

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN. (1896)

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

by

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Translation by William Archer.

PERSONS.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN, formerly Managing Director of a Bank.

MRS. GUNHILD BORKMAN, his wife.

ERHART BORKMAN, their son, a student.

MISS ELLA RENTHEIM, Mrs. Borkman's twin sister.

MRS. FANNY WILTON.

VILHELM FOLDAL, subordinate clerk in a Government office.

FRIDA FOLDAL, his daughter.

MRS. BORKMAN'S MAID.

The action passes one winter evening, at the Manorhouse of the Rentheim family, in the neighbourhood of Christiania.

ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN's *drawing-room*, furnished with old-fashioned, faded splendour. At the back, an open sliding-door leads into a garden-room, with windows and a glass door. Through it a view over the garden; twilight with driving snow. On the right, a door leading from the hall. Further forward, a large old-fashioned iron stove, with the fire lighted. On the left, towards the back, a single smaller door. In front, on the same side, a window, covered with thick curtains. Between the window and the door a horsehair sofa, with a table in front of it covered with a cloth. On the table, a lighted lamp with a shade. Beside the stove a high-backed armchair.

MRS. GUNHILD BORKMAN *sits on the sofa, crocheting. She is an elderly lady, of cold, distinguished appearance, with stiff carriage and immobile features. Her abundant hair is very grey. Delicate transparent hands. Dressed in a gown of heavy dark silk, which has originally been handsome, but is now somewhat worn and shabby. A woollen shawl over her shoulders.*

She sits for a time erect and immovable at her crochet. Then the bells of a passing sledge are heard.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Listens; her eyes sparkle with gladness and she involuntarily whispers*]. Erhart! At last!

[*She rises and draws the curtain a little aside to look out. Appears disappointed, and sits down to her work again, on the sofa. Presently THE MAID enters from the hall with a visiting card on a small tray.*]

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Quickly.*] Has Erhart come after all?

THE MAID.

No, ma'am. But there's a lady——

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Laying aside her crochet.*] Oh, Mrs. Wilton, I suppose——

THE MAID.

[*Approaching.*] No, someone strange——

MRS. BORKMAN.

Did she say she wanted to see Mrs. Borkman?

THE MAID.

Yes.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Shortly, resolutely.*] Good. Tell her I'm here.

[THE MAID opens the door for the strange lady and goes out. MISS ELLA RENTHEIM enters. She resembles her sister; but her face has rather a suffering than a hard expression. It still shows signs of great beauty, combined with strong character. She has a great deal of hair, which is drawn back from the forehead in natural ripples, and is snow-white. She is dressed in black velvet, with a hat and a fur-lined cloak of the same material.]

[The two sisters stand silent for a time, and look searchingly at each other. Each is evidently waiting for the other to speak first.]

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Standing erect and immovable between the sofa and the table, resting her finger-tips upon the cloth.*] Haven't you made a mistake? The bailiff lives in the side wing, you know.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I'm not here for the bailiff, but for you.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Coming forward into the middle of the room.*] Well—then sit down.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Thank you, but I'll stand for now.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Fine, but please loosen your cloak at least.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Unbuttoning her cloak.*] Yes, it's very warm here.

MRS. BORKMAN.

I am always cold.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Stands looking at her for a time with her arms resting on the back of the armchair.*] It's been nearly eight years now since we ...

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Coldly.*] Since last we spoke to each other at any rate.

ELLA RENTHEIM. True, since we spoke to each other. I suppose you've seen me now and again—when I came on my yearly visit to the bailiff.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Once or twice.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ELLA RENTHEIM. I've had a few glimpses of you, too—there, at the window.

MRS. BORKMAN. You have good eyes. [*Harshly and cuttingly.*] But the last time we spoke to each other—it was here in this room—
—

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Trying to stop her.*] Yes, yes; I know, Gunhild!

MRS. BORKMAN.
—the week before he—before he was let out.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Moving towards the back.*] Don't speak about that.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Firmly, but in a low voice.*] It was the week before he—was set at liberty.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Coming down.*] How could I forget?

MRS. BORKMAN. I can't understand how such a thing—how anything so horrible can fall upon one single family! And then—that it should be our family! So old a family as ours! Think of its choosing us out!

ELLA RENTHEIM. Oh, Gunhild—there were many, many families besides ours who suffered.

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, but I don't care about those others. For them it was only a matter of a little money—or some papers. But for us—! For me! And then for Erhart! My little boy! [*In rising excitement.*] The shame that fell upon us two innocents! The dishonour! The hateful, terrible dishonour! And then the utter ruin too!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Cautiously.*] Tell me, how does he bear it?

MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart??

ELLA RENTHEIM.
No—he himself. How does he bear it?

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Scornfully.*] Do you think I ever ask? You don't suppose I have anything to do with him? That I ever meet him? That I even see him, do you?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Not even that!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*As before.*] The man was in gaol, in gaol for five years! [*Covers her face with her hands.*] The crushing shame of it! [*With increased vehemence.*] And then to think of all that the name of John Gabriel Borkman used to mean! No, no, no—I can never see him again! Never!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Looks at her for a while.*] You have a hard heart, Gunhild.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Towards him, yes.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
He's your husband.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Didn't he say in court that I began his ruin? That I spent money so recklessly?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Tentatively.*] But there's some truth in that, isn't there?

MRS. BORKMAN. Why, he himself made me do it! He insisted on our living in such an absurdly lavish style——

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, I know. But that's just where you should have restrained him.

MRS. BORKMAN. How was I to know that it wasn't his own money he gave me to squander? And that he himself used to squander, too—ten times more than I did!

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Quietly.*] Well, but in his position ...

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Scornfully.*] Yes, it was always the same story—we were to "cut a figure." And he did "cut a figure"! Driving about with a four-in-hand as if he were a king ... people bowing and scraping to him and calling him by his Christian names—all over the country—as if he had been the king himself. "John Gabriel," "John Gabriel," "John Gabriel." Everyone knew what a great man "John Gabriel" was!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Warmly and emphatically.*] He was a great man then.

MRS. BORKMAN. To all appearances, yes, but he never breathed a single word to me about what really went on—never gave a hint about where the money really came from.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, no; and the others never dreamt of it.

MRS. BORKMAN. I don't care about the others. It was his duty to tell me the truth. And he never did! He kept on lying to me—lying abominably——

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Interrupting.*] Surely not, Gunhild. He kept things back perhaps, but I'm sure he didn't lie.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Call it what you please; it makes no difference. And then it all fell to pieces—the whole thing.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*To herself.*] Yes, everything fell to pieces—for him—and for the rest of us.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Drawing herself up menacingly.*] But I tell you this, Ella, I shall redeem myself yet!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Eagerly.*] Redeem yourself! What do you mean?

MRS. BORKMAN. Redeem my name, and honour, and fortune! Redeem my ruined life— that's what I mean! I have someone in reserve, let me tell you— someone who will wash away every stain that he has left.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Gunhild! Gunhild!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With rising excitement.*] There is an avenger living, I tell you! One who will make up to me for all his father's sins!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Erhart.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, Erhart, my own boy! He will redeem the family, the house, the name. All that can be redeemed.—And perhaps more besides.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
How, Gunhild?

MRS. BORKMAN. I don't know how. But I know that it must and shall be done. [*Looks searchingly at her.*] Come now, Ella; isn't that really what you've had in mind too, ever since he was a child?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
No, I can't say that.

MRS. BORKMAN. No? Then why did you take charge of him when the storm broke upon—upon this house?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Because at the time you couldn't look after him yourself, Gunhild.

MRS. BORKMAN. No, no, I couldn't. And his father—he had a valid enough excuse—while he was there—in safe keeping—

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Indignant.*] How can you say such things!—You!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With a venomous expression.*] And how could you make up your mind to take charge of the child of a—a John Gabriel! Just as if he had been your own? To take the child away from me—home with you—and keep him there year after year, until the boy was nearly grown up. [*Looking suspiciously at her.*] What was your real reason, Ella? Why did you keep him with you?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
I came to love him so dearly—

MRS. BORKMAN.
More than I—his mother?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Evasively.*]
Erhart was rather delicate as a child—

MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart—delicate!

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, I thought so—at that time at any rate. And you know the air of the west coast is so much milder than here.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Smiling bitterly.*] Is it indeed? [*Breaking off.*] Yes, it's true you've done a great deal for Erhart. [*With a change of tone.*] Well, of course, you could afford it. [*Smiling.*] You were so lucky, Ella; you managed to save all your money.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Hurt.*] I didn't manage anything about it, I assure you. I had no idea—until long, long afterwards—that the securities belonging to me—that they had been left untouched.

MRS. BORKMAN. I don't understand anything about these things! I only say you were lucky. [*Looking inquiringly at her.*] But when you, of your own accord, undertook to educate Erhart for me—what was your motive in that?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Looking at her.*] My motive?

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes. What did you want to do with him? To make of him?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Slowly.*] I wanted to smooth the way for Erhart to happiness in life.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Contemptuously.*] Pooh—people situated as we are have something else than happiness to think of.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
What, then?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looking steadily and earnestly at her.*] Erhart has in the first place to make so brilliant a position for himself, that no trace shall be left of the shadow his father has cast upon my name—and my son's.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Searchingly.*] Tell me, Gunhild, is this what Erhart himself demands of his life?

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Slightly taken aback.*] Yes, I should hope so!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Is it not rather what you demand of him?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Curtly.*] Erhart and I always make the same demands upon ourselves.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Sadly and slowly.*] Are you so very certain of your boy?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With veiled triumph.*] Yes, I am—thank Heaven. You may be sure of that!

ELLA RENTHEIM. Then you must be happy after all; in spite of all the rest.

MRS. BORKMAN. So I am—so far as that goes. But then, every moment, all the rest comes rushing in upon me like a storm.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With a change of tone.*] Tell me—you may as well tell me at once—for that is really what I've come for—

MRS. BORKMAN.
What?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Something I felt I must talk to you about.—Tell me—Erhart doesn't live out here with—with you others?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Harshly.*] Erhart cannot live out here with me. He has to live in town—

ELLA RENTHEIM.
So he wrote to me.

MRS. BORKMAN. He must, for the sake of his studies. But he stops by here for a little while every evening.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Well, may I see him then? May I speak to him at once?

MRS. BORKMAN.
He isn't here, but I expect him any moment.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Why, Gunhild, surely he must have come. I can hear his footsteps overhead.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*With a rapid upward glance.*] Up in the long gallery?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes. I've heard him walking up and down there ever since I came.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Looking away from her.*] That's not Erhart, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Surprised.*] Not Erhart? [*Divining.*] Who is it then?

MRS. BORKMAN.

It is he.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Softly, with suppressed pain.*] Borkman? John Gabriel Borkman?

MRS. BORKMAN. He walks up and down like that—backwards and forwards—from morning to night—day in and day out. That's how it's been ever since they let him out, and sent him home to me. All these long eight years. Always to hear his footsteps up there—from early morning till far into the night. And everything sounds so clear in this house. I feel as if I have a sick wolf pacing his cage up there in the gallery, right over my head. [*Listens and whispers.*] Do you hear! Backwards and forwards, up and down, prowls the wolf.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Do you never happen to meet him, away from home?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*With a bitter laugh.*] In society, do you mean?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I mean, when he goes out walking. In the woods, or——

MRS. BORKMAN.

He never goes out.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Not even in the twilight?

MRS. BORKMAN.

Never.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*With emotion.*] He cannot bring himself to go out?

MRS. BORKMAN. I suppose not. He has his great cloak and his hat hanging in the cupboard—the cupboard in the hall, you know——

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*To herself.*] The cupboard we used to hide in when we were little.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Nods.*] And now and then—late in the evening—I can hear him come down as though to go out. But he always stops when he is halfway downstairs, and turns back—straight back to the gallery.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Quietly.*] Do none of his old friends ever come up to see him?

MRS. BORKMAN.

They tell me an old clerk or copyist or something comes out to visit now and then.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Probably a man called Foldal. They were friends as young men.

MRS. BORKMAN. I know nothing about him. He was quite outside our circle—when we had a circle——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

So he meets with Borkman now?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, he condescends to. But of course he only comes after dark.

ELLA RENTHEIM. This Foldal—didn't he suffer when the bank collapsed?

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Carelessly.*] Yes, I heard he lost some money. But no doubt it was something quite trifling.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*With slight emphasis.*] It was all he possessed.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Smiling.*] Oh, well; what he possessed must have been little enough—nothing to speak of.

ELLA RENTHEIM. And he didn't speak of it—Foldal I mean—during the investigation.

