

# GHOSTS

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ELEMENTAL THEATRE COMPANY

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You may not make any additions, omissions and/or alterations to the play without written consent from the writer *[this includes the title, dialogue, character names and stage directions]*.

## ACT ONE

*[A spacious living/dining room in a large country house, with one door to the left, and two doors to the right. In the middle of the room a round table, with chairs about it. On the table lie many leaflets and pamphlets, newspapers, and a laptop. In the foreground to the left a window, and by it a small sofa. Next to the sofa, a small table upon which sits a lamp and an Alexa. In the background, the room is continued into a somewhat narrower conservatory, the walls of which are formed by large panes of glass. In the right-hand wall of the conservatory is a door leading down into the garden. Through the glass wall a gloomy fjord landscape is faintly visible, veiled by steady rain.]*

*[The Alexa is playing music - something upbeat, modern. RACHEL enters, Dyson vacuum in hand, and begins cleaning, dancing along to the music slightly as she does so. ENGSTRAND, the carpenter, approaches from the garden door. His left leg is somewhat bent; he has a clump of wood under the sole of his boot. RACHEL notices him.]*

**RACHEL.** *[In a low voice.]* Stop there. No further. Look at you. You're soaked through.

**ENGSTRAND.** It's the Lord's own rain, my girl.

**RACHEL.** Y'what? Hang on. Alexa, music off. *[The music stops.]* Say that again.

**ENGSTRAND.** All I was saying is, it's the Lord's own rain.

**RACHEL.** I don't care who's rain it is, I've just mopped the floor in that conservatory.

**ENGSTRAND.** Alright, alright, bloody hell, I'll stay here then. *[RACHEL nods and turns around. As soon as she has done so, ENGSTRAND hobbles in a few steps.]* All I've popped round to say is—

**RACHEL.** Can you keep your voice down?

**ENGSTRAND.** Eh?

**RACHEL.** Keep your voice down! Mr Alving is asleep upstairs.

**ENGSTRAND.** Asleep? In the middle of the day?

**RACHEL.** He didn't get home until late last night. So keep it quiet.

**ENGSTRAND.** You had that music playing loud enough when I arrived.

**RACHEL.** Music is soothing. Your voice is not.

**ENGSTRAND.** Asleep at this time of day. Bloody hell. Alright for some. Five o'clock, I got up. Five o'clock! And what do I have to show for it? I certainly don't have a house like this, or a cleaner, or a Dyson, or one of them Alexa thingies.

**RACHEL.** If you've just come here to moan, you can go. I've not got time to have rendezvous' with you.

**ENGSTRAND.** I've not come for a fucking ron-day-voov. I've just come to tell you this. *[He takes a few more steps in, and lowers himself into one of the chairs at the table.]* My work down at the children's home is almost done. Be done this afternoon in fact. And once that's done, there's nothing else for me round here. I'll be catching the next train back home.

**RACHEL.** *[Mutters.]* Thank Christ.

**ENGSTRAND.** Rachel, what have I said about using the Lord's name in vain? Bloody hell. Anyway, the children's home is opening tomorrow, and there's gonna be a party, a gathering, lots of the fancy folk from the village getting together and boozing. And you know what I'm like. I admit it, I've got a problem, I can't resist a little drink.

**RACHEL.** I know. And a little drink turns into another little drink-

**ENGSTRAND.** Exactly. Better I leave tonight before I make a fool of myself. The people coming for this children's home opening, it's ridiculous. You should see the guest list. They say they've got a celebrity guest coming to cut the ribbon. All for an children's home! Father Manders is coming up from town tomorrow as well.

**RACHEL.** Father Manders is coming up today.

**ENGSTRAND.** Well, there you go. And it would do no good for Father Manders to find out anything against me, do you understand what I'm saying?

**RACHEL.** Oh, and there we have it. I knew you were up to something!

**ENGSTRAND.** Am I?

**RACHEL.** What are you going to fool Father Manders into doing, this time?

**ENGSTRAND.** Sh! sh! Are you crazy? Fool Father Manders? What do you take me for? Father Manders has been far too good a friend to me for that. I just don't want him to know- Anyway, I just wanted to tell you, I'm off tonight.

