

THEORIES

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

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THE CAST

Mrs. Bertold, age thirty-six

Hortense, her daughter, age eighteen

Sebastian **Möller**, a rich old bachelor, age sixty

Dick, his nephew, age twenty-five

Sanderson, a massage doctor, age forty-five

Miss Widerman, age thirty-eight

Mr. Appelman, age thirty-one

Pettersson, landlord

Sanna, in service with **Mrs. Bertold**

Ström, in service with **Möller**

Mrs. Billberg, a fat woman

Older and younger ladies

The action is set in a small bathing resort in Sweden in the summer of 1887.

ACT I

An unkempt garden with heavy foliage. The background consists of a simple but pleasant country house, the walls of which are covered with clinging ivy, surrounded by a wide, open verandah. From the verandah a staircase equally wide, leads down to the garden. Two separate doors open out onto the platform, which between the doors is intersected by a canvas wall as tall as a man. Where the canvas ends down toward the garden a steel bar begins; it is fastened to the post, thus dividing the garden into two halves. To the right a garden bench, sheltered by some bushes. Also, tables and chairs.
Morning.

SANNA is sitting on the stairs to the right of the canvas, holding a bowl between her knees and stirring it with a large spoon.

PETTERSSON, to the left, is busy fastening the canvas. Holds the hammer in his hand and looks in to Sanna.

I know nothing better than being able to watch you, Miss Sanna, when you're doing something that keeps you busy. You're so nimble-fingered. It's just as if you were enjoying yourself at play.

SANNA

Well, it isn't work either, sitting here stirring a little butter.

PETTERSSON

Believe me, I've seen you doing other chores too, Miss Sanna. And with such energy!

SANNA *grammatically correct*

Well, when I was younger I could certainly get things going.

PETTERSSON *sighs*.

When you were young! Oh, Miss Sanna, you shouldn't say that. Why, you look so young!

SANNA

Shame on you, Mr. Pettersson, for joking that way!

PETTERSSON

Lord knows, I'm not joking! You don't look a day over thirty. No, Lord knows. *Pause*. In any case she must be a very special cook, this Mrs. Bertold.

SANNA *offended*

Special! I can't understand that.

PETTERSSON

Yes, well, you're always stirring and beating and --

SANNA

Oh, that's the mistress. Since she's got it into her head that she wants to learn to cook, we're supposed to experiment with everything, just so she can see it.

PETTERSSON

Really. Then she must be planning to get married?

SANNA

Not that we know of, at least.

PETTERSSON

They always think that anyway.

SANNA *virtuously*

You shouldn't say that, Mr. Pettersson.

PETTERSSON *sighs*

Oooh, yes! Who doesn't think so! *Pause*. But she must be special anyway, that Mrs. Bertold.

SANNA
How so?

PETTERSSON
Well, she always looks like some kind of a nun or heathen. It sends chills down my spine every time I see her.

SANNA
The lady really is a good person, I tell you! Though I do think she's grown a little strange since she's joined the new movement, certainly.

PETTERSSON
What kind of an operation is that? It doesn't have anything to do with a liquor license or anything?

SANNA
Do you suppose! Nooo, certainly not.

PETTERSSON
Then what is it?

SANNA
I don't really know; it's something to do with meetings and lists. They just call it "the new movement."

PETTERSSON
Really, well, then it's probably some kind of missionary operation for heathens. Why, what the rich don't come up with to pass the time of day! But I don't think she'd have to walk around looking like a nun on that account.

SANNA
Well, see, it's on account of the gentleman -- of course. Her husband.

PETTERSSON
Uh-huh. But you probably wouldn't need to walk around all your days in mourning though you've become a widower -- a widow, I

mean! I've grieved for my wife as much as anyone, but all things have their own time; weeping has its time and being happy has its. Why, that's why the law has set the period for mourning, you know: one year for the woman and a half a year for the man. Oh, believe me, I've thought this half year was quite enough. That's also why I rented out the house; I needed to see some people around me. Ah-ha, and so it is.

Hammers.

The lady wouldn't have needed to be so afraid of the new guest; he doesn't even plan to look at her.

She told me to put up the canvas partition, and the first thing *he* said was that it wasn't enough but that I should also put a steel bar across the garden and let it be known that if one single woman came over to his side of the fence, it would cost her a fine of five crowns.

SANNA

Ha! I really don't believe anybody's going to bother him. *Shouts in.* Miss! I'm ready for the sugar now!

HORTENSE *dressed in a white apron and rolled-up sleeves. Tips a dish of granulated sugar into the bowl while Sanna goes on stirring.*

Good morning, Mr. Pettersson. Does that mean we aren't allowed to look over there now? *Bends forward and looks in to the other side of the canvas.*

PETTERSSON

Yes, it's prohibited -- there's a penalty of five crowns.

HORTENSE

Ha, ha, ha! But anyone gets to look at us for nothing. Right, Sanna? I hope quite a few years will pass before I can be put in a cage and exhibited for money like a baboon. Bah! *Runs in.*

SANNA

That child, that child! She's always glad and jolly.

PETTERSSON

Yes, and a really fine-looking mistress, she is. I think one can be thankful we get to see her. But the old gentleman inside there, he has his own affairs to tend. So far as I'm concerned, I can't live without getting to see women around me, for they're the spice and the salt of life, that's for sure. It's been so empty in the house ever since my wife died, I don't even know myself.

SANNA *sighs*.

Yes, yes, but! Something like that takes its toll.

PETTERSSON

Yes, so often I tell myself: Pettersson, I say, if you could find a woman as good as she was, you'd remarry, even if it were tomorrow!

SANNA

Oh, Mr. Pettersson, you can probably find a good wife, you --

MÖLLER *in the door to Pettersson*

That's good, yes. Stretch the cloth a bit tighter down there. There now! I'm just as happy that those devils are going to have some peepholes to peek through.

SANNA *to herself; looks through a crack*.

Peek? I wonder who would care to peek at such an old -- Such an excuse for a man! He probably thinks a person would be impressed

. . .

Stirs.

MÖLLER

Well, Mr. Pettersson -- the fellow he got me can read and write, naturally?

PETTERSSON

I think so! He's been a tailor.

MÖLLER

That's good, so at least he's handy at something.

PETTERSSON

Yes, and see, there isn't a fellow in the whole county who can cook like the women; and they don't want to either.

MÖLLER

Like womenfolk! Any fellow with any wits at all can do it, my dear Pettersson. He just has to try.

SANNA *to herself, while she stirs.*

Cook? Yes, for the pig! Old numskull.

MÖLLER

Besides I've given him a cookbook with over twelve hundred dishes in it, and a person wouldn't need more than that, would they?

PETTERSON *takes his tools to go.*

Ha, ha, ha! I'd think that'd suffice.

SANNA *stirs.*

Are the confounded menfolk going to stick their nose into cooking now too! So how's a girl supposed to make a living? She'll probably wind up as a cavalryman or a chimney sweep.

MÖLLER *to Pettersson*

Please tell him he can set the table for breakfast out here. What kind of fish did they bring up today?

PETTERSSON

Eel and perch.

MÖLLER

Good. *To himself as he clenches his hand.* Anna Lisa, you old hag of a housewife, you've been tormenting me for twenty-six years, and now you'll see! The reign of women is over and done, and good riddance to satan and his mother. Down with women! That's our motto. *Exits with a large gesture.*

PETTERSSON *looks after him.*

Well, if he doesn't end up in the madhouse, it'd be odd. *To Sanna.*
My Lord, Miss Sanna, it's really hard to say good-bye. It's as if
we'd known each other forever.

SANNA

Ho, just three days, that's not much.

PETTERSSON

A lot of things can happen in three days! Good-bye then, I really
must go now.

SANNA

Good-bye. We're just about to take the buns out of the oven. I'll
stop by with a couple for you to taste.

PETTERSSON

Ho, ho, yes! Hot buns, they've always been my favorite! Just like
when my blessed wife used to bake. -- Miss Sanna! Well, I'll say
no more. *Out.*

STRÖM *with an open book in his hand.*

There's no trick to it, if you just have a cookbook, he said! No
trick? I could just as well sew up a gunny sack and ask folks to
find their way out of it as to find my way around in this book.
Reads. Oxtail soup -- blast it, are folks supposed to eat that!
Thumbs through the book. Seven skin pudding, burnt almonds,
antler jelly -- I'll be darned! -- Yes, but perch? There must be an
index. Ah yes, wait! Perch with parsley sauce -- sauce -- Well, if
I'd only known how to get the scales off! *Looks around, notices
Sanna.* Good morning, Miss.

SANNA *curtly.*

Go' morning.

STRÖM *amiably.*

Is the little Miss in a hurry today?

SANNA *gives him an irate glance without answering.*

STRÖM Are you cooking, Miss?

SANNA *turns her back on him.*

STRÖM

Sweet, good miss --

SANNA

Can't a person be left in peace?

STRÖM

I just wanted to ask about something

SANNA

What?

STRÖM

What do you do with perch?

SANNA

You scale them, naturally.

STRÖM

Yes, exactly! I've practically worn my fingers away, but I can't get the scales off. I did have the experience of plucking geese once, but this was even worse. How do you do it?

SANNA *brusquely.*

You take a grater.

STRÖM *to himself.*

She can grate on a person herself, so it's no wonder she can scale perch! *False exit. Coughs.* Ahem! Should the eels be scaled too? Or --

SANNA

No, I've never scaled an eel.

STRÖM *shakes his head and leaves.*

HORTENSE *with a pot and a steel whisk in one hand and a little bowl in the other.*

There you have the egg yolks. I can start beating the whites, can't I?

SANNA

Yes, gracious. Hold the pot toward the wind, so they'll stiffen better. *Stirs the egg yolks in the batter and goes in.*

HORTENSE *beats as she shouts in.*

The pan is on the table, it's buttered and breaded. I've taken the buns out of the oven.

SANNA *from inside*

That's good.

STRÖM *has set the table on the verandah during these lines. Enters again.*

MÖLLER *comes out rubbing his hands.*

What a smell! Fresh baked wheat bread! You'll see that that fellow knows his business.

DICK *smells.*

Yes-s-s. But I suspect --

MÖLLER

Suspect -- suspect? Confound it, You're fooling yourself if you think that a person can't eat food if a slow-minded, lazy, idiotic female has thrown it together for him! What in hell do you suspect?

DICK

Nothing except that these buns are going to be eaten at our neighbors' and not at our place.

STRÖM *comes out with glasses, etc.*

MÖLLER
The buns?

STRÖM *with mouth wide open.*
Buns?

MÖLLER
Yes, I can smell it -- you've got buns, Ström.

STRÖM
Me! You suggest I would hide something from you, Sir? If you'd like to conduct a search, feel free. -- *Turns all his pockets inside out.*

MÖLLER *waves his hand, abashed.*
That's right. I see there are some rusks here. Good -- Ström -- very good. You can go. I'll ring when I want something.

STRÖM *leaves.*

MÖLLER *to Dick*
What are you grinning at?

DICK
I'm not grinning; I'm just crunching on my hard tack.

MÖLLER Is that supposed to be malice? You'd set your heart on buns. As if that would have been so exceptional! Dough -- just dough -- which those pig-headed, pound-foolish rejects of cooks have sunk their fists into. Blast it! I'm glad I put an end to that misery. Glad, you understand! Happy as when you've rubbed out a stain. The woman is nothing but a disgrace to the entire human race. What? -- what do you want?

DICK
I didn't say anything.

MÖLLER
You have something in mind. Some sweetheart or other, I

suppose. But remember, I'm buying the property for you on the condition that you alone will be my administrator, and the day you get married, the day you pawn yourself off for life to one of these vampires they call wives -- that day it will be all over between us. That's it -- you understand?

DICK

Yes, provided my uncle hasn't given his consent.

MÖLLER

Me! Ha, ha, ha! Consent? Really, out of free will I should let a woman and her spawn of serpents eat up my honorably inherited and acquired fortune? No, let them support themselves and their offspring. Set the drones free!

DICK

But uncle --

MÖLLER

I don't want to hear one more word! You know my decision, and you have your freedom. I am consistent, I want to carry out my convictions, I want to put my theories to work. Away with the vermin.

DICK *tries to conceal a laugh.*

MÖLLER *again silent for a moment. Gets up.*

DICK *gloating secretly.*

I think you're eating so little, Uncle.

MÖLLER

Me? I'm stuffed. I haven't eaten a meal like this in ages.

DICK *tries to peek in through a crack in the canvas. Coughs. Coughs louder. Starts singing.*

HORTENSE *from the kitchen.*

Quiet! And don't look in here, they can see us from the windows.

Sits down on the stairway and hums. At eleven o'clock Mama goes bathing.

DICK

Bravo! Under the reign of terror of childless patriarchy you don't gain weight.

HORTENSE

Are you getting fed so poorly?

DICK

If it could even be called food!

HORTENSE *pretends to look skyward.*

Would you like some hot buns?

DICK

Would I! Angel!

HORTENSE

Then wait. *Runs in and comes back with buns in her apron, sneaks them under the canvas, and Dick smuggles them into his pockets. Go up to your room and eat them. I have to talk to Sanna. We'll never manage without her help. There's far too good a view from the kitchen windows.*

DICK

Leave the door open.

HORTENSE

Why?

DICK

It smells so nice.

HORTENSE

Does it make your food better?

DICK

No, but it whets the appetite, and I have a suspicion that our bear is going to be tamed by hunger.

HORTENSE

Go away, young man!

DICK *goes in.*

SANNA *with all the things to set the table.*

HORTENSE

We're setting the table down here in the garden, and we have to hurry. There are guests coming later.

SANNA

Guests! What do *they* want?

HORTENSE

Nothing.

SANNA

Lord, then what are they *doing* here?

HORTENSE

They want to discuss. You know what that means?

SANNA

No.

HORTENSE

Nor do I. But, listen -- Sanna -- I want to ask you about one thing: is it really so dumb to get married?

SANNA *offended*

Let me tell you, Miss, it's not so nice running around to every nook and cranny and spying on folks. If I were a fine lady like you, I'd really be on better behavior.

HORTENSE

Spying? But what do you mean? What are you angry about?

SANNA

And incidentally, let me tell you, Miss, there hasn't been any talk of marriage or anything else, and if he goes around suggesting something, I can't help it.

HORTENSE

Ha, ha, ha! I suppose you mean Pettersson?

SANNA

Yes, who else? There isn't anybody else, is there.

HORTENSE

Well yes, there's myself -- and a certain young gentleman.

SANNA

What are you saying, Miss?

HORTENSE

But we can't tell Mama yet, it's wiser to wait. Nobody must have any idea of it, you understand. You're the only one I confide in. -- Silence! Not one word! Here comes Mama.

MRS. BERTOLD *comes slowly down the stairs with a book in her hand.*

Good morning, children.

HORTENSE

How are your arms?

MRS. BERTOLD

Heavy as lead.

