk about it.

VICTOR

Exactly. The trouble comes when you join a group and go out and try to get other folks to join you.

HANK

What's religion then?

VICTOR

Religion is those guys in their groups. He says people should believe what they want to believe and then should go somewhere to join clubs if they want to be in a group.

HANK

I get it. But not a believer group. So?

VICTOR

Well this guy in the book says that's what people should do. But he doesn't get many buyers.

HANK

It's true. People go out and die because one club gets mad at the other. Like these kids in their hoods. They're nuts! All of 'em!

VICTOR

He also thinks that people join religious groups because they're not sure about what they believe.

HANK

You mean they're afraid they might not believe in God?

VICTOR

They think they should but they're afraid they don't.

HANK

Does he figure out why they're afraid?

VICTOR

I don't think so. At least I didn't catch it. Better than another one I had to do. On economics. I can't imagine anyone wants to listen to a guy in a novel spouting about economic models and causes. Awful stuff! Worse than politics.

(We hear a whistle blow)

HANK

Back to the cages. Maybe find you at supper time?

VICTOR

I'll look for you, Hank!

End of Scene 2  
End of Act I