

PERUSAL SCRIPT



by **Henrik Ibsen**
Translated from the Norwegian and Adapted by
Eric Samuelson



Newport, Maine

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GHOSTS

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CAST OF CHARACTERS: 3M 2W

Mrs. Helene Alving, widow of Captain and Chamberlain¹ Alving

Oswald² Alving, her son, a painter

Pastor Manders

Jacob³ Engstrand, a carpenter

Regina⁴ Engstrand, his daughter and servant to Mrs. Alving.

The play takes place at the Alving estate, by a great fjord in Western Norway.

A note on money: Ibsen mentions two kinds of Norwegian currency in the play: specie-dollars (riksdaler) and crowns (kroner). In 1875, Norway abandoned dollars, and replaced them with the current currency, kroner, at an exchange rate of 4 kroner=1 dollar. Writing in 1881, Ibsen describes Johanne, Regina's mother, given severance pay of 400 dollars, some 20 years previously. She (or more likely Engstrand) would then have exchanged that currency for 1200 kroner in 1875.

So how much money would that have been? The exchange rate between Norwegian kroner (NOK) and American dollars is ever shifting, but in 2008, was around 5 NOK=1 dollar. But a better way to understand it is to look at the information given in the play itself. Engstrand is a skilled carpenter, and after finishing work on the orphanage, has saved 700-800 kroner. Assuming that the work took a year, and that he had some expenses along the way, he was likely paid around 1000-1200 kroner for a year's work. That, in turn, is enough for him to buy the house he plans to turn into his 'old sailor's home.' Johanne, then, would have been given severance of 300 dollars, or around 1200 kroner, which was likely a year's pay for a skilled housemaid. In either case, it's a substantial amount of money.

There remains a third Norwegian currency: the Øre. Just as American currency has dollars and cents, with 100 cents=1 dollar, Norway uses kroner and Ører, with 100 Ører=1 kroner. But since Ibsen makes no mention of them in the play, we needn't trouble ourselves with them here.

GHOSTS premiered at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City in 2013

¹ Ibsen calls him 'captain and *kammerherre* Alving.' Kammerherre refers to a local official, a Chamberlain or Justice of the Peace.

² Oswald in the original Norwegian

³ Jakob in the original Norwegian

⁴ Regine in the original Norwegian

GHOSTS by Henrik Ibsen, Adapted and translated by *Eric Samuelsen*. (*Suitable for Professional, College/University, and Community groups.*) Mrs. Alving has spent her life meticulously creating the fantasy of a happy home and family and marriage, which explodes in revelations of sexually transmitted diseases, suicide and insanity. Quite possibly the most radical play in history. **Order#3032**

Eric Samuelsen taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright. He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at Mormoniconoclast.com. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

ACT ONE

(A spacious living room, with a door on the side wall stage left, two doors on the wall stage right. In the middle of the room is a round table with chairs around it; on the table are books, newspapers and magazines. Downstage left is a window, and next to it, a small sofa with a small coffee table in front of it. To the rear, the room continues into a somewhat narrower conservatory, the walls of which are glass. In the right-hand wall of the conservatory is a door leading down into the garden. Through the glass wall a gloomy fjord landscape is faintly visible, veiled by steady rain.)

(ENGSTRAND, a carpenter, stands by the garden door. His left leg is crippled and bent; to compensate, he has a clump of wood under the sole of his boot. REGINA, with an empty watering can in her hand, stops him from coming nearer.)

REGINA: *(quietly intense.)* What do you want? No, stay there. You're dripping wet.

JACOB: It's the good Lord's own rain, my dear.

REGINA: That's the devil's rain.

JACOB: Guh-damn⁵ it, girl, the way you talk . . .

(limps in a few steps.)

As I was about to say. . . .

REGINA: Don't clomp around on that foot of yours. The young master's sleeping in this morning.

JACOB: Sleeping in? It's the middle of the day.

REGINA: That's none of your business!

JACOB: So, I was out on the prowl last night

REGINA: I bet you were.

JACOB: I'm only human; we're all fallen, weak creatures, my dear. . . .

REGINA: True enough.

JACOB: Surrounded by temptations. Way of the world. Still, guh-damn if, five-thirty in the morning, I'm not strapping on my carpenter's belt, ready to work.

REGINA: Fine, great, will you just go? I can't stand here and rendezvous⁶ with . . .

JACOB: Excuse me? You can't stand here and rendez-what?

REGINA:

I can't have someone see you here. Go, go, get out!

JACOB: *(Takes another couple of steps in.)* I'm not going, damn it, until I've had my say. This afternoon, I'll be finished with the work down in the school, and I'm taking the ferry back home to the city.

⁵ One idiosyncrasy of Engstrand is his language. The most taboo Norwegian swear word from the period was 'fanden', meaning 'the devil.' The problem is, it doesn't carry the same punch in English, and we don't go around saying 'the devil this' or 'the devil that.' And Engstrand never completes the word; he says 'fa'n'. I thought the partial swear word 'guh-damn' might be an equivalent.

⁶ Regina uses the French word here—she's proud of her (rudimentary) French, and likes showing off.

REGINA: (*Mumbles.*) Have a nice trip.

JACOB: Thank you, my dear. Tomorrow's the day, the orphanage open house, a big shindig, a rich folk's party, good booze pouring. And nobody can say that Jacob Engstrand can't steer clear of temptation.

REGINA: Oh, right.

JACOB: Tomorrow, yes, sober as a priest, because of who will be here. High society, fine folks. And Pastor Manders coming up from town.

REGINA: He's coming today.

JACOB: You don't say. And it'd be a damn shame if he found out certain things about me. If you catch my drift.

REGINA: So that's what you're up to.

JACOB: And what am I up to?

REGINA: (*looks at him intently.*) How are you planning to con Pastor Manders this time?

JACOB: Hush now. Are you insane? You seriously think I'd try to con . . . ? No, no, no, Pastor Manders has always been good to me, I wouldn't dream of it. There just a little something I'd like to chat with him about, you see? Before I head back to town tonight.

REGINA: Head back now, as far as I'm concerned.

JACOB: Yes, but I want you to come with me, my dear.

REGINA: (*her mouth open.*) You want me to do what?

JACOB: I said, I want you home. With me.

REGINA: (*Scornfully.*) Not a chance in hell.

JACOB: We'll see.

REGINA: Me? Raised here by Captain Alving, educated as a lady. Me, who's lived here since she was a girl? I'm moving home with you? To that . . . house? You can go to hell.

JACOB: Well, guh-damn? You suddenly standing up to your father, you tramp?

REGINA: (*Quietly, without looking at him.*) You've always said I didn't belong with you.

JACOB: Puh. Don't worry about it.

REGINA: After all the times you've cussed at me, called me . . . forget it. *Fi donc!*⁷

JACOB: May God strike me dead right here if I've ever called you anything. . . .

REGINA: I know perfectly well what words you've used.

JACOB: But you see, that's only when I'm on a bender, my dear. Or hung-over, you know how it goes. The world is full of pitfalls and temptations, Regina.

REGINA: Yeah.

JACOB: That's what happened when your mother got all over me. I had to put her in her place, right? The way she put on airs.

(*Mimics.*)

'Let me go, Engstrand, let me be. I was a Rosenvald servant, Engstrand, I served three years in the home of Captain Alving.' God save us, like she was so high and mighty, chambermaid to the chamberlain. Never let me forget it, her fancy position here.

REGINA: My poor mother. You did it, her short, miserable life, that was all you.

⁷ Again, she uses this French colloquialism. It means 'fie'. I thought of using a stronger French insult, but thought I'd trust Ibsen.

JACOB: Yes, there you go, everything's my fault.

REGINA: You disgusting . . . and that leg.

JACOB: What's that, my dear?

REGINA: Pied de mouton.

JACOB: So that's English, then?

REGINA: Yes.

JACOB: Good, good. You've picked up some education, my dear, and that'll be good for us both, now.

REGINA: (*Short pause.*) So what do you want from me in town?

JACOB: How can you ask that, what a man wants from his only child? Aren't I a poor and lonely widower?

REGINA: Don't give me that sentimental crap. What do you want from me?

JACOB: Well, I'll tell you, I thought I might try something new.

REGINA: You're always trying something new. It always goes wrong.

JACOB: Ah, but this time, just watch me. Those sons of bitches --.

REGINA: Watch your language.

JACOB: Yes, yes, yes, you're absolutely right, my dear. It's just . . . you see, I've been able to put some aside from this orphanage job.

REGINA: Have you? Good for you.

JACOB: Well, what else is there to spend it on around here?

REGINA: All right, so?

JACOB: So you see, I had the thought that maybe I could put the money into something a little more lucrative. A sort of sailor's tavern.

REGINA: Of course.

JACOB: A nice place, classy. For officers, not some pig sty for common sailors. No, for captains and bosuns and . . . high class. Big shots.

REGINA: So I would. . . .

JACOB: Help out. Just to add to the look of the place, you understand. You wouldn't need to work so hard, damnit. Do any job you want.

REGINA: I see. Right.

JACOB: You have to have a skirt or two in the place. Essential, my dear. Keep things lively in the evenings. Fun. Some dancing and music, and so on. You have to remember, these are lonely seamen, lost in the ocean of life.

(Moves closer.)

Don't be stupid about this, start thinking you're better than you are. What is there out here for you? Your mistress gave you a fancy education. So you can what? Babysit orphan brats? Is that a life for you? Do you have some deep desire to give your life to snot-nosed bastards?

REGINA: If things go the way I hope. . . .it can happen . . . it can happen!

JACOB: What? What can happen?

REGINA: Don't worry about it. So you have a lot of money saved?

JACOB: This and that, it adds up to, seven, eight hundred crowns.

REGINA: Not bad.

JACOB: Enough to make a start, my dear.

REGINA: And I don't suppose you could let me have some of it?

