Little Eyolf

by Henrik Ibsen

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE EYOLF ***

LITTLE EYOLF

By Henrik Ibsen

Translated, With an Introduction, by William Archer

Contents

INTRODUCTION.

LITTLE EYOLF

CHARACTERS

ACT FIRST

ACT SECOND

ACT THIRD

INTRODUCTION.

Little Eyolf was written in Christiania during 1894, and published in Copenhagen on December 11 in that year. By this time Ibsen's correspondence has become so scanty as to afford us no clue to what may be called the biographical antecedents of the play. Even of anecdotic history very little attaches to it. For only one of the characters has a definite model been suggested. Ibsen himself told his French translator, Count Prozor, that the original of the Rat-Wife was "a little old woman who came to kill rats at the school where he was educated. She carried a little dog in a bag, and it was said that children had been drowned through following her." This means that Ibsen did not himself adapt to his uses the legend so familiar to us in Browning's Pied Piper of Hamelin, but found it ready adapted by the popular imagination of his native place, Skien. "This idea," Ibsen continued to Count Prozor, "was just what I wanted for bringing about the disappearance of Little Eyolf, in whom the infatuation [Note: The French word used by Count Prozor is "infatuation." I can think of no other rendering for it; but I do not quite know what it means as applied to Allmers and Eyolf.] and the feebleness of his father reproduced, but concentrated, exaggerated, as one often sees them in the son of such a father." Dr. Elias tells us that a well-known lady-artist, who in middle life suggested to him the

figure of Lona Hessel, was in later years the model for the Rat-Wife. There is no inconsistency between these two accounts of the matter. The idea was doubtless suggested by his recollection of the rat-catcher of Skien, while traits of manner and physiognomy might be borrowed from the lady in question.

The verse quoted on pp. 52 and 53 [Transcriber's Note: "There stood the champagne," etc., in ACT I] is the last line of a very well-known poem by Johan Sebastian Welhaven, entitled Republikanerne, written in 1839. An unknown guest in a Paris restaurant has been challenged by a noisy party of young Frenchmen to join them in drinking a health to Poland. He refuses; they denounce him as a craven and a slave; he bares his breast and shows the scars of wounds received in fighting for the country whose lost cause has become a subject for conventional enthusiasm and windy rhetoric.

"De saae pas hverandre. Han vandred sin vei. De havde champagne, men rörte den ei."

"They looked at each other. He went on his way. There stood their champagne, but they did not touch it." The champagne incident leads me to wonder whether the relation between Rita and Allmers may not have been partly suggested to Ibsen by the relation between Charlotte Stieglitz and her weakling of a husband. Their story must have been known to him through George Brandes's Young Germany, if not more directly. "From time to time," says Dr. Brandes, "there came over her what she calls her champagne-mood; she grieves that this is no longer the case with him." [Note: Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature, vol. vi. p. 299] Did the germ of the incident lie in these words?

The first performance of the play in Norway took place at the Christiania Theatre on January 15, 1895, Fru Wettergren playing Rita And Fru Dybwad, Asta. In Copenhagen (March 13, 1895) Fru Oda Nielsen and Fru Hennings played Rita and Asta respectively, while Emil Poulsen played Allmers. The first German Rita

(Deutsches Theater, Berlin, January 12, 1895) was Frau Agnes Sorma, with Reicher as Allmers. Six weeks later Frl. Sandrock played Rita at the Burgtheater, Vienna. In May 1895 the play was acted by M. Lugné-Poë's company in Paris. The first performance in English took place at the Avenue Theatre, London, on the afternoon of November 23, 1896, with Miss Janet Achurch as Rita, Miss Elizabeth Robins as Asta, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as the Rat-Wife. Miss Achurch's Rita made a profound impression. Mrs. Patrick Campbell afterwards played the part in a short series of evening performances. In the spring of 1895 the play was acted in Chicago by a company of Scandinavian amateurs, presumably in Norwegian. Fru Oda Nielsen has recently (I understand) given some performances of it in New York, and Madame Alla Nazimova has announced it for production during the coming season (1907-1908).

As the external history of Little Eyolf is so short. I am tempted to depart from my usual practice, and say a few words as to its matter and meaning.

George Brandes, writing of this play, has rightly observed that "a kind of dualism has always been perceptible in Ibsen; he pleads the cause of Nature, and he castigates Nature with mystic morality; only sometimes Nature is allowed the first voice, sometimes morality. In The Master Builder and in Ghosts the lover of Nature in Ibsen was predominant; here, as in Brand and The Wild Duck, the castigator is in the ascendant." So clearly is this the case in Little Eyolf that Ibsen seems almost to fall into line with Mr. Thomas Hardy. To say nothing of analogies of detail between Little Eyolf and Jude the Obscure, there is this radical analogy, that they are both utterances of a profound pessimism, both indictments of Nature.

But while Mr. Hardy's pessimism is plaintive and passive, Ibsen's is stoical and almost bracing. It is true that in this play he is no longer the mere "indignation pessimist" whom Dr. Brandes quite justly recognised in his earlier works. His analysis has gone deeper into the heart of things, and he has put off the satirist and

the iconoclast. But there is in his thought an incompressible energy of revolt. A pessimist in contemplation, he remains a meliorist in action. He is not, like Mr. Hardy, content to let the flag droop half-mast high; his protagonist still runs it up to the mast-head, and looks forward steadily to the "heavy day of work" before him. But although the note of the conclusion is resolute, almost serene, the play remains none the less an indictment of Nature, or at least of that egoism of passion which is one of her most potent subtleties. In this view, Allmers becomes a type of what we may roughly call the "free moral agent"; Eyolf, a type of humanity conceived as passive and suffering, thrust will-less into existence, with boundless aspirations and cruelly limited powers; Rita, a type of the egoistic instinct which is "a consuming fire"; and Asta, a type of the beneficent love which is possible only so long as it is exempt from "the law of change." Allmers, then, is self-conscious egoism, egoism which can now and then break its chains, look in its own visage, realise and shrink from itself; while Rita, until she has passed through the awful crisis which forms the matter of the play, is unconscious, reckless, and ruthless egoism, exigent and jealous, "holding to its rights," and incapable even of rising into the secondary stage of maternal love. The offspring and the victim of these egoisms is Eyolf, "little wounded warrior," who longs to scale the heights and dive into the depths, but must remain for ever chained to the crutch of human infirmity. For years Allmers has been a restless and half-reluctant slave to Rita's imperious temperament. He has dreamed and theorised about "responsibility," and has kept Eyolf poring over his books, in the hope that, despite his misfortune, he may one day minister to parental vanity. Finally he breaks away from Rita, for the first time "in all these ten years," goes up "into the infinite solitudes," looks Death in the face, and returns shrinking from passion, yearning towards selfless love, and filled with a profound and remorseful pity for the lot of poor maimed humanity. He will "help Eyolf to bring his desires into harmony with what lies attainable before him." He will "create a conscious happiness in his mind." And here the drama opens.

Before the Rat-Wife enters, let me pause for a moment to point out that here again Ibsen adopts that characteristic method which, in writing of The Lady from the Sea and The Master Builder, I have compared to the method of Hawthorne. The story he tells is not really, or rather not inevitably, supernatural. Everything is explicable within this limits of nature; but supernatural agency is also vaguely suggested, and the reader's imagination is stimulated, without any absolute violence to his sense of reality. On the plane of everyday life, then, the Rat-Wife is a crazy and uncanny old woman, fabled by the peasants to be a were-wolf in her leisure moments, who goes about the country killing vermin. Coming across an impressionable child, she tells him a preposterous tale, adapted from the old "Pied Piper" legends, of her method of fascinating her victims. The child, whose imagination has long dwelt on this personage, is in fact hypnotised by her, follows her down to the sea, and, watching her row away, turns dizzy, falls in, and is drowned. There is nothing impossible, nothing even improbable, in this. At the same time, there cannot be the least doubt, I think, that in the poet's mind the Rat-Wife is the symbol of Death, of the "still, soft darkness" that is at once so fearful and so fascinating to humanity. This is clear not only in the text of her single scene, but in the fact that Allmers, in the last act, treats her and his "fellow-traveller" of that night among the mountains, not precisely as identical, but as interchangeable, ideas. To tell the truth, I have even my own suspicions as to who is meant by "her sweetheart," whom she "lured" long ago, and who is now "down where all the rats are." This theory I shall keep to myself; it may be purely fantastic, and is at best inessential. What is certain is that death carries off Little Eyolf, and that, of all he was, only the crutch is left, mute witness to his hapless lot.

He is gone; there was so little to bind him to life that he made not even a moment's struggle against the allurement of the "long, sweet sleep." Then, for the first time, the depth of the egoism which had created and conditioned his little life bursts upon his parents' horror-stricken gaze. Like accomplices in crime, they turn upon and

accuse each other—"sorrow makes them wicked and hateful." Allmers, as the one whose eyes were already half opened, is the first to carry war into the enemy's country; but Rita is not slow to retort, and presently they both have to admit that their recriminations are only a vain attempt to drown the voice of self-reproach. In a sort of fierce frenzy they tear away veil after veil from their souls, until they realise that Eyolf never existed at all, so to speak, for his own sake, but only for the sake of their passions and vanities. "Isn't it curious," says Rita, summing up the matter, "that we should grieve like this over a little stranger boy?"

In blind self-absorption they have played with life and death, and now "the great open eyes" of the stranger boy will be for ever upon them. Allmers would fain take refuge in a love untainted by the egoism, and unexposed to the revulsions, of passion. But not only is Asta's pity for Rita too strong to let her countenance this desertion: she has discovered that her relation to Allmers is not "exempt from the law of change," and she "takes flight from him—and from herself." Meanwhile it appears that the agony which Allmers and Rita have endured in probing their wounds has been, as Halvard Solness would say, "salutary self-torture." The consuming fire of passion is now quenched, but "it, has left an empty place within them," and they feel it common need "to fill it up with something that is a little like love." They come to remember that there are other children in the world on whom reckless instinct has thrust the gift, of life—neglected children, stunted and maimed in mind if not in body. And now that her egoism is seared to the quick, the mother-instinct asserts itself in Rita. She will take these children to her—these children to whom her hand and her heart have hitherto been closed. They shall be outwardly in Eyolf's place, and perhaps in time they may fill the place in her heart that should have been Eyolf's. Thus she will try to "make her peace with the great open eyes." For now, at last, she has divined the secret of the unwritten book on "human responsibility" and has realised that motherhood means—atonement.

So I read this terrible and beautiful work of art. This, I think, is a meaning inherent

in it—not perhaps the meaning, and still less all the meanings. Indeed, its peculiar fascination for me, among all Ibsen's works, lies in the fact that it seems to touch life at so many different points. But I must not be understood as implying that Ibsen constructed the play with any such definitely allegoric design as is here set forth. I do not believe that this creator of men and women ever started from an abstract conception. He did not first compose his philosophic tune and then set his puppets dancing to it. The germ in his mind was dramatic, not ethical; it was only as the drama developed that its meanings dawned upon him; and he left them implicit and fragmentary, like the symbolism of life itself, seldom formulated, never worked out with schematic precision. He simply took a cutting from the tree of life, and, planting it in the rich soil of his imagination, let it ramify and burgeon as it would.

Even if one did not know the date of Little Eyolf, one could confidently assign it to the latest period of Ibsen's career, on noting a certain difference of scale between its foundations and its superstructure. In his earlier plays, down to and including Hedda Gabler, we feel his invention at work to the very last moment, often with more intensity in the last act than in the first; in his later plays he seems to be in haste to pass as early as possible from invention to pure analysis. In this play, after the death of Eyolf (surely one of the most inspired "situations" in all drama) there is practically no external action whatsoever. Nothing happens save in the souls of the characters; there is no further invention, but rather what one may perhaps call inquisition. This does not prevent the second act from being quite the most poignant or the third act from being one of the most moving that Ibsen ever wrote. Far from wishing to depreciate the play, I rate it more highly, perhaps, than most critics—among the very greatest of Ibsen's achievements. I merely note as a characteristic of the poet's latest manner this disparity of scale between the work foreshadowed, so to speak, and the work completed. We shall find it still more evident in the case of John Gabriel Borkman.

LITTLE EYOLF

(1894)

CHARACTERS

ALFRED ALLMERS, landed proprietor and man of letters formerly a tutor. MRS. RITA ALLMERS, his wife. EYOLF, their child, nine years old. MISS ASTA ALLMERS, Alfred's younger half-sister. ENGINEER BORGHEIM. THE RAT-WIFE.

The action takes place on ALLMERS'S property, bordering on the fjord, twelve or fourteen miles from Christiania.

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

ACT FIRST

[A pretty and richly-decorated garden-room, full of furniture, flowers, and plants. At the back, open glass doors, leading out to a verandah. An extensive view over the fiord. In the distance, wooded hillsides. A door in each of the side walls, the one on the right a folding door, placed far back. In front on the right, a sofa, with cushions and rugs. Beside the sofa, a small table, and chairs. In front, on the left, a larger table, with arm-chairs around it. On the table stands an open hand-bag. It is an early summer morning, with warm sunshine.]

[Mrs. RITA ALLMERS stands beside the table, facing towards the left, engaged in unpacking the bag. She is a handsome, rather tall, well-developed blonde, about thirty years of age, dressed in a light-coloured morning-gown.]

[Shortly after, Miss ASTA ALLMERS enters by the door on the right, wearing a light brown summer dress, with hat, jacket, and parasol. Under her arm she carries a

locked portfolio of considerable size. She is slim, of middle height, with dark hair, and deep, earnest eyes. Twenty-five years old.]

ASTA. [As she enters.] Good-morning, my dear Rita.

RITA. [Turns her head, and nods to her.] What! is that you, Asta? Come all the way from town so early?

ASTA. [Takes of her things, and lays them on a chair beside the door.] Yes, such a restless feeling came over me. I felt I must come out to-day, and see how little Eyolf was getting on—and you too. [Lays the portfolio on the table beside the sofa.] So I took the steamer, and here I am.

RITA. [Smiling to her.] And I daresay you met one or other of your friends on board? Quite by chance, of course.

ASTA. [Quietly.] No, I did not meet a soul I knew. [Sees the bag.] Why, Rita, what have you got there?

RITA. [Still unpacking.] Alfred's travelling-bag. Don't you recognise it?

ASTA. [Joyfully, approaching her.] What! Has Alfred come home?

RITA. Yes, only think—he came quite unexpectedly by the late train last night.

ASTA. Oh, then that was what my feeling meant! It was that that drew me out here! And he hadn't written a line to let you know? Not even a post-card?

RITA. Not a single word.

ASTA. Did he not even telegraph?

RITA. Yes, an hour before he arrived—quite curtly and coldly. [Laughs.] Don't you think that was like him, Asta?

