



THE ICE MAIDEN

BY CECILIA SIDENBLADH

BASED ON THE DIARIES OF VICTORIA BENEDICTSSON
TRANSLATED BY VERNE MOBERG

Truth or Lies?

It has been suggested that, in her journal *The Big Book* (the journal upon which *The Ice Maiden* is based), the Swedish author Victoria Benedictsson was telling a lie, that maybe she never had consummated a love relationship with the Danish critic Georg Brandes, that maybe it was only a tale.

Personally, I consider this unlikely.

But what I or others believe is of little interest!

The Big Book is a piece of literature, supremely subjective in its presentation of Georg Brandes as well as herself.

The Big Book contains Victoria's thoughts and feelings—stringently formulated, caustic, self-effacing, unbearable, as sharp as the razor with which she ultimately cut her throat.

Cecilia Sidenbladh

Copenhagen, 1888. Leopold's Hotel on Hovedvagtsgade 6. A room furnished with a writing desk, a sofa, and a couple of chairs. A mirror on the wall. Victoria Benedictsson is wearing a tight black dress. She may have crutches but can walk without them.

VICTORIA

Do you know what hell looks like?

It may look like this room at Leopold's Hotel,
Hovedvagtsgade 6 in Copenhagen!

Hell is repetition all over again,

Repetition,

Repetition.

Waiting

and waiting

night

after night.

The pendulum on the wall:

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

Inside these four walls

I've experienced hell.

The remarkable thing is that Paradise may look the same!

"I met Georg Brandes on the street,

I asked him to come here tomorrow!"

That's what my friend Axel said.

"You asked Georg Brandes if he wanted to come here?

Did he know who I was? Had he read anything I'd written?

Georg Brandes! Here! To my hotel room! Thank you, Axel!"

My most eager, most secret desire come true!
No author do I admire any more than Brandes,
the critic, the genius, and the giant of learning,
the author of *Main Currents of
Nineteenth Century Literature*,
the splendid lecturer, the brilliant European.
I've read every book he's written.

I arrange the room--it must look inviting!
A vase and some roses purchased in haste
Books out on the table. *On the Lower Species of Animals*,
that will amaze him!
He'll sit here. No!
He'll sit here! So that he'll have the light in his face!
And I'm sitting here.
With the light behind me.
My face in interesting half-shadow.
I don't look like a wife from the countryside, do I?
No. Black velvet by firelight,
Black satin by daylight.
Black pearls in the evening.
And a heavy fan with black plumes. Ah.
Heavy, precious. Unconcerned? *Voilà!*

Then he came.

Small, slender, manly--a dark face that appeared to have lived and suffered, fine

qualities,

strange, lackluster hair that stood straight up,

with the hint of a part in it.

"Mrs. Benedictsson?"

"Ernst Ahlgren is my pen name. Welcome!"

I took a seat here on the sofa and showed him the armchair.

But he pulled up one of the smaller chairs here!

"I want to look at you."

"Excuse me, but how old are you?" he asked.

"Thirty-seven. . . thirty-six years old."

"You look younger, I might have guessed twenty-eight.

Well, you don't think I'm sitting here handing out compliments?"

What he said was far too banal for me to contradict !

He asked me to say something about myself.

My fear of artifice made me sketch out

the course of my life as more insignificant than truth

would have it.

I told him I was born

of a miserly mother and an extravagant father.

That at twenty years of age I'd

got married to an old man I didn't love,
to get away from the thirty-years' war
that was my parents' marriage.

That I was unhappy with my isolated position
as wife of the postmaster in Hörby,
that I suffered from a hunger for books that no
public library could satisfy.

"I've heard you've been seriously ill!"

"I lay paralyzed in bed for two years. I'm still not
completely recovered."

"Poor thing. For two years! I can't imagine worse torture
than not being able to move!"

"Not at all! Those years were the best time of my life."

It became so calm when he spoke!

I could have sat there forever
listening to his subdued voice.

He had done some living, this man!