HORTENSE

Poor little mother! Sit down here now. *Places her at the breakfast table and serves coffee.*

MRS. BERTOLD

Thank you, child. How the mistress of the household spoils me. Have some yourself. *Pause.* You ought to read something, Hortense. There are so many good books coming out these days -- that elevate the morals of woman.

HORTENSE

Dear *Mama*, my morals are already elevated above it all.

MRS BERTOLD

You joke about everything.

HORTENSE

It's just impossible to resist.

MRS. BERTOLD

Ah, yes, well!

HORTENSE

You always sigh when I'm happy.

MRS. BERTOLD

Well, the deplorable recklessness of our age is in your very laugh.

HORTENSE

Nonsense! Is it a sin to be young and healthy? Just join in and let the world manage as best it can. Life is glorious.

MRS. BERTOLD

You don't know the meaning of sorrow.

HORTENSE

Does it make you sad?

MRS. BERTOLD

I hope that you'll never have to learn.

HORTENSE

Bah, each day has its tribulations. -- What's that you're reading?

Picks up the book and looks at the title page."Young woman, do you have a mission in life?" *Laughs.* Oh, I feel so clearly that I do.

MRS. BERTOLD

If only it were true! Then perhaps I'd feel secure.

HORTENSE *shouts in to the kitchen.*

Sanna, you can clear the table.

SANNA *clears the table during the beginning of the following line.*

HORTENSE *stands in front of her mother while gesturing grandly, with deliberate comedy.*

Well, I never feel it more clearly than when we sit down at the table -- you and I -- or when we leave home. We eat slowly. it's quiet as a the grave. Look how the dishes are carried out almost as full as when they were brought in! -- It's not my mission in life to sip a cup of coffee and solve life's riddles. Oh, I feel as if I were bearing a heart full of joy; all I'm missing is someone share to it with. Out -- out! -- I am created to be the mistress of a house, an arch mother and a grandmother. *Bends forward with a smile.* You understand now, what I mean by a mission in life?

MRS. BERTOLD

Child, you don't know what you're joking about!

HORTENSE

About my future; my *fate* it's called in the higher style.

MRS. BERTOLD

You know how this carefree attitude torments me.

HORTENSE

Is it my fault that I can't see the world as being something dark and heavy? For me it's been light and easy -- thanks to you.

FRU BERTOLD

But that blindness will bring your misfortune.

HORTENSE

Far from it! If the world gives me a push, then I'll push back.
Everything runs like clockwork, if only you have somebody to care
about.

MRS. BERTOLD

Well, you and I surely care for each other, and I hope that will
always continue. But tell me -- will you do anything to be able to
see me really happy?

HORTENSE

How can you ask!

MRS. BERTOLD

Promise me then, that you'll never think of getting married.

HORTENSE *turns her head away and falls silent.*

MRS. BERTOLD

You won't promise?

HORTENSE *with a smile*

You've been happy yourself -- and married.

MRS. BERTOLD *slowly*

Yes, I was happy.

HORTENSE *after a pause, seriously*

There's something strange about you. Something -- well, don't be
angry, but I must be honest -- something two-faced.

MRS. BERTOLD

Hortense!

HORTENSE

Yes, the word is ugly, but I don't know any other. I don't mean it
maliciously either.

MRS. BERTOLD

By saying that I am two-faced? You can at least explain --

HORTENSE

Oh -- I can't talk about it coherently, but wait! Yes, you're quick and practical. You're basically like me. But you want to be unhappy and sentimental and theoretical. Ugh! I can't bear it. What do you know, for example, about social issues?

MRS. BERTOLD *offended*

Absolutely nothing, naturally

HORTENSE

Oh, listen! I've done some serious thinking too. I've thought about the theories of heredity.

MRS. BERTOLD

That I can believe.

HORTENSE

Word of honor!

MRS. BERTOLD

Well?

HORTENSE

I assumed I'd inherited my practical disposition from father, and I started to construct a kind of normal papa for me. *Pouts her lips and tries to imagine how he ought to have looked.* A sober, resolute, enterprising businessman, with a secure sense of humor and "affable qualities." I express myself nicely, don't you think? With dignity -- decency -- propriety -- *Quickly in a changed tone of voice.* Listen! What kind of guy was he, actually, my father?

MRS. BERTOLD

What kind of guy? Is that how one speaks of one's parents!

HORTENSE

I'll formulate the question better next time. But -- you see -- now

I know that I have my practical disposition only from you and not from Papa. Ha, ha, ha! I've seen right through you.

MRS. BERTOLD

Hortense, I'm getting angry.

HORTENSE

With my sharp vision. *Takes her by the throat.* I know that you're splendid at tending your business. You've increased your capital, your household accounts are exemplary, you keep careful track of what gets used up in the kitchen; when I'm wasteful you bawl out Sanna. If in the future my grandchildren admire their grandmother's domestic virtues, I will reply: I inherited them from my blessed mother.

MRS. BERTOLD

Release me. You're choking me.

HORTENSE

Pooh! A person will tolerate a great deal of that sort before it's quits. But what was it we were talking about? Oh, yes! The thing you call the ideal in yourself, that's not nature, it's just tacked on, that's why it seems false, and that's why I call it two-faced.

MRS. BERTOLD

Not even my widow's weeds can instill respect in you.

HORTENSE

I don't believe in your widow's weeds.

MRS. BERTOLD *gives a shout, rushing forward.*

You don't believe?

HORTENSE

No. To grieve when you've lost a person you love, that's natural. But to abandon yourself to such grief for sixteen long years, that's artifice -- it's untrue.

MRS. BERTOLD

Ahh! Was *that* what you meant! *Sinks down in the chair with a sigh of relief.*

HORTENSE

You know, I'd rather you remarried.

MRS. BERTOLD

What an inappropriate thing to say! To a mother.

HORTENSE

Oh well, a mother's a human being too. And a sensible fellow might well take a fancy to you. I'll marry you off one fine day.

MRS. BERTOLD *is about to laugh.*

HORTENSE

There now, now I recognize you. We'll see if I don't do you credit in the end. So, is peace restored?

MRS. BERTOLD

You know I've got a weakness for you. That's the trouble.

HORTENSE

You're not the only one to sing that song. *Laughs.* I must have had a good-natured papa?

MRS. BERTOLD

Spare me!

HORTENSE *searching.*

You *weren't* happy with him?

MRS. BERTOLD *gets up to leave.*

HORTENSE

No, answer me first: I must have relatives on my father's side?

MRS. BERTOLD

No.

HORTENSE

He must have belonged to a family, naturally. He probably didn't put *himself* on this earth.

MRS. BERTOLD

They were all dead.

HORTENSE *aside*

I smell a rat there someplace. But wait!

MISS WIDERMAN *comes in from the back with a roll of paper in her hand.*

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh, it's a good thing you came; I have something to speak with you about. Hortense dear, would you leave us for a moment? It's nothing for a young girl...

HORTENSE

Gladly. *As she leaves.* Am I to be driven away for her sake! But you just wait! *Exits.*

MISS WIDERMAN

Dear Hermione, I came a bit before the others; I really wanted to meet with you. *Kisses her.* I care for you so terribly much. I would even say, that I feel admiration for you. *Kisses her again.*

MRS. BERTOLD *fending her off*

Oh -- my dear -- admiration --

MISS WIDERMAN

That's exactly the word! Your moral requirements, the sense of your own human value -- Tell me, weren't you a Nora before Ibsen's *Doll House* was written? Oh! Why, you were a Svava before we got Bjørnson's *A Gauntlet!* Then why shouldn't I say I admire you!

MRS. BERTOLD

Dear Klotilde, there was something else I wanted to talk to you about.

MISS WIDERMAN

Speak, my darling!

MRS. BERTOLD

You know that I've never spoken to Hortense about her father. I've let her live with the notion that it's death that has separated him and me.

MISS WIDERMAN

You've done the right thing, my sweet. You always do the right thing.

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes, but now she thinks our marriage was happy.

MISS WIDERMAN

What of it?

MRS. BERTOLD

I'm afraid that she's thinking of marriage herself.

MISS WIDERMAN *greedy for gossip.*

To whom?

MRS. BERTOLD

That's exactly what I don't know.

MISS WIDERMAN

Imagine, if it would be -- !

MRS. BERTOLD

What?

MISS WIDERMAN

A fallen --

MRS. BERTOLD

Well, how many do you find who --

MISS WIDERMAN

Right! That's why she must sign the moral purity list already today.

MRS. BERTOLD

But if she doesn't want to?

MISS WIDERMAN

Make her.

MRS. BERTOLD

But how?

MISS WIDERMAN

Do you not have the authority of a mother's say?

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes. Of course, but that would never come into question.

MISS WIDERMAN

Oh, no? When it concerns such an important thing as the requirement of equality?

MRS. BERTOLD

Well yes -- but ---

Pause

MISS WIDERMAN *solemnly*

Tell me, Hermione, don't you feel a void, an inner void?

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes.

MISS WIDERBERG

That void can be filled only by your taking your place in the ranks for the great cultural work: woman's emancipation. -- I too have felt this void.

MRS. BERTOLD

Really?

MISS WIDERMAN

But I've realized how to fill it.

MRS. BERTOLD

That's fortunate. But tell me: how are we supposed to lead a discussion?

MISS WIDERMAN

It's not so hard. You learn that from a newspaper account. I'll give you instructions.

MRS. BERTOLD

But it hurts me so that Hortense --

MISS WIDERMAN

Nonsense! She'll probably get interested in our cause too, if you just don't back down. But -- by the way -- how's your rheumatism?

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh -- poorly. Especially in my left shoulder.

MISS WIDERMAN

I was just going to tell you that there's a massage doctor that's come here. He's an American, or almost an American at least. I've signed up to be his patient and started yesterday. You should try too. I happened by chance to speak of you. -- He's a perfect gentleman and very easy to talk to. "Mrs. Bertold?" he said, and there was a gleam in his eyes. There definitely was. He has a strange pair of eyes, that fellow! -- "Do you know Mrs. Bertold?" I said. -- "No, I've not had the pleasure," he said. -- But it's clear

that he's heard tell of you. Sweet Hermione, try his massage.

MRS. BERTOLD

If only it could do some good.

MISS WIDERMAN

Surely! *Looks at her watch.* But we were going to get some benches. And a table to lead the discussion from. We don't have a podium. Maybe we could get a stool -- a tall stool.

MRS. BERTOLD *Calls out.*

Sanna!

SANNA from the kitchen

MRS. BERTOLD *arranges the stage together with Miss W. To Sanna.* Bring the big kitchen stool. *To Miss W.* We can put a rug over it.

SANNA leaves and returns with what has been requested

MISS WIDERMAN *pulls a piece of paper out of her pocket.* I'm equipped. *With a broad gesture.* Gentlemen and ladies --

MRS. BERTOLD

-- but there are no gentlemen, of course.

MISS WIDERMAN

Yes, Mr. Appelman.

MRS. BERTOLD

He's always asleep.

MISS WIDERMAN

It's nerves. But he is inspired by our idea.

MRS. BERTOLD

Aren't you afraid of losing the thread?

MISS WIDERMAN

Certainly not. I know it cold, and I'm not afraid of getting into competition with the women in the Nordic capitals. I'll also begin with --- "Should the province stand behind the capital city!" -- Notice the word *province*. There's a certain ring to it. It sounds European. -- Just wait! -- Ah! See, here we have them!

STRÖM *comes out on the stairs to the left and sets to scrubbing a copper pot.*

MISS WIDERMAN *to Mrs. Bertold.*

You can take the paper. I'll keep it extemporaneous. It looks better.

THE LADIES and MR. APPELMAN *in. Greetings and murmurs.*

HORTENSE *in from the side.*

MISS WIDERMAN *waving her hand. Nervously.*

A gavel, a gavel! We've forgotten the gavel.

MRS. BERTOLD *whispers to Sanna, who comes with a little gavel which she places on the table.*

MISS WIDERMAN *climbs up on the stool, which totters a bit.*

At the request of our hostess, I have by our hostess, been given an assignment -- I consider myself commissioned upon her behalf -- to call this meeting -- to convene this meeting, so as to constitute "The Society for the Emancipation of Woman and the Requirement of Moral Purity on the Part of the Man," in the provinces. *Hastily.* A glass of water! Can someone bring me a glass of water? *She gets a glass of water, drinks.*

Gentlemen and ladies!

Should the province stand behind the capital city! No. The province, just like the capital city, has women at the forefront who -- can take their place in the movement -- at the forefront -- at the forefront of --

MRS. BERTOLD *whispers.*

A movement --

MISS WIDERMAN

-- can be at the forefront of -- a movement. *Whispers.* Give me the paper. Bring me the paper! *Gets it and reads the lecture in a low monotone so the scattered remarks are heard clearly.*

The women's movement is, as you know, a movement which in recent times has accelerated. Woman has lived in slavery for thousands of years, and not only our history but also our own experience teaches us this ...

MRS. BILLBERG *whispers.*

I thought Mrs. Bertold was going to run the meeting?

VOICES

Shhhh, quiet!

MISS WIDERMAN *continues during the comment.*

-- but now the time has come for her emancipation, and hand in hand with this goes another movement; I mean woman's requirement for man.

Applause from some ladies.

MR. APPELMAN, *who is about to nod off, jumps up from his sleep.*
Bravo, bravo!

MISS WIDERMAN

The wicked nature of man has grown in our times to hitherto unknown dimensions. He demands nothing more and nothing less than that our entire gender be recreated, merely to satisfy his lowly inclinations and boundless desires. There are men who demand this, who demand that we should give ourselves to them -- we, gentlemen and ladies! *Looks around her, in appeal* That is why woman is arming for battle -- in self-defense --

MRS. BILLBERG

That was well put.

VOICES

Hush, be quiet!

MISS BILLBERG

I have as much right to speak as anybody else. This is a women's meeting -- remember! I have a right to speak. We've got a right to speak, us women.

STRÖM *gets up.*

No. They're driving me out of my mind! There must be a wad of cotton in the house at least? *Runs in and comes right out again with a handful of cotton that he stuffs into his ears. Continues scrubbing.*

MISS WIDERMAN

We are addressing ourselves to all social classes: we make no distinction between high and low. In the capital city the movement is a class issue, but here in the countryside we wish to make the demand for moral purity a universal question --

MRS. BILLBERG

High and low, she said. So I'm not supposed to be good enough, maybe!

MISS WIDERMAN

No interruptions, if I may ask.

MRS. BILLBERG

No, Lord have mercy.

MISS WIDERMAN

We request that the man --

MRS. BILLBERG *interrupts.*

Should mind his manners.

MISS WIDERMAN *with a reproachful glance*

-- should suppress his nature --

MÖLLER *on his stairs*
What the devil's going on here!

MISS WIDERMAN
That's why we join together against the growing evil that will
consume us all, if it is not restrained.

