

# Reading More Drama

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## SOPHOCLES

### *Oedipus the King*<sup>1</sup>

#### CHARACTERS

OEDIPUS, *King of Thebes*

FIRST MESSENGER

JOCASTA, *His Wife*

SECOND MESSENGER

CREON, *His Brother-in-Law*

A HERDSMAN

TEIRESIAS, *an Old Blind Prophet*

A CHORUS of *Old Men of Thebes*

A PRIEST

SCENE: *In front of the palace of OEDIPUS at Thebes. To the right of the stage near the altar stands the PRIEST with a crowd of children. OEDIPUS emerges from the central door.*

OEDIPUS: Children, young sons and daughters of old Cadmus,<sup>2</sup>  
why do you sit here with your suppliant crowns?  
The town is heavy with a mingled burden  
of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense;  
5 I did not think it fit that I should hear  
of this from messengers but came myself,—  
I Oedipus whom all men call the Great.

[*He turns to the PRIEST.*]

You're old and they are young; come, speak for them.  
What do you fear or want, that you sit here  
10 suppliant? Indeed I'm willing to give all  
that you may need; I would be very hard  
should I not pity suppliants like these.

PRIEST: O ruler of my country, Oedipus,  
you see our company around the altar;  
15 you see our ages; some of us, like these,  
who cannot yet fly far, and some of us  
heavy with age; these children are the chosen  
among the young, and I the priest of Zeus.  
Within the market place sit others crowned  
20 with suppliant garlands, at the double shrine

1. Translated by David Grene.    2. The founder of Thebes.

of Pallas<sup>3</sup> and the temple where Ismenus  
 gives oracles by fire. King, you yourself  
 have seen our city reeling like a wreck  
 already; it can scarcely lift its prow  
 out of the depths, out of the bloody surf. 25  
 A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth,  
 a blight is on the cattle in the fields,  
 a blight is on our women that no children  
 are born to them; a God that carries fire,  
 a deadly pestilence, is on our town, 30  
 strikes us and spares not, and the house of Cadmus  
 is emptied of its people while black Death  
 grows rich in groaning and in lamentation.  
 We have not come as suppliants to this altar  
 because we thought of you as of a God, 35  
 but rather judging you the first of men  
 in all the chances of this life and when  
 we mortals have to do with more than man.  
 You came and by your coming saved our city,  
 freed us from tribute which we paid of old 40  
 to the Sphinx, cruel singer. This you did  
 in virtue of no knowledge we could give you,  
 in virtue of no teaching; it was God  
 that aided you, men say, and you are held  
 with God's assistance to have saved our lives. 45  
 Now Oedipus, Greatest in all men's eyes,  
 here falling at your feet we all entreat you,  
 find us some strength for rescue.  
 Perhaps you'll hear a wise word from some God,  
 perhaps you will learn something from a man 50  
 (for I have seen that for the skilled of practice  
 the outcome of their counsels live the most).  
 Noblest of men, go, and raise up our city,  
 go,—and give heed. For now this land of ours  
 calls you its savior since you saved it once. 55  
 So, let us never speak about your reign  
 as of a time when first our feet were set  
 secure on high, but later fell to ruin.  
 Raise up our city, save it and raise it up.  
 Once you have brought us luck with happy omen; 60  
 be no less now in fortune.  
 If you will rule this land, as now you rule it,  
 better to rule it full of men than empty.  
 For neither tower nor ship is anything  
 when empty, and none live in it together. 65  
 OEDIPUS: I pity you, children. You have come full of longing,  
 but I have known the story before you told it

3. Athena, the goddess of wisdom.

only too well. I know you are all sick,  
yet there is not one of you, sick though you are,  
that is as sick as I myself.

70

Your several sorrows each have single scope  
and touch but one of you. My spirit groans  
for city and myself and you at once.

You have not roused me like a man from sleep;

75

know that I have given many tears to this,  
gone many ways wandering in thought,  
but as I thought I found only one remedy  
and that I took. I sent Menoeceus' son  
Creon, Jocasta's brother, to Apollo,

80

to his Pythian temple,  
that he might learn there by what act or word  
I could save this city. As I count the days,  
it vexes me what ails him; he is gone  
far longer than he needed for the journey.

85

But when he comes, then, may I prove a villain,  
if I shall not do all the God commands.

PRIEST: Thanks for your gracious words. Your servants here  
signal that Creon is this moment coming.

OEDIPUS: His face is bright. O holy Lord Apollo,  
grant that his news too may be bright for us  
and bring us safety.

90

PRIEST: It is happy news,  
I think, for else his head would not be crowned  
with sprigs of fruitful laurel.

OEDIPUS: We will know soon,

95

he's within hail. Lord Creon, my good brother,  
what is the word you bring us from the God?

[CREON *enters*.]

CREON: A good word,—for things hard to bear themselves  
if in the final issue all is well  
I count complete good fortune.

OEDIPUS: What do you mean?

100

What you have said so far  
leaves me uncertain whether to trust or fear.

CREON: If you will hear my news before these others  
I am ready to speak, or else to go within.

OEDIPUS: Speak it to all;

105

the grief I bear, I bear it more for these  
than for my own heart.

CREON: I will tell you, then,  
what I heard from the God.

King Phoebus<sup>4</sup> in plain words commanded us  
to drive out a pollution from our land,

4. Apollo, the god of truth.

- pollution grown ingrained within the land;  
drive it out, said the God, not cherish it,  
till it's past cure. 110
- OEDIPUS:                               What is the rite  
of purification? How shall it be done?
- CREON: By banishing a man, or expiation  
of blood by blood, since it is murder guilt 115  
which holds our city in this destroying storm.
- OEDIPUS: Who is this man whose fate the God pronounces?
- CREON: My Lord, before you piloted the state  
we had a king called Laius.
- OEDIPUS: I know of him by hearsay. I have not seen him. 120
- CREON: The God commanded clearly: let some one  
punish with force this dead man's murderers.
- OEDIPUS: Where are they in the world? Where would a trace  
of this old crime be found? It would be hard  
to guess where.
- CREON:                               The clue is in this land; 125  
that which is sought is found;  
the unheeded thing escapes:  
so said the God.
- OEDIPUS:                               Was it at home,  
or in the country that death came upon him,  
or in another country travelling? 130
- CREON: He went, he said himself, upon an embassy,  
but never returned when he set out from home.
- OEDIPUS: Was there no messenger, no fellow traveller  
who knew what happened? Such a one might tell  
something of use. 135
- CREON: They were all killed save one. He fled in terror  
and he could tell us nothing in clear terms  
of what he knew, nothing, but one thing only.
- OEDIPUS: What was it?  
If we could even find a slim beginning 140  
in which to hope, we might discover much.
- CREON: This man said that the robbers they encountered  
were many and the hands that did the murder  
were many; it was no man's single power.
- OEDIPUS: How could a robber dare a deed like this 145  
were he not helped with money from the city,  
money and treachery?
- CREON:                               That indeed was thought.  
But Laius was dead and in our trouble  
there was none to help.
- OEDIPUS: What trouble was so great to hinder you  
inquiring out the murder of your king? 150
- CREON: The riddling Sphinx induced us to neglect  
mysterious crimes and rather seek solution  
of troubles at our feet.

- 155 OEDIPUS: I will bring this to light again. King Phoebus<sup>5</sup>  
 fittingly took this care about the dead,  
 and you too fittingly.  
 And justly you will see in me an ally,  
 a champion of my country and the God.
- 160 For when I drive pollution from the land  
 I will not serve a distant friend's advantage,  
 but act in my own interest. Whoever  
 he was that killed the king may readily  
 wish to dispatch me with his murderous hand;  
 165 so helping the dead king I help myself.
- Come, children, take your suppliant boughs and go;  
 up from the altars now. Call the assembly  
 and let it meet upon the understanding  
 that I'll do everything. God will decide  
 170 whether we prosper or remain in sorrow.
- PRIEST: Rise, children—it was this we came to seek,  
 which of himself the king now offers us.  
 May Phoebus who gave us the oracle  
 come to our rescue and stay the plague.
- [*Exeunt*<sup>6</sup> all but the CHORUS.]
- 175 CHORUS: [*Strophe*.] What is the sweet spoken word of God from the shrine of  
 Pythorich in gold  
 that has come to glorious Thebes?  
 I am stretched on the rack of doubt, and terror and trembling hold  
 my heart, O Delian Healer, and I worship full of fears  
 for what doom you will bring to pass, new or renewed in the revolving  
 years.
- 180 Speak to me, immortal voice,  
 child of golden Hope.
- [*Antistrophe*.]
- First I call on you, Athene,<sup>7</sup> deathless daughter of Zeus,  
 and Artemis, Earth Upholder,  
 who sits in the midst of the market place in the throne which men call Fame,  
 185 and Phoebus, the Far Shooter, three averters of Fate,  
 come to us now, if ever before, when ruin rushed upon the state,  
 you drove destruction's flame away  
 out of our land.

5. Apollo, god of light.

6. Exit the stage (Latin for "they go out"). *Strophe* (line 175): in Greek stagecraft, a choral song and the corresponding dance of the chorus to one side. *Antistrophe* (stage direction following line 181): after the strophe, the chorus's answering song and returning dance.

7. Goddess of both war and peace as well as wisdom. Artemis (line 183): goddess of the earth and the hunt, twin sister of Apollo.

[*Strophe.*]

Our sorrows defy number;  
 all the ship's timbers are rotten; 190  
 taking of thought is no spear for the driving away of the plague.  
 There are no growing children in this famous land;  
 there are no women bearing the pangs of childbirth.  
 You may see them one with another, like birds swift on the wing,  
 quicker than fire unmastered, 195  
 speeding away to the coast of the Western God.

[*Antistrophe.*]

In the unnumbered deaths  
 of its people the city dies;  
 those children that are born lie dead on the naked earth  
 unpitied, spreading contagion of death; and grey haired mothers and wives 200  
 everywhere stand at the altar's edge, suppliant, moaning;  
 the hymn to the healing God rings out but with it the wailing voices are  
 blended.  
 From these our sufferings grant us, O golden Daughter of Zeus,  
 glad-faced deliverance.

[*Strophe.*]

There is no clash of brazen shields but our fight is with the War God, 205  
 a War God ringed with the cries of men, a savage God who burns us;  
 grant that he turn in racing course backwards out of our country's bounds  
 to the great palace of Amphitrite<sup>8</sup> or where the waves of the Thracian sea  
 deny the stranger safe anchorage.  
 Whatsoever escapes the night 210  
 at last the light of day revisits;  
 so smite the War God, Father Zeus,  
 beneath your thunderbolt,  
 for you are the Lord of the lightning, the lightning that carries fire.

[*Antistrophe.*]

And your unconquered arrow shafts, winged by the golden corded bow, 215  
 Lycean King, I beg to be at our side for help;  
 and the gleaming torches of Artemis with which she scourges the Lycean hills,  
 and I call on the God with the turban of gold, who gave his name to this  
 country of ours,  
 the Bacchic God with the wind flushed face,  
 Evian One, who travel 220  
 with the Maenad<sup>9</sup> company,  
 combat the God that burns us  
 with your torch of pine;

8. Queen of the sea and wife of Poseidon, sometimes said to dwell in the Atlantic Ocean.

9. Female worshipers of Bacchus (see line 219): Dionysus (Bacchus to the Romans), god of fertility and wine. *Evian one* (line 220): Dionysus (also known as Evius).

for the God that is our enemy is a God unhonoured among the Gods.

[OEDIPUS *returns*.]

- 225 OEDIPUS: For what you ask me—if you will hear my words,  
and hearing welcome them and fight the plague,  
you will find strength and lightening of your load  
Hark to me; what I say to you, I say  
as one that is a stranger to the story  
230 as stranger to the deed. For I would not  
be far upon the track if I alone  
were tracing it without a clue. But now,  
since after all was finished, I became  
a citizen among you, citizens—  
235 now I proclaim to all the men of Thebes:  
who so among you knows the murderer  
by whose hand Laius, son of Labdacus,  
died—I command him to tell everything  
to me,—yes, though he fears himself to take the blame  
240 on his own head; for bitter punishment  
he shall have none, but leave this land unharmed.  
Or if he knows the murderer, another,  
a foreigner, still let him speak the truth.  
For I will pay him and be grateful, too.  
245 But if you shall keep silence, if perhaps  
some one of you, to shield a guilty friend,  
or for his own sake shall reject my words—  
hear what I shall do then:  
I forbid that man, whoever he be, my land,  
250 my land where I hold sovereignty and throne;  
and I forbid any to welcome him  
or cry him greeting or make him a sharer  
in sacrifice or offering to the gods,  
or give him water for his hands to wash.  
255 I command all to drive him from their homes,  
since he is our pollution, as the oracle  
of Pytho's god proclaimed him now to me.  
So I stand forth a champion of the god  
and of the man who died.  
260 Upon the murderer I invoke this curse—  
whether he is one man and all unknown,  
or one of many—may he wear out his life  
in misery to miserable doom!  
If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth  
265 I pray that I myself may feel my curse.  
On you I lay my charge to fulfill all this  
for me, for the god, and for this land of ours  
destroyed and blighted, by the god forsaken.  
Even were this no matter of God's ordinance  
270 it would not fit you so to leave it lie,

- unpurified, since a good man is dead  
 and one that was a king. Search it out.  
 Since I am now the holder of his office,  
 and have his bed and wife that once was his,  
 and had his line not been unfortunate 275  
 we would have common children—(fortune leaped  
 upon his head)—because of all these things,  
 I fight in his defence as for my father,  
 and I shall try all means to take the murderer  
 of Laius the son of Labdacus 280  
 the son of Polydorus and before him  
 of Cadmus and before him of Agenor.  
 Those who do not obey me, may the Gods  
 grant no crops springing from the ground they plough  
 nor children to their women! May a fate 285  
 like this, or one still worse than this consume them!  
 For you whom these words please, the other Thebans,  
 may Justice as your ally and all the Gods  
 live with you, blessing you now and for ever!
- CHORUS: As you have held me to my oath, I speak: 290  
 I neither killed the king nor can declare  
 the killer; but since Phoebus set the quest  
 it is his part to tell who the man is.
- OEDIPUS: Right; but to put compulsion on the Gods  
 against their will—no man can do that. 295
- CHORUS: May I then say what I think second best?
- OEDIPUS: If there's a third best, too, spare not to tell it.
- CHORUS: I know that what the Lord Teiresias  
 sees, is most often what the Lord Apollo  
 sees. If you should inquire of this from him 300  
 you might find out most clearly.
- OEDIPUS: Even in this my actions have not been sluggard.  
 On Creon's word I have sent two messengers  
 and why the prophet is not here already  
 I have been wondering.
- CHORUS: His skill apart 305  
 there is besides only an old faint story.
- OEDIPUS: What is it?  
 I look at every story.
- CHORUS: It was said  
 that he was killed by certain wayfarers.
- OEDIPUS: I heard that, too, but no one saw the killer. 310
- CHORUS: Yet if he has a share of fear at all,  
 his courage will not stand firm, hearing your curse.
- OEDIPUS: The man who in the doing did not shrink  
 will fear no word.
- CHORUS: Here comes his prosecutor:  
 led by your men the godly prophet comes 315  
 in whom alone of mankind truth is native.



[Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a LITTLE BOY.]

OEDIPUS: Teiresias, you are versed in everything,  
 things teachable and things not to be spoken,  
 things of the heaven and earth-creeping things.  
 320 You have no eyes but in your mind you know  
 with what a plague our city is afflicted.  
 My lord, in you alone we find a champion,  
 in you alone one that can rescue us.  
 Perhaps you have not heard the messengers,  
 325 but Phoebus sent in answer to our sending  
 an oracle declaring that our freedom  
 from this disease would only come when we  
 should learn the names of those who killed King Laius,  
 and kill them or expel from our country.  
 330 Do not begrudge us oracles from birds,  
 or any other way of prophecy  
 within your skill; save yourself and the city,  
 save me; redeem the debt of our pollution  
 that lies on us because of this dead man.  
 335 We are in your hands; pains are most nobly taken  
 to help another when you have means and power.

TEIRESIAS: Alas, how terrible is wisdom when  
 it brings no profit to the man that's wise!  
 This I knew well, but had forgotten it,  
 else I would not have come here.

340 OEDIPUS: What is this?  
 How sad you are now you have come!

TEIRESIAS: Let me  
 go home. It will be easiest for us both  
 to bear our several destinies to the end  
 if you will follow my advice.

OEDIPUS: You'd rob us  
 345 of this your gift of prophecy? You talk  
 as one who had no care for law nor love  
 for Thebes who reared you.

TEIRESIAS: Yes, but I see that even your own words  
 miss the mark; therefore I must fear for mine.

350 OEDIPUS: For God's sake if you know of anything,  
 do not turn from us; all of us kneel to you,  
 all of us here, your suppliants.

TEIRESIAS: All of you here know nothing. I will not  
 bring to the light of day my troubles, mine—  
 rather than call them yours.

355 OEDIPUS: What do you mean?  
 You know of something but refuse to speak.  
 Would you betray us and destroy the city?

TEIRESIAS: I will not bring this pain upon us both,  
 neither on you nor on myself. Why is it

- you question me and waste your labour? I  
will tell you nothing. 360
- OEDIPUS: You would provoke a stone! Tell us, you villain,  
tell us, and do not stand there quietly  
unmoved and balking at the issue.
- TEIRESIAS: You blame my temper but you do not see  
your own that lives within you; it is me  
you chide. 365
- OEDIPUS: Who would not feel his temper rise  
at words like these with which you shame our city?
- TEIRESIAS: Of themselves things will come, although I hide them  
and breathe no word of them. 370
- OEDIPUS: Since they will come  
tell them to me.
- TEIRESIAS: I will say nothing further.  
Against this answer let your temper rage  
as wildly as you will.
- OEDIPUS: Indeed I am  
so angry I shall not hold back a jot  
of what I think. For I would have you know  
I think you were complotter of the deed  
and doer of the deed save in so far  
as for the actual killing. Had you had eyes  
I would have said alone you murdered him. 375
- TEIRESIAS: Yes? Then I warn you faithfully to keep  
the letter of your proclamation and  
from this day forth to speak no word of greeting  
to these nor me; you are the land's pollution.
- OEDIPUS: How shamelessly you started up this taunt!  
How do you think you will escape? 380
- TEIRESIAS: I have.  
I have escaped; the truth is what I cherish  
and that's my strength.
- OEDIPUS: And who has taught you truth?  
Not your profession surely!
- TEIRESIAS: You have taught me,  
for you have made me speak against my will. 390
- OEDIPUS: Speak what? Tell me again that I may learn it better.
- TEIRESIAS: Did you not understand before or would you  
provoke me into speaking?
- OEDIPUS: I did not grasp it,  
not so to call it known. Say it again.
- TEIRESIAS: I say you are the murderer of the king  
whose murderer you seek. 395
- OEDIPUS: Not twice you shall  
say calumnies like this and stay unpunished.
- TEIRESIAS: Shall I say more to tempt your anger more?
- OEDIPUS: As much as you desire; it will be said  
in vain.

400 TEIRESIAS: I say that with those you love best  
 you live in foulest shame unconsciously  
 and do not see where you are in calamity.

OEDIPUS: Do you imagine you can always talk  
 like this, and live to laugh at it hereafter?

405 TEIRESIAS: Yes, if the truth has anything of strength.

OEDIPUS: It has, but not for you; it has no strength  
 for you because you are blind in mind and ears  
 as well as in your eyes.

TEIRESIAS: You are a poor wretch  
 to taunt me with the very insults which  
 410 every one soon will heap upon yourself.

OEDIPUS: Your life is one long night so that you cannot  
 hurt me or any other who sees the light.

TEIRESIAS: It is not fate that I should be your ruin,  
 Apollo is enough; it is his care  
 to work this out.

415 OEDIPUS: Was this your own design  
 or Creon's?

TEIRESIAS: Creon is no hurt to you,  
 but you are to yourself.

OEDIPUS: Wealth, sovereignty and skill outmatching skill  
 for the contrivance of an envied life!

420 Great store of jealousy fill your treasury chests,  
 if my friend Creon, friend from the first and loyal,  
 thus secretly attacks me, secretly  
 desires to drive me out and secretly  
 suborns this juggling, trick devising quack,  
 425 this wily beggar who has only eyes  
 for his own gains, but blindness in his skill.

For, tell me, where have you seen clear, Teiresias,  
 with your prophetic eyes? When the dark singer,  
 the sphinx, was in your country, did you speak  
 430 word of deliverance to its citizens?

And yet the riddle's answer was not the province  
 of a chance comer. It was a prophet's task  
 and plainly you had no such gift of prophecy  
 from birds nor otherwise from any God  
 435 to glean a word of knowledge. But I came,  
 Oedipus, who knew nothing, and I stopped her.  
 I solved the riddle by my wit alone.

Mine was no knowledge got from birds.<sup>1</sup> And now  
 you would expel me,  
 440 because you think that you will find a place  
 by Creon's throne. I think you will be sorry,  
 both you and your accomplice, for your plot

1. Prophetic knowledge derived from observing the flight of birds, or sometimes from inspecting bird entrails.

- to drive me out. And did I not regard you  
as an old man, some suffering would have taught you  
that what was in your heart was treason. 445
- CHORUS: We look at this man's words and yours, my king,  
and we find both have spoken them in anger.  
We need no angry words but only thought  
how we may best hit the God's meaning for us.
- TEIRESIAS: If you are king, at least I have the right 450  
no less to speak in my defence against you.  
Of that much I am master. I am no slave  
of yours, but Loxias',<sup>2</sup> and so I shall not  
enroll myself with Creon for my patron.  
Since you have taunted me with being blind, 455  
here is my word for you.  
You have your eyes but see not where you are  
in sin, nor where you live, nor whom you live with.  
Do you know who your parents are? Unknowing  
you are an enemy to kith and kin 460  
in death, beneath the earth, and in this life.  
A deadly footed, double striking curse,  
from father and mother both, shall drive you forth  
out of this land, with darkness on your eyes,  
that now have such straight vision. Shall there be 465  
a place will not be harbour to your cries,  
a corner of Cithaeron<sup>3</sup> will not ring  
in echo to your cries, soon, soon,—  
when you shall learn the secret of your marriage,  
which steered you to a haven in this house,— 470  
haven no haven, after lucky voyage?  
And of the multitude of other evils  
establishing a grim equality  
between you and your children, you know nothing.  
So, muddy with contempt my words and Creon's! 475  
Misery shall grind no man as it will you.
- OEDIPUS: Is it endurable that I should hear  
such words from him? Go and a curse go with you  
Quick, home with you! Out of my house at once!
- TEIRESIAS: I would not have come either had you not called me. 480
- OEDIPUS: I did not know then you would talk like a fool—  
or it would have been long before I called you.
- TEIRESIAS: I am a fool then, as it seems to you—  
but to the parents who have bred you, wise.
- OEDIPUS: What parents? Stop! Who are they of all the world? 485
- TEIRESIAS: This day will show your birth and will destroy you.
- OEDIPUS: How needlessly your riddles darken everything.
- TEIRESIAS: But it's in riddle answering you are strongest.
- OEDIPUS: Yes. Taunt me where you will find me great.

2. Yet another name for Apollo.    3. The mountain where Oedipus was abandoned as a child.

490 TEIRESIAS: It is this very luck that has destroyed you.

OEDIPUS: I do not care, if it has saved this city.

TEIRESIAS: Well, I will go. Come, boy, lead me away.

OEDIPUS: Yes, lead him off. So long as you are here,  
you'll be a stumbling block and a vexation;  
once gone, you will not trouble me again.

495 TEIRESIAS: I have said

what I came here to say not fearing your  
countenance: there is no way you can hurt me.

I tell you, king, this man, this murderer  
(whom you have long declared you are in search of,  
500 indicting him in threatening proclamation  
as murderer of Laius)—he is here.

In name he is a stranger among citizens  
but soon he will be shown to be a citizen  
true native Theban, and he'll have no joy

505 of the discovery: blindness for sight  
and beggary for riches his exchange,  
he shall go journeying to a foreign country  
tapping his way before him with a stick.

He shall be proved father and brother both

510 to his own children in his house; to her  
that gave him birth, a son and husband both;

a fellow sower in his father's bed

with that same father that he murdered.

Go within, reckon that out, and if you find me  
515 mistaken, say I have no skill in prophecy.

[*Exeunt separately* TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS.]

CHORUS: [*Strophe.*] Who is the man proclaimed  
by Delphi's prophetic rock  
as the bloody handed murderer,  
the doer of deeds that none dare name?

520 Now is the time for him to run  
with a stronger foot  
than Pegasus<sup>4</sup>

for the child of Zeus leaps in arms upon him  
with fire and the lightning bolt,

525 and terribly close on his heels  
are the Fates<sup>5</sup> that never miss.

[*Antistrophe.*]

Lately from snowy Parnassus<sup>6</sup>

clearly the voice flashed forth,

bidding each Theban track him down,

530 the unknown murderer.