"How did it happen you started to write?" he asked.

"I was bored to death. Do you know that that means?"

He smiled at me.

"I know what it means to be bored!"

He lay his hand upon my hands here on the table,
took hold of them as if to hold my attention.
I couldn't resist the temptation of looking down at his hand.
Such a small hand!

“Boredom! Boredom is my basic state.
But it's also what drives me! It's in order to escape it
I keep myself in constant operation,
write ten hours a day, read, lecture,
meet new people, talking, talking. . .
Well. . . that's not the whole truth.”

“It isn't? Then tell me, what's the whole truth,
Dr. Brandes.”

“Do I dare? Well, of course I dare.
Boredom makes me feel like a stone.
What manages to bring me to life is feelings.
Love, falling in love, and beauty. Pleasure, Eros.
Then I feel alive and that life is worth living!”

“How I envy your carefree manner!”

When he got up to leave, he grasped my hand
and kissed it. "*Au revoir!*"

My big, lean, ugly hand. How could he bring himself
to kiss it? Practice, of course!

But his lips were very soft.

"Writing is my life!

You understand, Victoria Benedictsson hardly exists!

It's Ernst Ahlgren that lives!

Work is everything to me!"

He had gone.

That man whets my appetite!

How I thirst for his vast experience!

A novelist must be a canibal—a vampire.

He must understand everything human.

For him there is no categorical good or evil.

For him there's cause and effect, pain, jubilation,

devotion, rancour, great diversity, nuances, people, life!

I hate the conventional!

And I love lawlessness! Deep down inside I'm

a lawless person. A warm-blooded, self-aware lawlessness,

that's what I long for!

Why didn't I dare tell him that?!

Georg Brandes! I've always been looking for a human being
who's like me, a twin soul,
a male mirror-image of my own self.

Earlier Copenhagen had meant theater to me, and shopping,
now it meant only Georg Brandes!

Though the pace of the shopping kept picking up.

A pair of large candelabra, twelve and fifty! A new corsette, a coat
and muff,

A necklace and a pearl vest.

And a striped silk fabric, costly and elegant—
and a seamstress.

The cash flow slowed down significantly.

Soon I'll have to go home to the postmaster again.

Perfume, fruit, and flowers!

Tokays, Johannisberger, and champagne,
to offer him the next time he comes.

If he comes? If. . .

A person like that can win all your devotion
and betray it!

I took an evening walk in the rain around the horse at
King's New Square. What a joy to be alive!

I went home, and there was a knock at the door.

A brown hat, a thin, pointed full beard, and those eyes!

I thought I'd go crazy with joy—

and I told him so.

He pressed my hands and kissed them:

“I was longing to see you.”

“Oh, thank you, thanks! I've been longing so terribly to see you!”

He sat and warmed my hands between his.

His hands—they're created to caress and give warmth.

We talked about Goethe and love.

“You see, I've been doing some thinking lately

about what is “manly” and what is

“womanly”. . .

What then is “manly”? Power, boldness,

ruthlessness!

A real man doesn't care who stands in his way.

He goes after his goal.

He doesn't show his true inner person,

he hides it beneath a mask.

A real man above all has power,

power to mold others to his plans

and to use them as tools,

power to hold a woman tight.”

“And ‘the womanly,’ what is that, in your opinion?”

“the ability to love completely and without concern for convention,
fully with warmth and vitality. To be courageous, sacrificing, strong.
To love without jealousy, without looking back.

It is woman’s nature to love.

Tell me, what do you feel when you are loved?”

as if it were a thing that happened at least annually!

“But you can tell me how you usually feel, can’t you?”

Usually feel? Such a preposterous question.

“Do you feel admiration or a need for tenderness?”

“What they call love I have never felt.”

But it’s not true! Not anymore. I’m in love—
like a fool!

Inside me there’s something that weeps and cries out.

What I desire, what the woman inside me,
is on her knees begging for, must be a matter
of secondary importance.

It mustn't happen!

Timidity, woman's nature.

