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Infant Sorrow

My mother groaned! My father wept
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud:
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.
Struggling in my father's hands:
Striving against my swaddling bands:
Bound and wear I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

-William Blake

Cast of Characters

ALFRED ALLMERS, (M), 40s, a poet

RITA ALLMERS, (F), late 30s, Alfred's wife

EYOLF, (M), their son, 9 years old, walks with a crutch

ASTA ALLMERS, (F), late 20s, Alfred's adopted sister

MR. BORGEJM, (M), a road builder

THE RAT WIFE, (F), late 70s

Time

Summer, 1913.

Place

The Allmers estate, Newport, R.I., on the shore of the ocean.

EYOLF

adapted by John Belluso

FROM THE PLAY *LITTLE EYOLF* BY HENRIK IBSEN

ACT I

(A lovely, "Gilded Age"-era room, full of antique furniture, plants and fresh flowers.)

(Stage left, a door to the garden and a veranda with bay windows which looks out over the ocean. Stage right, the front door to the house, further right, a door leading to the kitchen and bedrooms.)

(The veranda windows are open, sounds of seagulls and ocean waves enter, as ASTA ALLMERS stands, staring out the window, taking in the view.)

(RITA ALLMERS stands by a table, unpacking a traveling bag.)

ASTA. *(Staring out the window:)* My mind was fluttering like a bird this morning. Like one of those beautiful gulls, gliding, skimming over the water, then fluttering their wings as they land on those jagged rocks.

RITA. *(Not looking up from her unpacking:)* You were distracted. I hope you aren't feeling unwell.

ASTA. No. I feel fine.

(Closing the windows, turning to RITA, walking towards her.)

I just felt compelled, to come here. For a visit. I felt I simply *must* come, to take a look at little Eyolf. Perhaps I should have sent word ahead of time, made plans first? But it was an *impulse*, I suppose. I had to come look at him, to see him.

(Short beat, smiling:)

And you.

(Short beat.)

A visit.

RITA. (*Finishing the unpacking, re-folding shirts and the like:*) Well, you are always welcome here, Asta.

ASTA. (*Touching the bag:*) Such a surprise to come here and see Alfred's traveling bag.

RITA. (*Gently takes it from her:*) Yes. Your brother returned home late last night. I wasn't expecting him back so soon.

ASTA. (*Smiling:*) And he didn't tell you he was coming home early?

RITA. He sent a short telegram, about an hour before he arrived. A short, cold message. (*Smiling, imitating his voice:*) "I will be arriving home shortly."

ASTA. (*Smiling playfully:*) That sounds like him. Quite reserved.

RITA. *Reserved, yes.*

ASTA. And he was feeling better after his trip, his mood was...?

RITA. (*Placing the bag down, turning to her:*) His face was luminous, transformed. He looked positively youthful and somehow, *determined*. Like when we were first married; that's what his face looked like when he walked through the door. A magnificent look of Promise in his eyes.

ASTA. A hiking trip in the Adirondacks must have, the mountain air must have agreed with him. To come home to Newport so refreshed, and full of youthful energy—

RITA. Well, he was tired as well. He said his goodnight to little Eyolf, and went right off to sleep. (*Beat.*) It's been so long since you've come here to visit, Asta.

ASTA. Yes, it was unkind of me not to come—

RITA. You should have stopped by so you could continue flirting with the road-builder working right outside.

ASTA. Oh really, Rita! *He* is the one who has been flirting with *me*, and I'll have no part of it!

RITA. (*Going to the window:*) But he's so very handsome, I think he may be in the garden playing games with Eyolf, perhaps we should invite him in for some tea?

ASTA. You are incorrigible, Rita! Just stay still for once, will you?

RITA. (*Suddenly serious:*) I wish you had come around to visit. I've been terribly alone with Alfred gone for so long. The place, so quiet, the only sound, the wooden floor, creaking as I walk. As quiet as a funeral.

(*Beat.*)

ASTA. But, you've had *Eyolf* to keep you company, surely he must have—

RITA. (*A bit cold:*) Yes, *Eyolf*. My little white-faced boy. (*Turning towards the door:*) Oh, here they come.

(*ALFRED ALLMERS enters, leading EYOLF by the hand; the left side of EYOLF's body is partially paralyzed, he walks slowly, with great difficulty, an uneven gait, using a small wooden crutch under his left arm. EYOLF wears a small version of a Civil War soldier's uniform, he awkwardly lowers himself to the floor and begins playing with some toy battle soldiers.*)

ALFRED. (*Gently letting go of EYOLF, arms outstretched:*) Asta! My dear sister, to see you, and out her so soon after my return!

ASTA. I felt I had to come here...Welcome home!

ALFRED. Such a wonderful welcome!

RITA. He looks good, doesn't he? His complexion is quite—

ASTA. Well, he looks splendid. Truly splendid, his eyes so bright, like two little, glowing stars! You must have gotten a good deal of writing done on your wilderness retreat, is the entire book finished, Alfred?

(*A pause. RITA smiles, looks away.*)

RITA. He didn't do any writing at all while he was away.

(*ALFRED looks to her.*)

RITA. I was unpacking your bag, preparing to put away your clothes; only blank paper and empty journals in your bag.

ASTA. But, then what did you do with all that time?

ALFRED. (*Smiling:*) A thousand thoughts ran through my head; I let them run.

RITA. I hope some of those thoughts were of the people waiting for you at home?

ALFRED. (*Looking over to EYOLF:*) Indeed, they were.

ASTA. But Alfred, this book of poetry was to be your “great work”—

RITA. (*A slightly mocking tone:*) Indeed, a collection of *Imagist* pieces exploring “*The Responsibility of Man in Society*” you were calling it.

ALFRED. Yes.

RITA. A collection of poetry which would leave Ezra Pound paralyzed with professional envy.

ASTA. I’m sure you weren’t so boastful, Alfred.

ALFRED. No, actually I *was* that boastful.

RITA. Yes, in fact, last winter we ran into Pound and Hilda Doolittle during a dinner in New York, and Alfred spent a great deal of time telling them how certain he was that this new collection was going to *captivate* them. Even though neither of them seemed to have a kind word to say about his current work.

ASTA. Perhaps they weren’t familiar with his work—

RITA. Alfred’s been published in “Poetry” and many other journals which I’m sure they’ve read.

ASTA. Yes, well, regardless, you look so serene and so, *joyful*.

ALFRED. (*Smiling:*) Well, I suppose I am, and I’ve... (*Having some trouble finding the words:*) My time away has allowed me the chance to see how stupid I can be, the things in life which I have been chasing; the things which I have valued.

(RITA sits, listening.)

Walking through the mountains, no sound but the wind blowing through the trees. The large open fields. (*Short beat, smiling, embarrassed:*) This whole business of words. Images. Taking thoughts, thoughts on “Responsibility” and “Society,” trying to express these

ideas through words, through Philosophy, or Poetry... Thinking, thought, thoughts which come not just from the Mind but also from the Soul, this is how we use the best part of ourselves, but trying to express these thoughts through words, the words which go down on paper, they have no meaning.

ASTA. Really Alfred, for a highly respected writer as yourself to claim that words have no meaning, you must have gone a little mad up there in the mountains!

RITA. Yes, my dear, I do think you may be acting a bit brash, and perhaps—

EYOLF. (*Interrupting, looking up to ALFRED, smiling:*) But Daddy, the words you write, they have a great deal of meaning.

(A pause. ALFRED smiles proudly, walks over to EYOLF, who pulls away, returns to playing with his toy battle figures.)

ALFRED. (*Stroking his hair:*) Well, if you say so, my boy, then it must be true. What a smart and fine boy you are.

EYOLF. (*Now ignoring him; pretend “explosions,” the battle figures go flying in the air:*) Kerrrrr-POW! Bloody bloody, machine-gun fire, take cover soldiers! Bloody bloody-kerr-POW!!!

ALFRED. Well, Eyolf is certainly, *energetic* today. (*To RITA, not looking at her:*) Again, you let him wear that ridiculous soldier’s uniform.

