

# PERUSAL SCRIPT



by **Henrik Ibsen**  
Translated from the Norwegian  
by **Eric Samuelsen**



Newport, Maine

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**LITTLE EYOLF**

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**Characters 2M 3W 1B**

**ALFRED ALLMERS**, man of means, literary scholar, formerly a part-time teacher

**RITA ALLMERS**, his wife

**EYOLF**, their child, nine years old

**ASTA ALMERS**, Alfred's younger half-sister

**BORGHEJM**, a civil engineer

**THE RAT-WIFE**, a figure of Norwegian mythology

**The action takes place on Allmer's estate out by the fjord, a few miles from town.**

**Act One.** Garden room in the Allmers' home.

**Intermission.**

**Act Two.** The next day. Near the Allmers' boathouse.

**Act Three.** Later. In the Allmers' garden.

**LITTLE EYOLF** by Henrik Ibsen. Adapted and Translated by Eric Samuelsen. 2M 3W 1B(age 9-11). Three settings. (*For Professional, College/University and Community Groups*) This new translation of Ibsen's 1894 play emphasizes the terrible consequences of poor decisions, the power of strength built in a crucible of sorrow, and the singular importance of family unity. It delves deep into both family tragedy and almost fable-like elements of Norwegian folklore. The plot circles around the Allmer family, with father Alfred about to abandon his plans for a book in favor of raising son Eyolf, a crippled little boy whom few are sure might live a normal life. When the family opens its door to a mysterious Rat-Wife capable of lulling rodents into the sea, followed by an engineer who fancies daughter Asta, all manner of guilt, resentment and sorrow follow, but so does the chance that the family might find some form of redemption; it's what we're all about. This is a play about secrets and hidden longings. It is about choices and consequences and how those choices have the possibility of destroying lives. It is a play about a family that has chosen not to have Christ in their lives and that has no understanding of his great love and atonement. But in spite of that, this play is about redemption and how people can choose to either wallow in their own guilt and remorse or to reach out to help others. It is a play that talks about the "Responsibility of Man" and finds the answer through the act of charity. However, Ibsen leaves the ending in question—Will these characters still talk about their responsibility to mankind, or will they put their words into action? This is the question Ibsen poses for each of us. Recommended for audiences aged 12 and older. **ORDER #3033.**

The Premiere production was by Tonic Productions, SanDiego -- 2006

The 2012 production was produced by the Brigham Young University Department of Theatre and Media Studies at the Margetts Arena Theatre, directed by Barta Heiner. The cast was as follows:

Rita **ALFRED: Mia Selway**

Asta **ALFRED: Heidi Smith**

Alfred **ALFRED: Eliot Wood**

Eyolf **ALFRED: Zack Elzey (11)**

The Rat-Wife: **Jennifer Chandler**

Borghejm: **Shaun Frenza**

With a special appearance by Princess Tigerlily in the role of Mopseman.

Jermyn Street Theatre, London -- 2011 was the second production and produced this production note:

**THE STORY:** The play was embraced almost unanimously by the Scandinavian critics, who dismissed many of Ibsen's earlier works, primarily due to their opacity. Still, other Ibsen creations, like *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, are far more frequently produced. What you see at first in this play is just the tip of the iceberg (or the fjord, which is where the action takes place). The still, surface calm of the Allmers' relationship is soon revealed to be a toxic marriage. Rita is obsessive and viciously jealous, refusing to share Alfred with his work or even with their 9 year-old child, crippled when he took a fall during their negligent moment of passion. Alfred is adrift, unstable, entrapped. He married for money and a little lust. Now he's an empty shell. But, having just returned from a replenishing retreat in the mountains, he decides to abandon his tome on human responsibility and instead to take some of his own – dedicating his life to his child. Rita will have none of it. In the nasty recriminations that course through the rest of the drama, especially following a tragedy involving Little Eyolf, the lid is blown off years of bottled-up emotions. Ugly truths -- and the sham and devastation of this marriage – are revealed. So is an apparently unsavory attraction between Alfred and his financially dependent sister, Asta, whom Rita would also love to get rid of, hopefully sending her off with the grounded Roadmaker, Borghejm, the only emotionally sturdy and optimistic character in this tightly constricted world. In the midst of all the angst, there's an eerie visit from the Rat Wife, a figure from Norwegian legend who, in a Pied Piper twist, entices more than rodents into the lake. Though promises are made in the final moments, this is hardly what one would call a happy ending. But the dark, intense psychological depth of the piece is still fresh and chilling (no wonder they called Ibsen the Freud of modern drama!).

**A Study Guide** prepared by LA Beene of the BYU Theatre and Media Arts Department, is available for download from the webpage free of charge.

**A Photo Set** from BYU's original production is also available for download from the webpage free of charge.

Selected **reviews** appear at the end of this document.

**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

*(An attractive and richly furnished garden room. Filled with furniture, flowers and plants. In the background, glass doors open out to a veranda with a nice view of the fjord. Forest hills in the distance. On each of the side walls, a door; the one on the right, a double door set further back. In front of the right door, a sofa with soft pillows, throw rugs in front of it. Chairs and a small table by the sofa. To the left, a large table with armchairs around it. On the table, an open case. It's an early summer morning, the scene bathed in warm sunshine.)*

*(Mrs. RITA ALLMERS stands by the left table, with her back to the right table, and unpacks the case. She's blonde, attractive, rather large, vital and energetic, about thirty. She's wearing a light morning dress. After a moment, Miss ASTA ALLMERS comes in the door to the right, wearing a light brown summer outfit, with a hat, a jacket, and an umbrella. She is thin, medium height, with dark hair and serious eyes; twenty-five years old.)*

**ASTA:** *(In the doorway.)* Good morning, Rita dear.

**RITA:** *(Turns her head, nods hello.)* Asta? You're awfully early. All the way out here, just to see us?

**ASTA:** *(Lays her things on the chair by the sofa.)* Yes. I felt so restless. So . . . ill at ease. I thought, I just had to come out here and see little Eyolf, today. And you too, of course. I took the steamer over.

**RITA:** *(Smiling at her.)* And did you, just maybe, happen to run into one of your . . . friends on board? Just by chance, of course.

**ASTA:** *(Quietly.)* No. I didn't meet anyone I knew.

*(Sees the case.)*

So, Rita. What's that?

**RITA:** *(Still unpacking.)* Alfred's suitcase. Don't you recognize it?

**ASTA:** *(Joyful, coming closer.)* Alfred's home?

**RITA:** Isn't that something? Complete surprise; he took the night train.

**ASTA:** That must have been what I was feeling; what brought me out here. And, no warning, not even a card?

**RITA:** Not a word.

**ASTA:** He could have telegraphed.

**RITA:** Oh, he did. One hour before he got here. Just the hard, cold facts, isn't that just like him?

**ASTA:** It is. Anything to avoid a fuss.

**RITA:** But, see, that made it all the more delicious, getting him back that way.

**ASTA:** I can well imagine.

**RITA:** Two whole weeks before I expected him!

**ASTA:** And he's all right? Not . . . depressed?

**RITA:** *(Snapping the case shut, and smiling.)* He looked like a new man. The second he walked in. Transformed.

**ASTA:** Wasn't he tired?

**RITA:** Tired? Sure he was, exhausted. Poor dear, he had to walk most of the way.

**ASTA:** In this thin mountain air. Sharp and cold.

**RITA:** I doubt it bothered him. I haven't heard him cough, not once.

**ASTA:** Now, see? It was probably good for him—for the doctor to talk him into that trip.

**RITA:** Yes, of course. Now that it's over, it probably . . . But, Asta, you have no idea what a miserable time this has been for me. I haven't wanted to complain. And you hardly ever make it out here, so it just . . . .

**ASTA:** No. I surely haven't been . . . But I—

**RITA:** Never mind, you've got the school to worry about. In town.

*(Smiles.)*

And a certain highway engineer? Of course, he wasn't out here either. . . ?

**ASTA:** Stop it, you.

**RITA:** All right. We just won't mention any road contractors . . . . Oh, Rita, how I've missed Alfred! I've felt so empty. Like a desert. Oh, it's felt like I was buried here, like this house was my grave.

**ASTA:** Oh, for heaven's sake. Just six, seven weeks, maybe, and--

**RITA:** All right, but you have to remember, Alfred's never been away before. Not even overnight. Not in ten years of marriage, have we—

**ASTA:** Sure, but that's exactly why I thought it was about time he got away for awhile. He's wanted to take a hiking trip to the mountains every summer. He needed it.

**RITA:** *(With a half-smile.)* Well, it's easy for you to talk. If I was . . . sensible, like you, I probably would have let him loose before now. Maybe. But I didn't think I could, Asta. I had this feeling that I'd never get him back again. You'll never understand that, will you?

**ASTA:** No. On the other hand, I don't really have anyone to lose, now do I?

**RITA:** *(With a teasing smile.)* Really? No one? Not even a single, solitary. . . .

**ASTA:** Not that I know of.

*(Changing the subject.)*

So, Rita, where's Alfred now? Still asleep?