In the savage forests he lurks and in

4. Winged horse. 5. Goddesses who decide the course of human life. 6. Mountain sacred to Apollo.

the caverns like  
 the mountain bull.  
 He is sad and lonely, and lonely his feet  
 that carry him far from the navel of earth;  
 but its prophecies, ever living,  
 flutter around his head. 535

[*Strophe.*]

The augur has spread confusion,  
 terrible confusion;  
 I do not approve what was said  
 nor can I deny it. 540  
 I do not know what to say;  
 I am in a flutter of foreboding;  
 I never heard in the present  
 nor past of a quarrel between  
 the sons of Labdacus and Polybus,<sup>7</sup>  
 that I might bring as proof  
 in attacking the popular fame  
 of Oedipus, seeking  
 to take vengeance for undiscovered  
 death in the line of Labdacus. 550

[*Antistrophe.*]

Truly Zeus and Apollo are wise  
 and in human things all knowing;  
 but amongst men there is no  
 distinct judgment, between the prophet  
 and me—which of us is right. 555  
 One man may pass another in wisdom  
 but I would never agree  
 with those that find fault with the king  
 till I should see the word  
 proved right beyond doubt. For once  
 in visible form the Sphinx  
 came on him and all of us  
 saw his wisdom and in that test  
 he saved the city. So he will not be condemned by my mind. 560  
 565

[*Enter CREON.*]

CREON: Citizens, I have come because I heard  
 deadly words spread about me, that the king  
 accuses me. I cannot take that from him.  
 If he believes that in these present troubles  
 he has been wronged by me in word or deed  
 I do not want to live on with the burden  
 of such a scandal on me. The report 570

7. King who adopted Oedipus.

injures me doubly and most vitally—  
for I'll be called a traitor to my city

575 and traitor also to my friends and you.

CHORUS: Perhaps it was a sudden gust of anger  
that forced that insult from him, and no judgment.

CREON: But did he say that it was in compliance  
with schemes of mine that the seer told him lies?

580 CHORUS: Yes, he said that, but why, I do not know.

CREON: Were his eyes straight in his head? Was his mind right  
when he accused me in this fashion?

CHORUS: I do not know; I have no eyes to see  
what princes do. Here comes the king himself.

[Enter OEDIPUS.]

585 OEDIPUS: You, sir, how is it you come here? Have you so much  
brazen-faced daring that you venture in  
my house although you are proved manifestly  
the murderer of that man, and though you tried,  
openly, highway robbery of my crown?

590 For God's sake, tell me what you saw in me,  
what cowardice or what stupidity,  
that made you lay a plot like this against me?  
Did you imagine I should not observe

the crafty scheme that stole upon me or  
595 seeing it, take no means to counter it?  
Was it not stupid of you to make the attempt,  
to try to hunt down royal power without  
the people at your back or friends? For only  
with the people at your back or money can  
600 the hunt end in the capture of a crown.

CREON: Do you know what you're doing? Will you listen  
to words to answer yours, and then pass judgment?

OEDIPUS: You're quick to speak, but I am slow to grasp you,  
for I have found you dangerous,—and my foe.

605 CREON: First of all hear what I shall say to that.

OEDIPUS: At least don't tell me that you are not guilty.

CREON: If you think obstinacy without wisdom  
a valuable possession, you are wrong.

OEDIPUS: And you are wrong if you believe that one,

610 a criminal, will not be punished only  
because he is my kinsman.

CREON: This is but just—  
but tell me, then, of what offense I'm guilty?

OEDIPUS: Did you or did you not urge me to send  
to this prophetic mumbler?

CREON: I did indeed,

615 and I shall stand by what I told you.

OEDIPUS: How long ago is it since Laius . . .

CREON: What about Laius? I don't understand.

OEDIPUS: Vanished—died—was murdered?

CREON: It is long,  
a long, long time to reckon.

OEDIPUS: Was this prophet  
in the profession then?

CREON: He was, and honoured  
as highly as he is today. 620

OEDIPUS: At that time did he say a word about me?

CREON: Never, at least when I was near him.

OEDIPUS: You never made a search for the dead man?

CREON: We searched, indeed, but never learned of anything. 625

OEDIPUS: Why did our wise old friend not say this then?

CREON: I don't know; and when I know nothing, I  
usually hold my tongue.

OEDIPUS: You know this much,  
and can declare this much if you are loyal.

CREON: What is it? If I know, I'll not deny it. 630

OEDIPUS: That he would not have said that I killed Laius  
had he not met you first.

CREON: You know yourself  
whether he said this, but I demand that I  
should hear as much from you as you from me.

OEDIPUS: Then hear,—I'll not be proved a murderer. 635

CREON: Well, then. You're married to my sister.

OEDIPUS: Yes,  
that I am not disposed to deny.

CREON: You rule  
this country giving her an equal share  
in the government?

OEDIPUS: Yes, everything she wants  
she has from me.

CREON: And I, as thirdsman to you,  
am rated as the equal of you two? 640

OEDIPUS: Yes, and it's there you've proved yourself false friend.

CREON: Not if you will reflect on it as I do.

Consider, first, if you think any one  
would choose to rule and fear rather than rule  
and sleep untroubled by a fear if power  
were equal in both cases. I, at least, 645

I was not born with such a frantic yearning  
to be a king—but to do what kings do.  
And so it is with every one who has learned  
wisdom and self-control. As it stands now, 650

the prizes are all mine—and without fear.

But if I were the king myself, I must  
do much that went against the grain.

How should despotic rule seem sweeter to me  
than painless power and an assured authority? 655

I am not so besotted yet that I



want other honours than those that come with profit.  
 Now every man's my pleasure; every man greets me;  
 660 now those who are your suitors fawn on me,—  
 success for them depends upon my favour.  
 Why should I let all this go to win that?  
 My mind would not be traitor if it's wise;  
 I am no treason lover, of my nature,  
 665 nor would I ever dare to join a plot.  
 Prove what I say. Go to the oracle  
 at Pytho and inquire about the answers,  
 if they are as I told you. For the rest,  
 if you discover I laid any plot  
 670 together with the seer, kill me, I say,  
 not only by your vote but by my own.  
 But do not charge me on obscure opinion  
 without some proof to back it. It's not just  
 lightly to count your knaves as honest men,  
 675 nor honest men as knaves. To throw away  
 an honest friend is, as it were, to throw  
 your life away, which a man loves the best.  
 In time you will know all with certainty;  
 time is the only test of honest men,  
 680 one day is space enough to know a rogue.

CHORUS: His words are wise, king, if one fears to fall.

Those who are quick of temper are not safe.

OEDIPUS: When he that plots against me secretly  
 moves quickly, I must quickly counterplot.

685 If I wait taking no decisive measure  
 his business will be done, and mine be spoiled.

CREON: What do you want to do then? Banish me?

OEDIPUS: No, certainly; kill you, not banish you.<sup>8</sup>

CREON: I do not think that you've your wits about you.

OEDIPUS: For my own interests, yes.

690 CREON: But for mine, too,  
 you should think equally.

OEDIPUS: You are a rogue.

CREON: Suppose you do not understand?

OEDIPUS: But yet

I must be ruler.

CREON: Not if you rule badly.

OEDIPUS: O, city, city!

CREON: I too have some share

695 in the city; it is not yours alone.

CHORUS: Stop, my lords! Here—and in the nick of time

8. *Translator's note:* Two lines omitted here owing to the confusion in the dialogue consequent on the loss of a third line. The lines as they stand in Jebb's edition (1902) are: OED.: That you may show what manner of thing is envy. / CREON: You speak as one that will not yield or trust. / [OED. *lost line.*]

I see Jocasta coming from the house;  
with her help lay the quarrel that now stirs you.

[Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA: For shame! Why have you raised this foolish squabbling  
brawl? Are you not ashamed to air your private  
griefs when the country's sick? Go in, you, Oedipus,  
and you, too, Creon, into the house. Don't magnify  
your nothing troubles. 700

CREON: Sister, Oedipus,  
your husband, thinks he has the right to do  
terrible wrongs—he has but to choose between  
two terrors: banishing or killing me. 705

OEDIPUS: He's right, Jocasta; for I find him plotting  
with knavish tricks against my person.

CREON: That God may never bless me! May I die  
accursed, if I have been guilty of  
one tittle of the charge you bring against me! 710

JOCASTA: I beg you, Oedipus, trust him in this,  
spare him for the sake of this his oath to God,  
for my sake, and the sake of those who stand here.

CHORUS: Be gracious, be merciful,  
we beg of you. 715

OEDIPUS: In what would you have me yield?

CHORUS: He has been no silly child in the past.  
He is strong in his oath now.  
Spare him. 720

OEDIPUS: Do you know what you ask?

CHORUS: Yes.

OEDIPUS: Tell me then.

CHORUS: He has been your friend before all men's eyes; do not cast him  
away dishonoured on an obscure conjecture. 725

OEDIPUS: I would have you know that this request of yours  
really requests my death or banishment.

CHORUS: May the Sun God,<sup>9</sup> king of Gods, forbid! May I die without God's  
blessing, without friends' help, if I had any such thought. But my  
spirit is broken by my unhappiness for my wasting country; and  
this would but add troubles amongst ourselves to the other troubles. 730

OEDIPUS: Well, let him go then—if I must die ten times for it,  
or be sent out dishonoured into exile.

It is your lips that prayed for him I pitied,  
not his; wherever he is, I shall hate him. 735

CREON: I see you sulk in yielding and you're dangerous  
when you are out of temper; natures like yours  
are justly heaviest for themselves to bear.

OEDIPUS: Leave me alone! Take yourself off, I tell you.

9. Helios, closely associated with Apollo, the god of light.

740 CREON: I'll go, you have not known me, but they have,  
and they have known my innocence.

[Exit.]

CHORUS: Won't you take him inside, lady?

JOCASTA: Yes, when I've found out what was the matter.

CHORUS: There was some misconceived suspicion of a story, and on the other  
745 side the sting of injustice.

JOCASTA: So, on both sides?

CHORUS: Yes.

JOCASTA: What was the story?

CHORUS: I think it best, in the interests of the country, to leave it where it  
ended.

750 OEDIPUS: You see where you have ended, straight of judgment  
although you are, by softening my anger.

CHORUS: Sir, I have said before and I say again—be sure that I would have been  
proved a madman, bankrupt in sane council, if I should put you away, you  
who steered the country I love safely when she was crazed with troubles. God  
755 grant that now, too, you may prove a fortunate guide for us.

JOCASTA: Tell me, my lord, I beg of you, what was it  
that roused your anger so?

OEDIPUS: Yes, I will tell you.

I honour you more than I honour them.

It was Creon and the plots he laid against me.

760 JOCASTA: Tell me—if you can clearly tell the quarrel—

OEDIPUS: Creon says

that I'm the murderer of Laius.

JOCASTA: Of his own knowledge or on information?

OEDIPUS: He sent this rascal prophet to me, since  
he keeps his own mouth clean of any guilt.

765 JOCASTA: Do not concern yourself about this matter;  
listen to me and learn that human beings  
have no part in the craft of prophecy.

Of that I'll show you a short proof.

There was an oracle once that came to Laius,—

770 I will not say that it was Phoebus' own,  
but it was from his servants—and it told him  
that it was fate that he should die a victim  
at the hands of his own son, a son to be born  
of Laius and me. But, see now, he,

775 the king, was killed by foreign highway robbers  
at a place where three roads meet—so goes the story;  
and for the son—before three days were out  
after his birth King Laius pierced his ankles  
and by the hands of others cast him forth  
780 upon a pathless hillside. So Apollo  
failed to fulfill his oracle to the son,  
that he should kill his father, and to Laius  
also proved false in that the thing he feared,

- death at his son's hands, never came to pass.  
 So clear in this case were the oracles, 785  
 so clear and false. Give them no heed, I say;  
 what God discovers need of, easily  
 he shows to us himself.
- OEDIPUS: O dear Jocasta,  
 as I hear this from you, there comes upon me  
 a wandering of the soul—I could run mad. 790
- JOCASTA: What trouble is it, that you turn again  
 and speak like this?
- OEDIPUS: I thought I heard you say  
 that Laius was killed at a crossroads.
- JOCASTA: Yes, that was how the story went and still  
 that word goes round.
- OEDIPUS: Where is this place, Jocasta, 795  
 where he was murdered?
- JOCASTA: Phocis is the country  
 and the road splits there, one of two roads from Delphi,  
 another comes from Daulia.
- OEDIPUS: How long ago is this?
- JOCASTA: The news came to the city just before  
 you became king and all men's eyes looked to you. 800  
 What is it, Oedipus, that's in your mind?
- OEDIPUS: What have you designed, O Zeus, to do with me?
- JOCASTA: What is the thought that troubles your heart?
- OEDIPUS: Don't ask me yet—tell me of Laius—  
 How did he look? How old or young was he? 805
- JOCASTA: He was a tall man and his hair was grizzled  
 already—nearly white—and in his form  
 not unlike you.
- OEDIPUS: O God, I think I have  
 called curses on myself in ignorance.
- JOCASTA: What do you mean? I am terrified 810  
 when I look at you.
- OEDIPUS: I have a deadly fear  
 that the old seer had eyes. You'll show me more  
 if you can tell me one more thing.
- JOCASTA: I will.  
 I'm frightened,—but if I can understand,  
 I'll tell you all you ask.
- OEDIPUS: How was his company? 815  
 Had he few with him when he went this journey,  
 or many servants, as would suit a prince?
- JOCASTA: In all there were but five, and among them  
 a herald; and one carriage for the king.
- OEDIPUS: It's plain—it's plain—who was it told you this? 820
- JOCASTA: The only servant that escaped safe home.
- OEDIPUS: Is he at home now?
- JOCASTA: No, when he came home again

and saw you king and Laius was dead,  
 he came to me and touched my hand and begged  
 825 that I should send him to the fields to be  
 my shepherd and so he might see the city  
 as far off as he might. So I  
 sent him away. He was an honest man,  
 as slaves go, and was worthy of far more  
 830 than what he asked of me.

OEDIPUS: O, how I wish that he could come back quickly!

JOCASTA: He can. Why is your heart so set on this?

OEDIPUS: O dear Jocasta, I am full of fears  
 that I have spoken far too much; and therefore  
 I wish to see this shepherd.

835 JOCASTA: He will come;  
 but, Oedipus, I think I'm worthy too  
 to know what it is that disquiets you.

OEDIPUS: It shall not be kept from you, since my mind  
 has gone so far with its forebodings. Whom  
 840 should I confide in rather than you, who is there  
 of more importance to me who have passed  
 through such a fortune?

Polybus was my father, king of Corinth,  
 and Merope, the Dorian, my mother.  
 845 I was held greatest of the citizens  
 in Corinth till a curious chance befell me  
 as I shall tell you—curious, indeed,  
 but hardly worth the store I set upon it.  
 There was a dinner and at it a man,  
 850 a drunken man, accused me in his drink  
 of being bastard. I was furious  
 but held my temper under for that day.  
 Next day I went and taxed my parents with it;  
 they took the insult very ill from him,  
 855 the drunken fellow who had uttered it.

So I was comforted for their part, but  
 still this thing rankled always, for the story  
 crept about widely. And I went at last  
 to Pytho, though my parents did not know.  
 860 But Phoebus sent me home again unhonoured  
 in what I came to learn, but he foretold  
 other and desperate horrors to befall me,  
 that I was fated to lie with my mother,  
 and show to daylight an accursed breed  
 865 which men would not endure, and I was doomed  
 to be murderer of the father that begot me.  
 When I heard this I fled, and in the days  
 that followed I would measure from the stars  
 the whereabouts of Corinth—yes, I fled  
 870 to somewhere where I should not see fulfilled  
 the infamies told in that dreadful oracle.

And as I journeyed I came to the place  
 where, as you say, this king met with his death.  
 Jocasta, I will tell you the whole truth.

When I was near the branching of the crossroads,  
 going on foot, I was encountered by

875

a herald and a carriage with a man in it,  
 just as you tell me. He that led the way  
 and the old man himself wanted to thrust me  
 out of the road by force. I became angry  
 and struck the coachman who was pushing me.

880

When the old man saw this he watched his moment,  
 and as I passed he struck me from his carriage,  
 full on the head with his two pointed goad.

But he was paid in full and presently  
 my stick had struck him backwards from the car  
 and he rolled out of it. And then I killed them

885

all. If it happened there was any tie  
 of kinship twixt this man and Laius,  
 who is then now more miserable than I,  
 what man on earth so hated by the Gods,  
 since neither citizen nor foreigner

890

may welcome me at home or even greet me,  
 but drive me out of doors? And it is I,  
 I and no other have so cursed myself.

895

And I pollute the bed of him I killed  
 by the hands that killed him. Was I not born evil?

Am I not utterly unclean? I had to fly  
 and in my banishment not even see  
 my kindred nor set foot in my own country,  
 or otherwise my fate was to be yoked  
 in marriage with my mother and kill my father,  
 Polybus who begot me and had reared me.

900

Would not one rightly judge and say that on me  
 these things were sent by some malignant God?

905

O no, no, no—O holy majesty  
 of God on high, may I not see that day!  
 May I be gone out of men's sight before  
 I see the deadly taint of this disaster  
 come upon me.

910

CHORUS: Sir, we too fear these things. But until you see this man face to face  
 and hear his story, hope.

OEDIPUS: Yes, I have just this much of hope—to wait until the herdsman comes.

JOCASTA: And when he comes, what do you want with him?

OEDIPUS: I'll tell you; if I find that his story is the same as yours, I at least will  
 be clear of this guilt.

915

JOCASTA: Why what so particularly did you learn from my story?

OEDIPUS: You said that he spoke of highway *robbers* who killed Laius. Now if he  
 uses the same number, it was not I who killed him. One man cannot be the  
 same as many. But if he speaks of a man travelling alone, then clearly the  
 burden of the guilt inclines towards me.

920

JOCASTA: Be sure, at least, that this was how he told the story. He cannot unsay it now, for every one in the city heard it—not I alone. But, Oedipus, even if he diverges from what he said then, he shall never prove that the murder of  
 925 Laius squares rightly with the prophecy—for Loxias declared that the king should be killed by his own son. And that poor creature did not kill him surely,—for he died himself first. So as far as prophecy goes, henceforward I shall not look to the right hand or the left.

OEDIPUS: Right. But yet, send some one for the peasant to bring him here; do  
 930 not neglect it.

JOCASTA: I will send quickly. Now let me go indoors. I will do nothing except what pleases you.

[*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS: [*Strophe.*] May destiny ever find me  
 pious in word and deed  
 935 prescribed by the laws that live on high:  
 laws begotten in the clear air of heaven,  
 whose only father is Olympus;  
 no mortal nature brought them to birth,  
 no forgetfulness shall lull them to sleep;  
 940 for God is great in them and grows not old.

[*Antistrophe.*]

Insolence breeds the tyrant, insolence  
 if it is glutted with a surfeit, unseasonable, unprofitable,  
 climbs to the roof-top and plunges  
 sheer down to the ruin that must be,  
 945 and there its feet are no service.  
 But I pray that the God may never  
 abolish the eager ambition that profits the state.  
 For I shall never cease to hold the God as our protector.

[*Strophe.*]

If a man walks with haughtiness  
 950 of hand or word and gives no heed  
 to Justice and the shrines of Gods  
 despises—may an evil doom  
 smite him for his ill-starred pride of heart!—  
 if he reaps gains without justice  
 955 and will not hold from impiety  
 and his fingers itch for untouchable things.  
 When such things are done, what man shall contrive  
 to shield his soul from the shafts of the God?  
 When such deeds are held in honour,  
 960 why should I honour the Gods in the dance?

[*Antistrophe.*]

No longer to the holy place,  
 to the navel of earth I'll go

to worship, nor to Abae  
 nor to Olympia,  
 unless the oracles are proved to fit, 965  
 for all men's hands to point at.  
 O Zeus, if you are rightly called  
 the sovereign lord, all-mastering,  
 let this not escape you nor your ever-living power!  
 The oracles concerning Laius 970  
 are old and dim and men regard them not.  
 Apollo is nowhere clear in honour; God's service perishes.

[Enter JOCASTA, carrying garlands.]

JOCASTA: Princes of the land, I have had the thought to go  
 to the Gods' temples, bringing in my hand  
 garlands and gifts of incense, as you see. 975  
 For Oedipus excites himself too much  
 at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing,  
 like a man of sense, what will be from what was,  
 but he is always at the speaker's mercy,  
 when he speaks terrors. I can do no good 980  
 by my advice, and so I came as suppliant  
 to you, Lycaean Apollo, who are nearest.  
 These are the symbols of my prayer and this  
 my prayer: grant us escape free of the curse.  
 Now when we look to him we are all afraid; 985  
 he's pilot of our ship and he is frightened.

[Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER: Might I learn from you, sirs, where is the house of Oedipus? Or best  
 of all, if you know, where is the king himself?  
 CHORUS: This is his house and he is within doors. This lady is his wife and mother 990  
 of his children.  
 MESSENGER: God bless you, lady, and God bless your household! God bless Oedi-  
 pus' noble wife!  
 JOCASTA: God bless you, sir, for your kind greeting! What do you want of us that  
 you have come here? What have you to tell us?  
 MESSENGER: Good news, lady. Good for your house and for your husband. 995  
 JOCASTA: What is your news? Who sent you to us?  
 MESSENGER: I come from Corinth and the news I bring will give you pleasure.  
 Perhaps a little pain too.  
 JOCASTA: What is this news of double meaning?  
 MESSENGER: The people of the Isthmus will choose Oedipus to be their king. 1000  
 That is the rumour there.  
 JOCASTA: But isn't their king still old Polybus?  
 MESSENGER: No. He is in his grave. Death has got him.  
 JOCASTA: Is that the truth? Is Oedipus' father dead?  
 MESSENGER: May I die myself if it be otherwise! 1005  
 JOCASTA: [To a SERVANT.] Be quick and run to the King with the news! O oracles  
 of the Gods, where are you now? It was from this man Oedipus fled, lest he



should be his murderer! And now he is dead, in the course of nature, and not killed by Oedipus.

[Enter OEDIPUS.]

1010 OEDIPUS: Dearest Jocasta, why have you sent for me?

JOCASTA: Listen to this man and when you hear reflect what is the outcome of the holy oracles of the Gods.

OEDIPUS: Who is he? What is his message for me?

JOCASTA: He is from Corinth and he tells us that your father Polybus is dead and  
1015 gone.

OEDIPUS: What's this you say, sir? Tell me yourself.

MESSANGER: Since this is the first matter you want clearly told: Polybus has gone down to death. You may be sure of it.

OEDIPUS: By treachery or sickness?

1020 MESSENGER: A small thing will put old bodies asleep.

OEDIPUS: So he died of sickness, it seems,—poor old man!

MESSANGER: Yes, and of age—the long years he had measured.

OEDIPUS: Ha! Ha! O dear Jocasta, why should one  
look to the Pythian hearth?<sup>1</sup> Why should one look  
1025 to the birds screaming overhead? They prophesied  
that I should kill my father! But he's dead,  
and hidden deep in earth, and I stand here  
who never laid a hand on spear against him,—  
unless perhaps he died of longing for me,  
1030 and thus I am his murderer. But they,  
the oracles, as they stand—he's taken them  
away with him, they're dead as he himself is,  
and worthless.

JOCASTA: That I told you before now.

OEDIPUS: You did, but I was misled by my fear.

1035 JOCASTA: Then lay no more of them to heart, not one.

OEDIPUS: But surely I must fear my mother's bed?

JOCASTA: Why should man fear since chance is all in all  
for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing?  
Best to live lightly, as one can, unthinkingly.

1040 As to your mother's marriage bed,—don't fear it.  
Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles,  
many a man has lain with his own mother.  
But he to whom such things are nothing bears  
his life most easily.

1045 OEDIPUS: All that you say would be said perfectly  
if she were dead; but since she lives I must  
still fear, although you talk so well, Jocasta.

JOCASTA: Still in your father's death there's light of comfort?

OEDIPUS: Great light of comfort; but I fear the living.

1050 MESSENGER: Who is the woman that makes you afraid?

OEDIPUS: Merope, old man, Polybus' wife.

1. Delphi.

MESSENGER: What about her frightens the queen and you?

OEDIPUS: A terrible oracle, stranger, from the Gods.

MESSENGER: Can it be told? Or does the sacred law

forbid another to have knowledge of it?

1055

OEDIPUS: O no! Once on a time Loxias said

that I should lie with my own mother and

take on my hands the blood of my own father.

And so for these long years I've lived away

from Corinth; it has been to my great happiness;

but yet it's sweet to see the face of parents.

1060

MESSENGER: This was the fear which drove you out of Corinth?

OEDIPUS: Old man, I did not wish to kill my father.

MESSENGER: Why should I not free you from this fear, sir,

since I have come to you in all goodwill?

1065

OEDIPUS: You would not find me thankless if you did.

MESSENGER: Why, it was just for this I brought the news,—

to earn your thanks when you had come safe home.

OEDIPUS: No, I will never come near my parents.

MESSENGER: Son,

it's very plain you don't know what you're doing.

1070

OEDIPUS: What do you mean, old man? For God's sake, tell me.

MESSENGER: If your homecoming is checked by fears like these.