RITA. He bothered me to no end, he wouldn’t stop begging me to wear it, you have no idea how he... (*Stopping herself.*) He can be quite a handful.

ASTA. Well, I think you look superb in that uniform, Eyolf.

EYOLF. Yes Aunty, I agree, it suits me quite well. Mr. Borghejm gave it to me, he sewed it himself! Do you know him? He’s our road-builder.

ASTA. Yes, I know him.

EYOLF. He’s a fine man, his father fought in the war on the side of the North, and the North won! And he sewed this uniform which he made to look like his father’s because he knew I would love it and we play battle games together all the time. He also gave me a bow

and arrow which I will learn to use, I will learn to use all sorts of weapons when I grow up to be a soldier!

(Another pretend explosion, more battle figures flying through the air.)

RITA. *(A small smile, with a dark edge:)* He can't even lift the bow, never mind pull back the arrow.

(ALFRED shoots her a sharp look, then looks away.)

ALFRED. Eyolf, have you been reading the books I gave you while I've been gone?

EYOLF. *(Not looking up, playing with the army figures:)* Yes, Father.

ALFRED. Good, it's important we cultivate your mind. You are a very wise and well-spoken young man—

EYOLF. Kerrrr-POW-POW-POW!

ALFRED. *(Turning to RITA:)* Has he been studying?

RITA. *(Hesitant:)* Yes, he's just, he's very rambunctious, he has trouble focusing—

ALFRED. Well you have to *make* him focus then.

ASTA. Alfred, he is still a child, and after all—

ALFRED. He is a child who will need to rely on his *intellect* when he grows up. *(Lowering his voice:)* If he is to have a future, a professional career, it will be a career based on the strength of his *mind*, not his *body*. Besides, what is the point of schooling him at home if he's not going to read the books?

RITA. The *point* is that the other children were constantly making fun of him, and so—

ALFRED. Yes, the same little children who make fun of him, when he tries to swim with them down by the shore, filthy, dark little vermin, they are.

EYOLF. I'm not afraid of them. They are simply jealous of me and my fine uniform.

ASTA. (*Whispering to RITA:*) He wears his uniform down to the beach?

(*RITA nods, shrugging her shoulders a bit.*)

ALFRED. Yes, I think you are quite right, Eyolf. They are simply jealous. (*Turning to RITA:*) His studies must become a priority in this house, Rita.

(*Beat.*)

RITA. (*Firmly, coldly:*) I do my best. (*Beat.*) Come along, Eyolf. Let's get you cleaned up, playing on the floor like that, (*Short beat.*) your hands are filthy.

EYOLF. No! I want to stay here with Auntie Asta, I want to play some more!

ASTA. (*Kneeling down to him:*) Eyolf, go with your Mother now, and later I will tell you about how, on my way here today, I saw the *Rat Wife*.

EYOLF. (*Amazed:*) You saw her? Really? With your own eyes you saw her?

ASTA. (*Nodding "yes":*) Walking along the side of the road, just down the street. (*Teasing him:*) A very strange and scary looking creature, she is.

EYOLF. Why do they call her the "Rat Wife" I wonder?

ASTA. Well, because she goes all around, from place to place, she drives away the rats, like the Pied Piper, (*A playful, scary tone:*) but instead of playing a flute, she uses her dark powers to drive the creatures awaaaay...into the Darkness.

RITA. All right, that's quite enough, Asta. No wonder Eyolf gets so worked up. This "Rat Wife," she is quite simply a crazy old woman who wanders the streets, she chases away rats and people give her money for it; there are no "dark powers." (*Escorting EYOLF off:*) Now let's go and get you cleaned up, no more playing. Now.

EYOLF. Daddy, should I go study after I'm cleaned up?

ALFRED. (*Pauses, smiling at him:*) Well, no, not if you don't want to. There's still some time for you to play.

(EYOLF *nods*, RITA *takes his hand and they exit.*)

ASTA. Now, Alfred—

ALFRED. (*Interrupting:*) You have baby's breath, flowers, in your hair.

ASTA. What? Oh, yes, I saw some growing out back, I picked them... I thought they might look...

ALFRED. You look *ravishing*.

(*Beat.*)

ASTA. Thank you, Alfred. (*Turning to him:*) Thank you. Now tell me, why did you send word for me to come here today. *Imploring* me to come, to be here for your return? (*Short beat.*) And why didn't you tell Rita that you asked me to come?

ALFRED. (*Short beat.*) I missed you. Isn't that enough of a reason?

ASTA. Of course. (*Changing the subject:*) Now what is all this nonsense about not writing anymore? What ever happened to you up there in those woods?

ALFRED. What happened to me?

ASTA. Yes, it's like a *transformation*, Rita has noticed it as well, your spirit is—

ALFRED. Something, inside of me, yes, has *changed*—

ASTA. Tell me—

ALFRED. I'll try to, as best as I can find the words to describe... I had much time, to think of my life, the choices I have made, the conduct of my life.

ASTA. Well, tell me this instant what you are—

ALFRED. I sat in the cabin, in the woods, contemplating themes of "Responsibility," while my son, and my wife sit in this quiet house, alone. The words... The words I wanted to write just slipped away from me, and thoughts, of little Eyolf, were the only thoughts I could think.

ASTA. Of course we all know how deeply you care about him, you look after him...

ALFRED. I look after him as a schoolmaster, not as a father. I want to be a father for him, I want to care for him in every way I can, that is a form of "Responsibility," which I have not succeeded in living up to, but I will now, in the future.

ASTA. I know it rests very heavy on you, Alfred. The poor child, fallen off the table, while Rita was tending to him. A damaged spine. (*Turning to him:*) but you look after him, you take care of him—

ALFRED. He thinks of me as a schoolmaster. I should, I need him to think of me as a father. I have work to do, to make him think of me that way.

(*RITA has quietly entered, she stands by the doorway, listening:*)

I don't want him to be an orphan, as you and I were orphans, my little Asta. (*Looking over the opulent surroundings:*) We've done a marvelous job of reinventing our fate, haven't we?

ASTA. I don't feel "reinvented."

ALFRED. Yes, well, perhaps we are the same people we always were, eh?

ASTA. I think we are, my big brother.

ALFRED. "Brother," the word has always seemed a bit strange to me, coming from you.

ASTA. Why?

ALFRED. Well, that's not what I am. We were adopted by the same parents, but there is no blood between us.

ASTA. Yes, but we were raised as brother and sister. (*Short beat.*) Surely, that is how you think of me, as a sister?

ALFRED. (*Short beat.*) Yes. Of course.

ASTA. This trip *has* changed you Alfred. And I'm sure it will be all for the good. For little Eyolf.

ALFRED. Yes. Yes, I will release his potential, I will help the seeds of nobility inside him to grow, to flower, to become fruit.

RITA. (*Stepping forward:*) Lovely words, Alfred, especially for a man who has so recently renounced the power of words. Or perhaps it's only certain words you have renounced? Such as the word "brother"? Perhaps you'll hold onto the words which suit you, and dismiss those which do not? (*A short beat, turning to ASTA:*) Asta dear, Mr. Borghejm is out back, he was looking for you. Perhaps you should go seek him out?

ASTA. (*Short beat.*) Yes, well, before I do, I best go to the washroom to prepare myself.

RITA. To pretty up your face and hair?

ASTA. No, to prepare myself for the dreadful stench of that man's armpits! Just the thought of it makes my stomach churn!

RITA. Don't be so unkind, he's a worker, he works very hard! He's, *robust...*

ASTA. (*Covering her mouth as she exits:*) Yes, *robust.*

ALFRED. The way you try to play matchmaker with her and our road-builder, it borders on rudeness.

RITA. *She* is the one who has been rude to *me.* (*Beat.*) She never came here to visit, not even once, while you were away.

ALFRED. Well, it's clear she's not the least bit fond of Borghejm.

RITA. And what if she were, would you be jealous?

ALFRED. Don't be ridiculous, I simply want the best for Asta.