MRS. BORKMAN. Erhart has made ample amends for any little loss he may have suffered.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*With surprise.*] Erhart! How can Erhart have done that?

MRS. BORKMAN. He's taken an interest in Foldal's youngest daughter. He's taught her things, and put her in the way of getting employment, and some day providing for herself. I'm sure that's a great deal more than her father could ever have done for her.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, I suppose her father can't afford to do much.

MRS. BORKMAN.
And then Erhart has arranged for her to have music lessons.

She's made such progress already that she can come up to—to him in the gallery, and play to him.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
So he's still fond of music?

MRS. BORKMAN. I suppose he is. Of course he has the piano you sent out here—when he was expected back——

ELLA RENTHEIM.
And she plays to him on it?

MRS. BORKMAN.
Now and then—in the evenings. Erhart has arranged for her to stay with a lady who lives nearby—a Mrs. Wilton——

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*With interest.*] Mrs. Wilton?

MRS. BORKMAN.
A very rich woman. You don't know her.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Mrs. Fanny Wilton?

MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Erhart has mentioned her. Does she live out here now?

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, she's taken a villa; she moved away from town some time ago.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With a slight hesitation.*] They say she's been divorced.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Her husband has been dead for several years.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, but they were divorced. He got a divorce.

MRS. BORKMAN. He deserted her, that's what he did. I'm sure the fault wasn't hers.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Do you know her very well, Gunhild?

MRS. BORKMAN. Fairly well. She lives close by and she looks in every now and then.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
And do you like her?

MRS. BORKMAN.
She is unusually intelligent and remarkably clear in her judgments.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
In her judgments of people, do you mean?

MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, principally of people. She's made quite a study of Erhart; looked deep into his character—into his soul. And the result is she idolises him, as she could not help doing.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With a touch of finesse.*] Then perhaps she knows Erhart a bit better than she knows you?

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, Erhart saw a good deal of her in town.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Without thinking.*] And in spite of that she moved away?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Taken aback, looking keenly at her.*] In spite of what? What do you mean?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
First let me tell you, I think I too have a certain claim upon Erhart. Because I love him.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Smiling scornfully.*] Love my son? Is it possible? You? In spite of everything?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, it's possible—in spite of everything. And it's true. I love Erhart—as much as I can love any one—now—at my time of life.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Suppose you do: what then?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Why, then, I am troubled as soon as I see anything threatening him.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Why, what should threaten him? Or who?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
You in the first place—in your way.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Vehemently.*] I!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And then this Mrs. Wilton, too, I am afraid.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looks at her for a moment in speechless surprise.*] And you think such things of Erhart! Of my own boy! He, who has his great mission to fulfil!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Lightly.*] Oh, his mission!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Indignantly.*] How dare you say that so scornfully?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Do you think a young man of Erhart's age, full of health and spirits—do you think he's going to sacrifice himself for—for such a thing as a "mission"?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Firmly and emphatically.*] I know he will.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Shaking her head.*] You neither know it nor believe it, Gunhild.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Threateningly.*] You want to come between us? Between mother and son? You?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I want to free him from your power—your will—your despotism.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Triumphantly.*] You're too late! You had him in your nets all these years—until he was fifteen. But I've won him back again.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And I'll win him back from you! [*Hoarsely, half whispering.*]

We've fought a life-and-death battle before, Gunhild—for a man's soul!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Looking at her in triumph.*] Yes, and I was the victor.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With a smile of scorn.*] Do you still think that victory was worth the winning?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Darkly.*] No.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Neither is this.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Not when I am fighting to preserve a mother's power over my son!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No; because it's only power you want.

MRS. BORKMAN.

And you?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Warmly.*] I want his affection—his soul—his whole heart!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*With an outburst.*] Never. I have used these eight years wisely.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Controlling herself.*] What have you said to Erhart about me?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN.

Only the truth. I have impressed upon him, every day of his life, that he must never forget that it is you we have to thank for being able to live as we do—for being able to live at all. When he first came back home to me, he imagined that you did it all out of goodness of heart. [*Looks malignly at her.*] But no longer, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

What does he believe now?

MRS. BORKMAN. He believes the truth. I asked him how he accounted for the fact that Aunt Ella never came here to visit us—

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Interrupting.*] He knew my reasons already!

MRS. BORKMAN. He knows them better now. You had got him to believe that it was to spare me and—and him up there in gallery—

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And so it was.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Erhart doesn't believe that for a moment, now.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

What have you put in his head?

MRS. BORKMAN. The truth, that you are ashamed of us—that you despise us. And do you pretend that you don't? Weren't you once planning to take him away from me?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With a gesture of negation.*] That was at the height of the scandal—when the case was before the courts. Not now.

MRS. BORKMAN. It wouldn't matter if you did. It's me that Erhart needs—not you. He's as good as dead to you—and you to him.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Coldly, with resolution.*] We shall see. For now I shall remain right here.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Stares at her.*] Here? In this house?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, here.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Here—with us? Remain all night?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I shall remain here all the rest of my days if need be.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Collecting herself.*] Very well, Ella; the house is yours—

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, nonsense—

MRS. BORKMAN. Everything is yours. The chair I am sitting in is yours. The bed I lie and toss in at night belongs to you. The food we eat comes to us from you.

ELLA RENTHEIM. You know it has to be like this. Borkman can own no property, otherwise it would be taken.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, I know. We must be content to live upon your pity and charity. When do you want us to move out?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Looking at her.*] Move out?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*In great excitement.*] Yes; you don't imagine that I can live under the same roof with you!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Good. Then let me take Erhart with me——

MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart? My own son? My child?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes; for then I would go straight home again.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*After reflecting a moment, firmly.*] Let Erhart himself choose between us.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Looking doubtfully and hesitatingly at her.*] Would you dare, Gunhild?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With a hard laugh.*] Would I dare? Let my boy choose between his mother and you? Yes, indeed I dare!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Listening.*] Is someone coming? I thought I heard——

MRS. BORKMAN.
It must be Erhart.

[*There is a sharp knock at the door leading in from the hall, which is immediately opened. MRS. WILTON*

enters, in evening dress, and with outer wraps. She is followed by THE MAID, who has not had time to announce her, and looks bewildered. The door remains half open. MRS. WILTON is a strikingly handsome, well-developed woman in the thirties. Broad, red, smiling lips, sparkling eyes. Luxuriant dark hair.

MRS. WILTON.
Good evening, my dearest Mrs. Borkman!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Rather drily.*] Good evening, Mrs. Wilton. [*To THE MAID, pointing toward the garden-room.*] Take the lamp and light it.

[*THE MAID takes the lamp and goes out with it.*

MRS. WILTON. [*Observing ELLA RENTHEIM.*] Oh, I beg your pardon—you have a visitor.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Only my sister, who has just arrived from——

[*ERHART BORKMAN flings the half-open door wide open and rushes in. He is a young man with bright cheerful eyes. He is well dressed; his moustache is beginning to grow.*

ERHART.
[*Radiant with joy; on the threshold.*] What is this! Is Aunt Ella here? [*Rushing up to her and seizing her hands.*] Aunt, aunt! Is it possible? Are you here?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Throws her arms round his neck.*] Erhart! My dear, dear boy! Why, how big you have grown! Oh, how good to see you again!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Sharply.*] What does this mean, Erhart? Were you hiding out in the hallway?

MRS. WILTON.

[*Quickly.*] Erhart—Mr. Borkman came in with me.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looking hard at him.*] Indeed, Erhart! You don't come to your mother first?

ERHART. I had just to look in at Mrs. Wilton's for a moment—to call for little Frida.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Is that Miss Foldal with you too?

MRS. WILTON.

Yes, we left her in the hall.

ERHART. [*Addressing some one through the open door.*] You can go right upstairs, Frida.

[*Pause. ELLA RENTHEIM observes ERHART. He seems embarrassed and a little impatient; his face has assumed a nervous and colder expression.*

[*THE MAID brings the lighted lamp into the garden-room, goes out again and closes the door behind her.*

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With forced politeness.*] Well, Mrs. Wilton, if you will give us the pleasure of your company this evening—

MRS. WILTON. Many thanks, my dear lady, but I really can't. We have another invitation. We're going down to the Hinkels'.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Looking at her.*] We? Whom do you mean by we?

MRS. WILTON. [*Laughing.*] Oh, I ought really to have said I. But I was commissioned by the ladies of the house to bring Mr. Borkman with me—if I happened to see him.

MRS. BORKMAN.

And you did happen to see him, it appears.

MRS. WILTON. Yes, fortunately. He was good enough to stop by my house— for Frida.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Drily.*] But, Erhart, I didn't realise you knew that family— those Hinkels?

ERHART.

[*Irritated.*] No, I don't exactly know them. [*Adds rather impatiently.*] You know better than anybody, mother, what people I know and don't know.

MRS. WILTON. Oh, it doesn't matter! They soon put you at your ease in that house! They're such cheerful, hospitable people—the house swarms with young ladies.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With emphasis.*] If I know my son, Mrs. Wilton, they are no fit company for him.

MRS. WILTON.

Why, good gracious, dear lady, he is young, too, you know!

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, fortunately he's young. He would need to be young.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ERHART.

[*Concealing his impatience.*] Well, mother, it's quite clear I can't go to the Hinkels' this evening. Of course I'll remain here with you and Aunt Ella.

MRS. BORKMAN.

I knew you would, my dear Erhart.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, Erhart, you mustn't stay at home on my account——

ERHART. Yes, indeed, my dear Aunt; I can't think of going. [*Looking doubtfully at MRS. WILTON.*] But how shall we manage? Can I get out of it? You've said "Yes" for me, haven't you?

MRS. WILTON. [*Gaily.*] What nonsense! Not get out of it! When I make my entrance into the festive halls—just imagine it!—deserted and forlorn—then I must simply say "No" for you.

ERHART. [*Hesitatingly.*] Well, if you really think I can get out of it——

MRS. WILTON. [*Putting the matter lightly aside.*] I am quite used to saying both yes and no—on my own account. And you can't possibly think of leaving your aunt the moment she has arrived! For shame, Monsieur Erhart! Would that be behaving like a good son?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Annoyed.*] Son?

MRS. WILTON.

Well, adopted son then, Mrs. Borkman.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, you may say so ...

MRS. WILTON. Oh, it seems to me we have often more reason to be grateful to a foster-mother than to our own mother.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Has that been your experience?

MRS. WILTON. I knew very little of my own mother, I am sorry to say. But if I had had a good foster-mother, perhaps I shouldn't have been so— so naughty, as people say I am. [*Turning towards ERHART.*] Well, then we stop peaceably at home like a good boy, and drink tea with mamma and auntie! [*To the ladies.*] Good-bye, good-bye Mrs. Borkman! Good-bye Miss Rentheim.

[*The ladies bow silently. She goes toward the door.*]

ERHART.

[*Following her.*] Can I go a little bit of the way with you?

MRS. WILTON. [*In the doorway, motioning him back.*] Not a step! I'm quite accustomed to taking my walks alone. [*Stops on the threshold, looks at him and nods.*] But now beware, Mr. Borkman—I warn you!

ERHART.

What should I beware of?

MRS. WILTON.

[*Gaily.*] Why, as I go down the road—deserted and forlorn, as I said before—I shall cast a spell upon you.

ERHART.

[*Laughing.*] Again?

MRS. WILTON.

[*Half seriously.*] Yes, just you beware! As I go down the road,

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

I will say in my own mind—right from the very centre of my will—
I will say: "Mr. Erhart Borkman, take your hat at once!"

MRS. BORKMAN.

And you think he will take it?

MRS. WILTON. [*Laughing.*] Good heavens, yes, he'll snatch up his hat instantly. And then I will say: "Now put on your overcoat, like a good boy, Erhart Borkman! And your goloshes! Be sure you don't forget the goloshes! And then follow me! Do as I bid you, as I bid you, as I bid you!"

ERHART.

[*With forced gaiety.*] Oh, you may rely on that.

MRS. WILTON.

[*Raising her forefinger.*] As I bid you! As I bid you!
Good-night!

[*She laughs and nods to the ladies, and closes the door behind her.*]

MRS. BORKMAN.

Does she really play tricks of that sort?

ERHART. How can you take her seriously? It's all in fun.

[*Breaking off.*] But let's not talk about Mrs. Wilton. [*He forces ELLA RENTHEIM to seat herself at the armchair beside the stove, then stands and looks at her.*] To think of your having taken all this long journey, Aunt Ella! And in winter too!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I had to, Erhart.

ERHART.

Why?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

To consult with the doctors in town.

ERHART.