MÖLLER *shouts.*
Ström! *Louder.* Ström! -- has he gone deaf now in the bargain!
Ström! *Pokes him on the shoulder with his cane* Ström jumps up
and they both leave.

MR. APPELMAN *to a lady who is stepping on him*
Excuse me, sorry!

HORTENSE *laughs.*

MISS WIDERMAN
That is why we must all join together in one single strong demand.
And not one of us should haggle or negotiate.

STRÖM *on Mrs. Bertold's stairs*
I'm supposed to send regards from Mr. Möller and ask if the
Madame couldn't move her goose path over to the other gable.

MRS. BERTOLD
Her goose path?

STRÖM
Yes, 'cause he said that that was the worst cackling of a gaggle of
geese he'd ever heard. *Leaves.*

MR. APPELMAN *after a pause*
Oh! -- That was supposed to be witty.

Murmer of disapproval.

DICK *on the stairs to the left.*

What's happening now? *Tries to peek through the canvas.*
Listens.

MISS WIDERMAN

It is most dignified to ignore such an inappropriate interruption. -
- Let us go on to the discussion. I assume that further
commentary is redundant. That is -- the first question: Does
anyone in the assembly consider immorality to be necessary for
man?

VOICES

No, no!

MISS WIDERMAN

Second question: Does anyone consider immorality to be desirable
for woman?

VOICES

No, no!

MISS WIDERMAN

And has anyone felt the temptation to live like a man?

VOICES

No, no!

MISS WIDERMAN

All the questions are thus considered to be answered with a no?

VOICES

Yes, yes!

MISS WIDERMAN *looks around with a smile.*

Is it not remarkable, what a high moral standing woman assumes!
-- But, truly, effective means are needed to combat the tendencies
of man. We have found one weapon. This list. Each and every
one of us pledges herself by her signature never to marry any other
man than one who has led a pure life, that is, in other words: a
virginal man.

Now it's a matter of the signatures. Who wants to begin?
Being most zealous, I'll take the lead. *Writes.* You see my name.
To Mrs. Bertold. And you?

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh, why I could never. . .

MISS WIDERMAN

You're free, Hermione dear. You can remarry any man you want.
Everyone ought to sign.

MR. APPELMAN *has approached. To one lady who is shoving him.*
Excuse me!

MRS. BERTOLD *writes. Tries to give the pen to Mr. Appelman,*
who is standing beside. Bites her lip.
Sorry! I forgot. -- Hortense!

APPELMAN *steps aside and bows in embarrassment.*
Beg your pardon!

Pause

MRS. BERTOLD

Hortense -- your name.

HORTENSE

I'm not going to sign.

MRS. BERTOLD

You're not?

HORTENSE

No.

MISS WIDERMAN

Opposition? To moral purity? And from women! That's incredible.

MRS. BERTOLD

Why don't you want to?

HORTENSE

Whom I marry is my own affair.

MRS. BILLBERG

That's right, little Miss, that's right. A fellow may have been a bit frisky as a youngster and still be a good fellow. But you see, my husband, he's a good for nothing, with all due respect -- a real --

MISS WIDERMAN

This is not a question of individuals, but of the race.

MRS. BILLBERG

What's that? He's a real lowlife of a man -- *resolutely* -- that's why I'm signing. *Prepares to sign.*

MRS. BERTOLD *confused*

But that's not possible; why, Mrs. Billberg is married.

MRS. BILLBERG

Now don't tell me I can't sign a moral purity list just because I'm married! The minister himself let me sign a list, so it must be right, mustn't it! *Signs slowly, with much grimacing.* There now. Now Billberg can see, if he wants. And the king himself is welcome to look at it.

MÖLLER *on his stairs with his bass tuba in hand. To Dick.*

Are you so fond of those old harpies that you have to stand there listening to them! *Puts the bass tuba to his mouth and blows during the following.*

MRS. BERTOLD

My lord, what's that noise?

The ladies scream and hold their ears.

VOICES

It's a man. It's an attempt to stifle the moral purity movement.

MÖLLER *stops blowing, listens. Murmurs.*

No, damn it -- they're still carrying on. *Blows again.*

STRÖM

Yes, they're really obnoxious.

A VOICE AMONG THE LADIES

It's the other tenant.

MISS WIDERMAN

Speak to him.

MRS. BERTOLD *to Möller, at the side of the canvas.*

Listen! Good sir!

MÖLLER *takes the bass tuba from his mouth*

I never conduct parliamentary business with womenfolk. *Blows again.*

MISS WIDERMAN

God knows that I'm not vindictive, but if that bloke were lying in a ditch and had broken his arm in three places, I wouldn't lift a finger to help him up.

VOICES

Mr. Appelman must speak to him. -- Mr. Appelman! Mr. Appelman! Talk to him.

APPELMAN *takes off his hat and stands at the steel bar.*

Excuse me.

MÖLLER

Everything's excused. Are you a man, sir?

APPELMAN

Such rude questions don't deserve answers.

MÖLLER

Rude? It was only sheer courtesy that kept me from immediately reckoning him among the other hags. *Blows.*

MISS WIDERMAN

The assembly must be adjourned.

MR. APPELMAN

Yes, the assembly must be adjourned.

MISS WIDERMAN *pounds the gavel.*

The assembly is adjourned.

Everybody troops out.

MISS WIDERMAN *takes Mrs. Bertold under her arm and departs with her during lively conversation.*

HORTENSE alone, afterwards SANNA.

MÖLLER

Well, are they gone now? Yes. -- Thank you, Lord, for my musical talent. *Leaves.*

SANNA

My dear child, I've been on pins and needles waiting to get to talk to you. Who is it?

HORTENSE

What? Who?

SANNA

Your fiancé -- you know!

HORTENSE

Oh! -- ah-ha, him! I'd forgotten that. Well, now we're going to be happy again. *Takes her around the waist, dances and sings.*

SANNA

My lord, she's crazy! Look, tell me who it is now.

HORTENSE

The young gentleman who lives in here -- the nephew of the old gentleman.

SANNA

But mercy, child, why, you've hardly laid eyes on him.

HORTENSE

Oh, we're old acquaintances. He's a good friend of Hildur Berger's brother -- you know -- and we've met innumerable times in Hildur's home. But I've never dared tell Mama. Both for her sake and uncle's we had to pretend we didn't know each other, otherwise they might keep us from meeting, and that -- you see -- if that happened, it would be the worst thing in the world. But you're going to help us. -- You're going to -- Sanna!

SANNA

Dear child, I will, of course. Just tell me what I'm supposed to do.

DICK *on Möller's stairs.*

HORTENSE *notices him. Sings.*

You have to go the other way,
the other way, the other way.
You have to sneak right through the hedge,
through the hedge, through the hedge.

To Sanna, as she takes her by the arm and speaks animatedly.

You're to keep a careful watch on the road, and as soon as you get a glimpse of Mama, you run out and wave a handkerchief there in the doorway --- you understand? March!

SANNA *leaves.*

MÖLLER *with a newspaper in his hand. Standing in the door so as to keep Dick from going in.*

HORTENSE

Torment everlasting -- as they say in the novels -- there we have the villain.

Hides behind the bushes.

MÖLLER *as if he were continuing a conversation*

No, it wouldn't occur to me to harbor any scruples concerning your cousin. Why, the parents are legally divorced, and then the family relationship is annulled. She's with her mother and bears her mother's name; I don't even know where she is.

Goes down the stairs.

Confound it! Didn't I see a hat over there? Isn't there one spot on God's green earth then where you can be free of womenfolk!

DICK

Don't mind that, Uncle. Sit down here. *He places a garden chair so the old man will turn his back to the place Hortense is hidden* I'm going to run in to get the bedroom screen. *Hurries into the house.*

HORTENSE

Saints preserve us! If he doesn't hurry, Mama will come back.

DICK *with a screen that he places behind the old man.*

There now, now I'll leave you to your newspaper. I'm going bathing. *Leaves.*

MÖLLER

Ah-ha. So long for now. *To himself* I can feel my stomach scratching against my backbone. Death by starvation must be horrible. *Reads.*

DICK *comes sneaking in through the bushes from the right*

Well, this is a pretty pickle! Before they hated each other on account of gender, now they hate each other as individuals. -- But finally we get to meet! *Tries to kiss Hortense, but she puts her*

hand over his mouth as she laughs.

Young woman, is this the way you reward the man who courageously defied all peril for the sake of his love?

Sits down on the bench a bit away from her.

HORTENSE

So what about me? Aren't I defiant?

DICK

But I've done more than you for "our future happiness."

HORTENSE

Oh, pooh! We'll figure that out later.

DICK

I came up with the idea of tricking the old folks to come here on their summer outing.

HORTENSE

But I played the cards so that Mama rented rooms in the same house as your uncle.

DICK

After I'd made the plan -- yes.

HORTENSE

Nice plan! Now we're trapped.

DICK

Trapped?

HORTENSE

Yes. If you get married, Uncle won't buy the house, and if Uncle doesn't buy the house, then you can't marry, and if you can't marry, then I'll turn into an old maid.

DICK

Nature forbids it. *Tries to kiss her.*

HORTENSE *laughs and thumbs her nose.*

DICK *offended*

Calm down, Miss, I'm not going to be forward with such a well-bred young lady.

HORTENSE

Let's try something useful first. We'll figure out something -- Say! -- what sort of passions does the old man have actually?

DICK

Passions?

HORTENSE

Of course! A weakness -- a mania -- an obsession -- whatever you please. Everybody has them when they get to be sixty. -- And there must be something else besides woman hating?

DICK *sullen*

Yes, there's old Sèvres porcelain and good food.

HORTENSE

That's always something.

Pause.

HORTENSE *gets up and looks out through the branches toward Möller.*

Do you think he can see us?

DICK

Through a thick screen and these bushes?

HORTENSE *comes closer, still pretending to be spying through the bushes.*

And he wouldn't crawl under the steel bar, of course?

DICK *looks at her and can't help laughing.*

HORTENSE *sits down on his knee, throws her arms around his neck and kisses him. There is a sizzling from inside the kitchen.*

MÖLLER *leaps up out of a half sleep.*

It's sizzling! They're turning a steak -- *sorrowfully* -- over at the neighbors'. And the smell! -- No, this is unbearable. *They should feed and fatten themselves, these useless vermin! Shakes his clenched hand at the house and walks in.*

SANNA *in the door, waving a handkerchief.*

My lord, what am I waving for, when there isn't anybody to see it. *Coughs.*

HORTENSE *flies up from Dick's knee and catches sight of Sanna.*

DICK *snaps his fingers.*

Now I've got it! A plan, a plan!

HORTENSE

Away with you! Mama's coming.

DICK

My plan, my plan!

HORTENSE

Run! *Gives him a shove in the back.*

DICK *swings his hat and runs out to the right.*

Hurra-a-a-ah!

Curtain.

ACT II

The First Tableau

Mrs. Bertold's study. In the rear a door leading to the entryway, to the right a door with thick portière, closer to the back a wallpapered door to the kitchen. Comfortably furnished; ornaments and flowers.

FRU BERTOLD *sits at a sewing table embroidering.* HORTENSE *goes and waters the potted plants and picks away withered leaves.*

MRS. BERTOLD *looks at the clock.*

The doctor says I mustn't go bathing right after breakfast.

HORTENSE

What did I tell you! But you're always so stubborn when it's me advising you to do something.

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh!

HORTENSE

For that matter, it was quite a stroke of luck that sent us a massage doctor, of all things. Why, it's as if it had been on order. -- But now *doctor*, he isn't one, strictly speaking?

MRS. BERTOLD

Of course he's a doctor, although he took his degrees in America and our medical authorities, in their wisdom, don't wish to recognize anything *they* haven't sanctioned themselves.

HORTENSE

Now, now, little mother, I see the merits of your American. What sort of fellow is he, by the way.

MRS. BERTOLD

A remarkable person -- quite remarkable. In an odd way he reminds me -- well, I don't know -- He has such a strange power over you. Yes, he's a hypnotist too, maybe that's it. If I just look at him it seems to calm my nerves.

HORTENSE

Yes, and you're really looking young, much younger than when we got here. How old are you actually, you little rascal of a mama? I always suspect that you garner a bit more old lady's respect than you rightfully deserve.

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh -- dear Hortense -- when you've reached the age of forty, then -
-

HORTENSE *counts on her fingers.*

You flunked! You're *only* thirty-six. Weren't you trying to fool me now! -- Just to get some respect -- that precious respect!

MRS. BERTOLD *laughs against her will.*

Child, you're so crazy!

HORTENSE *stops and looks at her.*

I've actually never thought about how young you were when you got married.

MRS. BERTOLD

Just a child, a foolish child.

HORTENSE

Seventeen years old -- isn't that true?

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes.

HORTENSE

Younger than I am now. You see, I have to hurry. Where am I supposed to find a fiancé?

MRS. BERTOLD

Stop joking. I feel as if your wanton words will bring bad luck.

HORTENSE

What kind of bad luck? Marriage?

MRS. BERTOLD

You don't know men.

HORTENSE

I? Oh yes, I promise you, I do.

MRS. BERTOLD

You? Who have lived alone with me --

HORTENSE

Pooh! Yes, that's what mothers always think. No, I wasn't any bigger than *this* when I had a fiancé who was as tall as *this* -- he was in the fifth grade -- ha, ha, ha!

MRS. BERTOLD

Childhood whims!

HORTENSE

Oh well, but such things return.

SANNA

Here are your hand towels, Madam, that have been hung out to dry. You usually go bathing at eleven o'clock.

MRS. BERTOLD

Thank you. Put them in the bedroom, I've changed my bathing time.

SANNA walks toward the door with the portière.

MRS. BERTOLD

Say -- Sanna -- it's dreadful how much is getting used up in the household lately.

HORTENSE *aside*

Oh yes -- well, some!

SANNA

Dear lady, in a house with such an unreasonable number of rats, why --

MRS. BERTOLD

I haven't seen any rats!

SANNA

To be taken for a liar and a thief and a sycophant; after serving a family for fifteen years! *Goes out weeping.*

HORTENSE

Yes, Mama, there are rats -- big rats -- and they eat a terrible lot.

SANNA *with a long rat trap from which there are hanging three mice.*

And if you don't believe what I'm saying, Lady, then you can see for yourself. *Holds up the trap.*

HORTENSE *screams and covers her face.*

Get out -- get out of here with those horrid animals!

MRS. BERTOLD

Well, those little creatures can't eat so much that they show up on the household accounts! A person would think I was feeding two full-grown fellows.

HORTENSE *coughs and tries to conceal her laughter.*

SANNA *offended*

Well, you won't need to feed *me* very long, Madam. *Leaves.*

PETTERSSON *carefully leaves the door ajar and withdraws.*

MRS. BERTOLD *shouts.*

Mr. Pettersson, Mr. Pettersson, come in! Please! Was there something?