OEDIPUS: Yes, I'm afraid that Phoebus may prove right.

MESSENGER: The murder and the incest?

OEDIPUS: Yes, old man;

that is my constant terror.

MESSENGER: Do you know

that all your fears are empty?

1075

OEDIPUS: How is that,

if they are father and mother and I their son?

MESSENGER: Because Polybus was no kin to you in blood.

OEDIPUS: What, was not Polybus my father?

MESSENGER: No more than I but just so much.

OEDIPUS: How can

my father be my father as much as one

that's nothing to me?

1080

MESSENGER: Neither he nor I

begat you.

OEDIPUS: Why then did he call me son?

MESSENGER: A gift he took you from these hands of mine.

OEDIPUS: Did he love so much what he took from another's hand?

1085

MESSENGER: His childlessness before persuaded him.

OEDIPUS: Was I a child you bought or found when I

was given to him?

MESSENGER: On Cithaeron's slopes

in the twisting thickets you were found.

OEDIPUS: And why

were you a traveller in those parts?

MESSENGER: I was

1090

in charge of mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS: You were a shepherd?

A hireling vagrant?

MESSENGER: Yes, but at least at that time  
the man that saved your life, son.

OEDIPUS: What ailed me when you took me in your arms?

1095 MESSENGER: In that your ankles should be witnesses.

OEDIPUS: Why do you speak of that old pain?

MESSENGER: I loosed you;  
the tendons of your feet were pierced and fettered,—

OEDIPUS: My swaddling clothes brought me a rare disgrace.

MESSENGER: So that from this you're called your present name.<sup>2</sup>

1100 OEDIPUS: Was this my father's doing or my mother's?

For God's sake, tell me.

MESSENGER: I don't know, but he  
who gave you to me has more knowledge than I.

OEDIPUS: You yourself did not find me then? You took me  
from someone else?

MESSENGER: Yes, from another shepherd.

1105 OEDIPUS: Who was he? Do you know him well enough  
to tell?

MESSENGER: He was called Laius' man.

OEDIPUS: You mean the king who reigned here in the old days?

MESSENGER: Yes, he was that man's shepherd.

OEDIPUS: Is he alive  
still, so that I could see him?

MESSENGER: You who live here  
would know that best.

1110 OEDIPUS: Do any of you here  
know of this shepherd whom he speaks about  
in town or in the fields? Tell me. It's time  
that this was found out once for all.

CHORUS: I think he is none other than the peasant

1115 whom you have sought to see already; but  
Jocasta here can tell us best of that.

OEDIPUS: Jocasta, do you know about this man  
whom we have sent for? Is he the man he mentions?

JOCASTA: Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it heed;

1120 nor try to keep in mind what has been said.  
It will be wasted labour.

OEDIPUS: With such clues  
I could not fail to bring my birth to light.

JOCASTA: I beg you—do not hunt this out—I beg you,  
if you have any care for your own life.  
What I am suffering is enough.

1125 OEDIPUS: Keep up  
your heart, Jocasta. Though I'm proved a slave,

2. *Oedipus* means, literally, "swollen foot."

- thrice slave, and though my mother is thrice slave,  
 you'll not be shown to be of lowly lineage.
- JOCASTA: O be persuaded by me, I entreat you;  
 do not do this. 1130
- OEDIPUS: I will not be persuaded to let be  
 the chance of finding out the whole thing clearly.
- JOCASTA: It is because I wish you well that I  
 give you this counsel—and it's the best counsel.
- OEDIPUS: Then the best counsel vexes me, and has 1135  
 for some while since.
- JOCASTA: O Oedipus, God help you!  
 God keep you from the knowledge of who you are!
- OEDIPUS: Here, someone, go and fetch the shepherd for me;  
 and let her find her joy in her rich family!
- JOCASTA: O Oedipus, unhappy Oedipus! 1140  
 that is all I can call you, and the last thing  
 that I shall ever call you.
- [*Exit.*]
- CHORUS: Why has the queen gone, Oedipus, in wild  
 grief rushing from us? I am afraid that trouble  
 will break out of this silence. 1145
- OEDIPUS: Break out what will! I at least shall be  
 willing to see my ancestry, though humble.  
 Perhaps she is ashamed of my low birth,  
 for she has all a woman's high-flown pride.  
 But I account myself a child of Fortune, 1150  
 beneficent Fortune, and I shall not be  
 dishonoured. She's the mother from whom I spring;  
 the months, my brothers, marked me, now as small,  
 and now again as mighty. Such is my breeding,  
 and I shall never prove so false to it, 1155  
 as not to find the secret of my birth.
- CHORUS: [*Strophe.*] If I am a prophet and wise of heart  
 you shall not fail, Cithaeron,  
 by the limitless sky, you shall not!—  
 to know at tomorrow's full moon 1160  
 that Oedipus honours you,  
 as native to him and mother and nurse at once;  
 and that you are honoured in dancing by us, as finding favour in sight of  
 our king.  
 Apollo, to whom we cry, find these things pleasing!
- [*Antistrophe.*]
- Who was it bore you, child? One of 1165  
 the long-lived nymphs who lay with Pan<sup>3</sup>—  
 the father who treads the hills?

3. God of nature; half man, half goat.

Or was she a bride of Loxias, your mother? The grassy slopes  
 are all of them dear to him. Or perhaps Cyllene's<sup>4</sup> king  
 1170 or the Bacchants' God<sup>5</sup> that lives on the tops  
 of the hills received you a gift from some  
 one of the Helicon Nymphs,<sup>6</sup> with whom he mostly plays?

[Enter an OLD MAN, led by OEDIPUS' servants.]

OEDIPUS: If someone like myself who never met him  
 may make a guess,—I think this is the herdsman,  
 1175 whom we were seeking. His old age is consonant  
 with the other. And besides, the men who bring him  
 I recognize as my own servants. You  
 perhaps may better me in knowledge since  
 you've seen the man before.

CHORUS: You can be sure  
 1180 I recognize him. For if Laius  
 had ever an honest shepherd, this was he.

OEDIPUS: You, sir, from Corinth, I must ask you first,  
 is this the man you spoke of?

MESSENGER: This is he  
 before your eyes.

OEDIPUS: Old man, look here at me  
 1185 and tell me what I ask you. Were you ever  
 a servant of King Laius?

HERDSMAN: I was,—  
 no slave he bought but reared in his own house.

OEDIPUS: What did you do as work? How did you live?

HERDSMAN: Most of my life was spent among the flocks.

1190 OEDIPUS: In what part of the country did you live?

HERDSMAN: Cithaeron and the places near to it.

OEDIPUS: And somewhere there perhaps you knew this man?

HERDSMAN: What was his occupation? Who?

OEDIPUS: This man here  
 have you had any dealings with him?

HERDSMAN: No—  
 1195 not such that I can quickly call to mind.

MESSENGER: That is no wonder, master. But I'll make him remember what he  
 does not know. For I know, that he well knows the country of Cithaeron, how  
 he with two flocks, I with one kept company for three years—each year half a  
 year—from spring till autumn time and then when winter came I drove my  
 1200 flocks to our fold home again and he to Laius' steadings. Well—am I right or  
 not in what I said we did?

HERDSMAN: You're right—although it's a long time ago.

MESSENGER: Do you remember giving me a child  
 to bring up as my foster child?

HERDSMAN: What's this?

4. Mountain reputed to be the birthplace of Hermes, the messenger god. 5. Dionysus.

6. The Muses; nine sister goddesses who presided over poetry, music, and the arts.

- Why do you ask this question?
- MESSANGER: Look old man, 1205  
here he is—here's the man who was that child!
- HERDSMAN: Death take you! Won't you hold your tongue?
- OEDIPUS: No, no,  
do not find fault with him, old man. Your words  
are more at fault than his.
- HERDSMAN: O best of masters,  
how do I give offense?
- OEDIPUS: When you refuse 1210  
to speak about the child of whom he asks you.
- HERDSMAN: He speaks out of his ignorance, without meaning.
- OEDIPUS: If you'll not talk to gratify me, you  
will talk with pain to urge you.
- HERDSMAN: O please, sir,  
don't hurt an old man, sir.
- OEDIPUS: [*To the SERVANTS.*] Here, one of you, 1215  
twist his hands behind him.
- HERDSMAN: Why, God help me, why?  
What do you want to know?
- OEDIPUS: You gave a child  
to him,—the child he asked you of?
- HERDSMAN: I did.  
I wish I'd died the day I did.
- OEDIPUS: You will  
unless you tell me truly.
- HERDSMAN: And I'll die 1220  
far worse if I should tell you.
- OEDIPUS: This fellow  
is bent on more delays, as it would seem.
- HERDSMAN: O no, no! I have told you that I gave it.
- OEDIPUS: Where did you get this child from? Was it your own or did you get it  
from another?
- HERDSMAN: Not 1225  
my own at all; I had it from someone.
- OEDIPUS: One of these citizens? or from what house?
- HERDSMAN: O master, please—I beg you, master, please don't ask me more.
- OEDIPUS: You're a dead man if I  
ask you again.
- HERDSMAN: It was one of the children 1230  
of Laius.
- OEDIPUS: A slave? Or born in wedlock?
- HERDSMAN: O God, I am on the brink of frightful speech.
- OEDIPUS: And I of frightful hearing. But I must hear.
- HERDSMAN: The child was called his child; but she within,  
your wife would tell you best how all this was. 1235
- OEDIPUS: *She* gave it to you?
- HERDSMAN: Yes, she did, my lord.
- OEDIPUS: To do what with it?

HERDSMAN: Make away with it.

OEDIPUS: She was so hard—its mother?

HERDSMAN: Aye, through fear  
of evil oracles.

OEDIPUS: Which?

HERDSMAN: They said that he  
should kill his parents.

1240 OEDIPUS: How was it that you  
gave it away to this old man?

HERDSMAN: O master,  
I pitied it, and thought that I could send it  
off to another country and this man  
was from another country. But he saved it  
1245 for the most terrible troubles. If you are  
the man he says you are, you're bred to misery.

OEDIPUS: O, O, O, they will all come,  
all come out clearly! Light of the sun, let me  
look upon you no more after today!

1250 I who first saw the light bred of a match  
accursed, and accursed in my living  
with them I lived with, cursed in my killing.

[*Exeunt all but the CHORUS.*]

CHORUS: [*Strophe.*] O generations of men, how I  
count you as equal with those who live  
1255 not at all!

What man, what man on earth wins more  
of happiness than a seeming  
and after that turning away?

Oedipus, you are my pattern of this,  
1260 Oedipus, you and your fate!  
Luckless Oedipus, whom of all men  
I envy not at all.

[*Antistrophe.*]

In as much as he shot his bolt  
beyond the others and won the prize

1265 of happiness complete—  
O Zeus—and killed and reduced to nought  
the hooked taloned maid of the riddling speech,<sup>7</sup>  
standing a tower against death for my land:

hence he was called my king and hence  
1270 was honoured the highest of all  
honours; and hence he ruled  
in the great city of Thebes.

7. The sphinx, who killed herself when Oedipus was the first to give a correct answer to her riddle: "What walks on four feet in the morning, on two at noon, and on three in the evening?"

[*Strophe.*]

But now whose tale is more miserable?  
Who is there lives with a savager fate?  
Whose troubles so reverse his life as his? 1275

O Oedipus, the famous prince  
for whom a great haven  
the same both as father and son  
sufficed for generation,  
how, O how, have the furrows ploughed 1280  
by your father endured to bear you, poor wretch,  
and hold their peace so long?

[*Antistrophe.*]

Time who sees all has found you out  
against your will; judges your marriage accursed,  
begetter and begot at one in it. 1285

O child of Laius,  
would I had never seen you.  
I weep for you and cry  
a dirge of lamentation.

To speak directly, I drew my breath 1290  
from you at the first and so now I lull  
my mouth to sleep with your name.

[*Enter a SECOND MESSENGER.*]

SECOND MESSENGER: O Princes always honoured by our country,  
what deeds you'll hear of and what horrors see,  
what grief you'll feel, if you as true born Thebans 1295  
care for the house of Labdacus' sons.<sup>8</sup>

Phasis nor Ister cannot purge this house,  
I think, with all their streams, such things  
it hides, such evils shortly will bring forth  
into the light, whether they will or not; 1300  
and troubles hurt the most  
when they prove self-inflicted.

CHORUS: What we had known before did not fall short  
of bitter groaning's worth; what's more to tell?

SECOND MESSENGER: Shortest to hear and tell—our glorious queen 1305  
Jocasta's dead.

CHORUS: Unhappy woman! How?

SECOND MESSENGER: By her own hand. The worst of what was done  
you cannot know. You did not see the sight.  
Yet in so far as I remember it

8. Labdacus, king of Thebes, was father of Laius and grandfather of Oedipus. *Phasis . . . Ister* (line 1297): rivers near Thebes.



1310 you'll hear the end of our unlucky queen.  
 When she came raging into the house she went  
 straight to her marriage bed, tearing her hair  
 with both her hands, and crying upon Laius  
 long dead—Do you remember, Laius,  
 1315 that night long past which bred a child for us  
 to send you to your death and leave  
 a mother making children with her son?  
 And then she groaned and cursed the bed in which  
 she brought forth husband by her husband, children  
 1320 by her own child, an infamous double bond.  
 How after that she died I do not know,—  
 for Oedipus distracted us from seeing.  
 He burst upon us shouting and we looked  
 to him as he paced frantically around,  
 1325 begging us always: Give me a sword, I say,  
 to find this wife no wife, this mother's womb,  
 this field of double sowing whence I sprang  
 and where I sowed my children! As he raved  
 some god showed him the way—none of us there.  
 1330 Bellowing terribly and led by some  
 invisible guide he rushed on the two doors,—  
 wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets,  
 he charged inside. There, there, we saw his wife  
 hanging, the twisted rope around her neck.  
 1335 When he saw her, he cried out fearfully  
 and cut the dangling noose. Then, as she lay,  
 poor woman, on the ground, what happened after,  
 was terrible to see. He tore the brooches—  
 the gold chased<sup>9</sup> brooches fastening her robe—  
 1340 away from her and lifting them up high  
 dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out  
 such things as: they will never see the crime  
 I have committed or had done upon me!  
 Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on  
 1345 forbidden faces, do not recognize  
 those whom you long for—with such imprecations  
 he struck his eyes again and yet again  
 with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs gushed  
 and stained his beard—no sluggish oozing drops  
 1350 but a black rain and bloody hail poured down.  
  
 So it has broken—and not on one head  
 but troubles mixed for husband and for wife.  
 The fortune of the days gone by was true  
 good fortune—but today groans and destruction

9. Decorated with ornamental grooves.

and death and shame—of all ills can be named 1355  
not one is missing.

CHORUS: Is he now in any ease from pain?

SECOND MESSENGER: He shouts  
for someone to unbar the doors and show him  
to all the men of Thebes, his father's killer,  
his mother's—no I cannot say the word, 1360  
it is unholy—for he'll cast himself,  
out of the land, he says, and not remain  
to bring a curse upon his house, the curse  
he called upon it in his proclamation. But  
he wants for strength, aye, and some one to guide him; 1365  
his sickness is too great to bear. You, too,  
will be shown that. The bolts are opening.  
Soon you will see a sight to waken pity  
even in the horror of it.

[*Enter the blinded OEDIPUS.*]

CHORUS: This is a terrible sight for men to see! 1370  
I never found a worse!  
Poor wretch, what madness came upon you!  
What evil spirit leaped upon your life  
to your ill-luck—a leap beyond man's strength!  
Indeed I pity you, but I cannot 1375  
look at you, though there's much I want to ask  
and much to learn and much to see.  
I shudder at the sight of you.

OEDIPUS: O, O,  
where am I going? Where is my voice 1380  
borne on the wind to and fro?  
Spirit, how far have you sprung?

CHORUS: To a terrible place whereof men's ears  
may not hear, nor their eyes behold it.

OEDIPUS: Darkness! 1385  
Horror of darkness enfolding, resistless, unspeakable visitant sped by an ill  
wind in haste!  
madness and stabbing pain and memory  
of evil deeds I have done!

CHORUS: In such misfortunes it's no wonder 1390  
if double weighs the burden of your grief.

OEDIPUS: My friend,  
you are the only one steadfast, the only one that attends on me;  
you still stay nursing the blind man.  
Your care is not unnoticed. I can know 1395  
your voice, although this darkness is my world.

CHORUS: Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you dare  
so far to do despite to your own eyes?  
what spirit urged you to it?

OEDIPUS: It was Apollo, friends, Apollo,

1400 that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion.  
 But the hand that struck me  
 was none but my own.  
 Why should I see  
 whose vision showed me nothing sweet to see?

1405 CHORUS: These things are as you say.

OEDIPUS: What can I see to love?

What greeting can touch my ears with joy?  
 Take me away, and haste—to a place out of the way!  
 Take me away, my friends, the greatly miserable,  
 1410 the most accursed, whom God too hates  
 above all men on earth!

CHORUS: Unhappy in your mind and your misfortune,  
 would I had never known you!

OEDIPUS: Curse on the man who took

1415 the cruel bonds from off my legs, as I lay in the field.  
 He stole me from death and saved me,  
 no kindly service.  
 Had I died then  
 I would not be so burdensome to friends.

1420 CHORUS: I, too, could have wished it had been so.

OEDIPUS: Then I would not have come

to kill my father and marry my mother infamously.  
 Now I am godless and child of impurity,  
 begetter in the same seed that created my wretched self.  
 1425 If there is any ill worse than ill,  
 that is the lot of Oedipus.

CHORUS: I cannot say your remedy was good;  
 you would be better dead than blind and living.

OEDIPUS: What I have done here was best done—don't tell me

1430 otherwise, do not give me further counsel.

I do not know with what eyes I could look  
 upon my father when I die and go  
 under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother—  
 those two to whom I have done things deserving  
 1435 worse punishment than hanging. Would the sight  
 of children, bred as mine are, gladden me?

No, not these eyes, never. And my city,  
 its towers and sacred places of the Gods,  
 of these I robbed my miserable self

1440 when I commanded all to drive *him* out,  
 the criminal since proved by God impure  
 and of the race of Laius.

To this guilt I bore witness against myself—  
 with what eyes shall I look upon my people?

1445 No. If there were a means to choke the fountain  
 of hearing I would not have stayed my hand  
 from locking up my miserable carcase,  
 seeing and hearing nothing; it is sweet  
 to keep our thoughts out of the range of hurt.

Cithaeron, why did you receive me? why  
 having received me did you not kill me straight?  
 And so I had not shown to men my birth. 1450

O Polybus and Corinth and the house,  
 the old house that I used to call my father's—  
 what fairness you were nurse to, and what foulness 1455  
 festered beneath! Now I am found to be  
 a sinner and a son of sinners. Crossroads,  
 and hidden glade, oak and the narrow way  
 at the crossroads, that drank my father's blood  
 offered you by my hands, do you remember 1460  
 still what I did as you looked on, and what  
 I did when I came here? O marriage, marriage!  
 you bred me and again when you had bred  
 bred children of your child and showed to men  
 brides, wives and mothers and the foulest deeds 1465  
 that can be in this world of ours.

Come—it's unfit to say what is unfit  
 to do.—I beg of you in God's name hide me  
 somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,  
 or throw me into the sea, to be forever 1470  
 out of your sight. Approach and deign to touch me  
 for all my wretchedness, and do not fear.  
 No man but I can bear my evil doom.

CHORUS: Here Creon comes in fit time to perform  
 or give advice in what you ask of us. 1475  
 Creon is left sole ruler in your stead.

OEDIPUS: Creon! Creon! What shall I say to him?  
 How can I justly hope that he will trust me?  
 In what is past I have been proved towards him  
 an utter liar.

[Enter CREON.]

CREON: Oedipus, I've come 1480  
 not so that I might laugh at you nor taunt you  
 with evil of the past. But if you still  
 are without shame before the face of men  
 reverence at least the flame that gives all life,  
 our Lord the Sun, and do not show unveiled 1485  
 to him pollution such that neither land  
 nor holy rain nor light of day can welcome.

[To a SERVANT.]

Be quick and take him in. It is most decent  
 that only kin should see and hear the troubles  
 of kin.

OEDIPUS: I beg you, since you've torn me from 1490  
 my dreadful expectations and have come  
 in a most noble spirit to a man

that has used you vilely—do a thing for me.

I shall speak for your own good, not for my own.

1495 CREON: What do you need that you would ask of me?

OEDIPUS: Drive me from here with all the speed you can  
to where I may not hear a human voice.

CREON: Be sure, I would have done this had not I  
wished first of all to learn from the God the course  
of action I should follow.

1500 OEDIPUS: But his word  
has been quite clear to let the parricide,  
the sinner, die.

CREON: Yes, that indeed was said.  
But in the present need we had best discover  
what we should do.

OEDIPUS: And will you ask about  
a man so wretched?

1505 CREON: Now even you will trust  
the God.

OEDIPUS: So. I command you—and will beseech you—  
to her that lies inside that house give burial  
as you would have it; she is yours and rightly  
you will perform the rites for her. For me—  
1510 never let this my father's city have me  
living a dweller in it. Leave me live  
in the mountains where Cithaeron is, that's called  
*my* mountain, which my mother and my father  
while they were living would have made my tomb.  
1515 So I may die by their decree who sought  
indeed to kill me. Yet I know this much:  
no sickness and no other thing will kill me.  
I would not have been saved from death if not  
for some strange evil fate. Well, let my fate  
go where it will.

1520 Creon, you need not care  
about my sons; they're men and so wherever  
they are, they will not lack a livelihood.  
But my two girls—so sad and pitiful—  
whose table never stood apart from mine,  
1525 and everything I touched they always shared—  
O Creon, have a thought for them! And most  
I wish that you might suffer me to touch them  
and sorrow with them.

[*Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE, OEDIPUS' two daughters.*]

O my lord! O true noble Creon! Can I  
1530 really be touching them, as when I saw?  
What shall I say?  
Yes, I can hear them sobbing—my two darlings!  
and Creon has had pity and has sent me

what I loved most?

Am I right?

1535

CREON: You're right: it was I gave you this  
because I knew from old days how you loved them  
as I see now.

OEDIPUS: God bless you for it, Creon,  
and may God guard you better on your road  
than he did me!

O children,

1540

where are you? Come here, come to my hands,  
a brother's hands which turned your father's eyes,  
those bright eyes you knew once, to what you see,  
a father seeing nothing, knowing nothing,  
begetting you from his own source of life.

1545

I weep for you—I cannot see your faces—  
I weep when I think of the bitterness  
there will be in your lives, how you must live  
before the world. At what assemblages  
of citizens will you make one? to what  
gay company will you go and not come home  
in tears instead of sharing in the holiday?

1550

And when you're ripe for marriage, who will he be,  
the man who'll risk to take such infamy  
as shall cling to my children, to bring hurt  
on them and those that marry with them? What  
curse is not there? "Your father killed his father  
and sowed the seed where he had sprung himself  
and begot you out of the womb that held him."

1555

These insults you will hear. Then who will marry you?  
No one, my children; clearly you are doomed  
to waste away in barrenness unmarried.

1560

Son of Menoeceus,<sup>1</sup> since you are all the father  
left these two girls, and we, their parents, both  
are dead to them—do not allow them wander  
like beggars, poor and husbandless.

1565

They are of your own blood.

And do not make them equal with myself  
in wretchedness; for you can see them now  
so young, so utterly alone, save for you only.

1570

Touch my hand, noble Creon, and say yes.  
If you were older, children, and were wiser,  
there's much advice I'd give you. But as it is,  
let this be what you pray: give me a life  
wherever there is opportunity  
to live, and better life than was my father's.

1575

CREON: Your tears have had enough of scope; now go within the house.

OEDIPUS: I must obey, though bitter of heart.

1. Father of Creon and Jocasta.

CREON: In season, all is good.

OEDIPUS: Do you know on what conditions I obey?

1580 CREON: You tell me them,  
and I shall know them when I hear.

OEDIPUS: That you shall send me out  
to live away from Thebes.

CREON: That gift you must ask of the Gods.

OEDIPUS: But I'm now hated by the Gods.

CREON: So quickly you'll obtain your prayer.

OEDIPUS: You consent then?

CREON: What I do not mean, I do not use to say.

OEDIPUS: Now lead me away from here.

1585 CREON: Let go the children, then, and come.

OEDIPUS: Do not take them from me.

CREON: Do not seek to be master in everything,  
for the things you mastered did not follow you throughout your life.

[As CREON and OEDIPUS go out.]

CHORUS: You that live in my ancestral Thebes, behold this Oedipus,—  
him who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful;

1590 not a citizen who did not look with envy on his lot—  
see him now and see the breakers of misfortune swallow him!  
Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till  
he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain.

ca. 429 B.C.E.