JACOB: Oh, hell, no. Not a chance.

REGINA: Not even fabric for a pretty new dress or two?

JACOB: You come with me to town, my dear, you'll have as many dresses as you like.

REGINA: Sure, dresses like that I could manage for myself.

JACOB: You should trust the guiding hand of your father, my dear. Now, I've got my eye on a trim little place on Little Harbor Street. They don't want much down, and we could turn it into a kind of sailor's home, you see.

REGINA: I don't want to live with you. I don't want anything to do with you. Go away!

JACOB: But you surely wouldn't be with me for long, my dear. That wouldn't do at all. No, you wait, you look for the right chance, a saucy little piece like you've turned into. . . .

REGINA: Excuse me?

JACOB: It wouldn't be long before some mate on a ship, perhaps even a captain. . . .

REGINA: You're not going to marry me off so easily. And to a sailor? With no savoir faire. . . .

JACOB: They don't have savoir what?

REGINA: I know all about seamen. Not marriage material.

JACOB: So don't marry 'em. There's money to be made either way. (Confidentially.) That Englishman, the one with the yacht. He forked out three hundred dollars, that guy. And she wasn't near as pretty as you.

REGINA: (*Threatening him.*) Get out!

JACOB: I really don't think you'd hit me.

REGINA: Don't count on it.

(*Forcing him out the door.*)

One more word about my mother, and I will hit you. And don't slam the door. Young Mr. Alving. . . .

JACOB: I know, he's sleeping. You seem pretty fond of young Mr. Alving. Oh, ho, it couldn't be that he's the fantasy

REGINA: Go! Now! You are crazy, Mister. No, not that way, Pastor Manders is coming. Go out the kitchen stairs.

JACOB: (*Heading off right.*) Yes, yes, I'm going. But talk to him when he gets here. He'll tell you the debt a daughter owes her father. And I am your father. I can prove it by the Church records!

(*He goes out through the second door on the right, which REGINA has opened, and closes again after him. REGINA glances hastily at herself in the mirror, loosens her collar, then she busies herself with the flowers. PASTOR MANDERS, wearing an overcoat, carrying an umbrella, and with a small traveling-bag on a strap over his shoulder, comes through the garden door into the conservatory.*)

MANDERS: Good morning, Miss Engstrand.

REGINA: (*Turns, surprised and pleased.*) Good morning, Pastor Manders. So the ferry's arrived?

MANDERS: It just docked.

(*Goes into the living room.*)

Nasty weather we've been having.

REGINA: (*Follows him.*) Farmers will be glad for the rain.

MANDERS: Yes, that's no doubt true. We city folks tend to forget. (Starts to take off his coat.)

REGINA: Oh, please, let me help you. There. Oh, it's soaked. I'll just hang it up in the hall. And now, the umbrella. I'll open it up to dry.

(She goes out with the things through the second door on the right. PASTOR MANDERS takes off his travelling bag and lays it and his hat on a chair. Meanwhile REGINA comes in again.)

MANDERS: Oh, it's good to be safely indoors. And I suppose everything's fine around here?

REGINA: Just fine, thanks.

MANDERS: But busy, I assume, what with preparations for tomorrow?

REGINA: Oh, yes, there's still lots to take care of.

MANDERS: And I trust Mrs. Alving is in?

REGINA: Oh, sure. She's just upstairs getting the young master his morning cocoa.

MANDERS: Yes, I imagine so. I heard down by the pier that Oswald had arrived.

REGINA: Yes, he arrived day before yesterday. We actually hadn't expected him until today.

MANDERS: All in good health, I hope?

REGINA: Thanks, yes, he's fine. Just exhausted from his trip. He came straight through from Paris, no stops, never even changed trains. I expect he's still sleepy, so we should keep our voices down.

MANDERS: Shh. We'll keep it quiet.

REGINA: *(Moving an arm-chair to beside the table.)* Now, please, Pastor Manders, sit, make yourself at home.
(He sits, she moves an ottoman under his feet.)

There we go. Now, there, completely comfy?

MANDERS: Yes, thank you, I am supremely comfortable.

*(Looks her over.)*⁸

Well, Miss Engstrand, you've certainly grown since last I saw you.

REGINA: Do you think so? Mrs. Alving thinks I've filled out some.

MANDERS: Filled out? Oh, well, yes, I suppose. As is proper.

(Short pause.)

REGINA: Shall I tell Mrs. Alving you're here?

MANDERS: Thank you, but, there's no hurry, my dear child. . . . Tell me, Regina, what is your father up to these days?

REGINA: Thanks, Pastor Manders, he's fine.

MANDERS: He came to see me, last time he was in town.

REGINA: Was he? He always enjoys talking with you, you know.

MANDERS: And you look in on him at work from time to time?

REGINA: Me? Um, sure, when I can. I'm pretty busy here. . . .

MANDERS: Your father is not a man of great steadiness of character, Miss Engstrand. He stands in need of a guiding hand.

REGINA: No argument here.

MANDERS: He needs someone around who he cares about and who cares about him. He told me as much when he saw me in town.

⁸ This may be my favorite stage direction in all of Ibsen. She's putting an ottoman under his feet, he's sitting down, in position to look down her dress and he says 'my, how you've grown.' Tells us everything we need to know about Manders.

REGINA: He's talked to me about something similar. But I don't know if Mrs. Alving will need me here, especially now that she has an orphanage to run. And I wouldn't want to leave Mrs. Alving either; she's always been so kind to me.

MANDERS: But your duty as a daughter, my dear child. . . . of course, we would need to ascertain the wishes of your mistress. . . .

REGINA: I also don't know if it would be proper. For someone my age to set up house with a single older man.

MANDERS: What? My dear Miss Engstrand, he is your own father, after all!

REGINA: Yes, I suppose that's . . . still . . . if it were in a respectable house, with a real gentleman.

MANDERS: But, my dear Regina. . . .

REGINA: Someone who I could look up to almost like I was his real daughter. . .

MANDERS: But my dear sweet child

REGINA: Because I would love to live in town. It's so lonely out here, and a good pastor knows it's not good to be alone. And if I say so myself, I'm smart, I'm a hard worker. Do you, maybe, know of a good place, something that's right for me?

MANDERS: Me? Uh, no, I regretfully don't know any. . . .

REGINA: But my dear, dear, Pastor Manders. . . . just think. About me. Can you do that, at least?

MANDERS: *(Stands.)* Yes, yes, I certainly shall. Miss Engstrand.

REGINA: Because, if I. . . .

MANDERS: Miss Enstrand, if you would be so kind as to announce me to Mrs. Alving.

REGINA: She'll be here soon.

(REGINA exits left. MANDERS paces the room two or three times, stands a moment in the background with his hands behind his back, and looks out over the garden. Then he returns to the table, takes up a book, and looks at the title-page; starts, and looks at several books.)

MANDERS: Hmmph.

(MRS. ALVING enters by the door on the left; she is followed by REGINA, who immediately goes out by the first door on the right.)

MRS. ALVING: *(Taking his hands.)* My dear Pastor, welcome!

MANDERS: Mrs. Alving. Here I am, as promised.

MRS. ALVING: Punctual as always.

MANDERS: As you can imagine, it wasn't easy to get away. All the committees I chair, the boards I'm involved with. . .

MRS. ALVING: All the kinder of you to come. Perhaps we can dispense with business matters first, before dinner? Did you bring your luggage?

MANDERS: *(Quickly.)* I left it at the inn. I'll stay there tonight.

MRS. ALVING: *(Trying not to smile.)* Are you seriously unwilling to spend the night under this roof? Again?

MANDERS: No, no, I am sorry, Mrs. Alving, and I thank you for your kindness, but it's best if I stay at the inn, as planned. It's convenient to the ferry landing.

MRS. ALVING: Whatever you say. But I would think that two old-timers like ourselves . . .

MANDERS: My word, you're teasing me! Well, I can imagine you must be in good spirits, what with the orphanage opening and Oswald's return.

MRS. ALVING: As you say, these are delightful days. It's been two years since he's been home. And he's

promised to stay the whole winter.

MANDERS: Has he indeed? That's lovely, a dutiful son. I can well imagine that Paris or Rome have attractions we can hardly match.

MRS. ALVING: Well, yes, but here he has his mother. Ah, my wonderful boy, he still has a soft spot for his mother.

MANDERS: It would indeed be sorrowful if his long absence, and his immersion in art and such were to deaden his natural affections.⁹

MRS. ALVING: Yes, well, no doubt you need to say that. But there's no chance of that happening with him, none. It'll be interesting to see if you recognize him. He'll be down soon—he's just resting, lying on the sofa. Now please, sit down Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: Thanks. If you're sure . . . ?

MRS. ALVING: Of course.

(She sits by the table.)

MANDERS: Good. Now, as you shall see . . .

(He goes to the chair where his traveling bag lies, takes out a packet of papers, sits down on the opposite side of the table, and tries to find a clear space for the papers.)

Would you mind telling me, Mrs. Alving, how these books came to be here?

MRS. ALVING: These books? I'm reading them.

MANDERS: You read these sorts of writings?

MRS. ALVING: I certainly do.

MANDERS: And you find this kind of reading material uplifting? Does it make you a better person?

MRS. ALVING: I think it makes me, in a way, safer.

MANDERS: Strange answer. How do you mean?

MRS. ALVING: Well, I feel a sort of confirmation or, perhaps, clarification of a lot of things I've been thinking about. That's what's remarkable, Pastor Manders, there's nothing in these books that's all that new; there's nothing in them except what most people really think or believe. Just that most people can't admit it to themselves, or define themselves by it.

MANDERS: Good God in Heaven. Would you seriously have me believe that most people . . . ?

MRS. ALVING: Yes, I believe so, exactly.

MANDERS: But surely not in our little country? Not here, with us?