RITA. As you do for Eyolf.

ALFRED. Yes, that's true, I want to be a true father to him from now on.

RITA. And what of *me*? What are you going to be for *me*?

ALFRED. I will go on, feeling affection for you, as always.

RITA. I'm not interested in quiet *affection*, Alfred. I want the *whole of you.*

ALFRED. I think there is enough affection in this house, to satisfy all three of us.

RITA. Then you are easily satisfied. I am not. Last night.

(Beat, he stares at the floor.)

(Softly.) I put on silk, a white dress, when I received the telegram telling me of your return, last night. I smoothed a perfumed lotion over my thighs and chest. I put rose-pink scarves over both our lamps. I poured champagne for you, when you walked through the door.

ALFRED. I didn't drink any, I—

RITA. Yes. You asked how Eyolf's *digestion* was tonight. *(Beat.)* And then you lied down and slept. A deep, restful sleep.

(Beat.)

ALFRED. What would you like me to say to you?

RITA. Not a thing. But I will say to *you*; you shouldn't feel so safe around me, Alfred.

ALFRED. Is that right?

RITA. You have no idea, the terrible things inside of me, which can be roused up, by my anger...

ALFRED. *(Standing:)* I'm not frightened of you, Rita. You have a jealous nature. That is all you have.

(ASTA reenters, quickly followed by MR. BORGHEJM, who bounces in, full of energy. ASTA is covering her mouth. ALFRED subtly reacts to his body odor.)

BORGHEJM. Good morning, Mrs. Allmers! Mr. Allmers, you've returned home, how exciting!

ALFRED. *(Shaking his hand:)* Uh, yes, I came home last night.

RITA. His leave was up, he had to come back here to the trenches.

BORGHEJM. *(Playfully "punching" ALFRED:)* Ahhh... You keep your husband on a short leash, is that how it is then, Mrs. Allmers?

RITA. I insist on my rights. Besides, his trip has to end sometime, everything must come to an end.

BORGHEJM. Oh, not everything—I should hope. (*Pulling some bent and bruised flowers out from inside his coat, handing them to ASTA:*) These are for you, Miss Asta.

ASTA. (*Avoiding his eyes, burying her nose in the flowers:*) Thank you. I'm very grateful, for their scent.

RITA. "Not everything" must end, what do you mean by that.

BORGHEJM. I believe that there is one thing in the World which will never come to an end.

RITA. (*A dark smile:*) Oh dear, I suppose you are thinking of "love"?

BORGHEJM. I am thinking of all things of Beauty, things of Joy, those things are Eternal, I believe.

RITA. Well, we can certainly hope that is true.

ALFRED. I suppose you'll be finishing up your work here soon, (*Looking out the window:*) the road looks almost—

BORGHEJM. (*Proudly:*) I finished it yesterday! Putting the final touches on it today. Oh, and there is some fine workmanship in that road if I do say so!

ALFRED. Yes, it looks quite—

BORGHEJM. Oh, well you see it's very smooth, all the stones have been set in a fine and delicate manner and the mortar, well the mortar, it has been mixed and applied in a number of thin coats which allows—

ALFRED. (*Interrupting:*) So does this mean you'll be leaving us soon?

BORGHEJM. Yes, I suspect this fact is very true.

RITA. You'll come and visit us often, won't you?

BORGHEJM. I'm afraid that just is something which would not be at all possible.

RITA. Oh, and why is that?

BORGHEJM. I have been contracted to help build a huge new road up through Massachusetts and up further towards Vermont, I'll have to move far, far up north for a good deal of time.

ALFRED. I'm delighted to hear it. (*Short beat.*) Which is to say, it sounds like a splendid opportunity.

BORGHEJM. Oh, it is! And quite a challenge as well; to think of the jagged, unstable trails which I must blow-up with dynamite, and then create the smooth surface of a road for people to travel on. *Oh!*

ALFRED. Well these new roads will certainly be put to good use.

BORGHEJM. Yes, our Lovely World is moving forward so quickly! Who knows what new Promise this century will hold for us? The terrible mistakes of our past are all being left behind!

RITA. Do you think?

BORGHEJM. Yes. (*A bit softer.*) All the Horrors, the carnage of our war, all of our dead, they will all be left behind us now. My father died in the war, did I ever tell you that?

RITA. Yes. You've told us about him.

BORGHEJM. Yes. (*Beat.*) But! Now there is nothing now but a new future waiting for us.

ALFRED. Yes, the nation seems quite unified towards the goals of Progress, in fact I was just reading an article which—

BORGHEJM. I love Progress! I feel a part of it! What a challenge. For me, in the view of my own personal thoughts of the matter at hand, *Progress* is all about Wrestling with Nature! New inventions, new products, I saw a "Model-T" Ford automobile on my way in here today! And because of these new inventions, new *roads* will have to be built. Nature's mountains and hillsides will have to be leveled. And that's just a wonderful thing for me. We'll need new tracks for our railroads, new pathways, and where will they take us, where will all these magnificent roads take us? *Oh!*

(*Calming down, a bit embarrassed:*)

It's really so very marvelous.

RITA. Yes, I suppose it is. So this new job opportunity is the source of your delightful mood?

BORGHEJM. Well, it is ONE of the sources for my mood; but today I feel as though the whole future is filled with promise and great goodness and beautiful things. (*Glancing to ASTA:*) When Good Fortune comes, it comes rushing in like a sudden spring flood.

RITA. Perhaps there is more Good Fortune coming your way?

BORGHEJM. Perhaps. (*Turning to ASTA:*) Shall we go for a walk in the garden together now, Miss Asta?

ASTA. No, thank you. Not now. I'm not feeling very well.

BORGHEJM. Oh, but PLEASE! I have something I want to say to you before I go. It's very important.

RITA. A question you'd like to ask her, perhaps?

BORGHEJM. (*Very flustered, almost hyper-ventilating:*) I, well, er, I well, oh, I er, oh...

RITA. (*Smiling, giving him some advice:*) Sometimes the things which are difficult to say can be spoken more easily in a whisper. Just breathe softly and speak.

BORGHEJM. (*Nodding "yes":*) *Whisper.*

RITA. Go with him, Asta.

ASTA. But Rita, I...

BORGHEJM. Miss Asta, this will be our last walk together. Please.

ASTA. Oh, very well, just a quick stroll through the garden.

BORGHEJM. Thank you! *Thank you.* (*To RITA, as he is exiting:*) Say, where is little Eyolf?

RITA. I believe he's upstairs playing.

BORGHEJM. Well, good for him then! He loves playing! Good God, I think the best thing we can do in this dark and unhappy World is to Play! (*Taking her arm:*) Come along, Miss Asta.

ASTA. (*Covering her mouth:*) Yes.

(They exit.)

ALFRED. (*Laughing a little:*) She doesn't care for him at all.

RITA. Well, if she doesn't take him, then perhaps I will.

ALFRED. You couldn't be serious. You with *him*?

RITA. Why not him? I've shared my wealth with a poor man once before, why not again?

ALFRED. Clearly, he's already smitten with—

RITA. (*Interrupting:*) All the more delicious if I were to steal him away from someone else. (*Short beat, softly:*) Just as Eyolf has stolen you from me.

ALFRED. (*Turning to her:*) Jealous of him now, are you?

RITA. (*Staring him in the eye:*) Yes. Jealous of "Eyolf."

(*Beat.*)

ALFRED. He's your child, Rita.

RITA. (*Suddenly furious:*) Oh, I know he is. While you are in your study writing poems with the door shut, I am bathing Eyolf's body, because he is not strong enough to do it himself. And while you were off traveling over the mountains, walking through forests and speaking with angels, contemplating "Human Responsibility," I was cleaning shit off the side of Eyolf's leg. (*Short beat.*) He isn't strong enough to reach the bowl.

ALFRED. Stop saying such *vile* things, Rita.

RITA. *Eyolf* is vile. His *body* is vile.

ALFRED. You call our child *vile*?