**RACHEL.** The sooner the better, if you ask me.

**ENGSTRAND.** Well, what a nice way to talk about your old man. I just wanted to tell you, I'm off tonight, and I want you to come with me.

**RACHEL.** *[Stopping in her tracks]* You want me—? What are you talking about?

**ENGSTRAND.** I said, I want you to come home with me.

**RACHEL.** Well, you can forget that. What makes you think I'd want to come and live with an old alky like you? You can piss off. Look around you, dad. Look at this place. Mrs Alving treats me like a daughter. You think I'd give all this up to come and live with you?

**ENGSTRAND.** Rachel. You're not Mrs Alving's daughter, you're her cleaner.

**RACHEL.** She invited me to live with her. That's more than a cleaner in my eyes.

**ENGSTRAND.** If you think you'll ever mean anything more to her, you're wrong. She'd replace you quick as anything and not think twice about it. She's got her son now, why does she need you? I'm telling you, you're coming home with me. I've not got time for this attitude. You'll do as I say.

**RACHEL.** *[Mutters without looking at him.]* You used to say I was "no concern of yours".

**ENGSTRAND.** Now, Rachel, come on, that's in the past, I've changed—

**RACHEL.** You haven't changed a bit.

**ENGSTRAND.** I have, I swear it. And I'm getting better. Now, come on, stop all this business and—

**RACHEL.** No, you can forget it. You've already put mum in an early grave, you're not putting me in one too.

**ENGSTRAND.** Oh, here we go. I was wondering how long it would be before you brought up your bloody mother and tried to blame that one on me too. You always were a spiteful little bitch.

*[He stands, and begins to limp towards the back door. There is a short silence, before RACHEL turns to look at him.]*

**RACHEL.** What do you want with me in town?

**ENGSTRAND.** What do I want? What do I want? What do you mean what do I want? What does a lonely, forlorn widower like myself want with his only child, his only daughter? I don't want anything.

**RACHEL.** Oh, don't try on any nonsense like that with me! Why do you want me?

**ENGSTRAND.** Well, ok, listen, I've been thinking of setting up in a new line of business.

**RACHEL.** Not again—

**ENGSTRAND.** Shut up, Rachel. You asked to hear it, and I'm telling you. Listen, this children's home job... I've got a nice tidy sum from it, I can tell you.

**RACHEL.** Have you? Well, good for you.

**ENGSTRAND.** And I was thinking of putting the money into some... some... How can I put this? Some "paying speculation". *[RACHEL looks at him]* I thought of a sort of a bar, a club with a stage and—

**RACHEL.** Unbelievable!

**ENGSTRAND.** What?

**RACHEL.** You, running a bar? Is that such a good idea? You'd drink away the profits.

**ENGSTRAND.** I'm getting better, Rachel, I told you. And this wouldn't be any old bar. This would be a high-class affair; not any sort of pig-sty for commoners. It would be for businessmen, and footballers, and popstars-

**RACHEL.** And what would I do in this business?

**ENGSTRAND.** You would help me. Be my right-hand woman. I have so many ideas, Rachel. And I want you by my side, as my business partner. You have a wonderful singing voice, you can perform in the evenings. Dance. Have fun! Better than spending the rest of your days out in this godforsaken place. Listen, what is there for you here? Yes, you've learnt a lot from Mrs Alving, yes, she treats you like a daughter, but do you want to spend the rest of your life down at that children's home, looking after a pack of dirty brats? Or do you want to come with me, and sing and dance and have your name in lights?

**RACHEL.** Dad, I just don't think—All I'm saying is... well, there's no saying what'll happen here, now that Oswald's home—there's no saying.

