

# SPELLBOUND

A Tragedy of Love

By Victoria Benedictsson

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Translated from the Swedish by Verne Moberg

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**CAST**

Gustave Alland

Louise Strandberg

Erna Walldén

Lilly Walldén

Viggo Pihl

Henrik Ryberg

The Concierge

\*

Möller, the Bank Manager

Mrs. Knutson

Miss Knutson

Miss Svensson

Miss Jönsson

Miss Tornström

Botilda

The Bank Manager's Lina

The Mailman

I.

**A Sunny May Day in Paris**

*A studio on the ground floor. In the background a large window and a couple of glass doors facing a garden that is enclosed by a high wall. In the garden stands a blooming cherry tree, lilacs, and ivy climbing up over the wall.*

*The room is sparsely furnished: a chaise longue, a table, an antique cabinet, and some chairs. Here and there on the walls hang some sketches that have been left behind.*

*On the right side wall is the door to the vestibule, on the left the door to the bedroom, and next to it a stove.*

*LOUISE is lying on the chaise longue with pillows behind her back and a cover over her feet.*

*HENRIK is sitting in front of the stove with his elbows on his knees and a cutty pipe in his mouth.*

*ERNA is busy preparing tea at a spirit lamp on the stove; she goes to the cabinet and takes out cups, sugar bowl, etc.; in passing she lifts up the edge of the quilt that has fallen to the floor.*

LOUISE

Thanks, Erna dear. Just about the worst part of lying around sick is being so much trouble to your friends.

ERNA

Nonsense! Just because I cook a little tea for you? You call that trouble?

LOUISE

Think of everything else that you've done for me while I've been sick in bed.

ERNA

There's really no use talking about it now that it's over! In a few days you'll be so hale and hearty you can go walking down the street. That'll be nice! *(To Henrik, as she nudges him on the shoulder.)* Lend me your pipe.

HENRIK RYBERG

No, I want it myself.

ERNA

You'll get it back.

HENRIK RYBERG

No, I want the pipe myself.

ERNA *(To Louise)* Here, Sweetheart, hold this for a minute while I go get some bread and cream. The house isn't so wealthy as to own a tray.

LOUISE

*(Accepts the tea cup.)*

ERNA

*(Goes to the cupboard and comes back with some bread and cream.)*

LOUISE

Thanks so much.

ERNA

*(Takes a seat on the edge of the chaise longue.)* Well, how does it taste?

LOUISE

Oh, just fine.

ERNA

*(Caresses her.)* Little pale beak!

LOUISE

Little superwoman.

ERNA

*(Gets ups and walks over to Henrik.)* So you would like a cup too, wouldn't you?

HENRIK RYBERG

No.

ERNA

Now, now, don't put on airs.

HENRIK RYBERG

I don't want anything.

ERNA

*(Bends down as if speaking to a naughty child.)*

My, but he's nasty today! (*Scratches around, running her fingers through his hair.*) If you want coffee instead, I'll make some, all right?

HENRIK RYBERG

I don't want anything. Leave me alone!

ERNA

What a grouch! (*Walks over to Louise.*) If I could only understand where Viggo and Lilly have gone!

LOUISE

They'll look out for each other all right.

ERNA

Well, my little Titmouse can go walking with Viggo as much as she likes. With the others it's a different story: you never know what stupid things they'll dream up to tell her.

LOUISE

You sound like her mother instead of her sister.

ERNA

I am twelve years her senior -- and it's on my account she's visiting Paris.

LOUISE

(*Smiling a little.*) When it comes to her, I think you're almost too anxious.

ERNA

Better that than let her be too free.

LOUISE

*(Lowers her eyes.)*

ERNA

I see what you're thinking, but *(in a low voice and with passion)* you think I want things to turn out for her the way they did for me? *(In a high voice.)* No, now you're going to have another cup of tea.

LOUISE

Can we afford it? You haven't drunk any yourself.

ERNA

Why, I only need to add water, since Sleepyhead here doesn't want any. *(Nudges Henrik on the head.)* You're falling asleep over your pipe! So you can lend it to me, can't you, Mr. Skinflint?

HENRIK RYBERG

No.

ERNA

Just one puff.

HENRIK RYBERG

No.

ERNA

God, what strength of character! *(Pours tea for Louise and sits beside her again on the edge of the chaise longue.)* Oh, when I think that Lilly could go through the same thing I did, it drives me crazy.

LOUISE

But you're always glad and contented.

ERNA

Oh, well -- why sulk? It's not my nature.

LOUISE

But -- aren't you happy?

ERNA

You talk like a child, and you are one too. *(In a low voice, with compassion.)* Happy? Yes, a person can survive anything. That's what makes the world such a miserable place. One takes comfort in a pipe of tobacco and -- *(looking over to Henrik).* No -- *(interrupts, gets up hastily, and walks a bit across the floor.)* But it's odd anyway, that the youngsters don't come! *(Stops in the vicinity of the stove, where Henrik is sitting.)*

HENRIK RYBERG

You've been to Bergström today.

ERNA

Yes.

HENRIK RYBERG

With flowers! Now that's really nice of you.

ERNA

I'd say so.

HENRIK RYBERG

You never bring me any flowers

ERNA

You haven't broken your leg.

HENRIK RYBERG

You want me to think it's just on account of the leg?

ERNA

Certainly not. It's for the sake of the whole fellow, naturally! If he'd been here, believe me, I wouldn't have had to crave tobacco.

HENRIK RYBERG

Really! You admit...

ERNA

Sweet Adonis, you will get twice as many flowers as Bergström. You'll have all you want, if you'll just be nice.

HENRIK RYBERG

I don't want anything.

ERNA

*(Hums walking over to Louise.)* No, you know, if I'd been able to be free of Lilly without bringing her here, then -- but she begged and asked in every letter, and since she could have benefited by learning French properly, I thought I couldn't say no.

LOUISE

My dear, what would she have to lose by coming to Paris?

ERNA

Oh! For a little *fille de bonne famille* like her, there's no point living among us tacky artists -- she'll spend her whole life there at home with the other hayseeds. Out here we keep a lighter hold on the reins -- and there is many a curious creature in the fields of Our Lord.

HENRIK RYBERG

*(Without turning around, with suppressed bitterness.)*

You yourself are one of the strangest.

ERNA

You think so?

HENRIK RYBERG

*(Turns around.)* Don't you think I've noticed, how you chase after him?

ERNA

Don't I chase after you too maybe? Lend me your pipe.

HENRIK RYBERG

*(Gets up and walks toward her.)*

I can't bear it anymore! You drive me crazy with your tricks.

ERNA

Then break away! You're free to go.

HENRIK RYBERG

You seem to want that!

ERNA

I neither want it nor fear it. But if it's your intent to torture the life out of both of us with your jealousy, then we'd better go our separate ways.

HENRIK RYBERG

Always these threats! But you're driving me to the limit.

ERNA

What's the limit?

LOUISE

*(Mediating.)*

Now -- now -- don't be so impetuous!

ERNA

He infuriates me with his pettiness.

HENRIK RYBERG

She conceals everything from me.

ERNA

I conceal nothing. I am friendly to my friends, and to Bergström because he's one of them. If he becomes more to me than that, I'll tell you so honestly.

HENRIK RYBERG

You assume that's possible!

ERNA

I've seen so much that I no longer believe in impossibilities.

HENRIK RYBERG

Well, you certainly have seen a few things! I don't even know about your past. May I ask how many --

ERNA

Be quiet, or you'll spoil everything. Didn't I tell you myself about the only man I can't mention.

HENRIK RYBERG

That's exactly what drives me insane! I might meet him on the street -- we could run into each other at the next corner. I suspect everybody! Oh, this is hell!

ERNA

You'll never meet him.

HENRIK RYBERG

How can you know that?

ERNA

Why, I've said, it's as if he were dead.

HENRIK RYBERG

Were dead! But he *isn't* dead.

*(Steps are heard outside the door.)*

LOUISE

Aha, now here we have Lilly and Viggo.

ERNA

*(Hastily to Henrik Ryberg.)*

Not one more word! Not one word so she hears it!

VIGGO

*(Comes in from the vestibule with a bouquet of flowers in his hand.)*

ERNA

*(Rushes toward him.)*

Where is Lilly?

VIGGO

She'll be right in. *(To Louise as he hands over the bouquet.)* I brought with me some summer greetings to our little invalid.

LOUISE

Thank you, thank you. How kind you all are to me!

ERNA

*(To Henrik Ryberg.)*

There you see! Viggo also brings flowers to a sick person -- nobody thinks *that* is peculiar.

VIGGO

*(To Erna.)*

Lilly went to the Maison Blanche to buy something, and I wasn't allowed to come along. But I almost thought she'd already have arrived here, because I was in the Café de la Régence looking at the newspapers -- turns to Louise -- and, it's true, I have a surprise for you.

LOUISE

From the newspapers?

VIGGO

No, can you guess who I met?

LOUISE

Pelle?

VIGGO

Pelle? Bah! No, someone great! An artist!

LOUISE

Well, that's news! When the city is swarming with artists.

VIGGO

None of the usual. One you admire!

LOUISE

Alland? Gustave Alland?

VIGGO

*(Nods.)*

LOUISE

Is he in Paris?

VIGGO

After two years' absence.

LOUISE

How could he be away?

ERNA

He hasn't produced as an artist and others have grown successful. He's ashamed.

VIGGO

Who says he hasn't produced?

ERNA

His last work was weak. Since then he hasn't exhibited anything.

VIGGO

At the salon there were a couple of busts.

ERNA

Yes, of course. Of their royal majesties.

VIGGO

They're people too, aren't they!

ERNA

*(Laughs contemptuously.)*

VIGGO

*(To Louise.)*

No, but the surprise was, that he's coming here.

LOUISE AND ERNA

*(At the same time.)*

Who?

VIGGO

Alland.

ERNA

*(Between her teeth.)*

Dear soul.

LOUISE

When?

VIGGO

Now. Soon.

LOUISE

I'm getting up.

VIGGO

No. I told him you'd been sick.

ERNA

So long then!

LOUISE

Are you planning to leave?

ERNA

As you know, I loathe celebrities.

LOUISE

Oh no, stay and help me! What shall I talk with him about? How shall I act?

VIGGO

Look at her! She's in utter despair. And here I was trying to make you happy!

ERNA

Little pale beak! Get better by tomorrow.

LOUISE

Won't you look in this evening?

ERNA

Oh yes. I probably will. *(Kisses her on the forehead; turns to Henrik Ryberg.)* Are you leaving too?

HENRIK RYBERG

*(Slowly gets up and knocks out his pipe. They leave.)*

LOUISE

I'm so afraid.

VIGGO

Of what?

LOUISE

I don't know. What are you thinking about?

VIGGO

That I'm leaving.

LOUISE

*(Extends her hand to him.)*

Are you sad?

VIGGO

Yes. It will feel empty.

LOUISE

Without Lilly?

VIGGO

Without everything out here -- mostly without her perhaps.

LOUISE

Thanks for all you've done for me.

VIGGO

Oh, it's nothing . . .

LOUISE

You've cared for me and been almost like a mother to me during the time I was sick. You and Erna.

VIGGO

*(Smiling a little.)* That's exactly why I don't like leaving my patient, who might need me.

LOUISE

Oh, I'm quite all right now.

VIGGO

You're still frail. You need to have friends around you.

LOUISE

I'll get used to feeling sickly, when I no longer have you to pamper me.

VIGGO

You aren't sickly. You're delicate. You have finer skin than the rest of us. (*Strokes her cheek in a caress.*)

LOUISE

Well, now I'll also be going home soon. And you'll come and see me this summer?

VIGGO

(*Extends his hand.*)

Agreed! So good-bye!

LOUISE

No, wait at least till Alland comes. I have no idea what to talk to him about.

VIGGO

Just be simple and natural -- that's all that's necessary. (*There is a knock on the door.*) Come in!

ALLAND

(*Enters.*)

VIGGO

(*Turns toward him.*)

Look here! My invalid was just lying there complaining that she doesn't know what to say to you!

ALLAND

*(Goes up to Louise and extends his hand to her.)*

Are you shy in my presence?

LOUISE

Yes. *(Gets up into a sitting position.)*

ALLAND

No, please don't! Just lie there! You've been feeling poorly, I hear.

LOUISE

Yes. And so you're paying a sick call.

ALLAND

*(Smiling to Viggo.)*

Why, Miss Strandberg *can* converse! Are you going? Am I the one who's frightening you?

VIGGO

On the contrary! But I'm leaving on the afternoon train and haven't packed yet.

ALLAND

Will you be away for long?

VIGGO

Most likely.

ALLAND

That will be sad for your foster sister. (*Smiling to Louise.*) Isn't that true? You are Mr. Pihl's foster sister.

LOUISE

Yes.

ALLAND

You'll miss him when he's gone?

LOUISE

Terribly.

VIGGO

(*Nods to Louise, bows to Alland, and leaves.*)

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ALLAND

Shall we lay you back down?

LOUISE

No, thanks. I can sit up all right.

ALLAND

Let me get a good look at you first.

LOUISE

There's not much to look at.

ALLAND

Your cheeks have grown thin and pale.

LOUISE

I've had typhoid.

ALLAND

*(With an evident artist's interest.)*

Just sit there absolutely quiet now, so I get a good chance to look at your face .... I like you. Such honest eyes you have.

LOUISE

*(Smiles a little.)*

ALLAND

*(Changes his tone, teasing.)*

Did you think I was trying to say something polite?

LOUISE

*(Timidly.)*

No.