**RITA:** Hardly. Up at the crack of dawn, as always.

**ASTA:** Well, then, he couldn't have been all that tired last night.

**RITA:** Actually, last night he was. When he came in. But now he's had Eyolf in there with him for over an hour.

**ASTA:** That poor kid, so pale and small. And now it's back to the books for him, studying and more studying. . . .

**RITA:** *(Shrugs.)* That's what Alfred wants, you know.

**ASTA:** I think you should stand up to him, Rita.

**RITA:** *(Impatiently.)* No. Sorry, but I'm not getting involved. Alfred understands these things a lot better than I do. Besides, what do you want Eyolf to do all day? He can't run around and play, not him, not like other kids.

**ASTA:** *(Determined.)* I'm going to talk to Alfred about this.

**RITA:** You go right ahead. Ah, Here we are!

*(ALFRED ALLMERS, in a summer suit, enters through the door on the left, leading EYOLF by the hand. He's a lean, slight man around thirty six or seven, with thinning brown hair and neatly trimmed beard. His face is serious and thoughtful. EYOLF wears a suit that resembles a uniform of some kind, gold braid, brass buttons. He's crippled, walks with a crutch under his left arm, the leg*

*on that side is paralyzed. He's very thin, and appears sick and pale, but has lovely, intelligent eyes.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Lets go of Eyolf, goes happily to take ASTA by both hands.)* Asta! My dear Asta. Already here! I can't believe it; so good to see you!

**ASTA:** I thought I'd . . . . Welcome home again.

**ALFRED:** *(Lets her hand drop.)* Thanks.

**RITA:** Doesn't he look wonderful?

**ASTA:** *(Scrutinizing him closely.)* Great. You look terrific. That sparkle in your eyes. Well, you must have gotten a lot of writing done.

*(Joyfully.)*

Maybe . . . oh Alfred, you finished the book!

**ALFRED:** *(Shrugs.)* The book. Oh, yes, that.

**ASTA:** I thought so, I thought it would flow so easily if you could just get some time alone.

**ALFRED:** I thought so too. But the fact is . . . well, it just didn't happen. I didn't write a single sentence.

**ASTA:** You weren't writing . . . .

**RITA:** Ah. I was wondering about all that blank paper in your suitcase.

**ASTA:** But, Alfred, dear. What were you doing all that time?

**ALFRED:** *(Smiling.)* Just walked and thought and thought some more.

**RITA:** *(Lays her arm across his shoulders.)* About us, sometimes, here alone at home?

**ALFRED:** Indeed I did. A lot. Every day.

**RITA:** *(Lets go.)* So there you go. Everything's fine.

**ASTA:** But you didn't work on the book? And you still look great: peaceful and happy. This isn't like you.

Usually, when you're blocked like this. . . .

**ALFRED:** No, you're right. Because I've always been such an idiot. It's the thinking that matters. Putting it down on paper isn't so important.

**ASTA:** *(With an outcry.)* Not important?!?

**RITA:** *(Laughs.)* You've gone crazy, is that it?

**EYOLF:** *(Looks at him trustingly.)* No, Papa. Anything you write, that's important.

**ALFRED:** *(Smiles and strokes his hair.)* All right, if you say so. But believe me, someday someone else will come along who'll do it better.

**EYOLF:** Who's that? That's better than . . . come on, tell me!

**ALFRED:** Give it time. He'll show up some day. And announce: I'm here!

**EYOLF:** What will you do then?

**ALFRED:** *(Seriously.)* I'll go back up to the mountains—.

**RITA:** Shame on you.

**ALFRED:** To the highest heights, to the wildest wilderness.

**EYOLF:** Papa, don't you think I'll soon be well enough to come with you?

**ALFRED:** *(Pained.)* Maybe so. Sure. Ah, son. . . .

**EYOLF:** Because I think it would be awesome, to climb mountains, and—.

**ASTA:** *(Changes the subject.)* Eyolf, you doll, just look at you! Neat as a pin.

**EYOLF:** You think so, Aunt Asta?

**ASTA:** Absolutely. So, you got all dressed up in your new clothes, just for papa?

**EYOLF:** I asked mama if I could. I wanted papa to see me in them.

**ALFRED:** (*Quietly to RITA.*) You shouldn't have gotten him a suit like that.

**RITA:** (*Quietly.*) Well, he wouldn't let up. Begged incessantly; wouldn't give me a moment's peace.

**EYOLF:** Oh, that's true, papa. And guess what? Borghejm bought me a bow and arrow. And taught me how to shoot with it too.

**ALFRED:** Ah, well, that's your kind of thing now, is it?

**EYOLF:** And the next time he comes, I'm going to ask him to teach me how to swim, too.

**ALFRED:** Swim? Why do you want to learn how to--?

**EYOLF:** Well, because all the other boys down by the shore, they all can swim. I'm the only one that can't.

**ALFRED:** (*Moved, takes him in his arms.*) You have my permission to learn anything you want to. Anything that sounds fun.

**EYOLF:** You want to know what I want to do most, papa?

**ALFRED:** No, tell me.

**EYOLF:** More than anything, I want to learn how to be a soldier.

**ALFRED:** Oh, little Eyolf. There are so many other things better than that.

**EYOLF:** Well, but when I'm bigger I have to be a soldier. You know that.

**ALFRED:** (*Wringing his hands.*) Of course. Well, we'll see.

**ASTA:** (*From the table at the left.*) Eyolf. Come over here by me, so I can tell you something.

**EYOLF:** What is it, Aunt Asta?

**ASTA:** Guess what, Eyolf. I saw the Rat-Wife.

**EYOLF:** What? You've seen her? The Rat-Wife? You're just teasing.

**ASTA:** No, it's true. I saw her yesterday.

**EYOLF:** Where did you see her?

**ASTA:** I saw her on the street, just outside of town.

**ALFRED:** I saw her too. Up-country.

**RITA:** (*Sitting on the sofa.*) Maybe we'll get to see her too, Eyolf.

**EYOLF:** Aunt Asta, isn't it weird that that's her name: Rat-Wife?

**ASTA:** It's just what people call her. Because she goes around from place to place and drives out all the rats.

**ALFRED:** Actually, I think her last name is Varg.

**EYOLF:** Varg. That means a wolf, doesn't it?

**ALFRED:** (*Pats him on the head.*) So you know that one, too, Eyolf?

**EYOLF:** (*Thoughtfully.*) So . . . maybe it's true what they say, that she's a werewolf at night. What do you think, Papa?

**ALFRED:** Oh, I don't believe in that sort of thing. But, Eyolf, maybe you should go out and play. Maybe in the garden?

**EYOLF:** Don't you think it'd be better if I took some books with me?

**ALFRED:** No. From now on, no more books. Go down to the shore and play with the other boys.

**EYOLF:** (*Embarrassed.*) No, I don't want to play with them today.

**ALFRED:** Why not?



**EYOLF:** Dressed like this?

**ALFRED:** (*Frowning.*) You think they'll make fun of . . . of how you're dressed?

**EYOLF:** (*Evasively.*) No . . . they don't really dare. I just hit 'em!

**ALFRED:** But . . . what in the . . .

**EYOLF:** But they're all mean. Those guys. And they say that I can't ever be a soldier.

**ALFRED:** (*Angry, hiding it.*) Why do they say that, do you think?

**EYOLF:** They're just jealous of me. Papa, they're all so poor, they go barefoot all the time.

**ALFRED:** (*In a low choked voice.*) Oh, Rita . . . it just makes me heartsick.

**RITA:** (*Soothingly, goes to him.*) Now, now, it's all right.

**ALFRED:** (*Ominously.*) Those boys are going to learn whose shore that is.

**ASTA:** (*Listens.*) Someone's at the door.

**EYOLF:** It's probably Borghejm.

**RITA:** Come in!

*(The RAT-WIFE comes slowly and silently in the door on the right. She's small and thin, old and gray haired, with sharp, probing eyes. She's wearing an old-fashioned flowered dress, and a black hooded cape. In one hand, she has a large red umbrella, and a black bag hangs from a string on her arm.)*

**EYOLF:** (*Grabs ASTA's dress, quietly.*) Aunt Asta! It must be her.

**RAT-WIFE:** Deepest apologies, master and mistress . . . have you anything gnawing away in the house?

**ALFRED:** We? No, I don't think so.

**RAT-WIFE:** Yes, you see, I would very much like to help you be rid of it.

**RITA:** Yes, we understand. But we haven't any . . . troubles of that sort.

**RAT-WIFE:** Most unlucky, that. Right now, as it happens, I'm out, roundabout, round here. And who knows when I'll be back in these parts. Oh! I'm exhausted.

**ALFRED:** (*Indicates a chair.*) Yes, you look it.

**RAT-WIFE:** One should never tire of doing what's best for these poor little creatures, hated and hunted so cruelly. But it takes all one's strength.

**RITA:** Would you like to sit and rest a bit?

**RAT-WIFE:** Bless you, thanks. All night long I've been on my feet, working.

**ALFRED:** You don't say?

**RAT-WIFE:** Over to the islands.

*(Chuckles.)*

Folks just begging me. They didn't like it. But they had no choice. They had to smile nicely, and take a bite from the sour apple.

*(Nods to EYOLF.)*

Sour apple, little sir. Sour apple.