MRS. ALVING: Certainly, here, as elsewhere.

MANDERS: Now, listen, I really must say . . . ?

MRS. ALVING: But seriously, what do you have against these books?

MANDERS: What do I have against them? Do you mean to suggest that I have nothing better to do with my time than *read* these sorts of publications?

MRS. ALVING: So in other words you're condemning something you haven't read.

MANDERS: I have read enough *about* these writings to know I disapprove.

MRS. ALVING: Well, but what is your own opinion. . . .

⁹ It's difficult to capture the pretentious stuffiness of Manders language. Norwegian allows for compound words, as German does. But Manders takes the cake, with these 14 letter monstrosities in nearly every speech.

MANDERS: My dear Mrs. Alving, there are many occasions in life when we simply must rely on the opinions of others. That's how things work in this world, and a good thing too. How could society function otherwise?

MRS. ALVING: I suppose you may be right.

MANDERS: Besides, I don't doubt that there may be something attractive about such books. And I can well imagine you wish to acquaint yourself with the larger intellectual movements said to prevail in the wider world outside here . . . where you have chosen to allow your son to spend his time. Still. . .

MRS. ALVING: Yes. . . ?

MANDERS: (*Lowering his voice.*) But one musn't talk about it, Mrs. Alving. One needn't advertise to everyone what one reads in the privacy of one's own four walls.

MRS. ALVING: Of course not. I believe that as well.

MANDERS: Consider, for example, how we have to take into account this orphanage, which was your brainchild at a time when your views on spiritual matters differed from where they are today. . . . as best as I can understand it.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, I admit you're right. But it's about the orphanage . . .

MANDERS: We're here to talk about the orphanage, yes. May I just urge you to. . . be circumspect.

(*He opens the packet and pulls out papers.*)

See these?

MRS. ALVING: Final documents?

MANDERS: All of them. In perfect order. You can well imagine the difficulty of getting them together in time. I practically had to force the issue. The authorities are excruciatingly scrupulous when it comes to acting decisively. But here they are at last.

(*Shuffling through the bundle.*)

Here's the formal deed donating the plot of land called Solvik, in Rosenvold manor, with newly constructed apartments, classrooms, schoolmaster's residence, and the chapel. And here's approval for the endowment, and the institutional by-laws. If you would look them over. . . .

(*Reads aloud.*)

"Statutes pertaining to the Home for Children: 'Captain Alving's Memorial.'"

MRS. ALVING: (*Looking at the papers.*) And there they are.

MANDERS: I chose the designation 'Captain', in preference to 'Chamberlain.' I thought 'Chamberlain' looked pretentious.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, fine, whatever you think.

MANDERS: And here is the bank account for interest-earning capital sufficient to cover current orphanage expenses.

MRS. ALVING: Thanks, but you keep that, for the sake of convenience.

MANDERS: I'd be happy to. I think it best to keep our money in the bank for now. The interest is certainly negligible, four percent with six months notice of withdrawal¹⁰. If we happen upon the right mortgage opportunity—a first mortgage, obviously, with adequate security—we might consider it at a later date.

MRS. ALVING: Certainly, Pastor Manders, whatever you think best.

¹⁰ One senses that Manders' first love really is finance.

MANDERS: I'll keep my eyes peeled. But in the meantime, there is an issue I have on several occasions thought of raising with you.

MRS. ALVING: And what is that?

MANDERS: Should the Orphanage buildings be insured? Or not?

MRS. ALVING: Of course it should be insured.

MANDERS: But wait, Mrs. Alving. Let's consider this a moment.

MRS. ALVING: I always insure everything: buildings, equipment, crops, livestock.

MANDERS: Of course. All your possessions. I do as well, naturally. But you must see, surely, that this is a different matter entirely. The Orphanage is, in a sense, consecrated to a higher purpose.

MRS. ALVING: That's no reason to. . . .

MANDERS: As far as I'm concerned, I would not have a moment's hesitation in protecting us from all conceivable eventualities. . . .

MRS. ALVING: No, I'm with you there.

MANDERS: . . . but how might this be viewed by people in the community? You surely have a better sense of it than I.

MRS. ALVING: Hmm. The sense of the community. . . .

MANDERS: Aren't there prominent individuals—people who are listened to—who might be scandalized?

MRS. ALVING: What, have you heard from 'people who are listened to'?

MANDERS: I'm thinking primarily of those of independent means, in responsible positions, people whose views one must weigh carefully.

MRS. ALVING: I can actually think of several such people, who may well take offense. . . .

MANDERS: And there you are! In the city, we have many such. Think of all my rivals' congregants! People who would be only too quick to decide that we lack the proper faith in a higher power.

MRS. ALVING: But, Pastor Manders, you know how you

MANDERS: Yes, I know, I know. My conscience is clear, that's true enough. But we still could not avoid the misinterpretations of others. And that could, in turn, damage irreparably the good work of the Orphanage.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, if that were to happen, I suppose. . . .

MANDERS: Nor can I lose sight of the difficult, not to say painful, position I might find myself in. In the town's leading social circles this orphanage is a major topic of conversation. The orphanage is meant to benefit the town, and hopefully, might provide a significant reduction in welfare expenditures. But since I have served as your spiritual advisor, and have been responsible for the business arrangements in this matter, I do fear that I will bear the brunt of whatever spirit of fanaticism. . . .

MRS. ALVING: No, you mustn't risk that.

MANDERS: Not to mention published attacks on me in certain papers and magazines

MRS. ALVING: Enough, dear Pastor. That must be the decisive factor.

MANDERS: So you prefer that we not insure it?

MRS. ALVING: No, we'll let it go.

MANDERS: (*Leans back in his chair.*) But what if there were some terrible accident? One never knows. Would you have means to rebuild?

MRS. ALVING: No. Let me be clear, absolutely not.

MANDERS: So let me say, Mrs. Alving, we're making a very serious decision.

MRS. ALVING: Do you think we can choose otherwise?

MANDERS: No, that's just the point. We can't do anything else. We cannot subject ourselves to ill-disposed scrutiny, nor provide an occasion for temptation for our weaker brethren.

MRS. ALVING: Especially you, as a priest.

MANDERS: And I believe that we can also trust in the good fortune that attends a divinely sanctioned institution.

MRS. ALVING: Let's hope for that, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: So we'll let it go?

MRS. ALVING: Absolutely, yes.

MANDERS: Good. As you wish.

(Makes a note.)

So . . . no insurance.

MRS. ALVING: It's actually rather odd that this subject should come up today.

MANDERS: I had for some time been thinking of raising it with you. . . .

MRS. ALVING: . . . because yesterday we nearly had a fire down there.

MANDERS: What on earth?

MRS. ALVING: It was no big deal. A small pile of shavings caught fire in the carpenter's shop.

MANDERS: Where Engstrand works?

MRS. ALVING: Yes. I've talked to him about it; he's so careless when he smokes.

MANDERS: Well, he has a lot on his mind, poor man, so many temptations. Thank God, he's been making a real effort to live an upstanding life, I hear.

MRS. ALVING: I suppose, when he's sober. . . .

MANDERS: Yes, that unfortunate weakness. But he's often driven to it by his bad leg, he tells me. The last time he came to town, I was very moved by him. He came to me, and thanked me so warmly, because I was able to get a job for him here, so he could spend some time with Regina.

MRS. ALVING: He doesn't see much of her.

MANDERS: Oh, no, he sees her every day, he told me himself.

MRS. ALVING: I suppose that's possible.

MANDERS: He feels so acutely how much he needs someone close by who can hold him back when temptation beckons. That's what I like about Jacob Engstrand—he comes to you in such abject helplessness, and confesses so openly his weaknesses. When last he came and talked to me, Mrs. Alving . . . well, suppose it was genuinely necessary for Regina to moved back home with him. . .

MRS. ALVING: *(quickly rising.)* Regina!

MANDERS: . . . I would ask that you not oppose it.

MRS. ALVING: I will absolutely oppose it. Besides, Regina already has a job at the orphanage.

MANDERS: But remember. He is, after all, her father.

MRS. ALVING: I know full well what kind of father he's been to her. No, she is not going with him, not if I have anything to say about it.

MANDERS: *(Rises.)* Mrs. Alving, don't take this so personally. I'm troubled at how badly you've misjudged Engstrand. It's almost as though you're frightened at the thought. . . .

MRS. ALVING: *(More quietly.)* It doesn't matter. I have welcomed Regina into my home, and here she shall

remain.

(Listening.)

Hush, Pastor Manders, don't talk about this anymore.

(Happiness lights up her face.)

Do you hear? Oswald's coming downstairs. Now, we'll only think about him.

(OSWALD ALVING, wearing a light overcoat, carrying a hat, smoking a meerschaum pipe, enters left, stops in the doorway.)

OSWALD: Oh, sorry. I thought you were in the study.

(Comes closer.)

Hello, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: *(Stares.)* Ah. So strange. . . .

MRS. ALVING: So, Pastor Manders, what do you think of him?

MANDERS: I think . . . I think . . . is it really

OSWALD: Yes, it's really the prodigal son, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: *(Protesting.)* But my dear young friend. . . .

OSWALD: The lost sheep found, then.

MRS. ALVING: Oswald was thinking of that time when you were so opposed to him becoming a painter.

MANDERS: Well, a step that may seem to human eyes badly misguided, can nonetheless later . . .

(Shakes his hand.)

Welcome home, welcome! My dear Oswald . . . I suppose it's all right if I call you Oswald?

OSWALD: What else would you call me?

MANDERS: Good. What I meant to say, my dear Oswald, is that you mustn't think I utterly condemn an artist's calling. I can well imagine that there are many there who can keep their inner life untainted by the world.

OSWALD: Let's hope so.

MRS. ALVING: *(Beaming with delight.)* I know one who kept his inner life and his outer self completely untainted. Just look at him, Pastor Manders.