ASTA. Yes; he goes so quietly about everything.

RITA. But that made it all the more delightful to have him again.

ASTA. Yes, I am sure it would.

RITA. A whole fortnight before I expected him!

ASTA. And is he quite well? Not in low spirits?

RITA. [Closes the bag with a snap, and smiles at her.] He looked quite transfigured as he stood in the doorway.

ASTA. And was he not the least bit tired either?

RITA. Oh, yes, he seemed to be tired enough—very tired, in fact. But, poor fellow, he had come on foot the greater part of the way.

ASTA. And then perhaps the high mountain air may have been rather too keen for him.

RITA. Oh, no; I don't think so at all. I haven't heard him cough once.

ASTA. Ah, there you see now! It was a good thing, after all, that the doctor talked him into taking this tour.

RITA. Yes, now that it is safely over.—But I can tell you it has been a terrible time for me, Asta. I have never cared to talk about it—and you so seldom came out to see me, too—

ASTA. Yes, I daresay that wasn't very nice of me—but—

RITA. Well, well, well, of course you had your school to attend to in town. [Smiling.] And then our road-maker friend—of course he was away too.

ASTA. Oh, don't talk like that, Rita.

RITA. Very well, then; we will leave the road-maker out of the question.—You can't think how I have been longing for Alfred! How empty the place seemed! How desolate! Ugh, it felt as if there had been a funeral in the house!

ASTA. Why, dear me, only six or seven weeks—

RITA. Yes; but you must remember that Alfred has never been away from me before—never so much as twenty-four hours. Not once in all these ten years.

ASTA. No; but that is just why I really think it was high time he should have a little outing this year. He ought to have gone for a tramp in the mountains every summer—he really ought.

RITA. [Half smiling.] Oh yes, it's all very well for you to talk. If I were as—as reasonable its you, I suppose I should have let him go before—perhaps. But I positively could not, Asta! It seemed to me I should never get him back again. Surely you can understand that?

ASTA. No. But I daresay that is because I have no one to lose.

RITA. [With a teasing smile.] Really? No one at all?

ASTA. Not that I know of. [Changing the subject.] But tell me, Rita, where is Alfred? Is he still asleep?

RITA. Oh, not at all. He got up as early as ever to-day.

ASTA. Then he can't have been so very tired after all.

RITA. Yes, he was last night—when he arrived. But now he has had little Eyolf with him in his room for a whole hour and more.

ASTA. Poor little white-faced boy! Has he to be for ever at his lessons again?

RITA. [With a slight shrug.] Alfred will have it so, you know.

ASTA. Yes; but I think you ought to put down your foot about it, Rita.

RITA. [Somewhat impatiently.] Oh no; come now, I really cannot meddle with that. Alfred knows so much better about these things than I do. And what would you have Eyolf do? He can't run about and play, you see—like other children.

ASTA. [With decision.] I will talk to Alfred about this.

RITA. Yes, do; I wish you would.—Oh! here he is.

[ALFRED ALLMERS, dressed in light summer clothes, enters by the door on the left, leading EYOLF by the hand. He is a slim, lightly-built man of about thirty-six or thirty-seven, with gentle eyes, and thin brown hair and beard. His expression is

serious and thoughtful. EYOLF wears a suit cut like a uniform, with gold braid and gilt military buttons. He is lame, and walks with a crutch under his left arm. His leg is shrunken. He is undersized, and looks delicate, but has beautiful intelligent eyes.]

ALLMERS. [Drops EYOLF's hand, goes up to ASTA with an expression of marked pleasure, and holds out both his hands to her.] Asta! My dearest Asta! To think of your coming! To think of my seeing you so soon!

ASTA. I felt I must—. Welcome home again!

ALLMERS. [Shaking her hands.] Thank you for coming.

RITA. Doesn't he look well?

ASTA. [Gazes fixedly at him.] Splendid! Quite splendid! His eyes are so much brighter! And I suppose you have done a great deal of writing on your travels? [With an outburst of joy.] I shouldn't wonder if you had finished the whole book, Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Shrugging his shoulders.] The book? Oh, the book—

ASTA. Yes, I was sure you would find it go so easily when once you got away.

ALLMERS. So I thought too. But, do you know, I didn't find it so at all. The truth is, I have not written a line of the book.

ASTA. Not a line?

RITA. Oho! I wondered when I found all the paper lying untouched in your bag.

ASTA. But, my dear Alfred, what have you been doing all this time?

ALLMERS. [Smiling.] Only thinking and thinking and thinking.

RITA. [Putting her arm round his neck.] And thinking a little, too, of those you had left at home?

ALLMERS. Yes, you may be sure of that. I have thought a great deal of you—every single day.

RITA. [Taking her arm away.] Ah, that is all I care about.

ASTA. But you haven't even touched the book! And yet you can look so happy and contented! That is not what you generally do—I mean when your work is going badly.

ALLMERS. You are right there. You see, I have been such a fool hitherto. All the best that is in you goes into thinking. What you put on paper is worth very little.

ASTA. [Exclaiming.] Worth very little!

RITA. [Laughing.] What an absurd thing to say, Alfred.

EYOLF. [Looks confidingly up at him.] Oh yes, Papa, what you write is worth a great deal!

ALLMERS. [Smiling and stroking his hair.] Well, well, since you say so.—But I can tell you, someone is coming after me who will do it better.

EYOLF. Who can that be? Oh, tell me!

ALLMERS. Only wait—you may be sure he will come, and let us hear of him.

EYOLF. And what will you do then?

ALLMERS. [Seriously.] Then I will go to the mountains again—

RITA. Fie, Alfred! For shame!

ALLMERS.—up to the peaks and the great waste places.

EYOLF. Papa, don't you think I shall soon be well enough for you to take me with you?

ALLMERS. [With painful emotion.] Oh, yes, perhaps, my little boy.

EYOLF. It would be so splendid, you know, if I could climb the mountains, like you.

ASTA. [Changing the subject.] Why, how beautifully you are dressed to-day, Eyolf!

EYOLF. Yes, don't you think so, Auntie?

ASTA. Yes, indeed. Is it in honour of Papa that you have got your new clothes on?

EYOLF. Yes, I asked Mama to let me. I wanted so to let Papa see me in them.

ALLMERS. [In a low voice, to RITA.] You shouldn't have given him clothes like that.

RITA. [In a low voice.] Oh, he has teased me so long about them—he had set his heart on them. He gave me no peace.

EYOLF. And I forgot to tell you, Papa—Borgheim has bought me a new bow. And he has taught me how to shoot with it too.

ALLMERS. Ah, there now—that's just the sort of thing for you, Eyolf.

EYOLF. And next time he comes, I shall ask him to teach me to swim, too.

ALLMERS. To swim! Oh, what makes you want to learn swimming?

EYOLF. Well, you know, all the boys down at the beach can swim. I am the only one that can't.

ALLMERS. [With emotion, taking him in his arms.] You shall learn whatever you like—everything you really want to.

EYOLF. Then do you know what I want most of all, Papa?

ALLMERS. No; tell me.

EYOLF. I want most of all to be a soldier.

ALLMERS. Oh, little Eyolf, there are many, many other things that are better than that.

EYOLF. Ah, but when I grow big, then I shall have to be a soldier. You know that, don't you?

ALLMERS. [Clenching his hands together.] Well, well, well: we shall see—

ASTA. [Seating herself at the table on the left.] Eyolf! Come here to me, and I will tell you something.

EYOLF. [Goes up to her.] What is it, Auntie?

ASTA. What do you think, Eyolf—I have seen the Rat-Wife.

EYOLF. What! Seen the Rat-Wife! Oh, you're only making a fool of me!

ASTA. No; it's quite true. I saw her yesterday.

EYOLF. Where did you see her?

ASTA. I saw her on the road, outside the town.

ALLMERS. I saw her, too, somewhere up in the country.

RITA. [Who is sitting on the sofa.] Perhaps it will be our turn to see her next, Eyolf.

EYOLF. Auntie, isn't it strange that she should be called the Rat-Wife?

ASTA. Oh, people just give her that name because she wanders round the country driving away all the rats.

ALLMERS. I have heard that her real name is Varg.

EYOLF. Varg! That means a wolf, doesn't it?

ALLMERS. [Patting him on the head.] So you know that, do you?

EYOLF. [Cautiously.] Then perhaps it may be true, after all, that she is a were-wolf at night. Do you believe that, Papa?

ALLMERS. Oh, no; I don't believe it. Now you ought to go and play a little in the garden.

EYOLF. Should I not take some books with me?

ALLMERS. No, no books after this. You had better go down to the beach to the other boys.

EYOLF. [Shyly.] No, Papa, I won't go down to the boys to-day.

ALLMERS. Why not?

EYOLF. Oh, because I have these clothes on.

ALLMERS. [Knitting his brows.] Do you mean that they make fun of—of your pretty clothes?

EYOLF. [Evasively.] No, they daren't—for then I would thrash them.

ALLMERS. Aha!—then why—?

EYOLF. You see, they are so naughty, these boys. And then they say I can never be a soldier.

ALLMERS. [With suppressed indignation.] Why do they say that, do you think?

EYOLF. I suppose they are jealous of me. For you know, Papa, they are so poor, they have to go about barefoot.

ALLMERS. [Softly, with choking voice.] Oh, Rita—how it wrings my heart!

RITA. [Soothingly, rising.] There, there, there!

ALLMERS. [Threateningly.] But these rascals shall soon find out who is the master down at the beach!

ASTA. [Listening.] There is someone knocking.

EYOLF. Oh, I'm sure it's Borgheim!

RITA. Come in.

[The RAT-WIFE comes softly and noiselessly in by the door on the right. She is a thin little shrunken figure, old and grey-haired, with keen, piercing eyes, dressed in an old-fashioned flowered gown, with a black hood and cloak. She has in her hand a large red umbrella, and carries a black bag by a loop over her arm.]

EYOLF. [Softly, taking hold of ASTA's dress.] Auntie! That must surely be her!

THE RAT-WIFE. [Curtseying at the door.] I humbly beg pardon—but are your worships troubled with any gnawing things in the house?

ALLMERS. Here? No, I don't think so.

THE RAT-WIFE. For it would be such a pleasure to me to rid your worships' house of them.

RITA. Yes, yes; we understand. But we have nothing of the sort here.

THE RAT-WIFE. That's very unlucky, that is; for I just happened to be on my rounds now, and goodness knows when I may be in these parts again.—Oh, how tired I am!

ALLMERS. [Pointing to a chair.] Yes, you look tired.

THE RAT-WIFE. I know one ought never to get tired of doing good to the poor little things that are hated and persecuted so cruelly. But it takes your strength out of you, it does.

RITA. Won't you sit down and rest a little?

THE RAT-WIFE. I thank your ladyship with all my heart. [Seats herself on a chair between the door and the sofa.] I have been out all night at my work.

ALLMERS. Have you indeed?

THE RAT-WIFE. Yes, over on the islands. [With a chuckling laugh.] The people sent for me, I can assure you. They didn't like it a bit; but there was nothing else to be done. They had to put a good face on it, and bite the sour apple. [Looks at EYOLF, and nods.] The sour apple, little master, the sour apple.

EYOLF. [Involuntarily, a little timidly.] Why did they have to—?

THE RAT-WIFE. What?

EYOLF. To bite it?

THE RAT-WIFE. Why, because they couldn't keep body and soul together on account of the rats and all the little rat-children, you see, young master.

RITA. Ugh! Poor people! Have they so many of them?

THE RAT-WIFE. Yes, it was all alive and swarming with them. [Laughs with quiet glee.] They came creepy-crawly up into the beds all night long. They plumped into the milk-cans, and they went pittering and pattering all over the floor, backwards and forwards, and up and down.

EYOLF. [Softly, to ASTA.] I shall never go there, Auntie.

THE RAT-WIFE. But then I came—I, and another along with me. And we took them with us, every one—the sweet little creatures! We made an end of every one of them.

EYOLF. [With a shriek.] Papa—look! look!

RITA. Good Heavens, Eyolf!

ALLMERS. What's the matter?

EYOLF. [Pointing.] There's something wriggling in the bag!

RITA. [At the extreme left, shrieks.] Ugh! Send her away, Alfred.

THE RAT-WIFE. [Laughing.] Oh, dearest lady, you needn't be frightened of such a little mannikin.

ALLMERS. But what is the thing?

THE RAT-WIFE. Why, it's only little Mopsëman. [Loosening the string of the bag.] Come up out of the dark, my own little darling friend.

[A little dog with a broad black snout pokes its head out of the bag.]

THE RAT-WIFE. [Nodding and beckoning to EYOLF.] Come along, don't be afraid, my little wounded warrior! He won't bite. Come here! Come here!

EYOLF. [Clinging to ASTA.] No, I dare not.

THE RAT-WIFE. Don't you think he has a gentle, lovable countenance, my young master?

EYOLF. [Astonished, pointing.] That thing there?

THE RAT-WIFE. Yes, this thing here.

EYOLF. [Almost under his breath, staring fixedly at the dog.] I think he has the horriblest—countenance I ever saw.

THE RAT-WIFE. [Closing the bag.] Oh, it will come—it will come, right enough.

EYOLF. [Involuntarily drawing nearer, at last goes right up to her, and strokes the

bag.] But he is lovely—lovely all the same.

THE RAT-WIFE. [In a tone of caution.] But now he is so tired and weary, poor thing. He's utterly tired out, he is. [Looks at ALLMERS.] For it takes the strength out of you, that sort of game, I can tell you, sir.

ALLMERS. What sort of game do you mean?

THE RAT-WIFE. The luring game.

ALLMERS. Do you mean that it is the dog that lures the rats?

THE RAT-WIFE. [Nodding.] Mopsëman and I—we two do it together. And it goes so smoothly—for all you can see, at any rate. I just slip a string through his collar, and then I lead him three times round the house, and play on my Pan's-pipes. When they hear that, they have got to come up from the cellars, and down from the garrets, and out of their holes, all the blessed little creatures.

EYOLF. And does he bite them to death then?

THE RAT-WIFE. Oh, not at all! No, we go down to the boat, he and I do—and then they follow after us, both the big ones and the little ratikins.

EYOLF. [Eagerly.] And what then—tell me!

THE RAT-WIFE. Then we push out from the land, and I scull with one oar, and play on my Pan's-pipes. And Mopsëman, he swims behind. [With glittering eyes.] And all the creepers and crawlers, they follow and follow us out into the deep, deep waters. Ay, for they have to.

EYOLF. Why do they have to?

THE RAT-WIFE. Just because they want not to—just because they are so deadly afraid of the water. That is why they have got to plunge into it.

EYOLF. Are they drowned, then?