## HENRIK IBSEN

### *A Doll House*<sup>1</sup>

#### CHARACTERS

TORVALD HELMER, *a lawyer*

NORA, *his wife*

DR. RANK

MRS. LINDE

NILS KROGSTAD, *a bank clerk*

THE HELMERS' THREE SMALL CHILDREN

ANNE-MARIE, *their nurse*

HELENE, *a maid*

A DELIVERY BOY

*The action takes place in HELMER's residence.*

#### ACT I

*A comfortable room, tastefully but not expensively furnished. A door to the right in the back wall leads to the entryway; another to the left leads to HELMER's study. Between these doors, a piano. Midway in the left-hand wall a door, and further back a window.*

1. Translated by Rolf Fjelde.

*Near the window a round table with an armchair and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, toward the rear, a door, and nearer the foreground a porcelain stove with two armchairs and a rocking chair beside it. Between the stove and the side door, a small table. Engravings on the walls. An etagère with china figures and other small art objects; a small bookcase with richly bound books; the floor carpeted; a fire burning in the stove. It is a winter day.*

*A bell rings in the entryway; shortly after we hear the door being unlocked. NORA comes into the room, humming happily to herself; she is wearing street clothes and carries an armload of packages, which she puts down on the table to the right. She has left the hall door open; and through it a DELIVERY BOY is seen, holding a Christmas tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who let them in.*

NORA: Hide the tree well, Helene. The children mustn't get a glimpse of it till this evening, after it's trimmed. [*To the DELIVERY BOY, taking out her purse.*] How much?

DELIVERY BOY: Fifty, ma'am.

NORA: There's a crown. No, keep the change. [*The BOY thanks her and leaves. NORA shuts the door. She laughs softly to herself while taking off her street things. Drawing a bag of macaroons from her pocket, she eats a couple, then steals over and listens at her husband's study door.*] Yes, he's home. [*Hums again as she moves to the table right.*]

HELMER: [*From the study.*] Is that my little lark twittering out there?

NORA: [*Busy opening some packages.*] Yes, it is.

HELMER: Is that my squirrel rummaging around?

NORA: Yes!

HELMER: When did my squirrel get in?

NORA: Just now. [*Putting the macaroon bag in her pocket and wiping her mouth.*] Do come in, Torvald, and see what I've bought.

HELMER: Can't be disturbed. [*After a moment he opens the door and peers in, pen in hand.*] Bought, you say? All that there? Has the little spendthrift been out throwing money around again?

NORA: Oh, but Torvald, this year we really should let ourselves go a bit. It's the first Christmas we haven't had to economize.

HELMER: But you know we can't go squandering.

NORA: Oh yes, Torvald, we can squander a little now. Can't we? Just a tiny, wee bit. Now that you've got a big salary and are going to make piles and piles of money.

HELMER: Yes—starting New Year's. But then it's a full three months till the raise comes through.

NORA: Pooh! We can borrow that long.

HELMER: Nora! [*Goes over and playfully takes her by the ear.*] Are your scatterbrains off again? What if today I borrowed a thousand crowns, and you squandered them over Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a roof tile fell on my head, and I lay there—

NORA: [*Putting her hand on his mouth.*] Oh! Don't say such things!

HELMER: Yes, but what if it happened—then what?

NORA: If anything so awful happened, then it just wouldn't matter if I had debts or not.

HELMER: Well, but the people I'd borrowed from?

NORA: Them? Who cares about them! They're strangers.

HELMER: Nora, Nora, how like a woman! No, but seriously, Nora, you know what



I think about that. No debts! Never borrow! Something of freedom's lost—and something of beauty, too—from a home that's founded on borrowing and debt. We've made a brave stand up to now, the two of us; and we'll go right on like that the little while we have to.

NORA: [*Going toward the stove.*] Yes, whatever you say, Torvald.

HELMER: [*Following her.*] Now, now, the little lark's wings mustn't droop. Come on, don't be a sulky squirrel. [*Taking out his wallet.*] Nora, guess what I have here.

NORA: [*Turning quickly.*] Money!

HELMER: There, see. [*Hands her some notes.*] Good grief, I know how costs go up in a house at Christmastime.

NORA: Ten—twenty—thirty—forty. Oh, thank you, Torvald; I can manage no end on this.

HELMER: You really will have to.

NORA: Oh yes, I promise I will. But come here so I can show you everything I bought. And so cheap! Look, new clothes for Ivar here—and a sword. Here a horse and a trumpet for Bob. And a doll and a doll's bed here for Emmy; they're nothing much, but she'll tear them to bits in no time anyway. And here I have dress material and handkerchiefs for the maids. Old Anne-Marie really deserves something more.

HELMER: And what's in that package there?

NORA: [*With a cry.*] Torvald, no! You can't see that till tonight!

HELMER: I see. But tell me now, you little prodigal, what have you thought of for yourself?

NORA: For myself? Oh, I don't want anything at all.

HELMER: Of course you do. Tell me just what—within reason—you'd most like to have.

NORA: I honestly don't know. Oh, listen, Torvald—

HELMER: Well?

NORA: [*Fumbling at his coat buttons, without looking at him.*] If you want to give me something, then maybe you could—you could—

HELMER: Come, on, out with it.

NORA: [*Hurriedly.*] You could give me money, Torvald. No more than you think you can spare; then one of these days I'll buy something with it.

HELMER: But Nora—

NORA: Oh, please, Torvald darling, do that! I beg you, please. Then I could hang the bills in pretty gilt paper on the Christmas tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

HELMER: What are those little birds called that always fly through their fortunes?

NORA: Oh yes, spendthrifts; I know all that. But let's do as I say, Torvald; then I'll have time to decide what I really need most. That's very sensible, isn't it?

HELMER: [*Smiling.*] Yes, very—that is, if you actually hung onto the money I give you, and you actually used it to buy yourself something. But it goes for the house and for all sorts of foolish things, and then I only have to lay out some more.

NORA: Oh, but Torvald—

HELMER: Don't deny it, my dear little Nora. [*Putting his arm around her waist.*] Spendthrifts are sweet, but they use up a frightful amount of money. It's incredible what it costs a man to feed such birds.

NORA: Oh, how can you say that! Really, I save everything I can.

HELMER: [*Laughing.*] Yes, that's the truth. Everything you can. But that's nothing at all.

NORA: [*Humming, with a smile of quiet satisfaction.*] Hm, if you only knew what expenses we larks and squirrels have, Torvald.

HELMER: You're an odd little one. Exactly the way your father was. You're never at a loss for scaring up money; but the moment you have it, it runs right out through your fingers; you never know what you've done with it. Well, one takes you as you are. It's deep in your blood. Yes, these things are hereditary, Nora.

NORA: Ah, I could wish I'd inherited many of Papa's qualities.

HELMER: And I couldn't wish you anything but just what you are, my sweet little lark. But wait; it seems to me you have a very—what should I call it?—a very suspicious look today—

NORA: I do?

HELMER: You certainly do. Look me straight in the eye.

NORA: [*Looking at him.*] Well?

HELMER: [*Shaking an admonitory finger.*] Surely my sweet tooth hasn't been running riot in town today, has she?

NORA: No. Why do you imagine that?

HELMER: My sweet tooth really didn't make a little detour through the confectioner's?

NORA: No, I assure you, Torvald—

HELMER: Hasn't nibbled some pastry?

NORA: No, not at all.

HELMER: Not even munched a macaroon or two?

NORA: No, Torvald, I assure you, really—

HELMER: There, there now. Of course I'm only joking.

NORA: [*Going to the table, right.*] You know I could never think of going against you.

HELMER: No, I understand that; and you *have* given me your word. [*Going over to her.*] Well, you keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, Nora darling. I expect they'll come to light this evening, when the tree is lit.

NORA: Did you remember to ask Dr. Rank?

HELMER: No. But there's no need for that; it's assumed he'll be dining with us. All the same, I'll ask him when he stops by here this morning. I've ordered some fine wine. Nora, you can't imagine how I'm looking forward to this evening.

NORA: So am I. And what fun for the children, Torvald!

HELMER: Ah, it's so gratifying to know that one's gotten a safe, secure job, and with a comfortable salary. It's a great satisfaction, isn't it?

NORA: Oh, it's wonderful!

HELMER: Remember last Christmas? Three whole weeks before, you shut yourself in every evening till long after midnight, making flowers for the Christmas tree, and all the other decorations to surprise us. Ugh, that was the dullest time I've ever lived through.

NORA: It wasn't at all dull for me.

HELMER: [*Smiling.*] But the outcome *was* pretty sorry, Nora.

NORA: Oh, don't tease me with that again. How could I help it that the cat came in and tore everything to shreds.

HELMER: No, poor thing, you certainly couldn't. You wanted so much to please us all, and that's what counts. But it's just as well that the hard times are past.

NORA: Yes, it's really wonderful.

HELMER: Now I don't have to sit here alone, boring myself, and you don't have to tire your precious eyes and your fair little delicate hands—

NORA: [*Clapping her hands.*] No, is it really true, Torvald, I don't have to? Oh, how wonderfully lovely to hear! [*Taking his arm.*] Now I'll tell you just how I've thought we should plan things. Right after Christmas—[*The doorbell rings.*] Oh, the bell. [*Straightening the room up a bit.*] Somebody would have to come. What a bore!

HELMER: I'm not at home to visitors, don't forget.

MAID: [*From the hall doorway.*] Ma'am, a lady to see you—

NORA: All right, let her come in.

MAID: [*To HELMER.*] And the doctor's just come too.

HELMER: Did he go right to my study?

MAID: Yes, he did.

[HELMER goes into his room. The MAID shows in MRS. LINDE, dressed in traveling clothes, and shuts the door after her.]

MRS. LINDE: [*In a dispirited and somewhat hesitant voice.*] Hello, Nora.

NORA: [*Uncertain.*] Hello—

MRS. LINDE: You don't recognize me.

NORA: No, I don't know—but wait, I think—[*Exclaiming.*] What! Kristine! Is it really you?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, it's me.

NORA: Kristine! To think I didn't recognize you. But then, how could I? [*More quietly.*] How you've changed, Kristine!

MRS. LINDE: Yes, no doubt I have. In nine—ten long years.

NORA: Is it so long since we met! Yes, it's all of that. Oh, these last eight years have been a happy time, believe me. And so now you've come in to town, too. Made the long trip in the winter. That took courage.

MRS. LINDE: I just got here by ship this morning.

NORA: To enjoy yourself over Christmas, of course. Oh, how lovely! Yes, enjoy ourselves, we'll do that. But take your coat off. You're not still cold? [*Helping her.*] There now, let's get cozy here by the stove. No, the easy chair there! I'll take the rocker here. [*Seizing her hands.*] Yes, now you have your old look again; it was only in that first moment. You're a bit more pale, Kristine—and maybe a bit thinner.

MRS. LINDE: And much, much older, Nora.

NORA: Yes, perhaps a bit older; a tiny, tiny bit; not much at all. [*Stopping short; suddenly serious.*] Oh, but thoughtless me, to sit here, chattering away. Sweet, good Kristine, can you forgive me?

MRS. LINDE: What do you mean, Nora?

NORA: [*Softly.*] Poor Kristine, you've become a widow.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, three years ago.

NORA: Oh, I knew it, of course; I read it in the papers. Oh, Kristine, you must believe me; I often thought of writing you then, but I kept postponing it, and something always interfered.

MRS. LINDE: Nora dear, I understand completely.

NORA: No, it was awful of me, Kristine. You poor thing, how much you must have gone through. And he left you nothing?

MRS. LINDE: No.

NORA: And no children?

MRS. LINDE: No.

NORA: Nothing at all, then?

MRS. LINDE: Not even a sense of loss to feed on.

NORA: [*Looking incredulously at her.*] But Kristine, how could that be?

MRS. LINDE: [*Smiling wearily and smoothing her hair.*] Oh, sometimes it happens, Nora.

NORA: So completely alone. How terribly hard that must be for you. I have three lovely children. You can't see them now; they're out with the maid. But now you must tell me everything—

MRS. LINDE: No, no, no, tell me about yourself.

NORA: No, you begin. Today I don't want to be selfish. I want to think only of you today. But there *is* something I must tell you. Did you hear of the wonderful luck we had recently?

MRS. LINDE: No, what's that?

NORA: My husband's been made manager in the bank, just think!

MRS. LINDE: Your husband? How marvelous!

NORA: Isn't it? Being a lawyer is such an uncertain living, you know, especially if one won't touch any cases that aren't clean and decent. And of course Torvald would never do that, and I'm with him completely there. Oh, we're simply delighted, believe me! He'll join the bank right after New Year's and start getting a huge salary and lots of commissions. From now on we can live quite differently—just as we want. Oh, Kristine, I feel so light and happy! Won't it be lovely to have stacks of money and not a care in the world?

MRS. LINDE: Well, anyway, it would be lovely to have enough for necessities.

NORA: No, not just for necessities, but stacks and stacks of money!

MRS. LINDE: [*Smiling.*] Nora, Nora, aren't you sensible yet? Back in school you were such a free spender.

NORA: [*With a quiet laugh.*] Yes, that's what Torvald still says. [*Shaking her finger.*] But "Nora, Nora" isn't as silly as you all think. Really, we've been in no position for me to go squandering. We've had to work, both of us.

MRS. LINDE: You too?

NORA: Yes, at odd jobs—needlework, crocheting, embroidery, and such—[*Casually.*] and other things too. You remember that Torvald left the department when we were married? There was no chance of promotion in his office, and of course he needed to earn more money. But that first year he drove himself terribly. He took on all kinds of extra work that kept him going morning and night. It wore him down, and then he fell deathly ill. The doctors said it was essential for him to travel south.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, didn't you spend a whole year in Italy?

NORA: That's right. It wasn't easy to get away, you know. Ivar had just been born. But of course we had to go. Oh, that was a beautiful trip, and it saved Torvald's life. But it cost a frightful sum, Kristine.

MRS. LINDE: I can well imagine.

NORA: Four thousand, eight hundred crowns it cost. That's really a lot of money.

MRS. LINDE: But it's lucky you had it when you needed it.

NORA: Well, as it was, we got it from Papa.

MRS. LINDE: I see. It was just about the time your father died.

NORA: Yes, just about then. And, you know, I couldn't make that trip out to nurse him. I had to stay here, expecting Ivar any moment, and with my poor sick Torvald to care for. Dearest Papa, I never saw him again, Kristine. Oh, that was the worst time I've known in all my marriage.

MRS. LINDE: I know how you loved him. And then you went off to Italy?

NORA: Yes. We had the means now, and the doctors urged us. So we left a month after.

MRS. LINDE: And your husband came back completely cured?

NORA: Sound as a drum!

MRS. LINDE: But—the doctor?

NORA: Who?

MRS. LINDE: I thought the maid said he was a doctor, the man who came in with me.

NORA: Yes, that was Dr. Rank—but he's not making a sick call. He's our closest friend, and he stops by at least once a day. No, Torvald hasn't had a sick moment since, and the children are fit and strong, and I am, too. [*Jumping up and clapping her hands.*] Oh, dear God, Kristine, what a lovely thing to live and be happy! But how disgusting of me—I'm talking of nothing but my own affairs. [*Sits on a stool close by KRISTINE, arms resting across her knees.*] Oh, don't be angry with me! Tell me, is it really true that you weren't in love with your husband? Why did you marry him, then?

MRS. LINDE: My mother was still alive, but bedridden and helpless—and I had my two younger brothers to look after. In all conscience, I didn't think I could turn him down.

NORA: No, you were right there. But was he rich at the time?

MRS. LINDE: He was very well off, I'd say. But the business was shaky, Nora. When he died, it all fell apart, and nothing was left.

NORA: And then—?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, so I had to scrape up a living with a little shop and a little teaching and whatever else I could find. The last three years have been like one endless workday without a rest for me. Now it's over, Nora. My poor mother doesn't need me, for she's passed on. Nor the boys, either; they're working now and can take care of themselves.

NORA: How free you must feel—

MRS. LINDE: No—only unspeakably empty. Nothing to live for now. [*Standing up anxiously.*] That's why I couldn't take it any longer out in that desolate hole. Maybe here it'll be easier to find something to do and keep my mind occupied. If I could only be lucky enough to get a steady job, some office work—

NORA: Oh, but Kristine, that's so dreadfully tiring, and you already look so tired. It would be much better for you if you could go off to a bathing resort.

MRS. LINDE: [*Going toward the window.*] I have no father to give me travel money, Nora.

NORA: [*Rising.*] Oh, don't be angry with me.

MRS. LINDE: [*Going to her.*] Nora dear, don't you be angry with me. The worst of my kind of situation is all the bitterness that's stored away. No one to work for, and yet you're always having to snap up your opportunities. You have to live; and so you grow selfish. When you told me the happy change in your lot,

do you know I was delighted less for your sakes than for mine?

NORA: How so? Oh, I see. You think maybe Torvald could do something for you.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, that's what I thought.

NORA: And he will, Kristine! Just leave it to me; I'll bring it up so delicately—find something attractive to humor him with. Oh, I'm so eager to help you.

MRS. LINDE: How very kind of you, Nora, to be so concerned over me—doubly kind, considering you really know so little of life's burdens yourself.

NORA: I—? I know so little—?

MRS. LINDE: [*Smiling.*] Well, my heavens—a little needlework and such—Nora, you're just a child.

NORA: [*Tossing her head and pacing the floor.*] You don't have to act so superior.

MRS. LINDE: Oh?

NORA: You're just like the others. You all think I'm incapable of anything serious—

MRS. LINDE: Come now—

NORA: That I've never had to face the raw world.

MRS. LINDE: Nora dear, you've just been telling me all your troubles.

NORA: Hm! Trivia! [*Quietly.*] I haven't told you the big thing.

MRS. LINDE: Big thing? What do you mean?

NORA: You look down on me so, Kristine, but you shouldn't. You're proud that you worked so long and hard for your mother.

MRS. LINDE: I don't look down on a soul. But it *is* true: I'm proud—and happy, too—to think it was given to me to make my mother's last days almost free of care.

NORA: And you're also proud thinking of what you've done for your brothers.

MRS. LINDE: I feel I've a right to be.

NORA: I agree. But listen to this, Kristine—I've also got something to be proud and happy for.

MRS. LINDE: I don't doubt it. But whatever do you mean?

NORA: Not so loud. What if Torvald heard! He mustn't, not for anything in the world. Nobody must know, Kristine. No one but you.

MRS. LINDE: But what is it, then?

NORA: Come here. [*Drawing her down beside her on the sofa.*] It's true—I've also got something to be proud and happy for. I'm the one who saved Torvald's life.

MRS. LINDE: Saved—? Saved how?

NORA: I told you about the trip to Italy. Torvald never would have lived if he hadn't gone south—

MRS. LINDE: Of course; your father gave you the means—

NORA: [*Smiling.*] That's what Torvald and all the rest think, but—

MRS. LINDE: But—?

NORA: Papa didn't give us a pin. I was the one who raised the money.

MRS. LINDE: You? That whole amount?

NORA: Four thousand, eight hundred crowns. What do you say to that?

MRS. LINDE: But Nora, how was it possible? Did you win the lottery?

NORA: [*Disdainfully.*] The lottery? Pooh! No art to that.

MRS. LINDE: But where did you get it from then?

NORA: [*Humming, with a mysterious smile.*] Hmm, tra-la-la-la.

MRS. LINDE: Because you couldn't have borrowed it.

NORA: No? Why not?

MRS. LINDE: A wife can't borrow without her husband's consent.

NORA: [*Tossing her head.*] Oh, but a wife with a little business sense, a wife who knows how to manage—

MRS. LINDE: Nora, I simply don't understand—

NORA: You don't have to. Whoever said I *borrowed* the money? I could have gotten it other ways. [*Throwing herself back on the sofa.*] I could have gotten it from some admirer or other. After all, a girl with my ravishing appeal—

MRS. LINDE: You lunatic.

NORA: I'll bet you're eaten up with curiosity, Kristine.

MRS. LINDE: Now listen here, Nora—you haven't done something indiscreet?

NORA: [*Sitting up again.*] Is it indiscreet to save your husband's life?

MRS. LINDE: I think it's indiscreet that without his knowledge you—

NORA: But that's the point: he mustn't know! My Lord, can't you understand?

He mustn't ever know the close call he had. It was to *me* the doctors came to say his life was in danger—that nothing could save him but a stay in the south. Didn't I try strategy then! I began talking about how lovely it would be for me to travel abroad like other young wives; I begged and I cried; I told him please to remember my condition, to be kind and indulge me; and then I dropped a hint that he could easily take out a loan. But at that, Kristine, he nearly exploded. He said I was frivolous, and it was his duty as man of the house not to indulge me in whims and fancies—as I think he called them. Aha, I thought, now you'll just have to be saved—and that's when I saw my chance.

MRS. LINDE: And your father never told Torvald the money wasn't from him?

NORA: No, never. Papa died right about then. I'd considered bringing him into my secret and begging him never to tell. But he was too sick at the time—and then, sadly, it didn't matter.

MRS. LINDE: And you've never confided in your husband since?

NORA: For heaven's sake, no! Are you serious? He's so strict on that subject. Besides—Torvald, with all his masculine pride—how painfully humiliating for him if he ever found out he was in debt to me. That would just ruin our relationship. Our beautiful, happy home would never be the same.

MRS. LINDE: Won't you ever tell him?

NORA: [*Thoughtfully.*] Yes—maybe sometime years from now, when I'm no longer so attractive. Don't laugh! I only mean when Torvald loves me less than now, when he stops enjoying my dancing and dressing up and reciting for him. Then it might be wise to have something in reserve—[*Breaking off.*] How ridiculous! That'll never happen—Well, Kristine, what do you think of my big secret? I'm capable of something too, hm? You can imagine, of course, how this thing hangs over me. It really hasn't been easy meeting the payments on time. In the business world there's what they call quarterly interest and what they call amortization, and these are always so terribly hard to manage. I've had to skimp a little here and there, wherever I could, you know. I could hardly spare anything from my house allowance, because Torvald has to live well. I couldn't let the children go poorly dressed; whatever I got for them, I felt I had to use up completely—the darlings!

MRS. LINDE: Poor Nora, so it had to come out of your own budget, then?

NORA: Yes, of course. But I was the one most responsible, too. Every time Torvald gave me money for new clothes and such, I never used more than half; always bought the simplest, cheapest outfits. It was a godsend that everything looks so well on me that Torvald never noticed. But it did weigh me down at times, Kristine. It *is* such a joy to wear fine things. You understand.

MRS. LINDE: Oh, of course.

NORA: And then I found other ways of making money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do. I locked myself in and sat writing every evening till late in the night. Ah, I was tired so often, dead tired. But still it was wonderful fun, sitting and working like that, earning money. It was almost like being a man.

MRS. LINDE: But how much have you paid off this way so far?

NORA: That's hard to say, exactly. These accounts, you know, aren't easy to figure. I only know that I've paid out all I could scrape together. Time and again I haven't known where to turn. [*Smiling.*] Then I'd sit here dreaming of a rich old gentleman who had fallen in love with me—

MRS. LINDE: What! Who is he?

NORA: Oh, really! And that he'd died, and when his will was opened, there in big letters it said, "All my fortune shall be paid over in cash, immediately, to that enchanting Mrs. Nora Helmer."

MRS. LINDE: But Nora dear—who *was* this gentleman?

NORA: Good grief, can't you understand? The old man never existed; that was only something I'd dream up time and again whenever I was at my wits' end for money. But it makes no difference now; the old fossil can go where he pleases for all I care; I don't need him or his will—because now I'm free. [*Jumping up.*] Oh, how lovely to think of that, Kristine! Carefree! To know you're carefree, utterly carefree; to be able to romp and play with the children, and to keep up a beautiful, charming home—everything just the way Torvald likes it! And think, spring is coming, with big blue skies. Maybe we can travel a little then. Maybe I'll see the ocean again. Oh yes, it *is* so marvelous to live and be happy!

[*The front doorbell rings.*]

MRS. LINDE: [*Rising.*] There's the bell. It's probably best that I go.

NORA: No, stay. No one's expected. It must be for Torvald.

MAID: [*From the hall doorway.*] Excuse me, ma'am—there's a gentleman here to see Mr. Helmer, but I didn't know—since the doctor's with him—

NORA: Who is the gentleman?

KROGSTAD: [*From the doorway.*] It's me, Mrs. Helmer.

[*MRS. LINDE starts and turns away toward the window.*]

NORA: [*Stepping toward him, tense, her voice a whisper.*] You? What is it? Why do you want to speak to my husband?

KROGSTAD: Bank business—after a fashion. I have a small job in the investment bank, and I hear now your husband is going to be our chief—

NORA: In other words, it's—

KROGSTAD: Just dry business, Mrs. Helmer. Nothing but that.

NORA: Yes, then please be good enough to step into the study. [*She nods indifferently as she sees him out by the hall door, then returns and begins stirring up the stove.*]



MRS. LINDE: Nora—who was that man?

NORA: That was a Mr. Krogstad—a lawyer.

MRS. LINDE: Then it really was him.

NORA: Do you know that person?

MRS. LINDE: I did once—many years ago. For a time he was a law clerk in our town.

NORA: Yes, he's been that.

MRS. LINDE: How he's changed.

NORA: I understand he had a very unhappy marriage.

MRS. LINDE: He's a widower now.

NORA: With a number of children. There now, it's burning. [*She closes the stove door and moves the rocker a bit to one side.*]

MRS. LINDE: They say he has a hand in all kinds of business.