Oh, I'm glad about that! I mean I'm glad you finally made up your mind to do it.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*On the sofa, coldly.*] Are you ill, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Looking hardly at her.*] You know quite well that I'm ill.

MRS. BORKMAN.

I knew you weren't strong, and hadn't been for years.

ERHART.

I told you before I left you that you ought to consult a doctor.
Are you feeling worse?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, my dear boy; worse.

ERHART.

But nothing serious?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

It depends.

ERHART. [*Emphatically.*] Well, then, Aunt Ella; you mustn't think of going home again for the present.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, I'm not thinking of it.

ERHART. You must stay here in town where you can have your choice of all the best doctors.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

That's what I was thinking when I left.

ERHART. And then you must be sure and find a really nice place to live— quiet, comfortable rooms.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I went this morning to the old ones, where I used to stay before.

ERHART.

Oh, well, you were comfortable enough there.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, but I shall not be staying there after all.

ERHART.

Indeed? Why not?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I changed my mind after coming out here.

ERHART.

[*Surprised.*] Really? Changed you mind?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Crocheting; without looking up.*] Your aunt will live here, in her own house, Erhart.

ERHART. [*Looking from one to the other alternately.*] Here, with us? Is this true, Aunt?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, that's what I made up my mind to do.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*As before.*] Everything here belongs to your aunt, you know.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I intend to remain here, Erhart—just now—for the present. I shall set up a little establishment of my own, over in the bailiff's wing.

ERHART. Good idea. There are plenty of rooms there. [*With sudden vivacity.*] But aren't you tired out after your journey?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh yes, very tired.

ERHART.

Well, then, I think you ought to go quite early to bed.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Looks at him smilingly.*] I mean to.

ERHART. [*Eagerly.*] And then we could have a good long talk tomorrow— or some other day, of course—about this and that—about things in general—you and mother and I.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With an outburst, rising from the sofa.*] Erhart, I can see you are going to leave me!

ERHART.

[*Starts.*] What do you mean?

MRS. BORKMAN.

You are going down to—to the Hinkels'?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FIRST

ERHART.

[*Involuntarily.*] Oh, that! [*Collecting himself.*] Well, you wouldn't have me sit here and keep Aunt Ella up half the night? Remember, she's an invalid, mother.

MRS. BORKMAN.

You are going to the Hinkels', Erhart!

ERHART. [*Impatiently.*] Well, really, mother, I don't think I can well get out of it. What do you say, Aunt?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I should like you to feel quite free, Erhart.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Goes up to her menacingly.*] You want to take him away from me!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Rising.*] Yes, if only I could, Gunhild!

[*Music is heard from above.*]

ERHART. [*Writhing as if in pain.*] Oh, I can't endure this! [*Looking round.*] What have I done with my hat? [*To ELLA RENTHEIM.*] Do you know the air that she is playing up there?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No. What is it?

ERHART. It's the *Danse Macabre*—the Dance of Death! Don't you know the Dance of Death, Aunt?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Smiling sadly.*] Not yet, Erhart.

ERHART.

[*To MRS. BORKMAN.*] Mother—I beg and implore you—let me go!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looks hardly at him.*] Away from your mother? So that's what you want to do?

ERHART.

Of course I'll come out again—to-morrow perhaps.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With passionate emotion.*] You want to abandon me! To be with those strange people! With—with—no, I won't even think about it!

ERHART. There are bright lights down there, and young, happy faces; and there's music there, mother!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Pointing upwards.*] There is music here, too, Erhart.

ERHART.

Yes, music that is driving me out of the house.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Do you begrudge your father a moment of indulgence?

ERHART. No, I don't. I'm very, very glad that he should have it—if only *I* don't have to listen.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looking solemnly at him.*] Be strong, Erhart! Be strong, my son! Don't forget your great mission.

ERHART.

Oh, mother—do spare me these phrases! I wasn't born to be

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

a "missionary."—Good-night, aunt dear! Good-night, mother.
[He goes hastily out through the hall.]

MRS. BORKMAN. *[After a short silence.]* It hasn't taken you long to capture him again, Ella, after all.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
I wish I could believe it.

MRS. BORKMAN.
But you won't be allowed to keep him for very long.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Allowed? By you, do you mean?

MRS. BORKMAN.
By me or—by her, the other one——

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then rather she than you.

MRS. BORKMAN. *[Nodding slowly.]* That I understand. I say the same. Rather she than you.

ELLA RENTHEIM. *[Taking her outdoor things upon her arm.]* For the first time in our lives, we twins are of one mind. Good-night, Gunhild.

[She goes out by the hall. The music sounds louder from above.]

MRS. BORKMAN. *[Stands still for a moment, starts, shrinks together, and whispers involuntarily.]* The wolf is whining again—the sick wolf. *[She stands still for a moment, then flings herself down on the floor, writhing in agony and whispering:]* Erhart!

Erhart!—be true to me! Come home and help your mother! I can't bear this any more!

ACT SECOND

The great gallery on the first floor of the Rentheim House. The walls are covered with old tapestries, representing hunting-scenes, shepherds and shepherdesses, all in faded colours. A folding-door to the left, and further forward a piano. In the left-hand corner, at the back, a door, cut in the tapestry, and covered with tapestry, without any frame. Against the middle of the right wall, a large writing-table of carved oak, with many books and papers. Further forward on the same side, a sofa with a table and chairs in front of it. The furniture is all of a stiff Empire style. Lighted lamps on both tables.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN *stands with his hands behind his back, beside the piano, listening to FRIDA FOLDAL, who is playing the last bars of the "Danse Macabre."*

BORKMAN is of middle height, a well-knit, powerfully-built man, well on in the sixties. His appearance is distinguished, his profile finely cut, his eyes piercing, his hair and beard curly and greyish-white. He is dressed in a slightly old-fashioned black coat, and wears a white necktie. FRIDA FOLDAL is a pretty, pale girl of fifteen, with a somewhat weary and overstrained expression. She is cheaply dressed in light colours.

BORKMAN.
Can you guess where I first heard tones like these?

FRIDA.
[Looking up at him.] No, Mr. Borkman.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

BORKMAN.

Down in the mines.

FRIDA.

[Not understanding.] The mines?

BORKMAN.

I'm a miner's son. And my father used sometimes to take me with him into the mines. The metal sings down there.

FRIDA.

Really? Sings?

BORKMAN. *[Nodding.]* As it is loosened. The hammer-strokes that loosen it are the midnight bell clanging to set it free; and that is why the metal sings—in its own way—for gladness.

FRIDA.

Why does it do that, Mr. Borkman?

BORKMAN.

It wants to come up into the light of day and serve mankind.
[He paces up and down the gallery, always with his hands behind his back.]

FRIDA.

[Sits waiting a little, then looks at her watch and rises.]
I beg your pardon, Mr. Borkman; but I'm afraid I must go.

BORKMAN.

[Stopping before her.] Are you leaving already?

FRIDA. *[Putting her music in its case.]* I really must. *[Visibly embarrassed.]* I have an engagement this evening.

BORKMAN.

For a party?

FRIDA.

Yes.

BORKMAN.

To play?

FRIDA.

Dance music.

BORKMAN.

[Stands and looks at her.] Do you like playing dance music?
At parties, I mean?

FRIDA. *[Putting on her outdoor things.]* Yes, when I can get an engagement. I can always earn a little that way.

BORKMAN. *[With interest.]* Is that what you're thinking about as you play for the dancers?

FRIDA. No; I'm generally thinking how hard it is that I can't join them and dance myself.

BORKMAN. Yes, that's the hardest thing of all. But it should comfort you to know that you have ten times more music in you than all the dancers together.

FRIDA.

[Smiling evasively.] Oh, I'm not so sure about that...

BORKMAN. *[Holding up his fore-finger warningly.]* You must never doubt yourself!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

FRIDA.

But since no one knows it——

BORKMAN. So long as you know it yourself, that is enough.
Where are going to play?

FRIDA.

At the Hinkels.

BORKMAN.

[*With a swift, keen glance at her.*] The Hinkels!

FRIDA.

Yes.

BORKMAN. [*With a cutting smile.*] Does that man give parties?
Can he get people to visit him?

FRIDA.

Yes, their house will be full of people, Mrs. Wilton says.

BORKMAN.

[*Vehemently.*] But what sort of people?

FRIDA.

[*A little nervously.*] I really don't know, except that young Mr.
Borkman will be there this evening.

BORKMAN.

[*Taken aback.*] Erhart? My son?

FRIDA.

Yes, he's going there.

BORKMAN.

How do you know that?

FRIDA.

He said so himself—an hour ago.

BORKMAN.

Is he out here to-day?

FRIDA.

Yes, he's been at Mrs. Wilton's all afternoon.

BORKMAN. [*Inquiringly.*] Did he come here too? I mean, did he
see anyone downstairs?

FRIDA.

Yes, he stopped in to see Mrs. Borkman.

BORKMAN.

[*Bitterly.*] Aha—I might have known it.

FRIDA.

A strange lady was visiting her, I think.

BORKMAN. Indeed? I suppose people do come now and then to
see Mrs. Borkman.

FRIDA. If I meet young Mr. Borkman this evening, shall I ask him
to come up and see you too?

BORKMAN. [*Harshly.*] You shall do nothing of the sort! I won't
have it on any account. The people who want to see me can come of
their own accord.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

FRIDA.

Very well; I won't say anything then. Good-night, Mr. Borkman.

BORKMAN.

[Pacing up and down and growling.] Good-night.

FRIDA.

Good-night, Mr. Borkman.

[She goes out by the little tapestry door in the back on the left.]

[BORKMAN, lost in thought, goes up to the piano, and is about to close it, but changes his mind. Looks round the great empty room, and sets to pacing up and down it from the corner at the back on the right—pacing backward and forward uneasily and incessantly. At last he goes up to the writing-table, listens in the direction of the folding door, hastily snatches up a hand-glass, looks at himself in it, and straightens his necktie.]

[A knock at the folding door. BORKMAN hears it, looks rapidly towards the door, but says nothing.]

[In a little there comes another knock, this time louder.]

BORKMAN. *[Standing beside the writing-table with his left hand resting upon it, and his right thrust in the breast of his coat.]* Come in!

[VILHELM FOLDAL comes softly into the room. He is a bent and worn man with mild blue eyes and long, thin grey hair straggling down over his coat collar. He has a

portfolio under his arm, a soft felt hat, and large horn spectacles, which he pushes up over his forehead.]

BORKMAN. *[Changes his attitude and looks at FOLDAL with a half disappointed, half pleased expression.]* Oh, is it you?

FOLDAL.

Good evening, John Gabriel. Yes, it's me.

BORKMAN.

[With a stern glance.] I must say you are rather a late visitor.

FOLDAL. Well, you know, it's a good bit of a way, especially when you have to trudge it on foot.

BORKMAN. But why do you always walk, Vilhelm? The tram passes your door.

FOLDAL.

It's better for you to walk—and then you always save a bit. Has Frida been playing for you lately?

BORKMAN.

She left just this moment. Didn't you see her?

FOLDAL. No, I've hardly seen anything of her since she went to live with this Mrs. Wilton.

BORKMAN.

[Seating himself on the sofa and waving his hand toward a chair.] Please sit down, Vilhelm.

FOLDAL. *[Seating himself on the edge of a chair.]* Thank you. *[Looks mournfully at him.]* You can't think how lonely I feel since Frida left home.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

BORKMAN.

Oh, come—you have plenty left.

FOLDAL. Yes, God knows I have—five of them. But Frida was the only one who really understood me. [*Shaking his head sadly.*] The others don't understand me a bit.

BORKMAN. [*Gloomily, gazing straight before him, and drumming on the table with his fingers.*] No, that's just it. That is the curse we chosen people have to bear. The common herd—the average man and woman—they do not understand us, Vilhelm.

FOLDAL. [*With resignation.*] If it were only the lack of understanding— with a little patience, one could manage to wait for that awhile yet. [*His voice choked with tears.*] But there is something still bitterer.

BORKMAN.

[*Vehemently.*] There is nothing bitterer than that.

FOLDAL. Yes, there is, John Gabriel. I have gone through a domestic scene to-night—just before I started.

BORKMAN.

Indeed? What about?

FOLDAL.

[*With an outburst.*] My people at home—they despise me.

BORKMAN.

[*Indignantly.*] Despise——?

FOLDAL. [*Wiping his eyes.*] I've suspected it for a long time, but today they rubbed my nose in it.

BORKMAN. [*After a short silence.*] You made an unwise choice, I fear, when you married.

FOLDAL.

I had practically no choice in the matter ... so crushed as I then was—so utterly broken down——

BORKMAN.