**ENGSTRAND.** What do you mean "there's no saying"?

**RACHEL.** It doesn't matter.—How much money have you saved?

**ENGSTRAND.** About 50 grand, total.

**RACHEL.** 50 grand?

**ENGSTRAND.** Not all from the children's home job. Just bits and pieces, here and there.

**RACHEL.** You've saved 50 grand and you never told me?

**ENGSTRAND.** I'm telling you now.

**RACHEL.** Think of the things I could buy with 50 grand.

**ENGSTRAND.** Come home with me and you can have anything you like. And you won't have to clean no more. You could be a star.

**RACHEL.** [*She is almost swayed, but then-*] No! No, I want nothing to do with you. Now, go on, I've got to finish up here-

**ENGSTRAND.** But think of the opportunities, Rachel. Think about it. If we did this right, if we were clever about this, we could get all sorts of people coming to our club. Celebrities. You could marry a popstar. The man of your dreams. If you play your cards right, you could own a house like this yourself one day... or an even bigger house!

**RACHEL.** You think I want to marry a popstar? You don't know me at all.

**ENGSTRAND.** Then don't marry him. String him along for a bit. Get some stuff out of him and dump him. Nothing wrong with that. You've got a fine figure - you want to learn how to use it-

**RACHEL.** Oh, you are disgusting. Go on, that's enough, now go away!

**ENGSTRAND.** Alright, Rachel, bloody hell, you're crazy as your mother. I thought you didn't want to wake young Master Alving!

**RACHEL.** If you don't leave right now, I am going to kill you. *[Spotting him through the window]* Oh, fuck me, here's Father Manders. Go that way, down the kitchen stairs.

**ENGSTRAND.** Yes, yes, I'm going. Don't push me - I can't go so fast with this leg. But just you think, think about your old man. Do you want me to grow old on my own? Think about everything I've done for you, the things I've given up. The train leaves tonight, 8pm. Please, Rachel, just think about it.

*[He goes out through the second door to the right, which RACHEL has opened, and closes again after him. RACHEL glances hastily at herself in the mirror, and tries to fix her hair, before busying herself with the cushions on the sofa.]*

*[FATHER MANDERS, wearing an overcoat, carrying an umbrella, and with a small laptop bag over his shoulder, comes through the garden door into the conservatory.]*

**MANDERS.** Good-morning, Miss Engstrand.

**RACHEL.** *[Turning round, surprised and pleased.]* Oh, Father Manders, what a surprise! Come in, come in, get out of the rain.

**MANDERS.** Thank you. Terrible weather we've been having lately.

**RACHEL.** Let me take your coat. I'll just hang it up in the hall. And your umbrella, too—I'll open it and let it dry.

*[She goes out with the things through the second door on the right. FATHER MANDERS takes off his laptop bag and lays it and his hat on a chair. Meanwhile RACHEL comes in again.]*

**MANDERS.** I hope everything is going on well here?

**RACHEL.** Yes, great thanks. We've been busy preparing for the celebration tomorrow.

**MANDERS.** Yes, there's plenty to do, no doubt. And Mrs. Alving is at home, I trust?

**RACHEL.** Yeah. She's just upstairs, sorting lunch for Oswald.

**MANDERS.** I thought you usually sorted lunch?

**RACHEL.** Yes, but she insists on choosing what he eats, then leaves it for me to prepare.

**MANDERS.** I see. And how is Oswald? Well, I hope?

**RACHEL.** Yes, but tired after the long journey. He came the day before yesterday. We didn't expect him so soon, it was quite a surprise.

**MANDERS.** Travelling can be very tiring. I only came up from town on the train, and that's enough to wear me out. Do you know, Miss Engstrand, I positively believe you have grown since I last saw you?

**RACHEL.** Do you think so, Father?

**MANDERS.** Yes, indeed. You've grown into a fine young woman.

*[Short pause.]*

**RACHEL.** Shall I tell Mrs. Alving you are here?

**MANDERS.** There's no hurry, best not disturb her if she's looking after Oswald. By the way, how's your father getting on? I heard he was working out here.