ALLAND

It doesn't make any difference to me whether you're ugly or beautiful. I like you the way you are.

LOUISE

Do you know my brother?

ALLAND

Yes. He is a fine artist! He measures up to his name. It does happen sometimes!

*(Regards her face.)* But look how you light up! You're proud of him. He's probably the one who has given you a bit of life.

LOUISE

Yes -- before. At that time he was at home in the summer, and when he was away, he wrote.

ALLAND

But now?

LOUISE

Now he is married.

ALLAND

*(Smiling.)*

Yes, that always ruins a person.

LOUISE

That's not what I meant.

ALLAND

But that's the way things work anyhow. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

LOUISE

There's nothing to tell.

ALLAND

There's always something, isn't there. Sometimes you have the expression of a tormented or frightened child.

LOUISE

*(Puts her hand across her eyes.)*

ALLAND

Has life been hard on you?

LOUISE

Perhaps. I lost my father when I was seventeen. Then my sister became mentally deranged. Then Mama took ill. I couldn't take care of them both, so my sister had to be put in the madhouse. Right afterwards Mama died. My doctor said that I ought to travel and find some diversion.

ALLAND

Haven't you ever been away from home before?

LOUISE

No.

ALLAND

Then you probably felt a bit dizzy in the beginning -- like a little bird set free.

LOUISE

I grew ill almost immediately.

ALLAND

That's right. I'm sorry. Is this your brother's studio?

LOUISE

He had rented it for a year, and since it was empty, he thought I could live here.

ALLAND

*(Gets up and looks around.)*

It's beautiful as well as spacious. *(Stops in the background and looks out.)* You have a garden too.

*(Turns toward her.)* Didn't it feel lonely lying by yourself in this big room?

LOUISE

I wasn't lying here, and I wasn't all by myself. There are compatriots in the house. Erna Walldén, the painter.

ALLAND

Does she live here?

LOUISE

Do you know her?

ALLAND

I've met her -- but it was a long time ago.

LOUISE

If you knew how good she'd been to me! How helpful and how much she's sacrificed! How she's taken care of me!

ALLAND

What high praise! I never believed that Miss Erna Walldén was such an angel.

LOUISE

She may seem hard, but she has a heart of gold.

ALLAND

Such big eyes you have! You don't resemble your brother.

LOUISE

Really? *(Casts her eyes down.)*

ALLAND

*(Imitates her.)*

Why do you do this?

LOUISE

*(Shyly.)*

I thought you were looking at me so strangely.

ALLAND

*(Laughs.)*

No, really! *(Seriously.)* I knew a woman who was a lot like you.

LOUISE

*(Smiling a bit.)*

That explains the matter.

ALLAND

The matter needs no explanation! For me it's just as natural to look as to breathe -- and from each face that I like to look at, I learn something. *(A moment's silence.)*

LOUISE

Who was she, whom you say I resemble?

ALLAND

A woman who has been very close to me.

LOUISE

Sorry ...

ALLAND

*(Hastily.)*

Not that it can offend either you or me! Are you a painter?

LOUISE

No.

ALLAND

Do you have any other work? Well, I don't mean making lace or embroidering -- but something to which you can devote yourself?

LOUISE

No.

ALLAND

Then you'll probably get married?

LOUISE

*(Smiling a bit.)*

You did say, that it always leads to a person's downfall!

ALLAND

The way society is now, a woman must marry. Otherwise she gets old before her time. That would be a pity with you.

LOUISE

Do you think so?

ALLAND

Yes. You'd certainly make a man happy, as we say. *(Smiling.)* You *are* good -- aren't you.

LOUISE

*(Cheerfully.)*

Unfortunately!

ALLAND

Now, now! Have you also noticed that it's only self-interest when people preach at each other to be good? The good ones are always trampled under. Remember that! It's always wiser to kill a person than to love her.

LOUISE

Oh ... fie ... Such terrible talk. You really don't believe in love.

ALLAND

Yes. But I don't believe in *women*. There aren't many of them who can stand to be loved.

LOUISE

What do you mean?

ALLAND

I mean to tolerate what we men -- so it's just an episode in their life.

LOUISE

In that case it serves to honor our gender!

ALLAND

Are you sure of that?

I remember one. She was a painter. She lived together with one of my friends for two years. He was also an artist, and they helped each other with advice and assistance. But she was younger and less significant. Things went the way they always do.

LOUISE

How?

ALLAND

Love is just a flower that blooms -- that's why it lasts a short time. My friend and his girlfriend broke up with each other. They had both got tired of it.

LOUISE

She too?

ALLAND

Does that frighten you? Yes, she did too . . . And later she hated him, the way a woman always does when she no longer loves.

LOUISE

Always?

ALLAND

Yes. This is the lowly thing about your race. A man always holds some good will for the one he's loved; a woman never does.

LOUISE

Not everyone is the same .... But how did things go with her -- the painter?

ALLAND

Things went very well for her indeed! She had painted her self-portrait in his studio: a masterpiece -- bold, forceful, ruthlessly true. It won her a medal at the salon and was bought by the government. It

was the first puff in her sail, and it gave her what an artist needs more than anything else: self-confidence.

LOUISE

But then . . . ?

ALLAND

She's exhibited every year, and if I didn't know better, I would swear that a *man* had executed her work.

LOUISE

I'm not thinking of the external things -- I'm thinking of her inner story.

ALLAND

Of course, it's *behind* the work she's created; and if I'm not mistaken, it can be said in two words: *she hates*. The love was just an episode in her life, but the pain made her an artist of class.

LOUISE

Poor thing!

ALLAND

You wouldn't say that if you knew what it is to be able to work. (*Gets up.*) But now I'll be going. (*Suddenly, without reflecting.*) Why do you say "poor thing"? During the time they lived together, they both did the best work they'd ever done. He too.

LOUISE

Was it thanks to her?

ALLAND

Who knows? For me each woman I love means a new work.

LOUISE

Then how have things gone the last years?

ALLAND

It's been nothing but busts. (*Bows farewell.*) How long are you staying in Paris?

LOUISE

My brother has the studio only until the first of July.

ALLAND

So you have more than one month to live here. (*Looks out.*) And you have a delightful old garden -- abandoned, dilapidated, hidden away. Where you're away from the world.

LOUISE

Do you like it?

ALLAND

I like everything here. This place could be made beautiful. But you are Spartan. One can see it in your dress, in your hair, in everything. You look so stern! What judgement are you pronouncing in your heart about me? In your eyes is it a sin to enjoy life? If the sun wants to shine, you should put up your parasol or creep into the shade! (I myself find a spot in the sand where it's warmest .) You also think I am wanton -- isn't that true?

LOUISE

*(Slowly and subdued.)*

I don't know. No -- but it feels as if your world were not mine.

\*

LILLY

*(Comes running in from the vestibule and stops in embarrassment when she gets to see Alland.)*

LOUISE

*(Introduces them.)*

Miss Walldén -- Mr. Gustave Alland.

LILLY

*(Greeting Louise.)*

Has Viggo left?

LOUISE

Yes. He was going home to pack.

LILLY

*(Disappointed.)*

Already?

LOUISE

You've been away a long time ....

LILLY

*(About to cry.)*

I got to see a wedding -- a really splendid wedding -- in the Madeleine Church -- and then I forgot ...

ALLAND

*(Who has regarded Lilly with visible interest.)*

Don't be sad, Miss! *(Smiling a bit.)* He'll come back.

LILLY

Do you think so?

ALLAND

The more I see you, the more likely it seems to me!

ERNA

*(Outside.)*

Lilly! Is Lilly there!

LILLY

*(Shouts out.)*

I'll be right there.

ALLAND

*(Bows to Louise.)*

Now I hope to see you soon really spry and chipper. *(Takes her hand, holds it a moment in his and looks at it.)* Such a beautiful hand you have -- powerless, bloodless, but so finely modeled. *(Lifts it up and kisses it.)*

LOUISE

*(Draws it back quickly.)*

ALLAND

Why do you do that? *(Imitates her movement with his hand.)* Isn't that customary with your people, for a man to kiss a lady on the hand?

LOUISE

Oh -- well, yes -- but. . .

ALLAND

*I* always kiss a hand ... when the hand is beautiful

LILLY

*(Who has drawn off her gloves, examines her right hand.)*

ALLAND

*(Saying his farewell.)*

Farewell, Miss! *(Walks toward the door. Just as he grasps the handle, it is opened from the outside, and Erna comes in. When she becomes aware of him, she stands aside and remains there, pale and upset, staring at him with widened eyes. He bows slightly and quickly walks out past her.)*

\*

LOUISE

*(Walks toward Erna.)*

Has something happened?

ERNA

*(Collects herself.)*

No ... oh no ... nothing. I just got so frightened ... I thought Mr. Alland had left ... and then he was standing there right inside the door. *(With an effort to laugh.)* That sleepyhead up there really managed to make me nervous with her constant chatter. *(Quickly to Lilly.)* Why didn't you come right away?

LILLY

I thought Viggo was here.

ERNA

Viggo, Viggo! I don't want you running around that way!

LILLY

Why, you said yourself ...!

LOUISE

What's the matter with you? You're so tense.

ERNA

*(Strokes her brow.)*

I'm nervous. It feels as if every fiber in my body were twitching.

LOUISE

*(Walks over and takes her around the waist, leads her to the chaise longue, makes her sit down, and pats her on the head, calming her.)* There, there. My poor little superwoman.

ERNA

*(Gets up)*

Just never mind. *(To Lilly.)* Well, did you get to tell him good-bye?

LILLY

Which "him"?

ERNA

Don't tell me that! There's only one. Well?

LILLY

No.

ERNA

Then he'll probably come here again?

LILLY

*(Fights back tears.)*

I don't know.

ERNA

Of course he will.

LOUISE

*(Walks over to Lilly.)*

Is it so hard to part?

LILLY

It will feel so empty, so terribly empty.

LOUISE

*(Takes her head between her hands and kisses her on the forehead.)*

II.

**A June Day in Paris**

*The same studio, but several pieces of furniture, some new. Drapes in front of the doors. Some small Japanese lanterns hanging down from the ceiling. On the coffee table a vase with roses. On a small table at the side of the chaise longue a formal portrait of Alland.*

*Louise, in an elegant new Parisian gown, greets the concierge, who has just stepped in.*

THE CONCIERGE

Today is the twenty-second of June, and on the first of July the studio --

LOUISE

I'll rent it for a month -- two months, or three, if need be.

THE CONCIERGE

No, no less than a year, I told you that the other day.

LOUISE

*(Looks around. To the concierge.)*

Six months -- I'll rent it for six months.

THE CONCIERGE

A whole year or not at all. The new tenant is waiting for an answer, and he's offering me money on the table -- money on the table.

LOUISE

So am I.

THE CONCIERGE

Then you'll get preference.

LOUISE

I can pay half now and the other half the first of September. I don't have so much money at my disposal just now.

THE CONCIERGE

Till the first of September I can wait. But you will pay me a little for all these extras, no?

LOUISE

If you let me have everything I want, and --

THE CONCIERGE

*(With a wink.)*

One is discreet. One has seen the world. *(Nods.)* It no doubt pleases you, not to have to deal with any ordinary imbecile?

LOUISE

*(Impatiently.)*

Yes, yes ...

THE CONCIERGE

Good! I have been very happy with you, so you shall have your studio. And Monsieur Alland is also an excellent gentleman, a really distinguished gentleman.

LOUISE

*(Goes to the cupboard, takes out a bunch of bills, and counts.)*

THE CONCIERGE

And if there should be anything else with shopping, minding things or such, I am always at your service.

LOUISE

*(Gives her the money.)*

There! That's right, I believe.

THE CONCIERGE

Quite right. I shall write a receipt.... Yes, then there's the furniture, the furniture that your brother rented. It is also free the first of July.

LOUISE

We'll have to discuss that later.

THE CONCIERGE

Good. You can have everything agreeable to your own taste. *(Leaves.)*

LOUISE

*(Remains standing and stares out into the air.)*

Oh, it's insane, insane! But it's all I can do.

THE CONCIERGE

*(Re-enters.)*

Now they're here again. She, the painter and her sister. What --

LOUISE

Let them come in.

THE CONCIERGE

Good. I'm always thinking of your best interest ... never let any person enter without saying first that you are not at home.

LOUISE

*(Distracted.)*

Yes, I know...

THE CONCIERGE

I do this out of pure friendship -- God in heaven knows -- of pure friendship for you and the handsome gentleman .... Yes, well, do not be angry, after all, a person has also been young once, though it is no longer evident ... but I remember how things were in any case! *(Runs out.)*

\*

LOUISE

*(With subdued passion.)* Oh, God in heaven, where is he! What have I done! Why doesn't he come .... *(Erna and Lilly from the entryway.)*

ERNA

What news the post brought. (*Extending an open letter to Louise.*) Read!

LOUISE

(*Reads, preoccupied.*)

I don't understand.

ERNA

Don't you see -- I got a fellowship?

LILLY

(*Radiant.*)

Nine thousand crowns! Well -- that is, *three* thousand for three years!

LOUISE

(*Dully.*)

Congratulations, Erna dear.

LILLY

And I get to stay!

ERNA

I didn't promise that.

LILLY

Oh, and you would have the heart to send me home.

ERNA

It's probably best that you leave with Louise.

LOUISE

I'm staying on -- for some time yet.

ERNA

You said you couldn't afford to?

LOUISE

I can probably make do a bit longer.

LILLY

That's right! You have cash -- you just have to write to the bank person at home there -- (*clasps her hands*). I'm so glad! Now we're going to live it up!