[*Jumping up in anger.*] Is this meant for me? A reproach——!

FOLDAL.

[*Alarmed.*] No, no, for Heaven's sake, John Gabriel——!

BORKMAN. Yes, you're thinking of the bank disaster, I can see you are.

FOLDAL.

[*Soothingly.*] But I don't blame you for that! Heaven forbid!

BORKMAN. [*Growling, resumes his seat.*] Well, that's a good thing, at any rate.

FOLDAL. Besides, it's not my wife I'm complaining of, but the children.

BORKMAN.

I thought as much.

FOLDAL. For the children—well, they have more culture and therefore they expect more of life.

BORKMAN. [*Looking at him sympathetically.*] And so your children despise you, Vilhelm?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

FOLDAL. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I haven't made much of a career, you see—there's no denying that.

BORKMAN. [*Moving nearer to him, and laying his hand upon his arm.*] Do they not know, then, that in your young days you wrote a tragedy?

FOLDAL. Yes, of course they know that. But it doesn't seem to make much of impression on them.

BORKMAN. They don't understand these things. Your tragedy is good. I am firmly convinced of that.

FOLDAL. [*Brightening up.*] Yes, don't you think there are some good things in it, John Gabriel? Good God, if I could only manage to get it placed——! [*Opens his portfolio, and begins eagerly turning over the contents.*] Look here! Just let me show you one or two alterations I have made.

BORKMAN.
Did you bring it with you?

FOLDAL. Yes, it's been so long since I've read it to you. And I thought it might amuse you to hear an act or two.

BORKMAN. [*Rising, with a negative gesture.*] No, let's keep that for another time.

FOLDAL.
As you please.

[*BORKMAN paces up and down the room. FOLDAL puts the manuscript up again.*]

BORKMAN. [*Stopping in front of him.*] You are quite right in what you said just now—you have not made a career. But I promise you this, Vilhelm, that when the hour of my redemption strikes——

FOLDAL.
[*Making a movement to rise.*] Thank you, thank you!

BORKMAN. [*Waving his hand.*] No, please be seated. [*With rising excitement.*] When the hour of my restoration is at hand—when they see that they cannot get on without me—when they come to me, here in the gallery, and crawl to my feet, and beseech me to take the reins of the bank again——! The new bank, that they have founded and can't carry on—— [*Placing himself beside the writing-table in the same attitude as before, and striking his breast.*] Here I shall stand, and receive them! And it shall be known far and wide, all over the land, what conditions John Gabriel Borkman imposes before he will—— [*Stopping suddenly and staring at FOLDAL.*] Perhaps you don't believe that they will come?

FOLDAL.
Yes, Heaven knows I do, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN. [*Seating himself again on the sofa.*] I firmly believe it. I am immovably convinced—I know that they will come. If I had not been certain of it I would have put a bullet through my head long ago.

FOLDAL.
[*Anxiously.*] No, for Heaven's sake——!

BORKMAN.
[*Exultantly.*] But they will come! They will come sure enough! You shall see! I expect them any day, any moment. And you see, I hold myself in readiness to receive them.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

FOLDAL.

[*With a sigh.*] If only they would come quickly.

BORKMAN.

[*Restlessly.*] Yes, time flies: the years slip away; life—
Ah, no—I dare not think of it! [*Looking at him.*] Do you know
what I sometimes feel like?

FOLDAL.

What?

BORKMAN.

I feel like a Napoleon who has been maimed in his first battle.

FOLDAL.

[*Placing his hand upon his portfolio.*] I have that feeling too.

BORKMAN.

But yours is on a smaller scale, of course.

FOLDAL.

[*Quietly.*] My little world of poetry is very precious to me,
John Gabriel.

BORKMAN. [*Vehemently.*] Yes, but think of me, who could have
created millions! All the mines I should have controlled! New veins
innumerable! And the water-falls! And the quarries! And the trade
routes, and the steamship-lines all the wide world over! I would
have organised it all—I alone!

FOLDAL. Yes, I know, I know. There was nothing in the world you
would have shrunk from.

BORKMAN. [*Clenching his hands together.*] And now I have to sit
here, like a wounded eagle, and look on while others pass me in the
race, and take everything away from me, piece by piece!

FOLDAL.

That is my fate too.

BORKMAN. [*Not noticing him.*] Only to think of it; so near to the
goal! If I had only had another week! All the deposits would have
been covered. All the securities I had leveraged so daringly would
have been in place. Not a soul would have lost a cent.

FOLDAL.

Yes, yes; you were on the very verge of success.

BORKMAN. [*With suppressed fury.*] And then treachery overtook
me! Just at the critical moment! [*Looking at him.*] Do you know
what I hold to be the most infamous crime a man can be guilty of?

FOLDAL.

No, tell me.

BORKMAN. It isn't murder. It isn't robbery or home-invasion. It
isn't even perjury. People do these things to those they hate, or who
are indifferent to them, and who don't matter.

FOLDAL.

What's the worst of all, John Gabriel?

BORKMAN. [*With emphasis.*] The most infamous of crimes is a
friend's betrayal of his friend's confidence.

FOLDAL.

[*Somewhat doubtfully.*] Yes, but you know—

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

BORKMAN. [*Firing up.*] The people who had their securities in the bank should have got them all back again—every penny. No; I tell you the most infamous crime a man can commit is to misuse a friend's letters; to publish to all the world what has been confided to him alone, in the closest secrecy, like a whisper in an empty, dark, double-locked room. The man who can do such things is infected and poisoned in every fibre with the morals of the highest criminality. And such a friend was mine—and it was he who crushed me.

FOLDAL.

I can guess whom you mean.

BORKMAN. There wasn't a nook or cranny of my life that I hesitated to lay open to him. And then, when the moment came, he turned against me the weapons I myself had placed in his hands.

FOLDAL. I've never been able to understand why he—— Of course, there were whispers of all sorts at the time.

BORKMAN.

What were the whispers? Tell me. You see I know nothing. For I had to go straight into—into isolation. What did people whisper, Vilhelm?

FOLDAL.

You were to have gone into the Cabinet, they said.

BORKMAN.

I was offered a portfolio, but I refused it.

FOLDAL.

Then it wasn't there you stood in his way?

BORKMAN.

That wasn't the reason he betrayed me.

FOLDAL.

Then I really can't understand——

BORKMAN.

I may as well tell you, Vilhelm——

FOLDAL.

Well?

BORKMAN.

There was—in fact, there was a woman in the case.

FOLDAL.

A woman in the case? Well but, John Gabriel——

BORKMAN. [*Interrupting.*] Well, well—let us speak no more of these stupid old stories. After all, neither of us got into Cabinet, neither he nor I.

FOLDAL.

But he rose high in the world.

BORKMAN.

And I fell into the abyss.

FOLDAL.

A terrible tragedy——

BORKMAN.

[*Nodding to him.*] Almost as terrible as yours.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

FOLDAL.

[*Naively.*] Yes, at least as terrible.

BORKMAN. [*Laughing quietly.*] But looked at from another point of view, it is really a sort of comedy as well.

FOLDAL.

A comedy? The story of your life?

BORKMAN. Yes, it seems to be taking a turn in that direction. For let me tell you——

FOLDAL.

What?

BORKMAN.

You say you didn't meet Frida as you came in?

FOLDAL.

No.

BORKMAN. At this moment, as we sit here, she is playing waltzes for the guests of the man who betrayed and ruined me.

FOLDAL.

I hadn't the least idea of that.

BORKMAN. Yes, she took her music, and went straight from me to—to the great house.

FOLDAL.

[*Apologetically.*] Well, you see, poor child——

BORKMAN.

And can you guess for whom she is playing—among the rest?

FOLDAL.

No.

BORKMAN.

For my son.

FOLDAL.

What?

BORKMAN. What do you think of that, Vilhelm? My son is down there in the whirl of the dance this evening. Am I not right in calling it a comedy?

FOLDAL.

But you may be sure he knows nothing about it.

BORKMAN.

Yes, he knows, as surely as I am sitting here.

FOLDAL.

Then how can he possibly be a guest in that house?

BORKMAN. [*Shaking his head.*] He probably thinks that Hinkel only did his confounded duty when he went and betrayed me.

FOLDAL. But, my dear friend, who can have got him to see things in that light?

BORKMAN. Who? Do you forget who has brought him up? First his aunt, from the time he was six or seven years old; and then his mother!

FOLDAL.

I believe you are doing them an injustice.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

BORKMAN. [*Firing up.*] I never do any one injustice! Both of them have gone and poisoned his mind against me, I tell you!

FOLDAL.

[*Soothingly.*] Well, well, well, I suppose they have.

BORKMAN. [*Indignantly.*] These women! They wreck and ruin life for us! Play the devil with our whole destiny—our triumphal progress.

FOLDAL.

Not all of them!

BORKMAN. Indeed? Do you know a single one who is good for anything?

FOLDAL. No, that's the trouble. The few I know are good for nothing, but it is such a blessed, beneficial thought that here or there in the world, somewhere, far away—the true woman exists after all.

BORKMAN. [*Moving impatiently on the sofa.*] Oh, do spare me that poetical nonsense.

FOLDAL. [*Looks at him, deeply wounded.*] Do you call my holiest faith poetical nonsense?

BORKMAN. [*Harshly.*] Yes I do! That's what has always prevented you from getting on in the world. If you would get all that out of your head, I could still help you on in life—help you to rise.

FOLDAL.

[*Boiling inwardly.*] Oh, you can't do that.

BORKMAN.

I can when I come into power again.

FOLDAL.

That won't be for many a day.

BORKMAN.

[*Vehemently.*] Perhaps you think that day will never come? Answer me!

FOLDAL.

I don't know what to answer.

BORKMAN. [*Rising, cold and dignified, and waving his hand towards the door.*] Then I no longer have any use for you.

FOLDAL.

[*Starting up.*] No use——!

BORKMAN.

Since you do not believe that the tide will turn for me——

FOLDAL. How can I believe in the teeth of all reason? You would have to be legally rehabilitated——there's no precedent for such a thing.

BORKMAN.

Exceptional men are above precedents.

FOLDAL.

The law knows nothing of such distinctions.

BORKMAN.

[*Harshly and decisively.*] You are no poet, Vilhelm.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

FOLDAL. [*Unconsciously folding his hands.*] Do you say that in sober earnest?

BORKMAN. [*Dismissing the subject, without answering.*] We're only wasting each other's time. You had better not come here again.

FOLDAL.

Then you really want me to leave you?

BORKMAN.

[*Without looking at him.*] I no longer have any use for you.

FOLDAL.

[*Softly, taking his portfolio.*] No, no, no; I daresay not.

BORKMAN.

You've been lying to me all the time.

FOLDAL.

[*Shaking his head.*] Never lying, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN. Have you not sat here feeding me with hope, and trust, and confidence—was it all a lie?

FOLDAL. It wasn't a lie so long as you believed in my vocation. So long as you believed in me, I believed in you.

BORKMAN. Then we have been deceiving each other. And perhaps deceiving ourselves—both of us.

FOLDAL.

But isn't that the essence of friendship, John Gabriel?

BORKMAN. [*Smiling bitterly.*] Yes, you're right there. Friendship means—deception.

FOLDAL. [*Looking at him.*] I have no poetic vocation! And you could actually say it to me so bluntly.

BORKMAN. [*In a gentler tone.*] Well, you know, I don't pretend to know much about these matters.

FOLDAL.

Perhaps you know more than you think, for I myself have had my doubts ... The horrible doubt that I may have bungled my life for the sake of a delusion.

BORKMAN. If you have no faith in yourself, you are on the downward path indeed.

FOLDAL. That was why I found such comfort in coming here to lean upon your faith in me. [*Taking his hat.*] But now you've become a stranger to me.

BORKMAN.

And you to me.

FOLDAL.

Good night, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN.

Good night, Vilhelm.

[*Foldal goes out to the left.*]

[*BORKMAN stands for a moment gazing at the closed door; makes a movement as though to call FOLDAL back, but changes his mind, and begins to pace the floor with his hands behind his back. Then he stops at the table beside the sofa and puts out the lamp. The room becomes half dark. After a short pause, there comes a knock at the tapestry door.*]

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

BORKMAN.

[*At the table, starts, turns, and asks in a loud voice:*] Who is there? [*Another knock*] Who is it? Come in!

[*ELLA RENTHEIM, with a lighted candle in her hand, appears in*

the doorway. She wears her black dress, as before, with her cloak thrown loosely round her shoulders.

BORKMAN.