RITA. You rouse the demon in me, Alfred.

ALFRED. I told you, I am going to help with Eyolf from now on. I am going to be a father to him, I—

RITA. (*Interrupting:*) Stale, nauseating words. Eyolf, is a living wall which separates us.

ALFRED. Go lie down and rest, Rita. You are frightening me.

RITA. You give your love to your work. Or to Eyolf. Or to *Asta*. And I am left with scraps. (*Beat.*) You have barely even touched me since Eyolf's accident, so many years ago. (*Short beat.*) It is a hateful thing, what you have done, to my life.

(She exits toward the kitchen. ALFRED pauses, his face in his hands, he breathes a deep breath.)

ALFRED. (*A whisper:*) "Eyolf." The name, gnawing, at my heart.

(He looks toward the door that ASTA and BORGHEJM exited through, then exits out the door.)

(The stage is quiet for a few moments. There are a series of knocks at the front door.)

(The front door slowly opens.)

(THE RAT WIFE enters. An old woman in her late 70s, she has long gray hair and dark piercing eyes. She wears a long tattered flower-print dress, a black cloak with long blue tassels and carries large black sack.)

(She stands, looking around the house.)

(EYOLF enters alone, slowly, staring at her.)

RAT WIFE. (*Smiling:*) Well, hello there little one.

EYOLF. (*Staring up at her:*) You are *her*...

RAT WIFE. Well, you've heard of me then?

EYOLF. "The Rat Wife," is what they call you...

RAT WIFE. Oh, yes, but that's not my *real* name, of course. (*Curtseying, presenting herself:*) My name is Miss Weir, and I'm very pleased to meet you, little soldier. What is your name?

(He doesn't answer, just smiles shyly.)

RAT WIFE. Such pretty little eyes you have. Now, are you the Master of this fine house, or perhaps I could speak with your mommy or daddy?

EYOLF. (*Backing away a little:*) I, I don't know where they are right now. (*Like a soldier guarding the house:*) What do you want?

RAT WIFE. Oh well, I mean no harm, I'm simply on my rounds in this neighborhood, and I was wondering if my services were needed here? Are there troubles in this house, any little creatures which are going critchedy-cratchedy through the floorboards, critchedy-cratchedy creatures which are causing you troubles?

EYOLF. No, we don't have any rats.

RAT WIFE. Oh, tis a pity, as I have no idea when I'll be traveling out here to Newport again. (*A sigh.*) Oh, very tired, I am. I've been hard at work all night.

EYOLF. Well, you may sit down and rest a bit, if you like.

RAT WIFE. Oh really? You're not scared of old Miss Weir?

EYOLF. I'm not scared.

RAT WIFE. What a brave little soldier you are! Oh, and yes, I do think a rest would do me well, (*Sitting:*) such a long ride here from out on the mainland shore.

(RITA enters, she sees EYOLF talking to THE RAT WIFE.)

(She is about to step forward, about to speak and interrupt them, but suddenly stops herself.)

(She freezes, staring at EYOLF, who comes closer to THE RAT WIFE, he touches the strands of her long gray hair.)

(EYOLF and THE RAT WIFE continue talking, unaware that RITA is watching them.)

EYOLF. Why did you come here to the island?

RAT WIFE. Oh, well they called for me. The needed my services, so they did call for me. People call for me when there is nothing else which can be done. When it becomes that bad, all that is left for them to do, is to bite the sour apple. (*Playfully tweaking his nose, tickling him:*) Sour apple, sour apple!

(RITA stares coldly at them, EYOLF laughs from the tickling, breaks away from her.)

RAT WIFE. Oh yes, their house was very troubled, nothing left for them to eat but soiled pieces of fish and rotting fruit. The rats ate everything which was good.

EYOLF. (*Sitting by her feet:*) Oh, those poor people.

RAT WIFE. (*Nodding “yes”:*) Poor they were. The little creatures did take over their house.

(Laughs a little, with a quiet satisfaction.)

Oh, up onto the beds they crawled, and rustled their way through the sheets. They plopped themselves right into the milk churns, precious little feet flipping and flapping, swimming through the milk. And all night long they’d whistle and hiss, crichetdy-crachetdy through the floorboards.

EYOLF. (*Staring at her:*) That is something, I would never want to see.

RAT WIFE. But then I came along and made everything alright, (*Picking up her black sack:*) along with my dear sweet friend. We took them all away. The poor, sweet creatures, there is a place in my heart, even for them! But we brought them all to their end.

EYOLF. (*Pointing to the sack, frightened, backing away:*) There, is something *moving* in there.

RAT WIFE. (*Laughing:*) Oh, brave little soldier, don’t be afraid of such a gentle fellow as he! It’s only Mopespand. (*Opening the bag, looking inside:*) Come, come up out from the darkness, my little friend.

(She lifts a small dog with a long, black snout out from the bag. EYOLF has backed further away.)

(She lifts the dog into the air in front of EYOLF, almost as if she were holding a mirror to his face.)

(*Nodding and beckoning to EYOLF:*) See. Don’t be afraid. Come closer, and stroke him. Come now. He won’t bite you. Come closer.

EYOLF. (*Frightened:*) No.

RAT WIFE. But doesn’t my young master think Mopespand has a beautiful, gentle face.

EYOLF. (*Staring at the dog:*) Him...

RAT WIFE. Yes, him.

EYOLF. His face, is Horrible, it is Ugly...

RAT WIFE. But don't you see his Beauty, too?

(EYOLF moves toward the dog, almost involuntarily. RITA stands, watches, emotion coming to her face.)

EYOLF. *(Reaching toward the dog:)* He is, a little Beautiful, isn't he?

RAT WIFE. Yes, he is.

(RITA steps forward, takes EYOLF into her arms.)

RITA. There you are, little Eyolf.

RAT WIFE. *(Standing:)* Oh, you must be the gentle lady of the house, I was just here seeing if you might be needing my services.

RITA. *(Putting EYOLF down, separating him from THE RAT WIFE:)* No. Thank you.

RAT WIFE. The kind young master here was just allowing me to take a little rest. The kind of work which I do causes tired and weary bones.

EYOLF. Chasing the rats away.

RAT WIFE. *(Nodding:)* But I don't "chase" them, you see. I cast spells. Mopespand and I. *(Smiling:)* It's the most Natural thing in the World. Everyone can cast a spell, and they do, whether they know it or not. People are always casting spells over each other. It's called the Evil Eye, anyone can give the Evil Eye. *(Stroking the dog:)* And Mopespand does it so well. A simple string around his collar, I lead him around the house three times as I play on the harp. And when they hear me play, up they come from the dark holes. They have no choice. All of them come, bless their tiny hearts.

EYOLF. *(Pointing to the dog:)* And he bites them to death?

RAT WIFE. No! Nothing of the sort. No, we go down to the boat, and they follow us to the shore, both the old fat ones and their darling babies.

EYOLF. *(Excited:)* And then what? Then what happens?

RAT WIFE. Then I push the boat off from the shore, I play my harp as we sail away, Mopespand swimming behind, and they all follow us, all the critchedy-cratchedy little creatures sink, down, into the depths.

EYOLF. And then, they die?

RAT WIFE. Every blessed one. *(Her voice a bit lower:)* And down there in the darkest depths of the ocean, they sink, they sleep, so sweetly. They sleep the long and gentle sleep which persecuted creatures can never find in life. *(Getting up, putting Mopespand away, picking up her bags:)* Oh, how old I've gotten! Casting spells has worn me down.

EYOLF. Have you every cast a spell on a human?

RITA. *(Her hand on his shoulder, restraining him:)* Eyolf, it's time for her to leave now...

RAT WIFE. *(Answering EYOLF's question, but staring deep into RITA's eyes as she speaks:)* I once cast a spell on a man. So many years ago. He was my sweetheart.

(A pause, her mouth is hanging wide open, her eyes staring, stretching upwards, her voice speaking very slowly:)

Oh Sweet Jesus, how he broke my heart!

RITA. *(Staring:)* And where, is he now?