ERNA

(*Harshly.*)

Live, yes... Why, Louise has withdrawn from us all ....

LILLY

(*Puts her arm around Louise's waist.*)

Yes, but now we're going to draw her out again!

LOUISE

(*To Erna.*)

How can you say that?

ERNA

*(Walks about the room aimlessly.)*

Your door is always closed to your friends these days. *(Stops short when she becomes aware of Alland's portrait.)*

LOUISE

I'm often at the theater. . . and then I have my French lessons.

ERNA

*(Looks at the portrait.)*

What's the name of your teacher?

LOUISE

*(Falls silent, embarrassed.)*

LILLY

*(To Louise.)*

You know what! I got a letter from Viggo.

LOUISE

*(Coolly.)*

Really.

ERNA

Sixteen pages! What a lot of nonsense they must contain!

LILLY

Oh, fie. *(Walks to the window, takes out the letter and buries herself in its contents.)*

ERNA

*(To Louise.)*

How things have changed here! So many new things in the junky old attic. You're certainly squandering an awful lot of money? Well, don't be offended, my young friend. . . . You know, I'm used to being everybody's guardian.

LOUISE

*(Turns away.)*

ERNA

Were you really offended?

LOUISE

No.

ERNA

Because it doesn't bother me, what you are and aren't. *(Looks around for Lilly.)* There she goes, reading that blessed letter from that blessed guy again. Lord Almighty! That's the fourth time.

LILLY

It is not! There's just something I was going to check.

ERNA

I see you're "checking" on all sixteen pages!

LILLY

Be quiet! It was just the thing I was going to tell Louise about, that Viggo got a publisher for his stories and hopes to be able to become a regular correspondent here and...

ERNA

*(Imitates her.)*

... and ... and... and! Yes, one "hopes" for so much that never happens.

LILLY

What kind of mood are you in today?

ERNA

Oh yes, well. One can't always be soft as silk.

LILLY

*(Sweetly insinuating.)*

But when you got a fellowship!

ERNA

Why, I'm glad. But go up to the studio, in case your idol should come. He promised to help out with the shopping and such .... *(to Louise)* ... because we're going to have some fellowship festivities, believe me. We just came to ask you to grace them with your presence.

LOUISE

Thanks ... I don't know for sure if I can ...

ERNA

*(To Lilly.)*

Hurry now, because if no one is home, he'll be angry and go away.

LILLY

But you'll probably be along shortly, won't you?

ERNA

Yes, yes.

LILLY

-- because it's so strange being alone with a fellow who just sits and stares. *Nods to Louise and leaves.*

ERNA

*(Stations herself in front of Louise and fixes her gaze on her.)*

You're not going to go and get sick again, are you?

LILLY

How can you believe that?

ERNA

You look devastated ... pale and tormented. What is it? You've been crying ... well, there's no use trying to hide it. A person has seen these things before.

LOUISE

I've just had a hard time sleeping.

ERNA

Really, just that? Say, does Alland visit you often?

LOUISE

Not so often really.... Sometimes. These last days it hasn't been much, for that matter. Of course, I'm not home very often.

ERNA

You don't have much practice yet, my friend.

LOUISE

What do you mean by that?

ERNA

In lying. You oughtn't stay here any longer.

LOUISE

Thanks, but....

ERNA

And how you've lost weight! I've seen that before!

LOUISE

But Erna now!

ERNA

I know, that's indelicate but forget about it. Alland is a killer. Watch out!

LOUISE

You don't know him.

ERNA

*(Passionately.)*

I know him through my best friend. He made life hell for her ... and then he threw her away.

LOUISE

That's not true. They broke up with each other. They had both got tired of it.

ERNA

Who said --

LOUISE

He told me about it.

ERNA

*(Vehemently.)*

*He* did? *(Controls herself.)* Well, that's true. It's part of his plan of attack. But he doesn't mention any names.... And he embellishes ... remember that he embellishes... *(slowly)* above all himself!

LOUISE

But how can you believe?

ERNA

*(With newfound self-control.)*

I met him outside here.

LOUISE

*(Happy.)*

Here! Outside?

ERNA

Yes, yes, yes. It looked as if he intended to come here, but when he caught sight of me, he went around the corner.

LOUISE

He sometimes looks in, when he has errands in our neighborhood.

ERNA

Well, are you coming this evening?

LOUISE

Where?

ERNA

You don't even remember that five minutes ago I officially invited you!

LOUISE

*(Laughs.)*

Yes, yes -- of course I remember ... but I don't know ... maybe a little while ....

ERNA

Really! Thanks! (*Stares at her hard.*) Are you waiting for Alland?

LOUISE

He hasn't been here for ages ... and ...

ERNA

A few days, I should think. So that's ages, you mean?

LOUISE

Erna! You mustn't get angry if I ask you to leave me now.

ERNA

Lord help us. (*Hurries out.*)

\*

(*Louise walks restlessly around in the studio; arranges her hair, sits down, takes a book and tries to read. Shortly thereafter Alland enters.*)

ALLAND

(*In from the vestibule, walks up and kisses her on the forehead.*)

LOUISE

Finally! I thought you would never come again.

ALLAND

(*Dryly.*)

One should be wary of habits.

LOUISE

Have you been angry with me?

ALLAND

No ... But I've come to meet *you*. Your friends ...

LOUISE

Why, I've withdrawn from them all.

ALLAND

The last time it was crowded here. (*Coolly.*) For that matter, what difference does it make if I come or not?

LOUISE

(*Praying, as she folds her hands.*)

Come ... the way you did before!

ALLAND

(*Looks at her and laughs.*)

I never share with anybody!

LOUISE

(*Fights back tears.*)

These days have been so terrible.

ALLAND

There now! I'm here now and ... Well, just look here! A new dress. Is that for my sake?

LOUISE

No ... yes ... *(laughs)* ... yes.

ALLAND

You've had a different expression in your eyes lately, for some time. And you've learned to laugh.

LOUISE

*(Casts her eyes down at his scrutinizing gaze.)*

ALLAND

Still black...? I mean the dress! Well, it's beautiful in any case. But it could use some flowers to go with it. *(Takes some roses from the vase on the table and fastens them at her shoulder.)* There, that helps already. You, who are so slender and fine, you should look like a fairy-tale princess, if you were veiled in gauze and lace. Do you know, that you look young? And happy?

LOUISE

The world has never looked as splendid as it does now. I'm pleased by everything in a totally different way than before: by the sun, by flowers, by the big beautiful city with the gray bridges and lanterns, all reflected in the river. Sometimes I think it will take my breath away.

ALLAND

Do you know too that you've become beautiful?

LOUISE

I wish I were. *You* certainly like those who are beautiful?

ALLAND

You I would surely like, even if you were ugly.

LOUISE

*(Lays her hand in his.)*

Thank you. That pleases me more than if you had called me beautiful.

ALLAND

What a strange one you are! A bird who has been sitting in a cage and has tried its wings but now has become free and started to chirp. *(Puts his arm around her shoulders and leads her up to a mirror.)* See for yourself! Do you think you're the same person as when you came?

LOUISE

All my acquaintances also say I've grown young.

ALLAND

You see! Take a seat there and let me be your lady's maid. *(She sits down on the chair in front of the mirror, and he loosens her hair.)* Where is your comb? What beautifully wavy hair you have. Look how it falls over your brow, light and fine. And this hair you torture, pulling it back. It should be done up like this ... and this way ... and so! Well? Isn't it becoming?

LOUISE

*(Gets up and looks in the mirror.)*

Yes.

ALLAND

May I please be excused in the future from seeing that awful cloister coiffure?

LOUISE

Yes.

ALLAND

I like you this way. *(Bends her back and kisses her.)*

LOUISE

And I'm glad.

ALLAND

Then put your arms around my neck. Of your own free will. Show me you've grown since we met, that you're a free being who dares to feel totally and dares to follow her nature.

LOUISE

*(Gets up hesitantly.)*

ALLAND

*(Looks into her face and smiles.)*

Louise!

LOUISE

*(Puts her arms around his neck.)*

Of course, it's the only thing possible ... and yet I'm afraid of saying it ... *(smiling a little)* to you.

ALLAND

*(Embraces her.)*

A devoted little woman. Can you also be strong?

LOUISE

Why should I be strong? After all, I have you.

ALLAND

But when you don't have me any more?

LOUISE

Not ... What do you mean?

ALLAND

Why, I've told you that love doesn't last forever.

LOUISE

*(Draws back.)*

ALLAND

*(Sadly.)*

You too will hate me one day.

LOUISE

Never.

ALLAND

*(Gently.)*

What do you know about that? If you were floating on a plank in the ocean, alone with me, and it came down to one of us having to die, you would sink your teeth and nails into me. Such is life -- that's how you are, that's how we all are.

LOUISE

You mustn't say such nasty things.

ALLAND

Where do you think that love is, that bends its head in silence and dies?

LOUISE

*I would rather die than hurt you.*

ALLAND

You don't know that ... until you stand there empty-handed.

LOUISE

Empty-handed? After ...

ALLAND

Happiness.

LOUISE

You frighten me.

ALLAND

I don't want you to come to me with a blindfold over your eyes.

LOUISE

I don't understand you. I thought just now ... Now I don't know what to think ....

ALLAND

Then look at me! (*He bends down in front of her and captures her gaze.*) What do you see?

LOUISE

(*Blushes, embarrassed.*)

ALLAND

My eyes don't lie. But I never tie myself down and never tie others down. *That* is what I want you to understand.

LOUISE

Oh ... it is ...

ALLAND

It's freedom ... happiness ... life ... for you, who have never lived.

LOUISE

That life I don't *want* to live.

ALLAND

That is to say, you don't *dare*? Well ... yes, follow your nature!

(*Walks silently back and forth.*)

LOUISE

*(Beseeching.)*

Don't be angry.

ALLAND

When you are a coward?

LOUISE

It is not cowardice.

ALLAND

Is it disgust then?

LOUISE

No ... but ... to speak about love and not give it for life ... ohh!

ALLAND

I *never* talk about love. When it's there, it shines from my eyes, streaming out of my being. *You* want words and assurances. You want me to swear by the stars in heaven that I will love you forever.

LOUISE

No! No oaths would be necessary; the intent -- the honest will would suffice.

ALLAND

I have the strongest intention of living, the most honest will to cling fast to life ... but I'm not capable of adding one second to its length. That's how it is with love too.

LOUISE

You don't understand me.

ALLAND

That's what you women always say ....

LOUISE

Let's talk about something else -- let things be the way they were.

ALLAND

Between us things will never be as before. Either more or less. It is you who will decide.

LOUISE

Without your friendship I cannot live.

ALLAND

Self-deception! Women spoil everything with their lies. *(Takes his hat.)*

LOUISE

*(Beseeching.)*

Stay a while longer.

ALLAND

Just don't look so solemn. I'll be glad to stay, if you like. But it will be painful to both of us. (*He takes a seat and puts his hat away; in silence regards her changing facial expressions and speaks in a subdued tone.*) It's not me you're struggling against; it's yourself. Look how artificiality clamps its hands around nature's throat, to strangle it! I'm not going to move a finger.

LOUISE

(*Clenches her hands together.*)

Why are you so bitter? My dear! Be nice! Talk to me the way you did before ....

ALLAND

What shall I talk about? (*In a conversational tone.*) I'm going to tell you a story. Sit down there; don't be afraid. I never try to appropriate for myself what's not given freely. You could travel around the world with me without risk. I would not lay a finger on you, not come one hair's breadth closer to you than this.

LOUISE

(*Shyly.*)

It sounded so pretty when you called me Louise.

ALLAND

Why should I be on familiar terms? We're not in a relationship with each other. We are two people unknown to each other as you've decided yourself. But perhaps you don't care about my story?

LOUISE

Yes, oh yes.

ALLAND

*(Joking a bit, but with an undertone of seriousness.)*

It's about me, of course. Artists who have stopped developing or regressed, and men who start getting old always talk about themselves. Have you noticed that?

LOUISE

Oh....

ALLAND

I am about to model a bust of a lady. She looks good -- really ugly women never turn to me. Word has it, namely, that I never embellish ....

LOUISE

There are probably enough of that kind of sculptor, who embellish ... and surely they're cheaper.

ALLAND

*(Smiling a little.)*

Do you think so? Well ... well. The woman I'm working on now has one of these faces that – it's difficult to capture its likeness precisely because its appeal lies in the expression, in the nuances, in the play of life more than its features. She is so exceptionally, soulfully beautiful; when one speaks with her, one feels the quivering in the nervous system, that peculiar, secretive attraction that certain women possess ... and know they possess.

LOUISE

*(Instinctively moves farther away.)*

ALLAND

Immediately I thought it was a pity about her; she was so alone. Her husband is a Hungarian magnate who lives only for horses and racing. He is incredibly rich, has a dozen mistresses, and neglects his wife.

LOUISE

Although she is beautiful.

ALLAND

His taste might be in a different genre ... For that matter, the attraction of beauty does not last forever ....

LOUISE

Well ... but what about her?

ALLAND

She is an aristocrat of the spirit and proud -- a lady of the world in every fiber of her beautiful body. She has a court of admirers but finds them insipid and empty -- plays with them as with puppies ... discards them, or scolds them when they tire her. She is quite free of prejudice, but loves none of them .... And she longs for someone to love, for her life is impoverished in the midst of the affluence.

LOUISE

*(With effort.)*

Have you known her long?

ALLAND

It's as if we'd been together for years already. How pale you are! Don't you feel well?

LOUISE

Yes, perfectly.