PETTERSSON *abashed*

Ha, ha, ha, I didn't think the family was home, ha, ha, ha, excuse me.

MRS. BERTOLD *with suppressed laughter*

He pays a visit when he thinks we're away -- now those are worldly ways! *Aloud.* Was there something you were looking for, Mr. Pettersson?

PETTERSSON

Thank you. It was nothing. I'd just promised Miss Sanna to make some minor repairs in the pantry.

MRS. BERTOLD

How kind of you, Mr. Pettersson! Please come this way. This way.

PETTERSSON

Thank you. *Walks with hurried steps through the room out into the kitchen.*

HORTENSE *laughs.*

You see, Mama?

MRS. BERTOLD

What?

HORTENSE

Sanna and Pettersson are going to become a couple.

MRS. BERTOLD

Would Sanna think of marrying? That dear old soul! Oh -- never!

HORTENSE

Can't she be just as dear for that? She'll make a good match, and a more good-natured hulk than Pettersson doesn't walk this earth.

MRS. BERTOLD

You have a way of expressing yourself -- -!

HORTENSE

Vivid and drastic! It's the custom these days.

MRS. BERTOLD *reprovingly*

There are *varioust* trends these days.

HORTENSE

I know only one: I'm young!

MRS. BERTOLD

Hortense!

HORTENSE

Uh-huh, don't preach! Look, there's sun and summer. It almost makes you laugh just to hear the crow cawing and all the grasshoppers. I like the country, I adore the country, I want to live and die there! I can't just sit on a stump and philosophize over the ruination of our age!

MRS. BERTOLD

How presumptuous! And I feel like such a stranger when I hear you talk.

HORTENSE

Yes, for I am a little duckling, and the dearest, most precious little hen has hatched me. *Kisses both of her mother's hands.*

MRS. BERTOLD

One *cannot* be angry with you; that's just the trouble. *Gets up.*

HORTENSE

Here is your hat, here's your parasol, and I'll fetch the hand towels, so we won't bother Pettersson in his "repairs."

MRS. BERTOLD *shakes her head.*

Ho, ho, yes! Human folly! Sanna, at your age!

HORTENSE *with the hand towels.*

Here you are, little mother.

MRS. BERTOLD

Thank you and good-bye, child. *Kisses Hortense and leaves.*

HORTENSE

If only Dick would look this way! *Runs to the window, opens the window, waves the handkerchief.*

Oh yes, there he goes sauntering about, smoking his cigar in the fresh morning air, gracious, he's splendid. Who would suspect that he's in love! The personification of indifference. -- Well! Doesn't he intend to come over here? Beast! *Waves one more time.*

DICK *from the rear.*

What is it?

HORTENSE

Didn't you see that Mama left?

DICK

And so?

HORTENSE *imitates him.*

And so! -- Blockhead!

DICK

Well, what do you want.

HORTENSE

Want? Hmm! -- How do things stand with our old man?

DICK

I'm worried, I'm really worried about him, it looks serious.

HORTENSE

How so?

DICK

He's patient, he's downright lazy. It's all over with him. He's had it. His energy is gone: he's eaten fried pork and boiled fish for a whole week without a peep. Him -- the fussiest of all fussbudget old bachelors!

HORTENSE

Well, what about yourself then!!

DICK

If I didn't have you, I'd die of misery amidst these old codgers.

HORTENSE

If you didn't have my patés and beef steaks, you mean.

DICK *kisses her hands.*

And if *you* can't hold onto a man's love, then nobody can. But listen -- something odd has happened to me.

HORTENSE

What?

DICK

Yesterday, when you sent me the warm chicken filet, and up in my room I prepared myself to consume this (under the present circumstances) sumptuous --

HORTENSE

"Under any circumstances sumptuous" --

DICK

-- meal, I saw that I didn't have any salt. Naturally, I rushed down to the kitchen to make inquiries. It took awhile: -- I didn't right away come to search for the salt cellar on the shelf where they keep the shoe polish supplies -- and as Uncle at that time usually sleeps through dinner, I hadn't thought of taking the key from my room.

HORTENSE

Well?

DICK

When I came back the chicken was gone.

HORTENSE

Gone?

DICK

Without a trace! The thigh bone and the dish were still there. And our faithful Fido was sitting there.

HORTENSE

Ha, ha, ha!

DICK

There wasn't any dog in the room when I went out, and he wouldn't have been able to open the door himself. Naturally, I bawled out Ström. He looked as if he thought I was out of my head.

HORTENSE

And Uncle?

DICK

Could I go and ask Uncle about a missing chicken?

HORTENSE

Ha, ha, ha! To what lengths mustn't his gastronomic anguish have gone when he could sink to stealing and then blame his dog! You still don't doubt our plan?

DICK

My plan.

HORTENSE

If it's headed for success -- yes. And mine if things go badly. -- But I want to be generous. My poor little lad, who lost his dinner! Ha, ha, ha! Poor thing! -- Today I'll only give you cold food; the warm kind the old man would stick his nose in. *Walks to a cupboard, she carries the key to it, and takes out a couple packages that she stuffs into Dick's coat pockets. There is a knock on the door. Both listen.*

What is it! Somebody's coming.

DICK

Where shall I go?

HORTENSE

Out in the kitchen. Sanna will save you. Run!

DICK *exits.*

HORTENSE

Come in!

SANDERSON

Excuse me. Hmm -- my name is Sanderson -- Doctor Sanderson, massagist.

HORTENSE *amiably*

Ah, Mama's doctor.

SANDERSON

Mama's -- hmm -- yes --

HORTENSE *looks at him, about to laugh.*
Mama has gone bathing.

SANDERSON
It's not her I'm looking for either; I just saw her walk by.

HORTENSE
Is it *me* you want to speak with?

SANDERSON
Yes.

Pause.

SANDERSON
I -- hmm -- I'm not quite unaccustomed to introducing myself, but
-- hmmm -- the situation is so new.

HORTENSE
How so?

SANDERSON
I don't know how well I might be known.

HORTENSE
Mama has spoken so cordially of you, she's already so much
better, and she feels so grateful --

SANDERSON
That's not what I meant. Say, do you know the name "Möller"?
It's true, you call yourselves "Bertold," but --

HORTENSE
What do you mean?

SANDERSON
To come out with it: have you ever heard tell of someone named
Dick Möller?

HORTENSE

Quiet, please! What have you learned?

SANDERSON

Dick Möller -- that's me.

HORTENSE *approaches the door as she regards him, frightened and incredulous.*

SANDERSON

No, don't go. Stay! -- I feel so horribly embarrassed. It usually isn't my case otherwise, but I'm not used to this -- not at all. I don't know how to put it. Hortense -- I -- I --

HORTENSE

What?

SANDERSON

Well, there's no other word for it: I'm your father.

HORTENSE *to herself*

He's mad!

SANDERSON

Don't you even know your father's name?

HORTENSE

Bertold, naturally. Richard Bertold.

SANDERSON

No one has told you that his name was Richard Möller?

HORTENSE

Nooo. How could he be called that!

SANDERSON

And no one said that he traveled abroad so your mother could get the divorce document she was so anxious about?

HORTENSE

When would this have occurred?

SANDERSON

When you were two years old.

HORTENSE

Then Mama is not a widow?

SANDERSON

No more than I'm a widower.

HORTENSE

But how could I believe that this is true?

SANDERSON

That I don't know.

HORTENSE *takes his hands and looks him in the face.*

You should be my father?

SANDERSON

I'm almost beginning to think it isn't true. You've grown so big and beautiful and I'm just an old bum.

HORTENSE

Nonsense! You look good. Why, you're a real dandy. *Puts her hands on his shoulders.* It's odd. It feels both as if it couldn't be otherwise and as if it weren't true. How can I know?

SANDERSON

Well, I have neither a necklace as a sign of perpetual recognition nor any birthmark to show every time my authenticity is cast in doubt. I'm just an old fool, an adventurer, a vagabond -- in a stylish way, of course.

HORTENSE *puts her arms around his neck.*

I like you. *Looks him in the face. Laughs.* I'm like you. Now I know where I got it from, the thing Mama wants to eradicate. You

are a slob. I see that you're a slob. I want keep a close check on you. *Puts her cheek against his shoulder.* I can also care about you. -- You're not fooling me? *Looks him in the eyes.*

SANDERSON

An old lowlife, I am -- a blasted lowlife! A man doesn't notice it till he gets to see his child.

HORTENSE

Ha, ha, ha! Don't you see we're two chips off the same block! Don't get sentimental now. -- I have a Papa, I have a Papa, I have a Papa. *Spins around, jumps on him around his neck, and kisses him.* There now. Now the preliminaries are taken care of. Now you are my papa, now I have permission to scold you, to hold you by the ear and get fresh with you. That's the children's duties toward their parents nowadays. -- Well? And Mama? -- Sit down here and let's talk about her. *They sit down.*

SANDERSON

She hasn't recognized me. I've acquired a full beard. -- Hmm. -- It's so confounded unbecoming.

HORTENSE *looks at him critically.*

A person could fancy you with the beard too. -- So, more?

SANDERSON

I am not her husband now.

HORTENSE

But you're my papa. There's no divorce document for *that*.

SANDERSON

I was homesick for Sweden. Sometimes you're gripped by such a need to see the old place again -- hmm -- *smiles.* -- or to be quits with the new.

HORTENSE

But how in the world can you be called Dick Möller?

SANDERSON

That I don't know. My father was called Möller for fifty years without anybody finding it remarkable. There's no patent on the name.

HORTENSE

But *Dick* also! That you're called *Dick* Möller, that's quite remarkable.

SANDERSON

So! There ought to be one more person who bears this remarkable name. As I recall, my brother's boy was named after me.

HORTENSE

How old is he now?

SANDERSON

Let's see! He was probably about nine when I set off on my travels. So he should be around twenty-five.

HORTENSE *claps her hands and jumps up and down on the chair.*

SANDERSON

What was so odd about that?

HORTENSE

Wait! Was one of your brothers Sebastian?

SANDERSON

Of course -- the oldest.

HORTENSE

Ha, ha, ha!

SANDERSON

What's got into you?

HORTENSE

Then he's my uncle, that old grump, the old fogie! He -- he lives here -- hee, hee, hee -- inside here. *Points her thumb over her shoulder.* He hates women -- hee, hee, hee -- When he sits in the garden he puts a screen in front of him, so we won't look at him -- hee, hee, hee! And then he's my own uncle! "Uncle Sebastian." How funny!

SANDERSON

He hates women?

HORTENSE

Yes.

SANDERSON

Then either he must have acquired that recently, or else you've got the wrong person.

HORTENSE

Certainly not. Dick says --

SANDERSON

Which Dick?

HORTENSE

My cousin, I tell you!

SANDERSON

Why, you don't know him.

HORTENSE

No -- yes -- that is to say, I do, but I didn't know that he was my cousin. Mama's always said that my father didn't have any relatives, and naturally I thought they would have been named Bertold, if there'd been any. And now -- this thing with Dick -- you mustn't tell this to anybody. You hear! Not to Mama, and not to Uncle. Not one word! *Holds his lapel tight.*

SANDERSON

What should I tell? I don't know anything.

HORTENSE

You'll find out, if only you're patient -- No wait! *Snaps her fingers and jumps up.* You can help us. You know English, don't you?

SANDERSON

Of course, I do. Why, I'm completely Americanized, and this has helped me not be recognized. Your mother had no idea I emigrated from Denmark to America and that I switched from being a pharmacist to a doctor.

HORTENSE

I'll pretend I'm taking English lessons from you.

SANDERSON

Pretend? Why?

HORTENSE

Well -- and when Mama asks if I've really been at your place an hour or two in the morning, then you say yes. And when she asks if I've been with you some other time of the day, then you also say yes, and when she asks what I was there for, then you can say it was a word I wanted to know, or a lesson I was supposed to have, or a book I'd forgotten, and if she figures out I haven't been with you at the time you said, then you just tell her you don't recall and that you're so terribly forgetful.

SANDERSON

My Lord, child, you're just like me!

HORTENSE

Did you also used to fool Mama?

SANDERSON

Do you think there's anybody who lives with her who doesn't deceive her?

HORTENSE *looks at him in silence, bursts out in laughter.*
You're right about that! I've never thought of it.

SANDERSON

Well, but what is it that Dick says? You started on something.

HORTENSE

I don't remember. -- Oh, yes! It was about Uncle Sebastian. He's been a really big-time philanderer and until not so long ago. Dick says that we women are just like grapes, and that's why there are only two kinds of women haters; the shy ones, who say "You're sour," and the unshy ones, who overeat. *Pauses and looks up.* Now that was a nasty thing for Dick to say? -- Dick says things like that sometimes, but he's a good boy.

SANDERSON

Just go to it; you needn't be afraid of hurting my moral sensibility.

HORTENSE

Well. And Uncle is one of those who've overeaten. He started getting old, and the housekeeper tyrannized him, since she prepared such good food, and he's a frightful gourmand.

SANDERSON

Well?

HORTENSE

Well now he believes in Strindberg and says that all women are bad and lazy and deceitful. It's not true, of course -- but Uncle *believes* it, and now women are not allowed in his house, and Dick is not allowed to marry. -- Dick is his foster son.

SANDERSON

Ah-ha!

HORTENSE

But we're going to trick him.

SANDERSON

How?

HORTENSE

I'll tell you later. We don't have time now; Mama's coming soon. --
But tell me: *Puts her arm around his neck and whispers.* Why did
you two divorce?

SANDERSON

Well -- hmm -- it's not easy to say. Differences in temperament.

HORTENSE

Differences?

SANDERSON

Yes. It can mean a good deal. I, for example, have no special
ability worth mentioning to hold onto money, and your mother
was brought up very sensibly.

HORTENSE

Yes. She has tended to her fortune as well as any man. She's
clever.

SANDERSON

Yes, she's perfect.

HORTENSE

Ugh! You say that in such a nasty way.

SANDERSON

No, God knows I don't! I mean she's so moral.

HORTENSE

And you're not?

SANDERSON

Perhaps not.

Pause.

HORTENSE

So was *that* why you divorced?

SANDERSON

Well, since you must know, there -- there was something during my bachelor days that --

HORTENSE

That you hadn't told her about?

SANDERSON

That's right.

HORTENSE

Uh-huh. But that sort of thing you disclose before getting married -- you understand? While the person concerned still has the freedom to take you or not.

SANDERSON

I wonder how I should have gone about telling her something like that! God help me, I think she believed in the stork when she got married, and it was one of her basic principles to continue that.

HORTENSE *emphatically.*

Well, see, that's the trouble!

SANDERSON

Yes. The misfortune -- the bad luck --

HORTENSE

I know everything about Dick. *Everything*, you understand! *Laughs.* But it wasn't so much either. Dick, he is such an honorable boy.

SANDERSON

Soo?

HORTENSE

Listen! *Nods.* And we enlightened women, we understand a thing or two, believe me.

