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. Petterson, 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?

PETTERSSON 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 whisp 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 Misss 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
Shhhhh, 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 WIDERMANN
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. Murmers.
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 WIDERM AN
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 WIDERM AN
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 WIDERMANN
The assembly must be adjourned.

MR. APPELMAN
Yes, the assembly must be adjourned.

MISS WIDERMANN pounds the gavel.
The assembly is adjourned.

Everybody troops out.

MISS WIDERMANN 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.
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 reprouingly
There are various 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 Strömg. 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.*
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 maître 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-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
Hurrah!

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 rogishly
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 WIDERM AN from the back.
Good morning.

HORTENSE
Good morning.

MISS WIDERM AN
Is Mrs. Bertold at home?

HORTENSE
Yes, she’ll be coming soon.

MISS WIDERM AN
May I have a seat?

HORTENSE
Please do.

MISS WIDERM AN 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 WIDERM AN
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 WIDERMANN
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 WIDERMANN
It probably will be necessary.

HORTENSE
What brings you here?

MISS WIDERMANN
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 WIDERMANN
Good morning, Hermione dear.

MRS. BERTOLD
Good morning.

MISS WIDERMANN
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 WIDERMANN
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 WIDERMANN
Morality!?

MRS. BERTOLD
No, but the list there.

MISS WIDERMANN
Hermione, your daughter is making you depraved!

MRS. BERTOLD
Ha!

MISS WIDERMANN
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 WIDERMANN
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 WIDERMANN
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 *incorruptible* requirement 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

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