ALLAND

Women such as her have an incredible power over me. This perfect clarity and consciousness, at once free and cool -- chaste ... She has all the prestige of the nobility of spirit and birth.

Generations of refinement are in her blood. Just to see how she dresses -- oh! Now I like a lady to dress well. But you despise it.

LOUISE

*(With rising anguish.)*

No -- I don't despise it.

ALLAND

It feels as if she had begun to spin a net of silk around me -- I'll probably become her victim one day.

LOUISE

*(Has gotten up, but falters and grabs hold of the chair.)*

ALLAND

What is it? *(Looks into her face, smiling, and says in a changed tone.)* Oh my dear! Does it hurt so much, when the truth comes out? *(Lifts up her hand and kisses it.)*

LOUISE

*(Quickly jerks it away.)*

No! Oh ... you must think I'm very naive and stupid ... because I haven't lived in the great world like you ... but you are mistaken! I've seen through you. From the first moment. I wanted -- just wanted to know ... how Don Juan usually goes about it. Your conceit has made you blind -- you've fallen into my trap ....

ALLAND

In that case you forgot to set it....

LOUISE

*(Without listening to him.)*

For me it's been interesting to study the man of the world, the renowned artist and conqueror of women.... But you? What was *your* motive?

ALLAND

There is never more than one motive. But one mustn't slice it up. It's like sticking a knife into a songbird, putting it stuffed on a perch instead of letting it fly and sing!

LOUISE

What joy could you have from an insignificant creature? Why have you drawn me closer to you? I don't understand what you *want*.

ALLAND

*(Coolly.)*

I don't want anything. For me life is a river, and I glide along wherever events lead me.

I came to you person to person, open, full of confidence, without ulterior motives. I liked you from the start, gradually became warm and caressed you. It was as natural for me as breathing. You threw your arms around my neck and returned my caresses. But you thought only of collecting

erotic experience! You and your stern principles! Oh, fie, fie! *(Turns away with an expression of loathing.)*

LOUISE

*(Has seated herself on a chair, with her elbows on its back support; shades her eyes with her hand and weeps quietly.)*

ALLAND

*(Walks nervously back and forth.)*

I'm sorry for you, but I can't help it -- it's so disgusting. *(Stops in front of her.)* And like a conceited fool I've given you my picture. Now you don't have anything against my taking it back, do you?

LOUISE

*(Pleading, but without changing position.)*

No -- oh no, not *that!* Let me keep the picture, please!

ALLAND

*(Moved by the desperate expression in her voice.)*

Don't take it so hard!

LOUISE

*(As before.)*

Let me keep the picture.

ALLAND

Yes, yes.... But why couldn't you let it develop as it pleased, this thing between us? Couldn't it have been allowed to grow in peace? Why would you go and rip it up with the clumsy claws of reflection?

LOUISE

Yes, why, why....

ALLAND

Did you think that I didn't care for you? Because I told that story?

LOUISE

Yes.

ALLAND

And then you were ashamed that you hadn't rejected my caresses.

LOUISE

Yes, yes.

ALLAND

You're not qualified to understand a nature like mine. You want to measure me by pathetic philistine standards -- and it doesn't work. "Why? Why?" What small-minded suspicion! Do you think one sits and ponders why one kisses a woman? If it doesn't happen of its own accord, one doesn't do it.

LOUISE

I was so irked -- I - I don't understand myself....

ALLAND

Did you think that I would consider it immoral?

LOUISE

Yes.

ALLAND

One isn't, with those eyes, that brow, and that mouth. (*Touches her face lightly with his hand.*)

LOUISE

If you knew the circumstances in which I grew up, maybe you would understand ... and forgive.

ALLAND

Poor thing! Life has been hard on you ... and made you suspicious and bitter. (*Walks around the room silently.*) It was self-defense; you felt it as if I were going to inflict pain on you -- and your nature reacted. I ought to have understood it right away.

LOUISE

Yes, yes. I think ... I was afraid that you would become too deeply involved in my life.

ALLAND

(*Bends forward and sees her smiling into his eyes.*)

And now you no longer think that?

LOUISE

(*Smiles at him without answering.*)

ALLAND

*(Joking as he extends his hand in farewell.)* Then perhaps you will permit me to leave?

LOUISE

Oh, no ... stay a while longer.

ALLAND

I can't. *(Looks at the clock..)* The baroness has been waiting for me for an hour already. There won't be much work done today.

LOUISE

But if I beg you now --

ALLAND

Never ask me to do anything tactless to a lady!

LOUISE

Won't I get to see you any more today?

ALLAND

In any event, I won't promise you anything.

LOUISE

*(Beseeching.)*

Come back again!

ALLAND

*(Bows good-bye and kisses her hand.)*

*Au revoir! Possibly à bientôt! (Leaves.)*

\*

LOUISE

*(Looks after him through the window; then turns around and walks forward, raises her hand, regards it a moment tenderly and finally presses her lips to where he kissed it.)*

*(Outside is heard the sound of voices bickering: "I told you she isn't home!" "Calm down, you old fussbudget.")*

ERNA

*(Comes in from the right, followed by the concierge, who tries in vain to hinder her.)*

THE CONCIERGE

She forces her way in, this person. It does not help, what one says.

ERNA

I have something to speak with Miss Strandberg about.

THE CONCIERGE

Speak ... speak! When I say that the Miss is not at home.

ERNA

Why, she's standing there.

THE CONCIERGE

She's standing ... yes.

LOUISE

*(To the concierge.)*

Leave us alone.

THE CONCIERGE

*Mon Dieu!* I should permit the whole world to enter! *(Leaves.)*

ERNA

*(Extremely excited.)*

I have something to speak with you about.

LOUISE

Sit -- sit down, Erna dear!

ERNA

Thank you. *(Walks toward Louise and stands in front of her.)* I don't like to beat around the bush.

This is about Alland.

LOUISE

Alland?

ERNA

He just left here. I've been waiting for it.

LOUISE

*(Regards her inquiringly.)*

ERNA

You mentioned that he had spoken with you about a woman painter who --

LOUISE

Yes...yes...

ERNA

That was me. *(Long silence.)*

LOUISE

I know everything ... everything ... everything ...

ERNA

No. Perhaps you are familiar with it through *his* description, but ... it is very different from the reality.

LOUISE

He never lies!

ERNA

But he adds his own colors! Hypnotizes you into seeing with *his* eyes and ... *(Forces herself to speak calmly.)* Did he tell you that they'd both tired of each other?

LOUISE

Yes.

ERNA

*He* grew tired! Not me. But I was the one who broke it up. I told him ... that it ... that it was over ... for me also.

LOUISE

Then the blame was yours and not his!

ERNA

I'm no beggar – I don't want charity from somebody whose love I possessed!

LOUISE

You knew from the beginning that it would end this way, didn't you?

ERNA

What good is it knowing! He takes your heart and soul! He entraps you in his train of thought. He lets you see so many qualities of true feeling and the refinement of the soul that in the end -- despite everything -- you go and wrap yourself in dreams.

LOUISE

*(Casts down her eyes.)*

ERNA

*(Grasps her hand.)*

Go home, Louise!

LOUISE

I can't.

ERNA

*(Looks at her inquiringly.)*

LOUISE

No. There is nothing between us ... nothing.

ERNA

I know that he often comes to you. If there is nothing today, there will be tomorrow. He is a parasite ... he never lets go voluntarily. Rip him out, before he sinks his teeth into your heart! Leave!

LOUISE

It's not -- it's not the way you think. I'm strong enough never to let him get closer to me than I want.

ERNA

You are weaker than I am ....

LOUISE

I don't dare to travel. I know that my longing to see him -- just to see him and hear him speak -- would overwhelm me then.

ERNA

Do you think it's better to stay?

LOUISE

Yes.

ERNA

You are a child. You don't know what you're doing.

LOUISE

*(Looks into her eyes.)*

Oh yes. I do know what I'm doing.

ERNA

You think you're strong ... because you resisted once perhaps! It will come again -- tempting ... luring. And in the end he will force the confession out of you ... with torture, if necessary. *(Imitates Alland's voice and manner; not caricatured but dreaming and gentle.)* “Don't be afraid. Either out of free will or not at all. ... Let's talk about something else....”

“I've started to work. I don't know how it happens but work always brings me such a strong lust for happiness ... for love. I become absolutely defenseless -- a woman can capture me by reaching out her hand ....”

“I'm working now on the bust of a princess. She's rich and beautiful -- the prince neglects her.

“Women such as her have an indescribable power over me. She is absolutely unprejudiced, but so generous and fine. The one she loves will be a happy man.

“I'll probably become her victim one day....”

LOUISE

*(Has turned away, struggling with her emotions.)*

He's a master at twisting the knife in a wound. You think you will die from the pain. You start to believe in your power to hold onto him, despite his own assurances. But one never holds onto him. He is slippery as an eel. You might scratch him till he bleeds. But you can never hold him back!

LOUISE

Has he told you that? The thing about the princess -- that he was sculpting?

ERNA

*(Nods, darkly.)*

I have reason to remember it. It was after I gave in.

LOUISE

Do you also think it was true ... the thing ...

ERNA

He always has some little princess that he's sculpting. And he knows how to use her. He makes her into the decoy in his pursuit of women. I understood it later. I've gone through his plan in my mind step by step ... afterwards one is always so wise. I could have torn my hair out in shame over having let myself be taken by surprise. But it was no surprise. There was nothing else I could do. The thought that someone else would receive those caresses he had just given me ... that thought burned like fire. And I knew that I *had to choose* -- either to become his completely or also to give him up completely. I could not give him up. *(Subdued and soft, but with an intonation filled with happy memories.)* And so it happened.

LOUISE

*(Puts her arm around her waist.)*

You were happy?

ERNA

*(Leans her head against her shoulder.)*

Yes. It was the loveliest time of my life. *(Some seconds' silence; then she tears herself loose.)* No, no! It's not true. It's an accident. It's shame and degradation. He offers enough caresses -- more than enough -- but not the secure devotion one thirsts for. His hunger for women makes him unreliable. He's so little! He's so foolish in all his greatness. And compared to us women he has no conscience.

LOUISE

I have never seen you as beautiful as just now -- in that second. You *have* been happy -- very happy.

ERNA

I've suffered all the agony of hell! You don't know what it's like seeing yourself rejected.

LOUISE

I think one should always have the memory left. And then I think that such a memory would shed light over the rest of one's entire life.

ERNA

The memory! No. It does not shed light. On the contrary! He has caressed fifty, sixty, a hundred women before us. And to all of us he has said, in the same charming voice: "You are good. I care for you."

LOUISE

Do you think the tone of voice always sounded equally genuine?

ERNA

Yes. That's exactly why it's so dangerous to listen to. He is a man of moods. All these women he has given a fraction of himself, an ounce of true feeling. That is why he has so little left. A few shavings that catch fire and die out.

LOUISE

Yes ... I ... I may have ... let our association for two continue much too long ... much too freely .... I have been weak ... I ought to have turned him away .... (*Switches to a different line of thought.*) He's probably right ... to choose. It won't last any longer.

ERNA

So you'll probably leave then?

LOUISE

I have to go away. I've never before known what temptation is ....

ERNA

And for the meantime you'll shut your door?

LOUISE

Yes, but not this evening. I can't part with him without saying good-bye. It would be much too difficult. But tomorrow ....

ERNA

Will you go?

LOUISE

I think so ....

ERNA

You don't know anymore what you want!

LOUISE

I can't leave without telling him how dear he has become to me.

ERNA

A dangerous experiment.

LOUISE

I think -- sometimes -- that he loves me ...

ERNA

I thought so too.

LOUISE

If he asked me now... to become his wife?

ERNA

Everybody has probably thought the same thing! But he never lets his feeling run away with his reason! He never ties himself down. "Everything withers." And when it's over, he kisses you gallantly on the hand and goes his way. Then you're alone ... alone ....

LOUISE

*(Shivers. )*

ERNA

Go home. Tear yourself loose. You are weaker than I ... and ... I know what I suffered. It was as if body and soul would be wrenched apart.

*(The tears have started running down her face, which is distorted with pain. She struggles with herself; then she raises her head, proud and defiant.)*

It's over now. And the pain has made me hard. I *was* humble. I looked up to him. I could have crept in the dust at his feet. No one puts up with that ... least of all him. Now I'm his equal. In Luxembourg my self-portrait hangs in the hall next to his own marble dream. The hate nurtured energy and the ability to work. When you can hate, you can also live.

LOUISE

*(Slowly.)*

I can't.

ERNA

That's unfortunate for you! So leave. Bury yourself in your niche at home there -- and forget.

LOUISE

Yes, yes. I want to go home! It feels as if I'd been locked up in an underground troll world where the light consists of flames and the joy consists of people's torture.

Perhaps there's salvation up there, where the sun is shining, the forest stands green, and the wind is blowing cold from the sea ....

\*

ALLAND

*(Comes in with his hat in hand. When he gets to see Erna, he bows coldly. With that, he walks up to Louise, takes her hand, and kisses it.)*

It didn't work out. And so here you have me now again.

LOUISE

Thanks! I scarcely thought that .... *(He looks over to Erna, who has retreated a couple steps back with her left hand against her breast, staring at Alland.)*

ALLAND

I don't know, if Miss Walldén knows me ... in any event she always rejects my greeting whenever I have the pleasure of meeting her ....

ERNA

*(Throws her head back, looks him defiantly in the eye; turns around and leaves.)*

ALLAND

*(Looks after her and speaks, slightly put off, but somewhat nervous.)*

There you see a woman who knows how wrap herself in the cloak of her dignity. *(Stares at Louise, who stands still, pale, and with eyes downcast.)* But what's the matter with you?