OSWALD: *(Pacing restlessly.)* All right, Mother. Let it go.

MANDERS: Well, certainly. Undeniably. And I understand you've begun to make a name for yourself. The papers have often mentioned you, most favorably. That is to say, well, I haven't seen your name quite so much recently.

OSWALD: *(By the flowers.)* I haven't been able to paint much recently.

MRS. ALVING: A painter must get his rest occasionally.

OSWALD: Right. Mother, are we going to eat soon?

MRS. ALVING: In a half hour or so. He hasn't lost his appetite, thank God.

MANDERS: Or taste for good tobacco.

OSWALD: I found Papa's old pipe upstairs, and

MANDERS: That's what it was!

MRS. ALVING: What?

MANDERS: When Oswald stood in the doorway, with that pipe in his mouth, I could have sworn it was his father, large as life.

OSWALD: No, really?

MRS. ALVING: How can you say that? Oswald takes after me.

MANDERS: Yes, but there's something about the corners of his mouth, something about his lips, which reminds me exactly of Alving. At least when he smokes.

MRS. ALVING: Certainly not. In fact, Oswald looks to me rather priestly; at least his mouth does.

MANDERS: Yes, I can see that. I have colleagues who have similar facial proclivities.

MRS. ALVING: But please put the pipe away, son. I don't want smoking in this room.

OSWALD: (*Does.*) Happily. I just wanted to try it. I smoked it once when I was a kid.

MRS. ALVING: You did?

OSWALD: Sure. I was very young. I came into Papa's room one evening and he was particularly happy.

MRS. ALVING: Oh, you don't remember anything from those years.

OSWALD: Sure I do, I remember it clearly. He picked me up and sat me on his knee, and let me smoke his pipe. 'Smoke, boy,' he said, 'have a real smoke.' So I smoked as hard as I could, until I could tell I was going all pale, and sweat breaking out in huge drops on my forehead. And he laughed so heartily. . . .

MANDERS: That was most strange.

MRS. ALVING: Dear, it was only a dream.

OSWALD: No, Mother, it was absolutely not a dream. Don't you remember, you came in and picked me up and took me to my room. And I got sick, and I noticed you were crying. Did Papa like those kinds of practical jokes?

MANDERS: As a young man, he was most . . . high spirited.

OSWALD: And yet he accomplished so much. So many good, socially worthwhile projects. As young as he was.

MANDERS: Yes. You have inherited the name of an energetic and admirable man, my dear Oswald Alving. And I hope it will inspire you. . . .

OSWALD: It should, I hope.

MANDERS: Anyway. It was good of you to come home for the ceremony honoring your father's memory.

OSWALD: The least I could do for him.

MRS. ALVING: And I get to keep you here so long. That's the nicest part of it.

MANDERS: I understand that you'll stay here over the winter?

OSWALD: I'm here indefinitely, Pastor Manders. Though I must say, it's wonderful to be home.

MRS. ALVING: (*Beaming.*) Isn't it though?

MANDERS: (*Looking at him sympathetically.*) You were on your own early in this world, young man.

OSWALD: I was. I sometimes wonder if it was too early.

MRS. ALVING: Absolutely not. A healthy, active boy needs to be out and about. Especially an only child. He'd get spoiled, just laying around at home with his parents.

MANDERS: I would say that's a highly debatable point, Mrs. Alving. The proper place for a child is in the home of his fathers.

OSWALD: I'm with you on that one, Pastor.

MANDERS: Just look at your own son. Yes, we can talk about him openly. What have the consequences been for him? He's what? Twenty six or seven? And never had the opportunity to learn what a proper home is.

OSWALD: Sorry, Pastor Manders. But you're wrong there.

MANDERS: Am I? I was given to understand that you'd spent your time in bohemian, artistic circles.

OSWALD: I have.

MANDERS: Mostly in the company of younger artists?

OSWALD: That's right.

MANDERS: I wouldn't think such fellows would have the means to marry and set up a household.

OSWALD: They certainly can't afford to get married, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: That's what I said.

OSWALD: But they still can have a home. And some of them do, and very pleasant and moral homes, too.

(MRS. ALVING nods, follows this conversation intently, but doesn't speak.)

MANDERS: I'm not talking about a bachelor's apartment. By 'home' I mean a proper home, where a man lives with his wife and children.

OSWALD: Or with his children and their mother.

MANDERS: *(startled, claps his hands together.)* Good heavens!

OSWALD: What?

MANDERS: Living together with . . . his children's mother?

OSWALD: Would you rather he abandoned her, the mother of his children?

MANDERS: That is an illicit arrangement you describe! Wildly immoral so-called marriages.

OSWALD: I didn't see much immoral with how these people lived.

MANDERS: But how could it be possible that any decent young man or woman could live that way? In the eyes of all the world!

OSWALD: What are they supposed to do, a poor young artist, a poor girl. It costs a lot of money to get married, you know. What should they do?

MANDERS: What should they do? My dear young friend, I'll tell what they should do: Exercise self-restraint!

OSWALD: Your doctrine won't carry much weight with warm-blooded young people in love.

MRS. ALVING: No, it certainly won't!

MANDERS: *(Beside himself.)* And the authorities allow this sort of thing! Just ignore what's going on in broad daylight!

(Turns to Mrs. Alving.)

Do you see now what cause I had to be concerned about your son! In circles where unconcealed depravity prevails; even has a certain social status. . . .

OSWALD: Let me tell you something, Pastor Manders. I have been a regular Sunday guest in a few of these so-called immoral homes. . .

MANDERS: On Sundays!

OSWALD: A day off, a day to enjoy yourself. But never have I heard a single offensive word there, and I have never been witness to anything I would consider immoral. But do you know where I have witnessed open immorality in artistic circles?

MANDERS: No, God knows I don't.

OSWALD: Then I'll tell you. I've seen it on those occasions when respectable, upper crust fathers and husbands come to Paris on their own, and have honored us with visits to our lofts and apartments. They knew what was going on. They could tell us about places and acts we never dreamed of.

MANDERS: What? Are you suggesting that upstanding citizens of our town, here, would

OSWALD: Haven't you heard these upstanding citizens of yours, when they come home from a trip, talking about the rampant depravity of the world outside?

MANDERS: Certainly. . . .

MRS. ALVING: I have too.

OSWALD: Well, you can take them at their word. They know all about depravity.

(Grabs at his head.)

Oh, the way they defile the wonderful, free life out there.

MRS. ALVING: You mustn't get so upset, darling. It's not good for you.

OSWALD: No, you're right, Mom. It's not good for me. I'm just so damned tired. I think I'll go for a walk before dinner. I'm sorry, Pastor Manders, I know you can't see my side of things, but I did have to speak out.

(Goes out the second door on the right.)

MRS. ALVING: My poor boy. . . .

MANDERS: You may say so. Look at what he's become!

(MRS. ALVING looks at him silently. MANDERS paces up and down.)

He said it himself: the Prodigal son. Unfortunate boy. Truly unfortunate.

(MRS. ALVING continues to look at him.)

And what have you to say about this?

MRS. ALVING: I say: that every word Oswald said was right.

MANDERS: *(Stands still.)* Right! Right! With those opinions!

MRS. ALVING: Here, in my loneliness, I've had time to think: the same thoughts. But I've never dared speak up. Now: all right, my son will speak for me.

MANDERS: You are a most unfortunate woman, Mrs. Alving. But now, it's time to speak seriously with you. I'm not speaking as your business advisor, nor as the childhood friend of your husband, best man at his wedding. I am your priest, the same priest who was here when you stood at the most dangerous crossroads of your life.

MRS. ALVING: And what does my priest have to say?

MANDERS: Let me first stir up your memory. The moment is well chosen. Tomorrow is the tenth anniversary of your husband's death. Tomorrow we unveil a memorial in his honor, tomorrow I will address the assembled multitude. But today, I speak to you, alone.

MRS. ALVING: Good, Pastor Manders. Speak.

MANDERS: Do you remember that after less than a year of marriage, you stood at an abyss? That you had left your house and home, that you fled from your husband? Yes, Mrs. Alving, fled, fled, with no intention of returning to him, no matter how much he begged.

MRS. ALVING: Have you forgotten how desperately unhappy I was that first year?

MANDERS: It's nothing less than a spirit of rebellion that desires happiness here in life. What right do we humans have to happiness? No, it is duty that sustains us, Mrs. Alving. And it was your duty to remain with your husband, who you once chose, and to whom you were joined in the holy bonds of matrimony.

MRS. ALVING: You knew what the kind of life Alving was living then, the vicious debauchery of which he was guilty.

MANDERS: I was well aware of rumors about him, and I was reminded of his reputation from his younger

years, if such can be believed. But it's not a wife's role to sit in judgment of her husband. It was your duty to bear humbly the cross a higher power, in His infinite wisdom, chose to lay on your shoulders. But you rebelliously tossed the cross aside, abandoned the sinner it was your duty to support, and risked your good name and reputation, and . . . nearly ruined the reputation of others as well.

MRS. ALVING: One specific reputation, you mean.

MANDERS: It was incredibly reckless for you to seek refuge with me!

MRS. ALVING: With our priest? Our closest friend?

MANDERS: Especially . . . well, you can thank the living God that I had the strength to persuade you to abandon your insane plan, and to lead you back to the path of duty and back home to your loving husband.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, Pastor Manders. That was certainly your doing.

MANDERS: I was but the poor instrument for a much higher power. And what a great blessing in your life, that I induced you to return to the path of duty and obedience. Hasn't everything turned out the way I said it would? Didn't Alving turn away from his sinful ways, as a man should? Didn't he live in honor and virtue with you all the rest of his days? Didn't he become a great benefactor to this district? Didn't he help you rise to his level, until you became his assistant in all his great endeavors? And a great assistant, too. . . oh, yes, Mrs. Alving, I plan to give you full credit. But now let me speak of the other great error of your life.