THE RAT-WIFE. Every blessed one. [More softly.] And there it is all as still, and soft, and dark as their hearts can desire, the lovely little things. Down there they

sleep a long, sweet sleep, with no one to hate them or persecute them any more. [Rises.] In the old days, I can tell you, I didn't need any Mopsëman. Then I did the luring myself—I alone.

EYOLF. And what did you lure then?

THE RAT-WIFE. Men. One most of all.

EYOLF. [With eagerness.] Oh, who was that one? Tell me!

THE RAT-WIFE. [Laughing.] It was my own sweetheart, it was, little heart-breaker!

EYOLF. And where is he now, then?

THE RAT-WIFE. [Harshly.] Down where all the rats are. [Resuming her milder tone.] But now I must be off and get to business again. Always on the move. [To RITA.] So your ladyship has no sort of use for me to-day? I could finish it all off while I am about it.

RITA. No, thank you; I don't think we require anything.

THE RAT-WIFE. Well, well, your sweet ladyship, you can never tell. If your ladyship should find that there is anything here that keeps nibbling and gnawing, and creeping and crawling, then just see and get hold of me and Mopsëman.—Good-bye, good-bye, a kind good-bye to you all. [She goes out by the door on the right.]

EYOLF. [Softly and triumphantly, to ASTA.] Only think, Auntie, now I have seen the Rat-Wife too!

[RITA goes out upon the verandah, and fans herself with her pocket-handkerchief. Shortly afterwards, EYOLF slips cautiously and unnoticed out to the right.]

ALLMERS. [Takes up the portfolio from the table by the sofa.] Is this your portfolio, Asta?

ASTA. Yes. I have some of the old letters in it.

ALLMERS. Ah, the family letters—

ASTA. You know you asked me to arrange them for you while you were away.

ALLMERS. [Pats her on the head.] And you have actually found time to do that, dear?

ASTA. Oh, yes. I have done it partly out here and partly at my own rooms in town.

ALLMERS. Thanks, dear. Did you find anything particular in them?

ASTA. [Lightly.] Oh, you know you always find something or other in such old papers. [Speaking lower and seriously.] It is the letters to mother that are in this portfolio.

ALLMERS. Those, of course, you must keep yourself.

ASTA. [With an effort.] No; I am determined that you shall look through them, too, Alfred. Some time—later on in life. I haven't the key of the portfolio with me just now.

ALLMERS. It doesn't matter, my dear Asta, for I shall never read your mother's letters in any case.

ASTA. [Fixing her eyes on him.] Then some time or other—some quiet evening—I will tell you a little of what is in them.

ALLMERS. Yes, that will be much better. But do you keep your mother's letters—you haven't so many mementos of her.

[He hands ASTA the portfolio. She takes it, and lays it on the chair under her outdoor things. RITA comes into the room again.]

RITA. Ugh! I feel as if that horrible old woman had brought a sort of graveyard smell with her.

ALLMERS. Yes, she was rather horrible.

RITA. I felt almost sick while she was in the room.

ALLMERS. However, I can very well understand the sort of spellbound fascination that she talked about. The loneliness of the mountain-peaks and of the great waste

places has something of the same magic about it.

ASTA. [Looks attentively at him.] What is it that has happened to you, Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Smiling.] To me?

ASTA. Yes, something has happened—something seems almost to have transformed you. Rita noticed it too.

RITA. Yes, I saw it the moment you came. A change for the better, I hope, Alfred?

ALLMERS. It ought to be for the better. And it must and shall come to good.

RITA. [With an outburst.] You have had some adventure on your journey! Don't deny it! I can see it in your face!

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] No adventure in the world—outwardly at least. But—

RITA. [Eagerly.] But—?

ALLMERS. It is true that within me there has been something of a revolution.

RITA. Oh Heavens—!

ALLMERS. [Soothingly, patting her hand.] Only for the better, my dear Rita. You may be perfectly certain of that.

RITA. [Seats herself on the sofa.] You must tell us all about it, at once—tell us everything!

ALLMERS. [Turning to ASTA.] Yes, let us sit down, too, Asta. Then I will try to tell you as well as I can.

[He seats himself on the sofa at RITA's side. ASTA moves a chair forward, and places herself near him.]

RITA. [Looking at him expectantly.] Well—?

ALLMERS. [Gazing straight before him.] When I look back over my life—and my fortunes—for the last ten or eleven years, it seems to me almost like a fairy-tale or a

dream. Don't you think so too, Asta?

ASTA. Yes, in many ways I think so.

ALLMERS. [Continuing.] When I remember what we two used to be, Asta—we two poor orphan children—

RITA. [Impatiently.] Oh, that is such an old, old story.

ALLMERS. [Not listening to her.] And now here I am in comfort and luxury. I have been able to follow my vocation. I have been able to work and study—just as I had always longed to. [Holds out his hand.] And all this great—this fabulous good fortune we owe to you, my dearest Rita.

RITA. [Half playfully, half angrily, slaps his hand.] Oh, I do wish you would stop talking like that.

ALLMERS. I speak of it only as a sort of introduction.

RITA. Then do skip the introduction!

ALLMERS. Rita,—you must not think it was the doctor's advice that drove me up to the mountains.

ASTA. Was it not, Alfred?

RITA. What was it, then?

ALLMERS. It was this: I found there was no more peace for me, there in my study.

RITA. No peace! Why, who disturbed you?

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] No one from without. But I felt as though I were positively abusing—or, say rather, wasting—my best powers—frittering away the time.

ASTA. [With wide eyes.] When you were writing at your book?

ALLMERS. [Nodding.] For I cannot think that my powers are confined to that alone. I must surely have it in me to do one or two other things as well.

RITA. Was that what you sat there brooding over?

ALLMERS. Yes, mainly that.

RITA. And so that is what has made you so discontented with yourself of late; and with the rest of us as well. For you know you were discontented, Alfred.

ALLMERS. [Gazing straight before him.] There I sat bent over my table, day after day, and often half the night too—writing and writing at the great thick book on "Human Responsibility." H'm!

ASTA. [Laying her hand upon his arm.] But, Alfred—that book is to be your life-work.

RITA. Yes, you have said so often enough.

ALLMERS. I thought so. Ever since I grew up, I have thought so. [With an affectionate expression in his eyes.] And it was you that enabled me to devote myself to it, my dear Rita—

RITA. Oh, nonsense!

ALLMERS. [Smiling to her.]—you, with your gold, and your green forests—

RITA. [Half laughing, half vexed.] If you begin all that rubbish again, I shall beat you.

ASTA. [Looking sorrowfully at him.] But the book, Alfred?

ALLMERS. It began, as it were, to drift away from me. But I was more and more beset by the thought of the higher duties that laid their claims upon me.

RITA. [Beaming, seizes his hand.] Alfred!

ALLMERS. The thought of Eyolf, my dear Rita.

RITA. [Disappointed, drops his hand.] Ah—of Eyolf!

ALLMERS. Poor little Eyolf has taken deeper and deeper hold of me. After that unlucky fall from the table—and especially since we have been assured that the

injury is incurable—

RITA. [Insistently.] But you take all the care you possibly can of him, Alfred!

ALLMERS. As a schoolmaster, yes; but not as a father. And it is a father that I want henceforth to be to Eyolf.

RITA. [Looking at him and shaking her head.] I don't think I quite understand you.

ALLMERS. I mean that I will try with all my might to make his misfortune as painless and easy to him as it can possibly be.

RITA. Oh, but, dear—thank Heaven, I don't think he feels it so deeply.

ASTA. [With emotion.] Yes, Rita, he does.

ALLMERS. Yes, you may be sure he feels it deeply.

RITA. [Impatiently.] But, Alfred, what more can you do for him?

ALLMERS. I will try to perfect all the rich possibilities that are dawning in his childish soul. I will foster all the germs of good in his nature—make them blossom and bear fruit. [With more and more warmth, rising.] And I will do more than that! I will help him to bring his desires into harmony with what lies attainable before him. That is just what at present they are not. All his longings are for things that must for ever remain unattainable to him. But I will create a conscious happiness in his mind. [He goes once or twice up and down the room. ASTA and RITA follow him with their eyes.]

RITA. You should take these things more quietly, Alfred!

ALLMERS. [Stops beside the table on the left, and looks at them.] Eyolf shall carry on my life-work—if he wants to. Or he shall choose one that is altogether his own. Perhaps that would be best. At all events, I shall let mine rest as it is.

RITA. [Rising.] But, Alfred dear, can you not work both for yourself and for Eyolf?

ALLMERS. No, I cannot. It is impossible! I cannot divide myself in this matter—and therefore I efface myself. Eyolf shall be the complete man of our race.

And it shall be my new life-work to make him the complete man.

ASTA. [Has risen and now goes up to him.] This must have cost you a terribly hard struggle, Alfred?

ALLMERS. Yes, it has. At home here, I should never have conquered myself, never brought myself to the point of renunciation. Never at home!

RITA. Then that was why you went away this summer?

ALLMERS. [With shining eyes.] Yes! I went up into the infinite solitudes. I saw the sunrise gleaming on the mountain peaks. I felt myself nearer the stars—I seemed almost to be in sympathy and communion with them. And then I found the strength for it.

ASTA. [Looking sadly at him.] But you will never write any more of your book on "Human Responsibility"?

ALLMERS. No, never, Asta. I tell you I cannot split up my life between two vocations. But I will act out my "human responsibility"—in my own life.

RITA. [With a smile.] Do you think you can live up to such high resolves at home here?

ALLMERS. [Taking her hand.] With you to help me, I can. [Holds out the other hand.] And with you too, Asta.

RITA. [Drawing her hand away.] Ah—with both of us! So, after all, you can divide yourself.

ALLMERS. Why, my dearest Rita—!

[RITA moves away from him and stands in the garden doorway. A light and rapid knock is heard at the door on the right. Engineer BORGHEIM enters quickly. He is a young man of a little over thirty. His expression is bright and cheerful, and he holds himself erect.]

BORGHEIM. Good morning, Mrs. Allmers. [Stops with an expression of pleasure

on seeing ALLMERS.] Why, what's this? Home again already, Mr. Allmers?

ALLMERS. [Shaking hands with him.] Yes, I arrived list night.

RITA. [Gaily.] His leave was up, Mr. Borgheim.

ALLMERS. No, you know it wasn't, Rita—

RITA. [Approaching.] Oh yes, but it was, though. His furlough had run out.

BORGHEIM. I see you hold your husband well in hand, Mrs. Allmers.

RITA. I hold to my rights. And besides, everything must have an end.

BORGHEIM. Oh, not everything—I hope. Good morning, Miss Allmers!

ASTA. [Holding aloof from him.] Good morning.

RITA. [Looking at BORGHEIM.] Not everything, you say?

BORGHEIM. Oh, I am firmly convinced that there are some things in the world that will never come to an end.

RITA. I suppose you are thinking of love—and that sort of thing.

BORGHEIM. [Warmly.] I am thinking of all that is lovely!

RITA. And that never comes to an end. Yes, let us think of that, hope for that, all of us.

ALLMERS. [Coming up to them.] I suppose you will soon have finished your road-work out here?

BORGHEIM. I have finished it already—finished it yesterday. It has been a long business, but, thank Heaven, that has come to an end.

RITA. And you are beaming with joy over that?

BORGHEIM. Yes, I am indeed!

RITA. Well, I must say—

BORGHEIM. What, Mrs. Allmers?

RITA. I don't think it is particularly nice of you, Mr. Borgheim.

BORGHEIM. Indeed! Why not?

RITA. Well, I suppose we sha'n't often see you in these parts after this.

BORGHEIM. No, that is true. I hadn't thought of that.

RITA. Oh well, I suppose you will be able to look in upon us now and then all the same.

BORGHEIM. No, unfortunately that will be out of my power for a very long time.

ALLMERS. Indeed! How so?

BORGHEIM. The fact is, I have got a big piece of new work that I must set about at once.

ALLMERS. Have you indeed?—[Pressing his hand.]—I am heartily glad to hear it.

RITA. I congratulate you, Mr. Borgheim!

BORGHEIM. Hush, hush—I really ought not to talk openly of it as yet! But I can't help coming out with it! It is a great piece of road-making—up in the north—with mountain ranges to cross, and the most tremendous difficulties to overcome!—[With an outburst of gladness.]—Oh, what a glorious world this is—and what a joy it is to be a road-maker in it!

RITA. [Smiling, and looking teasingly at him.] Is it road-making business that has brought you out here to-day in such wild spirits?

BORGHEIM. No, not that alone. I am thinking of all the bright and hopeful prospects that are opening out before me.

RITA. Aha, then perhaps you have something still more exquisite in reserve!

BORGHEIM. [Glancing towards ASTA.] Who knows! When once happiness comes to us, it is apt to come like a spring flood. [Turns to ASTA.] Miss Allmers, would you not like to take a little walk with me? As we used to?

ASTA. [Quickly.] No—no, thank you. Not now. Not to-day.

BORGHEIM. Oh, do come! Only a little bit of a walk! I have so much I want to talk to you about before I go.

RITA. Something else, perhaps, that you must not talk openly about as yet?

BORGHEIM. H'm, that depends—

RITA. But there is nothing to prevent your whispering, you know. [Half aside.] Asta, you must really go with him.

ASTA. But, my dear Rita—

BORGHEIM. [Imploringly.] Miss Asta—remember it is to be a farewell walk—the last for many a day.

ASTA. [Takes her hat and parasol.] Very well, suppose we take a stroll in the garden, then.

BORGHEIM. Oh, thank you, thank you!

ALLMERS. And while you are there you can see what Eyolf is doing.

BORGHEIM. Ah, Eyolf, by the bye! Where is Eyolf to-day? I've got something for him.

ALLMERS. He is out playing somewhere.

BORGHEIM. Is he really! Then he has begun to play now? He used always to be sitting indoors over his books.

ALLMERS. There is to be an end of that now. I am going to make a regular open-air boy of him.

BORGHEIM. Ah, now, that's right! Out into the open air with him, poor little fellow! Good Lord, what can we possibly do better than play in this blessed world? For my part, I think all life is one long playtime!—Come, Miss Asta!

[BORGHEIM and ASTA go out on the verandah and down through the garden.]

ALLMERS. [Stands looking after them.] Rita—do you think there is anything

between those two?

RITA. I don't know what to say. I used to think there was. But Asta has grown so strange to me—so utterly incomprehensible of late.

ALLMERS. Indeed! Has she? While I have been away?

RITA. Yes, within the last week or two.

ALLMERS. And you think she doesn't care very much about him now?

RITA. Not, seriously; not utterly and entirely; not unreservedly—I am sure she doesn't. [Looks searchingly at him.] Would it displease you if she did?

ALLMERS. It would not exactly displease me. But it would certainly be a disquieting thought—

RITA. Disquieting?