LOUISE

It's nothing ... it ... will no doubt pass ....

ALLAND

*(Clasps her hand.)*

Tell me... Has Miss Walldén ...? But then look at me at least! *(She opens up her eyes.)* Or have I hurt you in some way? Have I offended you?

LOUISE

If that were so -- what would you care?

ALLAND

*(Darkens.)*

Would I not care if I had offended you? What do you mean?

LOUISE

*(Passes her hand across her forehead.)*

Nothing -- oh, nothing. I'm just a little melancholy -- or sensitive, if you will ....

ALLAND

Why are you?

LOUISE

I'm probably that way by nature. You'd just find it ridiculous.

ALLAND

No, now I *want* to know.

LOUISE

It's just that I'm going to leave Paris.

ALLAND

Soon now?

LOUISE

Tomorrow.

ALLAND

Have you received some news from home?

LOUISE

No.

ALLAND

But why .... (*Bends forward toward her; subdued.*) Is it on account of *me*?

LOUISE

Yes.

ALLAND

Do you think -- that I could be dangerous for you?

LOUISE

(*Sits quietly with downcast eyes.*)

ALLAND

(*Cheerfully.*)

You're an odd creature! Not a woman, not a child -- nothing.

LOUISE

I am a woman who is starting to age.

ALLAND

Coquette! You know that you're young, look young, feel young! But not like a woman.

LOUISE

*(Is silent.)*

ALLAND

Aren't I right?

LOUISE

No.

ALLAND

You cannot love.

LOUISE

Am not allowed to. Don't want to.

ALLAND

Do you think love *cares* whether you're allowed to or want to?

LOUISE

No. Unfortunately!

ALLAND

*(Throws his arms around her and presses her to him.)*

Now you are mine!

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

No. *(Puts her arms around his neck, closes her eyes, and snuggles her head to his chest.)*

ALLAND

Your entire being says yes. Every nerve in your body, every drop of your blood!

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

No. I'm afraid. It's against -- against my nature, my upbringing, my principles.

ALLAND

Women never know what they want. In *that* respect at least you're a woman. *(Frees himself.)* Oh well ... as you please! You northerners are not born under the star of Romeo and Juliet.

LOUISE

*(With tears in her eyes.)*

Don't be harsh. It hurts me. We're going to part now. Or ... do you want me to stay? I'll do whatever you want, just not this one thing.

ALLAND

Halfway! No. Then it's better that you leave.

LOUISE

*(Whining.)*

I've been so happy. The sunshine entered the room with you. There was a jubilation within me, as if all the birds in heaven had been let loose. When you were gone there was no joy in the world, when you were with me sorrow and melancholy were very far away, as if they could no longer reach me. You see how I've become these days, when I haven't got to see you. It's as if I'd go crazy or die. What's the good of talking about friendship and good will. I love you, and that misfortune is incurable.

ALLAND

Is it a misfortune to love?

LOUISE

It feels that way.

ALLAND

Time always teaches us to forget.

LOUISE

Not me. It's too deep.

ALLAND

*(Amiably, as he bends down toward her.)*

Poor thing! It saddens me about you. I have difficulty understanding it ... your nature is so unlike mine. But I think you are truthful, and I'm going to help you. I'm not going to think about myself.

You're going away. You're not up to the life out here. You are too delicate. Go home and get married, live a still and quiet life that suits your nature and your upbringing.

LOUISE

I can't.

ALLAND

You mustn't be weak. You shouldn't stay here ....

LOUISE

*(Looks up at him.)*

You're so good. That's exactly why it's so difficult.

ALLAND

*(Smiling a bit.)*

Me good? You're the first one to say that.

LOUISE

No one who loved you?

ALLAND

No one.

LOUISE

I know it. You are good. You deserve to be happy.

ALLAND

One never gets what one deserves in this life.

LOUISE

You haven't got to know me. I've been so moved by your superiority -- that I haven't been able to speak.

ALLAND

I thought you had seen my weaknesses mainly. I've never tried to hide them.

LOUSIE

That's exactly why I've seen your greatness all the more clearly ....

ALLAND

Don't you think it's true then, what people say: that I've regressed?

LOUISE

No.

ALLAND

*(Energetically.)*

I'll prove you right!"

LOUISE

*(Grips his hands.)*

Do! Do!

ALLAND

Can it really interest you, whether or not I succeed?

LOUISE

Oh! You don't know me.

ALLAND

*(Looks at her face and speaks slowly....)*

No. You are deeper than I ever realized. *(Walks up to her, takes her head between his hands, and kisses her on the forehead.)* Good-bye. Thank you! Think of me sometime.

LOUISE

Always, always!

ALLAND

*(Looks her in the eyes.)*

Happy? I wonder if I could be ... calm and quiet that way, like other people. I think so sometimes. I don't require so much. But the woman I could live together with -- for good -- must be infinitely gentle, precisely because I myself am so restless and nervous .... *(Falls silent a moment; then adds slowly.)* I haven't met many women like that in my life.

LOUISE

*How many?*

ALLAND

Two.

LOUISE

That was one too many.

ALLAND

*(Takes her hand and kisses it; leaves.)*

LOUISE

*(Turns around and watches him; then she sinks down and bursts into tears.)*

**III.**

**A Rainy July Day in a Small Swedish Town**

A living room with a low ceiling. Two windows with small panes, draped by white curtains. On the window sills fuchsias, geraniums, and cactus are blooming. In the wall facing the windows are doors to the kitchen and dining room; in the background a third door, to a vestibule with white-washed walls and a tile floor strewn with juniper.

Old-fashioned furniture, stiffly arranged. White covers over the sofa and the chairs. In front of the sofa stands an empty coffee table with a white cover. Home-woven rugs cross the floor.

LOUISE

*(In a cotton dress, she sits by one of the windows with her elbows on the sill looking out.)*

BOTILDA

*(Comes from the kitchen with coffee cups on a tray; arranges them carefully and symmetrically on the table.)*

LOUISE

*(Without turning around.)*

Does it always rain like this?

BOTILDA

Dear girl, you must know, don't you, that it does. It *always* rains when the hay is standing out in the fields.

LOUISE

It hasn't been sunny a single day since I came home. Not a single day has the street looked different from what it does now.

BOTILDA

No, how should it look? Why, it looks the way it usually does.

LOUISE

As usual! Yes, that's just it --

BOTILDA

If a person didn't go off on a trip for any other reason but to grow dissatisfied with everything a person has, then she could just as well stay at home.

LOUISE

It's true, Botilda. One always ought to stay at home. (*Gets up.*) What day is it today?

BOTILDA

Lord, she asks questions! Why, it's her birthday.

LOUISE

Yes, but what day of the week?

BOTILDA

You know, don't you, Miss, that it's Wednesday. Why, it's market day today.

LOUISE

Just think – it's only two weeks since I've been home. I came on a Wednesday, didn't I?

BOTILDA

Yes.

LOUISE

*(Absently.)*

Two weeks! Like two decades. It's as if life had fallen asleep -- were standing still dying ... and the dust covers over everything.

BOTILDA

Heavens, a person ought to be able to keep the dust off.

LOUISE

*(Sinks down into the sofa, puts her arms on the table, and bursts into tears.)*

BOTILDA

But dear child, think what you're doing! That tablecloth is clean! *(Smooths it out with her apron.)*

LOUISE

*(Gets up, walks back and forth; dries her eyes, but without managing to hold back the tears.)*

BOTILDA

*(Stands looking at her.)*

I don't know what's got into her, since she came back from that confounded Paris. She's not like herself.

LOUISE

No.

BOTILDA

She doesn't have to go off and be like Agnes!

LOUISE

Then I'd rather die.

BOTILDA

Don't toss such big words around at Our Lord! A body can certainly stay here as long as He pleases.

LOUISE

*(Has seated herself by the window staring out.)*

BOTILDA

The poor dear, she shouldn't be crying on her birthday. It's a bad sign.

LOUISE

I can't help it.

BOTILDA

She's doing just fine. Everybody thinks she's kind and sweet. *(Secretively.)* Can you guess, Miss, what I saw this morning, when I went to market?

LOUISE

No.

BOTILDA

It was only six o'clock, but the bank manager was already out in his garden ... and can you guess what he was doing?

LOUISE

No.

BOTILDA

Picking flowers. For a really nice package .... A person knows all right where *that* was heading!

LOUISE

The bank manager is always kind!

BOTILDA

Oh, believe me! He no doubt has good reason! (*A train whistle is heard.*)

LOUISE

The train is here.

BOTILDA

There's sure to be a huge herd of livestock. Big cattle market, if you'd like to know. Squire Svensson is in with all three colts.... (*Walks to the window.*) My, all those people! The squire at Tjellmo --

and the preacher in Vallby -- and Knutson, the surveyor! But who's that young gentleman he's walking with?

LOUISE

*(Getting up happily.)*

Viggo! No, look, Viggo! *(Waves out with her handkerchief.)*

BOTILDA

Yes, believe me, if it isn't Viggo! I almost didn't recognize him! He's in such a hurry! Well, now I'll have to go out and put the coffee back on, so he can get something warm in him! *(Hurries busily out into the kitchen.)*

LOUISE

*(Walks to the door and opens it.)*

VIGGO

*(Comes into the vestibule.)*

LOUISE

*(Extends her hand to him.)*

Viggo! You're here!

VIGGO

Good day. And happy birthday! *(Takes off his long traveling coat, puts galoshes and umbrella in the vestibule, comes in and closes the door.)* There! Now I can give you a proper hello! *(Holds her hands in both of his and looks at her.)* How you've changed!

LOUISE

Do you think so too?

VIGGO

Is it Paris? Or the grief after your mother that made you that way ...?

LOUISE

That way?

VIGGO

Yes, that way .... larger, like...more womanly than before?

LOUISE

Come and sit down now. You must be tired after the trip?

VIGGO

Not one bit. It takes a lot more to make me tired.

LOUISE

You probably need to rest at least, you as well as the rest of us.

VIGGO

Not yet. I'm traveling on with the one o'clock train.

LOUISE

You're *traveling*? Where to?

VIGGO

*(Happily.)*

To Paris. I got a little money for my book, and then I have a newspaper to write for. So I hope to be able to make something of myself.

LOUISE

*(Subdued.)*

I thought you were going to stay here now.... *(Gets tears in her eyes.)*

VIGGO

*(Strokes her hair.)*

Now, now. Don't be sad about it!

\*

BOTILDA

*(Comes from the kitchen with the coffee tray.)*

VIGGO

Well, good day, Botilda.

BOTILDA

*(Curtsies.)*

Thank you. And then good day again! Well, that was a pleasure and a surprise on her birthday! *(Sets the tray on the table, dries her hand on her apron and extends it, curtsying.)* Welcome, a person should say! And please, now have a cup of coffee. I was thinking it might be a good thing, for a person who has been traveling a long ways.

VIGGO

Thank you, thanks. (*Serves himself.*) That will be really fine, believe me .... So ... how are things here otherwise?

BOTILDA

Thanks for asking, an old biddy like me is not so bad off, you know. But see, the Miss ... she really isn't quite the way she ought ... (*to Louise*) ... Well, she'll have to excuse me for telling it the way it is ... and that's why it surely was a good thing that Mr. Viggo came, because if *that* doesn't cheer her up, I don't know of anything ....

LOUISE

We don't get to keep him, at all. He's leaving on the one o'clock train.

BOTILDA

My Lord, then what's up. With such a big hurry?

VIGGO

(*Laughing.*)

Nothing ... but I'm going to Paris.

BOTILDA

You're going there now again?

VIGGO

(*Nods.*)

BOTILDA

If I could understand what's so remarkable about that town!

VIGGO

Oh yes ... what's remarkable about it is that you always long to return again.

LOUISE

*(Slowly)*

So it is ...

BOTILDA

Then a person never ought to go there! Wouldn't you like more coffee, sir?

VIGGO

No, thank you.

BOTILDA

Then I'll take it back out, to keep it warm .... I thought they would come any minute.

VIGGO

Who?

BOTILDA

Heavens! There's a birthday here in the house ... though it doesn't show on the Miss! *(Takes the coffee kettle and Viggo's cup, brushes off the tablecloth and goes out into the kitchen.)*

VIGGO

*(Grasps Louise's hand.)*

Tell me now, what it is.

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

Nothing, Viggo, nothing.

VIGGO

Has your confidence run out?

LOUISE

People are coming ....

*(Noise is heard from the vestibule. Mrs. Knutson opens the door, and she and Miss Knutson are seen in the process of removing their galoshes and wraps.)*

\*

MRS. KNUTSON

We better not bring that deluge into the house. Put the umbrellas in the corner, Agneta.... Lend me your handkerchief, so I can dry off the paper wrapping on the bouquet.... it's all soaked....

*(Louise has got up and gone to meet the guests. Mrs. Knutson and Miss Knutson step in with bouquets of flowers in their hands.)*

MRS. KNUTSON

Good day, Louise dear! Do let me congratulate you! *(Extends the bouquet.)* What a terrible rain.

MISS KNUTSON

Congratulations! *(Extends her bouquet.)*

LOUISE

Thank you, thank you.

MRS. KNUTSON

And look at The Author. Come on account of her birthday, of course! Well, that's nice. *(Extends her hand.)*

MISS KNUTSON

*(Also extends her hand.)*

LOUISE

Please come in, Auntie. *(Goes to the kitchen door and gives an order to Botilda.)*

MRS. KNUTSON

*(Takes a seat on the sofa. Miss Knutsson sits down on a chair at the table.)*

Well, Mr. Author, coming from the big wide world -- what's new?