MRS. ALVING: And what do you mean by that?

MANDERS: Just as you renounced your duty as a wife, so have you also renounced your duty as a mother.

MRS. ALVING: Ah.

MANDERS: You have been ruled by a rebellious spirit of independence all of your days. Your mind has always inclined to disobedience and lawlessness. You have never been willing to tolerate any restrictions. Any inconvenience in your life, you've thoughtlessly and without conscience tossed aside, like a burden you were free to be rid of. You found it unpleasant to be a wife, so you left your husband. And you sent your child off to strangers.

MRS. ALVING: That's true. That's what I did.

MANDERS: And so, you've become a stranger to him.

MRS. ALVING: No. No, I'm not.

MANDERS: You are, you must be. And in what state of mind have you found him? Think carefully, Mrs. Alving. You sinned against your husband, and you've acknowledged it with this memorial you've built to him. Acknowledge now your sin against your son; there may well be time yet to reclaim him from the paths of serious error. Repent, and let's restore what we can of your son. Because I say to you, Mrs. Alving, you are a guilt-ridden mother. This is what I thought it my duty to say to you today, Mrs. Alving.

(A pause.)

MRS. ALVING: *(Slowly, very controlled.)* You have now spoken, Pastor Manders, and tomorrow you will speak in memoriam of my husband. I will not speak tomorrow. But now I will speak to you, just as you have spoken to me.

MANDERS: Of course you want to defend yourself.

MRS. ALVING: No. Just tell a story.

MANDERS: Story?

MRS. ALVING: What you have said about me and about my husband after you recalled me, as you put it, to the path of duty, about all that, you speak without personal knowledge of any kind. From that moment, you, our

closest friend, never once set foot in our home.

MANDERS: You and your husband left town shortly thereafter.

MRS. ALVING: Yes we did, and you never once visited here while my husband was alive. It was the business affairs of the orphanage that brought you here at all.

MANDERS: (*Softly, hesistantly.*) Helene, if this is a reproach, I ask you to consider . . .

MRS. ALVING: What you owed your sacred calling, yes. And also that I was a runaway wife. One can't be too careful when it comes to wanton women.

MANDERS: My dear . . . Mrs. Alving. . . you know what a ridiculous exaggeration . . .

MRS. ALVING: Fine, let it go. All I'm saying is, when you judge my marriage, you're basing that judgment on what you've heard from others, general public knowledge.

MANDERS: All right. So. . .

MRS. ALVING: But now, Manders, I will tell you the truth. I promised myself that one day, you would hear it. Just you.

MANDERS: And what is the truth?

MRS. ALVING: The truth is that my husband died as dissolute as he lived all his days.

MANDERS: (*Fumbles for a chair.*) What are you saying?

MRS. ALVING: After nineteen years of marriage, as licentious, in his desires at least, as he was on the day you married us.

MANDERS: And those, what, wild oats, peccadilloes, improprieties, whatever you call them, you call a depraved and dissolute life?

MRS. ALVING: That's what our doctor called it.

MANDERS: I don't understand you.

MRS. ALVING: It doesn't matter.

MANDERS: My head is spinning. Your entire marriage, all those years with your husband, was nothing more than a secret . . . nothingness?

MRS. ALVING: Nothing. Now you know.

MANDERS: It's just inconceivable. I can't begin to understand. But how was it possible that . . . how could you keep the whole secret?

MRS. ALVING: That was my endless struggle, day after day. After Oswald's birth, I thought things were maybe a little better with Alving. But that didn't last. Then I had to fight twice as hard, so that no one would know what kind of man the father of my child really was. And you know Alving's charisma, the way he could win people over. No one could see anything but good in him. He was one of those people whose reputation could withstand any hit. But then, Pastor Manders—and you need to know this too—came the ugliest act of all.

MANDERS: Uglier still?

MRS. ALVING: I had put up with a lot, though I knew full well what he was up to when he left this house. But then he had to shame me here, within these four walls.

MANDERS: What are you saying? Here?

MRS. ALVING: Here, in our home. Right there

(gestures to the door stage right)

in the dining room, I learned of it. I was doing something in here, and the door was ajar. I heard our

housemaid come up from the garden, with water for the flowers.

MANDERS: Yes?

MRS. ALVING: Then I heard Alving go in too. I heard him speak to her. I heard . . .

(with a short laugh)

I can still hear it, so hateful, so ridiculous. I heard my own servant girl say “don’t touch me there, let me go.”

MANDERS: How indecently irresponsible! But it was surely meant in jest, Mrs. Alving. A bad joke gone wrong, surely that’s all. Believe me.

MRS. ALVING: I learned soon enough what to believe. The master of the house had his way with the girl . . . and that act had consequences.

MANDERS: *(as though frozen in place.)* In this house, this house!

MRS. ALVING: I have taken a great deal in this house, Pastor Manders. To keep him home in the evenings, and overnight? I became his drinking buddy, his partner in the secret binges¹¹ he enjoyed up in our room. I’d sit alone with him, drinking toast after toast, listening to his filthy talk, his idiotic rants. Then I’d fight him into bed. . . .

MANDERS: *(moved)* And you put up with all this.

MRS. ALVING: For the sake of our little boy. But then came the last straw, when my own servant I swore to myself, ‘that’s it, now it ends.’ I took control of everything--complete control—over him and over everything else. Because now, I had a weapon against, him, he didn’t dare complain. That’s when I sent Oswald away. He was nearly seven, and was noticing things, asking questions, as children will do. I couldn’t bear it. I thought, ‘our child will be poisoned by the atmosphere here, by the pollution of it.’ I got him out of it. And that’s why he never set foot in this house again while his father lived. There is no one who knows how much that cost me.

MANDERS: Your life has been full of trials.

MRS. ALVING: I would never have survived it, were it not for my work. Yes, you must know how hard I worked. All the additions to the estate, all the investments, all the practical improvements that Alving got so much credit for—do you think he did any of that? He, who spend his days lounging on the sofa reading court gossip? No, but let me tell you something else, on his rare moments of clarity and ambition, I encouraged him, then picked up the slack when he again reverted to drunken self-pity and wretched dissipation.

MANDERS: And this is the man you choose to memorialize?

MRS. ALVING: You see the power of a guilty conscience.

MANDERS: A guilty . . .? What do you mean?

MRS. ALVING: I always thought it impossible to think that, one day, the truth wouldn’t come out, and be believed. Thus: the orphanage. To quiet every rumor, and lay all doubts to rest.

MANDERS: Well, you’ve certainly succeeded there.

MRS. ALVING: And I had one more reason. I could not allow Oswald, my son, to inherit anything whatever from his father.

¹¹ Ibsen’s word is ‘orgies.’ But that suggests a level of kinkiness that I don’t think he intended. In context, he seems to have meant ‘drunken binges.’

MANDERS: So Alving's fortune. . . ?

MRS. ALVING: Yes. The money I've spent on the orphanage—I've calculated it to the penny—is the exact sum that made Lieutenant Alving a 'good match' back then.

MANDERS: I don't understand. . . ?

MRS. ALVING: My purchase price. . . . I don't want any of that money going to Oswald. My son will have everything from me. Everything.

(OSWALD comes in the second door on the right, leaving his coat and hat in the hallway.)

MRS. ALVING: Back already? My dear, dear boy.

OSWALD: Yes, how can one expect to take a walk in this miserable rain? I gather we're eating soon. That's great.

REGINA: *(Enters with a package from the dining room.)* Package for you, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING: *(With a glance at PASTOR MANDERS.)* The songs for tomorrow, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: Hmmm. . . .

REGINA: And dinner's ready.

MRS. ALVING: Good, we'll come shortly. I just need to. . . .

(She nods at the package.)

REGINA: *(To OSWALD)* And would Mr. Alving like white wine, or red?

OSWALD: He would like both, Miss Engstrand.

REGINA: Bien. Um. . . good.

(Exits to dining room.)

OSWALD: I'll help uncork it.

(Goes with her to the dining room, leaves the door ajar.)

MRS. ALVING: *(Opening package.)* Yes, I thought so. Look. All the songs for the celebration.

MANDERS: *(Wringing his hands.)* How I am to stand there tomorrow with a clear conscience and talk. . . .

MRS. ALVING: Oh, you'll manage well enough.

MANDERS: *(Quietly, so it can't be heard in the dining room.)* Yes, I mustn't allow a hint of scandal. . . .

MRS. ALVING: *(With quiet firmness.)* No. We must play out this ugly charade to the end. After tomorrow, it will be over for me, as though a certain dead man never lived in this house. There will be no one here but my boy, and his mother.

(From the dining room, we hear a chair over-turned, and at the same moment. . . .)

REGINA'S VOICE: *(A sharp whisper.)* Oswald! Are you crazy? Let go!

MRS. ALVING: *(Starts in fear.)* Ahhh!

(She stares at the half-open door. OSWALD laughs. He hums—we hear a bottle uncorked.)

MANDERS: But what on earth. . . what is this, Mrs. Alving?

MRS. ALVING: Ghosts. The couple from the garden, risen again.

MANDERS: What are you saying? Regina. . . ? Is she?

MRS. ALVING: Yes. Come on. Not a word.

(She takes MANDERS by the arm, and leads him into the dining room.)

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(The same room. The mist still lies over the landscape. PASTOR MANDERS and MRS. ALVING enter from the dining room.)

MRS. ALVING: *(in the doorway.)* Glad you liked it, Pastor Manders!

(Calls into the dining room.)

Aren't you coming too, Oswald?

OSWALD: *(from within.)* No, thanks. I think I'll go out for a bit.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, do. The weather seems a bit nicer.

(Closes the dining room door, crosses to the hall door, and calls out.)

Reginal!

REGINA: Yes, ma'am?