NORA: Oh? That may be true; I wouldn't know. But let's not think about business. It's so dull.

[*DR. RANK enters from HELMER'S study.*]

RANK: [*Still in the doorway.*] No, no, really—I don't want to intrude, I'd just as soon talk a little while with your wife. [*Shuts the door, then notices MRS. LINDE.*]

Oh, beg pardon. I'm intruding here too.

NORA: No, not at all. [*Introducing him.*] Dr. Rank, Mrs. Linde.

RANK: Well now, that's a name much heard in this house. I believe I passed the lady on the stairs as I came.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, I take the stairs very slowly. They're rather hard on me.

RANK: Uh-hm, some touch of internal weakness?

MRS. LINDE: More overexertion, I'd say.

RANK: Nothing else? Then you're probably here in town to rest up in a round of parties?

MRS. LINDE: I'm here to look for work.

RANK: Is that the best cure for overexertion?

MRS. LINDE: One has to live, Doctor.

RANK: Yes, there's a common prejudice to that effect.

NORA: Oh, come on, Dr. Rank—you really do want to live yourself.

RANK: Yes, I really do. Wretched as I am, I'll gladly prolong my torment indefinitely. All my patients feel like that. And it's quite the same, too, with the morally sick. Right at this moment there's one of those moral invalids in there with Helmer—

MRS. LINDE: [*Softly.*] Ah!

NORA: Who do you mean?

RANK: Oh, it's a lawyer, Krogstad, a type you wouldn't know. His character is rotten to the root—but even he began chattering all-importantly about how he had to *live*.

NORA: Oh? What did he want to talk to Torvald about?

RANK: I really don't know. I only heard something about the bank.

NORA: I didn't know that Krog—that this man Krogstad had anything to do with the bank.

RANK: Yes, he's gotten some kind of berth down there. [*To MRS. LINDE.*] I don't know if you also have, in your neck of the woods, a type of person who scuttles about breathlessly, sniffing out hints of moral corruption, and then maneu-

vers his victim into some sort of key position where he can keep an eye on him. It's the healthy these days that are out in the cold.

MRS. LINDE: All the same, it's the sick who most need to be taken in.

RANK: [*With a shrug.*] Yes, there we have it. That's the concept that's turning society into a sanatorium.

[NORA, *lost in her thoughts, breaks out into quiet laughter and claps her hands.*]

RANK: Why do you laugh at that? Do you have any real idea of what society is?

NORA: What do I care about dreary old society? I was laughing at something quite different—something terribly funny. Tell me, Doctor—is everyone who works in the bank dependent now on Torvald?

RANK: Is that what you find so terribly funny?

NORA: [*Smiling and humming.*] Never mind, never mind [*Pacing the floor.*] Yes, that's really immensely amusing: that we—that Torvald has so much power now over all those people. [*Taking the bag out of her pocket.*] Dr. Rank, a little macaroon on that?

RANK: See here, macaroons! I thought they were contraband here.

NORA: Yes, but these are some that Kristine gave me.

MRS. LINDE: What? I—?

NORA: Now, now, don't be afraid. You couldn't possibly know that Torvald had forbidden them. You see, he's worried they'll ruin my teeth. But hmp! Just this once! Isn't that so, Dr. Rank? Help yourself! [*Puts a macaroon in his mouth.*] And you too, Kristine. And I'll also have one, only a little one—or two, at the most. [*Walking about again.*] Now I'm really tremendously happy. Now there's just one last thing in the world that I have an enormous desire to do.

RANK: Well! And what's that?

NORA: It's something I have such a consuming desire to say so Torvald could hear.

RANK: And why can't you say it?

NORA: I don't dare. It's quite shocking.

MRS. LINDE: Shocking?

RANK: Well, then it isn't advisable. But in front of us you certainly can. What do you have such a desire to say so Torvald could hear?

NORA: I have such a huge desire to say—to hell and be damned!

RANK: Are you crazy?

MRS. LINDE: My goodness, Nora!

RANK: Go on, say it. Here he is.

NORA: [*Hiding the macaroon bag.*] Shh, shh, shh!

[HELMER comes in from his study, hat in hand, overcoat over his arm.]

NORA: [*Going toward him.*] Well, Torvald dear, are you through with him?

HELMER: Yes, he just left.

NORA: Let me introduce you—this is Kristine, who's arrived here in town.

HELMER: Kristine—? I'm sorry, but I don't know—

NORA: Mrs. Linde, Torvald dear. Mrs. Kristine Linde.

HELMER: Of course. A childhood friend of my wife's, no doubt?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, we knew each other in those days.

NORA: And just think, she made the long trip down here in order to talk with you.

HELMER: What's this?

MRS. LINDE: Well, not exactly—

NORA: You see, Kristine is remarkably clever in office work, and so she's terribly eager to come under a capable man's supervision and add more to what she already knows—

HELMER: Very wise, Mrs. Linde.

NORA: And then when she heard that you'd become a bank manager—the story was wired out to the papers—then she came in as fast as she could and—Really, Torvald, for my sake you can do a little something for Kristine, can't you?

HELMER: Yes, it's not at all impossible. Mrs. Linde, I suppose you're a widow?

MRS. LINDE: Yes.

HELMER: Any experience in office work?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, a good deal.

HELMER: Well, it's quite likely that I can make an opening for you—

NORA: [*Clapping her hands.*] You see, you see!

HELMER: You've come at a lucky moment, Mrs. Linde.

MRS. LINDE: Oh, how can I thank you?

HELMER: Not necessary. [*Putting his overcoat on.*] But today you'll have to excuse me—

RANK: Wait, I'll go with you. [*He fetches his coat from the hall and warms it at the stove.*]

NORA: Don't stay out long, dear.

HELMER: An hour; no more.

NORA: Are you going too, Kristine?

MRS. LINDE: [*Putting on her winter garments.*] Yes, I have to see about a room now.

HELMER: Then perhaps we can all walk together.

NORA: [*Helping her.*] What a shame we're so cramped here, but it's quite impossible for us to—

MRS. LINDE: Oh, don't even think of it! Good-bye, Nora dear, and thanks for everything.

NORA: Good-bye for now. Of course you'll be back this evening. And you too, Dr. Rank. What? If you're well enough? Oh, you've got to be! Wrap up tight now.

*[In a ripple of small talk the company moves out into the hall; children's voices are heard outside on the steps.]*

NORA: There they are! There they are! [*She runs to open the door. The children come in with their nurse, ANNE-MARIE.*] Come in, come in! [*Bends down and kisses them.*]

Oh, you darlings—! Look at them, Kristine. Aren't they lovely!

RANK: No loitering in the draft here.

HELMER: Come, Mrs. Linde—this place is unbearable now for anyone but mothers.

*[DR. RANK, HELMER, and MRS. LINDE go down the stairs. ANNE-MARIE goes into the living room with the children. NORA follows, after closing the hall door.]*

NORA: How fresh and strong you look. Oh, such red cheeks you have! Like apples and roses. [*The children interrupt her throughout the following.*] And it was so much fun? That's wonderful. Really? You pulled both Emmy and Bob on the sled?

Imagine, all together! Yes, you're a clever boy, Ivar. Oh, let me hold her a bit, Anne-Marie. My sweet little doll baby! [*Takes the smallest from the nurse and dances with her.*] Yes, yes, Mama will dance with Bob as well. What? Did you throw snowballs? Oh, if I'd only been there! No, don't bother, Anne-Marie—I'll undress them myself. Oh yes, let me. It's such fun. Go in and rest; you look half frozen. There's hot coffee waiting for you on the stove. [*The nurse goes into the room to the left. NORA takes the children's winter things off, throwing them about, while the children talk to her all at once.*] Is that so? A big dog chased you? But it didn't bite? No, dogs never bite little, lovely doll babies. Don't peek in the packages, Ivar! What is it? Yes, wouldn't you like to know. No, no, it's an ugly something. Well? Shall we play? What shall we play? Hide-and-seek? Yes, let's play hide-and-seek. Bob must hide first. I must? Yes, let me hide first. [*Laughing and shouting, she and the children play in and out of the living room and the adjoining room to the right. At last NORA hides under the table. The children come storming in, search, but cannot find her, then hear her muffled laughter, dash over to the table, lift the cloth up and find her. Wild shouting. She creeps forward as if to scare them. More shouts. Meanwhile, a knock at the hall door; no one has noticed it. Now the door half opens, and KROGSTAD appears. He waits a moment; the game goes on.*]

KROGSTAD: Beg pardon, Mrs. Helmer—

NORA: [*With a strangled cry, turning and scrambling to her knees.*] Oh! What do you want?

KROGSTAD: Excuse me. The outer door was ajar; it must be someone forgot to shut it—

NORA: [*Rising.*] My husband isn't home, Mr. Krogstad.

KROGSTAD: I know that.

NORA: Yes—then what do you want here?

KROGSTAD: A word with you.

NORA: With—? [*To the children, quietly.*] Go in to Anne-Marie. What? No, the strange man won't hurt Mama. When he's gone, we'll play some more. [*She leads the children into the room to the left and shuts the door after them. Then, tense and nervous:*] You want to speak to me?

KROGSTAD: Yes, I want to.

NORA: Today? But it's not yet the first of the month—

KROGSTAD: No, it's Christmas Eve. It's going to be up to you how merry a Christmas you have.

NORA: What is it you want? Today I absolutely can't—

KROGSTAD: We won't talk about that till later. This is something else. You do have a moment to spare, I suppose?

NORA: Oh yes, of course—I do, except—

KROGSTAD: Good. I was sitting over at Olsen's Restaurant when I saw your husband go down the street—

NORA: Yes?

KROGSTAD: With a lady.

NORA: Yes. So?

KROGSTAD: If you'll pardon my asking: wasn't that lady a Mrs. Linde?

NORA: Yes.

KROGSTAD: Just now come into town?

NORA: Yes, today.

KROGSTAD: She's a good friend of yours?

NORA: Yes, she is. But I don't see—

KROGSTAD: I also knew her once.

NORA: I'm aware of that.

KROGSTAD: Oh? You know all about it. I thought so. Well, then let me ask you short and sweet: is Mrs. Linde getting a job in the bank?

NORA: What makes you think you can cross-examine me, Mr. Krogstad—you, one of my husband's employees? But since you ask, you might as well know—yes, Mrs. Linde's going to be taken on at the bank. And I'm the one who spoke for her, Mr. Krogstad. Now you know.

KROGSTAD: So I guessed right.

NORA: [*Pacing up and down.*] Oh, one does have a tiny bit of influence, I should hope. Just because I am a woman, don't think it means that—When one has a subordinate position, Mr. Krogstad, one really ought to be careful about pushing somebody who—hm—

KROGSTAD: Who has influence?

NORA: That's right.

KROGSTAD: [*In a different tone.*] Mrs. Helmer, would you be good enough to use your influence on my behalf?

NORA: What? What do you mean?

KROGSTAD: Would you please make sure that I keep my subordinate position in the bank?

NORA: What does that mean? Who's thinking of taking away your position?

KROGSTAD: Oh, don't play the innocent with me. I'm quite aware that your friend would hardly relish the chance of running into me again; and I'm also aware now whom I can thank for being turned out.

NORA: But I promise you—

KROGSTAD: Yes, yes, yes, to the point: there's still time, and I'm advising you to use your influence to prevent it.

NORA: But Mr. Krogstad, I have absolutely no influence.

KROGSTAD: You haven't? I thought you were just saying—

NORA: You shouldn't take me so literally. I! How can you believe that I have any such influence over my husband?

KROGSTAD: Oh, I've known your husband from our student days. I don't think the great bank manager's more steadfast than any other married man.

NORA: You speak insolently about my husband, and I'll show you the door.

KROGSTAD: The lady has spirit.

NORA: I'm not afraid of you any longer. After New Year's, I'll soon be done with the whole business.

KROGSTAD: [*Restraining himself.*] Now listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. If necessary, I'll fight for my little job in the bank as if it were life itself.

NORA: Yes, so it seems.

KROGSTAD: It's not just a matter of income; that's the least of it. It's something else—All right, out with it! Look, this is the thing. You know, just like all the others, of course, that once, a good many years ago, I did something rather rash.

NORA: I've heard rumors to that effect.

KROGSTAD: The case never got into court; but all the same, every door was closed in my face from then on. So I took up those various activities you know about. I had to grab hold somewhere; and I dare say I haven't been among the worst.

But now I want to drop all that. My boys are growing up. For their sakes, I'll have to win back as much respect as possible here in town. That job in the bank was like the first rung in my ladder. And now your husband wants to kick me right back down in the mud again.

NORA: But for heaven's sake, Mr. Krogstad, it's simply not in my power to help you.

KROGSTAD: That's because you haven't the will to—but I have the means to make you.

NORA: You certainly won't tell my husband that I owe you money?

KROGSTAD: Hm—what if I told him that?

NORA: That would be shameful of you. [*Nearly in tears.*] This secret—my joy and my pride—that he should learn it in such a crude and disgusting way—learn it from you. You'd expose me to the most horrible unpleasantness—

KROGSTAD: Only unpleasantness?

NORA: [*Vehemently.*] But go on and try. It'll turn out the worse for you, because then my husband will really see what a crook you are, and then you'll *never* be able to hold your job.

KROGSTAD: I asked if it was just domestic unpleasantness you were afraid of?

NORA: If my husband finds out, then of course he'll pay what I owe at once, and then we'd be through with you for good.

KROGSTAD: [*A step closer.*] Listen, Mrs. Helmer—you've either got a very bad memory, or else no head at all for business. I'd better put you a little more in touch with the facts.

NORA: What do you mean?

KROGSTAD: When your husband was sick, you came to me for a loan of four thousand, eight hundred crowns.

NORA: Where else could I go?

KROGSTAD: I promised to get you that sum—

NORA: And you got it.

KROGSTAD: I promised to get you that sum, on certain conditions. You were so involved in your husband's illness, and so eager to finance your trip, that I guess you didn't think out all the details. It might just be a good idea to remind you. I promised you the money on the strength of a note I drew up.

NORA: Yes, and that I signed.

KROGSTAD: Right. But at the bottom I added some lines for your father to guarantee the loan. He was supposed to sign down there.

NORA: Supposed to? He did sign.

KROGSTAD: I left the date blank. In other words, your father would have dated his signature himself. Do you remember that?

NORA: Yes, I think—

KROGSTAD: Then I gave you the note for you to mail to your father. Isn't that so?

NORA: Yes.

KROGSTAD: And naturally you sent it at once—because only some five, six days later you brought me the note, properly signed. And with that, the money was yours.

NORA: Well, then; I've made my payments regularly, haven't I?

KROGSTAD: More or less. But—getting back to the point—those were hard times for you then, Mrs. Helmer.

NORA: Yes, they were.

KROGSTAD: Your father was very ill, I believe.

NORA: He was near the end.

KROGSTAD: He died soon after?

NORA: Yes.

KROGSTAD: Tell me, Mrs. Helmer, do you happen to recall the date of your father's death? The day of the month, I mean.

NORA: Papa died the twenty-ninth of September.

KROGSTAD: That's quite correct; I've already looked into that. And now we come to a curious thing—[*Taking out a paper.*] which I simply cannot comprehend.

NORA: Curious thing? I don't know—

KROGSTAD: This is the curious thing: that your father co-signed the note for your loan three days after his death.

NORA: How—? I don't understand.

KROGSTAD: Your father died the twenty-ninth of September. But look. Here your father dated his signature October second. Isn't that curious, Mrs. Helmer? [NORA is silent.] Can you explain it to me? [NORA remains silent.] It's also remarkable that the words "October second" and the year aren't written in your father's hand, but rather in one that I think I know. Well, it's easy to understand. Your father forgot perhaps to date his signature, and then someone or other added it, a bit sloppily, before anyone knew of his death. There's nothing wrong in that. It all comes down to the signature. And there's no question about *that*, Mrs. Helmer. It really *was* your father who signed his own name here, wasn't it?

NORA: [*After a short silence, throwing her head back and looking squarely at him.*] No, it wasn't. I signed papa's name.

KROGSTAD: Wait, now—are you fully aware that this is a dangerous confession?

NORA: Why? You'll soon get your money.

KROGSTAD: Let me ask you a question—why didn't you send the paper to your father?

NORA: That was impossible. Papa was so sick. If I'd asked him for his signature, I also would have had to tell him what the money was for. But I couldn't tell him, sick as he was, that my husband's life was in danger. That was just impossible.

KROGSTAD: Then it would have been better if you'd given up the trip abroad.

NORA: I couldn't possibly. The trip was to save my husband's life. I couldn't give that up.

KROGSTAD: But didn't you ever consider that this was a fraud against me?

NORA: I couldn't let myself be bothered by that. You weren't any concern of mine. I couldn't stand you, with all those cold complications you made, even though you knew how badly off my husband was.

KROGSTAD: Mrs. Helmer, obviously you haven't the vaguest idea of what you've involved yourself in. But I can tell you this: it was nothing more and nothing worse than I once did—and it wrecked my whole reputation.

NORA: You? Do you expect me to believe that you ever acted bravely to save your wife's life?

KROGSTAD: Laws don't inquire into motives.

NORA: Then they must be very poor laws.

KROGSTAD: Poor or not—if I introduce this paper in court, you'll be judged according to law.

NORA: This I refuse to believe. A daughter hasn't a right to protect her dying father from anxiety and care? A wife hasn't a right to save her husband's life? I don't know much about laws, but I'm sure that somewhere in the books these things are allowed. And you don't know anything about it—you who practice the law? You must be an awful lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

KROGSTAD: Could be. But business—the kind of business we two are mixed up in—don't you think I know about that? All right. Do what you want now. But I'm telling you *this*: if I get shoved down a second time, you're going to keep me company. [*He bows and goes out through the hall.*]

NORA: [*Pensive for a moment, then tossing her head.*] Oh, really! Trying to frighten me! I'm not so silly as all that. [*Begins gathering up the children's clothes, but soon stops.*] But—? No, but that's impossible! I did it out of love.

THE CHILDREN: [*In the doorway, left.*] Mama, that strange man's gone out the door.

NORA: Yes, yes, I know it. But don't tell anyone about the strange man. Do you hear? Not even Papa!

THE CHILDREN: No, Mama. But now will you play again?

NORA: No, not now.

THE CHILDREN: Oh, but Mama, you promised.

NORA: Yes, but I can't now. Go inside; I have too much to do. Go in, go in, my sweet darlings. [*She herds them gently back in the room and shuts the door after them. Settling on the sofa, she takes up a piece of embroidery and makes some stitches, but soon stops abruptly.*] No! [*Throws the work aside, rises, goes to the hall door and calls out.*] Helene! Let me have the tree in here. [*Goes to the table, left, opens the table drawer, and stops again.*] No, but that's utterly impossible!

MAID: [*With the Christmas tree.*] Where should I put it, ma'am?

NORA: There. The middle of the floor.

MAID: Should I bring anything else?

NORA: No, thanks. I have what I need.

[*The MAID, who has set the tree down, goes out.*]

NORA: [*Absorbed in trimming the tree.*] Candles here—and flowers here. That terrible creature! Talk, talk, talk! There's nothing to it at all. The tree's going to be lovely. I'll do anything to please you, Torvald. I'll sing for you, dance for you—

[*HELMER comes in from the hall, with a sheaf of papers under his arm.*]

NORA: Oh! You're back so soon?

HELMER: Yes. Has anyone been here?

NORA: Here? No.

HELMER: That's odd. I saw Krogstad leaving the front door.

NORA: So? Oh yes, that's true. Krogstad was here a moment.

HELMER: Nora, I can see by your face that he's been here, begging you to put in a good word for him.

NORA: Yes.

HELMER: And it was supposed to seem like your own idea? You were to hide it from me that he'd been here. He asked you that, too, didn't he?

NORA: Yes, Torvald, but—

HELMER: Nora, Nora, and you could fall for that? Talk with that sort of person and promise him anything? And then in the bargain, tell me an untruth.

NORA: An untruth—?

HELMER: Didn't you say that no one had been here? [*Wagging his finger.*] My little



songbird must never do that again. A songbird needs a clean beak to warble with. No false notes. [*Putting his arm about her waist.*] That's the way it should be, isn't it? Yes, I'm sure of it. [*Releasing her.*] And so, enough of that. [*Sitting by the stove.*] Ah, how snug and cozy it is here. [*Leafing among his papers.*]

NORA: [*Busy with the tree, after a short pause.*] Torvald!

HELMER: Yes.

NORA: I'm so much looking forward to the Stenborgs' costume party, day after tomorrow.

HELMER: And I can't wait to see what you'll surprise me with.

NORA: Oh, that stupid business!

HELMER: What?

NORA: I can't find anything that's right. Everything seems so ridiculous, so inane.

HELMER: So my little Nora's come to *that* recognition?

NORA: [*Going behind his chair, her arms resting on its back.*] Are you very busy, Torvald?

HELMER: Oh—

NORA: What papers are those?

HELMER: Bank matters.

NORA: Already?

HELMER: I've gotten full authority from the retiring management to make all necessary changes in personnel and procedure. I'll need Christmas week for that. I want to have everything in order by New Year's.

NORA: So that was the reason this poor Krogstad—

HELMER: Hm.

NORA: [*Still leaning on the chair and slowly stroking the nape of his neck.*] If you weren't so very busy, I would have asked you an enormous favor, Torvald.

HELMER: Let's hear. What is it?

NORA: You know, there isn't anyone who has your good taste—and I want so much to look well at the costume party. Torvald, couldn't you take over and decide what I should be and plan my costume?

HELMER: Ah, is my stubborn little creature calling for a lifeguard?

NORA: Yes, Torvald, I can't get anywhere without your help.

HELMER: All right—I'll think it over. We'll hit on something.

NORA: Oh, how sweet of you. [*Goes to the tree again. Pause.*] Aren't the red flowers pretty—? But tell me, was it really such a crime that this Krogstad committed?

HELMER: Forgery. Do you have any idea what that means?

NORA: Couldn't he have done it out of need?

HELMER: Yes, or thoughtlessness, like so many others. I'm not so heartless that I'd condemn a man categorically for just one mistake.

NORA: No, of course not, Torvald!

HELMER: Plenty of men have redeemed themselves by openly confessing their crimes and taking their punishment.

NORA: Punishment—?

HELMER: But now Krogstad didn't go that way. He got himself out by sharp practices, and that's the real cause of his moral breakdown.

NORA: Do you really think that would—?

HELMER: Just imagine how a man with that sort of guilt in him has to lie and cheat and deceive on all sides, has to wear a mask even with the nearest and dearest he has, even with his own wife and children. And with the children, Nora—that's where it's most horrible.

NORA: Why?

HELMER: Because that kind of atmosphere of lies infects the whole life of a home. Every breath the children take in is filled with the germs of something degenerate.

NORA: [*Coming closer behind him.*] Are you sure of that?

HELMER: Oh, I've seen it often enough as a lawyer. Almost everyone who goes bad early in life has a mother who's a chronic liar.

NORA: Why just—the mother?

HELMER: It's usually the mother's influence that's dominant, but the father's works in the same way, of course. Every lawyer is quite familiar with it. And still this Krogstad's been going home year in, year out, poisoning his own children with lies and pretense; that's why I call him morally lost. [*Reaching his hands out toward her.*] So my sweet little Nora must promise me never to plead his cause. Your hand on it. Come, come, what's this? Give me your hand. There, now. All settled. I can tell you it'd be impossible for me to work alongside of him. I literally feel physically revolted when I'm anywhere near such a person.

NORA: [*Withdraws her hand and goes to the other side of the Christmas tree.*] How hot it is here! And I've got so much to do.

HELMER: [*Getting up and gathering his papers.*] Yes, and I have to think about getting some of these read through before dinner. I'll think about your costume, too. And something to hang on the tree in gilt paper, I may even see about that. [*Putting his hand on her head.*] Oh you, my darling little songbird. [*He goes into his study and closes the door after him.*]

NORA: [*Softly, after a silence.*] Oh, really! it isn't so. It's impossible. It must be impossible.

ANNE-MARIE: [*In the doorway, left.*] The children are begging so hard to come in to Mama.

NORA: No, no, no, don't let them in to me! You stay with them, Anne-Marie.

ANNE-MARIE: Of course, ma'am. [*Closes the door.*]

NORA: [*Pale with terror.*] Hurt my children—! Poison my home? [*A moment's pause; then she tosses her head.*] That's not true. Never. Never in all the world.

## ACT II

*Same room. Beside the piano the Christmas tree now stands stripped of ornament, burned-down candle stubs on its ragged branches. NORA's street clothes lie on the sofa. NORA, alone in the room, moves restlessly about; at last she stops at the sofa and picks up her coat.*

NORA: [*Dropping the coat again.*] Someone's coming! [*Goes toward the door, listens.*] No—there's no one. Of course—nobody's coming today, Christmas Day—or tomorrow, either. But maybe—[*Opens the door and looks out.*] No, nothing in the mailbox. Quite empty. [*Coming forward.*] What nonsense! He won't do anything serious. Nothing terrible could happen. It's impossible. Why, I have three small children.

[ANNE-MARIE, with a large carton, comes in from the room to the left.]