SANDERSON

“We” -- *phewww!* *Bursts into laughter.* Who has enlightened you?

HORTENSE

Dick. He's literally brought me up. Mama's not like me.

SANDERSON.

Nooo.

HORTENSE

How did you suppose it would be with her -- now?

SANDERSON

Well, actually, I didn't suppose anything. I came here because -- well, you know, it's a bit touchy talking to you about my life. I don't want to say anything that may hurt you.

HORTENSE

I'm not going to be hurt by what you say: I care about you.

SANDERSON

A man never knows how he is -- until he's about to look his children in the eye.

HORTENSE *kisses him.*

SANDERSON

I was longing to come here. I'd come to think about times gone by. Well -- you shouldn't think I'm better than I am. I went off to get away from something -- I traveled here out of curiosity -- out of a kind of vagabond spirit. I can't take anything too seriously -- not in the long run at least. Don't make me out to be some kind of ideal papa!

HORTENSE

No, I see that you aren't. But you *are* a papa in any case.

SANDERSON

And then I had a crazy desire to meet her again and see if she would be the same. I didn't know how it would happen, but there would probably always be a way. -- As it happened, she needed my massage.

HORTENSE

And now?

SANDERSON

Well, she doesn't suspect that this excellent doctor is her sinful Dick. But she probably notices a resemblance -- *smiles* -- and I think she doesn't find it unpleasant.

HORTENSE

Oh, I'm so worried about her.

SANDERSON

Worried! Soooo. Why?

HORTENSE

Well, you see, there's a young lady here who has placed herself at the forefront of an equality requirement society, or whatever they call it.

SANDERSON *repeats, as he marks the rhythm with his finger.*
"Equality requirement society"? Blast it, that's a mouthful! What does it mean?

HORTENSE

It's a women's league, where each and every one pledges herself never to marry anything but -- *Is about to laugh and glances at him surreptitiously*-- a virginal man. That's what they call it.

SANDERSON

Confound it; what words! But the issue in any case isn't so stupid.

HORTENSE

Isn't it?

SANDERSON

Nooo. If the women didn't put up with us the way we are, then --
It's quite right.

HORTENSE *with passion*

No, it isn't right, because if they get to spend time with Mama,
then she'll be completely crazed in the end.

SANDERSON

Oh, what can it hurt Mama? She will in any event have served as
an example in that case. And she probably isn't said to --

HORTENSE

It's more than that! All the ladies sit down to tell the worst things
about the men. One provokes the other. The men are tyrants, the
men are coarse and immoral and greedy as the devil for a soul. A
person would think they just walk around to gobble us poor girls
up. And we're supposed to distrust them and hate them. It's a
duty to our selves and to society.

SANDERSON

A solemn duty -- it appears.

HORTENSE *with conviction*

Oh! -- And then they always talk about how pure we are. They call
it *believing in woman*.

SANDERSON

He believes in Strindberg, and *she* believes in woman. A new
religion seems to have developed here in this country!

HORTENSE

And I -- *Pretends to be sobbing* -- I want to get married to Dick!

SANDERSON

Well, My Lord, then marry him!

HORTENSE

Yes, but Mama has to get out of that young woman's claws. I cannot bear Mama hating men. I cannot bear her coming and saying nasty things about Dick.

SANDERSON

What sort of young lady are you talking about?

HORTENSE

Widerman.

SANDERSON

Oh -- my patient! -- Then we should put Mama and her at odds with each other.

HORTENSE

How?

SANDERSON

Well, you see, the thing is that Mama -- *Tears his hair*. Well, I don't really know what's suitable to talk about or not -- I don't want to say anything you ought not get to hear.

HORTENSE

Now, now, don't be silly! I can hear everything.

SANDERSON

Well -- hmmm -- the way things are, it probably wouldn't be impossible to make her jealous.

HORTENSE

Oh -- you sly dog!

Change of Scene.

Second Tableau

MÖLLER *comes in abruptly with Dick's jacket in hand.*
 My heart's pounding! -- I didn't even have time to pick up the packages, I had to take the whole coat. How I'm trembling! Oh, to have got to this point! *Hastily pulls up the packages, throws them in a bureau drawer, and takes out the key.*

Thank God! *Runs out with the jacket.* It worked! It's hanging in place again. But what will he think? That the dog has taken it, or Ström --

Ah! *Sinks down into a chair.* It's come to this point! -- My morals are undermined. My will is not free, and I would beat my brother to death for a steak. I've got the olfactory organs of an animal; I have the nose of a dog. Pitiful decay! *Sits quiet a moment pondering, then gets up with energy.* But what's in the packages? *Walks up to the drawer and removes the paper.* Paté. Goose liver paté -- as I live and breathe! -- And cake. *Smells the paté, sneaks a bite between lines.* What devil can have baked a paté like this! This is what I call culinary art! -- But where did Dick get it? I'd bet anything it's a woman who's made this paté. -
 - A breed from hell! Is there a movement, a thought, a striving in woman other than to rule over man? Through centuries she has waged her quiet struggle, and on all points -- systematically -- satanically. Show me a single example of a mother teaching her sons to prepare food. No, the art gets passed on to the daughters, or else she takes it with her to the grave. -- It's the daughters, always the daughters! All might will be placed in their hands, everything that binds a man. *Has eaten up the paté and is licking his fingers.* This was the smörgåsbord -- no, a greeting from the smörgåsbord. *Sighs.* If I were to eat the cake too? -- No, it would be blasphemy to this divine paté. -- Smörgåsbord and dessert -- but no dinner! -- This infamous pork certainly doesn't count! Not in this life! Why, it's not food. It's a mockery, poison. And now I've whet my appetite.

STRÖM

I'm absolutely miserable! -- What should I do? Oh, poor me! -- But it wasn't me.

MÖLLER *aside*

Dick! *To Ström.* Let him squawk, let him hit you if need be -- I'll pay for everything. But say it was you.

STRÖM

Wha -- what?

MÖLLER

Tell the young man it was you who did it.

STRÖM

It was the cat --

MÖLLER

Is there a cat in the house?

STRÖM

Yes, there probably is; at least there are enough rats here. And for that matter maybe the old junk can be glued together.

MÖLLER

What old junk?

STRÖM

That I smashed.

MÖLLER

What? Which?

STRÖM *leaves and comes back with the pieces of a vase that he shows him.*

MÖLLER

One of my most expensive, most very expensive vases? Are you insane, man!

STRÖM

It was the cat!

MÖLLER

It was the cat?

STRÖM

Yes, it was --

MÖLLER *interrupting*

You understand, that's acting just like the womenfolk! That's exactly what housemaids have said through the ages!

STRÖM

Well, what's a person supposed to say? And when a body's to do their chores --

MÖLLER

God in heaven, come down and see what a fool you've created! And it's supposed to be a fellow! -- Go! Get out of my sight! -- And if he goes, who will brush my boots? Poor harrowed man that I am! *Sinks into a chair.* And the century of women brings all this with it. -- Ström, don't ever touch my porcelain. Go out to the kitchen.

DICK *dressed in nightshirt*

What's he done? What on earth's going on.

STRÖM *leaves.*

MÖLLER

He smashed one of my finest vases to bits. And then he says that the cat --

DICK

Ha, ha, ha!

MÖLLER *angrily*

What?

DICK

Nothing. -- I just mean that Ström isn't exactly a model. Not much better than a woman. His diet, for example --

MÖLLER

It's not bad at all.

DICK

No, fried pork is a venerable old dish, but --

MÖLLER

I find it wholesome. People are just prejudiced against it.

DICK

That may well be; but there are occasions when I put more value in a good, brown mortateli soup, cooked with a shoulder of venison, and a pike stuffed with minced fish and truffle, and then a juicy, nicely oven-baked --

MÖLLER *quietly*

Damn! *Loudly*. I despise the gastronomic pleasures.

DICK

Really? I didn't know. *Pause, Dick stands fingering bits of the vase*. Otherwise I've come upon a little wonder of a kitchen boy --

MÖLLER

A kitchen boy, you say!

DICK

Yes. But Uncle, since you don't care about --

MÖLLER

Who knows how to cook?

DICK

Certainly. An absolute miracle, from what I can understand, Uncle. But since you set no store by --

MÖLLER

Where is he?

DICK

Here near the fishing village.

MÖLLER

Why, it's not possible! I've advertised in all the papers for a clever cook, and heard back from only one -- who wanted 2,000 crowns in wages.

DICK

My boy doesn't have such great pretensions. In any event he's not asking for any wages till we've tested his skills.

MÖLLER

And when would he --

DICK

Now right away. For dinner already. He'd been thinking of setting up a little grill stand here, but of course there aren't enough people. He has everything with him that may be needed for at least one meal.

MÖLLER

Oh -- Dick! *Extends his hand to him.*

DICK

But he can't take a regular job here. He just comes in and prepares our dinner, and he demands that it be eaten at four o'clock sharp -- not one minute later.

MÖLLER

Oh -- as quickly as possible.

DICK

And tomorrow he'll come again at the same time. He's a little genius and, like all such types, he has his whims. One must humor him. May I introduce him?

MÖLLER

Have him come in.

DICK *calls out.*

Peter!

HORTENSE *dressed as a kitchen boy with a white cap on her head.*

DICK *whispers.*

Take off your cap.

HORTENSE *whispers back.*

Can't; my braid shows. *Stands at attention and gives a military greeting.*

DICK

He's been employed on one of the navy's warships.

MÖLLER

Good, my lad, make something suitable, and I'll -- I'll reward you.

HORTENSE

You'll be satisfied. Just tell that lout in the kitchen he's supposed to obey me. -- I'll do the serving at the table myself. *Out.*

MÖLLER *with admiration*

"I'll do the serving at the table myself." -- What a little man's man! This way and none other. He knows a thing or two. -- Ha, ha, ha! There's still hope for our gender. That one will take up the struggle against the women.

DICK *aside*

The diet of pork has made him sluggish. Not an inkling of deception!

MÖLLER *opens the door and calls out into the kitchen.*

Ström! Do whatever this young gentleman -- Mr. Peter -- tells you to. You hear?

STRÖM *from the kitchen.*
All right, I will!

There is a knock on the door in the entryway.

MÖLLER
Come in!

SANDERSON
Excuse me -- you don't recognize me, do you?

MÖLLER *looks at him.*
No -- I don't really believe I've had the honor.

SANDERSON
I'd very much like to speak with you privately for a few minutes.

DICK *with a bow to Sanderson.*
I'll be going. *To Möller.* I'll go out in the kitchen; there may be something I can help with there.

MÖLLER *gestures with his hand.*
Very well; everyone will obey.

DICK *leaves.*

SANDERSON
You don't recognize me?

MÖLLER
No, not on my life!

SANDERSON
Ha, ha, ha -- it's the beard! It's damned unbecoming.

MÖLLER

Yes, now when you laugh! It's Dick -- brother Dick!

SANDERSON

Yes, indeed! *They embrace each other.* I do believe you were happy to see me -- old codger! Otherwise you weren't so keen on me back then. But "the grave atones for all," so they say -- my wife has dressed in mourning on my account for sixteen years, that probably has an effect.

MÖLLER

Sit down. My God, yes -- it wasn't yesterday we met! One starts getting old. Oh-ho, oh yes!

During their conversation Ström starts setting the table.

SANDERSON

The devil is old, but not me! Forty-five -- is that any age?

MÖLLER *rocks his head.*

No, why, you're just a child. And not one strand of gray. Of course, I have my good fifteen years on you. -- Shall we drink a bottle together?

SANDERSON

Thanks! You know very well I won't say no.

MÖLLER *takes out some wine and glasses from a cabinet. They drink.*

Skoal! -- So you haven't become a teetotaler.

SANDERSON

Oh, no, not yet. I can convert later on. But -- listen -- I've changed my livelihood. I've changed name as well. -- Doctor Sanderson.

MÖLLER

San ---?

SANDERSON

Sanderson -- yes. For the meantime, it doesn't concern anybody who I am.

MÖLLER

No, I understand. For your wife's sake.

SANDERSON

My ex-wife, please note.

MÖLLER

Of course, your ex. Skoal to life without women! The state of the future!

SANDERSON

Are you insane! That would be a lovely state! But do you know that Hermione is your neighbor?

MÖLLER *jumps up.*

Is she the one making noise in there? Phew! Is that your wife? I've not been able to tolerate that prayer-meeting face for the life of me.

SANDERSON

Have you seen her lately?

MÖLLER

No. And I'd rather not.

SANDERSON

It seems to me she's won.

MÖLLER *gives a holler.*

Have you met her?

SANDERSON

Yes. That is, she's my patient. She doesn't recognize me. I think she's gone around lying about my death for so many years that she's fooled herself into thinking I am dead.

MÖLLER

You're not starting to -- ? -- you were quite in love -- watch out!
It's been known to happen that such things return.

SANDERSON *abashed*

Hmm -- no. But of course it could be platonic, so to speak -- a
friendship. I recall that she was crazy about that. -- Though I was
not platonic.

MÖLLER

Either to her or to others, ha, ha, ha!

SANDERSON

I'm now in a totally different relationship -- as doctor -- hmm.
You see, there's something peculiar about it, being a doctor. She
obeys -- she does everything I tell her. She has confidence.
Hmmm -- it wasn't that way in the days we were married.

MÖLLER

No, so I recall. And bedroom lectures -- heh -- Well, so, you're a
doctor now?

SANDERSON

Yes, I've devoted myself to massage. It's an occupation I like.

MÖLLER

Skoal!

*DICK in his ordinary clothes opens the door for HORTENSE, who
carries in a couple of dishes*

MÖLLER *to Sanderson*

You'll stay for dinner, naturally?

SANDERSON

Thanks.

MÖLLER

Look here -- Dick -- may I present: My brother's son, Doctor San -
- San--

SANDERSON

Sanderson.

MÖLLER

One of my oldest and best friends.

DICK

Whose face he's forgotten and whose name he can't say. Fine!

The gentlemen converse.

HORTENSE *to Ström*

He's a fellow, and he's a tailor, and he claims to be superior to women. And see, now, how the table looks! *Arranges.* Everything's here that's *supposed* to be here, since I sent it in. But look at *that!* Do you understand? No, this is the way it should be, and like this and this. Well? Do you see now!

STRÖM

Yes -- lord -- who can understand that, when one isn't a man of learning!

HORTENSE

But we always think we're better than womenfolk. Eh?

STRÖM

Yes, that may be.

HORTENSE

It's good for you and your kind. But pay attention, now it's going to happen, you should stand there, straight as a burning candle. Now stay alert and keep a close watch for a sign from me. Present arms! *In the tone of a maitre d' with a bow to Möller.* Dinner is served!

They sit down at the table. Hortense stands behind Möller's chair.

