

# Kjeld Abell's *Den blå pekingeser*: Introduction and Translation

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ABSTRACT: This is the first English translation of Kjeld Abell's *Den blå pekingeser* [The Blue Pekinese], which was first published and performed in 1954. The introduction is a reprint of an entry on Kjeld Abell by the translator, originally published in volume 214 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1999). The play is in two parts, indicated by the fall of the curtain at the end of act 1. Although there are eleven characters, almost the entire play takes place in the mind of André, who enters the Café Bern at the beginning and leaves it with his wife Marianne before the final curtain. With its virtuosic use of theatre space and a unique soundscape, *Den blå pekingeser* remains a classic of modern Danish drama.

RÉSUMÉ : Ceci est la première traduction anglaise de *Den Blå pekingeser* de Kjeld Abell [en anglais, « The Blue Pekinese »; en français, « Le pékinois bleu »], publié et interprété pour la première fois en 1954. L'introduction est une réimpression d'une entrée sur Kjeld Abell par le traducteur, publiée à l'origine dans le volume 214 du *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1999) (en français, « Dictionnaire des biographies littéraires »). La pièce est divisée en deux parties, tel que marqué par la chute du rideau à la fin du premier acte. Bien qu'il y ait onze personnages, presque toute la pièce prend place dans l'esprit d'André, qui entre dans le Café Bern au début de la pièce et le quitte avec sa femme Marianne avant le rideau final. Avec son utilisation virtuose de l'espace théâtral et un paysage sonore unique, *Den Blå pekingeser* demeure un classique du drame danois moderne.

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# Introduction

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## Kjeld Abell

(25 August 1901 – 5 March 1961)

### BOOKS

*Melodien der blev væk: Larsens komedie i 21 billeder* (Copenhagen: Monde, 1935); translated by Frances Sinclair and Ronald Adam as *The Melody that Got Lost* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939);

*Eva aftjener sin Barnepligt: Komedie i 11 billeder* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1936);

*Paraplyernes oprør* (Copenhagen: W. Hansen, 1937);

*Anna Sophie Hedvig: Skuespil i 3 akter* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1938); translated as *Anna Sophie Hedvig*, in *Scandinavian Plays of the Twentieth-Century*, Second Series, edited by Alrik Gustafson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, American-Scandinavian Foundation of New York, 1944), 223-29;

*Judith: Skuespil i 6 billeder* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1940);

*Silkeborg: Skuespil af Kjeld Abell* (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1946);

*Dage paa en sky: Skuespil i 3 akter* (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1947); translated by A. I. Roughton as *Days on a Cloud*, in *The Genius of the Scandinavian Theater*, edited by Evert Sprinchorn (New York: New American Library, 1964), 466-535;

*Teaterstreif i påskevej* (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1948);

*Miss Plinckby's kabale: Lystspil i 3 akter* (Copenhagen: Thaning and Appel, 1949);

- Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver: Skuespil i 3 akter* (Copenhagen: Thaning and Appel, 1950);
- Fodnoter i støvet: Glimt fra en rejse* (Copenhagen: Thaning and Appel, 1951);
- Den blå pekingeser* (Copenhagen: Thaning and Appel, 1954);
- Andersen; eller, Hans livs eventyr* (Copenhagen: Thaning and Appel, 1955);
- Fire skuespil af Kjeld Abell* (Copenhagen: Thaning and Appel, 1955)—comprises *Melodien der blev væk*; *Eva aftjener sin Barnepligt*; *Judith*; and *Dronning går igen*, translated by J. F. S. Pearce as *The Queen on Tour*, in *Contemporary Danish Plays: An Anthology*, edited by Elias Bredsdorff (London: Thames & Hudson / Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1955), 105–71;
- De tre fra Minikoi* (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1957); translated by Roughton as *Three from Minikoi* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960);
- Kameliadamen: Skuespil i 3 akter inspireret af Alexandre Dumas' roman af samme navn* (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1959);
- Skriget* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1961).

## EDITIONS AND COLLECTIONS

- Anna Sophie Hedvig: Skuespil i 3 akter*, edited by Niels Heltberg (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1951);
- Synskhedens gave: Prosa og vers af Kjeld Abell*, edited by Bredsdorff (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962);
- Den blå pekingeser*, edited, with an introduction, by Nils Kjærulf (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1965).

## PLAY PRODUCTIONS

- Enken i spejlet: Ballet*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 20 November 1934;
- Melodien der blev væk*, Copenhagen, Riddersalen, 6 September 1935; adapted as *The Melody that Got Lost*, London, Embassy Theatre, 26 December 1936;
- Eva aftjener sin Barnepligt*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 8 December 1936;
- Anna Sophie Hedvig*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 1 January 1939;
- Judith*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 10 February 1940;
- Dronning gaar igen*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 5 March 1943;
- Silkeborg*, Copenhagen, Det Ny Teater, 1 March 1946;

*Dage paa en sky*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 11 December 1947;  
*Miss Plinckby's kabale*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 13 February 1949;  
*Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver*, Copenhagen, Frederiksberg Theatre, 12 November 1950;  
*Den blå pekingeser*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 16 December 1954;  
*Skriget*, Copenhagen, The Royal Theatre, 2 November 1961.

## MOTION PICTURES

*Millionærdrengen*, screenplay by Abell, Palladium Productions, 1936;  
*Tak fordi du kom, Nick*, screenplay by Abell, Palladium Film, 1941;  
*Regnen holdt op*, screenplay by Abell, Palladium Film, 1942;  
*Ta' Brillen paa*, screenplay by Abell, Palladium Film, 1942.

Kjeld Abell was the great source of renewal in twentieth-century Danish drama. As playwright, essayist, and set designer, he worked tirelessly to create a modern theatre free from the constraints of realism and alive to the issues of its day. While only two of Abell's plays, *Melodien der blev væk: Larsens Komedie i 21 Billeder* [The Lost Melody: Larsen's Comedy in Twenty-one Scenes, 1935; translated as *The Melody that Got Lost*, 1936], and *Anna Sophie Hedvig Skuespil 3 Akter* [Anna Sophie Hedvig: Play in Three Acts, 1938; translated 1944] won international recognition, H. C. Branner could justly claim: "Det var Kjeld Abell som gjorde dansk teater levende og nutidigt" [It was Kjeld Abell who made Danish theater living and contemporary] by politicizing its subject matter and revolutionizing its form. (This and subsequent translations from the Danish are my own.)

Abell was born in Ribe, Jutland, Denmark, on 25 August 1901 to Peter Abell, a high-school teacher, and his wife, Susanne Jørgensen. In 1910 the family moved to Odense, and then in 1912 to Copenhagen. After Abell graduated from the Metropolitan School in 1919, he studied at the Academy of Art where he was able to develop his considerable talents as a graphic artist, painter, and designer. In 1920 Max Reinhardt's production of August Strindberg's *Spöksonaten* (*The Ghost Sonata*, 1907) was Abell's introduction to symbolist theatre, and its impact on the young theatre artist is vividly recalled in *Teaterstreif i påskevejr* (*Theatre Sketches in Easter Weather*, 1948): "Pludselig blev tanker klippet over. Jeg holdt op at tænke. I de korte øjeblikke katastrofen skete, var der kun tid at føle. Jeg følte med øjne, ører, hele personen" [Suddenly thought was disconnected. I stopped thinking. In the brief moments during which the catastrophe took place, there was only time to feel. I felt with my eyes, my ears, my whole being]. Abell went on to study political science at the University of Copenhagen. To pay his way, he found work

in the police fingerprint department, which almost certainly influenced his literal and metaphoric use of *gerningstedet* [the scene of the crime] in several of his plays. After receiving his degree, he left with his wife, Grete, for Paris where their son, Jacob, was born, and where Abell began his theatrical career as a designer. His encounter with French symbolist theatre and cinema would have lasting importance to him, as would the new ballet created by the revolutionary choreographers Sergei Diaghileff and Georges Balanchine.

In 1930 Abell followed Balanchine to Copenhagen to design sets for a season of ballet at the Royal Theatre, which soon became his second home. There too, his own ballet, *Enken i spillet: Ballet* [The Widow in the Mirror: Ballet] was successfully presented in 1934. Here, in what Abell called “Det ordløse teater hvor man lærer rummet at kende” [The wordless theatre where you learn to interpret space], he introduced his audience to many of the ideas and images that were to characterize his plays: the individual trapped by her past; a mirror- or picture-frame as an image of entrapment and loneliness; music and dance as metaphors for desire and freedom: “Enken sprænger spejlrømmet og lever” [The widow bursts the mirror-frame and lives].

While many of his contemporaries believed that cinema would replace theatre, Abell insisted that “Filmen gav teatret en mulighed for at leve videre. Det var filmen der viste teatret at det igen burde blive rigtigt teater” [Film gave theatre an opportunity to survive. It was film that showed theatre that it must again become real theatre]. Unlike motion pictures, theatre should not, indeed could not, be realistic; instead, “teatret bør altid være den frie tankes fantastiske fristed” [theatre must always be the free imagination’s fantastic sanctuary]. Just as Abell’s characters are often seen breaking away from some kind of frame, so the dramatist must escape the constraints of a “kølig og graa” [cool and grey] realism framed by the proscenium arch, to restore living contact with the audience. In his important essay “Realisme-?” [Realism-?, 1935], Abell claims that if this escape can be achieved, “der skal sejres paa begge sider af rampen” [there will be victory on both sides of the footlights].

On September 6, 1935, Abell’s first play, *Melodien der blev væk. Larsens Komædie i 21 Billeder*, opened at Riddersalen. In *Melodien der blev væk*, Abell tells the story of Larsen, an average middle-class clerk, who is haunted by fragments of a life-enhancing melody. Using the techniques of epic and expressionist theatre, Abell shows the audience Larsen at the office, at home with his wife Edith and her rather ghastly parents, or trying to enjoy a bourgeois picnic in the woods. Eventually, Larsen and Edith discover the full melody that leads them “langt ud i det fri” [far out into nature], leaving behind Larsen’s in-laws who are now blindfolded and deaf to the music of life.

More satirical review than drama, *Melodien der blev væk* nonetheless includes many of the ideas, techniques, and strengths and weaknesses of Abell’s later plays. The goal of the action is freedom—here freedom from middle-class conformity,

materialism, and a nine-to-five office routine. Abell is good at displaying the defects of this world. In two office scenes, for example, three typists, each called Froken Møller and wearing a photographic mask, sing a “skrivemaskinesang” [typewriter song] and perform a “Danse du Bureau” [office dance], looking like “hjerneløse mekaniske dukker” [brainless mechanical dolls]. In a scene titled “Søndag” [Sunday], banality darkens into pathos when Edith defends her right to use linen napkins: “Jeg vil bruge mine ting mens de er pæne og ny” [I want to use my things while they are fine and new]. The author is not, however, so successful at demonstrating ways of escape. One of his most perceptive and loyal critics, Frederik Schyberg, argued that the happy ending was “scenisk svag” [theatrically weak], and that “dens logik holdt ikke stik” [its logic did not hold true].

With all its flaws, *Melodien* had an extraordinary impact on its first audiences. “De af os, der var unge,” Carl Johan Elmqvist writes, “da Kjeld Abell i 1935 fik sit store gennembrud med *Melodien der blev væk ...* blev ikke de samme mennesker, som vi ville være blevet uden *Melodien*. Forestillingen havde jo i en sjælden grad publikumstække, men den havde først og fremmest ungdomstække, fordi den virkede lige saa ung som vi selv og lokkede toner frem i os, som vi knapt vidste, at virummede” [Those of us who were young in 1935 when Kjeld Abell had his great breakthrough with *Melodien der blev væk...* became different people from what we would have been without *Melodien*. The production had of course unusual audience appeal, but it appealed first and foremost to the young, because it seemed just as young as we were ourselves and struck chords in us we hardly knew we had]. The play ran for 594 performances in Copenhagen and was produced in Norway, Sweden, and England. Several satirical pieces in review format were to follow *Melodien der blev væk*, the most substantial being *Eva aftjener sin Barnepligt; Komædie i 11 Billeder* [Eve Serves her Childhood: Comedy in Eleven Scenes] in 1936, a popular if self-indulgent piece in which the biblical Eve walks out of a Renaissance painting to remake her own life.

*Anna Sophie Hedwig*, Abell's next major work, premiered on 1 January 1939. It is, in his own words, a “tilsyneladende gammeldags” [apparently old-fashioned] three-act problem play whose realism was “født af tiden” [born of the times]. Ever since German rearmament in 1935, Abell had been trying to warn Denmark of the threat from the south. In his play, he suggests that tyranny can only be overcome through violence.

Anna Sophie Hedvig, a middle-aged high-school teacher, has murdered a vicious, child-hating, female colleague who was about to become principal. Apart from two flashbacks to the scene of the crime, the play takes place in the living room of Anna's cousin who is married to a wealthy entrepreneur. During a cocktail-hour conversation about the Spanish Civil War, Hoff, the guest of honour, remarks that “et oplyst, kultiveret, moderne menneske kan ikke slaa ihjel” [an

enlightened, cultivated, modern person cannot kill]. This compels Anna to confess and defend her action:

det var som om jeg pludselig fra min lille verden så ind i den store—den fra viserne—den vi hører om og taler om—men som er så langt borte—den verden, hvor det ikke er mord at slå ihjel—hvor en enestes mening skal være alles—det var hende, der ville angribe min verden—måtte jeg ikke forsvare den—inden hun angreb?- - -må vi ikke forsvare vores små verdener?-?-er det ikke dem, der tilsammen er den store.

[it was as if I suddenly looked out of my little world into the big world—the one in the newspapers—the one we hear about and talk about—but which is so far away—that world where it isn't murder to kill—where one person's opinion must be shared by all—it was she who wanted to attack my world—wasn't I meant to defend it—before she attacked?- - -aren't we meant to defend our small worlds?-?-isn't it those that make up the big one.]

After her story has been told, the stunned company divides sharply over what action they should take. Anna's cousin and nephew boldly step out of line to take her side, but Hoff and his frightened host agree to hand her over to the police. With its intriguing plot, politically urgent message, and well-individualized characters, *Anna Sophie Hedvig* was Abell's second theatrical triumph, his first at the Royal Theatre, and has become a classic of modern Danish drama.

Even after the outbreak of war, there were Scandinavians who clung to the belief that the kind of political tyranny they read about in the newspapers was still "far away." Such complacency may have prompted Abell to choose for his first wartime play the apocryphal legend of Judith and Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes, who places her city under siege. The analogies between Denmark and Bethulia, between Hitler and Holofernes, are striking, but Abell's *Judith: Skuespil i 6 Billeder* [Judith: Play in Six Scenes, 1940] does not exploit them with sufficient resonance or clarity. This failure is largely because Abell sidetracks the central political conflict with a frame narrative involving a modern couple, which is only tenuously linked to the Bible story, and, more seriously, alters the famous climax; this Judith does not assassinate Holofernes; he is killed instead by a procuress who has posed as Judith's maid. The resulting sense of audience disappointment probably contributed to the box-office failure of the play. It is hard not to agree with Schyberg's review: "Hvem er Judith, naar hun ikke er den Judith, der slog Holofernes ihjel? Hun er ingen" [Who is Judith, when she is not the Judith who killed Holofernes? She is no one].