Put your hands on her crying throat and strangle her!

He'd got into the habit of kissing my scrawny writer's paw

Four or five times—

he did it with great emphasis.

Wasting such on an old beanpole like me!

I sat wondering how he could make himself do it.

What did he think of me?

Did he think I was deluding myself that he was in love with me?

“Have you read Nietzsche, Mrs. Benedictsson?” he asked. so formal!

“Yes. Well.”

He started to quiz me on what I'd read and not read.

Like a schoolmaster.

“Why, you've read practically nothing!” He was shocked.

He sat down at the desk and wrote a long list

of books I should read: Nietzsche and Heine,

Homer and Zola, George Sand and Pascal. . .

The list became three columns long.

“Couldn't you find a job

you could make a living on that would keep you busy all the time?

Become a regular staff writer on some newspaper? Why, you can write. . .”

“Thanks for all your kindness!!”

He evidently didn't think that my writing
was any such work!

I saw his face right above mine,
like a dark cloud the black beard approached,
the broad mouth opened.

I closed my eyes. The longed-for moment was there:
Georg Brandes was kissing Ernst Ahlgren.

Miscalculation! Disappointment! Fright!

It was the same sort of kiss the postmaster had taught me to loathe.

Cool, damp lips around mine.
teeth pressed in against them,
this horrid voraciousness without warmth.

The spark was totally lacking! Why?

“Let me embrace you, I want to feel you body against mine..”

A thought like lightning: “I'm taller than he is!”

Shame, I felt. And why was he so formal?

“You think I consider you wanton?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Not with that forehead, with those eyes and that chin!

This debating morality! It’s my experience
that two people who are in love with each other
care extremely little about each other’s past.”

I looked at him.

How ridiculous that he, Dr. Georg Brandes, was no more particular!

“What are you smiling at? Do you know that the times I’ve been
beside myself with passion, that’s been when I ran into cold indifference.

Not constant indifference,

but the kind that comes intermittently,
after having felt warmth and tenderness.

An abrupt change from heat to cold.

That kind of thing ignites your imagination.

Ice maidens always make me fall fiercely in love.”

Ice maidens! . . .

He’ll see I’m an ice maiden.

Thank goodness I have such cold blood!

That man’s a conceited fool, who gives his kisses
to every woman who’s willing!

Is he under the illusion that I’m in love with him?

An infatuation ends in alarm,

it’s calm devotion I’m looking for! . . .

I examine the reasons for his caresses.

Ridiculous!

I cut my bangs. He thought I should do it.

That is, I bought a curling iron for seven and fifty, cut my hair in bangs,
and curled it in order to please him.

He was delighted.

“That’s how you must have looked when you were young!”

He bent over and kissed me on the mouth,
easily and dispassionately, as if we’d been two women.

“Oh, caro mio!”

The next evening I waited for him. He had to come!

I sat down to write at my novel,
about a man and a woman who try
to be faithful to each other their whole life.

The idea I set such store by!

Wasn’t that steps out in the hallway?

No. The steps were only in my imagination.

I picked up one of his books instead and started reading
mechanically, without understanding a word.

It was past nine o’clock. So he’s not coming!

I was only an experiment for him.

He was curious about me. Humiliation!

I'd like to show him I can spend

my evenings in a different way than sitting shut up inside here
waiting for him!!

I understand I've been much too accommodating!

Ho, he really is small, who cannot bear
a woman's humility!

I'll always be out in the evenings,
even till one day he asks me to stay home.

Or until he show he wants to get rid of me.

Clarity! That's all I desire.

Do I have the courage to be an ice maiden?

He thinks he knows me. He thinks he has me where he wants.

Why be a coward? Winning or losing!

So I'm an ice maiden!

Axel is right! I must write! An author must write!

Writing is both god and satan,
writing is all the light and dark that's inside me.

You give yourself completely, you don't share.

But why be low, and false and mean?

Then haven't I cared for him, though it didn't last long?