**RACHEL.** He's been working on the children's home, yes.

**MANDERS.** So I heard. He called upon me last time he was in town.

**RACHEL.** Did he, indeed?

**MANDERS.** Yes. And you often look in on him, I daresay?

**RACHEL.** Well, when I have time, I—

**MANDERS.** Your father is not a man of strong character, Miss Engstrand. He is in need of a guiding hand, you understand?

**RACHEL.** Oh, yes; I'm well aware.

**MANDERS.** He requires someone near him to care for him. Someone he can trust to look out for him. He frankly admitted as much when he last came to see me.

**RACHEL.** Yes, he said something like that to me as well. But I don't know whether Mrs. Alving can spare me; especially now that we've got the new Children's home. And Mrs. Alving has always been so kind to me—

**MANDERS.** But a daughter's duty, my good girl—

**RACHEL.** Daughter's duty, oh please! This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Father Manders. He never looked after me when I was little. He was always too busy down the pub, or at the bookies. I enjoy my life here, quiet as it may be. I'm not ready to give all that up, especially not for him.

**MANDERS.** Well, maybe you should—

**RACHEL.** You won't convince me otherwise, so you may as well give up.

**MANDERS.** I see. Will you be so good as to tell Mrs Alving that I'm here?

**RACHEL.** Indeed. *[She goes out to the left.]*

*[MANDERS paces the room two or three times, stands a moment in the background with his hands behind his back, and looks out over the garden. Then he returns to the table, takes up a leaflet, and looks at the contents; starts, and looks at several of the other leaflets on the table]*

*[MRS. ALVING enters by the door on the left; she is followed by RACHEL, who immediately goes out by the first door on the right.]*



**MRS. ALVING.** *[Holds out her hand.]* Welcome, my dear Father.

**MANDERS.** How do you do, Mrs. Alving? Here I am as I promised.

**MRS. ALVING.** Always punctual to the minute.

**MANDERS.** It wasn't easy. The train was delayed, as usual. But I am a fast walker.

**MRS. ALVING.** I see. *[She spots his laptop bag]* Surely you haven't fitted all your things in there? Where's the rest of your cases?

**MANDERS.** I left them at the TravelLodge near the station. I'll be staying there tonight. It's all go around here, isn't it? What with tomorrow's festival and Oswald's return.

**MRS. ALVING.** I can't believe Oswald is really here. Two years he's been travelling the world. And before that, he was at the boarding school. It really has been so long since he's been living in this house. You should see the photos he's brought back with him from his adventures. I'm sure he'll show you when you see him. And he has promised to stay with me until Christmas.

**MANDERS.** Has he really? How lovely. I imagine life here isn't quite as exciting as life in Thailand, Singapore, and wherever other exotic places he has been.

**MRS. ALVING.** Ah, but here he has his mother, you see. My own darling boy—he hasn't forgotten his old mother! He'll be down soon; he's upstairs just now, resting a little. So much travelling. But sit down, sit down, we have business to discuss.

*[They sit together at the table, and Father Manders begins to take his laptop from the bag.]*

**MANDERS.** Very well. Now, to begin with, here is—*[Breaking off.]* I'm sorry, Mrs Alving, I hope you don't mind me saying, but these pamphlets... what are they doing here?

**MRS. ALVING.** These? Just things I picked up in town.

**MANDERS.** Do you read this sort of literature?

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes. I find them fascinating.

**MANDERS.** That is strange. How do you mean?

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, it's seems to me that they state a lot of things in these pamphlets that I myself have been thinking recently. Things that people don't usually say out loud. Lots of people think it, but they don't say it, that's what I've found.

**MANDERS.** Goodness me. Do you really believe that most people—?

**MRS. ALVING.** I do, indeed. Do you have a problem with them?

**MANDERS.** A problem? No. You know me, I don't get involved in politics. I have no interest. And I certainly have better things to do than read pamphlets like that.