ALLMERS. Yes; you must remember that I am responsible for Asta—for her life's happiness.

RITA. Oh, come—responsible! Surely Asta has come to years of discretion? I should say she was capable of choosing for herself.

ALLMERS. Yes, we must hope so, Rita.

RITA. For my part, I don't think at all ill of Borgheim.

ALLMERS. No, dear—no more do I—quite the contrary. But all the same—

RITA. [Continuing.] And I should be very glad indeed if he and Asta were to make a match of it.

ALLMERS. [Annoyed.] Oh, why should you be?

RITA. [With increasing excitement.] Why, for then she would have to go far, far away with him! And she could never come out here to us, as she does now.

ALLMERS. [Stares at her in astonishment.] What! Can you really wish Asta to go away?

RITA. Yes, yes, Alfred!

ALLMERS. Why in all the world—?

RITA. [Throwing her arms passionately round his neck.] For then, at last, I should have you to myself alone! And yet—not even then! Not wholly to myself! [Bursts into convulsive weeping.] Oh, Alfred, Alfred—I cannot give you up!

ALLMERS. [Gently releasing himself.] My dearest Rita, do be reasonable!

RITA. I don't care a bit about being reasonable! I care only for you! Only for you in all the world! [Again throwing her arms round his neck.] For you, for you, for you!

ALLMERS. Let me go, let me go—you are strangling me!

RITA. [Letting him go.] How I wish I could! [Looking at him with flashing eyes.] Oh, if you knew how I have hated you—!

ALLMERS. Hated me—!

RITA. Yes—when you shut yourself up in your room and brooded over your work—till long, long into the night. [Plaintively.] So long, so late, Alfred. Oh, how I hated your work!

ALLMERS. But now I have done with that.

RITA. [With a cutting laugh.] Oh yes! Now you have given yourself up to something worse.

ALLMERS. [Shocked.] Worse! Do you call our child something worse?

RITA. [Vehemently.] Yes, I do. As he comes between you and me, I call him so. For the book—the book was not a living being, as the child is. [With increasing impetuosity.] But I won't endure it, Alfred! I will not endure it—I tell you so plainly!

ALLMERS. [Looks steadily at her, and says in a low voice.] I am often almost afraid of you, Rita.

RITA. [Gloomily.] I am often afraid of myself. And for that very reason you must

not awake the evil in me.

ALLMERS. Why, good Heavens, do I do that?

RITA. Yes, you do—when you tear to shreds the holiest bonds between us.

ALLMERS. [Urgently.] Think what you're saying, Rita. It is your own child—our only child, that you are speaking of.

RITA. The child is only half mine. [With another outburst.] But you shall be mine alone! You shall be wholly mine! That I have a right to demand of you!

ALLMERS. [Shrugging his shoulders.] Oh, my dear Rita, it is of no use demanding anything. Everything must be freely given.

RITA. [Looks anxiously at him.] And that you cannot do henceforth?

ALLMERS. No, I cannot. I must divide myself between Eyolf and you.

RITA. But if Eyolf had never been born? What then?

ALLMERS. [Evasively.] Oh, that would be another matter. Then I should have only you to care for.

RITA. [Softly, her voice quivering.] Then I wish he had never been born.

ALLMERS. [Flashing out.] Rita! You don't know what you are saying!

RITA. [Trembling with emotion.] It was in pain unspeakable that I brought him into the world. But I bore it all with joy and rapture for your sake.

ALLMERS. [Warmly.] Oh yes, I know, I know.

RITA. [With decision.] But there it must end. I will live my life—together with you—wholly with you. I cannot go on being only Eyolf's mother—only his mother and nothing more. I will not, I tell you! I cannot! I will be all in all to you! To you, Alfred!

ALLMERS. But that is just what you are, Rita. Through our child—

RITA. Oh—vapid, nauseous phrases—nothing else! No, Alfred, I am not to be put

off like that. I was fitted to become the child's mother, but not to be a mother to him. You must take me as I am, Alfred.

ALLMERS. And yet you used to be so fond of Eyolf.

RITA. I was so sorry for him—because you troubled yourself so little about him. You kept him reading and grinding at books. You scarcely even saw him.

ALLMERS. [Nodding slowly.] No; I was blind. The time had not yet come for me—

RITA. [Looking in his face.] But now, I suppose, it has come?

ALLMERS. Yes, at, last. Now I see that the highest task I can have in the world is to be a true father to Eyolf.

RITA. And to me?—what will you be to me?

ALLMERS. [Gently.] I will always go on caring for you—with calm, deep tenderness. [He tries to take her hands.]

RITA. [Evading him.] I don't care a bit for your calm, deep tenderness. I want you utterly and entirely—and alone! Just as I had you in the first rich, beautiful days. [Vehemently and harshly.] Never, never will I consent to be put off with scraps and leavings, Alfred!

ALLMERS. [In a conciliatory tone.] I should have thought there was happiness in plenty for all three of us, Rita.

RITA. [Scornfully.] Then you are easy to please. [Seats herself at the table on the left.] Now listen to me.

ALLMERS. [Approaching.] Well, what is it?

RITA. [Looking up at him with a veiled glow in her eyes.] When I got your telegram yesterday evening—

ALLMERS. Yes? What then?

RITA.—then I dressed myself in white—

ALLMERS. Yes, I noticed you were in white when I arrived.

RITA. I had let down my hair—

ALLMERS. Your sweet masses of hair—

RITA.—so that it flowed down my neck and shoulders—

ALLMERS. I saw it, I saw it. Oh, how lovely you were, Rita!

RITA. There were rose-tinted shades over both the lamps. And we were alone, we two—the only waking beings in the whole house. And there was champagne on the table.

ALLMERS. I did not drink any of it.

RITA. [Looking bitterly at him.] No, that is true. [Laughs harshly.] "There stood the champagne, but you tasted it not"—as the poet says.

[She rises from the armchair, goes with an air of weariness over to the sofa, and seats herself, half reclining, upon it.]

ALLMERS. [Crosses the room and stands before her.] I was so taken up with serious thoughts. I had made up my mind to talk to you of our future, Rita—and first and foremost of Eyolf.

RITA. [Smiling.] And so you did—

ALLMERS. No, I had not time to—for you began to undress.

RITA. Yes, and meanwhile you talked about Eyolf. Don't you remember? You wanted to know all about little Eyolf's digestion.

ALLMERS. [Looking reproachfully at her.] Rita—!

RITA. And then you got into your bed, and slept the sleep of the just.

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] Rita—Rita!

RITA. [Lying at full length and looking up at him.] Alfred?

ALLMERS. Yes?

RITA. "There stood your champagne, but you tasted it not."

ALLMERS. [Almost harshly.] No. I did not taste it.

[He goes away from her and stands in the garden doorway. RITA lies for some time motionless, with closed eyes.]

RITA. [Suddenly springing up.] But let me tell you one thing, Alfred.

ALLMERS. [Turning in the doorway.] Well?

RITA. You ought not to feel quite so secure as you do!

ALLMERS. Not secure?

RITA. No, you ought not to be so indifferent! Not certain of your property in me!

ALLMERS. [Drawing nearer.] What do you mean by that?

RITA. [With trembling lips.] Never in a single thought have I been untrue to you, Alfred! Never for an instant.

ALLMERS. No, Rita, I know that—I, who know you so well.

RITA. [With sparkling eyes.] But if you disdain me—!

ALLMERS. Disdain! I don't understand what you mean!

RITA. Oh, you don't know all that might rise up within me, if—

ALLMERS. If?

RITA. If I should ever see that you did not care for me—that you did not love me as you used to.

ALLMERS. But, my dearest Rita—years bring a certain change with them—and that must one day occur even in us—as in everyone else.

RITA. Never in me! And I will not hear of any change in you either—I could not bear it, Alfred. I want to keep you to myself alone.

ALLMERS. [Looking at her with concern.] You have a terribly jealous nature—

RITA. I can't make myself different from what I am. [Threateningly.] If you go and

divide yourself between me and anyone else—

ALLMERS. What then—?

RITA. Then I will take my revenge on you, Alfred!

ALLMERS. How "take your revenge"?

RITA. I don't know how.—Oh yes, I do know, well enough!

ALLMERS. Well?

RITA. I will go and throw myself away—

ALLMERS. Throw yourself away, do you say?

RITA. Yes, that I will. I'll throw myself straight into the arms of—of the first man that comes in my way—

ALLMERS. [Looking tenderly at her and shaking his head.] That you will never do—my loyal, proud, true-hearted Rita!

RITA. [Putting her arms round his neck.] Oh, you don't know what I might come to be if you—if you did not love me any more.

ALLMERS. Did not love you, Rita? How can you say such a thing!

RITA. [Half laughing, lets him go.] Why should I not spread my nets for that—that road-maker man that hangs about here?

ALLMERS. [Relieved.] Oh, thank goodness—you are only joking.

RITA. Not at all. He would do as well as anyone else.

ALLMERS. Ah, but I suspect he is more or less taken up already.

RITA. So much the better! For then I should take him away from someone else; and that is just what Eyolf has done to me.

ALLMERS. Can you say that our little Eyolf has done that?

RITA. [Pointing with her forefinger.] There, you see! You see! The moment you mention Eyolf's name, you grow tender and your voice quivers! [Threateningly,

clenching her hands.] Oh, you almost tempt me to wish—

ALLMERS. [Looking at her anxiously.] What do I tempt you to wish, Rita?—

RITA. [Vehemently, going away from him.] No, no, no—I won't tell you that! Never!

ALLMERS. [Drawing nearer to her.] Rita! I implore you—for my sake and for your own—do not let yourself be tempted into evil.

[BORGHEIM and ASTA come up from the garden. They both show signs of restrained emotion. They look serious and dejected. ASTA remains out on the verandah. BORGHEIM comes into the room.]

BORGHEIM. So that is over—Miss Allmers and I have had our last walk together.

RITA. [Looks at him with surprise.] Ah! And there is no longer journey to follow the walk?

BORGHEIM. Yes, for me.

RITA. For you alone?

BORGHEIM. Yes, for me alone.

RITA. [Glances darkly at ALLMERS.] Do you hear that? [Turns to BORGHEIM.] I'll wager it is someone with the evil eye that has played you this trick.

BORGHEIM. [Looks at her.] The evil eye?

RITA. [Nodding.] Yes, the evil eye.

BORGHEIM. Do you believe in the evil eye, Mrs. Allmers?

RITA. Yes. I have begun to believe in the evil eye. Especially in a child's evil eye.

ALLMERS. [Shocked, whispers.] Rita—how can you—?

RITA. [Speaking low.] It is you that make me so wicked and hateful, Alfred.

[Confused cries and shrieks are heard in the distance, from the direction of the fiord.]

BORGHEIM. [Going to the glass door.] What noise is that?

ASTA. [In the doorway.] Look at all those people running down to the pier!

ALLMERS. What can it be? [Looks out for a moment.] No doubt it's those street urchins at some mischief again.

BORGHEIM. [Calls, leaning over the verandah railings.] I say, you boys down there! What's the matter?

[Several voices are heard answering indistinctly and confusedly.]

RITA. What do they say?

BORGHEIM. They say it's a child that's drowned.

ALLMERS. A child drowned?

ASTA. [Uneasily.] A little boy, they say.

ALLMERS. Oh, they can all swim, every one of them.

RITA. [Shrieks in terror.] Where is Eyolf?

ALLMERS. Keep quiet—quiet. Eyolf is down in the garden, playing.

ASTA. No, he wasn't in the garden.

RITA. [With upstretched arms.] Oh, if only it isn't he!

BORGHEIM. [Listens, and calls down.] Whose child is it, do you say?

[Indistinct voices are heard. BORGHEIM and ASTA utter a suppressed cry, and rush out through the garden.]

ALLMERS. [In an agony of dread.] It isn't Eyolf! It isn't Eyolf, Rita!

RITA. [On the verandah, listening.] Hush! Be quiet! Let me hear what they are saying!

[RITA rushes back with a piercing shriek, into the room.]

ALLMERS. [Following her.] What did they say?

RITA. [Sinking down beside the armchair on the left.] They said: "The crutch is

floating!"

ALLMERS. [Almost paralysed.] No! No! No!

RITA. [Hoarsely.] Eyolf! Eyolf! Oh, but they must save him!

ALLMERS. [Half distracted.] They must, they must! So precious a life!

[He rushes down through the garden.]

ACT SECOND

[A little narrow glen by the side of the fiord, on ALLMERS'S property. On the left, lofty old trees overarch the spot. Down the slope in the background a brook comes leaping, and loses itself among the stones on the margin of the wood. A path winds along by the brook-side. To the right there are only a few single trees, between which the fiord is visible. In front is seen the corner of a boat-shed with a boat drawn up. Under the old trees on the left stands a table with a bench and one or two chairs, all made of thin birch-staves. It is a heavy, damp day, with driving mist wreaths.]

[ALFRED ALLMERS, dressed as before, sits on the bench, leaning his arms on the table. His hat lies before him. He gazes absently and immovably out over the water.]

[Presently ASTA ALLMERS comes down the woodpath. She is carrying an open umbrella.]

ASTA. [Goes quietly and cautiously up to him.] You ought not to sit down here in this gloomy weather, Alfred.

ALLMERS. [Nods slowly without answering.]

ASTA. [Closing her umbrella.] I have been searching for you such a long time.

ALLMERS. [Without expression.] Thank you.

ASTA. [Moves a chair and seats herself close to him.] Have you been sitting here long? All the time?

ALLMERS. [Does not answer at first. Presently he says.] No, I cannot grasp it. It seems so utterly impossible.

ASTA. [Laying her hand compassionately on his arm.] Poor Alfred!

ALLMERS. [Gazing at her.] Is it really true then, Asta? Or have I gone mad? Or am I only dreaming? Oh, if it were only a dream! Just think, if I were to waken now!

ASTA. Oh, if I could only waken you!

ALLMERS. [Looking out over the water.] How pitiless the fiord looks to-day, lying so heavy and drowsy—leaden-grey—with splashes of yellow—and reflecting the rain-clouds.

ASTA. [Imploringly.] Oh, Alfred, don't sit staring out over the fiord!

ALLMERS. [Not heeding her.] Over the surface, yes. But in the depths—there sweeps the rushing undertow—

ASTA. [In terror.] Oh, for God's sake don't think of the depths!

ALLMERS. [Looking gently at her.] I suppose you think he is lying close outside here? But he is not, Asta. You must not think that. You must remember how fiercely the current sweeps out here straight to the open sea.

ASTA. [Throws herself forward against the table, and, sobbing, buries her face in her hands.] Oh, God! Oh, God!

ALLMERS. [Heavily.] So you see, little Eyolf has passed so far—far away from us now.