SANDERSON *looks at her and recognizes her.*

Ahh -- buh-h-h-! *Breaks out in laughter behind his napkin.*

HORTENSE *gives him a reprimanding look.*

MÖLLER

Please, gentlemen! *Tastes the soup.* Oh, yes, you know your art!
Bravo, my lad!

DICK

Well, Uncle, wasn't I right?

MÖLLER

And I was too! What can the women come up with, compared to this?

DICK

This is just the beginning.

MÖLLER *extends his hand to him across the table.*

You've saved my life.

DICK *laughs.*

Oh -- please!

MÖLLER

But for such a dish one must have wine. Peter, here's the key to the cabinet there, I entrust you with it. To the left of the door, on the first shelf -- yes -- you'll find it all right.

HORTENSE *opens the cabinet.*

As in my own pocket.

MÖLLER

Three!

HORTENSE *with the wine bottles, cannot close the cabinet door behind her, so it remains standing ajar. Places the wine bottles on the buffet and takes a corkscrew to draw up one of them. A small rat comes out of the cabinet.*

STRÖM

Peter! -- Mr. Peter! Get her! Hit her!

HORTENSE *frightened*

What is it?

STRÖM *runs around like a madman striking out.*

A rat! A rat! Shoot her! Hit her! -- there! *Strikes.*

HORTENSE *throws the wine bottle onto a sofa, jumps up on a chair and holds her legs as if she'd swept her skirts around her. Yells.*

MÖLLER *looks at her in surprise.*

SANDERSON *chokes with laughter.*

DICK *regards his uncle and shakes his head.*

Yes, he's grown dull: -- not even that shows him what gender she is!

STRÖM *with mouth hanging*

She went down into a hole.

DICK *with a distorted accent*

Yes -- natürlich!

HORTENSE *ashamed, gets down from the chair, meets Dick's roguish glance, and is about to laugh. Pours the wine.*

MÖLLER *still in surprise*

Are you afraid of rats?

HORTENSE

It's a congenital defect: my mother was frightened by one. *To Ström.* Go now. And close the door so more don't come in.

STRÖM *leaves.*

MÖLLER

Skoal, gentlemen! -- That's drinkable! Eh?

SANDERSON

Superb. Quite superb. Have you had that little master chef for long?

HORTENSE *winks and makes a sign that he should be careful.*

MÖLLER

No; this is his first day.

SANDERSON

Splendid. *To Hortense, in a low voice.* Look happy!

HORTENSE *nods to him, has got to see the broken vase.*

Oh -- what a beautiful vase! Broken.

MÖLLER

Do you realize what it is?

HORTENSE *examines the pieces.*

Sèvres.

MÖLLER

Dick! Dick! He knew it was Sèvres.

DICK

He should have become an artist, have gone to painting school, but he lacked the means.

HORTENSE

Well, how can one be so careless as to take such precious things with to a summer place?

MÖLLER

I was going to write a piece on “the striving for beauty in genuine Sèvres porcelain,” and I needed to have it around me. Inspiration, you see!

HORTENSE *with a sly glance at Dick*

Yes, I understand. You wanted the spirit of the porcelain -- its soul, so to speak -- to hover about you.

MÖLLER *enchanted*

Dick!

HORTENSE

But who broke it?

MÖLLER

Ström.

HORTENSE

But just to let him touch such things! It's a sacrilege.

MÖLLER

He said sacrilege -- Dick! Sacrilege -- do you hear!!

HORTENSE *laughs.*

No, you see, here are hands that can handle Sèvres porcelain!

Makes a coquettish gesture and extends her hands.

MÖLLER *takes one of them and kisses it.*

DICK

And still he doesn't notice anything! *To the uncle.* He always got the girls' roles in all the party skits. It sticks with him.

HORTENSE *makes gestures to Sanderson, who nods encouragingly.*

MÖLLER

Take a glass, lad! I *must* drink with you. You're no ordinary ---

DICK

Why, I've told you, it's genius.

HORTENSE *holds the glass.*

I probably mustn't propose -- not ask to ---

MÖLLER

Anything you like!

HORTENSE

Get to say "uncle."

DICK

He's from a fine family, Uncle. Incognito.

SANDERSON

Hurrahh!

HORTENSE *gives him a reprimanding look.* SANDERSON *holds the napkin in front of his face and laughs.*

MÖLLER

Oh yes -- young rascal! -- you may say "uncle." Skoal! -- You're going to be a heartbreaker, aren't you?

DICK

Yes. Skoal to the heartbreaker!

HORTENSE

Well, Ström; Get a move on! Why, I told you there were going to be other dishes. There now! *Runs out into the kitchen.*

MÖLLER

What an effect a good dinner can have! It's beginning to warm my heart.

DICK *roguishly*

And to make you more forgiving -- to the female gender.

MÖLLER

No -- confound it! This dinner is only a confirmation that it's possible to avoid the whole gang. Skoal!

SANDERSON

One shouldn't be unjust -- and even less ungrateful.

HORTENSE *from the kitchen with a bowl that she offers around.*

MÖLLER *nudges Sanderson in his side.*

You old rascal! Ha, ha, ha! You remember that story with "Katie" as we called her? The time, when Bergdahl --

SANDERSON

Quiet -- confound it!

MÖLLER

What's up?

SANDERSON *warning, resolutely*

The child!

MÖLLER *turns around and looks at Hortense.* HORTENSE *thanks Sanderson with a glance.*

MÖLLER

How old are you actually?

HORTENSE

Eighteen.

DICK

No, no -- fifteen. *Whispers.* He has this little weakness of always lying about his age. *To Hortense.* Do you think you look like an eighteen-year-old boy!

SANDERSON *steals away and takes Hortense by the hand. She nods to him happily.*

DICK, *annoyed, has got up from the table, grabs Hortense by the arm and takes her aside. Loud-voiced merriment at the table.* Listen, is there something between you and that gentleman?

HORTENSE *breaks free, offended.*
He's my father.

DICK *in utter surprise*
Pa -- papa?

HORTENSE
Uh-huh. Go and sit down.

DICK
But I don't understand --

HORTENSE
I'll explain later. *Looks at her watch.* Now it's almost time for me to go, now it's *our* dinnertime. It doesn't make *me* full watching *you* sitting there eating.

DICK *resumes his place. The other two have meanwhile been drinking and are talking louder and louder.*

MÖLLER *to Dick*
Du - don't bother the boy. He's behaving like a good fellow. --
You, you shouldn't bother him.

SANDERSON *wants to clink glasses.*

HORTENSE *grabs the bottle from him. SANDERSON looks at her. Obeys.*

MÖLLER

No -- Pe - Peter, we were going to have a little more wine.

HORTENSE *puts the cork in.*

Uh-huh! You're going to eat and drink today so you'll sit like crippled crows tomorrow? You've just had far too much already. From now on things are going to be different. *Pause. She looks at them with an indignant gaze.* Well, there you can see how fellows get, when they're let out on their own.

MÖLLER

Fu-fellows?

HORTENSE

Yes! I have always worked for women, and I'm going to be in the service of women again. Ström's dinners are just what you deserve! *Tries to leave.*

MÖLLER *rushes up.*

No, oh lord, please! -- We -- we'll obey. After this day it's Peter who gives the orders in this house. Li----Listen, lads -- Pe--Peter--.
Sinks down in the chair.

HORTENSE

Uh-huh! And Peter who keeps the key to the cabinet. Good-bye until tomorrow.
Leaves with the wine bottle under her arm.

MÖLLER *admiring*

If it had been a woman, she would have pelted us with words of abuse!

SANDERSON

I don't see that it was much different!

Curtain

ACT III

Mrs. Bertold's study.

HORTENSE *sits crocheting some lace*

MISS WIDERMAN *from the back.*

Good morning.

HORTENSE

Good morning.

MISS WIDERMAN

Is Mrs. Bertold at home?

HORTENSE

Yes, she'll be coming soon.

MISS WIDERMAN

May I have a seat?

HORTENSE

Please do.

MISS WIDERMAN *picks up a couple books from the table.*

Is this what you're reading, Miss? Max Nordau or the like, I suppose.

HORTENSE

I don't concern myself with social problems.

MISS WIDERMAN

Ohhh -- I thought quite the contrary -- Judging from your outspoken opinions...

HORTENSE

I don't need to get my opinions out of books. *Significantly. Life* has something to teach too.

MISS WIDERMAN

Excuse me! I thought it was literature we were just talking about.

HORTENSE

Ah-hah. It *is* my reading. It's *Hagdahl*, Sweden's favorite cookbook, that's going to help me keep my husband's love.

MISS WIDERMAN

It probably will be necessary.

HORTENSE

What brings you here?

MISS WIDERMAN

Nothing. I just wanted to say that with your good nature, *Hagdahl* won't be necessary.

HORTENSE

Oh, a person's nature adjusts accordingly. -- But I'll go and call Mama. *Meets Mrs. Bertold in the door.* It's a good thing you've come, Mama; *you* have a guest. *Leaves.*

MISS WIDERMAN

Good morning, Hermione dear.

MRS. BERTOLD.

Good morning.

MISS WIDERMAN

Your daughter --

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes, she really has me worried.

MISS WIDERMAN

I'm glad you've finally opened your eyes.

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes, it really is troubling. Why, as soon as he came here, it was decided that Hortense was going to take lessons from him, but --

MISS WIDERMAN

Which him?

MRS. BERTOLD

The doctor.

MISS WIDERMAN

And so?

MRS. BERTOLD

Now she's almost always there. Whenever I inquire about her, I always get the same answer from Sanna: "The mistress has gone to study English," and when I say something about it to him, he just answers: "Yes, she's making remarkable advances."

MISS WIDERMAN

God help us with those advances!

SANNA *with a couple of vases, filled with flowers.*

The mistress sent me in with these.

MRS. BERTOLD

Thank you. Put them there.

MISS WIDERMAN

Oh yes -- that's true -- Sanna, I have a list with me here -- *aside to Mrs. Bertold.* Isn't it true, Hermione? This movement ought to be representative of all social strata. *To Sanna.* Perhaps you would like to write your name here, Sanna?

SANNA

Why?

MISS WIDERMAN

Well, you see Sanna, everyone who writes on this list pledges only to marry a man who is morally pure.

SANNA

Well, I don't need to sign any list for that. I can't stand filthy people. For that matter I'd probably be man enough to *keep* him clean, if he couldn't do it himself.

MISS WIDERMAN

Hmm -- You don't understand, Sanna -- it's not external cleanliness that's intended here.

SANNA

No, that's not what I meant either! I'm not one of those folks who settle for "shiny clean on the outside and sickly on the inside," I'm telling you.

MISS WIDERMAN

I know that all right. But here it's moral purity that's intended.

SANNA

Moral purity? What's that?

MISS WIDERMAN

We mean -- hmm -- a fellow should not have been in any relationship to any woman other than the one he marries. That's what we mean by being morally pure. -- If you'll sign your name there, Sanna.

SANNA

No, I surely can't! Why, he's a widower.

MISS WIDERMAN

Ohh? Hmm. How should that be classified? We haven't thought about that.

Looks at Mrs. Bertold in appeal.

MRS BERTOLD

Don't bother about that.

SANNA

And besides, I probably don't have any more to blame him about for having been married than he has to blame me for having my boy.

MISS WIDERMAN

Boy!

SANNA

Mercy, yes, you must know that, Miss, that I had a boy who died right before I came to the Madam. A person can probably be just as respectable for that, when she behaves decently.

MISS WIDERMAN

No, *in that case* you cannot sign the list, Sanna!

SANNA

No, I think a person can manage fine without all that fuss.
Leaves.

MISS WIDERMAN

A boy! You've never told me that!

MRS. BERTOLD

Why, it was nothing to talk about.

MISS WIDERMAN

And I had such respect for Sanna!

MRS. BERTOLD

And with good reason. As loyal and honest and industrious --

MISS WIDERMAN

Oh -- this corruption! But let's not speak any more about it. I see that you're taking it line by line.

MRS. BERTOLD *smiles*.
Ohh!

MISS WIDERMAN
And just think, how remarkable that we couldn't collect more names! I always carry the list with me. You should too --

MRS. BERTOLD
No, my dear, actually I think it's childishness.

MISS WIDERMAN
Morality!?

MRS. BERTOLD
No, but the list there.

MISS WIDERMAN
Hermione, your daughter is making you depraved!

MRS. BERTOLD
Ha!

MISS WIDERMAN
And *such* a servant in your house!

MRS. BERTOLD
Yes, such a servant one doesn't part with, once one has been lucky enough to find her.

MISS WIDERMAN
You're abandoning our cause.

MRS. BERTOLD
No. But don't you think that all of us are best at tending to our own affairs? Let us keep our eyes on ourselves and try to do what's right.

MISS WIDERMAN
A merchant's morals!

MRS. BERTOLD

Dear, don't be angry! I merely mean it's too risky to develop such definite theories on our own. Life is so diverse and so variegated, one has one's eyes opened to so much one hasn't had any notion of before.

MISS WIDERMAN

Laxity? And this from *you*, who through your own marriage --

MRS. BERTOLD

It's precisely through it that I've come to think -- But you can't understand that, who've never been married yourself.

MISS WIDERMAN *with passion*

Ah, here we have it again, this complacency of married women! It's just too ridiculous. One could die laughing. It's as if no one should have a right to express themselves on gender questions and marriage except you -- *has got up and is nervously putting on her gloves* -- just because *you* have been married and we have not.

MRS. BERTOLD

It gives us some kind of experience always that you must lack.

MISS WIDERMAN

A logical way of thinking could probably compensate for a bit of experience. And it's known that the unmarried women always are more logical than the married ones.

MRS. BERTOLD *smiles*.

Really? That I didn't know. Besides, there must well be *something* that a person has a right to decide for herself!

MISS WIDERMAN

Well, I must say! You certainly have taken on a new way of looking at things lately?

MRS. BERTOLD

Perhaps.

MISS WIDERMAN

Ah-ha? Well, I seem to notice it! But if we're going to go bathing, it's certainly high time, if we're to manage to get back here before the meeting. Or *that* couldn't be held here either?

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes, naturally. I've promised you. *Walks to the door and shouts out.* Sanna! My bathing clothes!

SANNA *comes in from the right with a bathing bag that she leaves.* I had already packed it.

MRS. BERTOLD

Thank you, Sanna. My bathing cap too?

SANNA

Everything.

MRS. BERTOLD

Thank you, thanks.

SANNA *leaves as she casts a mistrustful glance at Miss Widerman.*

MISS WIDERMAN

Oh, to have to see *you* among the apostles of immorality! You, in whom I 'd believed!

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh Lord, if you could stop taking everything so seriously!