During the first years of the occupation, Abell produced three screenplays for feature films, as well as working as a director at Tivoli. His next play, *Dronning går igen* [The Queen Walks Again, 1943; translated as *The Queen on Tour*, 1955] was produced in 1943. It is on the surface a realistic murder mystery, set in a country

inn. A man's body has been found on a nearby road, and the chief suspect is Mirena Pritz, an actress who happens to carry a revolver and has just arrived at the inn still wearing her Gertrude costume from a touring production of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603). For two acts, the detective genre is skillfully sustained. In the third, Mirena delivers a thinly veiled appeal to the latter-day Hamlets in her audience:

jeg saa en verden der ikke lod sig bortforklare, en verden behersket af Macbeth's og Claudius' brutale efterkommere, en verden lukket inde i et ubarmhjertigt Kronborg med fortiden vandrende som genfærd på bastionerne og fremtiden hvilende i den veges haand—og op af det Kronborg rejste sig min fæstning, ikke til forsvar—nej, angreb!—jeg ville komme og jeg kom som den trojanske hest—dækket af de store, de berømte, de knæsatte navne red jeg ind i selve det elendigste provinshul med dolken parat i hvert ord.

[I saw a world that could not be explained away, a world controlled by the brutal successors of Macbeth and Claudius, a world shut inside a cruel Elsinore with its past wandering like ghosts on the ramparts and its future resting in the weak man's hand—and up from that Elsinore my own fortress rose, not for defense—no, for attack!—I planned to come and I did come like the Trojan horse—under cover of the assumed names of the great and the famous, I rode into the most wretched provincial hole with a dagger hidden in every word.]

Reviewers in what Johan Faltin Bjørnsen calls “en slik Ulvetid” [that time of the wolves] could not respond openly to this challenge. It was safer to address aesthetic matters: Bodil Ipsen's strong performance of Mirena and the seemingly bathetic revelation that there has been no murder after all. This, however, must have been Abell's point: the real murders were taking place outside the theatre. In retrospect, *Dronning går igen* seems one of Abell's more durable plays. Its clever interweaving of the detective plot with a system of Shakespearean allusion and coded resistance message makes it worthy of revival and reappraisal.

On August 29, 1943, the Germans declared a state of emergency in Denmark and took hundreds of Danish citizens, Abell among them, hostage, placing them in an internment camp at Horsørød. Shortly after their release, the great Danish playwright Kaj Munk was murdered by the Gestapo on January 4, 1944. The next evening, Abell courageously interrupted a performance at the Royal Theatre to speak from the stage in Munk's memory. The audience's reaction was recorded in a letter written by Bent Suenson to Abell the following day: “Jeg var i teatret i gaar og vil gerne sige dig, hvor smukt de ord, du sagde virkede, paa mig og dem, der var med mig. Intet, tror jeg, kunne have gjort et stærkere indtryk end disse tilstræbt stilfærdige og smukke ord” [I was in the theatre yesterday and would like to tell you what a beautiful effect the words you said had on me and those who were with me. Nothing, I believe, could have made a stronger impression



than those well-chosen, quiet, and beautiful words]. Abell left the theatre fifteen minutes before the arrival of the Gestapo and was active in the resistance for the remainder of the war. A photograph taken in the summer of 1944 shows him effectively disguised with bleached hair, moustache, and steel-rimmed glasses.

Out of these experiences came a new play, *Silkeborg* (1946), about the Martensen-Smiths, a family that is tragically divided by the occupation. The play opens and closes in 1900 near Himmelbjerget where a student has a waking dream about the family through three generations. Inside this frame, the plot centres on events surrounding a British weapons drop in which Jørgen, the son, takes part. The pickup miscarries, and the Gestapo track Jørgen and his friend Ulriksen back to the Martensen-Smiths' home, where Ulriksen is killed. Jørgen's mother, Git, once had an affair with a Germanized Dane called Carl Otto who is now serving with the occupation forces, though he is anti-Nazi. He chooses this night to visit Git, and later appears, in uniform, to help Jørgen evade the Gestapo. Misunderstanding the situation and traumatized by his mother's apparent treason, Jørgen shoots Carl Otto and runs out into the night.

*Silkeborg* is one of Abell's strongest plays. There is a new, caustic quality to the dialogue and a powerful film-noir atmosphere of violence and fear. Frederick J. Marker rightly praises the skill with which the "private" scene between Git and Carl Otto is charged with "wider ideological and ethical concerns."

*Dage Paa en sky. Skuespil i 3 Akter* [Days on a Cloud; Play in Three Acts, 1947; translated 1964] is the first of three postwar plays that form a kind of trilogy against suicide. A scientist, driven by guilt and despair over the atomic bomb, has jumped from a plane to end his life. The action turns a few seconds of free fall into a flashback on his life, and a mythical exploration of love and hate. The cloud of the title is inhabited by Aphrodite and her attendant goddesses who are at war with Zeus and inspire the scientist with a wish to live. As he pulls the ripcord on his parachute and floats to earth, Aphrodite seems set fair to defeat Olympic tyranny.

The surrealist setting is one of Abell's finest, with "gennemsigtige tempelruiner og væltede søjler" [transparent temple ruins and overturned columns], together with "faldefærdige balustre, tilsyneladende kun holdt sammen af visne efeuranker" [crumbling balustrades, apparently only held together by withered ivy vines]. This new balance of imagination and self-discipline is not as evident in the dialogue, which often betrays Abell's love of passionate, but dramatically inappropriate rhetoric. The reviewers praised Holger Gabrielson's sensitive production, but the dramatist was attacked for what some took to be communism, despite the play's appeal to individual love and freedom.

After *Miss Plinckby's kabale: Lystspil i 3 akter* [Miss Plinckby's Game of Patience: Comedy in Three Acts, 1949], a well-crafted and underrated excursion into drawing-room comedy, the trilogy continued with *Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver* [Vetsera Does not Bloom for Everyone, 1950]. Set in an isolated *landsted* [country

villa], *Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver* marks a return to Abell's symbolic realism. The cool grey neoclassical facade of the house is replaced in act 2 by an eerie garden room redolent of "et forfald der er standset" [an arrested decay]. The villa thus reflects the aristocratic pose of its recently deceased owner, which masked emotional sterility and despair. Obsessed with the legendary suicide pact of Maria Vetsera and Prince Rudolph of Austria, the owner, David, had tried to persuade a working-class girl named Vetsera to join him in a similar pact. After she rejected this sinister offer, he lacked the courage for direct suicide and drank himself to death instead. His sister-in-law Alice had once loved him but was repelled by his drift into self-destruction. The action moves toward her personal exorcism of David's ghost, aided by the more "common" but more courageous Vetsera.

*Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver* was Abell's one real box office and critical failure. All that reviewers found to praise were Bodil Ipsen's performance of Alice and Helge Refn's expert realization of the house. Svend Kragh-Jacobsen pointed to many borrowings from the plays of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Eugene O'Neill, Jean Giraudoux, and Jean Anouilh; and Hans Brix criticized the prolixity of the dialogue. While it is probable that Abell's borrowings form a corrective pastiche of dramatists who had valorized self-destruction, *Vetsera blomstrer ikke for enhver* is, unfortunately, not strong enough to take on Ibsen, O'Neill, or Anouilh at their own game.

The last play in this trilogy, *Den blå pekingeser* (The Blue Pekingese, 1954), opened at the Royal Theatre, with Mogens Wieth and Bodil Kjer in the leading roles of André and Tordis Eck. Like many of Abell's heroines, Tordis feels herself trapped in a series of mirrors and portraits. She calls herself "en indrammet datter" [a daughter in a frame], and even her friend and former lover, André, whose name is a pun on *andre* [other people], describes her as "en person i et billede som vi betragede udefra" [someone in a picture whom we looked at from the outside]. When the play begins, Tordis has retreated to a weird Viking-gothic mansion on a Baltic island, where she tries to kill herself, but spoils "den fuldendte forbrydelse" [the perfect crime] by sending a coded suicide note to André. The island is cut off from Sjælland by a fierce storm, but he manages to get a message sent to Tordis's doctor who saves her life.

This skeletal plot would not have made a full-length play if Abell had not, in Branner's words, "ophævede naturalismens love for tid og sted og lod os se det sceniske nu i dets sammenhæng med fortid og fremtid" [canceled the naturalistic rules of time and place and let us see the scenic present in its connection with the past and future]. As André waits for news of Tordis, the action moves between real time and place in a café near the Royal Theatre and a symbolist vision of the island "befolket af genfærd, genfærd af døde, genfaerd af ufødte" [peopled by ghosts, ghosts of the dead, ghosts of the unborn].

*Den blå pekingeser* had a great success with its first public and may well be Abell's masterpiece. The long second-act speeches are undoubtedly too rhetorical

to be truly dramatic. They are built from Abell's favourite kind of sentences, which Schyberg calls serpentine, where "billederne snubler over hinanden og tilsidst hverken er til at hitte ud af eller ind i" [the images stumble over each other and are in the end impossible to make head or tail of]. On the other hand, the interweaving of André's narrative in the café with dramatized scenes on the island is brilliant, especially in act 1. Just as striking are the play's dreamlike landscape—imaginatively realized in the first production by Erik Nordgreen's design—and a fascinatingly original soundscape that includes storm effects, a piano concerto by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a Waltz by Niels Viggo Bentzon, and the bells of an invisible Pekingese. Here, more successfully than in any other play, Abell succeeded in turning the stage into "the free imagination's fantastic sanctuary."

Abell died suddenly on March 5, 1961. His last play, *Skriget* [The Scream], was produced in November of that year. The main characters are birds who inhabit or invade the bell tower of a country church: two owls, Tuwit and her mate Tuhuh; an Australian vulture named Arthur, and a domesticated crow that once betrayed the owls into captivity. The story of Tuwit's revenge on Crow is juxtaposed with a human drama, at first narrated by the birds, involving an organist who seems to have lost his wife's affection and his ability to play. This plot climaxes with a terrifying cry that marks the turning point of the whole play. The organist's wife has heard the cry in a radio broadcast of the service and rushes to the church to be reunited with her husband. Meanwhile Arthur has gathered together a large flock of birds that peck Crow to death outside the tower.

Like the last or near-last plays of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Strindberg, *Skriget* suspends received conventions to bring a privately imagined judgment day to the stage. Abell's chosen target is mankind's inability to perceive and respect a deep connectedness between all living things: "Altid sir de noget de ikke mener," remarks Tuwit about her human captors, "—men lytter man sig ned under det de ikke mener, lytter sig helt ned, er sproget det samme som i den vingede verden, dernede kan ikke lyves, for dernede er ingen ord" [they always say something they don't mean—but if you listen down underneath what they don't mean, listen right down, the language is the same as in the winged world; there can be no lies down there, because down there are no words].

Though Abell undercuts his theme in the second part by introducing human characters, *Skriget* is often genuinely funny and wise. While Harald Engberg greeted the play with puzzled respect, H. C. Branner suggested that as soon as the curtain rises, "må man åbne seg" [you must open yourself] to Abell's world, "hvor der ikke gjaelder nogen anden logik end den digteriske" [where no other logic prevails than that of the poetic].

Nils Kjaerulf believed that Abell's reputation as Munk's successor began to wane during the 1950s, when a negative reaction to his late symbolic manner set in. By 1965, however, Kjaerulf could report that "*radioteatret* har gjort en stor

indsats for at rehabilitere Kjeld Abell ved en række fortjenstfulde opførelser af både ældre og nyere værker. Og har man lyttet til dem, vil man have fornemmet, hvor *levende* og *nærværende* en dramatiker han stadig er” [*radio theatre* has gone a long way toward rehabilitating Kjeld Abell with a series of excellent productions of both older and newer works. And if you have listened to them, you will have felt how *living* and *contemporary* a dramatist he still is]. Although Abell has never caught on in the English-speaking world in the way that Ibsen and Strindberg have, his plays and theatre essays form a fascinating contribution to twentieth-century drama.

## Letters

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## Translator’s note

This translation is based on the 1990 edition of Kjeld Abell’s *Den blå pekingeser*. Edited with introduction and notes by Nils Kjærulf. Copenhagen: Gyldendal. I am

indebted to the Kjeld Abell Estate and Nordiska Strakosch Teaterförlaget for granting me the rights to translate the play.

I have translated the play as it stands in the 1990 edition. Readers should, however, note that Abell's stage directions are at times confusing, and photographs of the 1954 premiere (kindly supplied me by the Royal Danish Theatre) indicate that director John Price and designer Erik Nordgreen must have departed in significant ways from the stage directions in the text (Kjærulf 1970b, 132). Abell has the sofa in the café on the island as well, but this idea was dropped in the production. Most importantly, André moves freely between the café and the island. For example, he sits on the terrace conversing with the doctor, and has physical contact with Tordis, even though we have to remember all this is taking place in his mind. The sofa and mirror are not in the centre of the stage, as the text states, but in what appears to be what we would now call the far stage right corner of the set. The use of the gauze curtain or scrim is problematic, as it would have to be raised whenever André moves to the island. In a contemporary production (i.e. 21st century) I can imagine the director and designer omitting the scrim entirely and simply using lighting to differentiate between the café and the island. The numerous set changes on the island could be carried out in silhouette lighting to which audiences have become long accustomed.

I have attempted to render Abell's spoken text in as idiomatic an English style as seemed possible. Readers will, however, become aware that the play's long speeches, as Frederick Schyberg noted (see the *DLB* entry above), are "serpentine" and hard for readers and actors to disentangle. It is a tribute to Mogens Wieth and Bodil Kjer, the first André and Tordis, that their performances received such high praise (Marker 112), since their long speeches must have put considerable demands on their acting skills.

**KJELD ABELL**  
**THE BLUE PEKINESE**  
**A Play in Two Acts**  
**1954**

Translated from *Den blå pekingeser* by John Lingard, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada 2017. Inquiries about rights and royalties for this translation should be addressed to:

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**THE CHARACTERS**

ANDRÉ  
TORDIS ECK  
MARIANNE  
A CAFÉ PATRON  
THE DOCTOR  
HANSSON, THE LIGHTHOUSEKEEPER'S ASSISTANT  
EMILY  
ISABELLA DE CREUITH  
THE MIDWIFE  
ESMOND  
OLSEN, A WAITER

## ACT 1

*[A café in elegant 1880's style. It has been painted on gauze drops, which either disappear or become translucent to reveal new and changing scenes. In the foreground to the right, an old-fashioned telephone booth with frosted glass windows conceals the entrance to a side room. In the foreground to the left, a pillar covers the window looking out onto the square. Further back, slightly to the left of centre, an archway with portieres leads to the buffet, cake display, and entrance door. This area is hidden from the audience who sense its layout through the entrances and exits of the characters. In the background the continuation of the café is glimpsed in a misty fashion. It is evening. A man and a woman are sitting at the window table. He is reading a newspaper; she is staring into space. A centre table in front of a red plush sofa is unoccupied.]*

ANDRÉ:

*[Comes in from the entrance, stops for a moment, and turns back towards the buffet.]*

Someone phoned. There should be a letter for me. Isn't Olsen here? Thanks—he knows about it.