ASTA. [Looks imploringly up at him.] Oh, Alfred, don't say such things!

ALLMERS. Why, you can reckon it out for yourself—you that are so clever. In eight-and-twenty hours—nine-and-twenty hours—Let me see—! Let me see—!

ASTA. [Shrieking and stopping her ears.] Alfred!

ALLMERS. [Clenching his hand firmly upon the table.] Can you conceive the meaning of a thing like this?

ASTA. [Looks at him.] Of what?

ALLMERS. Of this that has been done to Rita and me.

ASTA. The meaning of it?

ALLMERS. [Impatiently.] Yes, the meaning, I say. For, after all, there must be a meaning in it. Life, existence—destiny, cannot be so utterly meaningless.

ASTA. Oh, who can say anything with certainty about these things, my dear Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Laughs bitterly.] No, no; I believe you are right there. Perhaps the whole thing goes simply by hap-hazard—taking its own course, like a drifting wreck without a rudder. I daresay that is how it is. At least, it seems very like it.

ASTA. [Thoughtfully.] What if it only seems—?

ALLMERS. [Vehemently.] Ah? Perhaps you can unravel the mystery for me? I certainly cannot. [More gently.] Here is Eyolf, just entering upon conscious life: full of such infinite possibilities—splendid possibilities perhaps: he would have filled my life with pride and gladness. And then a crazy old woman has only to come this way—and show a cur in a bag—

ASTA. But we don't in the least know how it really happened.

ALLMERS. Yes, we do. The boys saw her row out over the fiord. They saw Eyolf standing alone at the very end of the pier. They saw him gazing after her—and then he seemed to turn giddy. [Quivering.] And that was how he fell over—and disappeared.

ASTA. Yes, yes. But all the same—

ALLMERS. She has drawn him down into the depths—that you may be sure of, dear.

ASTA. But, Alfred, why should she?

ALLMERS. Yes, that is just the question! Why should she? There is no retribution behind it all—no atonement, I mean. Eyolf never did her any harm. He never called

names after her; he never threw stones at her dog. Why, he had never set eyes either on her or her dog till yesterday. So there is no retribution; the whole thing is utterly groundless and meaningless, Asta.—And yet the order of the world requires it.

ASTA. Have you spoken to Rita of these things?

ALLMERS. [Shakes his head.] I feel as if I can talk better to you about them. [Drawing a deep breath.] And about everything else as well.

[ASTA takes sewing-materials and a little paper parcel out of her pocket. ALLMERS sits looking on absently.]

ALLMERS. What leave you got there, Asta?

ASTA. [Taking his hat.] Some black crape.

ALLMERS. Oh, what is the use of that?

ASTA. Rita asked me to put it on. May I?

ALLMERS. Oh, yes; as far as I'm concerned—[She sews the crape on his hat.]

ALLMERS. [Sitting and looking at her.] Where is Rita?

ASTA. She is walking about the garden a little, I think. Borgheim is with her.

ALLMERS. [Slightly surprised.] Indeed! Is Borgheim out here to-day again?

ASTA. Yes. He came out by the mid-day train.

ALLMERS. I didn't expect that.

ASTA. [Serving.] He was so fond of Eyolf.

ALLMERS. Borgheim is a faithful soul, Asta.

ASTA. [With quiet warmth.] Yes, faithful he is, indeed. That is certain.

ALLMERS. [Fixing his eyes upon her.] You are really fond of him?

ASTA. Yes, I am.

ALLMERS. And yet you cannot make up your mind to—?

ASTA. [Interrupting.] Oh, my dear Alfred, don't talk of that!

ALLMERS. Yes, yes; tell me why you cannot?

ASTA. Oh, no! Please! You really must not ask me. You see, it's so painful for me.—There now! The hat is done.

ALLMERS. Thank you.

ASTA. And now for the left arm.

ALLMERS. Am I to have crape on it too?

ASTA. Yes, that is the custom.

ALLMERS. Well—as you please.

[She moves close up to him and begins to sew.]

ASTA. Keep your arm still—then I won't prick you.

ALLMERS. [With a half-smile.] This is like the old days.

ASTA. Yes, don't you think so?

ALLMERS. When you were a little girl you used to sit just like this, mending my clothes. The first thing you ever sewed for me—that was black crape, too.

ASTA. Was it?

ALLMERS. Round my student's cap—at the time of father's death.

ASTA. Could I sew then? Fancy, I have forgotten it.

ALLMERS. Oh, you were such a little thing then.

ASTA. Yes, I was little then.

ALLMERS. And then, two years afterwards—when we lost your mother—then again you sewed a big crape band on my sleeve.

ASTA. I thought it was the right thing to do.

ALLMERS. [Patting her hand.] Yes, yes, it was the right thing to do, Asta. And then when we were left alone in the world, we two—. Are you done already?

ASTA. Yes. [Putting together her sewing-materials.] It was really a beautiful time

for us, Alfred. We two alone.

ALLMERS. Yes, it was—though we had to toil so hard.

ASTA. You toiled.

ALLMERS. [With more life.] Oh, you toiled too, in your way, I can assure you—[smiling]—my dear, faithful—Eyolf.

ASTA. Oh—you mustn't remind me of that stupid nonsense about the name.

ALLMERS. Well, if you had been a boy, you would have been called Eyolf.

ASTA. Yes, if! But when you began to go to college—. [Smiling involuntarily.] I wonder how you could be so childish.

ALLMERS. Was it I that was childish?

ASTA. Yes, indeed, I think it was, as I look back upon it all. You were ashamed of having no brother—only a sister.

ALLMERS. No, no, it was you, dear—you were ashamed.

ASTA. Oh yes, I too, perhaps—a little. And somehow or other I was sorry for you—

ALLMERS. Yes, I believe you were. And then you hunted up some of my old boy's clothes—

ASTA. Your fine Sunday clothes—yes. Do you remember the blue blouse and knickerbockers?

ALLMERS. [His eyes dwelling upon her.] I remember so well how you looked when you used to wear them.

ASTA. Only when we were at home, alone, though.

ALLMERS. And how serious we were, dear, and how mightily pleased with ourselves. I always called you Eyolf.

ASTA. Oh, Alfred, I hope you have never told Rita this?

ALLMERS. Yes, I believe I did once tell her.

ASTA. Oh, Alfred, how could you do that?

ALLMERS. Well, you see—one tells one's wife everything—very nearly.

ASTA. Yes, I suppose one does.

ALLMERS. [As if awakening, clutches at his forehead and starts up.] Oh, how can I sit here and—

ASTA. [Rising, looks sorrowfully at him.] What is the matter?

ALLMERS. He had almost passed away from me. He had passed quite away.

ASTA. Eyolf!

ALLMERS. Here I sat, living in these recollections—and he had no part in them.

ASTA. Yes, Alfred—little Eyolf was behind it all.

ALLMERS. No, he was not. He slipped out of my memory—out of my thoughts. I did not see him for a moment as we sat here talking. I utterly forgot him all that time.

ASTA. But surely you must take some rest in your sorrow.

ALLMERS. No, no, no; that is just what I will not do! I must not—I have no right—and no heart for it, either. [Going in great excitement towards the right.] All my thoughts must be out there, where he lies drifting in the depths!

ASTA. [Following him and holding him back.] Alfred—Alfred! Don't go to the fiord.

ALLMERS. I must go out to him! Let me go, Asta! I will take the boat.

ASTA. [In terror.] Don't go to the fiord, I say!

ALLMERS. [Yielding.] No, no—I will not. Only let me alone.

ASTA. [Leading him back to the table.] You must rest from your thoughts, Alfred. Come here and sit down.

ALLMERS. [Making as if to seat himself on the bench.] Well, well—as you please.

ASTA. No, I won't let you sit there.

ALLMERS. Yes, let me.

ASTA. No, don't. For then you will only sit looking out—[Forces him down upon a chair, with his back to the right.] There now. Now that's right. [Seats herself upon the bench.] And now we can talk a little again.

ALLMERS. [Drawing a deep breath audibly.] It was good to deaden the sorrow and heartache for a moment.

ASTA. You must do so, Alfred.

ALLMERS. But don't you think it is terribly weak and unfeeling of me—to be able to do so?

ASTA. Oh, no—I am sure it is impossible to keep circling for ever round one fixed thought.

ALLMERS. Yes, for me it is impossible. Before you came to me, here I sat, torturing myself unspeakably with this crushing, gnawing sorrow—

ASTA. Yes?

ALLMERS. And would you believe it, Asta—? H'm—

ASTA. Well?

ALLMERS. In the midst of all the agony, I found myself speculating what we should have for dinner to-day.

ASTA. [Soothingly.] Well, well, if only it rests you to—

ALLMERS. Yes, just fancy, dear—it seemed as if it did give me rest. [Holds out, his hand to her across the table.] How good it is, Asta, that I have you with me. I am so glad of that. Glad, glad—even in my sorrow.

ASTA. [Looking earnestly at him.] You ought most of all to be glad that you have Rita.

ALLMERS. Yes, of course I should. But Rita is no kin to me—it isn't like having a sister.

ASTA. [Eagerly.] Do you say that, Alfred?

ALLMERS. Yes, our family is a thing apart. [Half jestingly.] We have always had vowels for our initials. Don't you remember how often we used to speak of that? And all our relations—all equally poor. And we have all the same colour of eyes.

ASTA. Do you think I have—?

ALLMERS. No, you take entirely after your mother. You are not in the least like the rest of us—not even like father. But all the same—

ASTA. All the same—?

ALLMERS. Well, I believe that living together has, as it were, stamped us in each other's image—mentally, I mean.

ASTA. [With warm emotion.] Oh, you must never say that, Alfred. It is only I that have taken my stamp from you; and it is to you that I owe everything—every good thing in the world.

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] You owe me nothing, Asta. On the contrary—

ASTA. I owe you everything! You must never doubt that. No sacrifice has been too great for you—

ALLMERS. [Interrupting.] Oh, nonsense—sacrifice! Don't talk of such a thing.—I have only loved you, Asta, ever since you were a little child. [After a short pause.] And then it always seemed to me that I had so much injustice to make up to you for.

ASTA. [Astonished.] Injustice? You?

ALLMERS. Not precisely on my own account. But—

ASTA. [Eagerly.] But—?

ALLMERS. On father's.

ASTA. [Half rising from the bench.] On—father's! [Sitting down again.] What do you mean by that, Alfred?

ALLMERS. Father was never really kind to you.

ASTA. [Vehemently.] Oh, don't say that!

ALLMERS. Yes, it is true. He did not love you—not as he ought to have.

ASTA. [Evasively.] No, perhaps not as he loved you. That was only natural.

ALLMERS. [Continuing.] And he was often hard to your mother, too—at least in the last years.

ASTA. [Softly.] Mother was so much, much younger than he—remember that.

ALLMERS. Do you think they were not quite suited to each other?

ASTA. Perhaps not.

ALLMERS. Yes, but still—. Father, who in other ways was so gentle and warm-hearted—so kindly towards everyone—

ASTA. [Quietly.] Mother, too, was not always as she ought to have been.

ALLMERS. Your mother was not!

ASTA. Perhaps not always.

ALLMERS. Towards father, do you mean?

ASTA. Yes.

ALLMERS. I never noticed that.

ASTA. [Struggling with her tears, rises.] Oh, my dear Alfred—let them rest—those who are gone. [She goes towards the right.]

ALLMERS. [Rising.] Yes, let them rest. [Wringing his hands.] But those who are gone—it is they that won't let us rest, Asta. Neither day nor night.

ASTA. [Looks warmly at him.] Time will make it all seem easier, Alfred.

ALLMERS. [Looking helplessly at her.] Yes, don't you think it will?—But how I

am to get over these terrible first days [Hoarsely.]—that is what I cannot imagine.

ASTA. [Imploringly, laying her hands on his shoulders.] Go up to Rita. Oh, please do—

ALLMERS. [Vehemently, withdrawing from her.] No, no, no—don't talk to me of that! I cannot, I tell you. [More calmly.] Let me remain here, with you.

ASTA. Well, I will not leave you.

ALLMERS. [Seizing her hand and holding it fast.] Thank you for that! [Looks out for a time over the fiord.] Where is my little Eyolf now? [Smiling sadly to her.] Can you tell me that my big, wise Eyolf? [Shaking his head.] No one in all the world can tell me that. I know only this one terrible thing—that he is gone from me.

ASTA. [Looking up to the left, and withdrawing her hand.] Here they are coming.

[MRS. ALLMERS and Engineer BORGHEIM come down by the wood-path, she leading the way. She wears a dark dress and a black veil over her head. He has an umbrella under his arm.]

ALLMERS. [Going to meet her.] How is it with you, Rita?

RITA. [Passing him.] Oh, don't ask.

ALLMERS. Why do you come here?

RITA. Only to look for you. What are you doing?

ALLMERS. Nothing. Asta came down to me.

RITA. Yes, but before Asta came? You have been away from me all the morning.

ALLMERS. I have been sitting here looking out over the water.

RITA. Ugh,—how can you?

ALLMERS. [Impatiently.] I like best to be alone now.

RITA. [Moving restlessly about.] And then to sit still! To stay in one place!

ALLMERS. I have nothing in the world to move for.

RITA. I cannot bear to be anywhere long. Least of all here—with the fiord at my very feet.

ALLMERS. It is just the nearness of the fiord—

RITA. [To BORGHEIM.] Don't you think he should come back with the rest of us?

BORGHEIM. [To ALLMERS.] I believe it would be better for you.

ALLMERS. No, no; let me stay where I am.

RITA. Then I will stay with you, Alfred.

ALLMERS. Very well; do so, then. You remain too, Asta.

ASTA. [Whispers to BORGHEIM.] Let us leave them alone!

BORGHEIM. [With a glance of comprehension.] Miss Allmers, shall we go a little further—along the shore? For the very last time?

ASTA. [Taking her umbrella.] Yes, come. Let us go a little further.

[ASTA and BORGHEIM go out together behind the boat-shed. ALLMERS wanders about for a little. Then he seats himself on a stone under the trees on the left.]

RITA. [Comes up and stands before him, her hands folded and hanging down.] Can you think the thought, Alfred—that we have lost Eyolf?

ALLMERS. [Looking sadly at the ground.] We must accustom ourselves to think it.

RITA. I cannot. I cannot. And then that horrible sight that will haunt me all my life long.

ALLMERS. [Looking up.] What sight? What have you seen?

RITA. I have seen nothing myself. I have only heard it told. Oh—!

ALLMERS. You may as well tell me at once.

RITA. I got Borgheim to go down with me to the pier—

ALLMERS. What did you want there?

RITA. To question the boys as to how it happened.

ALLMERS. But we know that.

RITA. We got to know more.

ALLMERS. Well?