**MRS. ALVING.** You know nothing of what you are condemning?

**MANDERS.** I'm not condemning anything. But I have read enough about these things to disapprove of them.

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes; but your own judgment—

**MANDERS.** My dear Mrs. Alving, I of course do not deny that much of what is said in these pamphlets may seem attractive. Nor can I blame you for wishing to keep up with the... erm... how shall I put it... the intellectual movements that are said to be going on in the world. But—

**MRS. ALVING.** But?

**MANDERS.** [*Lowering his voice.*] But one should not talk about it, Mrs. Alving. One is certainly not bound to account to everybody for what one reads and thinks within one's own four walls.

**MRS. ALVING.** Of course not; I agree. Discussing politics with others will only lead to arguments.

**MANDERS.** Exactly. But now, think about the Children's home. You decided to build it at a time when your political ideas - and indeed, the whole political landscape of this country - was very different.

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, yes; I quite admit that. But it is the Children's home

—  
**MANDERS.** It is the Children's home I have come here to discuss, yes. All I'm saying is [*he pauses, trying to think of the right word*] caution, my dear lady! Caution! And now let's get to business. [*He opens the laptop, turns it on, clicks a few buttons*] Do you see this?

**MRS. ALVING.** Are these all the documents?

**MANDERS.** All—I've checked through each one on the train up. I can tell you it was hard work to get them in time. I had to put on strong pressure. The authorities are almost morbidly scrupulous when there is any decisive step to be taken. But here they are at last. Emailed to me at 8:30 this morning. This is the formal deed of gift of the parcel of ground known as Solvik in the Manor of Rosenvold, with all the newly built dormitories, the old schoolrooms, staff quarters, chapel, all listed here, see? And here, look at this- [*He reads*] "The Articles of Association for the children's home to be known as 'Captain Alving's Memorial Hall.'"

**MRS. ALVING.** So there it is.

**MANDERS.** I have chosen the designation "Captain" rather than "Chamberlain." "Captain" looks less pretentious.

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, yes; just as you think best.

**MANDERS.** And here you have the details of the savings account for the capital that bears the interest, set aside to cover the running costs of the children's home.

**MRS. ALVING.** Thank you; but please, why don't you hold on to it—it will be more convenient.

**MANDERS.** With pleasure. I think we will leave the money in the savings account for the present. The interest is certainly not what we could wish—four per cent and six months' notice of withdrawal. Still, I imagine it's to be expected in this economic climate. If a good mortgage could be found later on, then we could consider the matter further-

**MRS. ALVING.** Certainly. You know best, of course.

**MANDERS.** I will keep my eyes open at any rate. Now, there's one more thing I've been meaning to ask you. I've wanted to ask you many times, in fact, but I worry it might be slightly delicate-

**MRS. ALVING.** And what is that?

**MANDERS.** The children's home - should we have the buildings insured?

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, of course. It must be insured. It would be foolish not to have them insured.

**MANDERS.** Well, wait a moment, Mrs. Alving. Let's look into the matter a little more closely.

**MRS. ALVING.** I have everything insured. My husband always insisted on it.

**MANDERS.** Of course, of course. And that is wise—on your own estate. I do the same. But here, you see, this is different. This is an children's home, dedicated to a higher purpose.

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes, but even so-

**MANDERS.** Now, I myself would not find it insulting to safeguard against all eventualities-

**MRS. ALVING.** No, I agree, so-

**MANDERS.** But the people out there - what's their feeling?

**MRS. ALVING.** Their feeling?

**MANDERS.** Are many people of the opinion - and people do have a right to hold an opinion, whether it's agreeable or not, as we have seen from some of the supporters of these pamphlets - might they take this insurance as an insult?

**MRS. ALVING.** I'm not sure what you mean.

**MANDERS.** I mean, influential people. Men and women. Of the church. People that might, if the business of insurance were ever to be discussed at a church gathering, believe that you and I are lacking in faith. Lacking in faith in a higher power.

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, you know that at least as far as you're concerned-

**MANDERS.** Yes, I know—I know; my conscience is clear, that's true. But if others took this the wrong way-

**MRS. ALVING.** As much as I respect you, Father Manders, I really don't see this as a problem. Accidents happen. Look at Notre dame It's only sensible to-

**MANDERS.** But, consider this. If they interpreted it in a different way to which we intended, if they thought that our faith were lacking- well, that could restrict the work of the children's home. It could harm the entire business.