ANNE-MARIE: Well, at last I found the box with the masquerade clothes.

NORA: Thanks. Put it on the table.

ANNE-MARIE: [*Does so.*] But they're all pretty much of a mess.

NORA: Ahh! I'd love to rip them in a million pieces!

ANNE-MARIE: Oh, mercy, they can be fixed right up. Just a little patience.

NORA: Yes, I'll go get Mrs. Linde to help me.

ANNE-MARIE: Out again now? In this nasty weather? Miss Nora will catch cold—get sick.

NORA: Oh, worse things could happen—How are the children?

ANNE-MARIE: The poor mites are playing with their Christmas presents, but—

NORA: Do they ask for me much?

ANNE-MARIE: They're so used to having Mama around, you know.

NORA: Yes, but Anne-Marie, I *can't* be together with them as much as I was.

ANNE-MARIE: Well, small children get used to anything.

NORA: You think so? Do you think they'd forget their mother if she was gone for good?

ANNE-MARIE: Oh, mercy—gone for good!

NORA: Wait, tell me, Anne-Marie—I've wondered so often—how could you ever have the heart to give your child over to strangers?

ANNE-MARIE: But I had to, you know, to become little Nora's nurse.

NORA: Yes, but how could you *do* it?

ANNE-MARIE: When I could get such a good place? A girl who's poor and who's gotten in trouble is glad enough for that. Because that slippery fish, he didn't do a thing for me, you know.

NORA: But your daughter's surely forgotten you.

ANNE-MARIE: Oh, she certainly has not. She's written to me, both when she was confirmed and when she was married.

NORA: [*Clasping her about the neck.*] You old Anne-Marie, you were a good mother for me when I was little.

ANNE-MARIE: Poor little Nora, with no other mother but me.

NORA: And if the babies didn't have one, then I know that you'd—What silly talk! [*Opening the carton.*] Go in to them. Now I'll have to—Tomorrow you can see how lovely I'll look.

ANNE-MARIE: Oh, there won't be anyone at the party as lovely as Miss Nora. [*She goes off into the room, left.*]

NORA: [*Begins unpacking the box, but soon throws it aside.*] Oh, if I dared to go out. If only nobody would come. If only nothing would happen here while I'm out. What craziness—nobody's coming. Just don't think. This muff—needs a brushing. Beautiful gloves, beautiful gloves. Let it go. Let it go! One, two, three, four, five, six—[*With a cry.*] Oh, there they are! [*Poises to move toward the door, but remains irresolutely standing.* MRS. LINDE enters from the hall, where she has removed her street clothes.]

NORA: Oh, it's you, Kristine. There's no one else out there? How good that you've come.

MRS. LINDE: I hear you were up asking for me.

NORA: Yes, I just stopped by. There's something you really can help me with. Let's get settled on the sofa. Look, there's going to be a costume party tomorrow evening at the Stenborgs' right above us, and now Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan peasant girl and dance the tarantella<sup>2</sup> that I learned in Capri.

2. Lively folk dance of southern Italy, thought to cure the bite of the tarantula.

MRS. LINDE: Really, are you giving a whole performance?

NORA: Torvald says yes, I should. See, here's the dress. Torvald had it made for me down there; but now it's all so tattered that I just don't know—

MRS. LINDE: Oh, we'll fix that up in no time. It's nothing more than the trimmings—they're a bit loose here and there. Needle and thread? Good, now we have what we need.

NORA: Oh, how sweet of you!

MRS. LINDE: [*Sewing.*] So you'll be in disguise tomorrow, Nora. You know what? I'll stop by then for a moment and have a look at you all dressed up. But listen, I've absolutely forgotten to thank you for that pleasant evening yesterday.

NORA: [*Getting up and walking about.*] I don't think it was as pleasant as usual yesterday. You should have come to town a bit sooner, Kristine—Yes, Torvald really knows how to give a home elegance and charm.

MRS. LINDE: And you do, too, if you ask me. You're not your father's daughter for nothing. But tell me, is Dr. Rank always so down in the mouth as yesterday?

NORA: No, that was quite an exception. But he goes around critically ill all the time—tuberculosis of the spine, poor man. You know, his father was a disgusting thing who kept mistresses and so on—and that's why the son's been sickly from birth.

MRS. LINDE: [*Lets her sewing fall to her lap.*] But my dearest Nora, how do you know about such things?

NORA: [*Walking more jauntily.*] Hmp! When you've had three children, then you've had a few visits from—from women who know something of medicine, and they tell you this and that.

MRS. LINDE: [*Resumes sewing; a short pause.*] Does Dr. Rank come here every day?

NORA: Every blessed day. He's Torvald's best friend from childhood, and *my* good friend, too. Dr. Rank almost belongs to this house.

MRS. LINDE: But tell me—is he quite sincere? I mean, doesn't he rather enjoy flattering people?

NORA: Just the opposite. Why do you think that?

MRS. LINDE: When you introduced us yesterday, he was proclaiming that he'd often heard my name in this house; but later I noticed that your husband hadn't the slightest idea who I really was. So how could Dr. Rank—?

NORA: But it's all true, Kristine. You see, Torvald loves me beyond words, and, as he puts it, he'd like to keep me all to himself. For a long time he'd almost be jealous if I even mentioned any of my old friends back home. So of course I dropped that. But with Dr. Rank I talk a lot about such things, because he likes hearing about them.

MRS. LINDE: Now listen, Nora; in many ways you're still like a child. I'm a good deal older than you, with a little more experience. I'll tell you something: you ought to put an end to all this with Dr. Rank.

NORA: What should I put an end to?

MRS. LINDE: Both parts of it, I think. Yesterday you said something about a rich admirer who'd provide you with money—

NORA: Yes, one who doesn't exist—worse luck. So?

MRS. LINDE: Is Dr. Rank well off?

NORA: Yes, he is.

MRS. LINDE: With no dependents?

NORA: No, no one. But—

MRS. LINDE: And he's over here every day?

NORA: Yes, I told you that.

MRS. LINDE: How can a man of such refinement be so grasping?

NORA: I don't follow you at all.

MRS. LINDE: Now don't try to hide it, Nora. You think I can't guess who loaned you the forty-eight hundred crowns?

NORA: Are you out of your mind? How could you think such a thing! A friend of ours, who comes here every single day. What an intolerable situation that would have been!

MRS. LINDE: Then it really wasn't him.

NORA: No, absolutely not. It never even crossed my mind for a moment—And he had nothing to lend in those days; his inheritance came later.

MRS. LINDE: Well, I think that was a stroke of luck for you, Nora dear.

NORA: No, it never would have occurred to me to ask Dr. Rank—Still, I'm quite sure that if I had asked him—

MRS. LINDE: Which you won't, of course.

NORA: No, of course not. I can't see that I'd ever need to. But I'm quite positive that if I talked to Dr. Rank—

MRS. LINDE: Behind your husband's back?

NORA: I've got to clear up this other thing; *that's* also behind his back. I've *got* to clear it all up.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, I was saying that yesterday, but—

NORA: [*Pacing up and down.*] A man handles these problems so much better than a woman—

MRS. LINDE: One's husband does, yes.

NORA: Nonsense. [*Stopping.*] When you pay everything you owe, then you get your note back, right?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, naturally.

NORA: And can rip it into a million pieces and burn it up—that filthy scrap of paper!

MRS. LINDE: [*Looking hard at her, laying her sewing aside, and rising slowly.*] Nora, you're hiding something from me.

NORA: You can see it in my face?

MRS. LINDE: Something's happened to you since yesterday morning. Nora, what is it?

NORA: [*Hurrying toward her.*] Kristine! [*Listening.*] Shh! Torvald's home. Look, go in with the children a while. Torvald can't bear all this snipping and stitching. Let Anne-Marie help you.

MRS. LINDE: [*Gathering up some of the things.*] All right, but I'm not leaving here until we've talked this out. [*She disappears into the room, left, as TORVALD enters from the hall.*]

NORA: Oh, how I've been waiting for you, Torvald dear.

HELMER: Was that the dressmaker?

NORA: No, that was Kristine. She's helping me fix up my costume. You know, it's going to be quite attractive.

HELMER: Yes, wasn't that a bright idea I had?

NORA: Brilliant! But then wasn't I good as well to give in to you?

HELMER: Good—because you give in to your husband's judgment? All right, you

little goose, I know you didn't mean it like that. But I won't disturb you. You'll want to have a fitting, I suppose.

NORA: And you'll be working?

HELMER: Yes. [*Indicating a bundle of papers.*] See. I've been down to the bank. [*Starts toward his study.*]

NORA: Torvald.

HELMER: [*Stops.*] Yes.

NORA: If your little squirrel begged you, with all her heart and soul, for something—?

HELMER: What's that?

NORA: Then would you do it?

HELMER: First, naturally, I'd have to know what it was.

NORA: Your squirrel would scamper about and do tricks, if you'd only be sweet and give in.

HELMER: Out with it.

NORA: Your lark would be singing high and low in every room—

HELMER: Come on, she does that anyway.

NORA: I'd be a wood nymph and dance for you in the moonlight.

HELMER: Nora—don't tell me it's that same business from this morning?

NORA: [*Coming closer.*] Yes, Torvald, I beg you, please!

HELMER: And you actually have the nerve to drag that up again?

NORA: Yes, yes, you've got to give in to me; you *have* to let Krogstad keep his job in the bank.

HELMER: My dear Nora, I've slated his job for Mrs. Linde.

NORA: That's awfully kind of you. But you could just fire another clerk instead of Krogstad.

HELMER: This is the most incredible stubbornness! Because you go and give an impulsive promise to speak up for him, I'm expected to—

NORA: That's not the reason, Torvald. It's for your own sake. That man does writing for the worst papers; you said it yourself. He could do you any amount of harm. I'm scared to death of him—

HELMER: Ah, I understand. It's the old memories haunting you.

NORA: What do you mean by that?

HELMER: Of course, you're thinking about your father.

NORA: Yes, all right. Just remember how those nasty gossips wrote in the papers about Papa and slandered him so cruelly. I think they'd have had him dismissed if the department hadn't sent you up to investigate, and if you hadn't been so kind and open-minded toward him.

HELMER: My dear Nora, there's a notable difference between your father and me. Your father's official career was hardly above reproach. But mine is; and I hope it'll stay that way as long as I hold my position.

NORA: Oh, who can ever tell what vicious minds can invent? We could be so snug and happy now in our quiet, carefree home—you and I and the children, Torvald! That's why I'm pleading with you so—

HELMER: And just by pleading for him you make it impossible for me to keep him on. It's already known at the bank that I'm firing Krogstad. What if it's rumored around now that the new bank manager was vetoed by his wife—

NORA: Yes, what then—?

HELMER: Oh yes—as long as our little bundle of stubbornness gets her way—! I should go and make myself ridiculous in front of the whole office—give people the idea I can be swayed by all kinds of outside pressure. Oh, you can bet I'd feel the effects of that soon enough! Besides—there's something that rules Krogstad right out at the bank as long as I'm the manager.

NORA: What's that?

HELMER: His moral failings I could maybe overlook if I had to—

NORA: Yes, Torvald, why not?

HELMER: And I hear he's quite efficient on the job. But he was a crony of mine back in my teens—one of those rash friendships that crop up again and again to embarrass you later in life. Well, I might as well say it straight out: we're on a first-name basis. And that tactless fool makes no effort at all to hide it in front of others. Quite the contrary—he thinks that entitles him to take a familiar air around me, and so every other second he comes booming out with his “Yes, Torvald!” and “Sure thing, Torvald!” I tell you, it's been excruciating for me. He's out to make my place in the bank unbearable.

NORA: Torvald, you can't be serious about all this.

HELMER: Oh no? Why not?

NORA: Because these are such petty considerations.

HELMER: What are you saying? Petty? You think I'm petty!

NORA: No, just the opposite, Torvald dear. That's exactly why—

HELMER: Never mind. You call my motives petty; then I might as well be just that. Petty! All right! We'll put a stop to this for good. [*Goes to the hall door and calls.*] Helene!

NORA: What do you want?

HELMER: [*Searching among his papers.*] A decision. [*The MAID comes in.*] Look here; take this letter; go out with it at once. Get hold of a messenger and have him deliver it. Quick now. It's already addressed. Wait, here's some money.

MAID: Yes, sir. [*She leaves with the letter.*]

HELMER: [*Straightening his papers.*] There, now, little Miss Willful.

NORA: [*Breathlessly.*] Torvald, what was that letter?

HELMER: Krogstad's notice.

NORA: Call it back, Torvald! There's still time. Oh, Torvald, call it back! Do it for my sake—for your sake, for the children's sake! Do you hear, Torvald; do it! You don't know how this can harm us.

HELMER: Too late.

NORA: Yes, too late.

HELMER: Nora dear, I can forgive you this panic, even though basically you're insulting me. Yes, you are! Or isn't it an insult to think that *I* should be afraid of a courtroom hack's revenge? But I forgive you anyway, because this shows so beautifully how much you love me. [*Takes her in his arms.*] This is the way it should be, my darling Nora. Whatever comes, you'll see: when it really counts, I have strength and courage enough as a man to take on the whole weight myself.

NORA: [*Terrified.*] What do you mean by that?

HELMER: The whole weight, I said.

NORA: [*Resolutely.*] No, never in all the world.

HELMER: Good. So we'll share it, Nora, as man and wife. That's as it should be. [*Fondling her.*] Are you happy now? There, there, there—not these frightened

dove's eyes. It's nothing at all but empty fantasies—Now you should run through your tarantella and practice your tambourine. I'll go to the inner office and shut both doors, so I won't hear a thing; you can make all the noise you like. [*Turning in the doorway.*] And when Rank comes, just tell him where he can find me. [*He nods to her and goes with his papers into the study, closing the door.*]

NORA: [*Standing as though rooted, dazed with fright, in a whisper.*] He really could do it. He will do it. He'll do it in spite of everything. No, not that, never, never! Anything but that! Escape! A way out—[*The doorbell rings.*] Dr. Rank! Anything but that! *Anything*, whatever it is! [*Her hands pass over her face, smoothing it; she pulls herself together, goes over and opens the hall door.* DR. RANK stands outside, hanging his fur coat up. During the following scene, it begins getting dark.]

NORA: Hello, Dr. Rank. I recognized your ring. But you mustn't go in to Torvald yet; I believe he's working.

RANK: And you?

NORA: For you, I always have an hour to spare—you know that. [*He has entered, and she shuts the door after him.*]

RANK: Many thanks. I'll make use of these hours while I can.

NORA: What do you mean by that? While you can?

RANK: Does that disturb you?

NORA: Well, it's such an odd phrase. Is anything going to happen?

RANK: What's going to happen is what I've been expecting so long—but I honestly didn't think it would come so soon.

NORA: [*Gripping his arm.*] What is it you've found out? Dr. Rank, you have to tell me!

RANK: [*Sitting by the stove.*] It's all over with me. There's nothing to be done about it.

NORA: [*Breathing easier.*] Is it you—then—?

RANK: Who else? There's no point in lying to one's self. I'm the most miserable of all my patients, Mrs. Helmer. These past few days I've been auditing my internal accounts. Bankrupt! Within a month I'll probably be laid out and rotting in the churchyard.

NORA: Oh, what a horrible thing to say.

RANK: The thing itself is horrible. But the worst of it is all the other horror before it's over. There's only one final examination left; when I'm finished with that, I'll know about when my disintegration will begin. There's something I want to say. Helmer with his sensitivity has such a sharp distaste for anything ugly. I don't want him near my sickroom.

NORA: Oh, but Dr. Rank—

RANK: I won't have him in there. Under no condition. I'll lock my door to him—As soon as I'm completely sure of the worst, I'll send you my calling card marked with a black cross, and you'll know then the wreck has started to come apart.

NORA: No, today you're completely unreasonable. And I wanted you so much to be in a really good humor.

RANK: With death up my sleeve? And then to suffer this way for somebody else's sins. Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in some way or another, this inevitable retribution of nature goes on—

NORA: [*Her hands pressed over her ears.*] Oh, stuff! Cheer up! Please—be gay!



RANK: Yes, I'd just as soon laugh at it all. My poor, innocent spine, serving time for my father's gay army days.

NORA: [*By the table, left.*] He was so infatuated with asparagus tips and *pâté de foie gras*, wasn't that it?

RANK: Yes—and with truffles.

NORA: Truffles, yes. And then with oysters, I suppose?

RANK: Yes, tons of oysters, naturally.

NORA: And then the port and champagne to go with it. It's so sad that all these delectable things have to strike at our bones.

RANK: Especially when they strike at the unhappy bones that never shared in the fun.

NORA: Ah, that's the saddest of all.

RANK: [*Looks searchingly at her.*] Hm.

NORA: [*After a moment.*] Why did you smile?

RANK: No, it was you who laughed.

NORA: No, it was you who smiled, Dr. Rank!

RANK: [*Getting up.*] You're even a bigger tease than I'd thought.

NORA: I'm full of wild ideas today.

RANK: That's obvious.

NORA: [*Putting both hands on his shoulders.*] Dear, dear Dr. Rank, you'll never die for Torvald and me.

RANK: Oh, that loss you'll easily get over. Those who go away are soon forgotten.

NORA: [*Looks fearfully at him.*] You believe that?

RANK: One makes new connections, and then—

NORA: Who makes new connections?

RANK: Both you and Torvald will when I'm gone. I'd say you're well under way already. What was that Mrs. Linde doing here last evening?

NORA: Oh, come—you can't be jealous of poor Kristine?

RANK: Oh yes, I am. She'll be my successor here in the house. When I'm down under, that woman will probably—

NORA: Shh! Not so loud. She's right in there.

RANK: Today as well. So you see.

NORA: Only to sew on my dress. Good gracious, how unreasonable you are. [*Sitting on the sofa.*] Be nice now, Dr. Rank. Tomorrow you'll see how beautifully I'll dance; and you can imagine then that I'm dancing only for you—yes, and of course for Torvald, too—that's understood. [*Takes various items out of the carton.*] Dr. Rank, sit over here and I'll show you something.

RANK: [*Sitting.*] What's that?

NORA: Look here. Look.

RANK: Silk stockings.

NORA: Flesh-colored. Aren't they lovely? Now it's so dark here, but tomorrow—No, no, no, just look at the feet. Oh well, you might as well look at the rest.

RANK: Hm—

NORA: Why do you look so critical? Don't you believe they'll fit?

RANK: I've never had any chance to form an opinion on that.

NORA: [*Glancing at him a moment.*] Shame on you. [*Hits him lightly on the ear with the stockings.*] That's for you. [*Puts them away again.*]

RANK: And what other splendors am I going to see now?

NORA: Not the least bit more, because you've been naughty. [*She hums a little and rummages among her things.*]

RANK: [*After a short silence.*] When I sit here together with you like this, completely easy and open, then I don't know—I simply can't imagine—whatever would have become of me if I'd never come into this house.

NORA: [*Smiling.*] Yes, I really think you feel completely at ease with us.

RANK: [*More quietly, staring straight ahead.*] And then to have to go away from it all—

NORA: Nonsense, you're not going away.

RANK: [*His voice unchanged.*]—and not even be able to leave some poor show of gratitude behind, scarcely a fleeting regret—no more than a vacant place that anyone can fill.

NORA: And if I asked you now for—? No—

RANK: For what?

NORA: For a great proof of your friendship—

RANK: Yes, yes?

NORA: No, I mean—for an exceptionally big favor—

RANK: Would you really, for once, make me so happy?

NORA: Oh, you haven't the vaguest idea what it is.

RANK: All right, then tell me.

NORA: No, but I can't, Dr. Rank—it's all out of reason. It's advice and help, too—and a favor—

RANK: So much the better. I can't fathom what you're hinting at. Just speak out. Don't you trust me?

NORA: Of course. More than anyone else. You're my best and truest friend, I'm sure. That's why I want to talk to you. All right, then, Dr. Rank: there's something you can help me prevent. You know how deeply, how inexpressibly dearly Torvald loves me; he'd never hesitate a second to give up his life for me.

RANK: [*Leaning close to her.*] Nora—do you think he's the only one—

NORA: [*With a slight start.*] Who—?

RANK: Who'd gladly give up his life for you.

NORA: [*Heavily.*] I see.

RANK: I swore to myself you should know this before I'm gone. I'll never find a better chance. Yes, Nora, now you know. And also you know now that you can trust me beyond anyone else.

NORA: [*Rising, natural and calm.*] Let me by.

RANK: [*Making room for her, but still sitting.*] Nora—

NORA: [*In the hall doorway.*] Helene, bring the lamp in. [*Goes over to the stove.*] Ah, dear Dr. Rank, that was really mean of you.

RANK: [*Getting up.*] That I've loved you just as deeply as somebody else? Was *that* mean?

NORA: No, but that you came out and told me. That was quite unnecessary—

RANK: What do you mean? Have you known—?

[*The MAID comes in with the lamp, sets it on the table, and goes out again.*]

RANK: Nora—Mrs. Helmer—I'm asking you: have you known about it?

NORA: Oh, how can I tell what I know or don't know? Really, I don't know what to say—Why did you have to be so clumsy, Dr. Rank! Everything was so good.

RANK: Well, in any case, you now have the knowledge that my body and soul are at your command. So won't you speak out?

NORA: [*Looking at him.*] After that?

RANK: Please, just let me know what it is.

NORA: You can't know anything now.

RANK: I have to. You mustn't punish me like this. Give me the chance to do whatever is humanly possible for you.

NORA: Now there's nothing you can do for me. Besides, actually, I don't need any help. You'll see—it's only my fantasies. That's what it is. Of course! [*Sits in the rocker, looks at him, and smiles.*] What a nice one you are, Dr. Rank. Aren't you a little bit ashamed, now that the lamp is here?

RANK: No, not exactly. But perhaps I'd better go—for good?

NORA: No, you certainly can't do that. You must come here just as you always have. You know Torvald can't do without you.

RANK: Yes, but *you*?

NORA: You know how much I enjoy it when you're here.

RANK: That's precisely what threw me off. You're a mystery to me. So many times I've felt you'd almost rather be with me than with Helmer.

NORA: Yes—you see, there are some people that one loves most and other people that one would almost prefer being with.

RANK: Yes, there's something to that.

NORA: When I was back home, of course I loved Papa most. But I always thought it was so much fun when I could sneak down to the maids' quarters, because they never tried to improve me, and it was always so amusing, the way they talked to each other.

RANK: Aha, so it's *their* place that I've filled.

NORA: [*Jumping up and going to him.*] Oh, dear, sweet Dr. Rank, that's not what I meant at all. But you can understand that with Torvald it's just the same as with Papa—

[*The MAID enters from the hall.*]

MAID: Ma'am—please! [*She whispers to NORA and hands her a calling card.*]

NORA: Ah [*Glancing at the card.*]! [*Slips it into her pocket.*]

RANK: Anything wrong?

NORA: No, no, not at all. It's only some—it's my new dress—

RANK: Really? But—there's your dress.

NORA: Oh, that. But this is another one—I ordered it—Torvald mustn't know—

RANK: Ah, now we have the big secret.

NORA: That's right. Just go in with him—he's back in the inner study. Keep him there as long as—

RANK: Don't worry. He won't get away. [*Goes into the study.*]

NORA: [*To the MAID.*]And he's standing waiting in the kitchen?

MAID: Yes, he came up by the back stairs.

NORA: But didn't you tell him somebody was here?

MAID: Yes, but that didn't do any good.

NORA: He won't leave?

MAID: No, he won't go till he's talked with you, ma'am.

NORA: Let him come in, then—but quietly. Helene, don't breathe a word about this. It's a surprise for my husband.

MAID: Yes, yes, I understand—[*Goes out.*]

NORA: This horror—it's going to happen. No, no, no, it can't happen, it mustn't.

[*She goes and bolts HELMER's door. The MAID opens the hall door for KROGSTAD and shuts it behind him. He is dressed for travel in a fur coat, boots, and a fur cap.*]

NORA: [*Going toward him.*] Talk softly. My husband's home.

KROGSTAD: Well, good for him.

NORA: What do you want?

KROGSTAD: Some information.

NORA: Hurry up, then. What is it?

KROGSTAD: You know, of course, that I got my notice.

NORA: I couldn't prevent it, Mr. Krogstad. I fought for you to the bitter end, but nothing worked.

KROGSTAD: Does your husband's love for you run so thin? He knows everything I can expose you to, and all the same he dares to—

NORA: How can you imagine he knows anything about this?

KROGSTAD: Ah, no—I can't imagine it either, now. It's not at all like my fine Torvald Helmer to have so much guts—

NORA: Mr. Krogstad, I demand respect for my husband!

KROGSTAD: Why, of course—all due respect. But since the lady's keeping it so carefully hidden, may I presume to ask if you've also a bit better informed than yesterday about what you've actually done?

NORA: More than you ever could teach me.

KROGSTAD: Yes, I *am* such an awful lawyer.

NORA: What is it you want from me?

KROGSTAD: Just a glimpse of how you are, Mrs. Helmer. I've been thinking about you all day long. A cashier, a night-court scribbler, a—well, a type like me also has a little of what they call a heart, you know.