MISS WIDERMAN

Your daughter's words! Your daughters' words exactly! -- O, how blind is a mother's love! *Exits.*

SANNA *who has held the door ajar.*

Whew, what a woman! She looks like she didn't even allow herself food. A person might need to open up windows as well as doors when she leaves, like after a funeral. -- And these people, who

never set their hands to real labor, these our Lord shall feed!
Opens the window. Well, there surely is a difference between those two! Look at my mistress, light and youthful, and the way she walks. And look at that beanpole! -- If I were a fellow, I wouldn't touch her with tongs. *Sends a hello out to Dick. Answers him.* Ah yes, they're gone for a while all right, but then the lady will come back with seven others who are worse than she is, since there's going to be a discussion here. *Listens to something Dick says.* Yes, my little mistress is in the kitchen. Just come in, and I'll go and call her. -- Lord, it's a lovely time though, as long as you're young and sweet on each other. Then something else comes along, believe me! Yes, ha, ha! *Walks toward the kitchen door.*

DICK *from the back.*
I can go out to her myself.

SANNA
No, she certainly doesn't want that! She's standing cutting up chickens. *Opens the door.* Miss! You have a special visitor in here. Really, that little dearheart is already finished! *Leaves as Hortense comes in.*

HORTENSE *during little dance steps and turns. Stops at some distance from Dick.*
Well?

DICK
Well?

HORTENSE *regards him a moment in silence and afterward says in a schoolteacher's tone.*
Well, Dick, my dear, now I have brightened your and your uncle's existence with food and drink for a whole week. Now the bomb must be dropped, otherwise some terrible discovery will be made concerning my gender, and our whole plan will come to nothing.

DICK
It's strange it hasn't happened already.

HORTENSE *comes closer.*

Yes, indeed, my excellent list and diplomatic skill are needed to --

DICK

Your! Breaks out laughing.

HORTENSE *hits him.*

DICK

Well, to be honest, I hope to get everything on solid ground as soon as possible. This kind of idleness won't do for me. I'm longing for farming and threshing machines and horses and cows and --

HORTENSE *crosses her arms and regards him with indignation.*

Admit that you're a rough-hewn, insolent, and ill-mannered farmer! Nothing but. An oaf -- oaf -- a bumbling oaf! A potato, who's never been in the pot. Yes, that's you!

"My girl has pleased me
with smiles and wine."

says a poet. But *you!* *Imitates him.* "I'm longing for farming and threshing machines and horses and cows." Ughh, what a character! Get out of my sight! You're not worthy to walk on the same ground as me. I'm going to join an association for the requirements of ideals.

DICK

Yes, go then -- if you can. But just look at the clock! The time is passing too. And then Mama will come with *her* ideal requirements.

HORTENSE

And then you'll have to sneak away, my handsome lad. *He tries to kiss her.* Noo, we're going to talk reason first. You tell Uncle right away that I'm not going to prepare his food any more, that I am dissatisfied, and that I want to work for women.

DICK

Uh-huh.

HORTENSE

He'll be in despair -- naturally.

DICK

Naturally. Sheer modesty!

HORTENSE

Uh-huh. You'll see.

DICK

But your mother?

HORTENSE

Why, I've told you, she's quite changed. She's docile as a lamb.

DICK

You're laughing?

HORTENSE

Yes. *Takes him by the ear and whispers.* I think she's in love with Papa.

DICK

Ha, ha, ha!

HORTENSE

Isn't she allowed to be!

DICK

Oh heavens, yes!

HORTENSE

She looks almost as young as I do and is just as beautiful.

DICK

Well, we're not blind to our own merits, I hear.

HORTENSE

Pooh; a body deserves credit for that. I get my whole disposition from Papa, we're alike as two berries. Just that I'm a woman. And that always makes some difference -- naturally.

DICK

I hope so.

HORTENSE

And he's so dear. And lovable -- but why, here we have him!

SANDERSON

Good morning, children. Ah-ha! A rendezvous!

HORTENSE

Uh-huh. Under the protective auspices of authority. Listen -- apropos -- do you have any rights over me?

SANDERSON

That I don't know.

HORTENSE

In case Mama should make a fuss. But she won't. And if worst comes to worst, we'll wait till I'm of age.

SANDERSON

You should do that in any case.

HORTENSE

Ah-ha? Bla, bla, bla -- what kind of talk is that?

SANDERSON

Look at your mother! If she hadn't been such a child when she got married, then --

HORTENSE

Ah-ha, you think I'm a child!

SANDERSON

No. But it's not possible to think of you as a woman -- a married woman.

HORTENSE

No, because I'm *not* married.

SANDERSON

And that can just as well wait till you're twenty-one.

HORTENSE

Uh-huh. If Dick wants to wait. But now the time is this late and then some, and now, Dick, if you'll be so kind and go in to our big old bear. Father and I have important things to take care of.

DICK

You're whole little person is important.

HORTENSE

I know that. Listen; pay attention now. When Sanna hangs out the hand towels to dry on the hedge, then it's time.

DICK

All right.

HORTENSE

And today I'm the one who rules in this house.

DICK

But stern masters' rule is soon ended. *Nods teasingly and tries to leave.*

HORTENSE

Oh, what a monster! He doesn't say good-bye!

DICK

No, I'm talking sense. *Kisses her. Exits.*

SANDERSON
Hortense; it won't work.

HORTENSE
What?

SANDERSON
She won't get jealous.

HORTENSE
That's not necessary either -- anymore.

SANDERSON
How so?

HORTENSE
The young lady's rule is ended.

SANDERSON
Ah! -- Jealous anyway!

HORTENSE
I think that made you happy? -- Ha, ha, ha!

SANDERSON
Me?

HORTENSE
Uh-huh. You *wanted* her to care about you, you *want* her to get jealous.

SANDERSON
Certainly not! There 's nothing between us -- absolutely nothing.

HORTENSE
Hah! -- I recognize the symptoms in myself. It was exactly that way when I fell in love with Dick. So don't bother to pretend.

SANDERSON

I think the egg wants to teach the chicken...

HORTENSE

It's the new times. They're very modern. And young eyes see better than old ones; can you deny that? So now, sit down here and confess. Just say how things are between you and Mama. -- Well!

SANDERSON

The first days it went so well. I thought -- I thought surely --

HORTENSE

What did you think? *Protectively*. It becomes you so well to be a little embarrassed like that. Go on.

SANDERSON

She was happy to talk with me, simply and openly. You know, she can be really appealing, your mother, when she wants to be.

HORTENSE

Uh-huh.

SANDERSON

And I came closer. I kissed her on the hand. She has such beautiful hands, your mother.

HORTENSE

Uh-huh. I've inherited them. Well, and then?

SANDERSON

She didn't retreat.

HORTENSE

No, one doesn't.

SANDERSON

But she was calm, just calm and friendly.

HORTENSE

Well yes, that sense of dignity. -- It's strong in Mama.

SANDERSON

And then I changed. I showed myself steadfast with the lady, I conversed with her, I let her give me the woman question by the spoonful like medicine. Brrrr! I suffered incredibly. She's deplorable, she is -- that Miss W.

HORTENSE

Ah yes, rather!

SANDERSON

And your mother didn't get nervous, or unfriendly, or hysterical.

HORTENSE

Well, but what are you angry about?

SANDERSON

She is -- truly, isn't she *motherly* toward me! I thought she would give me her blessing.

HORTENSE

Mama is just wiser than we are. How could she be jealous of the young lady?

SANDERSON

I don't think she would be of anybody else either.

HORTENSE

Because she doesn't *want* to be.

SANDERSON

Doesn't *want* to?

HORTENSE

She's too *good* for that.

SANDERSON

Good? -- I wouldn't know if she can get jealous. You forget, of course, that I've been her husband.

HORTENSE *with suppressed laughter*

Poor Mama!

SANDERSON *annoyed?*

Really. Is *that* anything to pity her for?

HORTENSE

I'm afraid so. With a firecracker like you!

SANDERSON *more calmly*

Ah yes -- well, one could --!

HORTENSE *puts her arms around his neck and looks at him*

Yes, one can't help being fond of you. How I admire you, old Papa!

SANDERSON

No, that's the worst blow-- the worst my ego has ever got!

HORTENSE

What do you mean? -- You silly Papa, why you're bashful! Just like a girl getting her first compliment at a ball. -- My handsome Papa. Heart throb! Has just won over his daughter. -- *Looks at him and strokes his hair with both her hands.* -- So good and kind -- and so easy-going! It's high time that you came under the influence of my upbringing. For it *is* upbringing, admit it. -- Ah, there we have her! Speak now -- I'll let you two be alone. *Runs out.*

MRS. BERTOLD

What happened to Hortense?

SANDERSON

We'd finished the lesson, and I'm sure she was glad to be free.

MRS. BERTOLD *sits down. A confused pause.*
Miss Widerman went by to see Mrs. Bertilsson.

Pause.

They've asked to have the meeting here because this room is so large.

SANDERSON

You're not interested in the Miss's -- hmm -- requirements or endeavors?

MRS. BERTOLD

No.

SANDERSON

But previously?

MRS. BERTOLD

Well, she has had great influence over me. She's so energetic, and I'm far too easily led.

SANDERSON

You surprise me! It seems to me -- it seems to me as if, during the short time we've known each other, you've undergone a remarkable change.

MRS. BERTOLD

I believe so.

SANDERSON

Well, you'll find me tactless, but --

MRS. BERTOLD

You want to know the reason.

SANDERSON

Yes.

MRS. BERTOLD

It's a matter of pure coincidence, but one that forced me to go back into my past and -- or to feel things through again -- No, it's far too difficult to explain!

SANDERSON

But this coincidence?

MRS. BERTOLD

A quite remarkable resemblance to my husband.

SANDERSON

Ah!

MRS. BERTOLD

I noticed it right away, but not so strongly. But, why, the more we've got to know each other, the more apparent it's become. Yes, sometimes it's almost unbearable to me.

SANDERSON

So you loathed him so profoundly then?

MRS. BERTOLD

Loathed? No. -- And when I feel confidence in you, when I speak to you as to a dear friend, when I feel that -- in short: I never know myself if it's about *him* or about *you*.

SANDERSON *to himself, laughing.*

Or both?

MISS WIDERMAN, MRS. APPELMAN *plus* OLDER *and* YOUNGER LADIES. *Greetings and general murmuring.*

MISS WIDERMAN

Oh, I forgot my list.

SANDERSON

Allow me to look at it?

MISS WIDERMAN

Please do. Unfortunately there aren't very many names yet.
Woman's laxity is so great.

SANDERSON *reads the list, lets it fall to the floor, strikes his forehead, and shows every sign of theatrical despair.*

MISS WIDERMAN

But Lord, what's happened? Speak! What is it?

SANDERSON

Your name is first on the list. I'll never survive that! *Sinks down on a chair and falls into a faint.*

MISS WIDERMAN

Water, water! He's dying! *Puts her hand on his heart. All the ladies flock around him, dab at his temples, loosen his neck scarf, offer him water, etc.*

HORTENSE *rushes in, startled, she sees that he is about to laugh and understands the comedy.*

SANDERSON *faintly, to the ladies*

Thank you. Ah -- thank you!

MISS WIDERMAN

Breathe deep now. Calm down. You're among friends.

MRS. BERTOLD *at a distance. Regards Sanderson.*

Well -- I must say! That's what you call sensitivity.

MR. APPELMAN *bends over and looks at the doctor's face.*

It's his conscience. The verdict of his conscience has killed him. A nemesis! *Raises his hands. Holy are the righteous!*

HORTENSE *laughs behind her handkerchief.*

MISS WIDERMAN *caressing*

Don't you know my voice? Don't you feel my hand on your brow?

SANDERSON *looks at her*
Ha! You avenging angel! *Falls again into a faint.*

MISS WIDERMAN
Then listen to my words. Let yourself be calm, take courage.

SANDERSON
Courage? Courage, for one crushed as I am? Where should I get courage?

MISS WIDERMAN
From this deep anguish there will --

SANDERSON
Ah, what good is remorse? Do these irrevocable words not remain: "*We, the undersigned, pledge ourselves never to take in wedlock a man who has not led a life that is morally pure.*" You have pledged yourself, solemnly and with your own signature; the document is binding as the I.O.U. of an honorable man, isn't it true?

MISS WIDERMAN
Yes, but --

SANDERSON
And a woman's words are just as holy as a man's.

MISS WIDERMAN
Yes, yes, but --

SANDERSON
And if a woman could break her word, her solemnly made promise, then what would there be for us men to believe in? No, this is irrevocable!

MISS WIDERMAN *signals to the others to distance themselves.*
Not this unbending, inconsolable despair! I beg you, I beseech you
--

SANDERSON

No, for me there is no consolation! -- Do not these appalling words remain: *morally pure*. To have lived a *pure* life! -- I am rejected, refused. I've wasted the virtue of my youth, and with it, my happiness. Lamenting my destiny I Will go off on the prairie, Watering its Wild plants with my tears.

MISS WIDERMAN

Oh, Richard, spare yourself!

SANDERSON *with pathos*

If I were to see you falter, I'd force you to keep your promise, for even to me it has -- albeit of late -- brought a spark of the spirit of purity. And I want to become its apostle. But I must believe in the *seriousness* of the woman's requirements of man. It will not be you -- Klotilde! -- who will shatter this faith.

MISS WIDERMAN

In woman there is also gentleness, forgiveness --

SANDERSON

No! No forgiveness! Why, you've said it yourself: In woman's *incurruptiblerequirement* of the purity of man lies the only salvation from the mire in which our society wallows. I have felt it here. *Strikes his chest*. A promise one doesn't intend to keep is not a promise, it's mere talk. However, if even you should be seized by indecision, then *I* will not permit you to turn aside. Shame to those who say that a woman's name and signature and duty do not weigh just as heavily as a man's! *Grips her hand, which he presses to his heart*. Klotilde, you will never, by marriage to me, be brought to the degradation of being forced to betray your cause.

MISS WIDERMAN

Don't call it degradation. For you it will be atonement, redress. A woman's pure, sacrificial love --

SANDERSON

Woman's love is spiritual. It does not need this external one, that captivates the manly nature. For the soul distance and divorce mean less than nothing. Thought fares freely o'er land and sea, and the soul is woman's heart!

MISS WIDERMAN

When I have forgiven you, so will society --

SANDERSON

Don't you know that society has already offered forgiveness in advance? No, it's the woman who will make the requirement.

MISS WIDERMAN

It cannot be your meaning that this -- and this alone -- would stand between us!

SANDERSON

Why, if it did not, there wouldn't be any requirement.

MISS WIDERMAN

I beg for mercy for myself.

SANDERSON *gets up.*

I do not accept it. If you bring down the flag you've borne so high, then you'll forever fall from the pedestal on which I've placed you. You will be merely a common woman. Weak -- inconsequential.

MISS WIDERMAN

But if I *am* nothing else?

SANDERSON

Then I won't love you.

MISS WIDERMAN *screams.*

Ahh! *Falls in a faint.*

APPELMAN and LADIES *rush to help.* SANDERSON *withdraws.*

APPELMAN *to Miss Widerman, who comes to.*

There are morally pure men; I can attest to it myself --

MISS WIDERMAN

Thank you, Appelman. *Extends her hand to him.*

SANDERSON

I would like to ask to say a few words to the assembly. Do I have your permission?