VIGGO

Nothing I know of! Terrible rain!

MRS. KNUTSON

Well, that's nothing new exactly. Here in our parts it's been absolutely awful .... The hay is standing out in the fields ... and God knows when it will be brought in.

MISS KNUTSON

We were supposed to have a little hiking party in the woods last Saturday, but in weather like this, naturally, it had to be called off.

VIGGO

Yes, of course.

*(Botilda comes with a coffee kettle; curtsies.)*

MRS. KNUTSON

*(Graciously.)*

Good day, Botilda.

MISS KNUTSON

Good day, Botilda.

LOUISE

May I serve you, Aunt?

MRS. KNUTSON

Thank you, my child, thanks.

*(The Misses Svensson, Jonsson, and Tornström come in from the vestibule, all with bouquets of flowers in their hands; they say hello.)*

Good day, Louise, dear! Congratulations!

LOUISE

*(Walks toward them, says hello and accepts the bouquets.)*

Thank you, thank you, Gerda. Thanks, Hanna, thank you, Sofi. Please do come in! A cup of coffee? *(Serves them.)*

*(The Misses come in, greeting and curtsying.)*

MISS TORNSTRÖM

Good day, Mr. Pihl. We just heard that you'd come.

MISS JÖNSSON

Yes, we went by the shop and picked up Gerda, and they said there --

MISS SVENSSON

We scarcely recognized you in that long coat.

MRS. KNUTSON

*(Knowingly.)*

Oh -- I have my own thoughts about that ... *(The Misses Knutson and Jönsson nudge each other in the side and giggle discreetly. Miss Svensson blushes.)*

VIGGO

Miss Svensson says --

MRS. KNUTSON

That's just the way she talks. The whole town knows who appears on the first pages of her album.

MISS SVENSSON

*(Reproachfully.)*

Aunty!

MRS. KNUTSON

Why, I didn't say anything. But I assure you, Mr. Author, that gentleman callers -- there's no shortage of them for Gerda Svensson.

MISS TORNSTRÖM

How long are you going to stay in town, Mr. Pihl?

VIGGO

Till one o'clock.

MISS JÖNSSON

We heard that you were going to stay a month, Mr. Pihl.

MRS. KNUTSON

The young people are going to put on a little play, and you were going to play a part, Mr. Author.

VIGGO

I won't be hard to replace.

MRS. KNUTSON

*(Knowingly.)*

Don't say that!

MISS JÖNSSON

You were going to play --

VIGGO

The first lover?

MISS JÖNSSON

Yes. But to whom?

VIGGO

To you?

*(Giggles.)*

MRS. KNUTSON

Gerda Svensson is going to play the lead, of course.

VIGGO

Miss Svensson always does, naturally.

MISS SVENSSON

*(Blushes.)*

What do you mean by that?

VIGGO

You're the town prima donna.

MISS TORNSTRÖM

How sad Louise looks!

MRS. KNUTSON

Yes, it would be a pity to say anything else. Can't you find some way to cheer up your foster sister, Mr. Author? She really is awfully glum.

VIGGO

Well, Louise has never been one to be really happy....

MRS. KNUTSON

But now it's just as if she were bewitched. She's not herself.

MISS SVENSSON

No, we fuss over her in every way, but it doesn't help ....

LOUISE

I'm grateful you're so kind to me.

MRS. KNUTSON

Well, you don't need to search very far for folks who want to be nice to you! I know one gentleman who certainly isn't asking any more than a chance to look after you the rest of his life....

\*

THE BANK MANAGER'S LINA

*(Comes in with a large bouquet of flowers in her hand; bows to the company, walks up and hands the flowers to Louise.)*

I bring best regards from the bank manager and want to give you this. The manager has so many people at the bank that he can't come himself till they close.

LOUISE

Tell the bank manager hello and thank him.

LINA

Thank you, I will.

*(Curtseys to the company and leaves.)*

*(The Misses Knutson and Jönsson lean their heads together in whispering conversation. Mrs. Knutson and Miss Tornström exchange meaningful glances.)*

MRS. KNUTSON

The poor bank manager!

*(Giggles from the ladies.)*

LOUISE

Why do you say that, Aunty?

MRS. KNUTSON

Being forced to sit in the bank all afternoon!

LOUISE

Would you like a little more coffee, Aunty?

MRS. KNUTSON

No thank you, dear child. (*Benevolently.*) We'll see to it that there's a bit more coffee for the bank manager when he comes. He likes coffee a lot (*pats Louise on the hand*) ... especially when it's served by this little hand.

LOUISE

Wouldn't anyone like another drop? Gerda? Hanna? Sofi?

MISS TORNSTRÖM

(*Reaches out her cup.*)

Yes, thanks ... just a bit.

LOUISE

(*Serves her.*)

That's good of you.

MRS. KNUTSON

*I'll* have to be off. Knutson turns into a wild animal if the food isn't on the table at twelve o'clock.

(*Gets up.*) That's what it 's like being mistress of a household.

MISS KNUTSON

*(Gets up also.)*

Oh yes, but --

MRS. KNUTSON

You're right about that, my child. It also has its pleasures, Louise, my child. *(Reaches her hand out in good-bye.)* How old is it actually you'll be today ... if one may be so nosy as to ask?

LOUISE

Thirty-two.

MRS. KNUTSON

It's high time! *(Laughing.)* Good-bye, good-bye! Say hello to the bank manager! *(The other ladies get up too.)*

MISS KNUTSON

*(Reaches out her hand to Louise.)*

Good-bye, good-bye.

MISS JÖNSSON

*(Reaches out her hand.)*

Adieu, Louise! Say hello to ... *(Giggles.)*

MISS TORNSTRÖM

*(Still chewing.)*

Adieu, Louise.

MRS. KNUTSON

*(Extends her hand.)*

Good-bye, Mr. Author. Have a good trip!

VIGGO

*(Bows.)*

Thank you, thanks!

*(The other ladies press his hand, taking turns. The party troops out. Louise, who has been following them out into the vestibule, comes in again and closes the door behind her.)*

\*

VIGGO

Phew! *(Walks back and forth. Louise has settled down by the window again, staring out.)*

BOTILDA

*(Comes in from the left with a tray; clears the coffee table.)*

Goodness, what a bunch of flowers! I must say! And still she sits there again looking out as if she had sold the butter and dropped the money. Oh yes, it certainly pays to be friendly to her! *(Goes out into the kitchen.)*

VIGGO

How are things with you? Tell me now.

LOUISE

I scarcely know that myself ... I feel like a stranger, homeless here in my own home. I'm chilly.

VIGGO

You miss Paris?

LOUISE

Yes.

VIGGO

The void here stares at you from every corner. You've lived here surrounded by those dearest to you -- and now you're left alone.

LOUISE

It's not just that. The people are friendly to me, but ... it's as if I didn't belong here.... Everything they talk about is trivial to me, their interests seem small to me ... and their coarse manners irk me ....

VIGGO

You mean....

LOUISE

I mean their way of getting involved in other people's affairs ... their giggling, their clumsy allusions ... everything provokes me.

VIGGO

There must be somebody here you can associate with, isn't there?

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

It's as if the hair on my head had turned gray in these two weeks, and my heart had frozen to ice in my breast.

VIGGO

Tell me now, Louise!

LOUISE

There's an old tale about a maiden who became the bride of the mountain king. I remember it vaguely -- but I think she was bewitched by the luster of the troll's world; and once she had seen it, she constantly longed to go there again.

I'm like that maiden in the story -- blinded by the splendor of a world that isn't mine ....

VIGGO

Me too --

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

You are happy! A knight going off to fetch his bride.... I? What am I? A shadow, bound to another person's existence ... doomed to lead an independent and therefore unreal existence faraway from him ....

VIGGO

Why?

LOUISE

Because this feeling goes against my principles, my upbringing ... yes, against the peculiar qualities of my very nature.... Out there one gives his love for the moment -- not for life.

VIGGO

*(With tears in his eyes.)*

I understand ... and it's the entire cumulative longing of your life that has now come into bloom. It's developed in secret all through the years ... now that it's blooming, it has such deep roots through your being that it can never be torn away. Just withers and dies ... but when it withers, you yourself wither with it ....

LOUISE

Yes, Viggo, yes that's how it is!

VIGGO

And now nature conducts its life-and-death struggle ....

LOUISE

I no longer recognize myself in these quiet, low little rooms where the dust covers dress the furniture like white shrouds. Am I the one who's played and grown up here? Who believed in God and felt myself safe and strong, aware of my firm principles? Now they've all fallen to the gravel beneath my feet.

VIGGO

Think of yourself and your future!

LOUISE

There is no future. When I thought about staying here in the cold for good -- thought that years would come and go without my being able to see him ... to hear his dear voice ... that day would slip away after day without a letter bringing a message from him and me -- then I saw that the days and

the years would not seem to me to be worth living. For me there was neither joy nor beauty -- nothing but an endless void ....

Then I wrote. I don't know what. But between the lines trembled my fear of being forgotten.

VIGGO

How long ago was that?

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

I don't know if I waited a long time or a short one. I don't know if the days have lost their length or if they no longer come to an end ... time has become something formless .... I only know that the void is forever.

*(Silence.)*

And if he asks you to come?

LOUISE

I would obey him blindly ... even if he also asked for my life.

VIGGO

*(Passes his hand over her forehead.)*

I won't pain you with advice. Perhaps you will see things differently yourself when your nerves have calmed down. *(From the vestibule is heard noise of galoshes being taken off and an umbrella striking against the floor. Shortly afterward there is a knock on the door and bank manager Möller enters.)*

THE BANK MANAGER

*(Bows.)*

Unfortunately I wasn't able to come until now, but I am reluctant to deny myself the pleasure of being able to congratulate you on your birthday, Miss Louise.

LOUISE

*(Extends her hand to him.)*

Thank you for the flowers. It was kind of you.

THE BANK MANAGER

Oh, not at all, it -- *(Greets Viggo.)* Good day, Viggo Pihl! It will be a brief visit this time?

VIGGO

*(Greets him.)*

Yes.

THE BANK MANAGER

You must be disappointed that he's leaving so soon, Miss?

LOUISE

Naturally. But it was fun to see him anyway ....

THE BANK MANAGER

There probably will be a lot of folks on the train.

VIGGO

*(Looks at the clock.)*

And I have to make arrangements for my baggage. Perhaps it's time.

LOUISE

Already?

VIGGO

*(Looks into Louise's eyes.)*

Do you want me to stay?

LOUISE

Thank you, Viggo, thanks. But you should leave.

VIGGO

*(Takes her hand.)*

Farewell, then.

LOUISE

*(With tears in her eyes.)*

Farewell ... and ... say hello to Paris!

*(They shake hands.)*

THE BANK MANAGER

Have a good trip!

VIGGO

Thank you. *(Goes to the kitchen door, opens it, and calls out.)*

Adieu, Botilda. It's time to go.

\*

BOTILDA

*(Comes to the door, drying her hands on her apron.)*

Adieu. *(Catches sight of the bank manager and curtsies deeply.)* Oh, to think the bank manager has arrived, and Miss didn't say anything! I'm going to bring in the coffee now!

THE BANK MANAGER

Thanks, not on my account.

LOUISE

But can't I interest you in a glass of wine?

THE BANK MANAGER

Thanks...but.... To tell the truth ... the blood always goes to my head if I drink wine in the morning

....

VIGGO

*(In the meantime he has put on his coat, hat, and galoshes out in the vestibule, nodding in through the door once more.)*

Good-bye, good-bye!

LOUISE

Adieu, Viggo.

BOTILDA

*(Beaming.)*

Mr. Bank Manager, do sit for at least a moment and keep the Miss company, or she'll be bored out of her wits. *(Goes out into the kitchen.)*

\*

THE BANK MANAGER

Well, I'd be glad to stay awhile, if you don't mind, Miss.

LOUISE

How can you think that, Sir.

THE BANK MANAGER

Just be honest! You're probably very sorry that Viggo is leaving, aren't you Miss?

LOUISE

Yes. It feels so empty....

THE BANK MANAGER

*(Compassionately.)*

Can't I do something ... I mean --

*(A signal is heard from the station.)*

LOUISE

Now the train left.

THE BANK MANAGER

Yes.

*(Silence.)*

LOUISE

*(Tries to control herself.)*

Have there been many people at the bank today?

THE BANK MANAGER

Yes.

LOUISE

But now the work's done?

THE BANK MANAGER

Oh ... no. There is work enough for the whole afternoon -- thank goodness.

LOUISE

Do you like to work?

THE BANK MANAGER

It's the only thing that helps, when one's mood grows heavy.

LOUISE

*(Slowly)*

I wish that I had a position too.

**THE BANK MANAGER**

Your work ought to be making a home bright and happy, Miss.

**LOUISE**

*(Shakes her head.)*

I wish I had a man's job. I understand that it can help with sorrows and worries ... if you bury yourself in it, devote yourself to it completely. *(In her thoughts.)* Hour after hour! The figures line up in front of you on the paper ... the mind doesn't release them for one second ... and the time runs on, without your knowing where it went. When at last you're tired body and soul ... how lovely it must be then to lie down and sleep away from it all ... dreamless ... to gather energy for the next day's labor ....

**THE BANK MANAGER**

Don't talk that way! There's something so hopeless and broken in your tone of voice and eyes ....

*(Takes her hand.)* What's happened? What is it that's weighing on you? Don't you have confidence in your old friend any more, Miss Louise?