Will I not be a better person
when I leave him than when we met?
Truer, less coarse, more womanly.
Resigned and calm.
I want to prove myself worthy of what you never gave me.

The following day—I sat waiting again,
I am ill, I'm consumed by this longing to see him, just to see him, then I'll be
content. I don't know what I'm doing.
Walking the floor like a sick animal.
I'm suffering, I'm suffering so terribly!. . .
Pathetic—but true. I am absolutely alone. Clarity!
I could die of uncertainty, but not from unhappy love.
Hopeless love is out of the question for a nature like mine!
At the same minute that hope dies, love is dead too.
When our break-up is a fact, it will be better!
The rejected one will become an author of rank,
Then Victoria Benedictsson will be no more, then it will be Ernst Ahlgren who
lives!

Suddenly he came in—without even knocking.
We sat down—he looked me in the eye. We talked of his new book, and he
seemed glad that I had read him with such attention. He kissed me for a long,
long time.

And I was so happy to be able to sit with my hands in his.

Win me if you can!

Win me if you think it's worth the trouble!

I would love Georg Brandes,

I would love him with all I own of body and soul if it were worth anything to him
that I did.D

He's slippery as an eel,

You have to scratch him till blood is drawn to be able to hold onto him.

No. I already feel a disliking for him!

Of the caresses I've had enough so I'm satisfied. It's signs of love I'm longing for—
mutual understanding, mutual trust.

He is almost repulsive to me.

Tomorrow we won't see each other,

then I'm going to the theater with Axel!

Maybe the day after tomorrow too.

But he came looking for me while I was at the theater!

I'm sick with worry that he won't come back today! Sick! If I just got to see him
only one more time, with the warmth from before.

Oh, Dear Lord, if he never comes again. . . ! I hate him!! Yes, I hate him because
he must know how I sit longing, in vain—

long so that my heart could explode. . .

Then the door opened. He came in. He was pale, and there were a couple drops of water on his cheeks. I thought it was rain.

“A great misfortune has occurred! The worst that could happen to me. I can’t say what it is.”

Naturally, I didn’t suppose so either.

“Do you have anything I can have a few bites of, some dry cake or something?”

I rang for cakes and wine.

How old he looked! His face was so little and shriveled up,

His chest sunk in. A pale, withered parchment skin.

He looked ill!

He asked me to say something that would distract him from his own thoughts.

How could I do that? “Don’t you have anyone you can confide in?”

“Yes, my mother—“

What an honest and lovely expression his face assumed as soon as he spoke about his mother!

What an enormous joy to be his mother.

“My mother, she teases with me about my sweethearts.

She asked me how many I have.

“Ten,” I answered. “No, you have at least eighteen,” she said.

“Maybe she’s right, it’s starting to be far too many.”

The ideal woman loves without jealousy—he’s said so. That he doesn’t think he’s too good to be scattered about, one grain at a time, like incense powder! I’m not jealous!

I’m suffering, but I’m alive.

Every time you’re about to fall in love, it’s best to read Catullus. Then it passes.

And thus one learns Latin.

Amor vincit omnia.

So he started telling anyway, about himself and Bertha Knudtzon,

A young girl he went to Switzerland with.

His wife had already been suspicious before he left.

“Miss Knudtzon has left Copenhagen, but now there’s a rumor that she’s expecting a child.”

“Is there any truth to the rumor?”

“No! But Bertha’s brothers have written threatening letters and demanded a promise that we’ll never meet again in the apartment I rented. . . and my wife chases after me on the streets screaming the most abominable things... well, you wouldn’t believe your ears.”

He asked me to stroke the hair from his forehead.

“No, draw your fingers through it, hard! No, again, again!

I do so long to be caressed!

My little daughter Edith sometimes comes into my room, unbuttons my vest and with her little hands

over and over again strokes my exposed chest. Just like this.”

He always talks about his daughters. I never talk about mine.

What would I say about her? That she lives with my mother?

“Why did you marry your wife,” I asked.

“Out of chivalry, why she’d left her husband.