RAT WIFE. Down below, with the rats. *(Slowly walking towards the door:)* I should be going now. Fare thee well, little soldier! Thank you for your kindness, gentle lady. It did me good to take a rest, but I must always keep moving. There is always work for such a one as me, even in this time, *especially* in this time, in this time, of our slowly rotting World.

(She exits out the front door. EYOLF stands, staring towards her direction.)

EYOLF. *(To himself:)* Now I've seen the Rat Wife, too.

RITA. Eyolf, come here, to me.

(EYOLF walks over to her. She kneels down, staring at him. She takes him into her arms, holds him gently and lovingly. The deep embrace of a mother.)

(He pushes away from her, stares at her coldly.)

EYOLF. I should like to go play, with my toys now.

RITA. *(Hurt:)* Yes. You may go, and play.

(He exits, a few beats.)

(RITA mixes herself a drink. ALFRED enters from the garden.)

RITA. A drink, Alfred? I'm having one.

ALFRED. Yes.

RITA. Where have Asta and Mr. Borghejm run off to?

ALFRED. (Almost to himself:) They are still walking in the garden. I interrupted them, their conversation. It was very rude of me. (Short beat.) It smells like a corpse in here.

RITA. There was, an old woman who came to the door...

ALFRED. A beggar?

RITA. Yes.

ALFRED. You sent her away I hope?

RITA. Yes.

ALFRED. Good. That is not the sort of thing I should want Eyolf exposed to at such a young age. It's bad enough he tries to play with those disgusting children down by the water.

RITA. Those children are poor, Alfred. Their families are destitute... (Short beat.) I was watching them play yesterday, their parents let them run around without any shoes—

ALFRED. Which is undoubtedly much of the reason they feel the need to mock Eyolf when he tries to play with them. Why won't he play on Bailey Beach, why must he insist on playing down there on the public beach? Those boys are all clearly jealous of our wealth, and they take it out on him.

(Beat.)

RITA. You weren't always wealthy, Alfred. How many years was it, before we were married, your adopted mother and father died, and you were left to care for Asta all alone, to provide for her?

ALFRED. Yes, it was a difficult time, but we managed to make it through—

RITA. You made it through because I entered your life, along with my father's wealth.

ALFRED. Wealth which he acquired from years of trading rum for Negro slaves. His hands, and therefore your hands, are hardly clean.

RITA. *(Beat.)* Yes.

ALFRED. And even before our marriage I made it quite clear to you that I found the source of your father's wealth reprehensible.

RITA. Nevertheless, you graciously accepted it and provided an education for Asta, and then you used his wealth to give yourself the leisure you needed to become a writer, a Poet, who contemplates the great themes of "Man's Responsibility in Society"! And now look at you, you can't even find a scrap of pity for those impoverished children down by the ocean.

ALFRED. The child I choose to focus my attention on is my own. A child you call vile and loathsome.

RITA. Yes, child you named "Eyolf." *(Turning to him:)* I gave birth to him in unimaginable pain. Agony, ripping through my body. But I suffered all that pain gladly, because I knew a child would please *you*. I was too old to have a child. I never wanted to be a mother, it was all for you.

(Suddenly moving in close to him, gently touching his face, kissing him:)

Alfred, I want to be alive. I want to *feel* alive. I want to feel *passion*, as we did in those magnificent days, before Eyolf, before his accident.

(He pushes her away.)

(Beat.)

RITA. *(Clasping her hands together:)* I could, I could almost wish for...

ALFRED. What, what could you wish for?

RITA. *(A dark tone:)* No, I could never speak out loud, the type of things, which I quietly wish for.

(BORGHEJM reenters from the garden, a terrible look of sadness on his face. ASTA reenters, but stays out on the veranda, looking out over the river.)

BORGHEJM. That was the last walk, Miss Asta and I shall take together. From now on, all my walks will be alone.

RITA. You hear that, Alfred? It sounds as if his heart has been broken. (*Turning back to BORGHEJM:*) Don't feel sad, Mr. Borghejm. It probably wasn't even your fault. Perhaps someone has cast a spell on Asta.

BORGHEJM. What do you mean?

RITA. (*Sipping her drink:*) Casting spells, people do it all the time, sometimes without even knowing that they're doing it. The Evil Eye, they call it.

BORGHEJM. (*Staring at her:*) You believe in the Evil Eye, Mrs. Allmers?

RITA. I think I do. I am beginning to realize that Evil can live anywhere, even in the eyes of a child.

ALFRED. Rita, stop speaking such—

RITA. The things you have *done*, have made me speak in this way—

(*They are interrupted by ASTA, who quickly reenters, alarmed. In the distance we hear the confused shouts and screams of children.*)

ASTA. There's something happening, down by the water—

(*They rush towards the veranda.*)

BORGHEJM. What are they saying? (*Calling out to them:*) What's wrong down there?

ALFRED. (*Stepping away:*) It's those repugnant little boys. Probably causing mischief...

BORGHEJM. You boys, what's wrong?

(*More sounds of children's voices; shouting, overlapping.*)

RITA. What are they saying?

BORGHEJM. They're calling for help, a child is caught up in the waves.

RITA. A child?

ALFRED. They're all fine swimmers, they are all constantly playing in the—

RITA. (*A quiet cry of fear:*) Where's Eyolf? (*Reassuring herself:*) No, he's upstairs playing with his toys.

ASTA. No, we saw him walking outside, by the garden.

BORGHEJM. (*Shouting down:*) Whose child is it, what does he look like?

RITA. (*Walking out on to the veranda:*) Oh god...

ALFRED. It's not him Rita, it's *not*—

RITA. (*Interrupting:*) Quiet, let me hear what they're saying...

(More voices; shouting, overlapping.)

(BORGHEJM and ASTA run off towards the water.)

(RITA lets out a slow, horrific scream and very slowly walks toward the front of the stage.)

ALFRED. What did they say?

RITA. They said, "The crutch, is floating in the waves. The crutch is floating."

ALFRED. (*Soft:*) Oh God, my precious little life.

(Eyolf's crutch appears in the air above RITA. She looks up; only she sees it.)

RITA. (*Staring up at it:*) The crutch, is floating.

(Blackout.)

End of Act I

ACT II

(Lights rise on a narrow path through the woods on the Allmer's property.)

(To the left in a clearing sits a bench and a table and chairs, not far off, the ocean can be heard.)

(ALFRED sits on the beach, staring out towards the water.)

(ASTA comes down the path, carrying an open umbrella and a sewing kit.)

ASTA. You shouldn't be out here. The weather, so damp and cold. *(Shutting the umbrella:)* I was looking all over the grounds for you. I was worried about you.

ALFRED. I have been sitting here, wondering, has all this really happened? Could I be going mad? Could this have been a terrible dream, if it is I want to wake up this moment, this instant.

ASTA. If I could, I would wake you up.

ALFRED. Looking out over the ocean, the water, moving so quickly, the far end of the shore, blending in with the gray clouds of the sky, the way the water moves, almost lulling me to sleep...

ASTA. Please, stop staring at the water...

ALFRED. It lulls you to sleep, and then it pulls you under. *(Staring outward:)* Where is he? To think of the force with which water moves, the rate at which it pulls things toward its center, *(Softly:)* the rate at which it pulled his body away. These are all equations which can be figured out, mathematical problems which can be solved, but what is the meaning? There must be some *meaning* to it. Life, creation, providence, where is the Purpose, the Meaning?

(She puts her hands over his mouth.)

ASTA. Stop, Alfred, please stop...

ALFRED. *(Staring out over the water:)* The most horrifying thought of all, is that there is no Meaning, that we're all standing on a crippled ship, drifting helplessly over the water...

ASTA. Have you heard anything more, as to why he—

ALFRED. The crazy old hag, she led him out into the water, and allowed him to drown.

ASTA. But we can't really be certain it was her...