*[Moves quickly into the foreground and stops by the centre table.]*

The table. How touching. It seems to have been waiting for me. Hello, old table. It's been a long time.

*[Puts a packet of cigarettes and a newspaper on the table, crosses to a hatstand that is partially hidden by the telephone booth, hangs up his hat and coat, and looks around with his hand resting on his coat.]*

So strange. These rooms. They were an unruly battlefield once, from which we looked out onto new worlds. Drunk with words, we set off on the most daring crusades, tore everything apart, knocked things down, possessed of the most death-defying certainty that only we had the strength and the ability to build high, build free.

*[Takes his hand off the coat.]*

Dear God.

*[Goes over to the centre table, glances quickly in the big mirror above the sofa, runs his hand quickly through his hair, sits down, lights a cigarette—just then*

*two wizened old women come in from the side room, button their gloves, and adjust their hats—he looks at his watch.]*

Seven-thirty, just after—in a little while they'll be taking their usual seats in the old theatre. *Their* theatre.

*[Looks towards the window.]*

Wonder what's on?

*[Checks quickly in the newspaper.]*

Medea!

*[Leans forward and looks at the old women who are now leaving the café.]*

Those two and *Medea*. Two dried-up ants crawling round with a programme and opera-glasses at the foot of a volcanic monument. Priceless.

*[Speaking of himself.]*

And what about you? You and Jason? Didn't you use to dream you were Jason, sat here with the others and dreamed, dreamed big wonderful dreams. But what happened to the golden fleece? Moths get into everything, dreams as well. Olsen.

*[An old waiter in black pants and a short white jacket shuffles in from the side room.]*

Good evening. You must have thought I was dead. Perhaps I am. It's hard to tell sometimes. You've a letter for me, I think. Someone's sent me a letter. Why here of all places? I don't understand. A glass of sherry, Olsen. Thanks, Olsen, thanks.

*[OLSEN leaves.]*

Old times, old times. My God, I've slowly reached the age when one gets sentimental over old times, sentimental and afraid. There's no going back. What did it all add up to? Not to what you once dreamed it would, yet to so much, in a different way, an unexpected way. Oh yes, I must remember to ring home. I promised the boys to help them with their math.

*[He is about to stand up, but at that moment OLSEN arrives with a glass of sherry and an envelope.]*

Ah, it's Olsen. Who the devil can the letter be from? Thanks, Olsen, thanks.



*[OLSEN leaves.]*

A cheap, nondescript envelope. But the handwriting—?

*[Turns the envelope over.]*

Villa G—

*[Looks up suddenly.]*

Villa G—?

*[Looks at the envelope again.]*

What's underneath? Poste restante, Sandodden, Iselø. The island with the lighthouse. You take the ferry there from Sandhavn. Villa G—Villa Gull's Cry, the lonely villa out by the lighthouse. Tordis Eck. It's from Tordis—Tordis who got engaged to half the men around this table, behind her parents' backs, especially her father's. For a fortnight I fooled myself into thinking I too was engaged to Tordis. We were sitting here on this sofa. And the others were sitting here too. The world was turned upside down, blown apart. Suddenly she had to go. Come over this evening, she whispered—father and mother are out to dinner. For a second or two I felt her hand on my arm. Come at eight. I came at eight. I was eighteen, almost nineteen. I'd just decided to go into law. As I climbed her steps I felt a dryness in my throat; I couldn't swallow. She opened the door herself. We went together into the big rooms, which were dimly lit by a few lamps. When I looked back I felt her mouth close to mine. I saw her father everywhere, the precise cabinet minister, the cool member of numerous committees. Her grandfather's sabers hung above the low sofa, well-polished, gleaming, two Javanese daggers, Japanese sword-hilts. I saw her eyes and her mouth coming closer through a forest of weapons. Then I forgot everything, everything round me, felt only myself and my proud triumph at being carried on wings into the temple of manhood, cabinet ministers, and sabers. I was the victor. We met here the next day. At the old café Bern.<sup>2</sup> It was all gold and flowers. We too were fire and gold, with eyes like stars.

*[The drops have slowly grown translucent revealing glimpses of gold and flowers; an orchestra plays quietly in the far distance.]*

The air became blue, the birds twittered, flew in and out between the waving portieres, while little sylphs with airy wings fluttered in the sunlight from the square, scattered violet petals, pirouetted, stood on pointe.

*[A line of sylphs have danced in from the side room.]*

Life opened up like a magic score. I could read every note. My hands were like a juggler's. I tossed cascades of notes into the air. The tea became champagne. Everything was champagne. We met every day. Every day for one week. Then suddenly—suddenly she had other things to do. The next day as well. And the next too. I heard nothing from her for days. There was a noose round my neck, tightening slowly. I felt like a hanged man. A cold world turned its back on me. I pulled myself together with an effort, telephoned her, and asked her if she would like to see a movie. We could meet here. Here at the Café Bern. I waited and waited. Then at last I heard her steps, the sound of her heels—

*[He pushes the table out, turns towards the entrance door, seems to greet an invisible person entering the café, invites her to sit down—sits down himself.]*

Nice of you to come. What will you have? Nothing? She smiled, shook her head, and lit a cigarette. She'd only come to say she couldn't join me at the movie. She didn't say why, and I didn't ask. Then we sat for a little and chatted about trivial things: a potluck supper on Saturday. Would she be there. Of course. She'd pinned two lilies-of-the-valley to her lapel. I looked at them. I talked to them while all the time I felt the crippling emptiness I was trapped in, a stupid, clumsy boy, too young for his age. She was the grown-up.

*[The telephone rings, OLSEN comes in from the buffet, and goes into the telephone booth.]*

Then the telephone rang. I stubbed my cigarette out in the ashtray, an advertisement for some liqueur. The name of the liqueur looked at me like people who'd been forced to attend a funeral that wasn't their concern.

*[OLSEN beckons from the booth.]*

Is it for me?

*[He stands and moves towards the booth.]*

I heard her say that she had to go, but I pretended not to have understood.

*[He goes into the booth.]*

Yes, yes, it's me.

*[All the time he is keeping an eye on the centre table.]*

While a voice filled my ear with the most dreary banalities, I saw her stand, remove the lilies-of-the-valley from her lapel, and lay them on the table next

to my empty place. Then she turned on her heels, walked past the fancy cakes in the display case, and past the woman who took care of the buffet. Olsen held the door open. She didn't look back.

*[He puts the phone down hesitantly and leaves the booth.]*

I saw her that Saturday. She was with another man. I often saw her with other men, but she was always the same. Come and visit us, André, please do. Father often asks about you. Her father? Why was her father suddenly interested in me now? Your first year at university has really impressed him. Come for dinner. Bring your girlfriend. I don't know her, but everyone says she's quite enchanting. We did visit a few times. Marianne and I. The sabers above the sofa smiled in a friendly way. I represented no danger to the family's well-being. That was all over.

*[He has returned to the table and sat down—he sits for a moment flipping the envelope back and forward in his hand—he is suddenly alert, and looks quickly at the envelope.]*

Yes, that's her handwriting. Oddly enough it was rather girlish, almost a bit impersonal—and it still is.

*[He opens the envelope—inside there is an old-fashioned photograph, about the size of a postcard.]*

An old photograph—?

*[He hastily turns the photo and looks at the back, but there seems to be nothing written there. He examines the envelope, but there is no clue there—he stares at the photo again.]*

An old photograph of an old lady in an old-fashioned hunting outfit. There's a dog lying at her feet. A dog?

*[Looks up suddenly.]*

The blue Pekinese!

*[Looks at the photo again.]*

Isabella de Creuith. *That's* who it is. The minister's aunt. Her brother built the villa in his day, the lonely villa on the point, out by the lighthouse. His legs were paralyzed. He used to lie in bed all day shooting gulls through the open window, while his sister, Isabella, followed by her dog, went up over the heath, up to the villa's landmark, an old figurehead, a peeling Triton with storm-blown cape and raised trident.

*[Stares at the photo again, lost in thought, turns it over suddenly, and notices something this time.]*

Here, down in the corner—some faint writing in pencil—what does it say? “If I were a poet—“

*[Suddenly pushes the table away from him, as if about to stand up.]*

No, it isn't true. It can't be true!

*[Sits for a moment staring into space.]*

This summer—there's never been such a cloudless summer—we took off into the blue, Marianne and I. The children were with Marianne's parents. Took the car-ferry from Sandhavn. I hadn't the slightest clue that there was a connection between Tordis and Iselø. We drove out to the lighthouse, swam for a while, and then lay in the sand to soak up the sun. There wasn't a soul in sight, just sun-bleached sand as far as the eye could see. Suddenly we heard the sound of hooves on the sand. Who was riding that horse? It wasn't a rider, but a female centaur. Tordis in tight riding breeches, her blouse open. In a cascade of sand, she reined her horse in. Leaning on my elbow I looked up at a stranger's face, a complete stranger's face. I only realized who it was when she recognized me. “André and Marianne, is it really you? I live up here behind the big sand-dune—*there*, you can see the corner of the gable. But André, haven't you been here before? No, that's true, we were never here in those days. Come up and have a drink, when you're ready. Where are you staying, by the way? Why don't you come and stay with me? I'm quite alone.”

*[The drops become translucent; we sense a warm deep blue summer sky.]*

We got dressed and went up through the dunes. *There* it was, the villa, a veritable barn of a house, with carved railings and old saga motifs. Not a house, but a living creature.

*[The drops are now completely translucent; we see the suggestion of a covered wooden terrace with carved railings and dragon heads—MARIANNE is sitting at the top of the wooden steps, while ANDRÉ is still sitting on the café-sofa that now seems to be part of the house. Both MARIANNE and ANDRÉ are now looking up at the house.]*

Under this roof you'd feel more than alone.

TORDIS:

*[Comes out of the house in her riding breeches, a short-sleeved blouse, with a cigarette in the corner of her mouth. She is carrying a tray of bottles and glasses—]*

MARIANNE:

*[Moves down a couple of steps.]*

Father and mother are out here so seldom. And my husband—

ANDRÉ:

Her husband. Now I remembered. Out of an unspoken hatred for her father she had eventually got married, married to a man who suited her father.

TORDIS:

*[She has sat down on the step.]*

My husband can never feel at home here, quite apart from the fact that he finds the location and the house rather ugly. He belongs in town. We were married *there*. Scotch or sherry?

ANDRÉ:

I'm sure it was Marianne she'd condemned to sherry, but we all drank scotch anyway. Handling bottles and glasses, cigarettes and lighters, was the only domestic skill Tordis had perfected over the years.

TORDIS:

Marianne—

*[She hands the glasses round.]*

Here are the cigarettes. Ah, it seems like thousands of years. How many children do you have?

ANDRÉ:

I was the one who answered. Marianne sat turned toward the sea. Her calm was so graceful, so completely hers. She has always had the fine balance that is at one with space. We have three boys.

TORDIS:

And I have only one.

ANDRÉ:

Marianne's eyes took on a listening expression, but she didn't turn.

TORDIS:

My husband is the son I gave my father to atone for being born a girl. No, he didn't reproach me, but it was always in the air. From the very first I understood that the concept "woman" was essentially inferior. I looked down on the other girls with their dolls and despised ribbons and finery to my mother's lasting sorrow. André, can you remember that high school prom?

ANDRÉ:

Did I remember! It was my first meeting with Tordis. When we met again we had both graduated from high school. I was still an adolescent, but she was still Tordis with those slightly tired but more and more experienced eyes that seemed to hold everything and everyone at a chilly distance. That evening as well, the evening of the prom.

TORDIS:

I was wearing pink tulle and high heels. Mother had had her way at last. She said I was an adult. But what disturbed me most was father, the way he looked at me, a completely new way. I saw myself all of a sudden and could have crept into a mouse hole. Before then I'd lived my life in oil-polished leather boots and Girl Guide uniforms, smoked pipes on the sly, roasted potatoes over campfires, and if anyone asked me what I wanted to be, I said: a forest ranger.

ANDRÉ:

I remember, yes.

TORDIS:

You were so sweet that evening. The boy who'd brought me had done it from a sense of duty. His parents and mine played bridge every Tuesday. He soon left me to cool my heels. Then you noticed me, felt pity for me.

ANDRÉ:

Not pity. I was alone as well.

TORDIS:

You crossed the floor.

ANDRÉ:

You were on your feet before I reached you.

TORDIS:

Yes, out of fright. Those dreadful heels. I didn't know to stand or walk or what to do with all my hands. A boy who'd been given a girl's role in a school play couldn't have felt more wretched.

ANDRÉ:

You didn't' look wretched, more a bit disdainful.

TORDIS:

That was a mask, André—a protective mask.

ANDRÉ:

That scared me senseless. Especially because I knew I couldn't dance.

TORDIS:

You were the one who could.

ANDRÉ:

With your assistance.

TORDIS:

No, André, no! You made me believe I'd been dancing all my life in high-heeled shoes and pink silk. You got me to love those shoes. They danced me into adulthood. I danced and danced over something, away from something, away from a little pack of wolf cubs who called me Thiiba. I heard them call, I saw them sitting in a circle round the fire, but I left them sitting there. Thiiba was dead, she never returned. I danced and danced over her grave; I strewed her grave with masses of flowers. I was a flower myself that any second could burst into bloom. Oh, André, it was a wonderful evening. And comic.

ANDRÉ:

You asked me for a glass of lemonade.

TORDIS:

I don't remember that.

ANDRÉ:

When I came back, you were dancing with someone in his senior year.

TORDIS:

He wanted to escort me home, but father came and fetched me.

ANDRÉ:

Fetched the daughter who was a daughter at last.

TORDIS:

I didn't tell him that. Neither him nor mother. I said I'd been bored. Yes, of course, I'd danced. Being the father of a wallflower would have injured his pride. But what I *did* tell him, that I thought boys were stupid, that pleased him, made him feel calm. And I took good care to preserve that calm. Call it what you will, but it gave me the freedom that I've cherished ever since. André, I can see what you're thinking. One day one has to give away part of one's freedom, a part of oneself. I've done that, André, done it gladly. But Iselø, the Villa Gull's Cry, no one must take them from me. My freedom lives its own life here. I have something here I can see. Something invisible, something intangible—something—

ANDRÉ:

She let her hands fall.

TORDIS:

How can I describe it?

ANDRÉ:

She stopped suddenly. For a moment she sat lost in thought. Then she turned suddenly to Marianne.

TORDIS:

Why don't you stay here? Stay a few days. Please do. Sometimes one can—



ANDRÉ:

She stopped suddenly. As if she'd glimpsed someone or something that cast a cloud across the sun—but only for a moment.

TORDIS:

Sometimes one needs friends so badly. Marianne, I know you understand me.

ANDRÉ:

What on earth had she seen?

TORDIS:

Everything's ready. The guestroom in the gable has just been redecorated. It used to be a bit old-fashioned and gloomy.

ANDRÉ:

I tried to turn my head in a casual manner, but there was nothing in sight.

TORDIS:

I had it refurbished last year, hoping for unexpected guests some day.

ANDRÉ:

Yes, now there was someone. A figure appeared by the last row of sand-dunes near the sea and disappeared again.

TORDIS:

But no one came last year. You are the first.

ANDRÉ:

A man. Young. In a blue suit. Was it him she'd seen?