I rescued her! But I didn’t love her—not any more.

Who could believe that she would become this way!”

I stroked his hair.

“Can’t you free yourself from this oppression?”

“If I leave her, she’ll take the children.

She’ll never agree voluntarily to a divorce.”

To see him suffer and be powerless!

My poor big child, who, lacking judgement, brings
so much grief upon himself.

My big child...

Was this really me?! Yes, it was I.

The repetition. It's hell!

This waiting, night after night!

Look at the clock. Already eight.

Will he come tonight?

To persuade oneself that it doesn't mean so much whether he comes or not.

If he comes, then it's the usual:

"I'll be leaving soon."

I'll sit working here all evening anyway.

If he doesn't come, then I'll wait for him tomorrow instead,
as I waited today, yesterday, the day before yesterday.

Half past eight! The indignation is boiling inside me!

But I want to suppress it. How? How?

He thinks he can treat me however he pleases!

The fury threatens to stifle me. I know he doesn't care about me! It's not the
longing any more.

No, it's the rage of an unruly nature at having to tolerate,
not being able,
not getting to rise up and get revenge.

A woman without love—an artist without artistry.

Then life isn't worth living—no!

I'm alone.

Alone as if on a big desolate heath, surrounded by darkness.

If I shouted, the shout would die away without having
reached one human creature,

for between me and the others lies this big desolate space,
the silent impenetrable darkness.

I am a woman. There you see the greatest misfortune!

The curse of being a woman, when one has a man's brain!!

My new Danish publisher visited me.

I wrote a contract for a Danish edition of *Madame Marianne*

that's to come out at the same time as the Swedish one! Halleluja!

Afterwards I went out and bought a bottle of champagne.

He came in the evening. We drank champagne together.

He said: "Shall we put out the light and go to bed?"

There it came, you see, the question!

I knew instantly I was to be thrown away in contempt in a few days, a no would make him withdraw coldly. The spiritual life he doesn't care about, if only he gets the body!

I hesitated.

Being loved in this way is disgusting!

Is my friendship, my devotedness, my esteem absolutely nothing?

...so shall I go out into my wilderness again.

Oh, this heinous thing, not being allowed to be a human being, only a woman, a woman!

“Don't you want to?”

“You mustn't be angry!”

What humiliation!...

“Why don't you want to? Are you afraid of me?”

I smiled at him... and then was discarded like the peel 'round an orange! Only one more moment...

“Just say yes...”

...only one moment of happiness.

“...or no!”

He pulled open a few buttons on my sweater.

“Why can't we? I can only stay fifteen minutes more now.

No? But then I don't want to kiss you any more!”

For three days I waited.

I walked and walked in this room.

Don't lose your courage, don't be crushed!

The days pass...it's as if the pain were trying to eat up
my whole being internally, to hollow out my chest with
its merciless, gnawing teeth.

I have only one intelligible thought in my head.

"Is he coming or not?"

Help me, God, if you exist!"

On the third day he came back, brisk and cheery.

He took me in his arms.

"Madame, you have a well-armored heart.

It's sealed up with seven locks, isn't it?!"

I laughed. Immediately I was content!

He's asked me, and I've answered no,
and he's come back.

The man who to me is most handsome

and greatest and most splendid,

the man I think all women must love,

he has pressed me against his heart

he has looked me in the eye—and become familiar!

I have been a woman.

For the rest of my life I can now be a human.

I was happy, happy!

With his caresses he has lifted me up and
placed me on a level with all the other women.

I wasn't a monster anymore.

finally I am free to travel!

I set off for Paris!

On Hovedbangården I ran into him.

He himself was going to Russia.

He kissed me.

“But are you crazy? What will people think?”

He just laughed.

“I'll say you are my sister. Or my aunt!

There now, we've disgraced ourselves for all eternity!”

I looked into this well-known, unreliable face.

“Will you write to me in Paris?” I asked.

“If I don't get abducted by some

Russian princess.