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, if that's what you think then-

**MANDERS.** Nor can I entirely lose sight of the difficult—I may even say painful—position in which I might perhaps be placed. In the leading circles of the town, people have taken a lively interest in this Children's home. It will do us good, in its way - the local council can spend less on the poor, it's to be hoped. But for myself. I've been your advisor. I've managed the business side of this matter. I cannot help but fear that I may have to bear the brunt of fanaticism—

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, you mustn't run the risk of that.

**MANDERS.** Think of the press coverage. I would have journalists at my door, any opportunity to knock the church down a peg or two, they jump at. It's disgraceful, some of the things they write about the clergy. I've managed to avoid any scandal so far, but I feel it's only a matter of time-

**MRS. ALVING.** Enough, Father Manders, enough. Let it be as you wish.

**MANDERS.** Then you do not wish the Children's home to be insured?

**MRS. ALVING.** No. We will leave it alone.

**MANDERS.** Ok, fair enough. But, I can't help but wonder. What if a disaster were to happen? Would you be able to cover the damage? I must make sure, Mrs Alving, do you understand the scale of the responsibility we are taking on?

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, it's as you said, there's nothing else we can do.

**MANDERS.** No, you're right, of course. We ought not to expose ourselves to misinterpretation; and we have no right to insult the parish. You make a good point. I really think, too, we may trust that such an establishment has fortune on its side. It is special, it is protected.

**MRS. ALVING.** Let's hope so, Father Manders.

**MANDERS.** Then we will take our chances?

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes, certainly.

**MANDERS.** Very well. So be it. [*He types on the keyboard.*] Then—no insurance.

**MRS. ALVING.** It's odd that you should bring this up today—

**MANDERS.** I meant to mention it when we spoke on the phone last week—

**MRS. ALVING.** We very nearly had a fire down there yesterday.

**MANDERS.** Really?

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, it was nothing big. A heap of shavings caught fire in the carpenter's workshop.

**MANDERS.** Where Engstrand works?

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes. They say he's often very careless with matches.

**MANDERS.** He has so much on his mind, that man—so many demons to fight against. Thank God, he is now striving to lead a decent life, or so I hear.

**MRS. ALVING.** Who's told you that?

**MANDERS.** He told me himself. And he is certainly a hard working man.

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, yes; so long as he's sober—

**MANDERS.** Ah, a weakness faced by many men! He is often driven to it by his injured leg, he says. Last time he was in he came and thanked me for getting him work here, so that he might be near Rachel.

**MRS. ALVING.** He doesn't see much of her.

**MANDERS.** He speaks with her everyday, on the phone. At least, that's what he told me.

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, maybe.

**MANDERS.** He is not afraid to face his problems. And he understands that he needs someone to keep him from succumbing to temptation. That is what I cannot help liking about Jacob Engstrand: he comes to you so helplessly, accusing himself and confessing his own weakness. He has had a difficult time of it. Which is why, Mrs. Alving, I thought I ought to mention... I mean, it may be necessary for him to have Rachel stay at home with him, for a while, in town-

**MRS. ALVING.** Rachel!

**MANDERS.**—think it through, it may be necessary. Engstrand's life may depend on it.

**MRS. ALVING.** Necessary or not—Rachel is to have a position in the Children's home.

**MANDERS.** Yes, but Jacob is her father—

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, I know very well what sort of a father he has been to her. No! She won't go and help him. I won't allow it. Jacob Engstrand can drink himself to death for all I care. I'll not let her go.

**MANDERS.** *[Rising.]* My dear lady, you cannot say things like that. You misjudge poor Engstrand. You seem to be quite terrified—

**MRS. ALVING.** *[More quietly.]* It makes no difference. Rachel lives here, and here she shall stay. *[Listens.]* Now, be quiet and say no more about it. I think I hear Oswald coming downstairs.