NORA: Then show it. Think of my children.

KROGSTAD: Did you or your husband ever think of mine? But never mind. I simply wanted to tell you that you don't need to take this thing too seriously. For the present, I'm not proceeding with any action.

NORA: Oh no, really! Well—I knew that.

KROGSTAD: Everything can be settled in a friendly spirit. It doesn't have to get around town at all; it can stay just among us three.

NORA: My husband must never know anything of this.

KROGSTAD: How can you manage that? Perhaps you can pay me the balance?

NORA: No, not right now.

KROGSTAD: Or you know some way of raising the money in a day or two?

NORA: No way that I'm willing to use.

KROGSTAD: Well, it wouldn't have done you any good, anyway. If you stood in front of me with a fistful of bills, you still couldn't buy your signature back.

NORA: Then tell me what you're going to do with it.

KROGSTAD: I'll just hold onto it—keep it on file. There's no outsider who'll even get wind of it. So if you've been thinking of taking some desperate step—

NORA: I have.

KROGSTAD: Been thinking of running away from home—

NORA: I have!

KROGSTAD: Or even of something worse—

NORA: How could you guess that?

KROGSTAD: You can drop those thoughts.

NORA: How could you guess I was thinking of *that*?

KROGSTAD: Most of us think about *that* at first. I thought about it too, but I discovered I hadn't the courage—

NORA: [*Lifelessly.*] I don't either.

KROGSTAD: [*Relieved.*] That's true, you haven't the courage? You too?

NORA: I don't have it—I don't have it.

KROGSTAD: It would be terribly stupid, anyway. After that first storm at home blows out, why, then—I have here in my pocket a letter for your husband—

NORA: Telling everything?

KROGSTAD: As charitably as possible.

NORA: [*Quickly.*] He mustn't ever get that letter. Tear it up. I'll find some way to get money.

KROGSTAD: Beg pardon, Mrs. Helmer, but I think I just told you—

NORA: Oh, I don't mean the money I owe you. Let me know how much you want from my husband, and I'll manage it.

KROGSTAD: I don't want any money from your husband.

NORA: What do you want, then?

KROGSTAD: I'll tell you what. I want to recoup, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get on in the world—and there's where your husband can help me. For a year and a half I've kept myself clean of anything disreputable—all that time struggling with the worst conditions; but I was satisfied, working my way up step by step. Now I've been written right off, and I'm just not in the mood to come crawling back. I tell you, I want to move on. I want to get back in the bank—in a better position. Your husband can set up a job for me—

NORA: He'll never do that!

KROGSTAD: He'll do it. I know him. He won't dare breathe a word of protest. And once I'm in there together with him, you just wait and see! Inside of a year, I'll be the manager's right-hand man. It'll be Nils Krogstad, not Torvald Helmer, who runs the bank.

NORA: You'll never see the day!

KROGSTAD: Maybe you think you can—

NORA: I have the courage now—for *that*.

KROGSTAD: Oh, you don't scare me. A smart, spoiled lady like you—

NORA: You'll see; you'll see!

KROGSTAD: Under the ice, maybe? Down in the freezing, coal-black water? There, till you float up in the spring, ugly, unrecognizable, with your hair falling out—

NORA: You don't frighten me.

KROGSTAD: Nor do you frighten me. One doesn't do these things, Mrs. Helmer. Besides, what good would it be? I'd still have him safe in my pocket.

NORA: Afterwards? When I'm no longer—?

KROGSTAD: Are you forgetting that *I'll* be in control then over your final reputation? [*NORA stands speechless, staring at him.*] Good; now I've warned you. Don't do anything stupid. When Helmer's read my letter, I'll be waiting for his reply. And bear in mind that it's your husband himself who's forced me back to my old ways. I'll never forgive him for that. Good-bye, Mrs. Helmer. [*He goes out through the hall.*]

NORA: [*Goes to the hall door, opens it a crack, and listens.*] He's gone. Didn't leave the letter. Oh no, no, that's impossible too! [*Opening the door more and more.*]

What's that? He's standing outside—not going downstairs. He's thinking it over? Maybe he'll—? [*A letter falls in the mailbox; then KROGSTAD's footsteps are heard, dying away down a flight of stairs. NORA gives a muffled cry and runs over toward the sofa table. A short pause.*] In the mailbox. [*Slips warily over to the hall door.*] It's lying there. Torvald, Torvald—now we're lost!

MRS. LINDE: [*Entering with the costume from the room, left.*] There now, I can't see anything else to mend. Perhaps you'd like to try—

NORA: [*In a hoarse whisper.*] Kristine, come here.

MRS. LINDE: [*Tossing the dress on the sofa.*] What's wrong? You look upset.

NORA: Come here. See that letter? *There!* Look—through the glass in the mailbox.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, yes, I see it.

NORA: That letter's from Krogstad—

MRS. LINDE: Nora—it's Krogstad who loaned you the money!

NORA: Yes, and now Torvald will find out everything.

MRS. LINDE: Believe me, Nora, it's best for both of you.

NORA: There's more you don't know. I forged a name.

MRS. LINDE: But for heaven's sake—?

NORA: I only want to tell you that, Kristine, so that you can be my witness.

MRS. LINDE: Witness? Why should I—?

NORA: If I should go out of my mind—it could easily happen—

MRS. LINDE: Nora!

NORA: Or anything else occurred—so I couldn't be present here—

MRS. LINDE: Nora, Nora, you aren't yourself at all!

NORA: And someone should try to take on the whole weight, all of the guilt, you follow me—

MRS. LINDE: Yes, of course, but why do you think—?

NORA: Then you're the witness that it isn't true, Kristine. I'm very much myself; my mind right now is perfectly clear; and I'm telling you: nobody else has known about this; I alone did everything. Remember that.

MRS. LINDE: I will. But I don't understand all this.

NORA: Oh, how could you ever understand it? It's the miracle now that's going to take place.

MRS. LINDE: The miracle?

NORA: Yes, the miracle. But it's so awful, Kristine. It mustn't take place, not for anything in the world.

MRS. LINDE: I'm going right over and talk with Krogstad.

NORA: Don't go near him; he'll do you some terrible harm!

MRS. LINDE: There was a time once when he'd gladly have done anything for me.

NORA: He?

MRS. LINDE: Where does he live?

NORA: Oh, how do I know? Yes. [*Searches in her pocket.*] Here's his card. But the letter, the letter—!

HELMER: [*From the study, knocking on the door.*] Nora!

NORA: [*With a cry of fear.*] Oh! What is it? What do you want?

HELMER: Now, now, don't be so frightened. We're not coming in. You locked the door—are you trying on the dress?

NORA: Yes, I'm trying it. I'll look just beautiful, Torvald.

MRS. LINDE: [*Who has read the card.*] He's living right around the corner.

NORA: Yes, but what's the use? We're lost. The letter's in the box.

MRS. LINDE: And your husband has the key?

NORA: Yes, always.

MRS. LINDE: Krogstad can ask for his letter back unread; he can find some excuse—

NORA: But it's just this time that Torvald usually—

MRS. LINDE: Stall him. Keep him in there. I'll be back as quick as I can. [*She hurries out through the hall entrance.*]

NORA: [*Goes to HELMER's door, opens it, and peers in.*] Torvald!

HELMER: [*From the inner study.*] Well—does one dare set foot in one's own living room at last? Come on, Rank, now we'll get a look—[*In the doorway.*] But what's this?

NORA: What, Torvald dear?

HELMER: Rank had me expecting some grand masquerade.

RANK: [*In the doorway.*] That was my impression, but I must have been wrong.

NORA: No one can admire me in my splendor—not till tomorrow.

HELMER: But Nora dear, you look so exhausted. Have you practiced too hard?

NORA: No, I haven't practiced at all yet.

HELMER: You know, it's necessary—

NORA: Oh, it's absolutely necessary, Torvald. But I can't get anywhere without your help. I've forgotten the whole thing completely.

HELMER: Ah, we'll soon take care of that.

NORA: Yes, take care of me, Torvald, please! Promise me that? Oh, I'm so nervous.

That big party—You must give up everything this evening for me. No business—don't even touch your pen. Yes? Dear Torvald, promise?

HELMER: It's a promise. Tonight I'm totally at your service—you little helpless thing. Hm—but first there's one thing I want to—[*Goes toward the hall door.*]

NORA: What are you looking for?

HELMER: Just to see if there's any mail.

NORA: No, no, don't do that, Torvald!

HELMER: Now what?

NORA: Torvald, please. There isn't any.

HELMER: Let me look, though. [*Starts out. NORA, at the piano, strikes the first notes of the tarantella. HELMER, at the door, stops.*] Aha!

NORA: I can't dance tomorrow if I don't practice with you.

HELMER: [*Going over to her.*] Nora dear, are you really so frightened?

NORA: Yes, so terribly frightened. Let me practice right now; there's still time before dinner. Oh, sit down and play for me, Torvald. Direct me. Teach me, the way you always have.

HELMER: Gladly, if it's what you want. [*Sits at the piano.*]

NORA: [*Snatches the tambourine up from the box, then a long, varicolored shawl, which she throws around herself, whereupon she springs forward and cries out:*] Play for me now! Now I'll dance!

[*HELMER plays and NORA dances. RANK stands behind HELMER at the piano and looks on.*]

HELMER: [*As he plays.*] Slower. Slow down.

NORA: Can't change it.

HELMER: Not so violent, Nora!

NORA: Has to be just like this.

HELMER: [*Stopping*.] No, no, that won't do at all.

NORA: [*Laughing and swinging her tambourine*.] Isn't that what I told you?

RANK: Let me play for her.

HELMER: [*Getting up*.] Yes, go on. I can teach her more easily then.

[*RANK sits at the piano and plays; NORA dances more and more wildly. HELMER has stationed himself by the stove and repeatedly gives her directions; she seems not to hear them; her hair loosens and falls over her shoulders; she does not notice, but goes on dancing. MRS. LINDE enters.*]

MRS. LINDE: [*Standing dumbfounded at the door*.] Ah—!

NORA: [*Still dancing*.] See what fun, Kristine!

HELMER: But Nora darling, you dance as if your life were at stake.

NORA: And it is.

HELMER: Rank, stop! This is pure madness. Stop it, I say!

[*RANK breaks off playing, and NORA halts abruptly*.]

HELMER: [*Going over to her*.] I never would have believed it. You've forgotten everything I taught you.

NORA: [*Throwing away the tambourine*.] You see for yourself.

HELMER: Well, there's certainly room for instruction here.

NORA: Yes, you see how important it is. You've got to teach me to the very last minute. Promise me that, Torvald?

HELMER: You can bet on it.

NORA: You mustn't, either today or tomorrow, think about anything else but me; you mustn't open any letters—or the mailbox—

HELMER: Ah, it's still the fear of that man—

NORA: Oh yes, yes, that too.

HELMER: Nora, it's written all over you—there's already a letter from him out there.

NORA: I don't know. I guess so. But you mustn't read such things now; there mustn't be anything ugly between us before it's all over.

RANK: [*Quietly to HELMER*.] You shouldn't deny her.

HELMER: [*Putting his arm around her*.] The child can have her way. But tomorrow night, after you've danced—

NORA: Then you'll be free.

MAID: [*In the doorway, right*.] Ma'am, dinner is served.

NORA: We'll be wanting champagne, Helene.

MAID: Very good, ma'am. [*Goes out*.]

HELMER: So—a regular banquet, hm?

NORA: Yes, a banquet—champagne till daybreak! [*Calling out*.] And some macaroons, Helene. Heaps of them—just this once.

HELMER: [*Taking her hands*.] Now, now, now—no hysterics. Be my own little lark again.

NORA: Oh, I will soon enough. But go on in—and you, Dr. Rank. Kristine, help me put up my hair.

RANK: [*Whispering, as they go*.] There's nothing wrong—really wrong, is there?

HELMER: Oh, of course not. It's nothing more than this childish anxiety I was telling you about. [*They go out, right*.]

NORA: Well?



MRS. LINDE: Left town.

NORA: I could see by your face.

MRS. LINDE: He'll be home tomorrow evening. I wrote him a note.

NORA: You shouldn't have. Don't try to stop anything now. After all, it's a wonderful joy, this waiting here for the miracle.

MRS. LINDE: What is it you're waiting for?

NORA: Oh, you can't understand that. Go in to them; I'll be along in a moment.

[MRS. LINDE goes into the dining room. NORA stands a short while as if composing herself; then she looks at her watch.]

NORA: Five. Seven hours to midnight. Twenty-four hours to the midnight after, and then the tarantella's done. Seven and twenty-four? Thirty-one hours to live.

HELMER: [In the doorway, right.] What's become of the little lark?

NORA: [Going toward him with open arms.] Here's your lark!

### ACT III

*Same scene. The table, with chairs around it, has been moved to the center of the room. A lamp on the table is lit. The hall door stands open. Dance music drifts down from the floor above. MRS. LINDE sits at the table, absently paging through a book, trying to read, but apparently unable to focus her thoughts. Once or twice she pauses, tensely listening for a sound at the outer entrance.*

MRS. LINDE: [Glancing at her watch.] Not yet—and there's hardly any time left. If only he's not—[Listening again.] Ah, there he is. [She goes out in the hall and cautiously opens the outer door. Quiet footsteps are heard on the stairs. She whispers:] Come in. Nobody's here.

KROGSTAD: [In the doorway.] I found a note from you at home. What's back of all this?

MRS. LINDE: I just *had* to talk to you.

KROGSTAD: Oh? And it just *had* to be here in this house?

MRS. LINDE: At my place it was impossible; my room hasn't a private entrance. Come in; we're all alone. The maid's asleep, and the Helmers are at the dance upstairs.

KROGSTAD: [Entering the room.] Well, well, the Helmers are dancing tonight? Really?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, why not?

KROGSTAD: How true—why not?

MRS. LINDE: All right, Krogstad, let's talk.

KROGSTAD: Do we two have anything more to talk about?

MRS. LINDE: We have a great deal to talk about.

KROGSTAD: I wouldn't have thought so.

MRS. LINDE: No, because you've never understood me, really.

KROGSTAD: Was there anything more to understand—except what's all too common in life? A calculating woman throws over a man the moment a better catch comes by.

MRS. LINDE: You think I'm so thoroughly calculating? You think I broke it off lightly?

KROGSTAD: Didn't you?

MRS. LINDE: Nils—is that what you really thought?

KROGSTAD: If you cared, then why did you write me the way you did?

MRS. LINDE: What else could I do? If I had to break off with you, then it was my job as well to root out everything you felt for me.

KROGSTAD: [*Wringing his hands.*] So that was it. And this—all this, simply for money!

MRS. LINDE: Don't forget I had a helpless mother and two small brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils; you had such a long road ahead of you then.

KROGSTAD: That may be; but you still hadn't the right to abandon me for somebody else's sake.

MRS. LINDE: Yes—I don't know. So many, many times I've asked myself if I did have that right.

KROGSTAD: [*More softly.*] When I lost you, it was as if all the solid ground dissolved from under my feet. Look at me; I'm a half-drowned man now, hanging onto a wreck.

MRS. LINDE: Help may be near.

KROGSTAD: It was near—but then you came and blocked it off.

MRS. LINDE: Without my knowing it, Nils. Today for the first time I learned that it's you I'm replacing at the bank.

KROGSTAD: All right—I believe you. But now that you know, will you step aside?

MRS. LINDE: No, because that wouldn't benefit you in the slightest.

KROGSTAD: Not “benefit” me, hm! I'd step aside anyway.

MRS. LINDE: I've learned to be realistic. Life and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that.

KROGSTAD: And life's taught me never to trust fine phrases.

MRS. LINDE: Then life's taught you a very sound thing. But you do have to trust in actions, don't you?

KROGSTAD: What does that mean?

MRS. LINDE: You said you were hanging on like a half-drowned man to a wreck.

KROGSTAD: I've good reason to say that.

MRS. LINDE: I'm also like a half-drowned woman on a wreck. No one to suffer with; no one to care for.

KROGSTAD: You made your choice

MRS. LINDE: There wasn't any choice then.

KROGSTAD: So—what of it?

MRS. LINDE: Nils, if only we two shipwrecked people could reach across to each other.

KROGSTAD: What are you saying?

MRS. LINDE: Two on one wreck are at least better off than each on his own.

KROGSTAD: Kristine!

MRS. LINDE: Why do you think I came into town?

KROGSTAD: Did you really have some thought of me?

MRS. LINDE: I have to work to go on living. All my born days, as long as I can remember, I've worked, and it's been my best and my only joy. But now I'm completely alone in the world; it frightens me to be so empty and lost. To work for yourself—there's no joy in that. Nils, give me something—someone to work for.

KROGSTAD: I don't believe all this. It's just some hysterical feminine urge to go out and make a noble sacrifice.

MRS. LINDE: Have you ever found me to be hysterical?

KROGSTAD: Can you honestly mean this? Tell me—do you know everything about my past?

MRS. LINDE: Yes.

KROGSTAD: And you know what they think I'm worth around here.

MRS. LINDE: From what you were saying before, it would seem that with me you could have been another person.

KROGSTAD: I'm positive of that.

MRS. LINDE: Couldn't it happen still?

KROGSTAD: Kristine—you're saying this in all seriousness? Yes, you are! I can see it in you. And do you really have the courage, then—?

MRS. LINDE: I need to have someone to care for; and your children need a mother. We both need each other. Nils, I have faith that you're good at heart—I'll risk everything together with you.

KROGSTAD: [*Gripping her hands.*] Kristine, thank you, thank you—Now I know I can win back a place in their eyes. Yes—but I forgot—

MRS. LINDE: [*Listening.*] Shh! The tarantella. Go now! Go on!

KROGSTAD: Why? What is it?

MRS. LINDE: Hear the dance up there? When that's over, they'll be coming down.

KROGSTAD: Oh, then I'll go. But—it's all pointless. Of course, you don't know the move I made against the Helmers.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, Nils, I know.

KROGSTAD: And all the same, you have the courage to—?

MRS. LINDE: I know how far despair can drive a man like you.

KROGSTAD: Oh, if I only could take it all back.

MRS. LINDE: You easily could—your letter's still lying in the mailbox.

KROGSTAD: Are you sure of that?

MRS. LINDE: Positive. But—

KROGSTAD: [*Looks at her searchingly.*] Is that the meaning of it, then? You'll save your friend at any price. Tell me straight out. Is that it?

MRS. LINDE: Nils—anyone who's sold herself for somebody else once isn't going to do it again.

KROGSTAD: I'll demand my letter back.

MRS. LINDE: No, no.

KROGSTAD: Yes, of course. I'll stay here till Helmer comes down; I'll tell him to give me my letter again—that it only involves my dismissal—that he shouldn't read it—

MRS. LINDE: No, Nils, don't call the letter back.

KROGSTAD: But wasn't that exactly why you wrote me to come here?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, in that first panic. But it's been a whole day and night since then, and in that time I've seen such incredible things in this house. Helmer's got to learn everything; this dreadful secret has to be aired; those two have to come to a full understanding; all these lies and evasions can't go on.

KROGSTAD: Well, then, if you want to chance it. But at least there's one thing I can do, and do right away—

MRS. LINDE: [*Listening.*] Go now, go, quick! The dance is over. We're not safe another second.

KROGSTAD: I'll wait for you downstairs.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, please do; take me home.

KROGSTAD: I can't believe it; I've never been so happy. [*He leaves by way of the outer door; the door between the room and the hall stays open.*]

MRS. LINDE: [*Straightening up a bit and getting together her street clothes.*] How different now! How different! Someone to work for, to live for—a home to build. Well, it is worth the try! Oh, if they'd only come! [*Listening.*] Ah, there they are. Bundle up. [*She picks up her hat and coat. NORA's and HELMER's voices can be heard outside; a key turns in the lock, and HELMER brings NORA into the hall almost by force. She is wearing the Italian costume with a large black shawl about her; he has on evening dress, with a black domino<sup>3</sup> open over it.*]

NORA: [*Struggling in the doorway.*] No, no, no, not inside! I'm going up again. I don't want to leave so soon.

HELMER: But Nora dear—

NORA: Oh, I beg you, please, Torvald. From the bottom of my heart, *please*—only an hour more!

HELMER: Not a single minute, Nora darling. You know our agreement. Come on, in we go; you'll catch cold out here. [*In spite of her resistance, he gently draws her into the room.*]

MRS. LINDE: Good evening.

NORA: Kristine!

HELMER: Why, Mrs. Linde—are you here so late?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, I'm sorry, but I did want to see Nora in costume.

NORA: Have you been sitting here, waiting for me?

MRS. LINDE: Yes. I didn't come early enough; you were all upstairs; and then I thought I really couldn't leave without seeing you.

HELMER: [*Removing NORA's shawl.*] Yes, take a good look. She's worth looking at, I can tell you that, Mrs. Linde. Isn't she lovely?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, I should say—

HELMER: A dream of loveliness, isn't she? That's what everyone thought at the party, too. But she's horribly stubborn—this sweet little thing. What's to be done with her? Can you imagine, I almost had to use force to pry her away.

NORA: Oh, Torvald, you're going to regret you didn't indulge me, even for just a half hour more.

HELMER: There, you see. She danced her tarantella and got a tumultuous hand—which was well earned, although the performance may have been a bit too naturalistic—I mean it rather overstepped the proprieties of art. But never mind—what's important is, she made a success, an overwhelming success. You think I could let her stay on after that and spoil the effect? Oh no; I took my lovely little Capri girl—my capricious little Capri girl, I should say—took her under my arm; one quick tour of the ballroom, a curtsy to every side, and then—as they say in novels—the beautiful vision disappeared. An exit should always be effective, Mrs. Linde, but that's what I can't get Nora to grasp. Phew, it's hot in here. [*Flings the domino on a chair and opens the door to his room.*] Why's it dark in here? Oh yes, of course. Excuse me. [*He goes in and lights a couple of candles.*]

NORA: [*In a sharp, breathless whisper.*] So?

MRS. LINDE: [*Quietly.*] I talked with him.

NORA: And—?

MRS. LINDE: Nora—you must tell your husband everything.

NORA: [*Dully.*] I knew it.

3. Hood worn by members of some religious orders.

MRS. LINDE: You've got nothing to fear from Krogstad, but you have to speak out.

NORA: I won't tell.

MRS. LINDE: Then the letter will.

NORA: Thanks, Kristine. I know now what's to be done. Shh!

HELMER: [*Reentering.*] Well, then, Mrs. Linde—have you admired her?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, and now I'll say good night.

HELMER: Oh, come, so soon? Is this yours, this knitting?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, thanks. I nearly forgot it.

HELMER: Do you knit, then?

MRS. LINDE: Oh yes.

HELMER: You know what? You should embroider instead.

MRS. LINDE: Really? Why?

HELMER: Yes, because it's a lot prettier. See here, one holds the embroidery so, in the left hand, and then one guides the needle with the right—so—in an easy, sweeping curve—right?

MRS. LINDE: Yes, I guess that's—

HELMER: But, on the other hand, knitting—it can never be anything but ugly. Look, see here, the arms tucked in, the knitting needles going up and down—there's something Chinese about it. Ah, that was really a glorious champagne they served.

MRS. LINDE: Yes, good night, Nora, and don't be stubborn anymore.

HELMER: Well put, Mrs. Linde!

MRS. LINDE: Good night, Mr. Helmer.

HELMER: [*Accompanying her to the door.*] Good night, good night. I hope you get home all right. I'd be very happy to—but you don't have far to go. Good night, good night. [*She leaves. He shuts the door after her and returns.*] There, now, at last we got her out the door. She's a deadly bore, that creature.

NORA: Aren't you pretty tired, Torvald?

HELMER: No, not a bit.

NORA: You're not sleepy?

HELMER: Not at all. On the contrary, I'm feeling quite exhilarated. But you? Yes, you really look tired and sleepy.

NORA: Yes, I'm very tired. Soon now I'll sleep.

HELMER: See! You see! I was right all along that we shouldn't stay longer.

NORA: Whatever you do is always right.

HELMER: [*Kissing her brow.*] Now my little lark talks sense. Say, did you notice what a time Rank was having tonight?

NORA: Oh, was he? I didn't get to speak with him.

HELMER: I scarcely did either, but it's a long time since I've seen him in such high spirits. [*Gazes at her a moment, then comes nearer her.*] Hm—it's marvelous, though, to be back home again—to be completely alone with you. Oh, you bewitchingly lovely young woman!

NORA: Torvald, don't look at me like that!

HELMER: Can't I look at my richest treasure? At all that beauty that's mine, mine alone—completely and utterly.

NORA: [*Moving around to the other side of the table.*] You mustn't talk to me that way tonight.

HELMER: [*Following her.*] The tarantella is still in your blood, I can see—and it

makes you even more enticing. Listen. The guests are beginning to go. [*Dropping his voice.*] Nora—it'll soon be quiet through this whole house.

NORA: Yes, I hope so.

HELMER: You do, don't you, my love? Do you realize—when I'm out at a party like this with you—do you know why I talk to you so little, and keep such a distance away; just send you a stolen look now and then—you know why I do it? It's because I'm imagining then that you're my secret darling, my secret young bride-to-be, and that no one suspects there's anything between us.