MRS. ALVING: Go down to the laundry room and help with the wreaths.

REGINA: Yes, ma'am.

(MRS. ALVING watches REGINA go, then closes the door.)

MANDERS: He can't hear anything from there?

MRS. ALVING: Not when the door's closed. Besides, he was going for a walk.

MANDERS: I'm still upset. I have no idea how I managed to choke down a single bite of your delicious dinner.

MRS. ALVING: *(controlling her nervousness, pacing.)* Me neither. What are we going to do?

MANDERS: Yes, what can we do? This isn't my kind of thing. It's too far outside any experience I've ever had.

MRS. ALVING: I'm convinced that nothing really bad has happened yet.

MANDERS: Heaven forbid! But it's still so unseemly, nonetheless.

MRS. ALVING: The whole thing's just a passing whim for Oswald, I'm sure of it.

MANDERS: Well, as said, this is really not my sort of thing. But I certainly think--.

MRS. ALVING: She's got to leave this house, immediately. That much is clear--.

MANDERS: Of course, absolutely.

MRS. ALVING: But where do we send her? We can't just --.

MANDERS: Where? Naturally, home to her father.

MRS. ALVING: To whom, did you say?

MANDERS: To her . . . No, wait, Engstrand's not her . . . Good heavens, Mrs. Alving, how is this possible? You must have been in error.

MRS. ALVING: Unfortunately no. I was not mistaken. Johanne confessed everything to me, and Alving couldn't deny it. There was nothing else to do except hush the whole thing up.

MANDERS: No, obviously that was it.

MRS. ALVING: The girl was immediately dismissed, with a good sum of money to keep her mouth shut. The rest she managed for herself when she got to town. She renewed an old friendship with Engstrand, let him see how much money she had, and told him some tale about a foreigner she'd met when he visited on his

yacht the previous summer. And she and Engstrand were very quickly married. Actually, you married them yourself.

MANDERS: I remember it well, when Engstrand made the arrangements. He came to me, full of contrition for the mistake he and his sweetheart had been guilty of making.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, he had to assume the guilt himself.

MANDERS: But to be so dishonest! And to me! I wouldn't have thought Jacob Engstrand capable of it. Well, I'm going to have a serious talk with him, see if I don't! And such a fraudulent relationship! How much money did she pay him for it?

MRS. ALVING: Three hundred dollars¹².

MANDERS: Well, there you go. For a mere three hundred dollars, to marry a fallen woman.

MRS. ALVING: Well, what does that say about me? I agreed to marry a fallen man.

MANDERS: What on God's green earth . . . what do you mean? A fallen man?

MRS. ALVING: Do you think Alving was any more pure when I married him than Johanne was when Engstrand agreed to marry her?

MANDERS: I'd say that's a completely different situation--.

MRS. ALVING: Not so different. The price was a lot higher—a mere three hundred dollars versus an entire fortune.

MANDERS: Nonetheless, the circumstances were entirely different. You were guided by your heart, and by the good advice of your closest circle.

MRS. ALVING: (*Avoiding his eyes.*) I thought you understood that my heart, back then, was leading me a very different direction.

MANDERS: (*Distantly.*) If I had known anything of the kind, I would not have been a frequent guest in your husband's home.

MRS. ALVING: At any rate, I never even thought about what I wanted.

MANDERS: But you took counsel from those closest to you, as you ought to have done, your mother and your two aunts.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, that's true. Those three arranged everything. It's marvelous, the picture they painted for me, what madness it would be to turn down an offer like that one. If my mother could see me now, and see what became of that glorious match.

MANDERS: Well, no one to blame any more. And one thing's for certain; your marriage met every possible standard of legality and propriety.

MRS. ALVING: Legality and propriety, yes. I often think those are the cause of most of the unhappiness in life.

MANDERS: That's a sinful way to talk, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING: So what? I can't let myself be tied to obligation and respectability any longer. I have to fight my way to freedom.

MANDERS: What do you mean by that?

MRS. ALVING: (*Drumming on the window frame.*) I shouldn't have covered up the details of Alving's life.

¹² Norway dropped the riksdaler (specie dollars) in 1875, exchanging them for kroner, which became the main currency, and remains so today. One riksdaler was worth four kroner. As I write this, the exchange rate is five kroner per American dollar. But three hundred riksdalers was a year's wage for a skilled worker—this was a tidy sum for Engstrand.

But I didn't dare do anything else, I was too worried about me. Such a coward.

MANDERS: A coward?

MRS. ALVING: If people had known the truth, they would have said, well, it makes sense. No wonder he turned out that way. Poor man, stuck with a runaway wife.

MANDERS: It's not unlikely that some would have seen it that way.

MRS. ALVING: (*looking steadily at him.*) If I was who I ought to have been, I would have taken Oswald aside, and said to him, listen my boy, your father was a corrupt degenerate

MANDERS: For God's sake. . . .

MRS. ALVING: . . . and I would have told him everything I've just told you. All of it.

MANDERS: I am nearly beside myself with anger at you, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING: I know. Me too. I'm furious at myself.

(*Crosses from window.*)

Such a coward.

MANDERS: And you call it cowardice, doing your plain duty? Haven't you forgotten the commandment, that a man should honor his father and mother?

MRS. ALVING: Let's not talk in generalities. Put it this way: should Oswald honor and love Captain Alving?

MANDERS: Isn't there a place in your heart, the heart of a mother, that forbids you to deprive him of all his ideals?

MRS. ALVING: What about truth?

MANDERS: What about ideals?

MRS. ALVING: Ideals, ideals! If only I wasn't such a coward!

MANDERS: Don't despise ideals, Mrs. Alving, or they'll take a terrible revenge. Look at Oswald. He doesn't seem to have many ideals, unfortunately. But as far as I can tell, he does genuinely look up his father, as a kind of ideal.

MRS. ALVING: You're right about that.

MANDERS: And this impression is one you nurtured; he got it from your letters.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, some superstitious sense of duty and honor led me to lie my head off to him, year after year. So cowardly. Such miserable coward I've been.

MANDERS: You have anchored his soul in a beautiful illusion. Don't think that's such a bad thing.

MRS. ALVING: Hmm. Who knows if it's so great, either. But I can't allow any hanky-panky with Regina. I won't have him ruining the life of that poor girl.

MANDERS: No, God knows. That would be disastrous.

MRS. ALVING: If I knew he was really serious about her, and that she could genuinely make him happy. . .

MANDERS: What?

MRS. ALVING: But no, it can't be. Regina, unfortunately, isn't the right sort of woman . . .

MANDERS: What are you saying?

MRS. ALVING: If I weren't such a terrible coward, I would say to him, marry her, or have whatever relationship you both want. Just be open about it.

MANDERS: For God's sake! You'd let him marry her! Such a completely unthinkable, utterly depraved, unimaginable. . . .

MRS. ALVING: Unimaginable, you say? You don't think out in the countryside you won't find plenty of

married couples who are every bit as closely related. . . .

MANDERS: I don't understand you at all.

MRS. ALVING: Oh, yes you do.

MANDERS: So, you're thinking of those circumstances where. . . all right, yes, families, unfortunately, aren't always as pure as they should be. But the sorts of things you're implying, well, we can't know . . . not for certain. . . .¹³ but this, you, a mother, can approve of your son. . . .

MRS. ALVING: But I don't want this. I don't approve, and wouldn't, not for all the money on earth; that's what I'm saying.

MANDERS: No, because you're a coward, as you keep saying. But if you weren't a coward . . .? For the love of God. . . a connection so scandalous . . .

MRS. ALVING: Actually, I believe that we're all descended from exactly that kind of connection, right, Pastor Manders? And who is it who created the world that way?

MANDERS: I will not discuss such questions with you, Mrs. Alving, not when you're clearly in the wrong frame of mind. When you regard your own moral scruples as cowardly

MRS. ALVING: Then I'll tell you just what I mean. I am afraid, I'm intimidated, because I'm surrounded by ghosts, and I can't get rid of them.

MANDERS: What?

MRS. ALVING: Ghosts. When I heard Regina and Oswald in there, they were like ghosts to me. But I almost believe that we're all ghosts, Pastor Manders. It's not just what we've inherited from our parents, which reappear in us. It's all kinds of old, dead opinions and lifeless old beliefs. They don't live in us, but they're everywhere and we can't get rid of them. When I pick up a newspaper and read it, it's as though I can see ghosts haunting every other line. Ghosts live throughout our whole country. They outnumber the sands of the sea. And that's why we're all so afraid of the light.

MANDERS: Aha! There's the fruit of all that reading. And such appealing fruit it is! Those books, those awful, revolutionary, free-thinking books!

MRS. ALVING: You're wrong. You were the man who started me thinking like this, and I'll be forever grateful for it.

MANDERS: Me!

MRS. ALVING: Yes. When you forced me to put on the yoke of what you called duty and responsibility, when you called good and virtuous what my entire soul rebelled against as an abomination! I knew how seamless you thought your teachings were. All I wanted to do was pick at one stitch, but when I did, the whole fabric came unraveled. And that's when I saw it was just piecework.

MANDERS: (*With quiet emotion.*) And that's the result of the toughest battle of my life?

MRS. ALVING: Call it your greatest defeat.

MANDERS: It was my greatest victory, Helene, victory over myself.

MRS. ALVING: It was a sin against us both.

MANDERS: When you came to me in your confusion and cried out: 'here I am, take me!' When I said to you, woman, go back to your lawful husband, was that a sin?

MRS. ALVING: I think it was.

¹³ Trying to convey how much Manders sputters here.

MANDERS: We don't understand each other.

MRS. ALVING: Not anymore, anyway.

MANDERS: Never . . . never in my loneliest thoughts, not once, have I thought of you as anything but as another man's wife.

MRS. ALVING: Really?

MANDERS: Helene . . . !