**EYOLF:** (*Uncomfortable, shy.*) Why did they have to—?

**RAT-WIFE:** What?

**EYOLF:** Bite it.

**RAT-WIFE:** Ah. Because they had nothing else to eat. Because of the rats and all the tiny rat babies, you

understand, young sir?

**RITA:** Those poor people. There were that many?

**RAT-WIFE:** Yes, swarming and crawling.

*(Quietly laughing.)*

Up in the beds they swarmed and crawled all night long. Popped into milk buckets. And over the floors, rustling and rippling, they went, across and back again.

**EYOLF:** *(Quietly to ASTA.)* I never want to go out there, Aunt Asta.

**RAT-WIFE:** But then I came. And one more, too. And we took them with us, every last one. The sweet, small creatures. Every single one, gone off with us.

**EYOLF:** *(With a cry.)* Papa, look!

**RITA:** Good Lord, Eyolf!

**ALFRED:** What's wrong?

**EYOLF:** *(Pointing.)* There's something squirming in the bag!

**RITA:** *(Moves left and screams.)* No! Get rid of her, Alfred!

**RAT-WIFE:** *(Laughs.)* Now, my sweet young mistress. Nothing to be afraid of with this little scarefly.

**ALFRED:** But . . . what is it?

**RAT-WIFE:** It's just Mopseman.

*(Unties the bag.)*

Come now, out of the dark, my dearest little friend.

*(A little dog with a black snout pokes his head from the bag. RAT-WIFE nods and beckons to EYOLF.)*

He won't hurt you, my poor little wounded soldier. He won't bite. Come closer! Closer!

**EYOLF:** *(Hides behind ASTA.)* I don't dare.

**RAT-WIFE:** Wouldn't you say, young master, that he has a mild and loving face?

**EYOLF:** *(Surprised, pointing.)* That?

**RAT-WIFE:** Yes, him.

**EYOLF:** *(Barely audible, staring at the dog.)* I think he has the most horrible . . . face I've ever seen.

**RAT-WIFE:** *(Closing the bag again.)* You'll come around. Soon enough.

**EYOLF:** *(Moves involuntarily closer, lightly strokes the bag.)* But he's also . . . lovely. Lovely, in spite of--

**RAT-WIFE:** *(In a gentle voice.)* But now he's so tired. Weary. Exhausted.

*(Looks at ALFRED.)*

It wears away your strength. That sort of game. As the master can well imagine.

**ALFRED:** What sort of game?

**RAT-WIFE:** The luring game.

**ALFRED:** Ah. Perhaps the dog lures away the rats, then?

**RAT-WIFE:** *(Nods.)* Mopseman and I. We work together. Slick as you please. To anyone watching. Tie a string through his collar. Then I lead him three times around the house. I play my jew's harp. And when they hear that, well, they crawl up from their cellars and down from their lofts and out from their holes. All those blessed little creatures.

**EYOLF:** And then he bites them to death?

**RAT-WIFE:** Far from it. No, we got down to the boat, him and me. And they follow us. The full grown and the tiny wobbly ones, too.

**EYOLF:** *(Excited.)* What then! Tell me!

**RAT-WIFE:** We push off from land. And I scull with the oars, and play on my jew's harp. And Mopseman, he swims after me.

*(With glistening eyes.)*

And all those who swarmed and crawled, they follow us out into the deepest waters. Yes, because they *have* to!

**EYOLF:** Why do they have to?

**RAT-WIFE:** Just because they don't want to. Because they're so shudderingly afraid of the water—and so they have to go out in it.

**EYOLF:** So . . . they drown?

**RAT-WIFE:** Every single one.

*(Quietly.)*

And then they have it so quiet, and so peaceful and dark, more than they could ever imagine. The dear little beauties. Down there they have such a sweet, long nap. All those who people hate and persecute.

*(Stands.)*

Yes, in the good old days, I didn't need any Mopseman. I lured things myself. By myself.

**EYOLF:** What did you lure then?

**RAT-WIFE:** Men. One, mostly.

**EYOLF:** *(In suspense.)* Please, tell me, who?

**RAT-WIFE:** *(Laughs.)* My one true love, you little heartbreaker, you.

**EYOLF:** Where is he now?

**RAT-WIFE:** *(Hard.)* Down below, with the rats.

*(Mildly again.)*

But now I'm up and about again. No rest for the weary.

*(To RITA.)*

You're sure? You have no job for me today? I could fit you in right now, this very second.

**RITA:** No thanks. I don't think we have anything we need done.

**RAT-WIFE:** Ah, yes, sweetie. But you never know, do you? Well, if any of you notice anything around here nibbling or gnawing, creeping or crawling, well, just call out for Mopseman and me. Goodbye, goodbye, with all my love goodbye.

*(She goes out the door right.)*

**EYOLF:** *(Quietly, triumphantly to ASTA.)* Aunt Asta. Can you believe it? I've seen the Rat-wife too!

*(RITA goes out on the veranda and fans herself with her handkerchief. Shortly after, EYOLF slips out unnoticed through the door right.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Picks up the folder from the table by the sofa.)* Is this your folder, Asta?

**ASTA:** Yes, I have a few of our old letters in it.

**ALFRED:** Ah, yes, the family letters.

**ASTA:** You asked me to organize them for you while you were gone.

**ALFRED:** *(Pats her on the head.)* You found time for it, then?

**ASTA:** Sure. I did some of it out here and some at my place, back in town.

**ALFRED:** Thanks. Did you find anything interesting?

**ASTA:** *(Offhandedly.)* Oh, you know. You always find something or other in old papers.  
*(Subdued, quiet.)*

The ones in that folder are letters to Mom.

**ALFRED:** Those, of course, you should keep.

**ASTA:** *(With an effort.)* No. I want you to look at them too, Alfred. Sometime later. Let's not get them out now.

**ALFRED:** Doesn't matter, Asta dear. I'd never read your mother's letters anyway.

**ASTA:** *(Stares at him intently.)* Someday, though, I want . . . Some quiet evening, I'll tell you about them, what's in them.

**ALFRED:** Well, sure, if you want to. But you should keep your mother's letters. You don't have many mementoes of her.

*(He gives ASTA the folder. She takes it and places it on the chair under her hat and parasol. RITA comes back into the room.)*

**RITA:** Ugh! That nasty old hag. It's like she brings the smell of corpses in with her.

**ALFRED:** Yes, she was rather unpleasant.

**RITA:** I almost felt sick, having her in here.

**ALFRED:** Still, I can understand the power she has, that pull, that magnetism she was describing. The quiet solitude of the mountains, those wide expanses; it had some of the same appeal.

**ASTA:** *(Looks intently at him.)* What is it, Alfred? What happened with you up there?

**ALFRED:** *(Smiles.)* With me?

**ASTA:** Something happened. Almost . . . some kind of transformation. Rita noticed it too.

**RITA:** Yes, I saw it the moment you walked in the door. But . . . it's good, right, Alfred?

**ALFRED:** It had better be good. It must be, it will be all for the good.

**RITA:** *(Quickly.)* You had some sort of . . . experience. On that trip. Don't deny it! I can see it in your face!

**ALFRED:** *(Shaking his head.)* Really, nothing . . . overt. But—

**RITA:** *(Intently.)* But—!

**ALFRED:** Inwardly, I did experience something of an upheaval.

**RITA:** Good Lord!

**ALFRED:** *(Soothing her.)* Only for the good, my dear. Nothing to worry about.

**RITA:** *(Sitting on the sofa.)* You've got to tell us, now, everything, immediately!

**ALFRED:** *(Turns towards ASTA.)* All right, let's sit, all of us. I'll try to tell you. As well as I can.

*(He sits on the sofa by RITA. ASTA takes a chair and sets it close by. A short pause.)*

**RITA:** *(Expectantly.)* Well!?

**ALFRED:** *(Staring straight ahead.)* When I think about my life, my destiny, my situation . . . these last ten, eleven years, they seem like a fairy tale to me, a dream. Don't you think so, Asta?

**ASTA:** Sure, in many ways.

**ALFRED:** Then I think about what the two of us were before, Asta. Two tattered penniless orphans—

**RITA:** *(Uneasy.)* That was a long time ago!

**ALFRED:** (*Not listening to her.*) And now I sit here, prosperous and comfortable. Able to follow my vocation. Able to work and study . . . everything I've wished for, has . . .

(*Reaches out his hand.*)

And all this tremendous, incomprehensible luck . . . we owe to you, Rita, my darling.

**RITA:** (*Half irritated, half amused, she slaps his hand.*) Will you just stop it, this stupid nonsense--

**ALFRED:** I'm only saying this as a kind of . . . preface.

**RITA:** Then just skip the preface!

**ALFRED:** Rita, you must believe me, it wasn't the doctor's advice that drove me to the mountains.

**ASTA:** It wasn't?

**RITA:** Then what was it that drove you?

**ALFRED:** It was . . . I couldn't find any peace in my work anymore.

**RITA:** No peace? Darling, what was bothering you?

**ALFRED:** (*Shakes his head.*) Nothing external. But I had this feeling that I've been, in a sense, misusing . . . or . . . at least neglecting my best abilities. That I've been wasting my time.

**ASTA:** (*Wide-eyed.*) By writing your book?

**ALFRED:** (*Nods.*) It's not like that's the only skill I have. I ought to be trying this or that or something . . . else.