RITA. It is not true that he disappeared all at once.

ALLMERS. Do they say that now?

RITA. Yes. They say they saw him lying down on the bottom. Deep down in the clear water.

ALLMERS. [Grinding his teeth.] And they didn't save him!

RITA. I suppose they could not.

ALLMERS. They could swim—every one of them. Did they tell you how he was lying whilst they could see him?

RITA. Yes. They said he was lying on his back. And with great, open eyes.

ALLMERS. Open eyes. But quite still?

RITA. Yes, quite still. And then something came and swept him away. They called it the undertow.

ALLMERS. [Nodding slowly.] So that was the last they saw of him.

RITA. [Suffocated with tears.] Yes.

ALLMERS. [In a dull voice.] And never—never will anyone see him again.

RITA. [Wailing.] I shall see him day and night, as he lay down there.

ALLMERS. With great, open eyes.

RITA. [Shuddering.] Yes, with great, open eyes. I see them! I see them now!

ALLMERS. [Rises slowly and looks with quiet menace at her.] Were they evil, those eyes, Rita?

RITA. [Turning pale.] Evil—!

ALLMERS. [Going close up to her.] Were they evil eyes that stared up? Up from

the depths?

RITA. [Shrinking from him.] Alfred—!

ALLMERS. [Following her.] Answer me! Were they a child's evil eyes?

RITA. [Shrieks.] Alfred! Alfred!

ALLMERS. Now things have come about—just as you wished, Rita.

RITA. I! What did I wish?

ALLMERS. That Eyolf were not here.

RITA. Never for a moment have I wished that! That Eyolf should not stand between us—that was what I wished.

ALLMERS. Well, well—he does not stand between us any more.

RITA. [Softly, gazing straight before her.] Perhaps now more than ever. [With a sudden shudder.] Oh, that horrible sight!

ALLMERS. [Nods.] The child's evil eyes.

RITA. [In dread, recoiling from him.] Let me be, Alfred! I am afraid of you. I have never seen you like this before.

ALLMERS. [Looks harshly and coldly at her.] Sorrow makes us wicked and hateful.

RITA. [Terrified, and yet defiant.] That is what I feel, too.

[ALLMERS goes towards the right and looks out over the fiord. RITA seats herself at the table. A short pause.]

ALLMERS. [Turning his head towards her.] You never really and truly loved him—never!

RITA. [With cold self-control.] Eyolf would never let me take him really and truly to my heart.

ALLMERS. Because you did not want to.

RITA. Oh yes, I did. I did want to. But someone stood in the way—even from the

first.

ALLMERS. [Turning right round.] Do you mean that I stood in the way?

RITA. Oh, no—not at first.

ALLMERS. [Coming nearer her.] Who, then?

RITA. His aunt.

ALLMERS. Asta?

RITA. Yes. Asta stood and barred the way for me.

ALLMERS. Can you say that, Rita?

RITA. Yes. Asta—she took him to her heart—from the moment that happened—that miserable fall.

ALLMERS. If she did so, she did it in love.

RITA. [Vehemently.] That is just it! I cannot endure to share anything with anyone! Not in love.

ALLMERS. We two should have shared him between us in love.

RITA. [Looking scornfully at him.] We? Oh, the truth is you have never had any real love for him either.

ALLMERS. [Looks at her in astonishment.] I have not—!

RITA. No, you have not. At first you were so utterly taken up by that book of yours—about Responsibility.

ALLMERS. [Forcibly.] Yes, I was. But my very book—I sacrificed for Eyolf's sake.

RITA. Not out of love for him.

ALLMERS. Why then, do you suppose?

RITA. Because you were consumed with mistrust of yourself. Because you had begun to doubt whether you had any great vocation to live for in the world.

ALLMERS. [Observing her closely.] Could you see that in me?

RITA. Oh, yes—little by little. And then you needed something new to fill up your life.—It seems I was not enough for you any longer.

ALLMERS. That is the law of change, Rita.

RITA. And that was why you wanted to make a prodigy of poor little Eyolf.

ALLMERS. That was not what I wanted. I wanted to make a happy human being of him.—That, and nothing more.

RITA. But not out of love for him. Look into yourself! [With a certain shyness of expression.] Search out all that lies under—and behind your action.

ALLMERS. [Avoiding her eyes.] There is something you shrink from saying.

RITA. And you too.

ALLMERS. [Looks thoughtfully at her.] If it is as you say, then we two have never really possessed our own child.

RITA. No. Not in perfect love.

ALLMERS. And yet we are sorrowing so bitterly for him.

RITA. [With sarcasm.] Yes, isn't it curious that we should grieve like this over a little stranger boy?

ALLMERS. [With an outburst.] Oh, don't call him a stranger!

RITA. [Sadly shaking her head.] We never won the boy, Alfred. Not I—nor you either.

ALLMERS. [Wringing his hands.] And now it is too late! Too late!

RITA. And no consolation anywhere—in anything.

ALLMERS. [With sudden passion.] You are the guilty one in this!

RITA. [Rising.] I!

ALLMERS. Yes, you! It was your fault that he became—what he was! It was your fault that he could not save himself when he fell into the water.

RITA. [With a gesture of repulsion.] Alfred—you shall not throw the blame upon me!

ALLMERS. [More and more beside himself.] Yes, yes, I do! It was you that left the helpless child unwatched upon the table.

RITA. He was lying so comfortably among the cushions, and sleeping so soundly. And you had promised to look after him.

ALLMERS. Yes, I had. [Lowering his voice.] But then you came—you, you, you—and lured me to you.

RITA. [Looking defiantly at him.] Oh, better own at once that you forgot the child and everything else.

ALLMERS. [In suppressed desperation.] Yes, that is true. [Lower.] I forgot the child—in your arms!

RITA. [Exasperated.] Alfred! Alfred—this is intolerable of you!

ALLMERS. [In a low voice, clenching his fists before her face.] In that hour you condemned little Eyolf to death.

RITA. [Wildly.] You, too! You, too—if it is as you say!

ALLMERS. Oh yes—call me to account, too—if you will. We have sinned, both of us. And so, after all, there was retribution in Eyolf's death.

RITA. Retribution?

ALLMERS. [With more self-control.] Yes. Judgment upon you and me. Now, as we stand here, we have our deserts. While he lived, we let ourselves shrink away from him in secret, abject remorse. We could not bear to see it—the thing he had to drag with him—

RITA. [Whispers.] The crutch.

ALLMERS. Yes, that. And now, what we now call sorrow and heartache—is really the gnawing of conscience, Rita. Nothing else.

RITA. [Gazing helplessly at him.] I feel as if all this must end in despair—in madness for both of us. For we can never—never make it good again.

ALLMERS. [Passing into a calmer mood.] I dreamed about Eyolf last night. I thought I saw him coming up from the pier. He could run like other boys. So nothing had happened to him—neither the one thing nor the other. And the torturing reality was nothing but a dream, I thought. Oh, how I thanked and blessed—[Checking himself.] H'm!

RITA. [Looking at him.] Whom?

ALLMERS. [Evasively.] Whom—?

RITA. Yes; whom did you thank and bless?

ALLMERS. [Putting aside the question.] I was only dreaming, you know—

RITA. One whom you yourself do not believe in?

ALLMERS. That was how I felt, all the same. Of course, I was sleeping—

RITA. [Reproachfully.] You should not have taught me to doubt, Alfred.

ALLMERS. Would it have been right of me to let you go through life with your mind full of empty fictions?

RITA. It would have been better for me; for then I should have had something to take refuge in. Now I am utterly at sea.

ALLMERS. [Observing her closely.] If you had the choice now—. If you could follow Eyolf to where he is—?

RITA. Yes? What then?

ALLMERS. If you were fully assured that you would find him again—know him—understand him—?

RITA. Yes, yes; what then?

ALLMERS. Would you, of your own free will, take the leap over to him? Of your

own free will leave everything behind you? Renounce your whole earthly life? Would you, Rita?

RITA. [Softly.] Now, at once?

ALLMERS. Yes; to-day. This very hour. Answer me—would you?

RITA. [Hesitating.] Oh, I don't know, Alfred. No! I think I should have to stay here with you, a little while.

ALLMERS. For my sake?

RITA. Yes. Only for your sake.

ALLMERS. And afterwards? Would you then—? Answer!

RITA. Oh, what can I answer? I could not go away from you. Never! Never!

ALLMERS. But suppose now I went to Eyolf? And you had the fullest assurance that you would meet both him and me there. Then would you come over to us?

RITA. I should want to—so much! so much! But—

ALLMERS. Well? I I?

RITA. [Moaning softly.] I could not—I feel it. No, no, I never could! Not for all the glory of heaven!

ALLMERS. Nor I.

RITA. No, you feel it so, too, don't you, Alfred! You could not either, could you?

ALLMERS. No. For it is here, in the life of earth, that we living beings are at home.

RITA. Yes, here lies the kind of happiness that we can understand.

ALLMERS. [Darkly.] Oh, happiness—happiness—

RITA. You mean that happiness—that we can never find it again? [Looks inquiringly at him.] But if—? [Vehemently.] No, no; I dare not say it! Nor even think it!

ALLMERS. Yes, say it—say it, Rita.

RITA. [Hesitatingly.] Could we not try to—? Would it not be possible to forget him?

ALLMERS. Forget Eyolf?

RITA. Forget the anguish and remorse, I mean.

ALLMERS. Can you wish it?

RITA. Yes,—if it were possible. [With an outburst.] For this—I cannot bear this for ever! Oh, can we not think of something that will bring its forgetfulness!

ALLMERS. [Shakes his head.] What could that be?

RITA. Could we not see what travelling would do—far away from here?

ALLMERS. From home? When you know you are never really well anywhere but here.

RITA. Well, then, let us have crowds of people about us! Keep open house! Plunge into something that can deaden and dull our thoughts!

ALLMERS. Such a life would be impossible for me.—No,—rather than that, I would try to take up my work again.

RITA. [Bitingly.] Your work—the work that has always stood like a dead wall between us!

ALLMERS. [Slowly, looking fixedly at her.] There must always be a dead wall between us two, from this time forth.

RITA. Why must there—?

ALLMERS. Who knows but that a child's great, open eyes are watching us day and night.

RITA. [Softly, shuddering.] Alfred—how terrible to think of!

ALLMERS. Our love has been like a consuming fire. Now it must be quenched—

RITA. [With a movement towards him.] Quenched!

ALLMERS. [Hardly.] It is quenched—in one of us.

RITA. [As if petrified.] And you dare say that to me!

ALLMERS. [More gently.] It is dead, Rita. But in what I now feel for you—in our common guilt and need of atonement—I seem to foresee a sort of resurrection—

RITA. [Vehemently.] I don't care a bit about any resurrection!

ALLMERS. Rita!

RITA. I am a warm-blooded being! I don't go drowsing about—with fishes' blood in my veins. [Wringing her hands.] And now to be imprisoned for life—in anguish and remorse! Imprisoned with one who is no longer mine, mine, mine!

ALLMERS. It must have ended so, sometime, Rita.

RITA. Must have ended so! The love that in the beginning rushed forth so eagerly to meet with love!

ALLMERS. My love did not rush forth to you in the beginning.

RITA. What did you feel for me, first of all?

ALLMERS. Dread.

RITA. That I can understand. How was it, then, that I won you after all?

ALLMERS. [In a low voice.] You were so entrancingly beautiful, Rita.

RITA. [Looks searchingly at him.] Then that was the only reason? Say it, Alfred! The only reason?

ALLMERS. [Conquering himself.] No, there was another as well.

RITA. [With an outburst.] I can guess what that was! It was "my gold, and my green forests," as you call it. Was it not so, Alfred?

ALLMERS. Yes.

RITA. [Looks at him with deep reproach.] How could you—how could you!

ALLMERS. I had Asta to think of.

RITA. [Angrily.] Yes, Asta! [Bitterly.] Then it was really Asta that brought us two together?

ALLMERS. She knew nothing about it. She has no suspicion of it, even to this day.

RITA. [Rejecting the plea.] It was Asta, nevertheless! [Smiling, with a sidelong glance of scorn.] Or, no—it was little Eyolf. Little Eyolf, my dear!

ALLMERS. Eyolf—?

RITA. Yes, you used to call her Eyolf, did you not? I seem to remember your telling me so—once, in a moment of confidence. [Coming up to him.] Do you remember it—that entrancingly beautiful hour, Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Recoiling, as if in horror.] I remember nothing! I will not remember!

RITA. [Following him.] It was in that hour—when your other little Eyolf was crippled for life!

ALLMERS. [In a hollow voice, supporting himself against the table.] Retribution!

RITA. [Menacingly.] Yes, retribution!

[ASTA and BORGHEIM return by way of the boat-shed. She is carrying some water-lilies in her hand.]

RITA. [With self-control.] Well, Asta, have you and Mr. Borgheim talked things thoroughly over?

ASTA. Oh, yes—pretty well.

[She puts down her umbrella and lays the flowers upon a chair.]

BORGHEIM. Miss Allmers has been very silent during our walk.

RITA. Indeed, has she? Well, Alfred and I have talked things out thoroughly enough—

ASTA. [Looking eagerly at both of them.] What is this—?

RITA. Enough to last all our lifetime, I say. [Breaking off.] Come now, let us go up

to the house, all four of us. We must have company about us in future. It will never do for Alfred and me to be alone.

ALLMERS. Yes, do you go ahead, you two. [Turning.] I must speak a word to you before we go, Asta.

RITA. [Looking at him.] Indeed? Well then, you come with me, Mr. Borgheim.

[RITA and BORGHEIM go up the wood-path.]

ASTA. [Anxiously.] Alfred, what is the matter?

ALLMERS. [Darkly.] Only that I cannot endure to be here any more.

ASTA. Here! With Rita, do you mean?

ALLMERS. Yes. Rita and I cannot go on living together.

ASTA. [Seizes his arm and shakes it.] Oh, Alfred—don't say anything so terrible!

ALLMERS. It is the truth. I am telling you. We are making each other wicked and hateful.

ASTA. [With painful emotion.] I had never—never dreamt of anything like this!

ALLMERS. I did not realise it either, till to-day.

ASTA. And now you want to—! What is it you really want, Alfred?

ALLMERS. I want to get away from everything here—far, far away from it all.

ASTA. And to stand quite alone in the world?

ALLMERS. [Nods.] As I used to, before, yes.

ASTA. But you are not fitted for living alone!

ALLMERS. Oh, yes. I was so in the old days, at any rate.

ASTA. In the old days, yes; for then you had me with you.

ALLMERS. [Trying to take her hand.] Yes. And it is to you, Asta, that I now want to come home again.

ASTA. [Eluding him.] To me! No, no, Alfred! That is quite impossible.