And if I am, I'll write but a single word:

Vainçu! Conquered!”

I laughed. Recklessly.

Paris!

Nôtre-Dame, Saint-Denis! All the museums—the Louvre!

The theaters—Comédie-Française, Odéon, the Opera,

The boulevard theaters!

And the art exhibitions—the spring salon! I saw paintings
totally different from everything else I'd seen in Copenhagen.

“Impressionism,” it was called!

I saw Auguste Rodin's scandalous work “The Kiss.”

The sculptor could be seen in person at the salon
together with his mistress Mademoiselle Claudel.

I myself lived a bohemian life between times—

associated with Scandinavian painters, sculptors, and authors—

Jonas Lie and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson,

Christian Eriksson, and Eva Bonnier...

I sat in cafés and little bistros...

Then came a telegram from Russia:

“Vainçu! Conquered!”

I'm not jealous. By what right should I be jealous?

Don't we believe in free love? Aren't we free people?

Free...

I went home to Hörby.

Have I ever been able to love this old dullard

who is my husband? The postmaster.

And as a mother, I'm nothing.
I've never liked my child, Hilma,
Now a half-grown woman who has inherited her father's stupidity,
her father's slobbishness,
her father's totally absent sense of order and interests.
I'm a bad mother. Really!
But I'm a writer!
I am Ernst Ahlgren.
My novel *Madame Marianne* had come out, and
it had roused justified interest. I've got good reviews.
I sent my book to Brandes.

He sent a card:

"I'm sorry I cannot like
Madame Marianne more than I do.
It's far too much a ladies' novel..."

"A ladies' novel."

The day after, a condescending review in the newspaper *Politiken*
written by his brother.

Again the same expression: "a ladies' novel!"

I've got my death sentence—

The judgement on my authorship.

I'm shaken in the very faith in my artistic talent,

My joy in working is no more.

But the greatest defeat is personal.

Victoria Benedictsson has received her sentence.

I can't do it any more!

All my work has been in vain.

I'm too weak, I'm not good enough to live.

I took the revolver I'd inherited from my father

and took a walk alone out on the heath.

I tried out the gun. The revolver worked well.

God—if you exist—let it go fast!

I was too cowardly—as my father was once.

Georg Brandes. Can you spare a moment

of your precious time to talk to me? Just one more time!

I went to Copenhagen. I took the revolver with me.

There's a security in the thought of death.

I'd forgotten how he looked.

I idolize this slim, fine figure!

He's so slender-limbed! Slender-limbed and lithe.

God, how handsome he is!

“You wrote that you wanted to meet me.”

When he saw how distressed I was
he caressed my body with his hands,
laughed and said:

“Are you planning to go hang yourself?
Then get a rope without knots,
one that’s strong, with a snare that slips freely.
There you have my advice!”

That was all he had to say.

No other way out than to put the mouth of the revolver
to my chest and pull the trigger. I’m bathing in sweat.
I’m so afraid of death!

But is he right to torment me and torture me?

I could kill him!

I would get punished—of course.

But they could also credit me with
having got rid of him for being a parasite.

They could explain that I’d done it out
of temporary insanity, lock me up in a madhouse,

and let me free after a time.

But to shoot from behind? Become a assassin.

No, it's too deceitful, it's too disgusting!

In the morning I sat down to write before seven o'clock.

I wrote a story I called "Criminal's Blood."

Criminal's blood?

My friend Axel saw how things stood with me.

He said: "Do you want to do me a big favor? Wait!"

I waited and went to Stockholm.

I worked, I got new friends, found appreciation.

A scholarship of 500 crowns from the Academy!

I could hear Brandes's voice: "That's what you get when you write moral books like *Madame Marianne!*"

I think I'm going to write a play now.

It will be about him. And his ruthlessness
and his Don Juan nature.

"What brings me to life is beauty. Eros!

It's the nature of woman to love without jealousy, without ulterior motive."

It may even be a comedy.

I went back to Copenhagen.

“How beautiful you’ve grown. That smile becomes you—you know that?”