MRS. ALVING: It can be so easy to forget.

MANDERS: Not me. I'm the same man I always was.

MRS. ALVING: Fine, fine. Let's not talk anymore about old times. You're up to your eyebrows in boards and commissions, and I sit here fighting with ghosts. Inner and outer.

MANDERS: Well, those, I can help you get rid of. After all the terrible things I've heard here today, I cannot in good conscience allow an unprotected girl to remain under this roof.

MRS. ALVING: Wouldn't the best plan be to make sure that she's provided for? I mean, in a good marriage.

MANDERS: Unquestionably. I think that would be best for her. Regina is now of an age where . . . I don't actually know that, but I believe. . . .

MRS. ALVING: Regina developed early.

MANDERS: Yes, didn't she? I thought she was marvelously well developed, at least physically, when I was instructing her for confirmation¹⁴. Meanwhile, she should be home, under her father's supervision. . . except Engstrand isn't . . . the idea that he, that he . . . would hide the truth from me!

(Knock on the door into the hall.)

MRS. ALVING: Who could that be? Come in!

JACOB: *(in his Sunday best.)* I do beg your pardon, but. . . .

MANDERS: Aha!

MRS. ALVING: So it's you, Engstrand?

JACOB: I didn't see my girl around anywhere, so I thought I'd take it upon myself to, you know, knock on the.

. . .

MRS. ALVING: Yes, yes, of course, come in. You want to talk about something: what?

JACOB: No, ma'am, though I do thank you. No, it's the Pastor here that I need to have a little word with.

MANDERS: *(Walking up and down.)* Really? You want to talk with me, do you? So? What do you have to say?

JACOB: Well, actually, I would like very much to. . . .

MANDERS: *(Stands before him.)* What do you want?

JACOB: Well, see, thing is, we've been paid off down there, many thanks to you, ma'am. And now that we're finished with everything, so I thought, it would be, you know, real nice if we who've been working together had a little prayer meeting there tonight.

MANDERS: A prayer meeting? At the orphanage?

JACOB: Yes, but maybe if the Pastor doesn't think it's proper, or--.

MANDERS: Proper? No, it's perfectly proper, but---.

JACOB: I've actually made a habit of offering a little prayer myself, evenings, after work . . .

MRS. ALVING: You have?

¹⁴ Norwegian Lutheran children are typically confirmed at fourteen. Trust Manders to have noticed her.

JACOB: Every once in awhile, sure. Just for a little extra inspiration. But I'm just a common, ordinary man, you see, don't have any real gift for it, God knows, but I thought maybe since Pastor Manders is here. . . .

MANDERS: Look here, Engstrand, there's something I need to ask you first. Are you in the right frame of mind for such a meeting? Is your conscience completely clear?

JACOB: God knows, it doesn't always help much to be talking about conscience. . . .

MANDERS: Still, that's what we're talking about now. How do you answer?

JACOB: Oh, well, a conscience, it can be a bugger, you know, sometimes.

MANDERS: So you admit that, at least. So let's take it further. How are things with Regina?

MRS. ALVING: Pastor Manders. . . .

MANDERS: Let me just. . . .

JACOB: With Regina? Gosh, you scared me half to death.

(Looks at MRS. ALVING.)

There's nothing wrong with Regina, is there?

MANDERS: Let's hope not. No, I mean, how are things between you and Regina? You say you're her father, don't you?

JACOB: *(Uncertain.)* Um, well, uh, the Pastor knows about the situation between me and Johanne. . . .

MANDERS: It's time for some truth, Engstrand. Your late wife confessed everything to Mrs. Alving, before leaving her service.

JACOB: Well, but she should have. . . . She did anyway, then, did she?

MANDERS: We see right through you, Engstrand.

JACOB: But she swore, on the Bible . . .

MANDERS: She swore!

JACOB: Yes! Not actually on a Bible, but real solemn-like.

MANDERS: So in all these years, you've hidden the truth from me. From me, who trusted you implicitly, completely.

JACOB: Yes. Unfortunately, I guess I did.

MANDERS: Do I deserve this from you, Engstrand? Haven't I always been there, to help you, words and deeds, whenever you asked me. Answer! Haven't I?

JACOB: Things would not have gone well for me without Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: And this is how I'm repaid? You had me enter false information into the books of the Church! And you withheld from me, year after year, what really happened and your explanation for it. Your conduct has been reprehensible, Engstrand, and from now on, we are finished.

JACOB: *(With a sigh.)* Well, I certainly do understand that.

MANDERS: How can you possibly justify yourself?

JACOB: But why'd she have to go around talking about it? I mean, Pastor Manders, imagine that you were in the same situation as Johanne?

MANDERS: Me?

JACOB: Wait, hold on, not the exact same situation. Just if you had something you were ashamed of, like. In the eyes of the world. We menfolk, we really shouldn't judge women too harshly.

MANDERS: I'm not. I'm judging *your* conduct.

JACOB: Could I just ask the Pastor one little question?

MANDERS: Fine, ask.

JACOB: Isn't it a proper, good thing for a man to raise up someone who's fallen?

MANDERS: Of course it is.

JACOB: And shouldn't a man be true when he gives his word?

MANDERS: Of course he should, but. . . .

JACOB: Back then, when Johanne found herself in trouble on account of that Englishman--or maybe it was an American, or a Russian, whatever--well, so she came to town. Poor thing--she'd already sent me away a couple of times, because she couldn't stand the sight of anything that wasn't attractive, and of course I've got this beat-up old leg. You may remember that I got up the nerve to go into that dance hall, where all the sailors were carrying on and drinking, and so on. And I stood there, preaching to 'em, and calling 'em to a new life. . .

MRS. ALVING: (*By the window.*) Hmm. . . .

MANDERS: I remember it well, Engstrand, that low-life threw you down the stairs. You've told me about that situation. Your handicap honors you.

JACOB: Well, I don't like to make a big deal of it. But that was when she came to me, all repentant, with weeping and gnashing of teeth, I'll tell you, Pastor Manders, it just broke my heart.

MANDERS: Did it indeed. Go on.

JACOB: So I said to her, I said, that American is long gone, sailing the seven seas. And you, Johanne, you've committed a bad sin, you're a fallen woman now. But Jacob Engstrand, he stands on his own two feet. I sort of meant that as a metaphor, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS: I understood. Continue.

JACOB: Well, so I raised her up, and made an honest woman of her, so folks wouldn't know she'd been with some foreigner.

MANDERS: You handled the whole thing very well indeed, Engstrand. But what I cannot forgive is you taking money for it--.

JACOB: Money? Me? Not a nickel.

MANDERS: (*looks questioningly at MRS. ALVING.*) But. . . .

JACOB: Hold on, just a sec. I remember now. Johanne did have a bit of change. But I wouldn't touch it. 'No,' I says to her, 'that's mammon, that, that's the wages of sin, that gold,' or paper money, or whatever it was, 'we'll just fling that back in that American's face.' But of course, he was long-gone, by then, sailing the seven seas.

MANDERS: Was he indeed?

JACOB: Yes he was! And so Johanne and I, we agreed that the money was going to be saved for the child's education, and that's what we did, and I can account for every single dime.

MANDERS: Well, that changes things entirely.

JACOB: That's the whole story, Pastor Manders. And if I say so myself, I've been a good father for Regina--as far as I've been able to--because I know I'm a weak and sinful man.

MANDERS: No, come on now, my dear Engstrand. . . .

JACOB: But I will say this, that I've raised that child and lived with my dear Johanne and presided over my home, just like it says. But I couldn't ever go to see you, Pastor Manders, and brag and puff myself up and tell you that I'd done a good deed here on this earth. No, when something like that happens with Jacob

Engstrand, he keeps his mouth shut about it. It's not like it happens every day, you know. And when I do come to see you, Pastor, it's to talk about faults and weaknesses. Because, as I said, conscience can be a real bugger.

MANDERS: Give me your hand, Jacob Engstrand.

JACOB: Oh, my, Pastor Manders. . . .

MANDERS: No more nonsense.

(Shakes his hand firmly.)

There we are.

JACOB: And if I could very humbly beg your forgiveness. . . .

MANDERS: Not at all. On the contrary, I should be asking for your forgiveness. . . .

JACOB: Good Lord, no. . . .

MANDERS: Yes, absolutely. And I do it with all my heart. Forgive me that I could have so misjudged you. I just wish there were something I could do for you, to prove my sense of regret, and the sincere fellowship I feel for you. . .

JACOB: If there were, would you do it?

MANDERS: With the greatest pleasure. . . .

JACOB: Well, then, here's an opportunity for you. With the money which I've been able to set aside, I thought perhaps I might start a kind of sailor's home in town.

MRS. ALVING: Did you?

JACOB: I thought there might be need for a sort of orphanage, you could say. Sailors face such great temptations, as they wander about the earth. But in this house, with me, there'd be a sort of father figure, you see.

MANDERS: What do you think of that, Mrs. Alving?

JACOB: I don't have much to start with, of course. But if I could find a helping hand

MANDERS: Yes, of course, let's take a closer look at it. Your proposal meets with my enthusiastic approval. But now, go down, light the candles, make it look good and festive. And we'll share an uplifting hour together, my dear Engstrand, because now I'm sure you're in the right frame of mind.

JACOB: I think so too. So good evening, ma'am, and thank you, and we'll say goodbye. Be sure to take good care of my Regina.

(Brushing a tear from his eye.)

My poor Johanna's little girl. You may think it's strange, but she's grown to become the apple of my eye. She has.

(With a little bow, he exits through the hall door.)

MANDERS: Now what do you say about that man, Mrs. Alving? That's a very different explanation we got just now.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, it certainly was.

MANDERS: You can see right there how careful we should be before judging a fellow creature. But it's also a great joy to learn that we'd been completely wrong. Or what do you think?