**RITA:** And this is what you've been sitting around brooding about?

**ALFRED:** Mostly.

**RITA:** And that's why you've been so restless and dissatisfied lately. And taking it out on us. Because you have been, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** (*Staring away from her.*) There I sat, bent over that desk, writing day after day. Often late into the night. Writing and writing my big, fat book on *The Responsibility of Mankind*. Hmpph.

**ASTA:** (*Laying her hand on his arm.*) But, dear, that book is your life's work.

**RITA:** That's what you've always told us!

**ALFRED:** I thought it was. Ever since I became an adult.

(*With an intense gaze.*)

And then, my dear Rita, you provided me the means to pursue it.

**RITA:** Don't be silly!

**ALFRED:** (*Smiling at her.*) You with all your gold, and your deep green forests--

**RITA:** (*Half laughing, half angry.*) Keep up this nonsense, and I'll smack you.

**ASTA:** (*Uneasily.*) But . . . the book, Alfred?

**ALFRED:** It's like it began to . . . fade away. More and more my thoughts turned to more important obligations of mine.

**RITA:** (*Clasping his hand.*) Alfred!

**ALFRED:** Thoughts of Eyolf, my dear Rita.

**RITA:** (*Releases his hand.*) Oh. Eyolf.

**ALFRED:** Poor little Eyolf. His place inside me has grown deeper and deeper. After his terrible fall from that table . . . . And particularly since we've learned that there's nothing doctors can. . . .

**RITA:** (*Intently.*) But you've done everything you could for him, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** Like a teacher, perhaps. Not like his father. And not like the father I'm going to be from now on.

**RITA:** (*Shaking her head.*) I don't know what you're talking about.

**ALFRED:** I mean, I'm going to do everything I can to make up for what can't be undone.

**RITA:** But, darling. Honestly, I don't think he cares that much.

**ASTA:** (*Emotionally.*) Oh, Rita, yes he does.

**ALFRED:** He hides it well, but he feels it deeply.

**RITA:** (*Impatiently.*) But, dear. What more do you think you can do for him?

**ALFRED:** I want to try to light a fire in him, show him all the rich possibilities dawning in his childish mind.

All those noble aspirations he's been cautiously exploring . . . I want him to find and glory in! And I want more than that! I want to help him harmonize his dreams, his longings with what's possible for him.

Because right now, they're not. He's set goals for himself that are unattainable, for him, the way he is. I'm going to shape his mind towards happiness.

(*He paces back and forth across the room. ASTA and RITA follow him with their eyes.*)

**RITA:** You're taking this all too hard, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** (*Stops by the table and looks at them both.*) Eyolf will take over my life's work. If he wants to. Or, if he wants to do something else with his life . . . maybe that would be better. Anyway, I'm done with mine.

**RITA:** (*Stands.*) But, Alfred, dear. Couldn't you work both for Eyolf and for yourself?

**ALFRED:** No, I can't. Impossible! I can't divide my attention like that. So I'll stand aside. Eyolf will become the one great accomplishment of our family. And I will make it my life's work to prepare him for it.

**ASTA:** (*Has stood and gone over to him.*) What a dreadful battle you must have fought. This has cost you, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** Yes, it has. Here at home, I couldn't have been tough enough with myself. Never could have forced myself to this realization. Never here.

**RITA:** Was that why you went away this summer?

**ALFRED:** (*His eyes shining.*) Yes! Up I went, into that infinite loneliness. Saw the sunrise shining on the mountains. Felt myself so close to the stars. Almost a sort of awareness, communion. And then I could do it.

**ASTA:** (*Sadly.*) But what about the book, *The Responsibility of Mankind*? Won't you write anymore?

**ALFRED:** No, never. I can't split myself up between two callings. But I'll still work for *The Responsibility of Mankind*. In my own life.

**RITA:** (*With a smile.*) So you really think you'll stick to these high new ideals of yours here at home?

**ALFRED:** (*Takes her hand.*) With you to help me, I can.

(*Reaches out his other hand.*)

And with you too, Asta?

**RITA:** (*Withdraws her hand.*) Ah. With both of us. So you can 'split yourself up.'

**ALFRED:** But, Rita, my dear--?

(*RITA stands and moves away from him in the garden doorway. There's a quick knock on the door.*

*BORGHEJM, the engineer, comes in briskly. He's a young man in his early thirties, stands tall with an open, confident expression.*)

**BORGHEJM:** Good morning, good morning, Mrs. Allmers!

(*Sees ALFRED, delighted.*)

Well, what in the world? Home already, Mr. Allmers?

**ALFRED:** (*Shaking his hand.*) Yes, I got home last night.

**RITA:** (*Gaily.*) I commuted his sentence, Mr. Borghejm!

**ALFRED:** Rita, please, that's not—

**RITA:** (*Comes closer.*) Is so! Your sentence expired.

**BORGHEJM:** So you keep your husband on a pretty tight leash, do you?

**RITA:** I want what's rightfully mine. Besides, everything has to come to an end.

**BORGHEJM:** Not everything, I hope . . . Good morning Miss Allmers.

**ASTA:** (*Coolly.*) Morning.

**RITA:** (*Looking at BORGHEJM.*) You don't think everything ends? What do you mean?

**BORGHEJM:** Well. I firmly believe that there must be something in this world that has no end.

**RITA:** You're thinking about love . . . and so on.

**BORGHEJM:** (*Warmly.*) I'm thinking of anything beautiful.

**RITA:** And that's something that never ends. Yes, let's think about that. Hope for it, anyway.

**ALFRED:** (*Goes to him.*) So I expect you'll soon be finished with your road construction out here?

**BORGHEJM:** It's finished! Finished yesterday. Took long enough. But, thank God, *that* project had an end.

**RITA:** And that's why you're so giddy?

**BORGHEJM:** You bet!

**RITA:** Well, I have to say—

**BORGHEJM:** What?

**RITA:** It isn't very nice of you, Mr. Borghejm.

**BORGHEJM:** Why do you say that?

**RITA:** Because we'll hardly ever see you around here again.

**BORGHEJM:** No, that's true. I didn't think of that.

**RITA:** Well, every so often, you'll have to drop in on us again.

**BORGHEJM:** Unfortunately, that won't be possible for quite awhile.

**RITA:** Why is that?

**BORGHEJM:** Well, I landed another big job. I'll have to get a jump on it right away.

**ALFRED:** Really?

*(Takes his hand.)*

Glad to hear it.

**RITA:** Congratulations, Mr. Borghejm!

**BORGHEJM:** Now, hush, everyone! I'm not supposed to tell a soul about it, not yet. But I had to tell someone!

It's a huge new road, way up north. Through the mountains, some of the biggest challenges an engineer can face.

*(Excited.)*

What a vast and lovely world we have! And can you believe the luck: to get to build roads through it!

**RITA:** (*Smiles at him roguishly.*) So is it just highway engineering that's brought you out here in such wild spirits today?

**BORGHEJM:** No, not just that. But all the bright and beautiful prospects which seem to be opening up for me.

**RITA:** (*As before.*) Aha. So perhaps there's something even more compelling in store.

**BORGHEJM:** (*Glancing towards ASTA.*) Who knows? When good luck starts to flow, there's no telling who washes up in it.

(*Turns to ASTA.*)

Miss Allmers, would you like to go for a walk together? Like old times?

**ASTA:** (*Quickly.*) No, no thanks. Not now. Not today.

**BORGHEJM:** Come on! Just a little stroll! I just feel like I have so much to talk to you about before I have to leave.

**RITA:** Perhaps something you can't say openly yet?

**BORGHEJM:** Hm. Well, that depends on--

**RITA:** Because you could just as easily whisper it.

(*Quietly.*)

Asta, go with him.

**ASTA:** But, Rita--

**BORGHEJM:** (*Begging.*) Asta. Please. This will be our last walk together, for a long long time.

**ASTA:** (*Takes her hat and parasol.*) Fine. Once round the garden, then.

**BORGHEJM:** Thanks!

**ALFRED:** While you're out there, keep a watch out for Eyolf.

**BORGHEJM:** Eyolf, that's right. Where is Eyolf today? I brought something for him.

**ALFRED:** He's playing somewhere down there.

**BORGHEJM:** Is he really? He's playing outside? He used to just sit in here and read.

**ALFRED:** No more. He's going to be an outdoors boy from now on.

**BORGHEJM:** See, that's just great. Some fresh air and sunshine, poor thing. By God, there's not a better doctor in the whole wide world. Of course, I think life's a big game anyway. Asta, come on, let's go!

(*BORGHEJM and ASTA leave by the veranda, and down through the garden.*)

**ALFRED:** (*Looks after them.*) Rita. Do you think there's something going on with those two?

**RITA:** I honestly don't know. I thought so, once. But Asta has become so mysterious . . . so guarded. I don't know what to make of her.

**ALFRED:** Has she really? While I was gone?

**RITA:** Yes. At least over the last few weeks.

**ALFRED:** And you think she isn't interested in him any more?

**RITA:** Not seriously. Not in any committed way. Has she considered . . . no, I doubt it.

(*Looks probingly at him.*)

Would it bother you if she did?