[*Staring at her.*] Who are you? What do you want with me?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Closes the door and advances.*] It is I, Borkman.

[*She puts down the candle on the piano and remains standing beside it.*

BORKMAN. [*Stands as though thunderstruck, stares fixedly at her, and says in a half-whisper.*] Is it—is it Ella? Is it Ella Rentheim?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, it's "your" Ella, as you used to call me in the old days; many, many years ago. Can you recognise me? There are no dark curls on my neck now—the curls you once loved to twist round your fingers.

BORKMAN. I had no idea you were in this part of the world.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I have only just arrived.

BORKMAN.

Why have you come all this way now, in winter? To see me?

ELLA RENTHEIM. You among others.

BORKMAN.

Won't you sit down?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, thank you; I need rest.

[*She crosses to the right and seats herself in the furthest forward corner of the sofa. BORKMAN stands beside the table with his hands behind his back looking at her. A short silence.*

ELLA RENTHEIM.

It seems an endless time since we two met, Borkman, face to face.

BORKMAN. [*Gloomily.*] A long, long time. And terrible things have passed since then.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

A whole lifetime has passed—a wasted lifetime.

BORKMAN.

[*Looking keenly at her.*] Wasted!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, I say wasted—for both of us.

BORKMAN. [*In a cold business tone.*] I cannot regard my life as wasted yet.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And what about mine?

BORKMAN.

You have only yourself to blame, Ella.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*With a start.*] How dare you say that?

BORKMAN.

You could quite well have been happy without me.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Bitterly.*] Oh, yes, I know well enough there was some one else ready to marry me.

BORKMAN.

But you rejected him.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, I did.

BORKMAN.

Time after time you rejected him. Year after year——

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Scornfully.*] Year after year I rejected happiness, I suppose you think?

BORKMAN. You might perfectly well have been happy with him. And then I should have been saved.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

You?

BORKMAN.

Yes, you would have saved me, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

How do you mean?

BORKMAN. He thought I was at the bottom of your obstinacy—of your perpetual refusals. And then he took his revenge. It was so easy

for him; he had all my frank, confiding letters in his keeping. He made his own use of them; and then it was all over with me—for the time, that is to say. So you see it is all your doing, Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM. So I owe *you* reparation, Borkman?

BORKMAN. It depends how you look at it. I know quite well all that you have done for us. I know all the sacrifices you have made for me and for your sister. But you were in a position to do so, Ella; and you mustn't forget that it was I who placed you in that position.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Indignantly.*] You're wrong, Borkman! It was the love of my inmost heart for Erhart—and for you too—that made me do it!

BORKMAN. [*Interrupting.*] My dear Ella, let's not become sentimental. If you acted generously, it was I made it possible for you to do so.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Smiling.*] You made it possible...?

BORKMAN. [*Warmly.*] Yes! On the eve of the great decisive battle—when I could afford to spare neither kith nor kin—when I had to grasp at—when I did grasp at the millions that were entrusted to me—then I spared all that was yours, every cent, although I could have taken it, and made use of it, as I did of all the rest!

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Looking at him.*] I have often wondered what your real reason for sparing all my property was.

BORKMAN. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Upon my soul, Ella, it is not so easy to remember one's motives of twenty years ago. I only know that when I used to grapple, silently and alone, with all the great projects I had in my mind, I had something like the feeling of a

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

man who is starting on a balloon voyage. All through my sleepless nights I was inflating my giant balloon, and preparing to soar away into perilous, unknown regions. That was why I wouldn't take you and yours with me in the balloon.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Eagerly.*] What do you mean? Why? Tell me why!

BORKMAN. [*Without looking at her.*] One shrinks from risking what one holds dearest on such a voyage.

ELLA RENTHEIM. You had risked what was dearest to you on that voyage. Your whole future life——

BORKMAN.

Life is not always what one holds dearest.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Breathlessly.*] Was that how you felt at that time? Was I the dearest thing in the world to you?

BORKMAN.

I seem to remember something of the sort.

ELLA RENTHEIM. And yet years had passed since you had deserted me—and married— married another!

BORKMAN.

Deserted you, you say? Other motives, higher motives compelled me.

Without his support I could not have done anything.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Controlling herself.*] So you deserted me from—higher motives.

BORKMAN. *He* made you the price of helping me. I had no choice. I had to conquer or fall.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [In a trembling voice, looking at him.] Can what you tell me be true—that I was then the dearest thing in the world to you?

BORKMAN.

Both then and afterwards—long, long, after.

ELLA RENTHEIM. But you bartered me away none the less; you drove a bargain with another man for your love. You sold my love for a—for a directorship.

BORKMAN. [*Gloomily and bowed down.*] I was driven by inexorable necessity, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Rises from the sofa, quivering with passion.*] Criminal!

BORKMAN.

[*Starts, but controls himself.*] I have heard that word before.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Oh, don't imagine I'm thinking of anything you may have done against the law of the land! The use you made of all those vouchers and securities, or whatever you call them—do you think I care a straw about that! If I could have stood at your side when the crash came——

BORKMAN.

[*Eagerly.*] What then, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Trust me, I should have borne it all so gladly along with you. The shame, the ruin—I would have helped you to bear it all—all!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

BORKMAN.

Would you have had the will—the strength?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Both the will and the strength. For then I didn't know of your great, your terrible crime.

BORKMAN.

What crime? What are you speaking of?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I'm speaking of that crime for which there is no forgiveness.

BORKMAN.

[*Staring at her.*] You must be out of your mind.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Approaching him.*] You are a murderer! You have committed the one mortal sin!

BORKMAN.

[*Falling back towards the piano.*] You are raving, Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM. You have killed the love-life in me. [*Still nearer him.*] Do you understand what that means? The Bible speaks of a mysterious sin for which there is no forgiveness. I have never understood what it could be; but now I understand. The great, unpardonable sin is to murder the love-life in a human soul. That you deserted me and turned to Gunhild instead—I took that to be mere common fickleness on your part, and the result of heartless scheming on hers. I almost think I despised you a little, in spite of everything. But now I see it! You deserted the woman you loved! Me, me, me! What you held dearest in the world you were ready to barter away for gain. That is the double murder you have committed! The murder of your own soul and of mine!

BORKMAN. [*With cold self-control.*] How well I recognise your passionate, ungovernable spirit, Ella. Of course, you are a woman, and therefore only your heart is what you know or care about in this world.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, yes it is.

BORKMAN.

Only your heart exists for you.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

You're right: it's the only thing I care about.

BORKMAN. But you must remember that I am a man. As a woman, you were the dearest thing in the world to me. But if the worst comes to the worst, one woman can always take the place of another.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Looks at him with a smile.*] Was that your experience when you made Gunhild your wife?

BORKMAN. No. But the great aims I had in life helped me to bear even that. I wanted to have at my command all the sources of power in this country. All the wealth that lay hidden in the soil, and the rocks, and the forests, and the sea—I wanted to gather it all into my hands to make myself master of it all, and so to promote the well-being of many, many thousands.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Lost in recollection.*] I know it. Think of all the evenings we spent in talking over your projects.

BORKMAN.

Yes, I could talk to you, Ella.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

ELLA RENTHEIM. I jested with your plans, and asked whether you wanted to awaken all the sleeping spirits of the mine.

BORKMAN. [*Nodding.*] I remember that phrase. [*Slowly.*] All the sleeping spirits of the mine.

ELLA RENTHEIM. But you didn't take it as a jest. You said: "Yes, yes, Ella, that is just what I want to do."

BORKMAN.

And so it was. If only I could get my foot in the stirrup—
And that depended on that one man. He could and would secure me
the control of the bank—if I on my side—

ELLA RENTHEIM. If you on your side would renounce the woman
you loved—and who loved you beyond words in return. And so you
struck the bargain.

BORKMAN. [*Vehemently.*] Yes, I did, Ella! I had to. And he
helped me half-way up towards the beckoning heights I was bent on
reaching. And I mounted and mounted; year by year I mounted—

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And I had been wiped out of your life.

BORKMAN. And after all he hurled me into the abyss again. On
account of you, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*After a short thoughtful silence.*] Borkman,
doesn't it seem to you as if there had been a sort of curse on us?

BORKMAN.

[*Looking at her.*] A curse?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes. Don't you think so?

BORKMAN.

[*Uneasily.*] Yes. But why is it? [*With an outburst.*] Oh Ella,
I begin to wonder who is right—you or I!

ELLA RENTHEIM. It is you who have sinned. You have done to
death all the gladness of my life in me.

BORKMAN.

[*Anxiously.*] Don't say that, Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM. From the day your image began to dwindle in
my mind, I have lived my life as though under an eclipse. During all
these years it has grown harder and harder for me—and at last
utterly impossible—to love any living creature. Human beings,
animals, plants: I shrank from all—from all but one—

BORKMAN.

What one?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Erhart, of course.

BORKMAN.

Has he really been so close to your heart?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Why else should I have taken him to me, and
kept him as long as I could? Why?

BORKMAN.

I thought it was out of pity, like all the rest that you did.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*In strong inward emotion.*] Pity! I haven't known pity since you deserted me. You have created an empty, barren desert within me—and without me too!

BORKMAN.
Except for Erhart.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, except for your son. But I am hardened to every other living thing. You have cheated me of a mother's joy and happiness in life—and of a mother's sorrows and tears as well. And perhaps that is the heaviest part of the loss to me. But at that time I couldn't resign myself to my loss; and that was why I took Erhart to me. I won him entirely. Won his whole, warm, trustful childish heart—until—— until his mother—his mother in the flesh, I mean—took him away.

BORKMAN.
And you've come here to take him back.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, if only it were possible——!

BORKMAN. It is possible enough, if you have set your heart upon it. For you have the first and strongest claims upon him.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, claims, claims! What's the use of claims? If he isn't mine of his own free will, he isn't mine at all. And have him I must! I must have my boy's heart, whole and undivided—now!

BORKMAN. Erhart is well into his twenties. You could scarcely reckon on keeping his heart undivided very long.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With a melancholy smile.*] It wouldn't need it very long.

BORKMAN. Indeed? I should have thought that when you want a thing, you want it to the end of your days.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
So I do. But that may not be for very long.

BORKMAN.
[*Taken aback.*] What do you mean by that?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
I suppose you know I have been ill for years?

BORKMAN.
Have you?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Looking at him in surprise.*] Hasn't Erhart told you?

BORKMAN.
A certain person below keeps him away from me. Keeps him away, you understand?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Are you quite sure of that, Borkman?

BORKMAN. Yes, absolutely sure. [*Changing his tone.*] And so you have been in bad health, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, I have. And this autumn I grew so much worse that I had to come to town for the specialists.

BORKMAN.
Have you seen the doctors already?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, this morning.

BORKMAN.

And what did they say to you?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

They gave me full assurance of what I had long suspected.

BORKMAN.

Well?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Calmly and quietly.*] My illness will never be cured, Borkman. The doctors can do nothing but let it take its course and allay the pain. At least that is something.

BORKMAN. But what in all the world can have brought on this illness? You have always lived such a healthy and regular life? What can have brought it on?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Looking at him.*] The doctors thought that perhaps at one time in my life I had suffered a tremendous emotional stress.

BORKMAN. [*Firing up.*] Emotion! Aha, I understand! You mean that it is my fault?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With increasing inward agitation.*] It's too late to go into that matter now! But I must have my heart's own child again before I go! It is so unspeakably sad for me to think that I must go away from all that is called life—away from sun, and light, and air—and not leave behind me one single human being who will think of me—who will remember me lovingly and mournfully—as a son remembers and thinks of the mother he has lost.

BORKMAN.

[*After a short pause.*] Take him, Ella, if you can win him.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*With animation.*] Do you give your consent? Can you?

BORKMAN. [*Gloomily.*] Yes. And it is no great sacrifice either. For in any case he isn't mine.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Thank you, thank you all the same for the sacrifice! But I have one thing more to beg of you—a great thing for me, Borkman.

BORKMAN.

Well, what is it?

ELLA RENTHEIM. I daresay you will think it childish of me—you will not understand——

BORKMAN.

Go on—tell me what it is.

ELLA RENTHEIM. When I die—as I must soon—I shall have a fair amount to leave behind me.

BORKMAN.

Yes, I suppose so.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And I intend to leave it all to Erhart.

BORKMAN.

Well, you have really no one nearer to you than he.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT SECOND

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Warmly.*] No, indeed, I have no one closer... no other family.
(*Pleads.*) Let Erhart bear my name when I have passed!

BORKMAN. I see. You want to save my son from having to bear his father's name.