TORDIS:

No, don't disappoint me. With three boys to look after, I'm sure you need a holiday. You can have your holiday here.

ANDRÉ:

A young man in blue. Like a blue uniform. Was that the cloud that had passed across the sun?

TORDIS:

It's always holiday on Iselø. No, don't ask André. You decide. I can tell you'll say yes.

ANDRÉ:

I said it though. A young man in blue. Of course we'd love to stay. Really love to. I said so anyway. A young man in blue against the sun-bleached sand. But our things—we'd as good as booked into the inn.

TORDIS:

We'll fetch them, Marianne and I. I have my car. All modern conveniences available, except for a telephone, and I don't miss that. How about lobster?

ANDRÉ:

Lobster—?

TORDIS:

In the old days, when Aunt Isabella was alive, we always had lobster the first evening. Lobster and champagne were a sort of ritual. No, Marianne, don't trouble yourself. I'm hopeless with domestic things, but little Emily, the half-sister of the lighthouse-keeper's wife, loves to help me. Come, Marianne, we'll drive that way round. Afterwards—

ANDRÉ:

She stopped again. But this time the sun was shining.

TORDIS:

Can you see that little carriage?

ANDRÉ:

Wasn't it what they called a phaeton—with two little yellow Norwegian ponies in the harness?

TORDIS:

It's my friend, my best friend here on Iselø, the old doctor.

ANDRÉ:

No, not Norwegian. I'm afraid I don't know much about horses. But they were small.

TORDIS:

He came here a thousand years ago as a young locum, reckoned on staying a month, but has been here ever since. Nature and hunting have bound him to the island. He's had no other passions.

ANDRÉ:

You could spot his type a mile away: a watch chain and walrus moustache. I think he was driving briskly across the heath towards the lighthouse.

TORDIS:

The lighthousekeeper's wife's expecting her confinement. No, not immediately. Not till November. But she's a little—yes, how to describe it?—a little highly strung. She lives in a strange, half-literary world full of poetry and novels. Her husband is 15 to 20 years older than her, and a former widower. Perhaps that's the reason. They'd been married for seven years. Then the miracle took place. I'm sorry for the boy. He won't have an easy time.

ANDRÉ:

They know it's a boy?

TORDIS:

They call him Esmond.

ANDRÉ:

The lighthousekeeper and his wife?

TORDIS:

No, the two sisters, the older and the young one. For them he's already a living being. He's their escape. Their escape from the lonely evenings on Iselø and the lamp that keeps on turning—turning and turning. Do you know the sound? Like something scraping glass. I love that sound. For them it's the seconds marching on the spot. But now Esmond is coming to rescue them. When Esmond goes to school, the lighthousekeeper's wife will live in town, go to the theatre with Esmond, lean on his arm, smile coquettishly at Esmond's friends, be Esmond's young and gifted mother. Emily sees him a little differently. He will replace the dolls she daren't admit she often misses, but at the same time he's the dream of the man, the young man, the secret power, she could kneel before with outstretched arms, ready to serve. Emily is sweet. She's a delightful girl we try to help as much as we can, the doctor and I.

ANDRÉ:

Esmond, Esmond, poor little Esmond. The yellow phaeton had reached the lighthouse now and drew up in front of the cottage.

TORDIS:

Come, Marianne. No, we'll leave the glasses. When he's called to the lighthouse, the old doctor, he always drops by here. You don't mind if I invite him to dinner? I think you will like him. He knew Aunt Isabella, knew her well. Come, Marianne. Come, let's go now.

ANDRÉ:

Marianne gave me a quick glance, then followed Tordis.

*[MARIANNE and TORDIS leave.]*

They walked together down the path to the garage. Two women, each in her own world, two worlds separated by an invisible wall of glass. Marianne, Marianne, there are so many things left unsaid. I dozed off, tired by the sea air, whisky in hand. I don't remember how long I sat there. But I was suddenly aware of someone's approach. Who could it be?

*[Turns round.]*

It was him.

*[HANSSON, the lighthousekeeper's assistant, appears with a badminton racquet in his hand.]*

He stopped and stared for a moment. Then quickly pulled himself together. Was Mrs. Eck at home? No, she had an errand in the village, but was stopping at the lighthouse for a while—she's probably there now. He looked in that direction, said his name was Hansson, the lighthousekeeper's assistant. I told him my name, said I was a friend of Tordis. He had a badminton racquet in his hand, which he'd promised to repair. Could he leave it here?

*[HANSSON puts the racquet down.]*

Of course. A few seconds passed without his knowing what to say next. I mentioned the weather and the natural beauty of the island. Suddenly he said goodbye—and walked off towards the sea.

*[HANSSON has gone; we are back in the café Bern.]*

Hansson. The lighthousekeeper's assistant. They played badminton together. Hansson in blue. Hansson visiting in his Sunday best. Surely he knew she

wasn't home? He must have seen her driving off. Seen it from the dunes. Had he come to size *me* up? Was that the reason? Yes, yes. Or rather no. It didn't really concern me personally. Tordis and her freedom. Yes, she had her freedom. But to call it invisible, intangible?

*[The island slowly comes back into view.]*

Well, why not?

*[There is now a sunset sky, growing quickly darker—the DOCTOR is sitting in an old-fashioned wicker chair with a plaid rug over his knees.]*

After dinner the girls went for a walk to watch the sunset, the girls and Emily, the little half-sister of the lighthousekeeper's wife. They walked up to the ship's figurehead, while we kept sitting there together, over cognac and coffee, the doctor and I.

DOCTOR:

Yes, yes, one grows old. It will soon be fifty years since I first met her, Isabella de Creuith.

ANDRÉ:

The minister's aunt?

DOCTOR:

Yes, though mind you, she was his father's aunt. She still had a gleam of youth about her then. She must have been enchanting once, completely enchanting. Her eyes, her hands—the way she walked. I only wished I'd been born a little earlier. Yes, yes—now I remember her as a strange old creature in an eccentric hunting outfit and always followed by a blue Pekinese.

ANDRÉ:

Pekinese would be enough.

DOCTOR:

It's not my fault.

ANDRÉ:

But blue?

DOCTOR:

She said it was blue. But to be honest, I had trouble seeing it. It looked more greyish brown to me. But it was no use. She wouldn't be gainsaid. Dicky was blue.

ANDRÉ:

Dicky, on top of everything?

DOCTOR:

She was given him by an English diplomat in Madrid. Her brother was attached to the foreign office for a number of years. Before he was struck down by that sickness that bound him first to a wheelchair, then to his bed. She spent her winters in Madrid and Paris for a number of years. There were rumours of an affair. But what do I know? They say so many things about her. On Iselø, to this very day, they say that when the hunting season begins, you can see her coming up from the beach and crossing the heath followed by Dicky. You can hear his bells and her whistle. Perhaps it's true. Anything's possible. But my sense of the supernatural can best be called underdeveloped, I'm afraid. Ask Tordis, if you want to know more about her. More Cognac?

ANDRÉ:

I'm fine, thanks.

DOCTOR:

Ah, yes, ah, yes.

ANDRÉ:

The doctor gazed at his cigar ash for some time.

DOCTOR:

Such stillness.

ANDRÉ:

We heard laughter in the distance. *There* they were, the girls—coming down through the heather.

DOCTOR:

Lighthearted ladies on a summer evening. Dear God—our life is too short.

*[after a pause]*

How time flies. It seems like yesterday I was called out here to care for the minister's little daughter.

*[after a pause]*

You're a childhood friend?

ANDRÉ:

No, a friend of her youth.

DOCTOR:

She's still young. Young and self-assured. See how calmly she's walking between your wife and Emily.

ANDRÉ:

Emily turned aside now and then, plucked a spray of heather, stripped off the leaves, then tossed it away.

DOCTOR:

Her calm.

ANDRÉ:

The word hung in the air like a question.

DOCTOR:

There's something strange about that calm.

ANDRÉ:

Strange?

DOCTOR:

Sometimes I try to get past it, find out what lies behind it. But I never succeed.

ANDRÉ:

You mean that in reality—?

DOCTOR:

I mean nothing, nothing, nothing at all. It's just an image that haunts me. An image that may have no significance at all. An image I've probably misinterpreted. But all the same I can't avoid brooding over. It's an image of her mother. Just a glimpse. A glimpse. A single impression. Then it was gone.

ANDRÉ:

The doctor stared at his cigar again.

DOCTOR:

When Tordis came here the first time after her marriage, she came with her husband and her parents. You've met her husband?

ANDRÉ:

I shook my head.

DOCTOR:

No. Well, he's—

ANDRÉ:

The doctor took a long pull at his cigar.

DOCTOR:

He's a splendid fellow, I'm sure, quite splendid. I don't really know him personally, only met him that one occasion. But I will say *this* for him, he'd done wonders with the cabinet minister. All his stiffness was gone. He was like a real human being. Anyway, it wasn't him I wanted to talk about, but her mother. I've always admired her by the way. A dear little mother hen who's seldom allowed to have her say. I was invited to dinner with a couple of neighbours. Tordis was playing hostess that evening. And what a hostess. I've never seen her look so lovely. Because you must admit, few people can change so much as she does.

ANDRÉ:

I had to agree.

DOCTOR:

But that evening. I will admit I stared. It was as if she had transformed the Villa Gull's Cry into a fairy palace with her personality and her glow. I thought



I could hear a distant string orchestra. I wanted to dance, to say all the romantic nonsense one never gets said. I felt wafted back to the unknown past when Isabella de Creuith was young with a long sweeping gown and her enchanting laughter that to this very day could make one journey to Paris, to Madrid, to hear if it still hovers in the air. Yes, I believe it might. That evening, Tordis laughed with Isabella's laughter. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She stood leaning lightly back against her husband, smiling, calm, full of grace, the most natural grace, while she listened to a guest. I turned round to look for someone with whom I could share my pleasure in that perfect image. My glance stopped at her mother. She was staring at Tordis as well, only at Tordis. But she wasn't smiling. Her eyes were full of fear.

ANDRÉ:

Fear?

DOCTOR:

A second passed. Then she caught my glance and became all smiling friendliness in an instant. Who took care that my glass was full? The cabinet minister. I've never seen him so much at ease. He said he'd drop by one day with his son-in-law. He was being friendly. But they never came. Not even to Iselø. Afterwards Tordis came alone. Always dropped by to see me on her way to the villa. She still does. Always sweet and cheerful. But every time she opens the garden gate I can see her mother's fear, like a sinister companion who will never leave her.

*[waves]*

Well, here they are, our lovely ladies of the evening. Bright and soft against the dark heath. Was the sunset as beautiful as it should be? Not a cloud in the sky. We'll have a fine day tomorrow. How the evening suits you, Tordis my dear.

*[TORDIS, MARIANNE, and EMILY appear out of the darkness. TORDIS wears a shawl slung loosely over her shoulders.]*

ANDRÉ:

She had changed out of her riding outfit. A strange shawl hung on her shoulders, blood-red and black, not woollen or silk. Was it Spanish, that shawl? Had it belonged to Isabella? Isabella de Creuith. An unknown life began to stir in the darkness.

DOCTOR:

How was my old friend the figurehead this evening?

TORDIS:

In the best of health, thank you. Two more lovers' initials inside a heart had joined the others. Otherwise he's just the same.

DOCTOR:

I carved my initials on him once, but they stand alone.

TORDIS:

So do mine.

*[to EMILY who is leaving.]*

No, Emily, please stay. The kitchen doesn't matter. It can wait till tomorrow. Ah well, it's no use our saying anything. She's learned from her sister to keep everything clean and tidy.

*[She moves a wicker chair for MARIANNE but stays standing herself.]*

How was she by the way, the lighthousekeeper's wife?

DOCTOR:

Lying on a sofa surrounded by books and magazines. As condescending as a queen waiting for the crown-prince to be born.

TORDIS:

She just wants to be entertained.

DOCTOR:

Of course, and the weather was perfect. I love that drive. And there's no harm in a glass of port. I sat with her for half an hour, then Hansson arrived.

TORDIS:

Hansson?

ANDRÉ:

The name rung out like a gun-shot. Or was it just me who heard it that way?

DOCTOR:

He brought her a bouquet of white orchids. There's a little marsh behind the lifeboat-house—

TORDIS:

Marianne, you're freezing.

DOCTOR:

There's a little marsh behind the lifeboat-house—

TORDIS:

Here, take my shawl.

ANDRÉ:

Marianne said she wasn't cold, but she admired the shawl.

TORDIS:

I think it's Spanish, Catalan. It belonged to Aunt Isabella. When she came back from the hunt she didn't change immediately but sat in the chair by the fire wrapped in her shawl.

DOCTOR:

Always that shawl.

ANDRÉ:

You knew Miss de Creuith?

TORDIS:

Yes,

*[after a pause]*

I was six when she died.

ANDRÉ:

So you can barely remember her?

TORDIS:

When you've seen her once you never forget her.

*[after a pause]*

I was afraid of her, quite terrified. There was a cold, empty space between us. She never said anything, never spoke to me. But she would look straight through me from the other side of that space. Then she would suddenly turn, whistle for Dicky, and be on her way.

*[Points at a glass.]*

Is that my cognac?

ANDRÉ:

No one replied. She took a sip from her glass. Stood for a moment and gazed out into the darkness.

TORDIS:

She only spoke to me once. One evening when father and mother had guests I lowered myself from my prison window on the second floor. Later I couldn't believe how I'd dared, but in those days I must have been very daring. I took a roundabout way in my nightdress and sandals across the heath and up to my friend the figurehead. She was sitting *there*. Aunt Isabella, lost in thought at the foot of the triton. She didn't hear me, just sat with her back to me. I hardly dared to breathe. I heard a humming sound in the quiet of the night. She was singing. A strange melody that made me want to dance. She made a rocking movement with her old hips, lifted her arms gracefully, and clicked her fingers. I stood nailed to the spot. She had turned. Quick as a flash. How didn't I sink into the earth? She looked at me for a second that was longer than an eternity, then she burst out laughing. He deserved you, your tyrant of a father who will go on his knees for "the de Creuith fortune" but still keeps our so-called madness at a discreet distance. Our madness! What does he know about it? What does he know about anything, when it comes to that? Come here my dear, come here and sit down. Have a cigarette. Now I know who will be my heir, my heir to everything. It will be you. But don't tell anyone, least of all your father. Let him have the pleasure of seeing it in my will. That will be a day to remember. She slapped her thighs, clapped me on my shoulders. We were a family all of a sudden, a six-year old girl and an old lady. Then she took me home. We never met again, except at a distance. But each time she saw me, she gave an extra-merry blast on her whistle and disappeared over the heath with Dicky at her heels.

*[after a pause]*

She died that winter.

DOCTOR:

We found her by the cold hearth.

ANDRÉ:

Wrapped in her shawl? I was about to ask, but didn't. It was enough to see Tordis pulling the shawl more tightly round her.

TORDIS:

She wanted a poem read over her grave, a poem by Shelley. But father forbade it.

DOCTOR:

She got her hymns instead.

TORDIS:

Then the house was locked. We stopped coming. Everyone hoped I would forget Iselø. But I didn't forget. The day after my twenty-first birthday I came here. I came alone in the twilight and went straight out to this spot—out onto the porch. You can laugh, I won't mind, but the first sound I heard from the heath was a welcoming whistle.