MISS WIDERMAN

Speak.

SANDERSON

The secretiveness of olden days is past. What was regarded before as the most clandestine secret of human beings, we now discuss at meetings and in committees. Our sense of moral virtue requires it. Evolution is such. Woman wrapped herself earlier in the wide mantle of her reserve, but now we live in the era of expositions, and woman displays her virtue alongside the fruits of her domestic diligence: one and all can examine the product. For in our days woman wants to be honest. She does not cover up as much as an innocent little bellyache. Undaunted, she steps up at a meeting and says: I have it or I don't have it. *Smiling.* But naturally she doesn't *have* it. *Murmurs of distrust.*

I'll go so far as to say that no woman has the right to conceal her greatest and best actions from the eyes of the world. Therefore I lift the veil away from a life destiny which for far too long has been kept secret.

VOICES

A life destiny!

MRS. BERTOLD

What do you intend to do?

SANDERSON

What you will not keep me from doing. -- Our hostess here was brought up by the most compassionate parents, and she went forth

into life filled with the notion of an ideal world. She fell in love and she got married.

MRS. BERTOLD

Doctor -- you have no right --

SANDERSON

I *will* speak. You can oppose me if you like. *Aloud.*

She dreamed of a prince, and she was thrown into the arms of a monster. Or perhaps rather: he was an ordinary young man, thirteen to the dozen. In one word: his wife's mouth was not the first he had kissed.

MRS. BERTOLD

This is coarse!

SANDERSON

But true. *Aloud.* By a coincidence her eyes were opened. She grew jealous of his past. She did what a moral woman ought to do: she left house and home and threw herself with her child into the arms of her rich parents. And she demanded a legal divorce. One could not force him, but the parents led the negotiations as compassionate parents ought to do. He was honorable enough not to want to try to urge himself upon his wife, and he left the country. *Aloud, to Mrs. Bertold* Have I spoken the truth?

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes; but against my will.

SANDERSON

I haven't said everything. *Aloud.* His wife regarded him as dead, she took her parents' name and became "Widow Bertold." And to his child he was dead. He had not deserved anything else; he was a wretch, a deceiver, a scoundrel and a villain.

MRS. BERTOLD

You're lying there!

SANDERSON

What a treasure of generosity: she excuses him! But justice there will be. He was a bundle of vices, without a single virtue to make up for them, and he ravaged this woman's life. *Takes her hand.*

MRS. BERTOLD *pulls her hand from him.*

He did not. You never saw him, you know nothing, nothing!

SANDERSON

But you stood closer to him than anyone, you ought to have known him better than others, and *you* were the one who wanted the divorce!

MRS. BERTOLD *throws herself on a chair and conceals her face.*
My parents.

SANDERSON

And what is it that's kept you going all these years, if not the secret satisfaction of having been a tool of heaven's punishment -- the thought of your own immaculate purity and the contempt you have a right to spread over him?

MRS. BERTOLD *gets up.*

Contempt? -- Be quiet, doctor! This is *my* house, and *here* you will refrain from speaking ill of him!

SANDERSON

If he were standing in our midst, as I stand now, then I'd --

MRS. BERTOLD

Then I'd beg for his forgiveness, and now you know it! I would do it before the whole world. -- Now, if you please, bring your virtue sermon to an end!

SANDERSON *strokes his moustache and laughs.*

Bravo, Hermione! That's what they call a straight answer.

MRS. BERTOLD *with a scream*

It's him!

Murmur of surprise.

MRS. BERTOLD

My friends -- I must ask you to leave us.

A VOICE

Oh, how remarkable!

MISS WIDERMAN

That's what's called failing your ideals and betraying your past!

MR. APPELMAN *offers her his arm.*

Permit me?

MISS WIDERMAN

Thank you, Appelman. You are my friend. I believe in you. *They leave.*

APPELMAN *who is shoved.*

Excuse me! *Out.*

Everyone leaves except MRS. BERTOLD, SANDERSON, and HORTENSE.

HORTENSE

Well done, old man.

MRS. BERTOLD *throws herself around his neck.*

Dick! -- Oh, finally!

SANDERSON

Easy, easy! Remember: I'm no longer your husband. And I'm no saint, you know that. I'm the same as I was.

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh Dick, Dick!

SANDERSON

No, upon my word, we can work it out! Remember that if we two were to get together, then the banns would have to be read first

from the pulpit three Sundays in a row, and then the minister would --

MRS. BERTOLD

What do I care about a minister and pulpit! I'm the happiest person on earth!

SANDERSON

Yes, I think so! But this is heading the wrong way. If my wife were to see us this way, what would she say?

MRS. BERTOLD

Your wife? *Screams.*

SANDERSON

Yes. Do you think I've been a grass widower all these years?

MRS. BERTOLD

His wife, his wife!

SANDERSON

Well, when *you* didn't want to, then -- There's always somebody who wants to.

MRS. BERTOLD

His wife, his wife! *Throws herself into a chair.*

HORTENSE *consoling*

It's only an American woman, you know.

SANDERSON

Yes. Only an American.

HORTENSE

And maybe he isn't really married.

SANDERSON

Nooo -- I've already been burnt once.

HORTENSE

You see, Mama!

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh, don't torment me!

SANDERSON

No, I'm not going to torment you; I'm leaving.

MRS. BERTOLD *screams.*

No! Don't go! Oh, Richard!

SANDERSON

But this is troubling. I shouldn't torment you; and I'm not supposed to go. What the devil shall I do?

MRS. BERTOLD *gets up, whispers smiling.*

Don't go.

SANDERSON

Not go? I -- the sinful male -- not go! There you see how far the theories hold up.

MRS. BERTOLD

Theories for whether or not one should love a person! Oh, Dick -- forgive me.

SANDERSON

As long as the men have as endless a amount of kindness as I have, as long as the women will do as you do, all the theories not withstanding. If I didn't help you now, you'd be in a state to throw yourself straight into my arms, and this despite the American woman and everything.

MRS. BERTOLD

Yes, yes! -- Oh, but I've grieved and regretted!

SANDERSON *smiles*.

I'm the one who ought to have done that.

MRS. BERTOLD

Ought to? Oh, what help is talk! -- It was Mama who influenced me, Mama and the aunties. And then my insane jealousy. If only I hadn't left you, and if we'd got together to talk --

SANDERSON

Yes, if we *had!* -- Well, but now I want to go.

MRS. BERTOLD

How *can* you?

SANDERSON

You don't want to ask me to sit here with this beard any longer, do you, when it's so darned unbecoming! I'll be back as soon as I've had time to shave.

HORTENSE

There's going to be a big family dinner. Finally I can get to show off with a banquet. *Shouts*. Sanna! Sanna!

SANNA *in the door*

What is it?

HORTENSE

Go hang the hand towels on the hedge. Quickly! Quickly! and then set the table! Be quick about it! The food is already done, of course.

SANNA *leaves*.

SANDERSON *slowly*

You look awfully nice, Hermione. And not a bit of jealousy?

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh, to see you, Dick!

SANDERSON *kisses her hand, leaves.*

HORTENSE *pretends she was straightening a loose collar, brushing her hair, tugs at the waist of her dress and strikes all sorts of military poses (standing at attention, etc.). Bows and comes up to her mother.*

MRS. BERTOLD
What is it.

HORTENSE
I'm engaged.

MRS. BERTOLD
Child!

HORTENSE
Yes. And now you can't say "no" without compromising yourself far too much, my beloved little Mama. -- For *admit* that you are in love -- *laughs and points her thumb* with him -- noo! -- my old Papa!

MRS. BERTOLD
Oh -- Hortense!

HORTENSE
No prudery! -- And I like your choice. I give you my blessing. Get married -- my child.

MRS. BERTOLD
You fresh brat.

HORTENSE
You're laughing! -- Oh, you're not as sentimental as I thought! And now I'm going to introduce you to *mine*. He's so precious and so good and so glad, just like "him" -- *pokes her in the side*. -- "him" -- but a little more stable, thank goodness. I could have signed the list -- hmm -- almost.

Takes Mrs. Bertold around the waist, sings and waltzes.

MRS. BERTOLD

But Hortense!

HORTENSE

It's a happy day, tra la la, la la --

DICK *stops in surprise.*

HORTENSE *stops dancing.*

Here I have the honor of presenting you to my mother. For the moment she's a bit out of breath and a bit red in the cheeks and her beautiful hair is a bit tousled, but otherwise she's a very respectable old wife -- in her own opinion. Embrace each other, my children! -- Ah hah, you're content to squeeze each other's hands and look cordial, touched, and intelligent, as befitting this solemn moment. Oh well, the other can come later. And it will come, all right. -- Listen -- little Hermione -- that young man is named Dick Möller, a nephew to an old grump who in turn is a brother to my father. Do you understand the relation? And this young man claims he once sat on your knee. But that was before the great inquisition, and before we began hating the male race.

MRS. BERTOLD

Oh -- "little" Richard then! -- I still feel a bit of a stranger and astonished, but that will soon pass. *Looks at him, smiling.* And you've been sneaking around keeping quiet and fooling me, child?

DICK

Yes, we were afraid of that --

MRS. BERTOLD

That was my fault. I was egotistical. I was so afraid of losing Hortense -- the only thing I possessed.

HORTENSE

And now she's glad to get rid of me!

DICK *laughing*

I'll happily be the scapegoat. -- Thank you, Mama. *They embrace each other.*

HORTENSE

Quite right. -- That's right! -- But now it comes to our big bear. You, Mama, vanish. *Whispers.* I'll give you permission to go and get dressed for dinner. Your black satin gown -- not the jet-black accessories, but flowers -- a breast bouquet -- there; really coquettish. And *he's* coming there! -- "He!"

MRS. BERTOLD *strikes her lightly on the cheek. Exits.*

DICK

Uncle is ready to cry, he's angry, furious. He's swearing about you and the whole world. And he would go and pick you up in a lion cage if it were necessary. *Looks at the clock.* It's dinnertime -- he ought to be hungry already. Everything will go brilliantly. Quick, into your costume! *Leaves.*

HORTENSE *shouts after him.*

You *never* say good-bye! *They kiss.*

DICK *out.* HORTENSE *goes into the bedroom.* SANNA *is setting the table.*

DICK *and MÖLLER from the back.* DICK *claps his hands.*

HORTENSE *dressed in a chef's cap and white jacket, appears within the portière so that only her upper body is visible. Nods.* Good day, Uncle.

MÖLLER

Listen, you young scamp, what sort of spectacle is this? Is this supposed to be a name's day surprise? You apparently intend to show yourself in the limelight.

HORTENSE

Yes. As the bright angel of the final tableau. Well, how do I get out?

MÖLLER

Come along and follow me home, it *is* dinnertime.

HORTENSE

No, not yet. First look at this menu. *Extends a piece of paper to him.* I've composed it myself, printed it myself, illustrated it myself, and prepared the food myself. I'm also going to sit at the table and eat it myself.

MÖLLER

Ah-ha! Why, goodness, you're the one who didn't want to! Didn't have time. Come now, and you'll get to sit at the table! *Takes her by the hand and tries to bring her out.*

HORTENSE *loosens her hand.*

Respect for the angel of the final tableau! -- Read the menu.

MÖLLER

Silly goose! You know that one never can get angry with you.

HORTENSE

Well, does "one" want this dinner?

MÖLLER

There, there, now be reasonable! Come along home with me.

HORTENSE

Does "one" sit at my right side, at the table, and enjoy these luscious dishes and one's own wine? -- For *I* don't have anything in that line.

MÖLLER

I think you've gone crazy today! Should I sit at the table with womenfolk! *Tries again to bring her out.*

HORTENSE

No, don't touch my fluttering white wings. Please! -- Look me over carefully. Are you really sure it's me -- "Peter"?

MÖLLER

I may not be sure it's your ear I'm pinching -- you young rascal!

HORTENSE

And Uncle, you want to put up with me exactly as I am?

MÖLLER

Yes -- since you probably won't be any different.

HORTENSE *lets the drapes fall to the side, steps out and throws off her cap and jacket.*

No, not until I get old, and that will take a very long time.

MÖLLER

Heh -- eh?

HORTENSE

I've asked Dick Möller to become my husband, "I want to bake his bread and cook his porridge," but he doesn't dare answer yes on account of you, Uncle.

MÖLLER

Ha, ha, ha! He's certainly said yes a long time ago -- he would have been a blockhead otherwise! Aren't you ashamed of trying to make a fool out of me, your uncle! But I've known it the whole time, ha ha ha, the whole time!

HORTENSE

A splendid thing, omniscience, it makes all explanations unnecessary. -- All the while you've known I was Dick's fiancée, Uncle?

MÖLLER

The whole time!

HORTENSE

And so naturally, Uncle, you also know there'll be a big family dinner here, that Papa is coming here, and that -- there's Mama!

MÖLLER

Noo? Oh, damn!

MRS. BERTOLD

Good day -- *smiles* -- Sebastian. You probably don't recognize me; it's been so long since we met, and I've changed so.

MÖLLER *gauges her with his glance. Brightens up.*

Dear God, I must go and look at myself in a mirror. My notion of years and age are topsy-turvy. *Takes himself by the hair.* No, I'm really an old man and my hair has turned gray, and many years have passed -- but my sister-in-law, she -- excuse me! *Ex-sister-in-law, I mean, still appears to be in her youth. Kisses her hand with old-fashioned chivalry.*

HORTENSE

Oh, Uncle, how you've put on airs! Why, you're a really sweet old lady's man. Why, you don't hate women!

MÖLLER

I hate *woman*. I've never said that I hated *women*.

HORTENSE

Oh! *Nods.* Yes of course! The way Miss Widerman hates man. Now I understand.

SANDERSON *with turned up moustaches and shaven beard.*

MÖLLER

No, I must say! You here?

HORTENSE

Well, they probably shouldn't tear me in two like two ducks would a frog!

SANDERSON *aside to Mrs. Bertold*

Flowers! And look -- red cheeks. And the mourning gown? Gone!
-- You silly little goose, you've always been faithful to me, haven't
you?

MRS. BERTOLD

Always!

HORTENSE *to Möller*

They're going to reconcile, they're going to marry, and -- *nudges
him in his elbow.* Did you know *that* too?

MÖLLER

Noo --

SANDERSON

Get married? No, I never said that. I have strong doubts about my
suitability as a married man. But as house doctor --

MRS. BERTOLD

Ughh, Dick, you're just like your old self!

SANDERSON

And you're so changed -- so much the better!

HORTENSE *admonishing*

You really are too old a fellow to let yourself be called "Dick." One
should think of one's age. And as a father of the family --

SANNA *from the right*

Dinner is served.

HORTENSE

With *my* menu.

Curtain