**ALFRED:** Not bother me. But I would certainly worry about. . . .

**RITA:** Worry?

**ALFRED:** You must remember, I'm responsible for Asta. For her happiness.

**RITA:** Oh, please. Responsible? She's a grown woman. She's perfectly capable of making her own decisions.

**ALFRED:** Well, I certainly hope she--

**RITA:** And for my part, I have nothing against Borghejm.

**ALFRED:** No, dear. . . . nor do I. Quite the contrary. Still--



**RITA:** *(Continuing.)* And I'd be thrilled to see them together, him and Asta.

**ALFRED:** *(Unhappily.)* And why do you say that?

**RITA:** *(With increasing emotion.)* Because then she'd go off with him, all the way north. And not come out here all the time, the way she does now.

**ALFRED:** *(Stares at her, astonished.)* What in the . . . you want to get rid of Asta?

**RITA:** Yes, Alfred! Absolutely I would.

**ALFRED:** But why in the world--?

**RITA:** *(Flings her arms around his neck.)* Because then I'd have you, finally, all to myself. Except . . . not even then . . . Never quite all to myself.

*(Bursts into tears.)*

Alfred, Alfred! I can't ever let you go--.

**ALFRED:** *(Gently disengaging.)* Rita, my dear. Be reasonable.

**RITA:** No, I don't care about being reasonable! I only care about you! About you alone in the whole world.

*(Throws her arms around him again.)*

About you, about you, about you!

**ALFRED:** Let go . . . you're choking me. . . .

**RITA:** *(Releases him.)* I truly wish I could!

*(Glares at him with flashing eyes.)*

Do you have any idea how much I've hated you!

**ALFRED:** Hated me--?

**RITA:** Yes. When you sat in there by yourself, brooding over your work. Long . . . long into the night. So long . . . so late. . . . Oh, how I hated your work.

**ALFRED:** Well, now I'm done with it.

**RITA:** *(Laughs bitterly.)* Oh, yes! Now you're caught up in something much worse.

**ALFRED:** *(Appalled.)* Worse? You're saying our child; that's worse?

**RITA:** *(Passionately.)* Yes, that's what I mean. I say for us, standing between us, that's worse. Because a child . . . a child's so much above . . . he's a living human being!

*(Furious.)*

But I can't take it anymore! I can't take it . . . that's what I'm telling you!

**ALFRED:** *(Staring at her, in a low voice.)* Sometimes I'm almost afraid of you, Rita.

**RITA:** *(Darkly.)* I'm afraid of myself. That's why you must never wake up the evil in me.

**ALFRED:** What in God's name . . . do I do that?

**RITA:** Yes, you do. When you rip to pieces the holiest thing we have.

**ALFRED:** *(Heatedly.)* Rita, think about what you're saying. This is your own child we're talking about . . . our only child.

**RITA:** That child is only half mine.

*(Another outcry.)*

But you, I want for my own. You will be mine, completely. I have the right to require that of you.

**ALFRED:** *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* Look, Rita, dear . . . you can't require anything, it doesn't work. Things have to be offered freely.

**RITA:** (*Looks at him, tensely.*) And you can't do that anymore?

**ALFRED:** No. I can't. I have to divide myself between Eyolf and you.

**RITA:** But what if Eyolf had never been born? What then?

**ALFRED:** (*Evasively.*) Well, that's another matter. I suppose then I'd only have you.

**RITA:** (*Quietly, slowly.*) Then I can wish I'd never given birth.

**ALFRED:** (*Flaring up.*) Rita. You don't know what you're saying!

**RITA:** (*Shaking with emotion.*) I gave birth, brought him into this world, in the most unspeakable pain. I bore it all, jubilantly, thankfully, all for your sake.

**ALFRED:** (*Warmly.*) Yes, yes, I know you did.

**RITA:** (*Determined.*) But that part of it ends now. I will live my life. With you. Completely with you. I can't go on here, just Eyolf's mom. Only that. Nothing more. I won't, I'm telling you now. I can't! I want to be everything for you. For you, Alfred!

**ALFRED:** But you are that now, Rita. Through our child--

**RITA:** Oh, that nauseating, tepid sentimentality! Nothing more. No, that has nothing to do with me. It was expected of me that I bear you a child. But not to actually be its mother. You'll have to take me as I am, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** You've always been so fond of Eyolf, before.

**RITA:** I felt sorry for him. You neglected him so, let him do as he pleased--so long as he got his required reading done. You hardly even *saw* him.

**ALFRED:** (*Nods slowly.*) No. I was blind. It wasn't time, yet, for me to--

**RITA:** (*Looks at him.*) But now it is?

**ALFRED:** Yes, now at last. Now I can see my highest calling, the reason I'm on this earth, is to be a real father to Eyolf.

**RITA:** And what about me? What will you be for me?

**ALFRED:** I will be with you, hold you close. In quiet intimacy.

(*He tries to take her hand.*)

**RITA:** (*Evading him.*) I don't care about quiet intimacy! I want you, all of you! Alone! I want what I had those first wonderful, ravenous months.

(*Fiercely.*)

I will never eat your leftovers, or lick off your plate, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** (*Mildly.*) I really do think there must be enough happiness for all three of us, Rita.

**RITA:** (*Scornfully.*) As long as *you're* satisfied.

(*Sits by the table left.*)

Listen to me.

**ALFRED:** (*Comes nearer.*) What is it?

**RITA:** (*Looks at him with a faint gleam in her eye.*) When I got your telegram yesterday--

**ALFRED:** Yes?

**RITA:** I got dressed, all in white--

**ALFRED:** Yes, you were wearing white when I came in.

**RITA:** I let down my hair--

**ALFRED:** Your rich, fragrant hair.

**RITA:** So it streamed over my neck and my back--.

**ALFRED:** I saw that. I saw. You were so beautiful, Rita.

**RITA:** There were rose-red shades over both lamps. And we were alone, just us. The only ones awake in the house. And there was champagne on the table.

**ALFRED:** I didn't drink--.

**RITA:** *(Looks bitterly at him.)* No, that's true.

*(Laughs sharply.)*

"The champagne was there for you, and you wouldn't touch it." As the old poem goes.

*(She rises from the armchair and walks wearily to sit, half-reclining, on the sofa.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Goes over to stand by her.)* I was completely absorbed in the most serious thoughts, Rita. I thought we should talk about our future together, Rita. First and foremost, Eyolf.

**RITA:** *(Smiles.)* And you did.

**ALFRED:** Not really, I didn't get to it. You started to undress.

**RITA:** Yes, and you kept talking about Eyolf. Don't you remember? You asked me all about little Eyolf's digestion.

**ALFRED:** *(Looks at her reproachfully.)* Rita--!

**RITA:** And then you lay down in bed. And fell sound asleep.

**ALFRED:** *(Shakes his head.)* Rita . . . Rita!

**RITA:** *(Lays back full length and gazes up at him.)* What? Alfred. . . .

**ALFRED:** Yes?

**RITA:** The champagne was there for you and you wouldn't touch it.

**ALFRED:** *(His voice harder.)* No. I wouldn't touch it.

*(He moves away from her, stands in the doorway to the garden. RITA lies motionless. Her eyes are closed.)*

**RITA:** *(Suddenly standing.)* But there is one thing I'm going to say, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** *(Turns.)* Yes?

**RITA:** You shouldn't feel as safe as you do.

**ALFRED:** Safe?

**RITA:** No. Don't get too complacent. Don't just assume that I'm yours.

**ALFRED:** *(Coming closer.)* What do you mean by that?

**RITA:** *(Lips trembling.)* I have never once so much as imagined cheating on you, Alfred. Not for one second.

**ALFRED:** No, Rita, I know that. I know you too well.

**RITA:** *(With smoldering eyes.)* But if you reject me--?

**ALFRED:** Reject. . . . I don't understand, where are you going with--?

**RITA:** Oh, you don't know anything, you don't know what could surface if you--?

**ALFRED:** If what?

**RITA:** If I ever should discover that you've lost interest in me. If you stop caring the way you once did.

**ALFRED:** But my dearest Rita . . . it's human nature to change over the years . . . we will too, like everyone else.

**RITA:** Not me! And I won't hear of any changed feelings on your part, Alfred. I couldn't bear it. I will keep you mine, all for me.

**ALFRED:** (*Looks at her uneasily.*) Your dreadfully jealous mind—.

**RITA:** I can only be who I am.

(*Ominously.*)

If you divide yourself between me and someone else—.

**ALFRED:** What, then—.

**RITA:** I will get my revenge, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** With what would you get revenge?

**RITA:** I don't know . . . . No, I do too.

**ALFRED:** All right. . . .

**RITA:** I'll throw my life away—.

**ALFRED:** Throw your life—.

**RITA:** Yes, that's what I'll . . . I'll give my body to the . . . first man who comes along.

**ALFRED:** (*Looks warmly at her, shakes his head.*) You wouldn't, Rita. My honest, proud, faithful, Rita.

**RITA:** (*Drapes her arms around his neck.*) You have no idea how far I would go, if you . . . if you didn't want me any more.