DOCTOR:

Nature up here is rich in noises.

TORDIS:

The wind in the heather sounded like distant bells. And somewhere above the heath the sky became blue.

ANDRÉ:

The blue Pekinese? Come now. Was it really blue?

TORDIS:

Yes, blue as the sky.

ANDRÉ:

As the sky?

TORDIS:

I think so.

ANDRÉ:

*Think so?*

DOCTOR:

Yes, our blue friend Dicky went to the eternal hunting grounds some years before Tordis was born.

ANDRÉ:

Before Tordis was born? But wasn't she saying a moment ago—?

TORDIS:

Doctor. Your glass?

DOCTOR:

Thank you, my dear. I have enough.

ANDRÉ:

Our blue friend Dicky.

TORDIS:

Marianne. A cigarette?

ANDRÉ:

A silence followed. One of those silences that the host or hostess usually breaks by saying that it's getting cold. But she said nothing. Drew the shawl around her and gazed out into the darkness, the darkness over the heath. I'd known her once. No I had never known her. I knew that now. As she stood *there* against the night, she was a stranger, a stranger in our midst, a figure in a painting that we looked at from the outside. A maze of experiences lay behind her, her parents and her past, which only she could see. Somewhere above the heath the sky became blue. It was as if a world, a strange world, was born from that word, that one word—blue. It hung in the air like a misty sphere, a pearl the sky was playing with in its hands. If I were a poet.—

*[He suddenly stops speaking.]*

Without being aware of it, I must have said it aloud. Marianne looked up. Tordis turned.

TORDIS:

If you were—?

ANDRÉ:

Emily came back at that moment. The kitchen was all clean and tidy, and now she was ready to go. She'd like to stay, but the lighthousekeeper's wife, her sister, couldn't sleep until the house was quiet. No, she could go on her own of course. She was used to that. The gate clicked suddenly, and we heard the sound of her footsteps fading in the sand. I gazed after her for a long time. A little summer dress running out into the night, into the night that was peopled with ghosts of the dead, ghosts of the unborn. Esmond, little Esmond, and Miss de Creuth. She stopped suddenly. A figure appeared. Approached her slowly. Hansson in blue, the lighthousekeeper's assistant. Then they vanished into the darkness, the darkness that had had eyes. Was Tordis aware? I don't think so. It was as if she was thinking of something else, something quite different.

TORDIS:

If you were a poet?

ANDRÉ:

It didn't sound like a question she was asking me, rather a question she was asking herself. A pause, a hesitation. Then she continued.

TORDIS:

When I'm dead—

ANDRÉ:

The terrace was wrapped in a listening silence.

TORDIS:

When I'm dead—

ANDRÉ:

It wasn't Tordis who repeated the words. They repeated themselves in my ears.

TORDIS:

When I'm dead, you shall have the only photograph I possess of Aunt Isabella and Dicky. It's an old photograph the size of a postcard. As long as I remember, it's been fastened by two thumbtacks on the inside of a faded screen in Aunt Isabella's dressing room. And it's still there. But you shall have it.

ANDRÉ:

Me?

TORDIS:

Yes, you.

ANDRÉ:

Her tone was almost aggressive.

TORDIS:

I want you to have it and no one else.

ANDRÉ:

She turned to the others.

TORDIS:

The dew is falling. Shall we go in? No, Marianne, we can leave everything. I'll take care of it later. I love pottering about when others are asleep. Come, doctor, come. We'll end the evening in front of the fire. A happy evening. No, let me carry your rug.

*[She leaves with MARIANNE and the DOCTOR—the light slowly fades on the island to reveal ANDRÉ in the café.]*

ANDRÉ:

*[Quickly picks up the photograph which is lying before him on the table.]*

Two pushpins—it was fastened by two pushpins to the inside of a faded screen.

*[The light on the island has gone completely dark, and the focus is now on the Café Bern.]*

Yes, there are the marks—two rusty marks.



*[Grabs the envelope.]*

It's her handwriting. She wrote the address. When was it postmarked? Yesterday! She knew she was about to—

*[Pushes the table away from him.]*

She chose the date. She chose it herself.

*[Is about to stand.]*

No, what's the use?

*[Falls back onto the sofa.]*

I won't get there. The last ferry left ages ago. Whatever I did, it would be too late. It was written yesterday. She wrote it yesterday.

*[Sits, staring into space.]*

Yesterday. Now the lighthouse lamp is turning, turning and turning, out over the sea, in over the heath, striking the roof of a lonely house.

*[Grabs the envelope again.]*

This photo is a cry for help, a terrified cry for help. Why else would she have sent it? No, no, she didn't want help. She sent it *here* where it could have sat for days, for weeks. When I'm dead. Why *me*? Why should I inherit the picture? I said it, I did say it—if I were a poet. But I didn't know why I said it. Yes, yes, it was blue, that one word blue, that suddenly revealed a vision to me. A vision of what? I don't remember. I glimpsed something, then it was gone. She cut off my train of thought. The shawl—she stood there with the old shawl wrapped tightly round her. Black birds and black flowers on a blood-red background. Where is that shawl? Where is it now? Is it lying on her shoulders, while the lamp turns, turns and turns, out over the sea, in over the heath, striking the roof of a deathly silent house.

*[Is about to get up again.]*

Marianne—

*[Falls back on the sofa.]*

No, no, she's not at home. She's going to a—

*[A short gentleman enters the café and stands for a moment by the cake display.]*

—to a concert that began at eight. The Royal Danish Orchestra and a famous pianist. Even if she were at home, she could do nothing. Yes, Marianne, I know that just by being here you could help, you could help me. I have *never* felt so helpless.

*[The short gentleman has torn himself away from the cake display; he comes quickly down to the foreground and hangs his hat and coat on the coat-rack.]*

Never.

*[ANDRÉ hides his head in his hands.]*

GENTLEMAN:

*[to OLSEN who appears immediately]*

Thanks. The usual.

*[He disappears into the side area on the right.]*

ANDRÉ:

And what about the boys' math homework? Who's going to help them with that? Marianne, Marianne, you never go out. Why *this* evening? Why *this* evening?

*[A classical piano concerto can be heard in the distance.]*

Mozart—a concerto for piano and orchestra, the concerto in G major, that's what you wanted to hear. I can see your eyes, your calm hands resting on your lap.

*[The music becomes louder without being overpowering.]*

Marianne and Mozart. Mozart blending with the waves pounding a desolate beach—

*[The island slowly comes into view. We glimpse a stormy sky with drifting clouds.]*

—a desolate beach with the bleached remains of all kinds of driftwood, which the children of summer guests are no longer crouching to examine. And up behind the dunes—I live up there behind the big dune. You can see the corner of the gable. No, not this evening. Not in the darkness. Yes. Yes. There's a light in the window on the second floor. It's her room, the one that was Isabella de Creuith's. When will that light go out?

*[The piano and orchestra drown in the storm, that rises to a howl; then the sounds of the storm fade a little into the background.]*

The storm is moving in from the sea over the heath, in over the house. The light will soon be out. No, it's still burning. I can see it. I see it. I still see it. And here I sit, empty-handed, unable to do anything. Yes!

*[He pushes the table away and stands up.]*

The doctor, the doctor, her old friend the doctor.

*[At the same moment the short gentleman comes in from the side room, crosses to ANDRÉ, and points at the paper that is lying on the table.]*

GENTLEMAN:

Is it your own copy?

ANDRÉ:

My own—?

GENTLEMAN:

Yes, I'm sorry—the newspaper.

ANDRÉ:

What paper for God's sake?

*[Notices it.]*

Take it, take it, keep it for ever, I don't have the time, do you understand, I don't have the time.

GENTLEMAN:

Thanks—but—

ANDRÉ:

*[Crosses to the telephone booth, picks up a telephone directory which is lying on a small, one-legged marble table outside the booth; he begins to leaf through the directory.]*

Iselø—Iselø—where do I find Iselø?

GENTLEMAN:

*[Snaps up the paper as if he's afraid ANDRÉ will change his mind—just then OLSEN comes past him with a tray.]*

People's nerves nowadays, their nerves—

*[He follows OLSEN into the side area to the right.]*

ANDRÉ:

I comes before J. Iselø. Here it is. The old doctor. There's only one doctor. Iselø 18.

*[He throws the directory onto the floor, goes into the booth, dials a number. The lighting on Iselø grows brighter. The music and the sounds of the storm become louder, drowning ANDRÉ'S voice. We can only see from his expressions and hand gestures that he is talking—the soundscape fades gradually into the background. He puts the receiver down, but keeps his hand on it, supporting his forehead on the back of his hand.]*

Thank you, miss—thank you.

*[Straightens up.]*

From a little café with patrons and newspapers a simple number shoots off through the clouds that are towering up into a mountainous storm.

*[The storm rises to a howl in the far distance; at the same moment the telephone rings. He grabs the receiver.]*

Yes, hello!

*[OLSEN walks solemnly across the stage.]*

The doctor, miss, I want to speak to him. Isn't he home? He's been called out to the lighthouse. Don't you mean the villa by the lighthouse? To the lighthouse itself? Together with whom? The local midwife? It's Esmond, it's Esmond—no, I'm talking to myself. Put me through to the lighthouse, but quickly, miss. I'll hold on.

*[The storm rises menacingly in the distance and dissolves in a howl.]*

Esmond, Esmond, that's what she called him, Emily who vanished into the darkness with the lighthousekeeper's assistant. Esmond, Esmond, you'll be born tonight, and she will die. Esmond and Tordis. Will they meet in the storm?

*[The storm sounds mingle with the sound of breakers—the light falls on a wall with photographs arranged round a telephone attached to the wall—the phone rings and rings, but no one picks it up.]*

No answer? That's impossible, miss. You must realize that yourself. Either the lighthousekeeper or Hansson. Try again, miss, keep on trying.

*[The phone rings again without being picked up. The wall disappears slowly in the darkness and the storm, but the phone still rings a few more times, until it too fades, and the storm sounds also fade into the background. There is silence for a moment.]*

GENTLEMAN:

*[Walks gingerly in from the side and is about to pick up the phone book, but as he puts his hand on it, the storm rises to a howl—he snatches the book in a frightened manner and disappears again.]*

ANDRÉ:

What did you say, miss? There's a storm, a hurricane? I know, I know. Yes, yes, but even if the road to the lighthouse is cut off by sand-drifts, it must be possible to get there on foot? What did you say, miss? You've talked to the driver? The man who drives for the doctor and the midwife? Does he know that you should stop by the gable of the lifeboat house and take the path across the heath by the ship's figurehead? I know that route; it takes time, but don't give up, miss, don't give up. For God's sake ring me as soon as they're through. You have the number? I'll wait here. I'll keep on waiting. I must get through. Do you understand that, miss? It's a matter of life and death.

*[He puts the receiver down.]*

Life and death.

*[Stands with his forehead resting on the back of his hand, as before—the storm rises, blending with passages from the classical piano concerto. In the far distance, a light falls on TORDIS who is standing half turned away—she is wearing a light and airy dress with the old shawl draped over her shoulders.]*

GENTLEMAN:

*[Enters from the side, is about to put the phone book back in its place, stops, and stares at ANDRÉ who suddenly looks up.]*

My God, he's white as a sheet.

ANDRÉ:

*[Pushing the door open.]*

Tordis—

GENTLEMAN:

*[Backs up against the hallstand.]*

Good grief, he must have seen a ghost.

ANDRÉ:

My thoughts are reaching you—through the darkness and the storm.

*[He takes a few steps backwards.]*

Stop, Tordis—stop.

GENTLEMAN:

*[Darting into the phone booth.]*

Good Lord—

ANDRÉ:

If I were a poet—those words hold us together, bind me to you.

GENTLEMAN:

1770—yes, thank you, 1770—

ANDRÉ:

But I'm not, I'm not a poet. Why are you calling me? Why are you opening a door into the unknown, into the invisible sky over Iselø, which is only visible to you.

*[TORDIS listens as if uncertain where the voice is coming from.]*

GENTLEMAN:

Yes, I'm sorry, it's Schaumann. I'm not disturbing you?

ANDRÉ:

Don't leave us, Tordis. I'm coming, I'm coming.

GENTLEMAN:

Yes, I said Preisler's anniversary—yes, Preisler's anniversary.

ANDRÉ:

I'm coming, Tordis. Don't leave us so soon.

*[The storm rises to a howl.]*

GENTLEMAN:

That's odd: there's a real draught here all of a sudden.

ANDRÉ:

Tordis, where are you? I can't see you.

GENTLEMAN:

Sorry, sorry, I'm here again.

ANDRÉ:

The darkness thickens. The storm comes lashing in from the sea.

*[The sounds of the storm come nearer—during the following dialogue, the café begins slowly, almost imperceptibly, to disappear. The couple at the window pay their bill. A few more patrons come in and disappear into the side room.]*

GENTLEMAN:

Yes, Preisler's anniversary—any ideas?

ANDRÉ:

I can see the sea, the sea and the lighthouse. The lamp's cone of light cuts through the darkness and lights up a gable. It's the lifeboat house.

GENTLEMAN:

What did you say? A flower basket? A flower basket with some bottles of wine?

ANDRÉ:

And *there*—there's the path across the heath.

GENTLEMAN:

But what kind of wine? Can't we meet one day?

ANDRÉ:

Who will I meet? Voices and the storm; they are all blending into one.

GENTLEMAN:

*[Trying to speak over the storm.]*

I said: can't we meet one day? I've made a list of Preisler's friends.

*[The café has now disappeared.]*

ECHOES:

Preisler's anniversary—of Preisler's friends—

ANDRÉ:

The voices are growing stronger, like cries, the cries of the storm gulls over Iselø.

ECHOES:

Iselø—

*[A faint light falls on the top of the ship's figurehead.]*

ANDRÉ:

The figurehead—

*[The storm rises to a howl, then everything becomes silent. The light slowly spreads itself—a little old lady in a rather prehistoric, rather masculine hunting outfit is sitting at the foot of the figurehead. She has a hunting rifle on her knees and is busy examining its safety catch.]*

Isabella de Creuith!



ISABELLA:

*[Quietly as she works, then suddenly appears to be listening to something, without noticing ANDRÉ, and takes a little silver whistle from the top pocket of her jacket.]*

Dicky!

*[Blows the whistle.]*

Dicky!

*[We can hear the sound of bells nearby and the frightened cries of a bird guarding its nest.]*

Dicky. Listen to me! Leave that lark alone. Either it's a strange lark that doesn't realize you only want to play or it's one of our own that's let itself be disturbed by the strange restlessness in the landscape. Quite understandably.

*[Blows the whistle.]*

Dicky! Dicky! How many times do I have to tell you? You're scaring the life out of that lark with your friendly paws. How can a little bird know that such a terrifying face as yours is just a mask that hides a gentle wish to play?

*[The sky has slowly become almost summer blue. Suddenly we hear the happy song of a lark.]*

There, now it knows. No, Dicky, get it to come down again. It's no weather for larks. You forget we're in the middle of November.

*[Blows the whistle angrily.]*

Dicky, you monster. You'll wake the others. We'll have a whole concert in a moment. Dicky, Dicky!