**LOUISE**

Oh yes, but ...

**THE BANK MANAGER**

Is it the grief? You're alone now in your old home, Miss Louise, and you need to get away from here -- into new circumstances.

LOUISE

Yes.

THE BANK MANAGER

*(Moves his chair closer.)*

Do you remember that summer, Miss Louise, when I saw you for the first time? You were a child and sat on my knee studying French ... sat there so securely, as if the place were yours and always would be. I was your "grown-up friend" ... there was no one you liked as well as me, you said ... and sometimes you threw your arms around my neck and kissed me ....

That was a long time ago now, but I remember it well. You grew up ... never again sat on my knee ... and surely forgot that I'd been her "grown-up friend" .... Me, I didn't forget it, I've been waiting for twenty years. It's not the first time I'm posing the question that I now repeat for the last time. Perhaps you think I'm too persistent? But you were so young the last time. I could very well understand that you wanted to look around the world first ....

Now you're alone in the world ... and have seen enough ... maybe more than enough ... of life out there. Now I am asking again: Will you be my wife?

LOUISE

*(Stares in front of her with eyes filled with tears.)*

THE BANK MANAGER

You shouldn't answer right away, but think about what I've said. After all, I'm not a young man anymore, and you're not an inexperienced young girl. But a friendship as old as ours has deep roots ... and twenty years of devotion, when it comes down to it, may be more solid grounds for marriage than the fleeting fancy of youth.

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head.)*

THE BANK MANAGER

This doesn't concern -- me. *I* can't imagine any greater joy on earth than being able to call you my wife, Louise. And I will never require more than the right ... with my devotion ... to provide that support which --

LOUISE

It can never happen.

THE BANK MANAGER

*(Gets up and begins to walk back and forth, dignified but struggling with his movements; stops in front of her again.)*

Is it .. *(straining)* -- someone else?

LOUISE

Yes.

THE BANK MANAGER

Then I beg your forgiveness, Miss, but -- *(with a tortured expression)* -- couldn't you have spared me this?

\*

THE MAILMAN

*(Knocks on the door, opens it, and hands over a letter.)*

Miss Louise Strandberg!

LOUISE

*(Hurries up and takes it; extremely excited.)*

THE MAILMAN

Good afternoon!

*(Leaves.)*

\*

LOUISE

*(Holds the letter in front of her, as if hesitant.)*

THE BANK MANAGER

I'm not keeping you from anything?

LOUISE

Oh ... no. But with your permission ....

*(Walks off to the window, breaks open the letter, and reads. Once she is reading, her cheeks take on color and the expression on her whole face is changed.)*

THE BANK MANAGER

*(After a moment.)*

I hope it's good news!

LOUISE

*(Turns around.)*

Oh ... sorry ... I forgot ....

THE BANK MANAGER

It was good news ... it shows.

LOUISE

*(Slow and serious but always with the same expression of subdued happiness.)*

Good or bad -- everything lies in the future's hands.

THE BANK MANAGER

*(Points to the letter.)*

That was the medicine.

LOUISE

It's as if I'd been walking alone for long years, with night on all sides .. and then suddenly heard a voice calling my name from the dark ... faraway.

THE BANK MANAGER

I sincerely hope that voice won't lead you astray. *(Slowly. A bit bitterly.)* I called out too. *(Walks toward the door.)*

LOUISE

*(Behind him.)*

Forgive me. I'm very grateful ... truly grateful with all my heart. .... (*Strokes her hand over her forehead.*) But I must think it over, and then I'll get back to you, Sir, to confer with you -- before I leave ....

THE BANK MANAGER

*When* are you leaving, Miss Louise? And where are you going?

LOUISE

Tomorrow ... or in a few days .... To Paris.

THE BANK MANAGER

God be with you on your journey. Good-bye.

*(Leaves.)*

\*

LOUISE

*(Opens the door to the kitchen and calls out.)*

Botilda.

BOTILDA

How happy she looks! He's proposed now.

LOUISE

No.

**BOTILDA**

What in heaven's name is it, then?

**LOUISE**

Botilda ... I'm leaving in a few days.

**BOTILDA**

What sort of tricks are you up to now? Where are you going?

**LOUISE**

To Paris.

**BOTILDA**

Well, I tell you, she's lost her wits! Venturing out to sea now when it's been raining for two weeks -- imagine, how deep it must be!

IV.

Paris, the Year After, in May

*The same studio, but now amply supplied with new furniture, rugs, and tapestries. In one corner stands a portrait bust by Alland, surrounded by palms and laurel; down below a grand piano.*

*The glass doors are open to the garden, where big bunches of lilacs hang over the wall, illuminated by the afternoon sun.*

LOUISE

*(Comes in from the bedroom, dressed in an elegant morning gown; walks about aimlessly, looks at the clock, sits down at the piano and strikes a few chords, which finally turn into a melody; she sings slowly.)*

"And the maid to morning vespers rode.

The time for me is longing.

She took the road to the high mountain,

but sorrow I know is heavy....."

ALLAND

*(Who has slowly come in, stopped and looked at her, walks up and puts his hand on her head, turning her face up.)*

What do you think about, when you sit here so alone?

LOUISE

About you. Always about you!

ALLAND

And what do you think about me?

LOUISE

That you are the mountain king! That I could sit here for a hundred years and think that a few weeks had passed.

ALLAND

*(Passes his hand across her forehead.)*

You almost make me afraid ....

LOUISE

By being far too happy?

ALLAND

Yes.

LOUISE

*(Puts her hand across his mouth.)*

Quiet! I know what you want to say!

ALLAND

That all things die!

LOUISE

One shouldn't think about that, when life is so rich.

ALLAND

*(Melancholy.)*

You are the most generous, most lovely woman I've met.

LOUISE

I am what you've made me. It was a troll drink from the mountain king.

ALLAND

*(Bends his knee, with his arm around her waist and his gaze lifted toward her.)*

Yes, it would suit you, to sit in the world of fairy tales spinning silk! You're so fine and whole and fragile ... that may break you.

LOUISE

What does it matter, when I've been happy.

ALLAND

*(Caresses her lightly.)*

Will it also be possible for you to be sensible -- and to forget?

LOUISE

If you require it -- yes.

ALLAND

It will feel the way it does when somebody pulls a strand of your hair out of your head.

That's exactly how much it hurts.

LOUISE

*(Gets up quietly, with her hand on her heart.)*

Is it time now -- to part?

ALLAND

My great work is completed .... And you know -- I have a commission that's waiting for me in New York. I'm leaving tomorrow evening, as I said .....

LOUISE

*(Fumbles with one hand over the keyboard of the piano, from which a jarring dissonance arises.)*

I'd forgotten!

ALLAND

Dear! Don't look so sad! You'll destroy all our memories.

LOUISE

*(Shakes her head slowly, dreaming.)*

Nothing can destroy those. My beautiful world! *(Stretches out her arms as if in a large embrace.)*

ALLAND

You're going home, aren't you?

LOUISE

*(Nods absently.)*

To my dark, cold home.

ALLAND

Your life will soon slip back into the old routine – don't you think? (*Looks at her sharply, frightened by the expression on her face.*) What is it? Speak! Say something!

LOUISE

(*Smiling a bit, with effort.*)

What shall I say? I love you.

ALLAND

You don't mean the way a woman loves one single time in her life?

LOUISE

Haven't you ever realized, that it must be this way, since I'm yours completely?

ALLAND

I've been afraid of that sometimes....

LOUISE

What did you think of me -- otherwise?

ALLAND

Bless my soul ... Nothing bad! But there are women who find consolation ....

LOUISE

I would rather die.

ALLAND

Child! Child! How could you become so attached to me! I wasn't innocent enough to reciprocate feelings like yours! But probably all that's necessary is for you to open up your eyes and see me the way I really am ....?

LOUISE

You're sensitive, honest, and good. To me you've been more than anyone else on earth.

ALLAND

Twenty women have loved me before you -- think of that!

LOUISE

What does that matter to me? My feelings are mine.

ALLAND

But child ... then turn to your pride for help! Remember -- you will not even be the last!

LOUISE

I don't know anything about that ...

ALLAND

*(Slowly.)*

You're making this parting much too difficult for both of us!

LOUISE

I wanted to make it easy for you ... since it has to happen. (*Lifts her face up toward him and smiles a bit beneath streaming tears.*) See! Why, I'm not even crying! (*Leans her head on his shoulder.*) I'm happy to the end! What more could one want? Thank you, my love, for all that has been, for whatever might come. And go now, if you must! But kiss me on the forehead in farewell.

ALLAND

(*Kisses her forehead and then her hand.*)

How warm you are! And how you're trembling!

LOUISE

I'll be calm -- cool and calm. Is that what you want? But then you should remember me sometime and think that there has been one who would have been able to do everything for you -- even to forget when you wanted that.

ALLAND

(*Puts his hand on her shoulders and looks her in the eyes, smiling a bit to conceal his emotion.*)

I will think of you the way a heathen does the best of his gods and remember you the way an artist remembers the woman whose heart warmed his hands, when he created his life's greatest work.

\*

ERNA

(*Vehemently jerks up the door, but steps back.*)

Excuse me!

ALLAND

*(Turns and greets her.)*

I was just going.

LOUISE

*(As if waking from a dream.)*

Already?

ALLAND

I'm having a reception at home today! In a while the whole world will stream into my workshop and utter stupidities about my work. Actually you should probably see it first.

LOUISE

*(Radiant.)*

May I?

ALLAND

Naturally! If you hurry up .... The whole world will be coming soon.

LOUISE

I'll be at the studio in half an hour.

ALLAND

You'll be welcome!

*(Kisses her hand and leaves with a bow to Erna, who presses herself against the wall and casts her eyes down.)*

ERNA

I won't keep you --

LOUISE

*(Regards her.)*

But Erna -- how you look!

ERNA

Are you deluding yourself, perhaps, that you look any better yourself?

LOUISE

What's happened?

ERNA

The usual. Today I was in no mood to put up with his pettiness -- so I showed him the door.

LOUISE

Then you don't love him any more?

ERNA

*(With a shrug.)*

Oh, I never "loved" him! Not for one second! Is this somebody to love -- this freeloader on the life of artists here! One who is nothing, who will become nothing, and is good for nothing!

LOUISE

You knew all that before.

ERNA

Knew, knew -- what good is it to know! I suffered so much I could have gone crazy! I was bewitched, cursed, bound. In the whole world there was only one single man for me -- but the one who once had died could never again be brought to life. You've heard talk of people who become drinkers as a result of unhappy love? I chose a different vice -- I threw myself into the arms of whoever came first. There you have my so-called love story!

LOUISE

(Strokes her hand across her cheek.)

Poor, poor you!

ERNA

But when I saw them beside each other, I was embarrassed at my degradation. (*Points to the portrait bust of Alland.*) On that man's chest I've leaned my head -- and yet I've been able to sink to the level of that other lowlife! (*Turns violently and leaves.*) Adieu!

LOUISE

Where are you going?

ERNA

Out! Anywhere. I must have air! I'm suffocating. I hate him -- right or wrong ... because never again can I force myself into his interest -- anything but this ice-cold indifference, that I can smash my head against, but never change. But I will go on! I'm coming up to his level again! I'm going to work wonders .... (*In a sob.*) Oh, if I were a man! But I will never be anything but a woman, which he despises. (*Sinks down into a chair, like a rag.*)

LOUISE

*(Looks at her, of two minds, finally putting her hand on her head.)*

Erna! I have to leave you.

ERNA

*(Without turning around.)*

I know. Go. I'll stay, if that's all right.

LOUISE

You have my permission. And if Viggo should come, you can tell him I'll be back soon. He had something to talk to me about. *(Hurries out.)*

\*

ERNA

*(Gets up slowly, walks up to Alland's bust and regards it for a long time. The expression on her face gradually softens, and she finally furtively strokes her hand across his features.)*

VIGGO

*(Comes in from the vestibule.)*

Where is Louise?

ERNA

*(Turns around, and the expression on her face grows harsh again.)*

At Alland's. But she'll be coming soon. Was it anything special? You look strange!

VIGGO

I've got a letter from bank manager Möller at home there, an old friend of the family. Louise's highly trusted financial adviser, otherwise an officer in the bank where she has her funds. He writes:

*(Takes out the letter, looks over it, and reads.)*

"...not been able to avoid noticing how much has been withdrawn over the past months from Miss Louise's savings account book....

“...to my eyes it seems impossible that she herself has managed to use such large sums .... I ask you therefore with greatest discretion and out of friendship for your foster sister to try to bring some light to this matter, concerning which I myself for certain reasons have difficulty addressing her. What is worrisome is that she is already probably nearly destitute....”

ERNA

I could just believe it! One doesn't dress like a duchess here in Paris without it costing a pretty penny!

VIGGO

She also seems to have rented the studio with her own funds.

ERNA

*(harshly)*

Really! Well -- *(looks around her)* -- "the frame around her life's novel" -- a very expensive luxury item for an impoverished single girl with a few paltry thousand in the bank!

VIGGO

*(slowly)*

Poor thing!

ERNA

Nonsense! It's best what's happening! Now she'll be forced to leave!

VIGGO

She probably still has a little money.

ERNA

Write to the bank manager that he shouldn't send any more.

VIGGO

He'll have to.

ERNA

One must be able to stop a person who's not responsible from killing themselves.

VIGGO

No, Erna. We have no right to use force.

ERNA

Nor would I be able, out of pure discretion, to bring her to her senses! Be obliged to stand still -- just staring like a sheep! It's not in my nature. (*Listens. A carriage is heard stopping outside.*)

VIGGO

Well, do as you think best! Tell her everything. But I know her.