ALFRED. It was her, I'm sure it was. Those boys, playing by the river, I talked to them this morning. They saw Eyolf, staring at her, following her to the edge of the dock. She pushed off her boat and began rowing away, her and her dog, Eyolf stared at her, almost transfixed, and as she rowed further away, he started, *giggling*, laughing uncontrollably, and he jumped into the water and swam after her, and he disappeared...

ASTA. But why wouldn't she cry out to tell someone, why didn't she try to help him?

ALFRED. Yes, "why," retribution? But what could little Eyolf have to atone for? There is no logical sense to be made out of it. It must be the cruelty of providence, and nothing else.

ASTA. The services, were beautiful this morning, to see all of your neighbors, and they were all very kind...

ALFRED. Yes, it's a shame their children weren't kinder to Eyolf, when he was alive. Why didn't they try harder to help him, any of those boys could have jumped in the water before the undertow pulled him away...

ASTA. (*Wrapping her arms around him.*) Alfred, please stop thinking such thoughts...

ALFRED. (*Closing his eyes.*) Yes.

(*Beat.*)

ASTA. (*Gently pulling away, reaches for her sewing kit.*) The cuffs of your jacket, Rita noticed they were getting a bit worn. She asked me to mend them for you.

ALFRED. Yes, of course, I'm always allowing the sleeves to become worn, I should just throw this old jacket out.

ASTA. The way you hold onto things, like a silly boy.

ALFRED. You *let* me hold onto things, because you were always running around the house with your sewing bag, mending my clothes.

ASTA. (*Kneeling, mending his sleeve with needle and thread.*) Back then we didn't have the money to buy you new clothes. Now hold still or I'll poke you with this needle. I was never very good at this.

ALFRED. Those were difficult times for you, back then.

ASTA. They were difficult times. Our parents' death, you were left to care for me, we were left alone, in our house.

ALFRED. Yes, but we had happy times together as well. In fact, I would say those were some of the most wonderful times in my life. (*Smiles.*) "Eyolf."

ASTA. Don't bring up those silly moments.

ALFRED. "Eyolf." That would have been your name! If you had been born a boy, you would have been called "Eyolf," Father told me as much.

ASTA. But I wasn't, born a boy. (*Beat.*) You were so childish back then.

(She finishes her sewing, steps away.)

ALFRED. I was never childish.

ASTA. You were ashamed, of not having a brother, only a sister. When I think back to those days, I think you must have been ashamed—

ALFRED. I think it was *you* who were ashamed, why else would you have played those silly games of yours?

ASTA. The games I played, were for you.

ALFRED. The way you looked! Digging out my old clothes, the clothes I wore as a boy. The blue shirt, the brown jacket, my old suspenders and cap. My best Sunday clothes.

(His eyes lingering on her.)

I remember so clearly, the way you looked, back then. Chasing you through the house, teasing you, you were dressed in those clothes. Dressing as a boy, named "Eyolf."

ASTA. (*Staring out over the water.*) Chasing me through the house, when we were alone together.

ALFRED (*Approaching her from behind, his hands on her shoulders:*) Running from room to room, both of us laughing. Singing that silly little song I wrote, my first poem, it was:

“His eyes were green and small and bright
 With arms so strong and bold,
 He was chased through the dark, chased through the light
 And he ran till he got cold
 Yes, he ran till he got cold.”

(*Beat, she slowly walks away from him.*)

ASTA. Alfred, you never mentioned any of this, these games, to Rita, have you?

ALFRED. Yes, there was a moment, where I told her, I felt *compelled* to tell her, and I did.

ASTA. I wish you hadn't.

ALFRED. There was, a moment of closeness between Rita and me, and I felt—

(*Interrupting himself:*) Listen to me! Going on about the past, lost in memories, forgetting all about him, my poor little boy...

ASTA. You deserve a rest from your grief.

ALFRED. (*Looking to her:*) Do I?

(*Beat.*)

ASTA. Of course, everyone does. You can't allow your mind to circle around the same thought forever.

ALFRED. But how can I let ridiculous thoughts enter my mind at a time like this, Asta? “Will there be roast chicken for dinner?” “Do my suspenders match my trousers?”, average questions of life, they all seem, *obscene* in moments like these. I can't find a Language of Grief to speak. I don't know, how to mourn.

ASTA. You are a strong man, and I know you will—

ALFRED. (*Interrupting:*) You have made me a strong man. You are my joy.

ASTA. Rita, should be your joy.

ALFRED. You've grown up to be, such an honorable woman. Despite the fact that you were so mistreated, by our adopted parents, they were so cruel to you...

ASTA. Oh Alfred, please, let the dead rest in peace.

ALFRED. Yes, let the dead rest, if only they would let us rest as well. Instead they haunt us forever. In this country, in this World, we are forever haunted by the frantic, chattering voices of our dead.

ASTA. Alfred, please, go up to Rita. She needs you now.

ALFRED. (*Looking out over the water:*) Where is my little Eyolf now, can you tell me that, my big, honorable Eyolf?

ASTA. (*Looking down the path:*) Alfred, Rita is coming, please be kind to her. She needs you to—

(*RITA enters, dressed in black, escorted by BORGHEJM.*)

BORGHEJM. Welllll, if you ask me Mrs. Allmers... I do suppose that if the stones on this path were placed in a different particular order, creating a clearer pathway here through the woods, not that this pathway isn't clear, but my skills are such that I envision pathways where the very thing of Nature can be changed and, oh, how I like changing Nature because that's what we have the power to do in this day and age! We wrestle with Nature! This new century has allowed us all to develop new skills and my skill is to wrestle with nature, the order in which stones and dirt have been placed together by Nature. And I could use my skills to arrange these stones in a different particular order which would—

RITA. We are not planning any changes in the landscape of our property anytime soon, Mr. Borghejm.

BORGHEJM. Oh, yes, it was very stupid of me to suggest such a thing at a time like this, it's just the way my thought process is working itself in a perpetual continuity, in order to help me deal with the loss of poor little...

(*BORGHEJM stops, he begins to sob and weep uncontrollably, overwrought.*)

RITA. I am *truly* not in the mood to comfort this man. Asta, would you be so kind as to—

ASTA. Of course. (*Taking BORGHEJM by the arm, leading him away:*) There, there... Come now, let's go for a walk together.

BORGHEJM. (*Wiping his tears away, smiling brightly:*) Oh yes, one last stroll together, like the old times, a stroll along the shore! My train will be leaving at the end of the day. One last, very last stroll along the shore together we will take!

(He sobs like a baby again as ASTA leads him off.)

(RITA and ALFRED stare at each other.)

ALFRED. How are you, Rita?

(She doesn't answer, just glares at him.)

RITA. I went back down to the shore. I heard more news, more details. About what happened to him. It isn't true that he was swept away all at once.

ALFRED. Of course he was, the waves, the undertow pulled him—

RITA. No. The boys, who saw it happen, they said he was lying deep in the clear water, lying on his back, not struggling, just lying there with his eyes open, staring upward, a smile on his face, as if he were waiting, waiting for—

(She stops herself.)

And then the undertow came and pulled him away. The thought of him lying there in the clear water, his eyes open... (*Short beat.*) I can see his eyes.

ALFRED. Were they evil eyes, Rita? Evil eyes staring up from the depths?

(Beat.)

RITA. Grief, is going to make you cruel, even crueler than you were before. I can see this is true.

ALFRED. (*Approaching her:*) You said his eyes were evil, that he was evil, are you happy now that he—

RITA. Stop!

(*Short beat.*)

Stop.

ALFRED. (*Now softer:*) The reason he couldn't swim, his crippled body, his accident, you are to blame.

RITA. We are *both*, to blame. You remember the accident which crippled him, don't you, Alfred?

ALFRED. Yes, I remember, but I don't want to remember.

RITA. (*Turning, staring outward:*) The water, the clouds, everything; it looks so desolate.