*[She is on her feet now, about to leave to the right, then stops.]*

No. I don't understand that dog. During the last few days his ears have been drooping and his fur has become almost light grey, but this evening—have you ever seen such a colour?

*[Blows her whistle.]*

Dicky!

*[Blows her whistle.]*

*[Leaves quickly.]*

Dicky—Dicky—

ANDRÉ:

She's gone—

*[He looks up at the sky, which is growing dark again.]*

She's gone and taken the weather with her. No, Dicky took it with him. There's a patch of blue somewhere above the heath.

*[We hear ISABELLA calling in the far distance: Dicky—Dicky—[The sound of his bells grows fainter and fainter, and finally disappears—ANDRÉ quickly towards the figurehead.]*

TORDIS:

Aunt Isabella—!

*[She appears behind the figurehead.]*

Aunt Isabella—wait for me, I'm coming—

*[She is about to run off to the left.]*

ANDRÉ:

Tordis—!

TORDIS:

*[She stops and turns quickly towards the sound of his voice.]*

That voice. It's there. The same voice, a voice calling from far, far away. But no one can call me back. I have severed every link with what used to be my world, every connecting thought. And yet I seem to know that voice.

ANDRÉ:

Tordis—

TORDIS:

No. No. Don't call me back. I'm happy now. Nothing can stop me, nothing, nothing!

*[We can hear Isabella's whistle in the distance.]*

I'm coming. Aunt Isabella. I'm coming, I'm coming!

*[She runs out to the right.]*

ANDRÉ:

Tordis—!

*[Is about to run after her, but at that moment the storm rises to a howl, and he stops as if confronted by a wall.]*

No, Tordis, don't close the gates on me. Don't lock me in. It's no use. I'll reach you, Tordis. My thoughts will reach you. They touched your soul, but you fled, Tordis, in self-defence. I saw your eyes, I saw your fear, your fear of yourself. Nothing can stop you, nothing, nothing. Yes, Tordis. I can.

*[Stops suddenly with his hands on his ears.]*

Preisler. Preisler. If I could be spared Preisler and his anniversary for just one moment.

*[The short gentleman from before appears in the foreground to the right with a telephone receiver to his ear.]*

The air seems to be full of flower baskets and bottles of wine.

GENTLEMAN:

Burgundy, Bordeaux—or what do you say to cognac?

*[OLSEN comes in from the right, crosses the stage, and disappears to the left.]*

ANDRÉ:

Yes, bring me a cognac, Olsen, a double. But quickly, quickly. And choke that man. Get him out of the booth. I'm waiting for a call. A vital call. Do you understand that, miss? Miss, miss, you must be through by now, to the doctor and the midwife. Yes—yes—it takes some time. I know, I know, but it's already taken its time. Yes, miss, yes—I'm waiting here. I'll go on waiting.

*[He has sat down on the base of the figurehead, with his head in his hands—the short telephoning gentleman has disappeared. The storm rises to a howl. [ANDRÉ looks up, stares out to the right, stands, and moves back a little, so as not to be seen.]*

Emily—

EMILY:

*[Comes quickly in from the left in a raincoat, with a multi-coloured scarf protecting her hair. She stops, out of breath, loosens the shawl, peers off to the left, takes a couple of steps towards the figurehead.]*

It's them, it's them!

*[Takes the shawl off, goes over to the figurehead, leans against it with one hand, holding the shawl with the other, as if she is about to wave it.]*

The car's stopping by the gable of the lifeboat house. And there's Hansson's lamp. Oh, Hansson, Hansson—

*[She sinks down at the base of the figurehead.]*

—why didn't you deny it? Why didn't you slap my sister in the face? She was lying. She was lying. Not a word was true, except about herself as I have never known her. No, no! I wasn't eavesdropping. I was standing by the sideboard, putting the silver away, when I heard her voice in the living room. She didn't know the washing-up after dinner could be done so quickly. How could she? When she walks upstairs every day and leaves everything to me. Oh, her voice, like a fishwife's, cursing, laughing hysterically, screaming as if Hansson was some kind of slave, flinging one filthy accusation after another at his head, accusing him and Tordis—Tordis, Tordis Eck! No, no! It's a lie. Life can't be so vile. But he didn't answer. Why, why—why didn't he answer? Only when she'd stopped screaming and started to cry, only then did he say that he'd asked for a transfer in January. Then he left. I saw him from the window. He went towards the sea. The sea and the shore. The shore is the shortest way to the villa. But did he go that way? Did he go to the villa, to her? I don't know. I'll never know. I locked myself in my room. And let my sister hammer at the door. Hammer and hammer. In the end she gave up, and everything was silent. The silence before the storm.

*[Looks up suddenly.]*

Then I heard the hooves. I knew those hooves.

*[The sound of a galloping horse's hooves can be heard through the storm; it comes nearer and nearer and crosses the stage, becomes fainter and fainter, until it finally fades away.]*

It was King! King, galloping across the courtyard, his stirrups swinging, and no rider.

ANDRÉ:

Emily—!

EMILY:

I don't know how I came down the steps into the courtyard. I suddenly felt the earth gliding away from beneath my feet. Everything went black. But then I felt a pair of hands on my shoulders and heard Hansson calling out:—let the horse go. It's her that matters. Her that matters. God, oh God, if she dies, I haven't a friend in the world. Let her live, God, let her live. God let her live!

*[She clings to the figurehead.]*

Oh God, oh God, how she lay there on the shore. Hansson lifted her up. Carried her in his arms up over the dunes, up to the villa.

ANDRÉ:

Emily—the lamp, the lamp!

EMILY:

Oh God, if she dies—!

ANDRÉ:

It's coming nearer, Emily, coming this way. No, now there are two. They're separating from each other, each going a different way.

EMILY:

If she dies, if she dies, it's my fault if she dies! No, no! I was afraid to stay. When Hansson went to telephone the doctor, I was alone, alone in the house, in the empty villa, alone with her. Oh God, if it's true. Her face? If it's true! Her face, her face. Where could I look? I daren't look anywhere, daren't get up and pull down the blind against the storm and the darkness that gazed in through the black windows. Isabella de Creuith! I put my fingers in my ears. Was it her whistle? Everything round me had once been hers, the pictures, the carpets, the upholstered chair with the silk covers. The door to the dressing room was open—the old screen, the photograph on the screen—it wasn't there. There was only a mark where it had been. Who had taken it? The photograph that was to stay there so long as Tordis was alive. Her face on the pillow, the mark on the screen. Where could I look, where could I look? What

was lying on the table by the bed where Hansson had laid her down?—A ticket to Paris, an airline ticket? She'd told me they were in Paris, the minister and his wife. In a few days they would meet up with her husband who was on a business trip. She'd told me that as well. But that she herself, that she was going to travel—the date on the ticket: the day after tomorrow. She hadn't told me. She hadn't told *me*! She always said: we have no secrets from each other. No, I was just a child. Yes, a child. But I'm not a child any longer. I've seen your world at last. And that's the world you are entering, Esmond, Esmond. You'll play like the little blue-eyed boy you are, until suddenly one day you'll—

*[Stops.]*

No! Oh God, oh God, if it's true, to have everything taken from me on one single day. I'm not even allowed to keep my dream about Esmond. I have dreamed. How I have dreamed. We sailed in your boat, a little white boat. Or I sat on the beach with a book in my lap, while you built sandcastles. Emily, Emily, what are you reading? Yes, come and see. You put your arms round my neck. Just look at the pictures. One day when you're big—how big you'll be, with a jacket and a parting in your hair. That curl—no, don't brush it away. Hair should be curly. You're such a fine little man—I could hug you to death. I can see you turning seventeen, eighteen—

*[A bright, almost translucent figure appears in the darkness behind the figurehead. It is a boy or a very young man. He approaches nervously, keeping a safe distance.]*

The same sweet eyes, the same delightful smile. You'll never change, never. No!

*[The figure stops, frightened.]*

This doubt. This doubt. I can't bear it. Oh, Hansson, Hansson, why didn't you answer, why—

*[Looks up suddenly. The figure shrinks back in fear.]*

Hansson—I call you Hansson, but my sister used your first name. She didn't know I was standing by the sideboard. God, oh God, I wish I were dead. Iselø has become a hell—a hell that I can never leave.

*[She turns and listens; stands up suddenly.]*

The lamp! There they are. That's Hansson's lamp. It's swinging over towards the lighthouse. Hansson walks in front. Then comes the midwife, that witch of a midwife. It's her hands that in a little while will—

[Stops.]

But the doctor—the doctor—? That lamp *there* in the darkness, that flickering lamp. It's his, the doctor's. He's cutting across through the heather where there's no path and walking down past the pines. Doctor!

*[She runs out to the left, not noticing that she has left her scarf on the base of the figurehead.]*

Doctor—doctor—

ANDRÉ:

Emily, your scarf—

*[He bends down quickly, picks up the scarf, is about to run after her, but catches sight of the figure that immediately disappears.]*

Stop! Who's that?

*[The storm rises to a howl and seems to close him in—he stands listening for a moment, the scarf in his hand. Then the storm sounds fade away.]*

No one, no one. Only the empty air, where souls are journeying from nothingness on their way to nothingness.

*[The sound of galloping hooves is heard in the distance, coming nearer and nearer, very near, and then fading away. He shouts as if to someone riding past.]*

Tordis! Your parents, your husband. You were going to travel. But the picture you sent? Tordis, Tordis—

*[He turns, looks up.]*

The sky is changing, becoming a summer blue. Isabella is whistling for Dicky—lark song—bells—

*[The sky has taken on an increasingly summer blue colour. We hear bells and lark song—he suddenly lays Emily's scarf on the base of the figurehead, takes a few steps back so as not to be seen.]*

They are coming up here like two ladies in conversation from a genre painting:<sup>3</sup> Tordis and Isabella, each in her own rhythm. One light and fluttering, almost translucent under her old shawl, which she keeps wrapped about her, the other closed up tight: a firmly penciled period that marks the end of an existence. What are they talking about? What's their topic of conversation? Hunting, no doubt. Isabella is telling some anecdote with

gesticulating hands, while Tordis only makes a show of listening. She is far, far away.

*[ISABELLA and TORDIS come in from the left.]*

I was right. It is hunting.

ISABELLA:

Dicky!

*[Turns and whistles.]*

Well, no, there were only a few of us, mostly from the island. We all had our usual posts. I let the farmer from Lindholm—

ANDRÉ:

—take my brother's post, and I stood by—

ANDRÉ:

Now Isabella has stopped too, sensing invisible resistance, but deciding quickly to ignore it.

ISABELLA:

—and I stood by the dike at the edge of the wood, you know, over there by the Virgin's Oak, where the animals cross over from the enclosure. I'm hardly in position when three deer jump past me from behind. I aimed at a young buck, missed him the first time, but got him with my second shot. All in all that day we shot four bucks, one roe deer, a fox, and sixteen hares.

*[She sits down on the base of the figurehead. TORDIS stands turned half away from her, looking out over the landscape.]*

ANDRÉ:

Tordis, Tordis, you know I'm here—that someone is here.

*[He is lying on his back with his hands under his head, looking up at the clouds.]*

ISABELLA:

The dinner that evening—



ANDRÉ:

The dinner, the dinner—

ISABELLA:

I'll never forget it. To please the doctor, I appeared in all my finery for once. A fire in the hearth, a good glass of wine, a lady with a train to her dress, he loved all that. He called it style. But it had its revenge. On me, that is. Feeling a little proud, a bit carried away with the atmosphere no doubt, I was tempted to consult a mirror. Dear God, what a sight. A stupid old fieldmouse decked out as the Lady of the Camelias at a masquerade. I've stuck to my hunting outfit ever since. It never lets me down. The pockets may be a bit worn, but otherwise no one can deny it's stood the test of time. I got it the year Sadi Carnot<sup>4</sup> was assassinated.

TORDIS:

Sadi Carnot—

ANDRÉ:

A pause.

ISABELLA:

Those were happy days.

ANDRÉ:

Lost in thought she has picked up Emily's scarf.

ISABELLA:

We called them happy.

ANDRÉ:

*Aufforderung zum Tanz.*<sup>5</sup> The words hover like a sigh in the stillness, but no one asks the little question needed to keep the topic rolling. Her youth, her memories—there's so much, so much. She draws the scarf through her hand, slowly, thoughtfully—and the end slips through. Then she draws it through again. Even an everyday scarf can be more than just an accessory.

[*half standing*]

More than just an accessory.

*[standing]*

I must have been blind. It's the silent extra character brought on stage by an act of providence, the maid with a chance letter that changes the direction of the plot. Tordis, Tordis, my thoughts are reaching out to you. They'll make contact soon. Look, her hands have stopped. Her gaze is suddenly focused, alert.

ISABELLA:

Is that your scarf?

TORDIS:

*[turning quickly]*

Mine?

ISABELLA:

No, I recognize it now. It's Emily's.

ANDRÉ:

Tordis. Your face.

ISABELLA:

She wore it yesterday when she went to the pastor's daughter for her English lesson.

TORDIS:

No!

ANDRÉ:

Contact!

TORDIS:

No, not yesterday. Her lesson is this evening.

ISABELLA:

*Parole d'honneur.* We both saw her, Dicky and I. She leaned her bicycle against the pastor's hedge and went through the gate with a book under her arm.

ANDRÉ:

Tordis!

*[The storm rises to a howl. The summer light disappears in darkness and driving storm clouds.]*

ISABELLA:

*[She has stood up.]*

In heaven's name! What's happening? Everything seems bewitched.

*[Whistles.]*

Dicky, Dicky! Is it your fault, you wicked dog? Where are you, Dicky? Can't you answer? Just silence and darkness, not a single bell. He must have noticed something, be sitting quiet as a mouse. That pale thing there—is it a human shape? A boy, a child, paralyzed with fear at the sight of such a dreadful monster.

*[Whistles.]*

No, Dicky, Dicky!

*[She goes quickly out to the right. Her calls are lost in the sounds of the storm that gradually move further and further away.]*

Dicky, Dicky!

TORDIS:

*[She is now sitting on the base of the figurehead.]*

Now they've vanished into the darkness: a little lady and a patch of open sky. Everything is closing in, becoming cold and grey. The storm moves in across the heath from the sea. The villa. The lighthouse. The lamp turning. Forgotten things are suddenly so near.<sup>6</sup>

ANDRÉ:

You heard my voice.

TORDIS:

Yes, from beyond the storm. I seemed to feel the pull of something invisible. But whose voice was it? My own thoughts, my own fear?

ANDRÉ:

It was Emily's name at first that—

TORDIS:

That's when I finally understood.

ANDRÉ:

She went through the gate with a book under her arm.

TORDIS:

The letter was inside the book. Or had been.

ANDRÉ:

The letter to me.

TORDIS:

I'd asked her to take it with her when she went to her English lesson. But like everyone who plans the perfect crime I made a mistake. For some reason or other her lesson was a day earlier than usual.

*[She is now on her feet.]*

Forgive me, André, for distressing you. But I assumed that if I sent a letter to the Café Bern, it would be kept by the woman at the buffet until you dropped by one day. I almost felt I could hear your sigh from the sofa under the mirror—"Oh, dear God."

ANDRÉ:

Tordis.