NORA: Yes, yes; oh, yes, I know you're always thinking of me.

HELMER: And then when we leave and I place the shawl over those fine young rounded shoulders—over that wonderful curving neck—then I pretend that you're my young bride, that we're just coming from the wedding, that for the first time I'm bringing you into my house—that for the first time I'm alone with you—completely alone with you, your trembling young beauty! All this evening I've longed for nothing but you. When I saw you turn and sway in the tarantella—my blood was pounding till I couldn't stand it—that's why I brought you down here so early—

NORA: Go away, Torvald! Leave me alone. I don't want all this.

HELMER: What do you mean? Nora, you're teasing me. You will, won't you? Aren't I your husband—?

[*A knock at the outside door.*]

NORA: [*Startled.*] What's that?

HELMER: [*Going toward the half.*] Who is it?

RANK: [*Outside.*] It's me. May I come in a moment?

HELMER: [*With quiet irritation.*] Oh, what does he want now? [*Aloud.*] Hold on. [*Goes and opens the door.*] Oh, how nice that you didn't just pass us by!

RANK: I thought I heard your voice, and then I wanted so badly to have a look in. [*Lightly glancing about.*] Ah, me, these old familiar haunts. You have it snug and cozy in here, you two.

HELMER: You seemed to be having it pretty cozy upstairs, too.

RANK: Absolutely. Why shouldn't I? Why not take in everything in life? As much as you can, anyway, and as long as you can. The wine was superb—

HELMER: The champagne especially.

RANK: You noticed that too? It's amazing how much I could guzzle down.

NORA: Torvald also drank a lot of champagne this evening.

RANK: Oh?

NORA: Yes, and that always makes him so entertaining.

RANK: Well, why shouldn't one have a pleasant evening after a well-spent day?

HELMER: Well spent? I'm afraid I can't claim that.

RANK: [*Slapping him on the back.*] But I can, you see!

NORA: Dr. Rank, you must have done some scientific research today.

RANK: Quite so.

HELMER: Come now—little Nora talking about scientific research!

NORA: And can I congratulate you on the results?

RANK: Indeed you may.

NORA: Then they were good?

RANK: The best possible for both doctor and patient—certainty.

NORA: [*Quickly and searchingly.*] Certainty?

RANK: Complete certainty. So don't I owe myself a gay evening afterwards?

NORA: Yes, you're right, Dr. Rank.

HELMER: I'm with you—just so long as you don't have to suffer for it in the morning.

RANK: Well, one never gets something for nothing in life.

NORA: Dr. Rank—are you very fond of masquerade parties?

RANK: Yes, if there's a good array of odd disguises—

NORA: Tell me, what should we two go as at the next masquerade?

HELMER: You little featherhead—already thinking of the next!

RANK: We two? I'll tell you what: you must go as Charmed Life—

HELMER: Yes, but find a costume for *that*!

RANK: Your wife can appear just as she looks every day.

HELMER: That was nicely put. But don't you know what you're going to be?

RANK: Yes, Helmer, I've made up my mind.

HELMER: Well?

RANK: At the next masquerade I'm going to be invisible.

HELMER: That's a funny idea.

RANK: They say there's a hat—black, huge—have you never heard of the hat that makes you invisible? You put it on, and then no one on earth can see you.

HELMER: [*Suppressing a smile.*] Ah, of course.

RANK: But I'm quite forgetting what I came for. Helmer, give me a cigar, one of the dark Havanas.

HELMER: With the greatest pleasure. [*Holds out his case.*]

RANK: Thanks. [*Takes one and cuts off the tip.*]

NORA: [*Striking a match*] Let me give you a light.

RANK: Thank you. [*She holds the match for him; he lights the cigar.*] And now good-bye.

HELMER: Good-bye, good-bye, old friend.

NORA: Sleep well, Doctor.

RANK: Thanks for that wish.

NORA: Wish me the same.

RANK: You? All right, if you like—Sleep well. And thanks for the light. [*He nods to them both and leaves.*]

HELMER: [*His voice subdued.*] He's been drinking heavily.

NORA: [*Absently.*] *Could be.* [*HELMER takes his keys from his pocket and goes out in the hall.*] Torvald—what are you after?

HELMER: Got to empty the mailbox; it's nearly full. There won't be room for the morning papers.

NORA: Are you working tonight?

HELMER: You know I'm not. Why—what's this? Someone's been at the lock.

NORA: At the lock—?

HELMER: Yes, I'm positive. What do you suppose—? I can't imagine one of the maids—? Here's a broken hairpin. Nora, it's yours—

NORA: [*Quickly.*] Then it must be the children—

HELMER: You'd better break them of that. Hm, hm—well, opened it after all. [*Takes the contents out and calls into the kitchen.*] Helene! Helene, would you put out the lamp in the hall. [*He returns to the room, shutting the hall door, then displays the handful of mail.*] Look how it's piled up. [*Sorting through them.*] Now what's this?

NORA: [*At the window.*] The letter! Oh, Torvald, no!

HELMER: Two calling cards—from Rank.

NORA: From Dr. Rank?

HELMER: [*Examining them.*] “Dr. Rank, Consulting Physician.” They were on top. He must have dropped them in as he left.

NORA: Is there anything on them?

HELMER: There’s a black cross over the name. See? That’s a gruesome notion. He could almost be announcing his own death.

NORA: That’s just what he’s doing.

HELMER: What! You’ve heard something? Something he’s told you?

NORA: Yes. That when those cards came, he’d be taking his leave of us. He’ll shut himself in now and die.

HELMER: Ah, my poor friend! Of course I knew he wouldn’t be here much longer. But so soon—And then to hide himself away like a wounded animal.

NORA: If it has to happen, then it’s best it happens in silence—don’t you think so, Torvald?

HELMER: [*Pacing up and down.*] He’d grown right into our lives. I simply can’t imagine him gone. He with his suffering and loneliness—like a dark cloud setting off our sunlit happiness. Well, maybe it’s best this way. For him, at least. [*Standing still.*] And maybe for us too, Nora. Now we’re thrown back on each other, completely. [*Embracing her.*] Oh you, my darling wife, how can I hold you close enough? You know what, Nora—time and again I’ve wished you were in some terrible danger, just so I could stake my life and soul and everything, for your sake.

NORA: [*Tearing herself away, her voice firm and decisive.*] Now you must read your mail, Torvald.

HELMER: No, no, not tonight. I want to stay with you, dearest.

NORA: With a dying friend on your mind?

HELMER: You’re right. We’ve both had a shock. There’s ugliness between us—these thoughts of death and corruption. We’ll have to get free of them first. Until then—we’ll stay apart.

NORA: [*Clinging about his neck.*] Torvald—good night! Good night!

HELMER: [*Kissing her on the cheek.*] Good night, little songbird. Sleep well, Nora. I’ll be reading my mail now. [*He takes the letters into his room and shuts the door after him.*]

NORA: [*With bewildered glances, groping about, seizing HELMER’s domino, throwing it around her, and speaking in short, hoarse, broken whispers.*] Never see him again. Never, never. [*Putting her shawl over her head.*] Never see the children either—them, too. Never, never. Oh, the freezing black water! The depths—down—Oh, I wish it were over—He has it now; he’s reading it—now. Oh no, no, not yet. Torvald, good-bye, you and the children—[*She starts for the hall; as she does, HELMER throws open his door and stands with an open letter in his hand.*]

HELMER: Nora!

NORA: [*Screams.*] Oh—!

HELMER: What is this? You know what’s in this letter?

NORA: Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me out!

HELMER: [*Holding her back.*] Where are you going?

NORA: [*Struggling to break loose.*] You can’t save me, Torvald!

HELMER: [*Slumping back.*] True! Then it’s true what he writes? How horrible! No, no, it’s impossible—it can’t be true.

NORA: It is true. I’ve loved you more than all this world.



HELMER: Ah, none of your slippery tricks.

NORA: [*Taking one step toward him.*] Torvald—!

HELMER: What *is* this you've blundered into!

NORA: Just let me loose. You're not going to suffer for my sake. You're not going to take on my guilt.

HELMER: No more playacting. [*Locks the hall door.*] You stay right here and give me a reckoning. You understand what you've done? Answer! You understand?

NORA: [*Looking squarely at him, her face hardening.*] Yes. I'm beginning to understand everything now.

HELMER: [*Striding about.*] Oh, what an awful awakening! In all these eight years—she who was my pride and joy—a hypocrite, a liar—worse, worse—a criminal! How infinitely disgusting it all is! The shame! [NORA says *nothing* and goes on looking straight at him. He stops in front of her.] I should have suspected something of the kind. I should have known. All your father's flimsy values—Be still! All your father's flimsy values have come out in you. No religion, no morals, no sense of duty—Oh, how I'm punished for letting him off! I did it for your sake, and you repay me like this.

NORA: Yes, like this.

HELMER: Now you've wrecked all my happiness—ruined my whole future. Oh, it's awful to think of. I'm in a cheap little grafter's hands; he can do anything he wants with me, ask for anything, play with me like a puppet—and I can't breathe a word. I'll be swept down miserably into the depths on account of a featherbrained woman.

NORA: When I'm gone from this world, you'll be free.

HELMER: Oh, quit posing. Your father had a mess of those speeches too. What good would that ever do me if you were gone from this world, as you say? Not the slightest. He can still make the whole thing known; and if he does, I could be falsely suspected as your accomplice. They might even think that I was behind it—that I put you up to it. And all that I can thank you for—you that I've coddled the whole of our marriage. Can you see now what you've done to me?

NORA: [*ICily calm.*] Yes.

HELMER: It's so incredible, I just can't grasp it. But we'll have to patch up whatever we can. Take off the shawl. I said, take it off! I've got to appease him somehow or other. The thing has to be hushed up at any cost. And as for you and me, it's got to seem like everything between us is just as it was—to the outside world, that is. You'll go right on living in this house, of course. But you can't be allowed to bring up the children; I don't dare trust you with them—Oh, to have to say this to someone I've loved so much, and that I still—! Well, that's done with. From now on happiness doesn't matter; all that matters is saving the bits and pieces, the appearance—[*The doorbell rings. HELMER starts.*] What's that? And so late. Maybe the worst—? You think he'd—? Hide, Nora! Say you're sick. [NORA remains standing motionless. HELMER goes and opens the door.]

MAID: [*Half dressed, in the hall.*] A letter for Mrs. Helmer.

HELMER: I'll take it. [*Snatches the letter and shuts the door.*] Yes, it's from him. You don't get it; I'm reading it myself.

NORA: Then read it.

HELMER: [*By the lamp.*] I hardly dare. We may be ruined, you and I. But—I've got to know. [*Rips open the letter, skims through a few lines, glances at an enclosure, then*

*cries out joyfully.*] Nora! [*NORA looks inquiringly at him.*] Nora! Wait—better check it again—Yes, yes, it's true. I'm saved. Nora, I'm saved!

NORA: And I?

HELMER: You too, of course. We're both saved, both of us. Look. He's sent back your note. He says he's sorry and ashamed—that a happy development in his life—oh, who cares what he says! Nora, we're saved! No one can hurt you. Oh, Nora, Nora—but first, this ugliness all has to go. Let me see—[*Takes a look at the note.*] No, I don't want to see it; I want the whole thing to fade like a dream. [*Tears the note and both letters to pieces, throws them into the stove and watches them burn.*] There—now there's nothing left—He wrote that since Christmas Eve you—Oh, they must have been three terrible days for you, Nora.

NORA: I fought a hard fight.

HELMER: And suffered pain and saw no escape but—No, we're not going to dwell on anything unpleasant. We'll just be grateful and keep on repeating: it's over now, it's over! You hear me, Nora? You don't seem to realize—it's over. What's it mean—that frozen look? Oh, poor little Nora, I understand. You can't believe I've forgiven you. But I have, Nora; I swear I have. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me.

NORA: That's true.

HELMER: You loved me the way a wife ought to love her husband. It's simply the means that you couldn't judge. But you think I love you any the less for not knowing how to handle your affairs? No, no—just lean on me; I'll guide you and teach you. I wouldn't be a man if this feminine helplessness didn't make you twice as attractive to me. You mustn't mind those sharp words I said—that was all in the first confusion of thinking my world had collapsed. I've forgiven you, Nora; I swear I've forgiven you.

NORA: My thanks for your forgiveness. [*She goes out through the door, right.*]

HELMER: No, wait—[*Peers in.*] What are you doing in there?

NORA: [*Inside.*] Getting out of my costume.

HELMER: [*By the open door.*] Yes, do that. Try to calm yourself and collect your thoughts again, my frightened little songbird. You can rest easy now; I've got wide wings to shelter you with. [*Walking about close by the door.*] How snug and nice our home is, Nora. You're safe here; I'll keep you like a hunted dove I've rescued out of a hawk's claws. I'll bring peace to your poor, shuddering heart. Gradually it'll happen, Nora; you'll see. Tomorrow all this will look different to you; then everything will be as it was. I won't have to go on repeating I forgive you; you'll feel it for yourself. How can you imagine I'd ever conceivably want to disown you—or even blame you in any way? Ah, you don't know a man's heart, Nora. For a man there's something indescribably sweet and satisfying in knowing he's forgiven his wife—and forgiven her out of a full and open heart. It's as if she belongs to him in two ways now: in a sense he's given her fresh into the world again, and she's become his wife and his child as well. From now on that's what you'll be to me—you little, bewildered, helpless thing. Don't be afraid of anything, Nora; just open your heart to me, and I'll be conscience and will to you both—[*NORA enters in her regular clothes.*] What's this? Not in bed? You've changed your dress?

NORA: Yes, Torvald, I've changed my dress.

HELMER: But why now, so late?

NORA: Tonight I'm not sleeping.

HELMER: But Nora dear—

NORA: [*Looking at her watch.*] It's still not so very late. Sit down, Torvald; we have a lot to talk over. [*She sits at one side of the table.*]

HELMER: Nora—what is this? That hard expression—

NORA: Sit down. This'll take some time. I have a lot to say.

HELMER: [*Sitting at the table directly opposite her.*] You worry me, Nora. And I don't understand you.

NORA: No, that's exactly it. You don't understand me. And I've never understood you either—until tonight. No, don't interrupt. You can just listen to what I say. We're closing out accounts, Torvald.

HELMER: How do you mean that?

NORA: [*After a short pause.*] Doesn't anything strike you about our sitting here like this?

HELMER: What's that?

NORA: We've been married now eight years. Doesn't it occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have ever talked seriously together?

HELMER: What do you mean—seriously?

NORA: In eight whole years—longer even—right from our first acquaintance, we've never exchanged a serious word on any serious thing.

HELMER: You mean I should constantly go and involve you in problems you couldn't possibly help me with?

NORA: I'm not talking of problems. I'm saying that we've never sat down seriously together and tried to get to the bottom of anything.

HELMER: But dearest, what good would that ever do you?

NORA: That's the point right there: you've never understood me. I've been wronged greatly, Torvald—first by Papa, and then by you.

HELMER: What! By us—the two people who've loved you more than anyone else?

NORA: [*Shaking her head.*] You never loved me. You've thought it fun to be in love with me, that's all.

HELMER: Nora, what a thing to say!

NORA: Yes, it's true now, Torvald. When I lived at home with Papa, he told me all his opinions, so I had the same ones too; or if they were different I hid them, since he wouldn't have cared for that. He used to call me his doll-child, and he played with me the way I played with my dolls. Then I came into your house—

HELMER: How can you speak of our marriage like that?

NORA: [*Unperturbed.*] I mean, then I went from Papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything to your own taste, and so I got the same taste as you—or I pretended to; I can't remember. I guess a little of both, first one, then the other. Now when I look back, it seems as if I'd lived here like a beggar—just from hand to mouth. I've lived by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that's the way you wanted it. It's a great sin what you and Papa did to me. You're to blame that nothing's become of me.

HELMER: Nora, how unfair and ungrateful you are! Haven't you been happy here?

NORA: No, never. I thought so—but I never have.

HELMER: Not—not happy!

NORA: No, only lighthearted. And you've always been so kind to me. But our home's been nothing but a playpen. I've been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child. And in turn the children have been my dolls. I

thought it was fun when you played with me, just as they thought it fun when I played with them. That's been our marriage, Torvald.

HELMER: There's some truth in what you're saying—under all the raving exaggeration. But it'll all be different after this. Playtime's over; now for the schooling.

NORA: Whose schooling—mine or the children's?

HELMER: Both yours and the children's, dearest.

NORA: Oh, Torvald, you're not the man to teach me to be a good wife to you.

HELMER: And you can say that?

NORA: And I—how am I equipped to bring up children?

HELMER: Nora!

NORA: Didn't you say a moment ago that that was no job to trust me with?

HELMER: In a flare of temper! Why fasten on that?

NORA: Yes, but you were so very right. I'm not up to the job. There's another job I have to do first. I have to try to educate myself. You can't help me with that. I've got to do it alone. And that's why I'm leaving you now.

HELMER: [*Jumping up.*] What's that?

NORA: I have to stand completely alone, if I'm ever going to discover myself and the world out there. So I can't go on living with you.

HELMER: Nora, Nora!

NORA: I want to leave right away. Kristine should put me up for the night—

HELMER: You're insane! You've no right! I forbid you!

NORA: From here on, there's no use forbidding me anything. I'll take with me whatever is mine. I don't want a thing from you, either now or later.

HELMER: What kind of madness is this!

NORA: Tomorrow I'm going home—I mean, home where I came from. It'll be easier up there to find something to do.

HELMER: Oh, you blind, incompetent child!

NORA: I must learn to be competent, Torvald.

HELMER: Abandon your home, your husband, your children! And you're not even thinking what people will say.

NORA: I can't be concerned about that. I only know how essential this is.

HELMER: Oh, it's outrageous. So you'll run out like this on your most sacred vows.

NORA: What do you think are my most sacred vows?

HELMER: And I have to tell you that! Aren't they your duties to your husband and children?

NORA: I have other duties equally sacred.

HELMER: That isn't true. What duties are they?

NORA: Duties to myself.

HELMER: Before all else, you're a wife and a mother.

NORA: I don't believe in that anymore. I believe that, before all else, I'm a human being, no less than you—or anyway, I ought to try to become one. I know the majority thinks you're right, Torvald, and plenty of books agree with you, too. But I can't go on believing what the majority says, or what's written in books. I have to think over these things myself and try to understand them.

HELMER: Why can't you understand your place in your own home? On a point like that, isn't there one everlasting guide you can turn to? Where's your religion?

NORA: Oh, Torvald, I'm really not sure what religion is.

HELMER: What—?

NORA: I only know what the minister said when I was confirmed. He told me religion was this thing and that. When I get clear and away by myself, I'll go into that problem too. I'll see if what the minister said was right, or, in any case, if it's right for me.

HELMER: A young woman your age shouldn't talk like that. If religion can't move you, I can try to rouse your conscience. You do have some moral feeling? Or, tell me—has that gone too?

NORA: It's not easy to answer that, Torvald. I simply don't know. I'm all confused about these things. I just know I see them so differently from you. I find out, for one thing, that the law's not at all what I'd thought—but I can't get it through my head that the law is fair. A woman hasn't a right to protect her dying father or save her husband's life! I can't believe that.

HELMER: You talk like a child. You don't know anything of the world you live in.

NORA: No, I don't. But now I'll begin to learn for myself. I'll try to discover who's right, the world or I.

HELMER: Nora, you're sick; you've got a fever. I almost think you're out of your head.

NORA: I've never felt more clearheaded and sure in my life.

HELMER: And—clearheaded and sure—you're leaving your husband and children?

NORA: Yes.

HELMER: Then there's only one possible reason.

NORA: What?

HELMER: You no longer love me.

NORA: No. That's exactly it.

HELMER: Nora! You can't be serious!

NORA: Oh, this is so hard, Torvald—you've been so kind to me always. But I can't help it. I don't love you anymore.

HELMER: [*Struggling for composure.*] Are you also clearheaded and sure about that?

NORA: Yes, completely. That's why I can't go on staying here.

HELMER: Can you tell me what I did to lose your love?

NORA: Yes, I can tell you. It was this evening when the miraculous thing didn't come—then I knew you weren't the man I'd imagined.

HELMER: Be more explicit; I don't follow you.

NORA: I've waited now so patiently eight long years—for, my Lord, I know miracles don't come every day. Then this crisis broke over me, and such a certainty filled me: *now* the miraculous event would occur. While Krogstad's letter was lying out there, I never for an instant dreamed that you could give in to his terms. I was so utterly sure you'd say to him: go on, tell your tale to the whole wide world. And when he'd done that—

HELMER: Yes, what then? When I'd delivered my own wife into shame and disgrace—!

NORA: When he'd done that, I was so utterly sure that you'd step forward, take the blame on yourself and say: I am the guilty one.

HELMER: Nora—!

NORA: You're thinking I'd never accept such a sacrifice from you? No, of course not. But what good would my protests be against you? That was the miracle I was waiting for, in terror and hope. And to stave that off, I would have taken my life.

HELMER: I'd gladly work for you day and night, Nora—and take on pain and deprivation. But there's no one who gives up honor for love.

NORA: Millions of women have done just that.

HELMER: Oh, you think and talk like a silly child.

NORA: Perhaps. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could join myself to. When your big fright was over—and it wasn't from any threat against me, only for what might damage you—when all the danger was past, for you it was just as if nothing had happened. I was exactly the same, your little lark, your doll, that you'd have to handle with double care now that I'd turned out so brittle and frail. [*Gets up.*] Torvald—in that instant it dawned on me that for eight years I've been living here with a stranger, and that I'd even conceived three children—oh, I can't stand the thought of it! I could tear myself to bits.

HELMER: [*Heavily.*] I see. There's a gulf that's opened between us—that's clear. Oh, but Nora, can't we bridge it somehow?

NORA: The way I am now, I'm no wife for you.

HELMER: I have the strength to make myself over.

NORA: Maybe—if your doll gets taken away.

HELMER: But to part! To part from you! No, Nora, no—I can't imagine it.

NORA: [*Going out, right.*] All the more reason why it has to be. [*She reenters with her coat and a small overnight bag, which she puts on a chair by the table.*]

HELMER: Nora, Nora, not now! Wait till tomorrow.

NORA: I can't spend the night in a strange man's room.

HELMER: But couldn't we live here like brother and sister—

NORA: You know very well how long that would last. [*Throws her shawl about her.*] Good-bye, Torvald. I won't look in on the children. I know they're in better hands than mine. The way I am now, I'm no use to them.

HELMER: But someday, Nora—someday—?

NORA: How can I tell? I haven't the least idea what'll become of me.

HELMER: But you're my wife, now and wherever you go.

NORA: Listen, Torvald—I've heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house just as I'm doing, then the law frees him from all responsibility. In any case, I'm freeing you from being responsible. Don't feel yourself bound, any more than I will. There has to be absolute freedom for us both. Here, take your ring back. Give me mine.

HELMER: That too?

NORA: That too.

HELMER: There it is.

NORA: Good. Well, now it's all over. I'm putting the keys here. The maids know all about keeping up the house—better than I do. Tomorrow, after I've left town, Kristine will stop by to pack up everything that's mine from home. I'd like those things shipped up to me.

HELMER: Over! All over! Nora, won't you ever think about me?

NORA: I'm sure I'll think of you often, and about the children and the house here.

HELMER: May I write you?

NORA: No—never. You're not to do that.

HELMER: Oh, but let me send you—

NORA: Nothing. Nothing.

HELMER: Or help you if you need it.

NORA: No. I accept nothing from strangers.

HELMER: Nora—can I never be more than a stranger to you?

NORA: [*Picking up the overnight bag.*] Ah, Torvald—it would take the greatest miracle of all—

HELMER: Tell me the greatest miracle!

NORA: You and I both would have to transform ourselves to the point that—Oh, Torvald, I've stopped believing in miracles.

HELMER: But I'll believe. Tell me! Transform ourselves to the point that—?

NORA: That our living together could be a true marriage. [*She goes out down the hall.*]

HELMER: [*Sinks down on a chair by the door, face buried in his hands.*] Nora! Nora! [*Looking about and rising.*] Empty. She's gone. [*A sudden hope leaps in him.*] The greatest miracle—?

[*From below, the sound of a door slamming shut.*]

1879

## ARTHUR MILLER

### *Death of a Salesman*

Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem

#### CHARACTERS

WILLY LOMAN	THE WOMAN	STANLEY
LINDA	CHARLEY	MISS FORSYTHE
BIFF	UNCLE BEN	LETTA
HAPPY	HOWARD WAGNER	
BERNARD	JENNY	

*The action takes place in WILLY LOMAN's house and yard and in various places he visits in the New York and Boston of today.*

#### ACT I

*A melody is heard, playing upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.*

*Before us is the Salesman's house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry flow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality. The kitchen at center seems actual enough, for there is a kitchen table with three chairs, and a refrigerator. But no other fixtures are seen. At the back of the kitchen there is a draped entrance, which leads to the living-room. To the right of the kitchen, on a level raised two feet, is a bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair. On a shelf over the bed a silver athletic trophy stands. A window opens onto the apartment house at the side.*