ERNA

I'll speak to her. But alone.

Viggo

As you like!

*(Goes out into the garden.)*

\*

LOUISE

*(Comes in from the entryway; her face is pale, petrified in its expression, and she is staring in front of her like a sleepwalker.)*

ERNA

*(Walks toward her, excited.)*

What is it? What has happened?

LOUISE

No. It's nothing.

ERNA

You're lying! It's something to do with Alland!

LOUISE

I'm coming from his studio. I have seen his new work. We've all seen it. Everybody says the same thing: it's the best thing he's ever done.

ERNA

But I don't understand -- what is it that's affected you so?

LOUISE

The group. He calls it "Destiny."

ERNA

"Destiny," what does that mean?

LOUISE

Wait -- I'll tell you. I was the first to come. He had wanted that. He took away the gray cloth ... and I saw ...

ERNA

What?

LOUISE

To begin with it was as if the marble had blinded my sight, but then the lines dissolved, appeared there firm and clear ... I'll remember them till my last moment ....

ERNA

Was it anything against you? He has the most peculiar notions.

LOUISE

It was what he calls it: "Destiny." A rough piece of rock that rises up and seems to suggest the entrance to a cave, a border of sea grass and some vines of sea weeds ....

ERNA

But the figures? The figures? It's a group, of course?

LOUISE

The main figure is somewhat more than body size ... the figure of a woman. The storm sweeps her thin toga tight to her strong limbs. With one hand she holds the dress together around her neck, and her gaze spies sharply and coolly into space -- toward a destination invisible to others. Destiny has taken the step out ... over the body that lies flung to the ground ....

ERNA

A woman's body?

LOUISE

*(With a deep breath.)*

Yes. A lifeless, naked woman's body -- executed with great art ... the powerlessness and helplessness cultivated, refined to the sublime by the peace of death....

And the face, one sees into it! A calm with something of supernatural balance ... the appeasement in it, for which human wishes and suffering no longer exist ... only holy oblivion of everything that here is called joy and sorrow -- good and evil .... A face, in which death's smile is as numb as an unsolvable puzzle. The work of a visionary ....

ERNA

Louise!

LOUISE

When I stood there looking, I was seized with trembling, anguish, admiration. This master I have touched as an equal -- believed that he needed my consolation, my help ... a great man of art!

ERNA

He is a human being ... he like us others ... nothing more....

LOUISE

You don't know him ... I myself had never until today known .... I think that until now I have seen him through others' praise, beneath the halo of his world reputation. But just now when I stood looking at his work ... it occurred to me, how great he is --

ERNA

And yet he probably stood himself alongside looking to see what impression the masterpiece made.

LOUISE

I trembled as in the presence of something supernatural; the dead one had my features, but refined, immortalized ... it was my own petrified self ... a story that will pass on to the afterworld ...my sad story .... (*Folds her hands together and stands thinking.*)

ERNA

That's one of his usual tricks. You shouldn't get so close.

LOUISE

(*Stares out into the air.*)

And the large figure -- destiny! The features of a person, but the expression was more than human ... the immovable obedience to law, to which everything in our world must bow down or be crushed ... what is determined by eternity ... what steps out over a human life as if it were worth less than the weeds of the sea ....

ERNA

You'd better lie down – or you'll faint.

LOUISE

(*Sinks down.*)

Yes, it's all over now. This was his good-bye.

ERNA

That wretch!

LOUISE

(*Vehemently.*)

You have no right to say that. He has not betrayed me, not you, not anyone! He has a different nature -- he's of a different race than our own.

ERNA

He's a scoundrel! But you ought to shut your door and show him that *you* are the one who's ending it.

LOUISE

*(With a melancholy smile.)*

*I end it!*

ERNA

Exactly! You owe that to your pride....

LOUISE

I have no pride.

ERNA

Go home, Louise!

LOUISE

Never again! There is no home!

ERNA

You can't live here any more -- without work, without money! Yes, Viggo got a letter today from the bank manager.

LOUISE

I don't want to hear anything about that matter tonight. I'm too tired.

ERNA

But I tell you ...

LOUISE

Erna! This is my home and -- *(with emphasis on each word)* ... I don't want to hear anything else.

Not this evening.

ERNA

*(In anger.)*

You will not need to remind me often that this is your home. *(Walks to the door.)*

LOUISE

At least tell me good-bye before you go! *(Throws her arms around her neck and kisses her.)* My dear! Don't be angry! I'm grateful for your friendship. Now go! *(Shoves her out the door. It has grown dark. She lights the lamp and sits down at the table.)* There. This is the day to balance the books. Now my debt has come due. Now I have to pay. And I knew the price. *(Looks around her.)* It was wonderful to live. And it seems hard to die. *(Sits lost in thought; takes out stationery and starts writing.)*

\*

VIGGO

*(Comes slowly in from the garden.)*

Am I disturbing you?

LOUISE

*(Puts a blotter over the paper with writing.)*

Oh, no. I'm glad you came.

VIGGO

When did Erna leave?

LOUISE

Just now. I certainly wasn't very nice to her.

VIGGO

She was very nervous. I don't know why.

LOUISE

She's broken up with Henrik.

VIGGO

Poor Erna!

LOUISE

If she'd loved him she would never have been able to become as unhappy as she is! *(Passes her hand over her forehead.)* Some beautiful words are ringing in my ears. I must have read them in a book about a woman who had given herself to the man she loved and so came into conflict with her conscience, duty, and honor. He asks her if she was very unhappy. But she looks at him with her

eyes sparkling with thanks and says: "I am a starving person who has been given food. He may still be freezing in his rags, but he is no longer unhappy."

VIGGO

For a woman with delicate feelings it must be the greatest unhappiness on earth to have given herself to a man who never possessed her love.

LOUISE

*(Shudders.)*

Oh! To have your whole life stained .... Don't judge her harshly! She's suffered more than anyone knows.

VIGGO

I'm judging no one!

LOUISE

No, you're good. Do you want to stay with me awhile?

VIGGO

Yes.

LOUISE

I feel in such a strange mood. So helpless and sad, but yet happy.

VIGGO

Shouldn't I ask Erna to come too?

LOUISE

No. I only want you. You remind me of my childhood.

VIGGO

You must be very ill.

LOUISE

I'll soon go and sleep.

VIGGO

That would probably be best.

LOUISE

But wait a little. (*Walks out into the garden.*) Come!

VIGGO

(*Stands at her side.*)

LOUISE

What an aroma of swelling buds! And look how the stars are peeping out one after another.

(*Smiling.*) God the father is sitting up there pricking holes with his pin, so that glimpses of heaven's loveliness twinkle down to the dark earth.... But do you also think that heaven *exists* up there, behind that dark-blue shell? Perhaps it's only a big fire burning there ... every night myriads of sparks rain down upon the earth's thin roof -- we call them stars .... When I was a child I walked around in a perpetual anguish that the *whole* sky would one night catch fire -- then the sea of fire up there would tumble down above our heads and burn us all up ....

VIGGO

Come in now! *(Takes her with her.)* You have a fever; you mustn't stay out there any longer.  
*(Closes the doors.)*

LOUISE

*(Slowly walks forward in the room.)*

I think it's as if I hadn't seen the stars since I was a little child. It's as if they disappear for you afterwards. *(Folds her hands together.)* How big the sky was! So big and dark! It made you shrink to nothing. Only a bit of dust. One isn't anything more. And one has experienced joy and sorrow. But it was nothing -- nothing at all.

VIGGO

Now you should go and lie down.

LOUISE

Yes. *(Looks up into the empty air.)* But how big the sky was. Imagine not seeing anything but sky and water! And that the sky grew and grew and came closer and consumed everything ....

VIGGO

*(Grabs her by the arm.)*

Louise!

LOUISE

*(Gives a start and looks at him as she strokes her hair from her temples.)*

Yes, Viggo, yes. I'm going to go now. *(Staggers over to the door to the bedroom; stops.)* No, not yet. I think I have so much to talk to you about first. *(They sit down; she looks at him, smiling.)*  
You're engaged now, aren't you? And going to get married?

VIGGO

Yes.

LOUISE

And you'll become a newspaperman at home and settle down and have a family and always live together with Lilly?

VIGGO

*(Regards her; worried.)*

Yes.

LOUISE

Aren't you happy?

VIGGO

Oh, yes -- but ....

LOUISE

And Lilly will be called Mrs. Pihl? Won't she?

VIGGO

Yes, naturally.

LOUISE

And wear a white apron and arrange everything for you and always think of you?

VIGGO

Yes ... but dear Louise ....

LOUISE

*(Nods.)*

That's right. Free love -- *(shivers)* – doesn't agree with everybody – it belongs to the world of trolls.... "The self is enough, the self is enough!" That's the teaching of the trolls. It doesn't suit us others .. not our race ...

VIGGO

*(Strokes the hair from her forehead and tries to lay her down on the chaise longue.)*

Now you mustn't talk any more.

LOUISE

No. I will go now. Good night. Sit there at the table, so you can hear if I call out.

VIGGO

Yes. But surely I ought to send a message to Erna.

LOUISE

No, no. I just need to sleep. And if you don't hear from me, then you'll know I've found peace -- and, why, that was best.

VIGGO

Sleep well then.

LOUISE

How long can you sit here?

VIGGO

All night if you like.

LOUISE

*(Throws her arms around his neck.)*

Thank you, thanks, you trusty soul. *(Goes into the bedroom.)*

VIGGO

*(Sits down at the table and takes out a book.)*

LOUISE

*(Comes in hastily again.)*

If anybody should come -- if Alland should come, then --

VIGGO

Yes?

LOUISE

Don't let anybody wake me; I am so tired. *(Throws him a kiss and walks into the bedroom again.)*

VIGGO

*(Prepares to read, but soon discards the book, gets up and rings the bell.)*

THE CONCIERGE

*(From the vestibule.)*

What has happened, that you ring at such a time?

VIGGO

Can you have a message sent to Miss Walldén, who has a studio on the top floor?

THE CONCIERGE

Impossible.

VIGGO

I don't dare leave her myself but will pay two francs for a messenger. *(Takes out he money.)* You see.

THE CONCIERGE

What was the message?

VIGGO

Just tell Miss Walldén that I said she should come down here.

THE CONCIERGE

*(Accepts the money.)*

Yes ... all right.

VIGGO

But see that it goes quickly.

THE CONCIERGE

*(Hurries out.)*

\*

ALLAND

*(Has entered during the last speech and stopped at the door. He is formally dressed and has an abundance of medals on his chest.)*

VIGGO

*(Makes a sign for silence.)*

Louise is ill.

ALLAND

Has she gone to her room?

VIGGO

Yes.

ALLAND

But what -- Why are you sitting here?

VIGGO

I've promised to be on hand.

ALLAND

I must speak with her ....

VIGGO

That cannot be permitted.

ALLAND

She was so strangely upset, when she left me.

VIGGO

That's exactly why she must have rest now. And that's why I'm keeping watch here tonight.

ALLAND

I couldn't go with her then -- but I'll stay now.

VIGGO

As you please.

ALLAND

In your place, sir.

VIGGO

*My place you cannot fill.*

ALLAND

*(Walks around nervously.)*

Not even if I tell you ... *(Stops and listens.)* Did you hear anything?

VIGGO

No.

\*

ERNA

*(Comes in hastily from the vestibule.)*

What is it? *(Gets to see Alland. To Viggo.)* What is it?

VIGGO

Louise is sick. I didn't want to be alone – she might need your help.

ERNA

*(Walks on tiptoe to the bedroom door.)*

VIGGO

Don't wake her if she's sleeping.

ERNA

*(Looks through the keyhole; listens.)*

The light is out and everything is quiet.

VIGGO

Then she's asleep. What? *(He has happened to move the blotter on the desk to one side.)* What's this? *(Reads.)* "Gustave Alland --

ALLAND

*(Grabs the letter and reads.)*

No, it mustn't be. Louise! (*Rushes in; calls out from inside.*) Bring a light! Light! (*Viggo hurries with the lamp, with Erna following at his heels.*)

VIGGO

(*Outside.*)

She's gone.

ERNA

(*Outside.*)

But how -- how?

ALLAND

(*Outside.*)

The window! The river! (*Comes running through the room and out through the door to the vestibule. Viggo and Erna follow him.*)

VIGGO

(*Puts the lamp back on the table, becomes aware of the letter that Alland has cast away from him, grabs it and reads.*)

ERNA

(*Stops.*)

What does she write?

VIGGO

(*Out of breath, strains to read out loud, but doesn't manage more than occasional fragments.*)

“...Gustave, forgive me.....my love, farewell!” (*Outside a rising murmur is heard: “What has happened?” “A woman has drowned!”*)

\*

HENRIK RYBERG

*(Tumbles in, pale and frightened.)*

...came walking along the quay -- saw her climb over the barrier and throw herself into the river!

God in heaven!

*(Heavy steps. Alland comes in, followed by four men, who carry Louise's dead body on a stretcher covered by a gray cloth.)*

VIGGO

*(Moaning.)*

Is she dead?

ALLAND

*(Tonelessly.)*

Dead.

ERNA

*(Beside herself.)*

It is your work!

ALLAND

My work.

ERNA

*(Lowers her head and walks away quietly.)*

HENRIK RYBERG

*(Follows her.)*

Erna! Forgive me! Let everything be the way it was before!

ERNA

*(Looks at him and from him to Alland; turns away and bursts into tears.)*

Oh, God! Why didn't I do what she did!

THE END