*[OSWALD ALVING enters the door on the left. He is smoking a roll-up, wearing baggy trousers, mobile in the other hand, laughing gormlessly at the screen.]*

**OSWALD.** Mother, you should see this meme that Pauline posted on Facebook. Oh, good morning, Father Manders, I didn't know you were here.

**MRS. ALVING.** Well now, what do you think of him, Mr. Manders? Hasn't he grown up?

**MANDERS.** I hardly recognised you.

**OSWALD.** The prodigal son returns. Have a look at this, Father.

*[He thrusts the mobile under MANDERS' nose.]*

**MANDERS.** Oh, yes, haha, very good.

**MRS. ALVING.** Oswald, put the phone away.

**OSWALD.** Sorry. It's strange to find you here, Father. We were only talking about you last night, weren't we, mother? Discussing the time when you tried to talk me out of becoming an artist.

**MANDERS.** Oh, now, Oswald - I can call you Oswald, can't I?

**OSWALD.** What else would you call me?

**MANDERS.** Well, yes, quite. Now, please take no offence, but I think you misremember. I never tried to talk you out of becoming an artist. I don't condemn the artist's calling, of course not. But there are many so-called artists in this world who... how can I put this... may at some time find a stain upon their souls.

**OSWALD.** But also many artists who have unstained souls, as well.

**MANDERS.** Well, yes, let us hope so. Anyway, that's by-the-bye. It appears my concerns were unfounded. You have begun to make quite a name for yourself already. A few months ago, there was barely a day went by when I didn't see your name in the papers. And all of it good, of course. Now that I come to think of it, I haven't seen you mentioned recently-

**OSWALD.** I haven't been able to paint so much lately.

**MRS. ALVING.** Even a painter needs a little rest now and then.

**MANDERS.** No doubt, no doubt. And meanwhile he can be preparing himself and mustering his forces for some great work.

**OSWALD.** Yes.—Mother, will lunch soon be ready?

**MRS. ALVING.** In less than half an hour. He has a capital appetite, Father Manders. He's only been back a day, and almost eaten me out of house and home already.

**MANDERS.** And a taste for tobacco, too.

**MRS. ALVING.** Well, he's a grown man.

**MANDERS.** You know, Mrs Alving, when Oswald appeared there, in the doorway, I could have sworn I saw his father, large as life.

**OSWALD.** No, really?

**MRS. ALVING.** Honestly, Father Manders? People always said Oswald takes after me.

**MANDERS.** Yes, but there is an expression about the corners of the mouth—something about the lips—that reminds one exactly of Alving.

**MRS. ALVING.** Not in the least. Oswald has rather a clerical curve about his mouth, I think.

**OSWALD.** A clerical curve? What the fuck's a "clerical curve"?

**MRS. ALVING.** Oswald, watch your language in front of Father Manders.

**MANDERS.** Oh, it's quite alright, my dear. I've heard much worse in my time.

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes, well, he ought to control himself. And put that cigarette out, Oswald, you're making the poor vicar cough.

**OSWALD.** [*Does so.*] By all means. Sorry, Father.

**MANDERS.** It's quite alright. I remember your own father used to smoke a pipe. In fact, it was very rare he was seen without it.

**OSWALD.** Yes, I remember. You know, he once let me smoke his pipe, when I was only little.

**MRS. ALVING.** He didn't, you're making it up.

**OSWALD.** He did! I remember it distinctly. He took me on his knee, and gave me the pipe. "Smoke, boy," he said; "smoke away, boy!" And I smoked as hard as I could, until I grew pale, and started to sweat, and feel quite sick, truth be told. Then he burst out laughing heartily. So heartily, in fact, I thought he was about to explode.

**MANDERS.** Well, that seems unusual.

**MRS. ALVING.** Oh, Father, take no notice, he's making it up.

**OSWALD.** No, mother, I'm not. Because then—don't you remember this?—you came and carried me out into the nursery. And I was sick, and I saw that you were crying.—Did father often play such practical jokes?

**MANDERS.** He was always a... a merry fellow, your father—

**OSWALD.** And yet he managed to do so much in the world; so much that was good and useful; although he died so early.