ELLA RENTHEIM. No, no, that isn't it! I myself would have borne it proudly and gladly along with you! But a mother who is at the point of death— There is more binding force in a name than you think or believe, Borkman.

BORKMAN. [*Coldly and proudly.*] Well and good, Ella. I am man enough to bear my own name alone.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Seizing and pressing his hand.*] Thank you, thank you! Now there has been a full settlement between us! Yes, yes, let it be so! You have made all the atonement in your power. For when I have gone from the world, I shall leave Erhart Rentheim behind me!

[*The tapestry door is thrown open. MRS. BORKMAN, with the large shawl over her head, stands in the doorway.*]

MRS. BORKMAN. [*In violent agitation.*] Never to his dying day shall Erhart be called by that name!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Shrinking back.*] Gunhild!

BORKMAN. [*Harshly and threateningly.*] I allow no one to come up to my room!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Advancing a step.*] I do not ask your permission.

BORKMAN.

[*Going towards her.*] What do you want with me?

MRS. BORKMAN. I will fight with all my might for you. I will protect you from the powers of evil.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

The worst "powers of evil" are in yourself, Gunhild!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Harshly.*] So be it then. [*Menacingly, with upstretched arm.*] But this I tell you—he shall bear his father's name! And bear it aloft in honour again! My son's heart shall be mine—mine and no other's.

[*She goes out by the tapestry door and shuts it behind her.*]

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Shaken and shattered.*] Borkman, Erhart's life will be wrecked in this storm. There must be an understanding between you and Gunhild. We must go down to her at once.

BORKMAN.

[*Looking at her.*] We?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Both you and I.

BORKMAN.

[*Shaking his head.*] She is hard, I tell you. Hard as the metal I once dreamed of hewing out of the rocks.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Then try it now!

[BORKMAN *does not answer, but stands looking doubtfully at her.*

ACT THIRD

MRS. BORKMAN's *drawing room. The lamp is still burning on the table beside the sofa in front. The garden-room at the back is quite dark.*

MRS. BORKMAN, *with the shawl still over her head, enters, in violent agitation, by the hall door, goes up to the window, draws the curtain a little aside, and looks out; then she seats herself beside the stove, but immediately springs up again, goes to the bell-pull and rings. Stands beside the sofa, and waits a moment. No one comes. Then she rings again, this time more violently.*

THE MAID *presently enters from the hall. She looks sleepy and out of temper, and appears to have dressed in great haste.*

THE MAID.

[*Looking at MRS. BORKMAN in astonishment.*] You want me to fetch Mr. Erhart?

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes; tell him he must come home to me at once.

THE MAID.

The snow's dreadful to-night.

MRS. BORKMAN. That doesn't matter; only make haste and go. It's just round the corner.

THE MAID.

Why, ma'am you can't call that just round the corner!

MRS. BORKMAN.

Of course it is. Don't you know Mr. Hinkel's villa?

THE MAID. [*With malice.*] Oh, indeed! It's there Mr. Erhart is this evening?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Taken aback.*] Why, where else should he be?

THE MAID. [*With a slight smile.*] Well, I only thought he might be where he usually is.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Where do you mean?

THE MAID.

At Mrs. Wilton's, as they call her.

MRS. BORKMAN. That's all nonsense, Malena. Go straight to Mr. Hinkel's and try to get hold of him.

[*She is on the point of going out by the hall, but just at that moment the hall door is opened, and ELLA RENTHEIM and BORKMAN appear on the threshold.*

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Staggers a step backwards.*] What does this mean?

THE MAID.

[*Terrified, instinctively folding her hands.*] Lord save us!

[*ELLA RENTHEIM and, after her, BORKMAN enter the room. THE MAID sidles behind them to the door, goes out, and closes it after her.*]

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Having recovered her self-control, turns to ELLA.*] What does he want down here in my room?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

He wants to come to an understanding with you, Gunhild.

MRS. BORKMAN.

The last time we stood face to face—it was in Court, when I was summoned to give an account——

BORKMAN. [*Approaching.*] And this evening it is *I* who will give an account of myself.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Looking at him.*] You?

BORKMAN.

Not of what I have done amiss. All the world knows that.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With a bitter sigh.*] Yes, all the world knows that.

BORKMAN. But it does not know why I did it; why I had to do it. People do not understand that I had to, because I was myself—because I was John Gabriel Borkman—myself, and not another. And that is what I will try to explain to you.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Shaking her head.*] Temptations and promptings acquit no one.

BORKMAN.

They may acquit one in one's own eyes.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With a gesture of repulsion.*] Oh, let all that alone! I have wasted enough of my wits over your black business.

BORKMAN. I too. During those five endless years in my cell—and elsewhere—I had time to think it over. And during the eight years up there in the gallery I have had still more ample time. I have re-tried the whole case—by myself. Time after time I have re-tried it. I have been my own accuser, my own defender, and my own judge. I have been more impartial than any one else could be—that I venture to say. I have paced up and down the gallery there, turning every one of my actions upside down and inside out. I have examined them from all sides as unsparingly and as pitilessly as any lawyer. And the final judgment I have always come to is this: the one person I have sinned against is—myself.

I have skulked up there and wasted eight precious years of my life! The very day I was set free, I should have gone forth into the world—out into the steel-hard, dreamless world of reality! I should have begun at the bottom and swung myself up to the heights anew—higher than ever before—in spite of all that lay between.

MRS. BORKMAN. Oh, it would have been the same thing over again; take my word for that.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

BORKMAN. I have never found one single soul to understand me.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Looking at him.] Never, Borkman?

BORKMAN. Except one—perhaps. Long, long ago. In the days when I did not think I needed understanding. Since then, at any rate, no one has understood me! There has been no one alive enough to my needs to be afoot and rouse me—to ring the morning bell for me—to call me up to manful work anew. And to impress upon me that I had done nothing unforgiveable

MRS. BORKMAN. *[Looking harshly at him.]* Why have you never come and asked me for what you call understanding?

BORKMAN.

What use would it have been to come to you?

MRS. BORKMAN. *[With a gesture of repulsion.]* You have never loved anything outside yourself; that's the secret of the whole matter.

BORKMAN.

[Proudly.] I have loved power.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, power!

BORKMAN. The power to create human happiness in wide, wide circles around me!

MRS. BORKMAN. You once had the power to make me happy. Have you used it to that end?

BORKMAN. *[Without looking at her.]* Some one must go down in a shipwreck.

MRS. BORKMAN. And your own son! Have you used your power—have you lived and laboured—to make him happy?

BORKMAN.

I do not know him.

MRS. BORKMAN.

No, that's true. You don't even know your own son.

BORKMAN.

[Harshly.] You, his mother, have taken care of that!

MRS. BORKMAN. *[Looking at him with a lofty air.]* You don't know what I have taken care of!

BORKMAN.

You?

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, I. I alone.

BORKMAN.

Then tell me.

MRS. BORKMAN.

I have taken care of your memory.

BORKMAN. *[With a short dry laugh.]* My memory? Oh, indeed! It sounds as if I were dead already.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[With emphasis.] And so you are.

BORKMAN. *[Slowly.]* Yes, perhaps you are right. *[Firing up.]* But no, no! Not yet! I have been close to the verge of death. But now I

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

have awakened. I have come to myself. A whole life lies before me yet. I can see it awaiting me, radiant and quickening. And you—you shall see it too.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Raising her hand.*] Never dream of life again! Lie quiet where you are.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Shocked.*] Gunhild! Gunhild, how can you——!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Not listening to her.*] I will raise the monument over your grave. I have brought up one to help me, who shall live for this alone. His life shall be so pure and high and bright, that your burrowing in the dark shall be as though it had never been! When I cry out to him in my need, he will come to me! It is with me that he will remain! With me, and never with any one else. [*Suddenly listens, and cries.*] I hear him! He is here, he is here! Erhart!

[*ERHART BORKMAN hastily tears open the hall door, and enters the room. He is wearing an overcoat and has his hat on.*

ERHART. [*Pale and anxious.*] Mother! What in Heaven's name——! [*Seeing BORKMAN, who is standing beside the doorway leading into the garden-room, he starts and takes off his hat. After a moment's silence, he asks:*] What do you want with me, mother? What has happened?

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Stretching her arms towards him.*] I want to see you, Erhart! I want to have you with me, always!

ERHART.
[*Stammering.*] Have me——? Always? What do you mean by that?

MRS. BORKMAN. I will have you, I say! There is some one who wants to take you away from me!

ERHART.
[*Recoiling a step.*] Ah—so you know?

MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes. Do you know it, too?

ERHART.
[*Surprised, looking at her.*] Do I know it? Yes, of course.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Aha, so you have planned it all out! Behind my back! Erhart! Erhart!

ERHART.
[*Quickly.*] Mother, tell me what it is you know!

MRS. BORKMAN. I know everything. I know that your aunt has come here to take you from me.

ERHART.
Aunt Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, listen to me a moment, Erhart!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Continuing.*] She wants me to give you up to her. She wants to stand in your mother's place to you, Erhart! She wants you to be her son, and not mine, from this time forward. She wants you to inherit everything from her; to renounce your own name and take hers instead!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

ERHART.

Aunt Ella, is this true?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, it is true.

ERHART. I knew nothing of this. Why do you want to have me with you again?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Because I feel that I am losing you here.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Hardly.*] You are losing him to me—yes. And that is just as it should be.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Looking beseechingly at him.*] Erhart, I cannot afford to lose you. I am a lonely—dying woman.

ERHART.

Dying——?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, dying. Will you come and be with me to the end? Be to me, as though you were my own child——?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Interrupting.*] And forsake your mother, and perhaps your mission in life as well? Will you, Erhart?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I am condemned to death. Answer me, Erhart.

ERHART. [*Warmly, with emotion.*] Aunt Ella, you have been unspeakably good to me. With you I grew up in as perfect happiness as any boy can ever have known——

MRS. BORKMAN.

Erhart, Erhart!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, how glad I am that you can still say that!

ERHART. But I cannot sacrifice myself to you ...

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Triumphing.*] I knew it! You shall not have him! You shall not have him, Ella! Erhart, dear, we two have still a long way to go together, have we not?

ERHART. [*Struggling with himself.*] Mother, I may as well tell you plainly——

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Eagerly.*] What?

ERHART. I'm afraid it's only a very little way you and I can go together.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Stands as though thunderstruck.*] What do you mean by that?

ERHART. [*Plucking up spirit.*] Good heavens, mother, I'm young, after all! I feel as if this room is suffocating me.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Here—with me?

ERHART.

Yes, here with you, mother.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Erhart, come with me!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

ERHART. Oh, Aunt Ella, it's no better with you. It's different, but no better—it is as airless there as here.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Shaken, but having recovered her composure with an effort.*] Airless in your mother's room, you say!

ERHART. [*In growing impatience.*] Yes, I don't know how else to express it. All this morbid watchfulness and—and idolisation, or whatever you like to call it—I can't endure it any longer!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looking at him with deep solemnity.*] Have you forgotten what you have consecrated your life to, Erhart?

ERHART. [*With an outburst.*] You have consecrated my life for me: I've had no will of my own. [*With a polite, considerate glance towards BORKMAN.*] I cannot devote my life to atoning for the sins of another, whoever he may be.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Seized with growing anxiety.*] Who has changed you, Erhart? You have come under some strange power. You are not in your mother's power any longer; nor in your—your foster-mother's either.

ERHART. [*With laboured defiance.*] I am in my own power, mother! And working my own will!

BORKMAN. [*Advancing towards ERHART.*] Then perhaps my hour has come at last.

ERHART. [*Distantly and with measured politeness.*] How so! How do you mean, sir?

BORKMAN. I will work out my own redemption, that is what I will do. I will begin at the bottom again. It is only through his present

and his future that a man can atone for his past. Through work, indefatigable work, for all that, in my youth, seemed to give life its meaning—and that now seems a thousand times greater than it did then. Erhart, will you join with me and help me in this new life?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Raising her hand warningly.*] Don't do it, Erhart!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Warmly.*] Yes, yes do it! Help him, Erhart!

BORKMAN.

Will you, Erhart?

ERHART. [*Wrung with pain.*] Father, I can't... I'm young! I want to live, I want to live my own life!

ELLA RENTHEIM. You can't give up two or three little months to brighten the end of mine?

ERHART.

I cannot, Aunt, however much I may wish to.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Not for the sake of one who loves you so dearly?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looking sharply at him.*] And your mother has no power over you either, any more?

ERHART. I will always love you, mother; but I can't go on living for you alone. This is no life for me.