Strange, strange feelings in my chest!

He tells about his Russian lady,

“she offered me half a million rubles

if I would divorce my wife...”

He’s superior to me in knowledge, but as a human being,

in my character, I’m more mature than he is...

There was a time I thought we would talk about literature!

“Do you think I’m lying?” he asked.

No! I believe him about everything.

“You’re making me completely crazy. Do you want to?”

Puppet play feelings!

And yet I’m happy to see him. Happy.

His eyes—and his hands. I’ve dreamt of his hands.

“You don’t want to? Can’t you make up your mind?”

I didn’t answer.

Yes and no are just as dangerous for the one who

fears only one thing: losing him!

He let me wait for eight days.

If only I could work. I have good ideas.

But my hopelessness put a weight upon the writing...

When he finally came, I kept him on

with my caresses.

“Don’t go now!” I reached out my hands.

“Do you want me to stay?”

“Yes. You understand, it feels as if my heart will break

when we’re to part.”

Again the same question.

“Do you want to?”

He drew me to him.

“Why, you look like somebody waiting to walk the plank.”

“Oh no, but wait a minute...

I want to have my favorite long nightgown on!”

Here. In this room.

Did I feel happy? I wanted to think so.

Childishly happy, devout.

To love a man. For the first time to love...

To love and give. Love and give...

That’s what I thought. That’s what I wanted to think.

I said yes. Strange. I said yes.

And immediately I was freed from his magic power!

A dark, blue frosty sky vaults above me,

the stars are shining.

I don't know what seized me.

It's as if through a miracle I

suddenly recovered from a disease.

There's come space around me.

I can breathe. I am free!

What I wasn't able to say was I knew that I was going to die.

What security there is in the thought of death!

All indecision and all compromise with its conviction

one can discard

when you know you're going to die.

But the following weeks...

We didn't see each other—except in the presence of strangers.

Cold indifference! He has possessed me—for half an hour.

He won't need to abandon me. No.

I'll break up myself. But I won't survive it,

for I love him with all my being,

with body and soul, with friendship and erotically.

If only the coarse, the unchaste thing had not come between us!

I asked him to come back to me.

We'll kiss each other carefree, like children, devoted!

The security of resting in your will.

Of being a woman. Come!

I desire your closeness, the sight of you, your kindness.

That's what I'll tell you, Georg Brandes. Come!

He came. I could hardly speak.

It's such a joy to see him,

it's such anguish to die.

When the bond between us is cut off, the whole world becomes
desolate and empty!

"But don't look so solemn! Just take it as a seduction.

In a few weeks it'll be over for both of us!"

In a few weeks it will be over...

"Don't you want to?"

"I'll do everything you want, if you just promise I'll get to see you.

Just one minute a day... you promise..."

"Yes, yes."

I purchase these minutes,

I buy them from your indifference,

in a boundless

passion-free

death-sentenced

devotion.

Now I had nothing more to pay with.

Now he was going to go.

He got up. Now he was going to go.

“How stupid of you to go and love me. Your pride ought to prevent you. Just think that a dozen other women are walking around loving me.”

“But I have no pride any more.”

“At your age. Why, it’s pure insanity!”

“Who’s denying it’s insane?”

My reasoning

is clear, and my mind is calm

and this is no rash act on my part.

I took the morphine tablets I’d left in readiness.

Then I got undressed and got into bed to die.

It need not be anything more remarkable than that.

To lie waiting for death...

People get so many ideas about what it's like to die.

You're afraid—and you're longing...

Actually I don't feel much... Emptiness!

I thought I would fall asleep. But nothing happens...

The swing of the pendulum!

The second child I bore, the little one that died...

I ate nothing. I loathed being pregnant!...

Let her starve. Was that why she died?

Good God, why aren't the tablets taking effect?

Axel!!!

I walked across the hall and knocked on Axel's door.

"Axel! I've taken all the morphine I have.

Come and watch over me as I die!"