**ALFRED:** Didn't want you . . . how can you say that?

**RITA:** (*Half laughing, releasing him.*) I could bait my hook. For that road engineer, the one who just left.

**ALFRED:** (*Relieved.*) Thank God. You're joking after all.

**RITA:** Not at all. Why not him? He'd do as well as anyone.

**ALFRED:** Well, he's already taken, isn't he?

**RITA:** All the better! I'll take him from someone else, why not? After all, that's what Eyolf did to me.

**ALFRED:** You're saying that's what Eyolf's done?

**RITA:** (*Points her finger at him.*) See! See! The second you mention Eyolf's name, you get all weak, your voice starts trembling.

(*Clenches her teeth.*)

I'm half tempted to wish for. . . ahh!

**ALFRED:** (*Looks at her anxiously.*) Wish for what, Rita?

**RITA:** (*Fervently, moves away.*) No, no, no! I'm not going to say it! Never!

**ALFRED:** (*Goes closer to her.*) Rita! I beg you . . . for your sake as well as mine. Don't let yourself be tempted to do something . . . evil.

(*BORGHEJM and ASTA come in from the garden. Both have tight control over their emotions. They look sober and sad. ASTA stays out on the veranda. BORGHEJM comes into the room.*)

**BORGHEJM:** Well. Miss Allmers and I have had our last walk together.

**RITA:** (*Looks surprised at him.*) Oh? You're not going on a longer trip?

**BORGHEJM:** I am. Alone.

**RITA:** Alone?

**BORGHEJM:** Yes. Alone.

**RITA:** (*A quick dark look at ALFRED.*) Hear that, Alfred?

*(Turns to BORGHEJM.)*

I'll bet you anything, the evil eye has been playing tricks on you here.

**BORGHEJM:** *(Looks at her.)* The evil eye?

**RITA:** *(Nods.)* Absolutely. The evil eye.

**BORGHEJM:** You believe in an evil eye, Mrs. Allmers?

**RITA:** Yes, I'm beginning to. Believe in an evil eye. Especially the evil eye of a child.

**ALFRED:** *(Upset, whispers.)* Rita . . . how can you. . . .

**RITA:** *(Huskily.)* If I'm bad, if I'm wicked, Alfred, it's your fault.

*(Distant shouts and cries are heard from the water.)*

**BORGHEJM:** *(Goes to the glass doors.)* What's all the excitement?

**RITA:** *(In the doorway.)* Look, all those people running down to the pier.

**ALFRED:** What is this?

*(Glances out.)*

It's that gang of boys, up to no good again.

**BORGHEJM:** *(Shouts out from the railing.)* Hey, you boys down there! What's going on?

*(Several answering voices can be heard, mingled and confused.)*

**RITA:** What are they saying?

**BORGHEJM:** They say there's a child who's drowned.

**ALFRED:** A drowned child?

**ASTA:** *(Uneasily.)* A little boy, they say.

**ALFRED:** They all know how to swim, all of them.

**RITA:** *(Cries out, frightened.)* Where's Eyolf?

**ALFRED:** Calm down. Eyolf's playing in the garden.

**ASTA:** No, he's not in the garden.

**RITA:** *(Throws her arms up.)* Oh please don't let it be him!

**BORGHEJM:** *(Listens, calls down.)* What are you. . . ? Who's child is it?

*(More crowd noises. BORGHEJM and ASTA let out stifled cries and rush down through the garden.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Trying to hear.)* It's not Eyolf? It's not Eyolf, Rita!

**RITA:** *(By the veranda, fearfully.)* Shhh. Be quiet! Let me hear what they're saying!

*(She reels back into the room, with a shriek of pain.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Follows her.)* What did they say?!?!?

**RITA:** *(Sinks into the armchair left.)* They say: a crutch is floating.

**ALFRED:** *(Frozen.)* No, no, no!

**RITA:** *(Hoarsely.)* Eyolf! Eyolf! They have to save him!

**ALFRED:** *(Nearly delirious.)* They must! That precious, precious life!

*(He dashes down through the garden.)*

**END ACT ONE**

## ACT TWO

*(A little wooded area on ALLMER's land, down by the shore. Huge old trees on the left overhang the scene. Across the hill in the background, a brook spills down to stones on the edge of the wood. To the right, scattered trees, through which we can see the fjord. In the foreground, the corner of a boathouse can be seen, with a beached boat next to it. Under the old trees to the left stands a table with a bench and a couple of chairs, all built out of light birchwood. It's an overcast, dark, misty day.)*

*(ALFRED ALLMERS, sits on the bench, his arms resting on the table. His hat lies in front of him. He gazes impassively and emptily out over the water. After a moment, ASTA ALLMERS comes down the path through the woods. She's carrying a raised umbrella.)*

**ASTA:** *(Goes quietly and cautiously up to him.)* You shouldn't sit out here in this nasty weather, Alfred.

*(ALFRED nods slowly without answering. ASTA closes the umbrella.)*

I've been looking for you everywhere.

**ALFRED:** *(Tonelessly.)* Thanks.

**ASTA:** *(Moves a chair, sits by him.)* Have you been down here, just sitting here all this time?

**ALFRED:** *(Doesn't answer at first. Finally, he does.)* No. I can't understand it. I just think . . . it's completely impossible . . . that.

**ASTA:** *(Lays her hand sympathetically on his arm.)* Poor, dear, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** *(Stares at her.)* Is it really true, Asta? Or have I gone insane? Or, am I just dreaming? I wish it were a dream. Imagine how wonderful it would be if I just . . . woke up.

**ASTA:** I wish I could just wake you.

**ALFRED:** *(Stares out at the water.)* How merciless the fjord looks today. Lying so heavy and sluggish. Blue-gray . . . flashing gold . . . reflecting the rainclouds.

**ASTA:** *(Imploring.)* Oh, Alfred, don't sit here and stare out at the fjord!

**ALFRED:** *(Doesn't hear her.)* On the surface, yes . . . but at depth . . . right there . . . the undertow—.

**ASTA:** *(Anxiously.)* For God's sake, Alfred, don't think about that!

**ALFRED:** *(Gazes gently at her.)* You probably think he's lying right out there, right? But he's not. Don't believe it. You have to remember how fast the current runs here. Out to sea.

**ASTA:** *(Slumps across the table, sobbing, face in her hands.)* Dear God!

**ALFRED:** *(Heavily.)* So little Eyolf is a long . . . a long way away from us now.

**ASTA:** *(Looks imploringly up at him.)* Alfred, please, don't talk like this!

**ALFRED:** You can probably even figure it out yourself. You've always been so bright. In twenty eight . . . twenty nine hours . . . let me see . . . let me see.

**ASTA:** *(Stops her ears and shrieks.)* Alfred!

**ALFRED:** *(Presses his hands hard against the table.)* But, listen, do you find any meaning in any of this?

**ASTA:** *(Looks at him.)* In this?

**ALFRED:** In this, in what's been done to me and Rita.

**ASTA:** Do I find a meaning?

**ALFRED:** (*Impatiently.*) Meaning, yes, meaning! There has to be some meaning in it. Life, existence . . . fate . . . even fate can't be so completely meaningless either.

**ASTA:** Dear Alfred. Who could say anything for sure about this sort of thing?

**ALFRED:** (*Laughs bitterly.*) No, I think you're probably right about that. Maybe it's all just random, pure chance, everything. Things just happen, like ships drifting without a rudder. Could be just like that. It looks that way anyway.

**ASTA:** (*Thoughtfully.*) But if it only looks that way, if--

**ALFRED:** (*Hotly.*) If? You think you can figure it all out for me? Because I can't.

(*Quieting.*)

There's Eyolf, just beginning, moving towards a . . . spiritually aware life. Filled with such infinite possibilities. Rich possibilities. Fulfilling my existence, full of joy and pride. And then, what do we get but a crazy old woman. . . carrying a dog in a bag. . . .

**ASTA:** But we have no idea what really happened.

**ALFRED:** Oh, yes, we know. The boys saw her row out into the fjord. They saw Eyolf standing alone, at the very end of the pier. Saw him stare after her . . . and he got sort of dizzy.

(*His voice quavering.*)

And then he toppled forward . . . and was gone.

**ASTA:** I know. But still--

**ALFRED:** She *drew* him into the depths. You can be sure of it.

**ASTA:** But, dear . . . why should she?

**ALFRED:** That's exactly it! Why should she? What did she have against him? Eyolf had never done her wrong. Never teased her . . . never threw rocks at her dog. He'd never even seen her or her dog before yesterday. So, there's no reason for her to get back at him. It's random, completely meaningless, the whole thing, Asta. Maybe there's some sense in which the order of the world requires it.

**ASTA:** Have you talked to Rita about any of this?

**ALFRED:** (*Shakes his head.*) I feel like I can talk more easily about it with you.

(*Sighs.*)

As with everything else.

(*ASTA takes her sewing materials and a small paper package out of her pocket. ALFRED stares at her vacantly.*)

What is it you have there, Asta?

**ASTA:** (*Picks up his hat.*) A little black crepe.

**ALFRED:** Oh, why do you have to do that?

**ASTA:** Rita asked me to. Is it all right?

**ALFRED:** It's all the same to me.

(*She sews the crepe on the hat. ALFRED sits and watches.*)

Where's Rita now?