BORKMAN. Then come and join with me, after all! For life, life means work, Erhart. Come, we two will go forth into life and work together!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

ERHART. [*Passionately.*] Yes, but I don't want to work now! For I am young! That's what I never realised before; but now the knowledge is tingling through every vein in my body. I will not work! I will only live, live, live!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*With a cry of divination.*] Erhart, what will you live for?

ERHART.

[*With sparkling eyes.*] For happiness, mother!

MRS. BORKMAN.

And where do you think you can find that?

ERHART.

I have found it, already!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Shrieks.*] Erhart! [ERHART *goes quickly to the hall door and throws it open.*]

ERHART.

[*Calls out.*] Fanny, you can come in now!

[MRS. WILTON, *in outdoor wraps, appears on the threshold.*]

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*With uplifted hands.*] Mrs. Wilton!

MRS. WILTON. [*Hesitating a little, with an enquiring glance at ERHART.*] Do you want me to——?

ERHART.

Yes, now you can come in. I have told them everything.

[MRS. WILTON *comes forward into the room.*
ERHART *closes the door behind her.* She bows formally to BORKMAN, who returns her bow in silence. A short pause.

MRS. WILTON. [*In a subdued but firm voice.*] So the word has been spoken— and I suppose you all think I have brought a great calamity upon this house?

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Slowly, looking hard at her.*] You have crushed the last remnant of interest in life for me. [*With an outburst.*] But all of this—all this is utterly impossible!

MRS. WILTON. I should rather say that it seems highly improbable. But it's so, none the less.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Turning.*] Are you really in earnest about this, Erhart?

ERHART. This means happiness for me, mother—all the beauty and happiness of life. That's all I can say.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Clenching her hands together; to MRS. WILTON.*] Oh, how you have cajoled and deluded my unhappy son!

MRS. WILTON.

[*Raising her head proudly.*] I have done nothing of the sort. Erhart came to me of his own free will. And of my own free will I went out half-way to meet him.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Measuring her scornfully with her eye.*] Yes, indeed! That I can easily believe.

MRS. WILTON. [*With self-control.*] Mrs. Borkman, there are forces in human life that you seem to know very little about.

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MRS. BORKMAN.

What forces, may I ask?

MRS. WILTON. The forces which ordain that two people shall join their lives together, indissolubly—and fearlessly.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With a smile.*] I thought you were already indissolubly bound—to another.

MRS. WILTON.

[*Shortly.*] That other has deserted me.

MRS. BORKMAN.

But he is still living, they say.

MRS. WILTON.

He is dead to me.

ERHART. [*Insistently.*] Yes, mother, he is dead to Fanny. And besides, this other makes no difference to me!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Looking sternly at him.*] So you know all this—about the other.

ERHART.

Yes, mother, I know quite well—all about it!

MRS. BORKMAN.

And yet you can say that it makes no difference to you?

ERHART. [*With defiant petulance.*] I can only tell you that it is happiness I must have! I am young! I want to live!

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, you are young, Erhart. Too young for this.

MRS. WILTON. [*Firmly and earnestly.*] You mustn't think, Mrs. Borkman, that I haven't said the same to him. I have laid my whole life before him. Again and again I have reminded him that I am seven years older than he——

ERHART.

[*Interrupting.*] Oh, nonsense, Fanny—I knew that all the time.

MRS. WILTON.

But nothing—nothing was of any use.

MRS. BORKMAN. Indeed? Nothing? Then why didn't you close your door to him? You should have done that, and done it in time!

MRS. WILTON.

[*Looks at her, and says in a low voice.*] I couldn't do that, Mrs. Borkman.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Why not?

MRS. WILTON.

Because for me too this meant happiness.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Scornfully.*] Happiness, happiness——

MRS. WILTON. I have never before known happiness in life. And I cannot possibly drive happiness away from me, merely because it comes so late.

MRS. BORKMAN.

And how long do you think this happiness will last?

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ERHART. [*Interrupting.*] Whether it lasts or doesn't I am only determined to live my own life—at last!

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*With deep pain.*] And you call this life, Erhart!

ERHART.
Don't you see how lovely she is!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Wringing her hands.*] And I have to bear this load of shame as well!

MRS. BORKMAN.
Day after day I shall have to see my own son linked to a—a——

ERHART. [*Interrupting her harshly.*] You shall see nothing of the kind, mother! You may make your mind easy on that point. I shall not remain here.

MRS. WILTON.
[*Quickly and with decision.*] We are going away, Mrs. Borkman.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Turning pale.*] Are you going away, too? Together, no doubt?

MRS. WILTON. [*Nodding.*] Yes, I am going abroad, to the south. I am taking a young girl with me. And Erhart is going along with us.

MRS. BORKMAN.
With you—and a young girl?

MRS. WILTON.
Yes. It is little Frida Foldal, who has been living with me. I want her to go abroad and study music.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Suppressing a smile.*] What do you say to this, Erhart?

ERHART. [*With some embarrassment, shrugging his shoulders.*] Well, mother, since Fanny will have it so——

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Coldly.*] And when does this distinguished party set out, if one may ask?

MRS. WILTON. We're going at once—to-night. My covered sledge is waiting on the road, outside the Hinkels'.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looking her from head to foot.*] So that was what the party meant?

MRS. WILTON.
[*Smiling.*] Yes, Erhart and I were the whole party. And little Frida, of course.

MRS. BORKMAN.
And where is she now?

MRS. WILTON.
She is sitting in the sledge waiting for us.

ERHART.
[*In painful embarrassment.*] Mother, surely you can understand? I would have spared you all this—you and every one.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Looks at him, deeply pained.*] You would have gone away from me without saying a good-bye?

ERHART. Yes, I thought that would be best; best for all of us. Our boxes were packed and everything settled. But of course when you

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT THIRD

sent for me, I—— [*Holding out his hands to her.*] Good-bye, mother.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*With a gesture of repulsion.*] Don't touch me!

ERHART.
[*Gently.*] Is that your last word?

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Sternly.*] Yes.

ERHART.
[*Turning.*] Good-bye to you, then, Aunt Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Pressing his hands.*] Good-bye, Erhart! And live your life—and be as happy—as happy as ever you can.

ERHART. Thanks, Aunt. [*Bowing to BORKMAN.*] Good-bye, father. [*Whispers to MRS. WILTON.*] Let's get out of here, the sooner the better.

MRS. WILTON.
[*In a low voice.*] Yes, let's.

MRS. BORKMAN. [*With a malignant smile.*] Mrs. Wilton, do you think you are acting quite wisely in taking that girl with you?

MRS. WILTON. [*Returning the smile, half ironically, half seriously.*] Men are so unstable, Mrs. Borkman. And women too. When Erhart is done with me—and I with him—then it will be well for us both that he, poor fellow, should have some one to fall back upon.

MRS. BORKMAN.
But you yourself?

MRS. WILTON.
Oh, I shall know what to do, I assure you. Good-bye to you all!

[*She bows and goes out by the hall door. ERHART stands for a moment as though wavering; then he turns and follows her.*]

MRS. BORKMAN.
[*Dropping her folded hands.*] Childless.

BORKMAN.
[*As though awakening to a resolution.*] Then out into the storm alone! My hat! My cloak!
[*He goes hastily towards the door.*]

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*In terror, stopping him.*] John Gabriel, where are you going?

BORKMAN.
Out into the storm of life, I tell you. Let me go, Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*Holding him back.*] No, no, I won't let you out! You are ill. I can see it in your face!

BORKMAN.
Let me go, I tell you!

[*He tears himself away from her, and goes out by the hall.*]

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[*In the doorway.*] Help me to hold him, Gunhild!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FOURTH

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Coldly and sharply, standing in the middle of the room.*] I will hold no-one. Let them go away from me—both the one and the other! As far—as far as they wish. [*Suddenly, with a piercing shriek.*] Erhart, don't leave me!

[*She rushes with outstretched arms towards the door.* ELLA RENTHEIM stops her.

ACT FOURTH

An open space outside the main building, which lies to the right. A projecting corner of it is visible, with a door approached by a flight of low stone steps. The background consists of steep fir-clad slopes, quite close at hand. On the left are small scattered trees, forming the margin of a wood. The snowstorm has ceased; but the newly fallen snow lies deep around. The fir-branches droop under heavy loads of snow. The night is dark, with drifting clouds. Now and then the moon gleams out faintly. Only a dim light is reflected from the snow.

BORKMAN, MRS. BORKMAN and ELLA RENTHEIM are standing upon the steps, BORKMAN leaning wearily against the wall of the house. He has an old-fashioned cape thrown over his shoulders, holds a soft grey felt hat in one hand and a thick knotted stick in the other. ELLA RENTHEIM carries her cloak over her arm. MRS. BORKMAN's great shawl has slipped down over her shoulders, so that her hair is uncovered.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Barring the way for MRS. BORKMAN.*] Don't go after him, Gunhild!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*In fear and agitation.*] Let me pass!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

It's utterly useless, I tell you! The sledge is on its way!

MRS. BORKMAN.

Listen! [*sledge bells tinkling*] I know the silver bells, it is Mrs. Wilton's covered sledge! They are driving past at the foot of the hill!

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Quickly.*] Gunhild, if you want to cry out to him, now is the time! They're right under us!

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Stands for a moment undecided, then she stiffens and says sternly and coldly.*] No. I will not cry out to him. Let Erhart Borkman pass away from me—far, far away—to what he calls life and happiness.

[*The sound dies away in the distance. Could you endure to let him know life and happiness, with her?*

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With warmth and feeling.*] Indeed, I could, with all my heart and soul!

MRS. BORKMAN. [*Coldly.*] Then you must be richer than I am in the power of love.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Looking far away.*] Perhaps it is the lack of love that keeps the power alive.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FOURTH

MRS. BORKMAN.

[*Fixing her eyes on her.*] If that is so, then I shall soon be as rich as you, Ella.

[*She turns and goes into the house.*]

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Stands for a time looking with a troubled expression at BORKMAN; then lays her hand cautiously on his shoulder.*] Come, John—you must come in, too.

BORKMAN.

[*As if wakening.*] I?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, —come in with me—into the house, into the warmth.

BORKMAN.

[*Angrily.*] Up to the gallery again, I suppose.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, into the room below.

BORKMAN. [*His anger flaming forth.*] Never will I set foot under that roof again!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Where will you go so late, and in the dark, John?

BORKMAN. [*Putting on his hat.*] First of all, I will go out and see to all my buried treasures.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Looking anxiously at him.*] John—I don't understand you.

BORKMAN. [*With laughter, interrupted by coughing.*] Oh, it's not hidden plunder I mean; don't be afraid of that, Ella. [*Stopping, and pointing outwards.*] Do you see that man there? Who is it?

[*VILHELM FOLDAL, in an old cape, covered with snow, with his hat-brim turned down, and a large umbrella in his hand, advances towards the corner of the house, laboriously stumbling through the snow. He is noticeably lame in his left foot.*]

BORKMAN.

Vilhelm! What do you want with me again?

FOLDAL.

[*Looking up.*] Good heavens, are you out on the steps, John Gabriel? [*Bowing.*] And Mrs. Borkman, too, I see.

BORKMAN.

[*Shortly.*] This is not Mrs. Borkman.

FOLDAL. Oh, I beg pardon. You see, I've lost my spectacles in the snow. But how is it that you, who never put your foot out of doors—
—?

BORKMAN. [*Carelessly and gaily.*] It is high time I should come out into the open air again, don't you see? Nearly three years in detention—five years in prison—eight years in the gallery up there——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Distressed.*] Borkman, I beg you——

FOLDAL.

Ah yes, yes, yes!

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FOURTH

BORKMAN.

But I want to know what has brought you here.

FOLDAL.

[*Still standing at the foot of the steps.*] I wanted to come up to you, John Gabriel. I felt I must come to you, in the gallery. Ah me, that gallery——!

BORKMAN.

What have you done to your foot? I see you are limping?

FOLDAL.

Yes, what do you think—I have been run over.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Run over!

FOLDAL.

Yes, by a covered sledge.

BORKMAN.

Oho!

FOLDAL.

With two horses. They came down the hill at a tearing gallop. I couldn't get out of the way quick enough; and so——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And so they ran over you?

FOLDAL. They came right down upon me, madam—or miss. They came right upon me and sent me rolling over and over in the snow—so that I lost my spectacles and got my umbrella broken. [*Rubbing his leg.*] And my ankle a little hurt too.

BORKMAN.

[*Laughing inwardly.*] Do you know who were in that sledge, Vilhelm?

FOLDAL. No, how could I see? It was a covered sledge, and the curtains were down. And the driver didn't stop a moment after he had sent me spinning. But it doesn't matter a bit, for—— [*With an outburst.*] Oh, I am so happy, so happy!