He followed me back to my room

and sat down on my bed.

"Aren't you afraid to die," he asked finally.

"I'm not afraid of anything more than sinking down into the dark of obscurity. I

don't want to die in Hörby!

I don't want the papers to have

a notice that I've died in that horrid

little hole."

Poor Axel, he looked so anxious.

Probably sat there thinking about the coming police inquest,
if he were accused of murder!

I drove him out of the room and bolted the door.

My mouth was dry, and I drank a glass of water, felt sick and
threw up on the floor.

Before I made it up to the bed, the morphine fog swept over me...

Axel says that the morphine rush lasted three days.

I slept and woke up, fell asleep again.

Suddenly Brandes was standing at my bed. He was scolding me.

“How could you? It’s detestable to commit suicide!

It’s pitiable! Cowardly! Disgusting!”

I cried, I was so weak. “Forgive me.”

He harbored no sympathy for me.

He’s thrown me down into the dirt, I didn’t put up any resistance,
and he isn’t extending a hand to me to get up again.

You didn’t have anything to give me,
for emptiness was your total fortune!

After a few days the crisis was over.

I felt better and sat down to write an article about him.

Yes, he is opposed for his opinions about free love

and needs my support. I've always been able to distinguish between the cause and the person.

He brought over a photograph of himself to illustrate the article.

He looked at me for a long time.

"I have the craziest urge to kiss you!"

I let him do it.

Watch out, Brandes!

Now I hate you!

Deep inside me,

in my inclinations and my secret desires,

and at times in my acts

I'm a lawless person!

I hate you!

"Free love" has poisoned my life.

I hate your doctrine—hate it!

Love?

It has nothing to do with love—nothing!

I know you.

I have no respect for you—

and I love you!

No! I love my work!

That's why I want to bear what is heavier than death!

Ernst Ahlgren wants to write about women. I'm going to write the most dangerous and most honest thing I'm able.

To draw sharp, powerful
images of people struggling for life.

Spellbound—that's what my drama will be called.

The one spellbound, captive in an underground world of trolls.

A man—based on Brandes, recognizable, mean.

He's a ruthless Don Juan and has only contempt
for woman's faithful love.

It will be the greatest thing I've written!

I am writing the drama with the blood of my own heart...

But I'm so tired.

So tired to death.

I don't have the energy to finish the play.

I'm so strangely alien to everything.

Anyone who's once stood facing death
certainly never learns to live again.

The only thing I feel is indifference,

I hope for—nothing!

Life is so beautiful,
but I stand outside.

It doesn't reach me.

I'm a hundred years old.

You want to slice me to pieces, Georg Brandes, and I won't
withdraw, not defend myself, not complain.

I shuddered at cold steel once, but no longer now.

I tear off my sweater, and you see my naked skin,
it's shivering under the beat of my heart.

Dear friend, you're no bloodthirsty nature,

I don't want to reproach you.

I only wish you'd been a bit less
careless with human life!

I'm withdrawing in the only way possible—
with my nature.

There is no rescue.

Down in the black depths!

A mirror—and my razor.

If only I weren't so afraid
of the physical pain!

I'm so afraid to lie in torture for a long time.

I'm most afraid of having too light a touch
at the crucial moment!

I think I don't believe in God—

and yet I'm going to pray to him in the end.

Axel, my friend!

I can't decide whether I care most about you or Brandes, it's
in such different ways.

Listen now, this is important! I want to ask you for one thing:
don't destroy my notes!

He's going to want that, but it mustn't happen.

Every word is true

and this truth that I can seal with my death

he should have the courage to stand for too.

Little souls are going to be howling over my grave!

Do you hear that, Georg Brandes!

I won't be hanged in silence!

When I was young, I had a recurring dream—

A remarkable dream,

In which my enemy always became my friend.

All the anguish first, and then

This wondrous, lovely peace.

Soon the one spellbound will be free

soon she'll again be

with her people
up there where the sun shines,
the forest stands green
and the wind blows cold from the sea.

THE END