MRS. ALVING: I think that you are, and always will be, a big baby.

MANDERS: Me?

MRS. ALVING: *(Laying both hands on his shoulders.)* And I think I almost want to throw my arms around

your neck and kiss you.

MANDERS: (*Backing away quickly.*) No, no, God bless me. . .the thought. . .

MRS. ALVING: (*With a smile.*) You don't need to be afraid of me.

MANDERS: (*By the table.*) It's just that sometimes, you have the most extravagant way of expressing yourself.

Now, I'll just gather the documents and put them carefully in my briefcase.

(He does.)

So. All right. Goodbye for now. Keep an eye peeled for Oswald. I'll stop by again.

(He takes his hat and goes out the hall door. OSWALD slips in another door, with a cigar and wine glass.)

MRS. ALVING: (*Sighs, looks for a moment out of the window, straightens the room, and is about to go into the dining-room, but stops at the door with a cry.*) Oswald? You're here?

OSWALD: Just finishing my cigar.

MRS. ALVING: I thought you'd gone for a walk.

OSWALD: In this weather?

(A glass clinks. MRS. ALVING keeps the door open, sits with her knitting on the sofa by the window.)

Wasn't that Pastor Manders who just left?

MRS. ALVING: Yes, he went down to the orphanage.

OSWALD: Hmm.

(We hear the glass clink and the decanter again.)

MRS. ALVING: Oswald, dear, careful with the liquor. It's pretty strong.

OSWALD: It helps cut through the dampness.

MRS. ALVING: Don't you want to come in here with me?

OSWALD: I can't smoke in there.

MRS. ALVING: Cigars are fine, you know that.

OSWALD: All right, then, I'll come in. Just one last drop. . . all right.

(He comes in with his cigar, closes the door after him. A short silence.)

Where was the pastor going?

MRS. ALVING: I told you, down to the orphanage.

OSWALD: That's right.

MRS. ALVING: You shouldn't have stayed in there sitting at the table, Oswald.

OSWALD: (*His cigar behind his back.*) I thought it was nice in there, mother.

(Strokes her)

Just think, for me to come home, sit at my mother's table, in my mother's room, eat my mother's delicious food.

MRS. ALVING: My dear, dear boy!

OSWALD: (*Impatiently, walks and smokes*) And what else is there for me to do here? I can't work at anything.

MRS. ALVING: Can't you?

OSWALD: In this weather? Without a single ray of sunshine day after day? (*Walks around the room.*) This, this . . . not able to work . . .

MRS. ALVING: Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to come home?

OSWALD: Mother. I had to.

MRS. ALVING: You know I would give up the pleasure of having you here ten times over if it means. . . .

OSWALD: (*Stands by table.*) But tell me something, mother. Is it really such a great pleasure for you having me home?

MRS. ALVING: You're asking if I don't find pleasure. . . .

OSWALD: (*Crumpling a newspaper.*) I suppose it doesn't make a difference to you if I'm here or not.

MRS. ALVING: You're heartless enough to say that to me, to your mother?

OSWALD: You've always managed pretty well here without me.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, I have managed without you. . . that's true.

(Long silence. Twilight overcomes the room. Oswald paces—he's laid down his cigar.)

OSWALD: (*Stops by her.*) Mother, can I sit here, on the sofa with you?

MRS. ALVING: (*Makes room for him.*) Of course you can, my dear boy.

OSWALD: I have to say something to you, Mother.

MRS. ALVING: (*Anxious.*) What?

OSWALD: (*looking straight ahead.*) Because I can't do this anymore.

MRS. ALVING: Do what? What is it?

OSWALD: I couldn't bring myself to write to you about it, and since I've been home. . . .

MRS. ALVING: (*Grabbing him by the arm.*) Oswald! What is it?

OSWALD: Both yesterday and today, I've tried to shove the thoughts aside; free myself. It doesn't work.

MRS. ALVING: (*Stands.*) Oswald, tell me straight out!

OSWALD: (*Pulls her down to the sofa.*) Sit down, and I'll try to tell you. . . .I've been complaining about how tired I was from the trip.

MRS. ALVING: What about it?

OSWALD: That's not what's wrong with me; not just ordinary fatigue.

MRS. ALVING: (*Wants to stand.*) Oswald, you're not sick!

OSWALD: Stay sitting, mother. Take it easy. I'm not really sick, not the kind of thing most people call sickness anyway.

(Grabs his head in his hands.)

Mother, my mind, it's broken, it's ruined. I can't work anymore.

(He puts his hands over his face, and falls on her lap, crying bitterly.)

MRS. ALVING: (*White, trembling.*) Oswald, look at me. It's not, it's not true!

OSWALD: To never work again. Never, ever. I'm the living dead. Can you imagine anything . . .the most horrible . . .

MRS. ALVING: My poor boy. How did this terrible thing happen?

OSWALD: (*Sitting upright.*) That's what's so impossible to understand. I haven't lived a a licentious life. Not ever, not at all. Don't believe that of me, mother, I really haven't.

MRS. ALVING: I don't believe you have.

OSWALD: And it infected me anyway. Just horrible luck.

MRS. ALVING: But it's going to get better, my dear boy. It's nothing more than over-exertion. Believe me.

OSWALD: That's what I thought at first. But it's not true.

MRS. ALVING: Tell me everything.

OSWALD: I will.

MRS. ALVING: When did you first notice it?

OSWALD: It was right after I came home the last time, and went back to Paris. I began to have the worst headaches. Mostly in the back of my head, I thought. Like a tight iron band was screwed around my neck and then upwards.

MRS. ALVING: So?

OSWALD: At first, I thought it was just the same normal headaches I had so often as a child.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, all right.

OSWALD: But that wasn't it; I learned that soon enough. I couldn't work anymore. I wanted to start a new big painting, but it was though my talent failed me, my strength was diminished, I couldn't keep it together enough to create the images I once could see, everything swimming, whirling around. It was the most awful condition. Finally I went to the doctor. He's the one who told me.

MRS. ALVING: Told you what?

OSWALD: He's one of the top doctors there. I told him what I was feeling, and he proceeded to ask a whole series of questions that had nothing whatever to do with my problem. I couldn't imagine what the man was doing.

MRS. ALVING: So?

OSWALD: Finally he said, 'there has been something worm-eaten inside you since birth.' He used that very word: "vermoulu."

MRS. ALVING: (*Anxious.*) What did he mean by that?

OSWALD: I didn't understand him either, and asked him to explain. And so that old cynic said . . .
(*wrings his hands*).

MRS. ALVING: What?

OSWALD: 'The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children.'

MRS. ALVING: (*Stands slowly.*) The sins of the fathers.

OSWALD: I nearly punched him in the face.

MRS. ALVING: (*Walks across the floor.*) The sins of the fathers.

OSWALD: (*Smiling sadly.*) So what do you think of that? Of course I told him that any such thing was completely impossible. He wouldn't give in, though, not until I showed him your letters, translated for him all the things you said about father.

MRS. ALVING: But then. . . ?

OSWALD: Well, then he had to admit he'd been wrong. And so I finally learned the truth. The incomprehensible truth. That joyful, wonderful life I had with my artist friends, that is what I should have stayed away from. It overcame my physical powers. My own fault, in other words.

MRS. ALVING: Oswald, no. Don't believe that.

OSWALD: There was no other possible explanation, he said. That's what's so horrible. Incurably ruined for life, because of my own carelessness. Everything I meant to do in the world—I can't even think about it now—I'm not able to think about it. If only I could live it all over again, do it all differently.

(*He buries his face in the sofa. MRS. ALVING wrings her hands, and walks back and forth by the sofa. After awhile, OSWALD sits up and rests on his elbow.*)

If only it was something I'd inherited, something that's not my fault. But this! To have thrown away,

heedlessly, thoughtlessly, recklessly, my health, my happiness, everything, my future, my entire life. . . .

MRS. ALVING: No, no, my poor, dear boy, it's impossible.

(Bends over him.)

Things are not as desperate as you think.

OSWALD: Oh, you just don't know. . . .

(Gets up.)

And then, mother, to cause you all this sorrow. Many times, I've hoped and wished that maybe, you didn't actually care about me all that much.

MRS. ALVING: Oswald, you're my only child! The only thing I have on earth, the only thing I really care about!

OSWALD: *(Takes her hands and kisses them.)* Yes, I can see that now. Now I'm home, I can see it clearly. And that's the hardest part of all for me . . . Anyway, now you know it too. And I don't want to talk about it anymore today. I'm not able to think about it for very long.

(Walks around.)

Get me something to drink, mother!

MRS. ALVING: Drink? What would you like to drink?

OSWALD: Oh, whatever. You have some cold punch in the house, I think.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, but my dear Oswald. . . .

OSWALD: Don't start denying me, mother. Be nice to me. I need something to drown these nagging thoughts.

(Goes to the flower garden.)

So dark out there.

(MRS. ALVING pulls on a bell rope.)

And this endless rain. It goes on week after week, for months on end. Never even a glimpse of the sun. The times I've been home, I don't think I've once seen the sun shine.

MRS. ALVING: Oswald, you're thinking of leaving me.

OSWALD: Hmmm.

(Takes a deep breath.)

I'm not thinking about anything.

(In a low voice.)

I let that go.

REGINA: *(From the dining room.)* Did you ring, ma'am?

MRS. ALVING: Yes, bring in a lamp.

REGINA: Yes, ma'am. It's already lighted.

(Exits.)

MRS. ALVING: *(Crosses to OSWALD.)* Oswald, don't keep things from me.

OSWALD: I haven't, mother.

(Goes to the table.)

I think I've told you enough.

(REGINA brings in the lamp and puts it on the table.)

MRS. ALVING: Regina, bring in a small bottle of champagne.

REGINA: Very well, ma'am.

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(Goes out again.)

19 pages finish off Act Two and comprise Act Three