ALLMERS. [Looks sadly at her.] Then Borgheim stands in the way after all?

ASTA. [Earnestly.] No, no; he does not! That is quite a mistake!

ALLMERS. Good. Then I will come to you—my dear, dear sister. I must come to you again—home to you, to be purified and ennobled after my life with—

ASTA. [Shocked.] Alfred,—you are doing Rita a great wrong!

ALLMERS. I have done her a great wrong. But not in this. Oh, think of it, Asta—think of our life together, yours and mine. Was it not like one long holy-day from first to last?

ASTA. Yes, it was, Alfred. But we can never live it over again.

ALLMERS. [Bitterly.] Do you mean that marriage has so irreparably ruined me?

ASTA. [Quietly.] No, that is not what I mean.

ALLMERS. Well, then we two will live our old life over again.

ASTA. [With decision.] We cannot, Alfred.

ALLMERS. Yes, we can. For the love of a brother and sister—

ASTA. [Eagerly.] What of it?

ALLMERS. That is the only relation in life that is not subject to the law of change.

ASTA. [Softly and tremblingly.] But if that relation were not—

ALLMERS. Not—?

ASTA.—not our relation?

ALLMERS. [Stares at her in astonishment.] Not ours? Why, what can you mean by that?

ASTA. It is best I should tell you at once, Alfred.

ALLMERS. Yes, yes; tell me!

ASTA. The letters to mother—. Those in my portfolio—

ALLMERS. Well?

ASTA. You must read them—when I am gone.

ALLMERS. Why must I?

ASTA. [Struggling with herself.] For then you will see that—

ALLMERS. Well?

ASTA.—that I have no right to bear your father's name.

ALLMERS. [Staggering backwards.] Asta! What is this you say!

ASTA. Read the letters. Then you will see—and understand. And perhaps have some forgiveness—for mother, too.

ALLMERS. [Clutching at his forehead.] I cannot grasp this—I cannot realise the thought. You, Asta—you are not—

ASTA. You are not my brother, Alfred.

ALLMERS. [Quickly, half defiantly, looking at her.] Well, but what difference does that really make in our relation? Practically none at all.

ASTA. [Shaking her head.] It makes all the difference, Alfred. Our relation is not that of brother and sister.

ALLMERS. No, no. But it is none the less sacred for that—it will always be equally sacred.

ASTA. Do not forget—that it is subject to the law of change, as you said just now.

ALLMERS. [Looks inquiringly at her.] Do you mean that—

ASTA. [Quietly, but with warm emotion.] Not a word more—my dear, dear Alfred. [Takes up the flowers from the chair.] Do you see these water-lilies?

ALLMERS. [Nodding slowly.] They are the sort that shoot up—from the very depth.

ASTA. I pulled them in the tarn—where it flows out into the fiord. [Holds them out to him.] Will you take them, Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Taking them.] Thanks.

ASTA. [With tears in her eyes.] They are a last greeting to you, from—from little Eyolf.

ALLMERS. [Looking at her.] From Eyolf out yonder? Or from you?

ASTA. [Softly.] From both of us. [Taking up her umbrella.] Now come with me to Rita.

[She goes up the wood-path.]

ALLMERS. [Takes up his hat from the table, and whispers sadly.] Asta. Eyolf. Little Eyolf—!

[He follows her up the path.]

ACT THIRD

[An elevation, overgrown with shrubs, in ALLMERS'S garden. At the back a sheer cliff, with a railing along its edge, and with steps on the left leading downwards. An extensive view over the fiord, which lies deep below. A flagstaff with lines, but no flag, stands by the railing. In front, on the right, a summer-house, covered with creepers and wild vines. Outside it, a bench. It is a late summer evening, with clear sky. Deepening twilight.]

[ASTA is sitting on the bench, with her hands in her lap. She is wearing her outdoor dress and a hat, has her parasol at her side, and a little travelling-bag on a strap over her shoulder.]

[BORGHEIM comes up from the back on the left. He, too, has a travelling-bag over his shoulder. He is carrying a rolled-up flag.]

BORGHEIM. [Catching sight of ASTA.] Oh, so you are up here!

ASTA. Yes, I am taking my last look out over the fiord.

BORGHEIM. Then I am glad I happened to come up.

ASTA. Have you been searching for me?

BORGHEIM. Yes, I have. I wanted to say good-bye to you for the present. Not for good and all, I hope.

ASTA. [With a faint smile.] You are persevering.

BORGHEIM. A road-maker has got to be.

ASTA. Have you seen anything of Alfred? Or of Rita?

BORGHEIM. Yes, I saw them both.

ASTA. Together?

BORGHEIM. No—apart.

ASTA. What are you going to do with that flag?

BORGHEIM. Mrs. Allmers asked me to come up and hoist it.

ASTA. Hoist a flag just now?

BORGHEIM. Half-mast high. She wants it to fly both night and day, she says.

ASTA. [Sighing.] Poor Rita! And poor Alfred!

BORGHEIM. [Busied with the flag.] Have you the heart to leave them? I ask, because I see you are in travelling-dress.

ASTA. [In a low voice.] I must go.

BORGHEIM. Well, if you must, then—

ASTA. And you are going, too, to-night?

BORGHEIM. I must, too. I am going by the train. Are you going that way?

ASTA. No. I shall take the steamer.

BORGHEIM. [Glancing at her.] We each take our own way, then?

ASTA. Yes.

[She sits and looks on while he hoists the flag half-mast high. When he has done he

goes up to her.]

BORGHEIM. Miss Asta—you can't think how grieved I am about little Eyolf.

ASTA. [Looks up at him.] Yes, I am sure you feel it deeply.

BORGHEIM. And the feeling tortures me. For the fact is, grief is not much in my way.

ASTA. [Raising her eyes to the flag.] It will pass over in time—all of it. All our sorrow.

BORGHEIM. All? Do you believe that?

ASTA. Like a squall at sea. When once you have got far away from here, then—

BORGHEIM. It will have to be very far away indeed.

ASTA. And then you have this great new road-work, too.

BORGHEIM. But no one to help me in it.

ASTA. Oh yes, surely you have.

BORGHEIM. [Shaking his head.] No one. No one to share the gladness with. For it is gladness that most needs sharing.

ASTA. Not the labour and trouble?

BORGHEIM. Pooh—that sort of thing one can always get through alone.

ASTA. But the gladness—that must be shared with someone, you think?

BORGHEIM. Yes; for if not, where would be the pleasure in being glad?

ASTA. Ah yes—perhaps there is something in that.

BORGHEIM. Oh, of course, for a certain time you can go on feeling glad in your own heart. But it won't do in the long run. No, it takes two to be glad.

ASTA. Always two? Never more? Never many?

BORGHEIM. Well, you see—then it becomes a quite different matter. Miss Asta—are you sure you can never make up your mind to share gladness and success

and—and labour and trouble, with one—with one alone in all the world?

ASTA. I have tried it—once.

BORGHEIM. Have you?

ASTA. Yes, all the time that my brother—that Alfred and I lived together.

BORGHEIM. Oh, with your brother, yes. But that is altogether different. That ought rather to be called peace than happiness, I should say.

ASTA. It was delightful, all the same.

BORGHEIM. There now—you see even that seemed to you delightful. But just think now—if he had not been your brother!

ASTA. [Makes a movement to rise, but remains sitting.] Then we should never have been together. For I was a child then—and he wasn't much more.

BORGHEIM. [After a pause.] Was it so delightful—that time?

ASTA. Oh yes, indeed it was.

BORGHEIM. Was there much that was really bright and happy in your life then?

ASTA. Oh yes, so much. You cannot think how much.

BORGHEIM. Tell me a little about it, Miss Asta.

ASTA. Oh, there are only trifles to tell.

BORGHEIM. Such as—? Well?

ASTA. Such as the time when Alfred had passed his examination—and had distinguished himself. And then, from time, to time, when he got a post in some school or other. Or when he would sit at home working at an article—and would read it aloud to me. And then when it would appear in some magazine.

BORGHEIM. Yes, I can quite see that it must have been a peaceful, delightful life—a brother and sister sharing all their joys. [Shaking his head.] What I cannot understand is that your brother could ever give you up, Asta.

ASTA. [With suppressed emotion.] Alfred married, you know.

BORGHEIM. Was not that very hard for you?

ASTA. Yes, at first. It seemed as though I had utterly lost him all at once.

BORGHEIM. Well, luckily it was not so bad as that.

ASTA. No.

BORGHEIM. But, all the same—how could he! Go and marry, I mean—when he could have kept you with him, alone!

ASTA. [Looking straight in front of her.] He was subject to the law of change, I suppose.

BORGHEIM. The law of change?

ASTA. So Alfred calls it.

BORGHEIM. Pooh—what a stupid law that must be! I don't believe a bit in that law.

ASTA. [Rising.] You may come to believe in it, in time.

BORGHEIM. Never in all my life! [Insistently.] But listen now, Miss Asta! Do be reasonable for once in a way—in this matter, I mean—

ASTA. [Interrupting him.] Oh, no, no—don't let us begin upon that again!

BORGHEIM. [Continuing as before.] Yes, Asta—I can't possibly give you up so easily. Now your brother has everything as he wishes it. He can live his life quite contentedly without you. He doesn't require you at all. Then this—this—that at one blow has changed your whole position here—

ASTA. [With a start.] What do you mean by that?

BORGHEIM. The loss of the child. What else should I mean?

ASTA. [Recovering her self-control.] Little Eyolf is gone, yes.

BORGHEIM. And what more does that leave you to do here? You have not the poor

little boy to take care of now. You have no duties—no claims upon you of any sort.

ASTA. Oh, please, Mr. Borgheim—don't make it so hard for me.

BORGHEIM. I must; I should be mad if I did not try my uttermost. I shall be leaving town before very long, and perhaps I shall have no opportunity of meeting you there. Perhaps I shall not see you again for a long, long time. And who knows what may happen in the meanwhile?

ASTA. [With a grave smile.] So you are afraid of the law of change, after all?

BORGHEIM. No, not in the least. [Laughing bitterly.] And there is nothing to be changed, either—not in you, I mean. For I can see you don't care much about me.

ASTA. You know very well that I do.

BORGHEIM. Perhaps, but not nearly enough. Not as I want you to. [More forcibly.] By Heaven, Asta—Miss Asta—I cannot tell you how strongly I feel that you are wrong in this! A little onward, perhaps, from to-day and to-morrow, all life's happiness may be awaiting us. And we must needs pass it by! Do you think we will not come to repent of it, Asta?

ASTA. [Quietly.] I don't know. I only know that they are not for us—all these bright possibilities.

BORGHEIM. [Looks at her with self-control.] Then I must make my roads alone?

ASTA. [Warmly.] Oh, how I wish I could stand by you in it all! Help you in the labour—share the gladness with you—

BORGHEIM. Would you—if you could?

ASTA. Yes, that I would.

BORGHEIM. But you cannot?

ASTA. [Looking down.] Would you be content to have only half of me?

BORGHEIM. No. You must be utterly and entirely mine.

ASTA. [Looks at him, and says quietly.] Then I cannot.

BORGHEIM. Good-bye then, Miss Asta.

[He is on the point of going. ALLMERS comes up from the left at the back. BORGHEIM stops.]

ALLMERS. [The moment he has reached the top of the steps, points, and says in a low voice.] Is Rita in there—in the summer-house?

BORGHEIM. No; there is no one here but Miss Asta.

[ALLMERS comes forward.]

ASTA. [Going towards him.] Shall I go down and look for her? Shall I get her to come up here?

ALLMERS. [With a negative gesture.] No, no, no—let it alone. [To BORGHEIM.] Is it you that have hoisted the flag?

BORGHEIM. Yes. Mrs. Allmers asked me to. That was what brought me up here.

ALLMERS. And you are going to start to-night?

BORGHEIM. Yes. To-night I go away in good earnest.

ALLMERS. [With a glance at ASTA.] And you have made sure of pleasant company, I daresay.

BORGHEIM. [Shaking his head.] I am going alone.

ALLMERS. [With surprise.] Alone!

BORGHEIM. Utterly alone.

ALLMERS. [Absently.] Indeed?

BORGHEIM. And I shall have to remain alone, too.

ALLMERS. There is something horrible in being alone. The thought of it runs like ice through my blood—

ASTA. Oh, but, Alfred, you are not alone.

ALLMERS. There may be something horrible in that too, Asta.

ASTA. [Oppressed.] Oh, don't talk like that! Don't think like that!

ALLMERS. [Not listening to her.] But since you are not going with him—? Since there is nothing to bind you—? Why will you not remain out here with me—and with Rita?

ASTA. [Uneasily.] No, no, I cannot. I must go back to town now.

ALLMERS. But only in to town, Asta. Do you hear!

ASTA. Yes.

ALLMERS. And you must promise me that you will soon come out again.

ASTA. [Quickly.] No, no, I dare not promise you that, for the present.

ALLMERS. Well as you will. We shall soon meet in town, then.

ASTA. [Imploringly.] But, Alfred, you must stay at home here with Rita now.

ALLMERS. [Without answering, turns to BORGHEIM.] You may find it a good thing, after all, that you have to take your journey alone.

BORGHEIM. [Annoyed.] Oh, how can you say such a thing?

ALLMERS. You see, you can never tell whom you might happen to meet afterwards—on the way.

ASTA. [Involuntarily.] Alfred!

ALLMERS. The right fellow-traveller—when it is too late—too late.

ASTA. [Softly, quivering.] Alfred! Alfred!

BORGHEIM. [Looking front one to the other.] What is the meaning of this? I don't understand—

[RITA comes up from the left at the back.]

RITA. [Plaintively.] Oh, don't go away from me, all of you!

ASTA. [Going towards her.] You said you preferred to be alone.

RITA. Yes, but I dare not. It is getting so horribly dark. I seem to see great, open eyes fixed upon me!

ASTA. [Tenderly and sympathetically.] What if it were so, Rita? You ought not to be afraid of those eyes.

RITA. How can you say so! Not afraid!

ALLMERS. [Insistently.] Asta, I beg you—for Heaven's sake—remain here with Rita!

RITA. Yes! And with Alfred, too. Do! Do, Asta!

ASTA. [Struggling with herself.] Oh, I want to so much—

RITA. Well, then, do it! For Alfred and I cannot go alone through the sorrow and heartache.

ALLMERS. [Darkly.] Say, rather—through the ranklings of remorse.

RITA. Oh, whatever you like to call it—we cannot bear it alone, we two. Oh, Asta, I beg and implore you! Stay here and help us! Take Eyolf's place for us—

ASTA. [Shrinking.] Eyolf's—

RITA. Yes, would you not have it so, Alfred?

ALLMERS. If she can and will.

RITA. You used to call her your little Eyolf. [Seizes her hand.] Henceforth you shall be our Eyolf, Asta! Eyolf, as you were before.