ALFRED. I dreamed of Eyolf last night. He was running, bold and strong, running up the shore, like a normal boy, out from the water. I said such thanks and praise to—

RITA. To who? To God? You don't believe in God, how could you possibly praise Him when you never believed in Him. You always told me how foolish those who believed were, you made me an unbeliever as well, always saying that Nature was wholly irrational, that our very existence in Nature is guided only by forces which know nothing of "Rationality" or "Spirituality." Do you still feel the same now, Alfred?

ALFRED. I don't believe in holding on to false illusions.

RITA. Oh, you don't? At least those who believe in Heaven, an After-Life, they have comfort in moments like these, what do we have? (*Turning to him:*) If there were such a place, if you could follow Eyolf to where he is now, if you were sure you would see him again, and he would recognize you, would you leave? Would you let go of this life and cross over this very minute?

(*Beat.*)

ALFRED. No. (*Turning to her:*) No. I believe the only happiness we will ever know, is here on earth.

RITA. And will we, you and I, find happiness together, Alfred? Will the guilt and remorse ever pass? Will you be mine ever again?

(*ASTA and BORGHEJM reenter, staying a distance away.*)

(*ASTA carries an armful of long-stemmed water-lilies.*)

ALFRED. No. Not now and not ever. Not with the wide-open, evil eyes of a child watching us forever. All there can be left between us now, is retribution.

RITA. Yes then. That's exactly what there shall be. (*Furious, almost a growl:*) *Retribution.*

(*ASTA and BORGHEJM approach.*)

ASTA. I picked some flowers for you, Rita. Water-lilies.

RITA. (*Not looking at them:*) Yes they're beautiful dear. Lay them on the ground next to the bench.

(*She does so.*)

I'm going to the boat house, to lie down for a bit, and rest my nerves.

(*She exits without looking at the flowers. BORGHEJM sits on the ground off to the side, stacking up some rocks.*)

ALFRED. (*Approaching ASTA, whispering:*) I can't take it anymore, Asta, I can't bear the thought of living with her any longer.

ASTA. Alfred, this is a terrible time to be thinking such thoughts.

ALFRED. I need to leave her behind. All she does is bring me pain and evil.

ASTA. Alfred, calm down—

ALFRED. (*Trying to take her hand:*) It's you, Asta. I want to come home with you. I saw your bags packed up by the front door, I know you are planning to leave tonight.

ASTA. Yes, I must get back home.

ALFRED. Let me come with you tonight. I want to live with you, to be close to you, as we did in the past.

ASTA. No...

ALFRED. Please Asta, we will live together as it was before, I need to feel clean and pure, as I did in the past, with you...

ASTA. (*Pulling away:*) It's a sin, Alfred.

ALFRED. It is not a sin. There is no blood between us. We were only raised as brother and—

ASTA. (*Interrupting:*) It is a sin. It is a sin against Rita. And a sin against me.

ALFRED. There is no “sin,” the only laws we follow in this life are the laws of change.

ASTA. Then call it the “laws of change” if you like. (*Turning, staring at him defiantly:*) *The laws of change.*

(*Beat.*)

ALFRED. Yes, then. That’s what I will call it, the laws of change. Meaningless fate, providence. Even the human heart, is subject to the laws of change. (*Beat.*) And it’s devastating, isn’t it?

(*He begins exiting toward the house.*)

ASTA. Alfred, you’ve been so good to me...

(*ALFRED stops.*)

ASTA. Let me sit here and think for a while. I owe you a great deal. I know I do. You’ve taken such good care of me, all through my life.

(*He comes up close to her.*)

ASTA. (*Softly:*) Let me just sit here, and think for a while.

ALFRED. Of course.

(*He gently kisses her on the forehead, then exits.*)

(*ASTA stares out towards the water. BORGHEJM still stacks rocks off to the side.*)

BORGHEJM. Oh dear.

(*Beat.*)

Oh dear.

(*Beat, his hand near his mouth.*)

Dear me.

ASTA. What is it?

BORGHEJM. (*Sniffing his fingers:*) My finger smells funny. Oh dear, my fingers smell so strange.

ASTA. (*Wiping away tears:*) Oh, Mr. Borghejm, I would really prefer if you would—

BORGHEJM. (*Interrupting, coming towards her, presenting his fingers:*) Yes, I do apologize to you Miss Asta, I hadn't realized that my fingers smelled this way. You see that must be the reason that you pulled away as I tried to take your hands when we were walking together, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize that my fingers smelled so funny.

ASTA. It wasn't because your fingers...

(She stops, takes his fingers, smells them.)

They smell like flowers. Your fingers smell like flowers. They smell like the water-lilies you helped me pick for Rita.

BORGHEJM. (*Smelling his fingers:*) Oh yes, *flowers!* Well, I suppose it's a fine thing for a man to smell like flowers, isn't it?

ASTA. (*Smiling kindly at him:*) Yes, I suppose it is.

(They sit together. ASTA takes the flowers into her arms.)

BORGHEJM. It's all so perplexical isn't it?

ASTA. "Perplexical"?

BORGHEJM. Indeed, it is. I'll tell you the truth about me, Asta. I'm not a philosopher, or a poet like Mr. Allmers. But I do feel things in a very deep way.

ASTA. I'm sure you do. You were very close with little Eyolf, always playing with him, this must be very hard on you as well.

BORGHEJM. It hurts in my heart very much. And I'm not the type of person who spends much time on sadness and grief, that sort of thing really doesn't suit me very well.

ASTA. I think this kind of grief passes through everyone's life at one time or another. It comes in like a hard storm, then gradually passes through, drying up, like a summer rain shower.

BORGHEJM. You believe that? That grief like this goes, that it moves away?

ASTA. Yes, and the farther you move away from here, the quicker you will forget. Yes. I do believe that.

BORGHEJM. I don't believe it. I believe it stays with you, always, everywhere.

(Short beat.)

ASTA. And when you lost your father, in the war?

BORGHEJM. Yes, I was Eyolf's age when my father was killed, and I still hold it with me. *(Short beat.)* I saw your bags packed up by the front door. You're leaving tonight?

ASTA. Yes, I am.

BORGHEJM. I am too. I am taking the train, are you also taking the—

ASTA. I'm taking the steamer—

BORGHEJM. Oh yes. I see. We'll be traveling different directions, then.

ASTA. Yes. We will. *(Her hand on his face, a bit playfully:)* You'll be going upstate, starting your new job, blowing holes in mountains, blowing up nature...

BORGHEJM. ...*wrestling* with Nature...! Not "blowing it up"!

ASTA. You will be creating new roads, doing the work which brings you so much joy.

BORGHEJM. Work doesn't bring me Joy, work is nothing more than work. Joy comes from sharing yourself, all the hidden things inside of you, sharing those great things with another person. That's what Joy is; and it only comes from finding a person to share yourself with.

ASTA. I thought you weren't a philosopher...

BORGHEJM. *(A bit angry:)* That's not philosophy, it's my heart.

(He stands, walks a few feet away.)

ASTA. Of course... And you believe that kind of Joy, a person cannot find it on their own? A person cannot find it in themselves alone.

BORGHEJM. For a while, maybe. But to feel true Joy, there needs to be two. There always needs to be Two. (*Looking off towards the water:*) Have you ever done that, Asta? Have you ever shared all the wonderful, hidden things inside of you with another person?

ASTA. Yes, when I was younger, all those years, when Alfred and I lived alone together.

BORGHEJM. Were they really so joyful, Asta? Those years with Mr. Allmers?

ASTA. Yes. (*Sincere:*) For the most part, yes. They really were.

BORGHEJM. Tell me about those times.

ASTA. I have so many lovely memories, helping Alfred study for his exams while he was in school, the way we celebrated when his first collection of poems were published; he swept me up into his arms and we danced!

BORGHEJM. Yes, it sounds lovely. But still, the love you felt, was the love between a brother and a sister. And that is a very different thing, from the Joy that I was speaking of.

ASTA. Yes. (*Softly, tears coming:*) I suppose, it was, it is, a very different thing, after all.

BORGHEJM. (*Approaching her:*) Oh, Asta, come with me on the train tonight. We'll send for the rest of your things later, come with me, start a new life with the one who has loved you for so long.