TORDIS:

Yes, "dear God." Nothing more nor less. That little sigh would have been enough for me. No, no, perhaps you don't understand. That's another thing with the perfect crime. You become so childishly self-obsessed that you don't think of it as perfect until you have secured *one* witness. A single witness. But there's something else. No, André, no—you mustn't' laugh—

ANDRÉ:

Laugh—!

TORDIS:

—or think that I take myself too seriously. But in the midst of one’s helplessness one feels a need to—to reach out to someone. But I can’t. I don’t have the strength. This summer, you said, that evening on the terrace—“If I were a poet.”

ANDRÉ:

I only heard myself after I had said it. I was miles away.

TORDIS:

The abyss—I’ve never seen it so clearly.

ANDRÉ:

The abyss—?

TORDIS:

Between you and me. Between me and both of you. You were sitting on a corner of Marianne’s calm. Marianne. Flocks of children can crawl over her without disturbing her repose for one second. Marianne who never needs to grope her way to what it means to be—she *is*. She is warmth and tenderness. I have never known tenderness, never shown tenderness. Not even for my mother. When she bent over me and pressed her cheek to mine, it seemed embarrassing, unbelievably childish. So I drifted towards my father.

ANDRÉ:

Your father, whom you’ve fought with all your life?

TORDIS:

No! Not fought. I left fighting alone. In all those years I walked backwards and forwards down the long corridor past their bedrooms to mine, I believed that life was a fight. But it was only a fight to avoid fighting. By never attacking one loses one’s right to attack at all. I have lost that right. I became the silent partner. In the game against my husband as well. A frightening need for order, regimentation, external order, a surface image of something that resembled order, got me to enter into a contract I imagined I could honour.

ANDRÉ:

But you couldn’t.

TORDIS:

I could, I could. But, André, does one have the right to steal into someone else's life, as if it were an apartment with a certain number of doors for playing postman's knock, play it willingly, so long as deep within one has one door behind all the other doors, which can be closed and locked on that solitude that is completely one's own? Does one have that right?

ANDRÉ:

I don't know your husband.

TORDIS:

The question's not for him. It's one I have to answer. It's my business, André, mine—mine! I'm tired of hiding behind excuses, excuses way back to Adam and Eve. You can forgive other people, not yourself. The life you've lived and will go on living: you hold it in your own hand. I alone am responsible for it. That's what I think. Not with my intellect that thrives on excuses, but deep within, in the heart of my own will, my own being. Call it a belief. Because it is a belief. I couldn't live without that belief. I couldn't. I understood too late that there is a pattern, a living pattern that grows and flowers. I saw only myself, my own thread, believed it could make a pattern, a unique pattern. A thread can lead you into a labyrinth easily enough, only rarely out. Now it's too late.

ANDRÉ:

No!

TORDIS:

Oh, André, André—

ANDRÉ:

If it's strength you need, I have enough for both of us.

TORDIS:

If you'd said that that evening, that evening on the terrace. But you didn't say it, didn't dream of saying it. You looked at me from your world of calm round Marianne, looked at me with big surprised childish eyes, as if I were a strange lady one is really a bit afraid of. A strange lady. Strange to everyone. That was your judgement.

ANDRÉ:

I didn't judge you. I've never judged you.

TORDIS:

Without knowing it. That evening especially. Your judgement was a shrug. No, no, I'm not rebuking you. On the contrary. I accepted your judgement. I saw how futile it was to save something so utterly futile. Utterly. The world has other things to think about. Forget me. Forget me as I forgot the world around me. Lean back in that old sofa with your back to the mirror. Call for Olsen. Order a glass of sherry. We always had sherry then, if we could afford it. Dry, not sweet. We both preferred the sweet but were afraid to admit it. And in the midst of it all you heard twittering birds flying in and out of the Café Bern and saw little dancers scattering flowers. Everything was gold. You turned everything to gold. You could do that. That's what I loved. That and your eyes. I've always been in love with boys with eyes like yours. I saw them this summer. A glimpse. Suddenly you were a boy I simply wanted to put my arms around.

*[She has turned to face him.]*

André—

ANDRÉ:

The sky's changing colour.

TORDIS:

The sky?

ANDRÉ:

It's turning blue again.

TORDIS:

Then Dicky must be nearby. Yes, I can hear his bells.

*[Calls.]*

Dicky, Dicky—

ANDRÉ:

It must be hard to run with such a long coat. Through the heather, I mean.

TORDIS:

Not for Dicky.

*[The sky has changed colour. We hear the sound of bells coming nearer and nearer.]*

Come, Dicky—come.

ANDRÉ:

He's much bigger than I'd thought. Bigger than a Scotch terrier.

TORDIS:

And that colour, that colour—

*[The bells are now very close. The stage is full of silver-clear bells.]*

No, Dicky, Dicky—

*[ANDRÉ seems to be trying to stop Dicky from jumping at him.]*

Don't jump up, do you hear, Dicky? The strange man doesn't like it. Sit, sit.

No, Dicky, Dicky—

*[The bells seem to be running round the stage.]*

What's the matter with that dog?

*[The bells stop for a moment. Then they begin again, in almost fawning manner.]*

Here we are. Such a good little dog. Isn't it touching when he puts his forepaws in my lap? Those big, big paws. What have you got in your mouth? Give it to me, give it to me. A blue gentian? But Dicky, Dicky, blue gentians don't grow, not in the middle of November.

*[The bells sound happy and eager.]*

Is it for me?

*[The bells say no.]*

Who then? For him?

*[The bells say yes.]*

It's for you.

*[She gets up.]*

For you, André.



*[While she puts the gentian in André's lapel, the bells dance round them, then stop. A whistle is heard in the distance.]*

Aunt Isabella's whistle. I'm coming, I'm coming.

*[The bells seem to jump into the air.]*

I'm coming, Dicky. Tell her that I'm coming.

*[The bells run off and fade into the distance—TORDIS puts her arms round ANDRÉ.]*

I loved you once. I loved your eyes. But I needed something else. I never found your eyes *and* that something in anyone. I never found the repose you found in Marianne. But I've found it now. Let me keep that repose, André. André, André, please let me keep it.

ANDRÉ:

The light in your window is still burning.

TORDIS:

Let me go! What do you want with me?

ANDRÉ:

The shadow on the blind—

TORDIS:

No, no!—Don't call me back.

ANDRÉ:

Now it's stopped. Moved away from the blind. Whoever cast the shadow has gone into your room.

TORDIS:

Whoever cast the shadow. I can hear the stealthy footsteps, the creaking shoes coming nearer and nearer. Now he's bending over me. A faint scent of leather and tobacco. My old doctor, my old friend the doctor. His hand rests on mine for a moment. Then his footstep move away, grow fainter and fainter in the room, then fade away. No, André—no. He didn't call me back to life.

ANDRÉ:

Because he suspects nothing. But if he did suspect—

TORDIS:

—he would do his duty, his pitiless duty. But he suspects nothing, will never suspect anything.

ANDRÉ:

You forget where I'm sitting.

TORDIS:

No. You're in the Café Bern. But you have no power over him from your sofa under the mirror, only over me.

ANDRÉ:

From my sofa under the mirror—what do you see in that mirror?

TORDIS:

What do I see. What I remember. Gold mouldings round the wall, an old-fashioned coat-rack, and half-hidden behind that—

*[She grasps ANDRÉ by the arm.]*

—The telephone in the kiosk! You have jumped up. Heaven be praised. Preisler's anniversary. It wasn't for you.

ANDRÉ:

But the next time, or the time after that, it will be for me. Up there in the clouds, there's a call on its way to the lighthouse. It will be there soon. I must get though, miss, do you hear? I'm waiting here. I'll go on waiting. Miss, do you understand?

TORDIS:

*[She is sitting, tired, on the base of the figurehead.]*

She understands, André, the young girl at the island switchboard. Everyone knows the big news by now. A man has phoned, a stranger with an excited voice. It's the new gossip. Everyone's waiting for the call to go through. Have you considered what you will say then? With a whole island listening. Whatever you say will upset them. That's the last thing I want to do.

ANDRÉ:

*[without looking at TORDIS]*

Your parents. Your husband.

TORDIS:

You never met him.

ANDRÉ:

I saw his picture in some newspaper once—from a boat launching, I think.

TORDIS:

He was like a son to them. He gave meaning to their lives. They began to live at last. In his world. He let himself drift with the current in the most charming way, kind to everyone, always the same and always ready with those thoughtful little gestures that made Mother fall in love with him. And he could talk to Father, above all listen to him. Of course, he drifted off every now and then. He would smile at me suddenly, when he knew he'd been caught napping, and become all friendly attention again. Why take things so seriously? Well, I had to admit he was right. We didn't take them seriously. But little Mother—sometimes I felt her hand on mine for a moment—I'm just a bit tired. Just this evening. Everyone can get tired. Suddenly her eyes were happy again, without a shadow of fear. That fear I'd seen so often. I saw it less and less. They felt safe. Could I take that gift from them? Could I leave my husband? Could I suddenly say that it was all over?

ANDRÉ:

You're saying it now.

TORDIS:

No! That's the one thing I will never say.

ANDRÉ:

But the son you gave them?

TORDIS:

If he marries again, it will make no difference. There'll have been no divorce. They'll keep him. They'll keep us both. From now on they have a living son and a daughter in a frame. My photograph will be reflected in the shining

mahogany surfaces, like a harmless psychic who never foretells bad luck. She only brings security, permanent security—permanent, André. And you'll wreck that? Upset the apple cart? Is that really your duty—your duty as a human being?

ANDRÉ:

The light in the window—

TORDIS:

Andre!

ANDRE:

It's still burning.

TORDIS:

Don't gaze at the house as if it were in league with you.

ANDRÉ:

In league with me—

*[He turns suddenly to TORDIS.]*

Yes, it is. In the struggle to find what you are hiding!

TORDIS:

I'm hiding nothing.

ANDRÉ:

That house is a witness.

TORDIS:

André!

*[We can hear the bells and the whistle in the distance, but coming nearer and nearer.]*

ISABELLA:

Dicky, Dicky!

*[She comes in from the left, out of breath.]*

Did you see him? The boy? Pale as asparagus. A little cut-out doll in much too fancy city clothes. I'm sure he ran this way. I lost track of him for a moment, but I found him by the lighthouse. He stood transfixed at the kitchen door, staring at the midwife who was putting water on for coffee. Then he turned suddenly, and the devil knows where he's gone. The midwife from Vrem. Even a hurricane, a typhoon, would fall to its knees whimpering at the sight of her. Let alone little Lord Fauntleroy with his jacket and his parting, besides himself with the fear of getting a spot on his pants. *There*—there he is—trying to creep round the juniper bush. Dicky! *En avant*. No, down, down, or you'll scare the life out of him. Tordis, are you coming? Dicky, Dicky!

*[She goes out to the right—the bells and the whistle grow fainter and fainter in the distance.]*

TORDIS:

I'm coming. I'm coming.

*[She turns suddenly—ANDRÉ has begun to walk to the left.]*

André!

*[For a moment she is in doubt as to whom she will follow—the figurehead glides slowly, almost imperceptibly to the right. Finally she is standing there alone. It grows darker and darker. The storm rises to a howl.]*

Wait for me. I'm coming.

*[The darkness envelops her.]*

André—André—

*[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]*

## ACT TWO

*[Storm and darkness. The light falls to the right, a little in the background, on the suggestion of a low stone dike that frames the open driveway to the Villa Gull's Cry. In the foreground, to the left, we sense the house itself through a corner, a pillar, a carving. ISABELLA is sitting on the dike. She sways from her hips as if she were dancing. She makes graceful figures and circles with her arms and marks the rhythm now and then with a light snap of her fingers. The storm rises threateningly, then dissolves in a howl.]*

ISABELLA:

*[She stops her dance with her arms still raised.]*

Storm! You lovely storm over Iselø. Play up for the dance. The last dance will be tonight. By sunrise everything will be silent. And the house, my house, you'll be yourself again. Without a shadow. We will dance the shadows away, pass the time of waiting with a dance. Oh, if I could only remember that waltz. Help me, storm, you who never forget. Help me, help me!

*[The storm rises to a howl. Far away we can hear a waltz that comes nearer and nearer.]*

There, there it is! The waltz that will end my last ball. My last, my last.

*[The waltz fills the stage. She hums, sways from her hips, moves her arms gracefully—suddenly she raises her hand as if to stop an orchestra—everything becomes silent.]*

No, Dicky, Dicky—

*[A bluish light falls on the dike.]*

Not that colour.

*[The blue light fades. We hear fawning bells.]*

No one must see us. Or know that we are here, so near the house. Oh, Dicky, Dicky, she said she would come, but she didn't follow me. I heard her call a name through the storm—André, André. I saw him only as a resisting force, a will in space. But she is following him—

*[We hear the waltz again.]*

Oh, Dicky, Dicky. I shall dance tonight. Dance the past away.

*[She hums, "dances," suddenly stops, listening. The waltz has gone.]*

TORDIS:

*[We hear her voice in the far distance.]*

André—André—

ISABELLA:

*[She gets to her feet and stands in the driveway.]*

She's coming; she's coming. She's following him, Dicky. No, not a sound. Watch your colour. We must go on, go on, and hunt for the boy, the pale little fellow. Once we've found him, my ball can begin, my last ball. Because we'll dance tonight. Come, Dicky—come!

*[She leaves to the left behind the dike. The storm rises to a howl. We hear TORDIS' voice in the distance, but coming nearer:—André, André. Then everything is silent.]*

ANDRÉ:

*[Comes in from the right behind the dike.]*

Isabella—it was Isabella. Why did she run away?

*[Is about to follow her, but suddenly notices the house and walks slowly through the entrance to the driveway and stops.]*

The house. The villa. The lights are on in the living room. The candelabra imaginatively made from deer antlers and kestrels' wings casts a ghostly glow over the empty room. Emily's coat is lying on a chair by the hearth. The only sign of life.

*[He takes a step backwards.]*

No, the lamp, the lamp, his lamp—circles restlessly round in the storm and darkness. Now it's disappearing round the corner towards the sea. There's a light in the window on the side that faces the sea. The shadow on the blinds—

*[The storm rises to a howl.]*

TORDIS:

André—!

*[She comes in from the right and walks hesitantly through the entrance to the driveway.]*

Oh, to be here again—

*[She stops behind ANDRÉ and follows his gaze.]*

—at the scene of the crime. What was once my life, my world, has suddenly become a crime scene, that has to suffer being ransacked by prying eyes, measured, photographed. Do it, André. Measure. Photograph. It will be of no use to you. I've hidden nothing. I could have used other words. But was that necessary? I know you would understand. And yet I shall be tormented, tormented until I scream. Go, go. Give me back my calm. Go, André, go while there is still time. I have so little time. You have no right to steal it from me. Go, André, go!

*[She takes a step towards the villa.]*

No! You won't get me across that threshold.

*[Clings to him to bar the way.]*

André—!

*[The storm rises to a howl, which mingles with fragments of the waltz. The dike glides out to the left. A door with glass panels glides in from the left, followed by a hearth, with the suggestion of a staircase up to the second floor. Emily's coat lies on a faded-green upholstered chair. There is a small ornamental table with two glasses on it. The background fades into a veiled darkness, with hints of properties: an oriental rug hung up to serve as a portiere, a suggested interior, an atmosphere—all is quiet.]*

André—!