ALLMERS. [With concealed emotion.] Remain—and share our life with us, Asta. With Rita. With me. With me—your brother!

ASTA. [With decision, snatches her hand away.] No. I cannot. [Turning.] Mr. Borgheim—what time does the steamer start?

BORGHEIM. Now—at once.

ASTA. Then I must go on board. Will you go with me?

BORGHEIM. [With a suppressed outburst of joy.] Will I? Yes, yes!

ASTA. Then come!

RITA. [Slowly.] Ah! That is how it is. Well, then, you cannot stay with us.

ASTA. [Throwing her arms round her neck.] Thanks for everything, Rita! (Goes up to ALLMERS and grasps his hand.) Alfred-good-bye! A thousand times, good-bye!

ALLMERS. [Softly and eagerly.] What is this, Asta? It seems as though you were taking flight.

ASTA. [In subdued anguish.] Yes, Alfred—I am taking flight.

ALLMERS. Flight—from me!

ASTA. [Whispering.] From you—and from myself.

ALLMERS. [Shrinking back.] Ah—!

[ASTA rushes down the steps at the back. BORGHEIM waves his hat and follows her. RITA leans against the entrance to the summer-house. ALLMERS goes, in strong inward emotion, up to the railing, and stands there gazing downwards. A pause.]

ALLMERS. [Turns, and says with hard-won composure.] There comes the steamer. Look, Rita.

RITA. I dare not look at it.

ALLMERS. You dare not?

RITA. No. For it has a red eye—and a green one, too. Great, glowing eyes.

ALLMERS. Oh, those are only the lights, you know.

RITA. Henceforth they are eyes—for me. They stare and stare out of the darkness—and into the darkness.

ALLMERS. Now she is putting in to shore.

RITA. Where are they mooring her this evening, then?

ALLMERS. [Coming forward.] At the pier, as usual—

RITA. [Drawing herself up.] How can they moor her there!

ALLMERS. They must.

RITA. But it was there that Eyolf—! How can they moor her there!

ALLMERS. Yes, life is pitiless, Rita.

RITA. Men are heartless. They take no thought—whether for the living or for the dead.

ALLMERS. There you are right. Life goes its own way—just as if nothing in the world had happened.

RITA. [Gazing straight before her.] And nothing has happened, either. Not to others. Only to us two.

ALLMERS. [The pain re-awakening.] Yes, Rita—so it was to no purpose that you bore him in sorrow and anguish. For now he is gone again—and has left no trace behind him.

RITA. Only the crutch was saved.

ALLMERS. [Angrily.] Be silent! Do not let me hear that word!

RITA. [Plaintively.] Oh, I cannot bear the thought that he is gone from us.

ALLMERS. [Coldly and bitterly.] You could very well do without him while he was with us. Half the day would often pass without your setting eyes on him.

RITA. Yes, for I knew that I could see him whenever I wanted to.

ALLMERS. Yes, that is how we have gone and squandered the short time we had with Little Eyolf.

RITA. [Listening, in dread.] Do you hear, Alfred! Now it is ringing again!

ALLMERS. [Looking over the fiord.] It is the steamer's bell that is ringing. She is just starting.

RITA. Oh, it's not that bell I mean. All day I have heard it ringing in my ears.—Now it is ringing again!

ALLMERS. [Going up to her.] You are mistaken, Rita.

RITA. No, I hear it so plainly. It sounds like a knell. Slow. Slow. And always the same words.

ALLMERS. Words? What words?

RITA. [Nodding her head in the rhythm.] "The crútch is—flóating. The crútch is—flóating." Oh, surely you must hear it, too!

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] I hear nothing. And there is nothing to hear.

RITA. Oh, you may say what you will—I hear it so plainly.

ALLMERS. [Looking out over the railing.] Now they are on board, Rita. Now the steamer is on her way to the town.

RITA. Is it possible you do not hear it? "The crútch is—flóating. The crútch is _____"

ALLMERS. [Coming forward.] You shall not stand there listening to a sound that does not exist. I tell you, Asta and Borgheim are on board. They have started already. Asta is gone.

RITA. [Looks timidly at him.] Then I suppose you will soon be gone, too, Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Quickly.] What do you mean by that?

RITA. That you will follow your sister.

ALLMERS. Has Asta told you anything?

RITA. No. But you said yourself it was for Asta's sake that—that we came together.

ALLMERS. Yes, but you, you yourself, have bound me to you—by our life together.

RITA. Oh, in your eyes I am not—I am not—entrancingly beautiful any more.

ALLMERS. The law of change may perhaps keep us together, none the less.

RITA. [Nodding slowly.] There is a change in me now—I feel the anguish of it.

ALLMERS. Anguish?

RITA. Yes, for change, too, is a sort of birth.

ALLMERS. It is—or a resurrection. Transition to a higher life.

RITA. [Gazing sadly before her.] Yes—with the loss of all, all life's happiness.

ALLMERS. That loss is just the gain.

RITA. [Vehemently.] Oh, phrases! Good God, we are creatures of earth after all.

ALLMERS. But something akin to the sea and the heavens too, Rita.

RITA. You perhaps. Not I.

ALLMERS. Oh, yes—you too, more than you yourself suspect.

RITA. [Advancing a pace towards him.] Tell me, Alfred—could you think of taking up your work again?

ALLMERS. The work that you have hated so?

RITA. I am easier to please now. I am willing to share you with the book.

ALLMERS. Why?

RITA. Only to keep you here with me—to have you near me.

ALLMERS. Oh, it is so little I can do to help you, Rita.

RITA. But perhaps I could help you.

ALLMERS. With my book, do you mean?

RITA. No; but to live your life.

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] I seem to have no life to live.

RITA. Well then, to endure your life.

ALLMERS. [Darkly, looking away from her.] I think it would be best for both of us

that we should part.

RITA. [Looking curiously at him.] Then where would you go? Perhaps to Asta, after all?

ALLMERS. No—never again to Asta.

RITA. Where then?

ALLMERS. Up into the solitudes.

RITA. Up among the mountains? Is that what you mean?

ALLMERS. Yes.

RITA. But all that is mere dreaming, Alfred! You could not live up there.

ALLMERS. And yet I feel myself drawn to them.

RITA. Why? Tell me!

ALLMERS. Sit down—and I will tell you something.

RITA. Something that happened to you up there?

ALLMERS. Yes.

RITA. And that you never told Asta and me?

ALLMERS. Yes.

RITA. Oh, you are so silent about everything. You ought not to be.

ALLMERS. Sit down there—and I will tell you about it.

RITA. Yes, yes—tell me!

[She sits on the bench beside the summer-house.]

ALLMERS. I was alone up there, in the heart of the great mountains. I came to a wide, dreary mountain lake; and that lake I had to cross. But I could not—for there was neither a boat nor anyone there.

RITA. Well? And then?

ALLMERS. Then I went without any guidance into a side valley. I thought that by that way I could push on over the heights and between the peaks—and then down again on the other side of the lake.

RITA. Oh, and you lost yourself, Alfred!

ALLMERS. Yes; I mistook the direction—for there was no path or track. And all day I went on—and all the next night. And at last I thought I should never see the face of man again.

RITA. Not come home to us? Oh, then, I am sure your thoughts were with us here.

ALLMERS. No—they were not.

RITA. Not?

ALLMERS. No. It was so strange. Both you and Eyolf seemed to have drifted far, far away from me—and Asta, too.

RITA. Then what did you think of?

ALLMERS. I did not think. I dragged myself along among the precipices—and revelled in the peace and luxury of death.

RITA. [Springing up.] Oh, don't speak in that way of that horror!

ALLMERS. I did not feel it so. I had no fear. Here went death and I, it seemed to me, like two good fellow-travellers. It all seemed so natural—so simple, I thought. In my family, we don't live to be old—

RITA. Oh, don't say such things, Alfred! You see you came safely out of it, after all.

ALLMERS. Yes; all of a sudden, I found myself where I wanted to be—on the other side of the lake.

RITA. It must have been a night of terror for you, Alfred. But now that it is over, you will not admit it to yourself.

ALLMERS. That night sealed my resolution. And it was then that I turned about and came straight homewards. To Eyolf.

RITA. [Softly.] Too late.

ALLMERS. Yes. And then when—my fellow-traveller came and took him—then I felt the horror of it; of it all; of all that, in spite of everything, we dare not tear ourselves away from. So earthbound are we, both of us, Rita.

RITA. [With a gleam of joy.] Yes, you are, too, are you not! [Coming close to him.] Oh, let us live our life together as long as we can!

ALLMERS. [Shrugging his shoulders.] Live our life, yes! And have nothing to fill life with. An empty void on all sides—wherever I look.

RITA. [In fear.] Oh, sooner or later you will go away from me, Alfred! I feel it! I can see it in your face! You will go away from me.

ALLMERS. With my fellow-traveller, do you mean?

RITA. No, I mean worse than that. Of your own free will—you will leave me—for you think it's only here, with me, that you have nothing to live for. Is not that what is in your thoughts?

ALLMERS. [Looking steadfastly at her.] What if it were—?

[A disturbance, and the noise of angry, quarrelling voices is heard from down below, in the distance. ALLMERS goes to the railing.]

RITA. What is that? [With an outburst.] Oh, you'll see, they have found him!

ALLMERS. He will never be found.

RITA. But what is it then?

ALLMERS. [Coming forward.] Only fighting—as usual.

RITA. Down on the beach?

ALLMERS. Yes. The whole village down there ought to be swept away. Now the men have come home—drunk, as they always are. They are beating the children—do you hear the boys crying! The women are shrieking for help for them—

RITA. Should we not get someone to go down and help them?

ALLMERS. [Harshly and angrily.] Help them, who did not help Eyolf! Let them go—as they let Eyolf go.

RITA. Oh, you must not talk like that, Alfred! Nor think like that!

ALLMERS. I cannot think otherwise. All the old hovels ought to be torn down.

RITA. And then what is to become of all the poor people?

ALLMERS. They must go somewhere else.

RITA. And the children, too?

ALLMERS. Does it make much difference where they go to the dogs?

RITA. [Quietly and reproachfully.] You are forcing yourself into this harshness, Alfred.

ALLMERS. [Vehemently.] I have a right to be harsh now! It is my duty.

RITA. Your duty?

ALLMERS. My duty to Eyolf. He must not lie unavenged. Once for all, Rita—it is as I tell you! Think it over! Have the whole place down there razed to the ground—when I am gone.

RITA. [Looks intently at him.] When you are gone?

ALLMERS. Yes. For that will at least give you something to fill your life with—and something you must have.

RITA. [Firmly and decidedly.] There you are right—-I must. But can you guess what I will set about—when you are gone?

ALLMERS. Well, what?

RITA. [Slowly and with resolution.] As soon as you are gone from me, I will go down to the beach, and bring all the poor neglected children home with me. All the mischievous boys—

ALLMERS. What will you do with them here?

RITA. I will take them to my heart.

ALLMERS. You!

RITA. Yes, I will. From the day you leave me, they shall all be here, all of them, as if they were mine.

ALLMERS. [Shocked.] In our little Eyolf's place!

RITA. Yes, in our little Eyolf's place. They shall live in Eyolf's rooms. They shall read his books. They shall play with his toys. They shall take it in turns to sit in his chair at table.

ALLMERS. But this is sheer madness in you! I do not know a creature in the world that is less fitted than you for anything of that sort.

RITA. Then I shall have to educate myself for it; to train myself; to discipline myself.

ALLMERS. If you are really in earnest about this—about all you say—then there must indeed be a change in you.

RITA. Yes, there is, Alfred—and for that I have you to thank. You have made an empty place within me; and I must try to fill it up with something—with something that is a little like love.

ALLMERS. [Stands for a moment lost in thought; then looks at her.] The truth is, we have not done much for the poor people down there.

RITA. We have done nothing for them.

ALLMERS. Scarcely even thought of them.

RITA. Never thought of them in sympathy.

ALLMERS. We, who had "the gold, and the green forests"—

RITA. Our hands were closed to them. And our hearts too.

ALLMERS. [Nods.] Then it was perhaps natural enough, after all, that they should not risk their lives to save little Eyolf.

RITA. [Softly.] Think, Alfred! Are you so certain that—that we would have risked ours?

ALLMERS. [With an uneasy gesture of repulsion.] You must never doubt that.

RITA. Oh, we are children of earth.

ALLMERS. What do you really think you can do with all these neglected children?

RITA. I suppose I must try if I cannot lighten and—and ennoble their lot in life.

ALLMERS. If you can do that—then Eyolf was not born in vain.

RITA. Nor taken from us in vain, either.

ALLMERS. [Looking steadfastly at her.] Be quite clear about one thing, Rita—it is not love that is driving you to this.

RITA. No, it is not—at any rate, not yet.

ALLMERS. Well, then what is it?

RITA. [Half-evasively.] You have so often talked to Asta of human responsibility—

ALLMERS. Of the book that you hated.

RITA. I hate that book still. But I used to sit and listen to what you told her. And now I will try to continue it—in my own way.

ALLMERS. [Shaking his head.] It is not for the sake of that unfinished book—

RITA. No, I have another reason as well.

ALLMERS. What is that?

RITA. [Softly, with a melancholy smile.] I want to make my peace with the great, open eyes, you see.

ALLMERS. [Struck, fixing his eyes upon her.] Perhaps, I could join you in that? And help you, Rita?

RITA. Would you?

ALLMERS. Yes—if I were only sure I could.

RITA. [Hesitatingly.] But then you would have to remain here.

ALLMERS. [Softly.] Let us try if it could not be so.

RITA. [Almost inaudibly.] Yes, let us, Alfred.

[Both are silent. Then ALLMERS goes up to the flagstaff and hoists the flag to the top. RITA stands beside the summer-house and looks at him in silence.]

ALLMERS. [Coming forward again.] We have a heavy day of work before us, Rita.

RITA. You will see—that now and then a Sabbath peace will descend on us.

ALLMERS. [Quietly, with emotion.] Then, perhaps, we shall know that the spirits are with us.

RITA. [Whispering.] The spirits?

ALLMERS. [As before.] Yes, they will perhaps be around us—those whom we have lost.

RITA. [Nods slowly.] Our little Eyolf. And your big Eyolf, too.

ALLMERS. [Gazing straight before him.] Now and then, perhaps, we may still—on the way through life—have a little, passing glimpse of them.

RITA. Where, shall we look for them, Alfred?

ALLMERS. [Fixing his eyes upon her.] Upwards.

RITA. [Nods in approval.] Yes, yes—upwards.

ALLMERS. Upwards—towards the peaks. Towards the stars. And towards the great silence.

RITA. [Giving him her hand.] Thanks!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE EYOLF ***

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