BORKMAN.

Happy?

FOLDAL. Well, I don't exactly know what to call it. But I think happy is the nearest word. For something wonderful has happened! And that is why I couldn't help—I had to come out and share my happiness with you, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN.

[*Harshly.*] Well, share away then!

FOLDAL.

Well, now you shall hear! Only think, when I got home this evening after I had been with you, what did I find but a letter. Can you guess who it was from?

BORKMAN.

Possibly from your little Frida?

FOLDAL. Precisely! Think of your hitting on it at once! Yes, it was a long letter from Frida. A footman had brought it. And can you imagine what was in it?

BORKMAN.

Perhaps it was to say good-bye to her mother and you?

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN - ACT FOURTH

FOLDAL. Exactly! How good you are at guessing, John Gabriel! Yes, she tells me that Mrs. Wilton has taken such a fancy to her, and she is to go abroad with her and study music. And Mrs. Wilton has engaged a first-rate teacher who is to accompany them on the journey—and to read with Frida. For unfortunately she has been a good deal neglected in some branches, you see.

BORKMAN. [*Shaken with inward laughter.*] Of course, of course—I see it all quite clearly, Vilhelm.

FOLDAL. [*Eagerly continuing.*] And only think, she knew nothing about the arrangement until this evening; at that party, you know, h'm! And yet she found time to write to me. And the letter is such a beautiful one—so warm and affectionate, I assure you. There is not a trace of contempt for her father in it. And then what a delicate thought it was to say good-bye to us by letter—before she started. [*Laughing.*] But of course I can't let her go like that.

BORKMAN.
[*Looks inquiringly at him.*] How so?

FOLDAL. She tells me that they start early to-morrow morning; quite early.

BORKMAN.
Oh indeed—to-morrow? Does she tell you that?

FOLDAL. [*Laughing and rubbing his hands.*] Yes; but I know a trick worth two of that, you see! I am going straight up to Mrs. Wilton's—

BORKMAN.
This evening?

FOLDAL.
Oh, it's not so very late yet. And even if the house is shut up, I shall ring; without hesitation. For I must and will see Frida before she starts. Good-night, good-night!

[*Makes a movement to go.*]

BORKMAN. Stop a moment, my poor Vilhelm; you may spare yourself that heavy bit of road.

FOLDAL.
Oh, you are thinking of my ankle—

BORKMAN.
Yes; and in any case you won't get in at Mrs. Wilton's.

FOLDAL. Yes, indeed I will. I'll go on ringing and knocking till some one comes and lets me in. For I must and will see Frida.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Your daughter has gone already, Mr. Foldal.

FOLDAL. [*Stands as though thunderstruck.*] Has Frida gone already! Are you quite sure? Who told you?

BORKMAN.
We had it from her future teacher.

FOLDAL.
Indeed? And who is he?

BORKMAN.
A certain Mr. Erhart Borkman.

FOLDAL. [*Beaming with joy.*] Your son, John Gabriel? Is he going with them?

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BORKMAN. Yes; it is he that is to help Mrs. Wilton with little Frida's education.

FOLDAL.

Oh, Heaven be praised! Then the child is in the best of hands. But is it quite certain that they have started with her already?

BORKMAN.

They took her away in that sledge which ran you over in the road.

FOLDAL. [*Clasping his hands.*] To think that my little Frida was in that magnificent sledge!

BORKMAN. [*Nodding.*] Yes, yes, Vilhelm, your daughter has come to drive in her carriage. And Master Erhart, too. Tell me, did you notice the silver bells?

FOLDAL. Yes, indeed. Silver bells did you say? Were they silver? Real, genuine silver bells?

BORKMAN. You may be quite sure of that. Everything was genuine—both outside and in.

FOLDAL. [*In quiet emotion.*] Isn't it strange how fortune can sometimes befriend one? It is my—my little gift of song that has transmuted itself into music in Frida. So after all, it is not for nothing that I was born a poet. For now she is going forth into the great wide world, that I once yearned so passionately to see. Little Frida sets out in a splendid covered sledge with silver bells on the harness——

BORKMAN.

And runs over her father.

FOLDAL. [*Happily.*] Oh, pooh! What does it matter about me, if only the child——! Well, so I am too late, then, after all. I must go home again and comfort her mother. I left her crying in the kitchen.

BORKMAN.

Crying?

FOLDAL. [*Smiling.*] Yes, would you believe it, she was crying her eyes out when I came away.

BORKMAN.

And you are laughing, Vilhelm?

FOLDAL. Yes, *I* am, of course. But she, poor thing, she doesn't know any better, you see. Well, good-bye! Good-bye, good-bye, John Gabriel. Good-bye, Madam.

[*He bows and limps laboriously out by the way he came.*]

BORKMAN.

[*Stands silent for a moment, gazing before him.*] Good-bye, Vilhelm! It is not the first time in your life that you've been run over, old friend.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Looking at him with suppressed anxiety.*] John, you are so pale, so very pale.

BORKMAN.

That's the effect of the prison air up yonder.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I've never seen you like this before.

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BORKMAN.

No, you've never seen an escaped convict before.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, come into the house with me, John!

BORKMAN.

It's no use trying to lure me in. I've told you——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

But when I beg and implore you——? For your own sake——

BORKMAN. [*Stands silent for a moment, and listens; then goes hastily down the steps and out into the open space.*] I am outside the walls, Ella! They will never get hold of me again!

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Who has gone down to him.*] But you are a free man in there, too, John. You can come and go just as you please.

BORKMAN. [*Softly, as though in terror.*] Never under a roof again! It is so good to be out here in the night. If I went up into the gallery now, ceiling and walls would shrink together and crush me—crush me flat as a fly.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

But where will you go?

BORKMAN. I will simply go on, and on, and on. I will make my way to freedom, and life, and human beings again. Will you go with me, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I? Now?

BORKMAN.

Yes, at once!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

But how far?

BORKMAN.

As far as I can.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Out in this raw, cold winter night——

BORKMAN. [*Speaking very hoarsely.*] Is my lady concerned about her health? Yes, yes—I know it is delicate.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I'm concerned about yours.

BORKMAN.

Hohoho! A dead man's health! I can't help laughing at you, Ella! [*He moves onwards.*]

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Following him: holding him back.*] What did you call yourself?

BORKMAN. A dead man, I said. Don't you remember, Gunhild told me to lie quiet where I was?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*With resolution, throwing her cloak around her.*] I will go with you, John.

BORKMAN.

Yes, we two belong to each other, Ella. [*Advancing.*] So come!

[*They have gradually passed into the low wood on the left. It conceals them little by little, until they are quite*

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*lost to sight. The house and the open space disappear.
The landscape, consisting of wooded slopes and ridges,
slowly changes and grows wilder and wilder.*

*[They have emerged upon a small high-lying, open
plateau in the wood. The mountain rises abruptly
behind them. To the left, far below, an extensive fiord
landscape, with high ranges in the distance, towering
one above the other. On the plateau, to the left, a dead
fir-tree with a bench under it. The snow lies deep upon
the plateau.*

[BORKMAN and, after him, ELLA RENTHEIM enter from the right and wade with difficulty through the snow.

BORKMAN.

[Stopping at the verge of the steep declivity on the left.]
Come here, Ella, and you shall see.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Coming up to him.] What do you want to show me, John?

BORKMAN. *[Pointing outwards.]* Do you see how free and open the country lies before us—away to the far horizon?

ELLA RENTHEIM. *[Nodding sadly.]* It was the dreamland of our life, yes. And now that land is buried in snow. And the old tree is dead.

BORKMAN. *[Not listening to her.]* Can you see the smoke of the great steamships out on the fiord?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No.

BORKMAN. I can. They come and they go. They weave a network of fellowship all round the world. They shed light and warmth over the souls of men in many thousands of homes. That was what I dreamed of doing.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Softly.] And it remained a dream.

BORKMAN. It remained a dream, yes. *[Listening.]* And hark, down by the river, dear! The factories are working! My factories! All those that I would have created! Listen! Do you hear them humming? The night shift is on—so they are working night and day. Hark! hark! the wheels are whirling and the bands are flashing—round and round and round. Can't you hear, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No.

BORKMAN.

I can hear it.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Anxiously.] I think you are mistaken, John.

BORKMAN. *[More and more fired up.]* Oh, but all these—they are only like the outworks around the kingdom, I tell you!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

The kingdom, you say? What kingdom?

BORKMAN. My kingdom, of course! The kingdom I was on the point of conquering when I—when I died.

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ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Shaken, in a low voice.*] Oh, John, John!

BORKMAN. And now there it lies—defenceless, masterless—exposed to all the robbers and plunderers. Ella, do you see the mountain chains there—far away? They soar, they tower aloft, one behind the other! That is my vast, my infinite, inexhaustible kingdom!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, but there comes an icy blast from that kingdom, John!

BORKMAN. That blast is the breath of life to me. That blast comes to me like a greeting from subject spirits. I seem to touch them, the prisoned millions; I can see the veins of metal stretch out their winding, branching, luring arms to me. I saw them before my eyes like living shapes, that night when I stood in the strong-room with the candle in my hand. You begged to be liberated, and I tried to free you. But my strength failed me; and the treasure sank back into the deep again. [*With outstretched hands.*] But I will whisper it to you here in the stillness of the night: I love you, as you lie there spellbound in the deeps and the darkness! I love you, unborn treasures, yearning for the light! I love you, with all your shining train of power and glory! I love you, love you, love you!

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*In suppressed but rising agitation.*] Yes, your love is still down there, John. It has always been rooted there. But here, in the light of day, here there was a living, warm, human heart that throbbed and glowed for you. And this heart you crushed. Oh worse than that! Ten times worse! You sold it for—for——

BORKMAN. [*Trembles; a cold shudder seems to go through him.*] For the kingdom—and the power—and the glory—you mean?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, that *is* what I mean. I said it once before to-night: you have murdered the love-life in the woman who loved you. And whom you loved in return, so far as you could love any one. [*With uplifted arm.*] And therefore I prophesy to you, John Gabriel Borkman—you will never touch the price you demanded for the murder. You will never enter in triumph into your cold, dark kingdom!

BORKMAN. [*Staggers to the bench and seats himself heavily.*] I almost fear your prophecy will come true, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Going up to him.*] You must not fear it, John. That is the best thing that can happen to you.

BORKMAN.

[*With a shriek; clutching at his breast.*] Ah——! [*Feebly.*] Now it let me go again.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[*Shaking him.*] What was it, John?

BORKMAN. [*Sinking down against the back of the seat.*] It was a hand of ice that clutched at my heart.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

John! Did you feel the ice-hand again!

BORKMAN.

[*Murmurs.*] No. No ice-hand. It was a metal hand.
[*He sinks right down upon the bench.*]

ELLA RENTHEIM. [*Tears off her cloak and throws it over him.*] Lie still where you are! I will go and bring help for you.

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[She goes a step or two towards the right; then she stops, returns, and carefully feels his pulse and touches his face.]

ELLA RENTHEIM. *[Softly and firmly.]* No. It is best so, John Borkman. Best for you.

[She spreads the cloak closer around him, and sinks down in the snow in front of the bench. A short silence.]

[MRS. BORKMAN, wrapped in a mantle, comes through the wood on the right.]

MRS. BORKMAN. *[Calls.]* Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Pointing.] Look, there he lies, Gunhild.

MRS. BORKMAN.
Sleeping?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
A long, deep sleep, I think.

MRS. BORKMAN. *[With an outburst.]* Ella! *[Controls herself and asks in a low voice.]* Did he do it—of his own accord?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
No.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[Relieved.] Not by his own hand then?

ELLA RENTHEIM.
No. It was an ice-cold metal hand that gripped him by the heart.

MRS. BORKMAN. So the night air has killed him——

ELLA RENTHEIM.
So it appears.

MRS. BORKMAN.
——strong man that he was.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Coming in front of the bench.] Will you not look at him, Gunhild?

MRS. BORKMAN. *[With a gesture of repulsion.]* No, no, no. *[Lowering her voice.]* He was a miner's son, John Gabriel Borkman. He couldn't live in the open air.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
It was the cold that killed him.

MRS. BORKMAN. *[Shakes her head.]* The cold? That had killed him long ago.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Nodding to her.] And changed us two into shadows. A dead man and two shadows—that's what the cold has made of us.

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, the coldness of heart.—And now may we hold out our hands to each other, Ella, we two twin sisters—over the man we loved.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Two shadows—over the dead.

[MRS. BORKMAN behind the bench, and ELLA RENTHEIM in front of it, take each other's hand.]