ASTA. Mr. Borghejm, I—

BORGHEJM. There isn't much left for you here, you need to make a new life for yourself because of what has happened...

ASTA. (*Her hands trembling:*) "What has happened"? What do you mean?

BORGHEJM. Eyolf's death, of course.

ASTA. Yes, *Eyolf's death*. Yes.

BORGHEJM. Oh God, Asta! Think of the mistake you could be making in this very moment! There could be a whole lifetime of Joy waiting for us if we seek it out together. I must... I need... I must speak clearly to you.

(Picking up a small rock.)

I believe there is the potential for a heart, to beat, inside of a stone.

I believe there is a Spirit, in all things, all matter.
This Spirit is also in us. It is the Best Part of Us.

This Spirit allows us to love and to forgive and to share all of the wonderful hidden things deep inside of us, but it is only released when two people come together.

Two.

You've never done this, you've never felt this, I know you haven't Asta.

Now you must listen to me, listen closely; there could be enough happiness and love between us to fill up the entire sky over our heads! But if we don't bring ourselves together, if we just let it lie there and die, we could both spend the rest of our lives regretting it.

(RITA reenters, her hair is disheveled, she seems disoriented.)

ASTA. *(Standing, composing herself:)* Rita, did you rest in the boat-house?

RITA. I fell asleep on the rocks. By the shore. The waves. Smell of salt. The sun is going down. It's getting dark, soon the stars will be out...

ASTA. Rita...

RITA. *(Bitterly:)* What is it? What is it you want, Asta?

ASTA. Your flowers.

(ASTA picks up the water-lilies, places them in RITA's arms.)

RITA. *(Staring at them:)* Yes, they are lovely.

ASTA. They're water-lilies, the kind which grow out from deep below the surface of the water. Think of them as a final gift, from Eyolf.

RITA. From little Eyolf, or from you?

ASTA. From both of us. I have decided to leave tonight, with Mr. Borghejm. I'm going to join him. I won't be coming back here.

(RITA slowly stares at the flowers, puts them down, takes ASTA into her arms, they hold each other.)

RITA. I hope, you two will find happiness, together.

BORGHEJM. *(Does a little dance, then tries to contain his giddiness:)* Oh, well, I'm sure we will! What else could we possibly find?

RITA. You'd be surprised at the horrible things you can find in love, Mr. Borghejm. But I wish you both the best. *(Looking to ASTA:)* I truly do.

BORGHEJM. Come now, Asta! We should prepare for our bags to be picked up, it's getting late! I'll keep you in my prayers, Mrs. Allmers!

(They exit together. RITA stares out over the water.)

RITA. Eyolf. Can you hear me, little Eyolf? I can feel you staring at me, I can feel the heat from your stare, I feel your eyes I feel them like hot breath all over my skin. Burning my skin.

Each of the stars in the sky are like your wide-open eyes, staring down at me. My son. My little boy. I'm so sorry. Forgive the way I mistreated you. Forgive me.

Please, stop haunting your Mother. I am haunted. Those words. "The crutch, is floating." The crutch, is floating. A consistent rhythm in the sound of the words repeating. The-crutch-is-floa-ting, the-crutch-is-floa-ting. You are whispering those words in my ears. What can I do, Eyolf? Give me some peace. Give me some penance.

(ALFRED enters from the house, he looks distraught.)

ALFRED. "Penance"? Who are you speaking to, Rita?

RITA. To no one.

ALFRED. Are you going mad now?

RITA. (*Bitterly:*) Yes, quite mad. Perhaps I will seek out the Rat Wife and join her on her journeys, she and I could become fine companions, both of us having been driven mad over our love for a man.

ALFRED. Yes, very clever.

RITA. I suppose you saw Asta and Borgheim, on their way out.

ALFRED. Yes. I did. (*Softly:*) She said a brief good-bye. And now she's gone.

RITA. Poor Alfred. Now both your "Eyolfs" are dead.

(*Beat.*)

ALFRED. The way you throw that name at me, using it like a weapon—

RITA. It is a weapon. Between you and I it will always be a weapon.

ALFRED. Yes, I suppose so. And now only you and I are left in this house.

RITA. (*Smiling:*) You and I alone. Alone with the memories which haunt us.

ALFRED. (*Boastful, lying:*) Rita, I can assure you, I am not "haunted."

RITA. You've lost all your memories, then? You've left your history behind?

ALFRED. Yes, I—

RITA. You've forgotten the times you would go for days without looking in on your son, too busy working on your great Epic Poem about "The Responsibilities of Man in Society"!

ALFRED. I gave up my work in order to spend more time with Eyolf—

RITA. You gave up your work because you lost confidence in your abilities as a poet, and rightfully so, it had been years since your work had been taken seriously. What a perfect time to take a walk

through Nature and decide to devote yourself to your child! After years of leaving his care-taking completely in my hands.

ALFRED. And what capable hands they were, Rita.

RITA. And what do you mean by that?

ALFRED. You know what I mean! If he wasn't a cripple, he would have been able to swim for the shore, he'd be alive if it wasn't for—

RITA. You are disgusting.

ALFRED. It's your fault, that he was, that he became—

RITA. *You* were supposed to be watching him, you left him lying on cushions on top of a table—

ALFRED. I left him because you called to me, you *tempted* me, you called me into the bedroom—

RITA. Oh, so you *do* have memories, after all?

ALFRED. No, just stop it! That's enough, I don't want to remember anymore!

RITA. I called you into the bedroom, and you climbed on top of me, and you kissed me and whispered in my ears and pushed your way deep inside of me and told me secrets from your past, your past with Asta—

ALFRED. (*Violently grabbing her, clasping his hand over her mouth:*) Stop it! I don't want to remember!

RITA. (*Struggling, breaking away:*) You *will* remember! You will *always* remember! You named him "Eyolf"! (*Softly:*) You named him.

(*A few beats, they are quiet.*)

ALFRED. (*Quietly:*) I do have memories. The trip I took, walking through the mountains, shortly before Eyolf's death...

RITA. Yes, what did happen to you up there, Alfred? Was it indeed a "*Reinvention*" of yourself?

ALFRED. No. No, it was not. But I did, I did see things, which I had never seen before. I saw things which I never believed existed. I was hiking through the mountains, I reached a peak which was too

rugged and steep to pass. On the other side was the river, I thought I might wade through it, to cross it, but I found it was too deep. I walked a narrow path, clinging tightly to the side of the mountain, gleaming sun in my eyes, rounding a corner, and suddenly I saw a copious, beautiful, open field. Enormous, it was, green grass, but when I looked closer at the ground I couldn't believe what I saw: a thousand blackbirds had died there. A thousand blackbirds, all lying dead in the green grass, covering the entire space of the field.

RITA. How did they die?

ALFRED. I don't know. But the path was too narrow, it was too dangerous to try and cross back; I had no choice but to cross through this field. I walked forward, the pulp of their bodies was dry and they cracked under my boots. And as I walked, I felt a presence, it was the presence of Death, walking with me, hanging over my shoulder, like a traveling companion. His presence was nothing like I imagined it would be; the Presence of Death felt so sweet and serene. I stopped walking in the middle of the field and raised my arms up to Him, to my traveling companion; I offered myself to Him, but He didn't take me. It was in that moment that I knew I had a Purpose.

RITA. And what was your Purpose?

ALFRED. To try and leave the past behind. To care for little Eyolf, to be a good father to him.

RITA. Yes. And so now your only Purpose is gone.

ALFRED. Yes, it is. So perhaps I should return there, to the mountains, and seek out my old traveling companion, and once and for all, give myself to Him.

RITA. *(Softly, sincere:)* You're not going back up to the mountains, Alfred. You're going to stay here, in this house. Even in terrible grief, you and I both want to keep living. We are tied to the Earth.

ALFRED. Yes. I suppose you are right.

(There are sounds of voices yelling, a commotion down by the shore.)

RITA. Alfred, go down there and see what's happening—

ALFRED. I'm sure it's just those boys—

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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