**ASTA:** Taking a little walk in the garden, I think. Borghejm's with her.

**ALFRED:** (*Taken aback.*) Really? Borghejm's out here again today?

**ASTA:** Yes. He took the noon train.

**ALFRED:** I'm a little surprised.

**ASTA:** *(Sewing.)* He was very fond of Eyolf.

**ALFRED:** Borghejm is a faithful soul, Asta.

**ASTA:** *(With quiet warmth.)* He is certainly faithful. That's quite true.

**ALFRED:** *(Fixes his eyes on her.)* You do care for him, don't you?

**ASTA:** Yes. I do.

**ALFRED:** But you still can't decide what to—.

**ASTA:** *(Breaks in.)* Alfred, please. Don't talk about this.

**ALFRED:** Fair enough. Just . . . can you tell me why you can't—?

**ASTA:** Stop it! I'm asking you please. Don't . . . question me. It's too painful . . . you don't understand . . . all right now. See. Hat's done.

**ALFRED:** Thanks.

**ASTA:** Now, your left arm.

**ALFRED:** A black armband?

**ASTA:** It's customary.

**ALFRED:** Fine. Go ahead.

*(She moves closer, and sews.)*

**ASTA:** Hold your arm still. Or I'll stick you with the needle.

**ALFRED:** *(With a half smile.)* Just like old times.

**ASTA:** Yes, isn't it?

**ALFRED:** When you were a little girl, you'd sit like this and patch up my clothes.

**ASTA:** As best I could.

**ALFRED:** The very first thing you sewed for me . . . it was also black crepe.

**ASTA:** Really?

**ALFRED:** Around my student cap. When Dad died.

**ASTA:** Did I sew back then? I don't remember.

**ALFRED:** Of course you don't. You were so little.

**ASTA:** Yes, I guess I was.

**ALFRED:** And two years later, when you lost your mother, you sewed a black armband on me then, too.

**ASTA:** It seemed like the right thing to do.

**ALFRED:** *(Pats her hand.)* It was. The right thing. Asta . . . and then, when we two were left alone in the world, we . . . are you finished?

**ASTA:** Yes.

*(Gathers up her sewing things.)*

Despite everything, that was a beautiful time for us, Alfred. Just the two of us, alone.

**ALFRED:** It was, wasn't it? Despite how hard we worked.

**ASTA:** How hard you worked.

**ALFRED:** *(More lively.)* You worked as hard as I did, in your own way.

*(Smiles.)*

My dear, faithful . . . Eyolf.



**ASTA:** Please, don't remind me of that silly nonsense with the name.

**ALFRED:** If you'd been a boy, you would have been named Eyolf.

**ASTA:** Sure, if. But when you went off to college. . . .

*(Smiles involuntarily.)*

You know, you could be so immature.

**ALFRED:** You're calling me immature?

**ASTA:** Yes, come to think of it, looking back at it. You were so embarrassed: you didn't have a brother, you only had a sister.

**ALFRED:** No, that was you! You were the one who was embarrassed!

**ASTA:** All right, maybe a little. I guess I felt a little sorry for you--.

**ALFRED:** You must have been. You found some old clothes of mine--.

**ASTA:** Your nicest Sunday clothes, right. The blue shirt and those cute little shorts.

**ALFRED:** *(His eyes lingering on her.)* I'll never forget. Watching you all dressed up and walking around in them.

**ASTA:** Only when we were home, alone together.

**ALFRED:** And we took all so seriously. Everything so important. And I always called you Eyolf.

**ASTA:** Alfred. You've never told Rita any of this, have you?

**ALFRED:** I think I told her once.

**ASTA:** But Alfred. How could you!

**ALFRED:** You know, people do tend to tell their spouses pretty much everything.

**ASTA:** All right. I suppose that's true.

**ALFRED:** *(As if waking from a start.)* And I can just sit here and--.

**ASTA:** *(Stands, looks anxiously at him.)* What's wrong now?

**ALFRED:** He was nearly gone. Completely gone from me.

**ASTA:** Eyolf?

**ALFRED:** Here I was, sitting, lost in my memories. And he wasn't in them.

**ASTA:** Alfred, no. He was behind everything we were talking about.

**ALFRED:** No. He wasn't. He'd slipped away, out of my mind. Out of my thoughts. I lost sight of him, for a moment there, while we sat, chattering away. Totally forgot about him the entire time.

**ASTA:** But you can't lose yourself in grief every second. You need some rest.

**ALFRED:** No, no, no! That's just what I don't need. I don't have permission. . . . I don't have the right . . . don't have the heart . . .

*(Upset, moves right.)*

My thoughts should stay there, out there where he lies, drifting down to the depths.

**ASTA:** *(Pursues him, holds him.)* Alfred, don't go to the fjord!

**ALFRED:** I'm going out there, to him. Let go, Asta. I'm taking the boat.

**ASTA:** *(Screams.)* Don't go to the fjord!

**ALFRED:** *(Yields.)* No. . . . no, I won't. Just leave me alone.

**ASTA:** *(Leads him to the table.)* Please, give your thoughts some rest, Alfred. Come here, sit down.

**ALFRED:** *(Starts to sit on the bench.)* Yes, all right. Whatever you say.

**ASTA:** No, don't sit there.

**ALFRED:** Yes, I want to.

**ASTA:** No, please, don't. You'll just sit there, and stare out over the. . . .

*(Forces him to a chair, facing left.)*

There you go. Now you're sitting comfortably.

*(Seats on the bench herself.)*

So, let's . . . talk a little more together.

**ALFRED:** *(With a sigh.)* It feels good to forget all the pain and sorrow for a second.

**ASTA:** You really need to, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** But don't you think it's weak of me, or apathetic, that I can?

**ASTA:** Not at all. It's surely impossible to keep circling back over the same ground.

**ALFRED:** For me it's impossible. Before you came here, I was sitting here, and it's unbelievable how I tormented myself . . . this gnawing, haunting grief.

**ASTA:** I'm sure.

**ALFRED:** And would you believe it, Asta. . . .?

**ASTA:** What?

**ALFRED:** I'm tearing myself up, in utter agony, and suddenly I found myself wondering what we were having for dinner tonight.

**ASTA:** *(Soothingly.)* Well, if that thought helped you get some rest--

**ALFRED:** It sort of did, actually. Gave me something of a respite, at least.

*(Takes her hand over the table.)*

You don't know how good it is for me to have you, Asta. I'm glad someone I love is near. Glad, despite the sorrow. . . .

**ASTA:** *(Looks seriously at him.)* What should make you happiest is that you have Rita.

**ALFRED:** That goes without saying. But Rita isn't quite . . . family. It's not the same as having a sister.

**ASTA:** *(Tense.)* You mean that?

**ALFRED:** Well, our family *is* pretty unusual.

*(Half joking.)*

For one thing, our names all begin with vowels. Do you remember the times we talked about that? And all our relatives, they're all equally poor. And we all have the same eyes.

**ASTA:** Do you really think my eyes are--

**ALFRED:** Actually, no, you're the exception. You take after your mother. You don't look like the rest of us.

Not even Dad. Even so--

**ASTA:** Even so, what--?

**ALFRED:** Even so, I think that living together has put its stamp on us. Two people, created in each other's image. In thought and mind, I mean.

**ASTA:** *(Strongly moved.)* Don't say that, Alfred. I'm the one, me alone, created in your image. And it's you, you're the one I owe for everything. . . . everything good.

**ALFRED:** You don't owe me anything, Asta. Quite the contrary--

**ASTA:** I owe you everything! You must have figured that out! There's never been a sacrifice that you haven't

been willing to—.

**ALFRED:** What sacrifice? Don't give me that. . . . I've done nothing but love you. Ever since you were a little child.

*(After a short pause.)*

And I've always thought that I have so many wrongs to make right.

**ASTA:** *(Surprised.)* Wrongs? You?

**ALFRED:** Not exactly things I've done. But—.

**ASTA:** *(Tensely.)* But—?

**ALFRED:** Dad.

**ASTA:** *(Half rising from the bench.)* Dad.

*(Sits again.)*

What do you mean?

**ALFRED:** He wasn't good to you.

**ASTA:** *(Impulsively.)* Don't say that.

**ALFRED:** I will say it, because it's true. He never loved you. Not the way he should have.

**ASTA:** *(Evasively.)* Not the way he loved you. And that's understandable.

**ALFRED:** *(Continuing.)* And he mistreated your mother. The last few years, anyway.

**ASTA:** *(Quietly.)* Mother was so much younger than he was. Remember that.

**ALFRED:** You think they just . . . didn't get along together?

**ASTA:** Maybe that's all it was.

**ALFRED:** Yes, but still. . . . Dad was always so gentle and kindhearted, so friendly to everyone.

**ASTA:** *(Quietly.)* And mother wasn't always . . . what she should have been.

**ALFRED:** Your mother?

**ASTA:** Sometimes. She wasn't.

**ALFRED:** Towards father?

**ASTA:** Yes.

**ALFRED:** I never noticed that.

**ASTA:** *(Rising, fighting tears.)* Oh, Alfred, dear. They're long gone. Let them rest.

*(She crosses right.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Stands.)* Fine. We'll let them rest.

*(Wrings his hands.)*

But . . . they're all gone, but they won't let us rest. Day or night.

**ASTA:** *(Sympathetically.)* But time will heal all our wounds, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** *(Gazes helplessly at her.)* You believe that too? . . . but how I'll get through these first horrible days .

..

*(Hoarsely.)*

No. I have no idea.

**ASTA:** *(Imploring, hands on his shoulders.)* Go to Rita. Please, I'm begging you—.

**ALFRED:** *(Heavily, pulling away.)* No, no, no. Don't talk to me about that. I can't.

*(Calmly.)*

Just let me stay here with you.

**ASTA:** I won't leave you.

**ALFRED:** *(Seizes her hand and holds it tight.)* Thanks.

*(Looks for a moment out over the fjord.)*

Where's my little Eyolf now?

*(Smiles sadly at her.)*

Can you tell me that, my strong, wise Eyolf?

*(Shakes his head.)*

No one on earth can tell me that. I only know one, horrible . . . I'll never see him again.

**ASTA:** *(Looks left, withdraws her hand.)* They're coming.

*(RITA and BORGHEJM appear, as she leads the way and he follows up the path through the woods. She wears a dark dress, with a black veil over her head. He carries an umbrella under one arm.)*

**ALFRED:** *(Goes to her.)* How are you doing, Rita?

**RITA:** *(Walks past him.)* Don't ask.

**ALFRED:** What do you want?

**RITA:** Looking for you. What have you been doing?

**ALFRED:** Nothing. Asta came down.

**RITA:** Fine. But before Asta came? You've been away from me all morning.

**ALFRED:** I've been sitting here, looking out over the water.

**RITA:** Oh. How can you--?

**ALFRED:** *(Impatiently.)* I'd rather be alone right now.

**RITA:** *(Moving around restlessly.)* So you can just sit here. Stuck in the same spot!

**ALFRED:** I have no reason to move.

**RITA:** I can't settle any place. Least of all here . . . with the fjord pressing in on me.

**ALFRED:** Exactly right. The fjord's so close here.

**RITA:** *(To BORGHEJM.)* Don't you think he should join the rest of us?

**BORGHEJM:** *(To ALFRED.)* I do think it would be better for you.

**ALFRED:** No, no. Let me stay where I am.

**RITA:** Then I'll stay with you, Alfred.

**ALFRED:** Fine. Do that. You stay too, Asta.

**ASTA:** *(Whispers to BORGHEJM.)* Let's let them have some time alone.

**BORGHEJM:** *(With an understanding look.)* Miss Allmers. Perhaps we could take a little walk . . . along the shore? One last time?

**ASTA:** *(Takes her umbrella.)* Yes, all right. Just a little stroll.

*(ASTA and BORGHEJM go out together behind the boathouse. ALFRED wanders around a little. Then he sits on a rock under the trees. RITA approaches, faces him, hands clasped in front of her.)*

**RITA:** Can you even think about it, Alfred? That we've lost Eyolf?

**ALFRED:** *(Looks sorrowfully at the ground.)* It's an idea we'll have to get used to.

**RITA:** I can't. I can't. I'll have that horrible sight with me the rest of my life.

**ALFRED:** *(Looks up.)* What sight? What did you see?

**RITA:** I didn't even see it myself. Only heard about it. Oh--.

**ALFRED:** Just say it quickly.

**RITA:** I took Borghejm with me, down to the pier--.

**ALFRED:** Why there?

**RITA:** To ask the boys about it. How it happened.

**ALFRED:** We know that already.

**RITA:** I learned more.

**ALFRED:** Well?

**RITA:** It isn't true that he disappeared immediately.

**ALFRED:** That's what they're saying?

**RITA:** They say they saw him lying on the bottom. Deep down in the clear water.

**ALFRED:** *(Through clenched teeth.)* And they didn't rescue him?

**RITA:** They couldn't. I suppose.

**ALFRED:** They could swim! . . . all of them could. . . .did they say how he was lying there, when they saw him.

**RITA:** Yes. He lay on his back. His eyes wide open.

**ALFRED:** Eyes open. But not moving?

**RITA:** Not moving. And then something came . . . and drew him away. An undertow, they called it.

**ALFRED:** *(Nodding slowly.)* Then *that* was the last they saw of him.

**RITA:** *(Choked with tears.)* Yes.

**ALFRED:** *(In a low voice.)* And never . . . no one ever saw him again.

**RITA:** *(Wailing.)* Day and night I'll see him, lying down there.

**ALFRED:** With those big eyes, wide open.

**RITA:** *(Shudders.)* Those big eyes, wide open. I see them! I see them now!

**ALFRED:** *(Rises slowly, very quiet.)* Were they evil, those eyes, Rita?

**RITA:** *(Turning pale.)* Evil?

**ALFRED:** *(Moving in towards her.)* Were they evil eyes, staring up at you, up from the depths of the sea?

**RITA:** *(Shrinks.)* Alfred?

**ALFRED:** Answer me! Were they the evil eyes of a child?

**RITA:** *(Shrieks.)* Alfred!

**ALFRED:** Now we've got it . . . Just what you wanted.

**RITA:** Me? What did I want?

**ALFRED:** For Eyolf not to be here.

**7 more pages in ACT TWO**

**17 pages in ACT THREE**

# BYU production of 'Little Eyolf' is serious entertainment

February 23, 2012 •Amber Foote - Correspondent

As a nod to the "father of modern drama," Brigham Young University's Department of Theatre and Media Arts will perform Henrik Ibsen's "Little Eyolf," beginning Wednesday and running through March 10. The Scandinavian playwright unseated the theater world more than a hundred years ago with his plays, which threw out the light comedy status quo and instead focused on real-life, sober issues.

"He [Ibsen] revolutionized the plays going on at the time, which were more parlor dramas or melodramas," said Barta Heiner, professor in BYU's theater and media department and director of "Little Eyolf." "He dealt with some very, very serious subject matter for the time period, and even now. He's quite a universal playwright in that the things he talked about and exposed are still going on today."

"Little Eyolf," which was originally written in Danish in 1894, was translated by BYU faculty member, Eric Samuelsen. The play -- which Heiner said is about secrets and hidden longings, choices and consequences, redemption and potential ruin -- is centered around a well-to-do Norwegian family who experience upheaval following the death of a family member and the appearance of a stranger.

"It starts out with a seemingly very congenial family life, but then there's a tragedy in the family and all the cracks in the plaster start to appear," Heiner said.

Mia Selway, a student in the acting program at BYU, is assuming the role of Rita Allmer, the wife and mother of the family, as her senior project. Selway's character, Rita, is a wealthy woman who is a contributor in a poisonous marriage. Her husband, Alfred, married her for the wrong reasons and is now searching for meaning and identity.

"We live in this relationship where no one talks," Selway said. "There's stuff going on and it's just this undercurrent of sewage that happens. It's a big event like the death of our son that ... basically brings us to a point where we have to start looking at our relationship and what life is about."

Yet the play has a redemptive message as well, left in question at the end. The characters discover their responsibility toward each other and mankind, but will they continue to only talk about it or will they put their words into action?

"I think that's the question Ibsen poses to us all," Heiner said.

## Ibsen goes dark, and deep

Many modern theater fans believe the stage dramas of Henrik Ibsen, himself the granddaddy of modern theater, became better with time. If not better, they certainly became darker.

With "Little Eyolf," a 1894 play that's third-to-last in his oeuvre, the master delved deep into both family tragedy and almost fable-like elements of Norwegian folklore. The plot circles around the Allmer family, with father Alfred about to abandon his plans for a book in favor of raising son Eyolf, a crippled little boy whom few are sure might live a normal life. When the family opens its door to a mysterious Rat-Wife capable of lulling rodents into the sea, followed by an engineer who fancies daughter Asta, all manner of guilt, resentment and sorrow follow, but so does the chance that the family might find some form of redemption.

Little Eyolf – review

### **Jermyn Street theatre, London**

Lyn Gardner, The Guardian -- Sunday 8 May 2011

"Is there any troublesome thing that gnaws here in this house?" asks the Rat Wife in Ibsen's mysterious and compelling late play, offering her Pied Piper-style services to Alfred Allmers and his wife, Rita, in their home on the edge of the fjord. They shake their heads and shudder, but the rats of guilt and despair nibble at their souls and have done since their small son, Eyolf, was crippled as baby, falling off a table while they made love.

Gloomy, doomy and offering the merest, tantalising glimpse of salvation, Little Eyolf is a secretive play that only reveals its desperate, damaged heart in a really great production that isn't frightened of the symbolism and chips away relentlessly at the characters' self-deceiving lies. It gets a workmanlike one here, largely because the enterprise is scuppered by a mannered performance from Imogen Stubbs that is out of proportion to the size of the space.

Recently so delightful in Private Lives at the Royal Exchange in Manchester, Stubbs offers a Rita who begins on a note of high hysteria and becomes so increasingly demented that it's not at all surprising that Jonathan Cullen's weary Alfred and Nadine Lewington's buttoned-up Aster increasingly look as if they would both like to give her a good slap. It's a grand, showy, external performance full of affected finger-biting, ear-stroking, nose-rubbing physical tics that doesn't excavate truthfulness, but just get in its way. She didn't, or wasn't allowed, to do it in Manchester, so why does the director let her get away with it here?