EMILY:

*[Appears on the stairs.]*

Who called? I thought someone—someone called.

*[She has taken a few steps down the stairs.]*

Doctor—!

DOCTOR:

*[Appears behind EMILY.]*

Ssh—even if she's far, far away, she may well still be listening. Emily—it was probably just the storm.

EMILY:

No. No, it wasn't the storm. Doctor, doctor, can't you sense—



DOCTOR:

Emily—

EMILY:

—that we're not alone?

DOCTOR:

The only way we can help her now is for both of us to stay calm. Forgive me, dear girl, I'm an old man. That journey across the heath, which used to be child's play, even in a storm, has been a bit too much for me. In that carved cabinet, *there*, just past the fireplace, there's usually a couple of crystal decanters.

*[EMILY has gone down the stairs and over to the hearth.]*

She called it her medicine cabinet, Miss de Creuth, when she came home tired from the hunt. Cognac preferably, if it's there. Ladies, ladies, you're always so thoughtful. You've put out some glasses for me.

EMILY:

*[Turns quickly.]*

Glasses?

DOCTOR:

Those two *there* on the table, or—or has she had a guest?

EMILY:

A guest?

TORDIS:

André—

DOCTOR:

Ssh—now I did hear a voice. Was it—

*[He turns and listens.]*

—was it her voice?

*[He disappears from view at the top of the stairs.]*

EMILY:

Doctor!

*[She runs to the stairs.]*

A guest. She has had a guest. When I saw him from the window walking towards the sea, he was coming here. Here. Here.

*[She runs up the stairs and turns towards the room.]*

Here—!

*[She disappears from view at the top of the stairs.]*

TORDIS:

Emily—

*[She tears herself away from ANDRÉ, stands for a moment looking at the spot where Emily had been, then turns quickly towards ANDRÉ.]*

The scene of your crime. Yours! I've hidden nothing. Two glasses on a table. I hid nothing. In everything I said there were two glasses between the lines. But you weren't content with that. And it was you one summer evening who floated a banner—if I were a poet. In that one word—if!—you drew back hastily from that wholeness you had glimpsed, had helped me to glimpse. The wholeness that stands above us like a sky, binds us together, allows us freedom. But me? Why should I care? You wash your hands, and the sky shrinks to a picturesque sunset. What will the weather be like tomorrow? And tomorrow? On and on. Until you stand at the scene of a crime.

ANDRÉ:

Which is not yet a crime scene.

TORDIS:

Yes, André! You can change nothing, nothing, nothing. You have no power. You're fumbling like a boy who has only one wish—to save what cannot be saved. My face, the only face I never dared to look at—I've seen it, André.

*[She crosses slowly to the hearth, touches the table lightly, then the chair, and turns.]*

The cabinet minister's daughter. A portrait with a background. A background I couldn't escape. Had I wanted to—but I didn't. I stood in front of that

background. Being in front of it—was enough for me. I knew from a distance that outside me there was a world in turmoil. That distance was enough. I danced into forgetfulness. I was good at forgetting. I was forced to forget, forced by a terrible power within myself. A pair of eyes, a smile, my feet began to dance. A woman's fulfillment? Human fulfillment? Well, I had time. I danced and danced, danced into the chain that has danced though all the ages. One Friday, I danced in Jerusalem. Two eyes and a smile. As I journeyed on, I only realized in my memory that the long shadows at evening were like a cross I danced away from memory, from a thousand memories, danced through Titian's pillars and the palaces of Rome. Who are they burning today? A name, a name, I think I heard it. If the earth turns and the sun stands still, the earth is grey, I dance in the sun, the artificial sun, over bonfires and ruins, through processions and flags, ordinary flags. Roll down the blinds. I danced, I danced, in the end alone in an empty room. That mirror, that mirror!—at the end of the room. It drew me like an abyss. I danced, danced, but the mirror was the strongest. I was crushed against that mirror.

*[The waltz that has been coming nearer and nearer during this speech, ends in a discordant crash.]*

The truth, André!

*[For a few seconds everything is still—it is as if she has freed herself from something that had her in its grip.]*

If you knew how mean and small the truth is, the truth inside, when the music stops. A rotten piece of straw you stumble over. Two glasses on a table. Let me go, let me go. You are forcing me down the staircase step by step. Two glasses on a table. They can be forgotten, André. But his past, to become part of his past, to be stuck on a wall in a row with all the others, with *her*. The woman from the lighthouse. If that is true. I can't, André. My skin is not mine, will never be mine. After the last step there's nothing but emptiness. Only emptiness. André.

*[Everything is quiet for a moment—then Isabella's whistle can be heard.]*

Aunt Isabella's whistle. Thank heavens. She's waiting out there. I'll take the last part of my journey with her. I'm coming, Aunt Isabella—I'm coming, I'm—

*[She has turned quickly towards the background, then stops suddenly.]*

The lamp. His lamp. I'm trapped. It's circled my house evening after evening. A pair of eyes have been watching. They'll never let me go.

ANDRÉ:

A young man in blue, a uniform-like blue.

TORDIS:

I rode past him on the beach but didn't recognize him. I recognized him first when he came up to the terrace in his Sunday best. He had caught my gaze. Not a gaze, only a glance. The most fleeting glance that had given him the right of way, the right to come. He had that right, but I didn't give it to him. He found excuse after excuse. Came again and again. I tried every means of escape, but his pipe kept turning between his quiet hands. He didn't budge an inch. His silence hovered in the air like a desire. But I didn't give in. I wouldn't be drawn into his world. Iselø, my freedom. No one could take that from me, no one, no one. I left, came back. To show my strength. Oh, strength, André—

*[She has crossed slowly towards the hearth—everything is quiet for a moment.]*

My last strength—

*[She turns quickly.]*

—is to escape myself.

*[She takes a couple of steps forward. Her gaze is fixed on the glass door.]*

André—!

ANDRÉ:

*[He turns quickly and follows the direction of her gaze.]*

The lamp. It's out. There's a hand on the door.

TORDIS:

I'm coming, Aunt Isabella—

*[She runs towards the background.]*

I'm coming, I'm coming!

*[She vanishes in the darkness.]*

ANDRÉ:

Tordis—!

*[Is about to run after her, but stops—at the same moment the door opens. The wind blows across the stage. HANSSON comes in, closes the door quickly behind him, and remains standing with his back to the door, his gaze fixed on the staircase.—It is quiet for a few seconds, then EMILY appears suddenly at the top of the staircase.]*

EMILY:

Hansson—

*[She runs a few steps down the stairs—the DOCTOR appears behind her.]*

Hansson, Hansson—

*[She sinks, crying, on the staircase. HANSSON opens the door quickly, there is a gust of wind, and he is gone.]*

DOCTOR:

Hansson—?

*[Without taking his eyes off the door for a moment, he bends over EMILY, but she jumps up and runs down the stairs.]*

EMILY:

No, no—no!

*[She throws herself crying into the chair by the fireplace.]*

DOCTOR:

*[He comes slowly down the stairs, and stands for some time, thinking.]*

Hansson—

ANDRÉ:

Doctor, doctor. Two glasses on a table. Oh, if my thoughts could reach you.  
Doctor!

DOCTOR:

*[He turns quickly towards EMILY.]*

Emily—

EMILY:

No, no, no—

DOCTOR:

Emily—!

*[He grasps her firmly by the shoulders and makes her look up at him.]*

When did you last see her, I mean speak with her?

EMILY:

Yesterday.

DOCTOR:

Did anything about her strike you as strange?

EMILY:

*[She jumps to her feet and frees herself from the DOCTOR.]*

Strange!

DOCTOR:

Think carefully.

EMILY:

No, no. Well yes, she did give me a letter.

DOCTOR:

A letter?

EMILY:

Which she asked me to post when I went to my English lesson this evening; but the lesson was changed.

DOCTOR:

Who was the letter to?

EMILY:

Her friend, the gentleman who was here this summer.

DOCTOR:

This summer.

ANDRÉ:

Doctor, doctor, that evening on the terrace.

DOCTOR:

The photograph of Isabella!

EMILY:

No!

DOCTOR:

I should have known it. I should have sensed it. The fear I saw in her mother's eyes. *That* was her fear. It happened today. It happened before the horse was saddled. You old fool!!—What was I thinking of? When she was here last, sweet and radiant.—No, no, she didn't need a prescription. She'd got over her insomnia. What was I thinking of? The ticket to Paris, the fall from her horse. It was all planned to lead me astray. The prescription she got me to write for her months ago, she's saved it for today. Today! You old fool! Emily, Emily. If she has the will to live, there's still hope.

*[He has gone back up the stairs, then stops.]*

But does she have the will?

EMILY:

Doctor—!

*[She has run up the stairs.]*

DOCTOR:

Come, girl, come.

ANDRÉ:

The will to live!

*[The storm rises to a howl. The waltz blends with the storm, coming nearer and nearer. The room glides out, the candelabra vanishes. The stage seems to open out—we see a beach, just horizon and sky. The light is strange, neither night nor day—in the middle of the stage, a little to the right, there is a boat, half on its side, with its keel towards the audience—ISABELLA is sitting in front of the boat on a small, old-fashioned folding chair with a back-rest. She hums as she examines the bolt on her hunting rifle—the storm is now far away. Only the waltz lingers like the more and more distant thrumming of waves—we hear laughter and the happy sound of bells from nearby—ANDRÉ takes a few steps forward and stops.]*

The beach on Iselø. Isabella de Creuith.

*[He walks forward again, stops, and turns to the right, listening.]*

And laughing voices—?

ISABELLA:

*[She looks up, shading her eyes with her hand.]*

Ah, at last, at last.

ANDRÉ:

*[He starts, turns, and stands for a moment listening, but ISABELLA is again only interested in her gun. We hear joyful laughter nearby—ANDRÉ whirls round.]*

A boy's laughter. That was a boy's laughter. A young boy, playing with Dicky.

TORDIS:

No, Esmond, Esmond—

ANDRÉ:

Emily's Esmond?

*[A ball is thrown onto the stage, and bounces a few times. ANDRÉ catches it, stands for a moment holding it in his hand, then quickly lays it down.]*

ESMOND:

*[He comes in from the left. He is slim and fair. He wears a bow-tie and a little, tight-fitting suit, too short at the wrists and ankles. Its cut is both modern and a*



*little dated, but with an odd colour, almost pale beige with a hint of mother of pearl in the folds.]*

No, old friend, I said no.

*[He grabs the ball, then holds it high up and close to the ground as if to tease a playfellow.]*

That's not the game.

*[He throws the ball with all his strength out to the right, almost taking himself with it.]*

There! You jackal of a Pekinese.

*[He runs off.]*

ANDRÉ:

Was that Emily's Esmond? The pale little fellow who was afraid of dogs, afraid of everything. Well I'm damned—there he is turning cartwheels, doing handsprings, while Dicky dances round him in delight. The boy and the dog. They're running down to the beach. Off with his jacket, off with his clothes. It's a swimming race. First to the sandbar. Tordis, Tordis—no, she doesn't hear. She's far, far away. She's searching, bending over, collecting mussel shells, looking for amber, her shawl trailing in the sand. The spirit of summer on Iselø's beach. She's left everything behind her, the storm and the darkness. Tordis!

*[He stops, listening—ISABELLA hums and examines her rifle—he turns quickly.]*

And there you are, an old monster in an old-fashioned hunting outfit. Sitting as if nothing had happened, as if there were oceans of time. Oh, if my thoughts could reach you. But they can't. You are as deaf as that door that has been shut on your past along with Sadi Carnot and all your hunting trophies. Who am I?—no, you don't know that. But I know who you are. An egotistical old maid who in one sunset mood pointed round the horizon and said to a girl, a six-year old girl: all this is yours, you are my heir, my heir to everything. To everything. Your life, your fate, your defeat. If she hadn't stumbled over a wretched piece of straw, then Iselø, the Villa Gull's Cry, would have become her cloister, as it once was yours. Your worldly cloister. Paris, Madrid. You sought that expensive loneliness that holds everything at a distance. A sanctuary. You had the means to give that sanctuary elbow-room as far as the sea and the sky. You deluded yourself into becoming the neighbour of

eternity. I know what that means. I've felt its call myself. We all feel it. We have it in our blood. All of us refugees from a petty world with its dreary rules and regulations that threaten to steal the fragrance from our personal style. The neighbour of eternity. But with all creature comforts, central heating, a bath, a car in the garage, and above us stands the only explanation: uncertainty. We are carried by the wave, we are foam on the wave, that does not feel the power of the great water masses, will not realize that *one* power forces it up, another pulls it back, back to gather strength to create new waves. The new waves: why shouldn't one ride forward on them, just as people once changed horses? There's always an inn, always a horse, so long as our travel documents are in order. But who decides what that order is? A just providence? No, a self-appointed one. But, thank heavens, we know how to wrap everything up in silk paper embossed with flowers and bewildering patterns, so bewildering at last, that we are ready to die to find some sense of certainty. We who have only *one* faith, *one* religion, *one* certainty—ourselves.

*[He lets his hands sink, turns slowly towards the landscape, searches distractedly for a packet of cigarettes, puts a cigarette in his mouth, is about to light it, then stands listening—ISABELLA is still busy with her gun—he turns quickly.]*

Oh, that humming, that humming, and that stupid gun. For Christ's sake put it down or I'll—!

*[Is about to turn towards the landscape again.]*

ISABELLA:

In the face of such strong language—

*[She puts the gun down.]*

ANDRÉ:

Isabella de Creuith!

ISABELLA:

No, don't frown like that!

ANDRÉ:

You knew I was here?

ISABELLA:

That someone was here.

ANDRÉ:

Miss de Creuith—

ISABELLA:

If you give me so much as a single excuse, I'll never forgive you. On the other hand if you've a cigarette to spare, you will make an old monster very happy. I've searched in all my pockets, and I have quite a few, but there's not a single one. Thanks, thanks. And a light. A tiny flame, but alive.

*[He has offered her a cigarette and lit it for her with a match.]*

Ah, one puff from a cigarette—and you feel whole again right out to your fingertips. Your whole body. To be considered a human being—I could fall on my knees in gratitude.

*[Inhales the smoke again.]*

That evening this summer, that evening on the terrace. I came from the shore, stopped for a second. She so rarely had guests. You sat on the terrace, I saw your face, heard your name, the same name she called through the storm. It was then I knew who you were, why you had come, and my hope took wings. You gave it wings. Now my ball can begin. My last, my last. Listen to Dicky's bells and the boy's laughter. He's suddenly turned himself into an Indian with Tordis's shawl and a couple of gull's feathers.

ANDRÉ:

Miss de Creuith! Isabella. This summer mood over Iselø—there *isn't* time.

ISABELLA:

Look at him, look at him! Isn't he a delight? In the middle of a fight with Dicky he's caught sight of a bird. The fight's forgotten—what is that bird? Black as velvet, with coral-red legs, and a white speck on its wings. The black guillemot. The pearl of Iselø. I haven't seen a guillemot on these coasts for countless years. But when his eyes start to see, everything comes to life. Ah, Esmond, Esmond. A pity she's waiting, the midwife from Vrem, over there in the darkness. But you'll come through. You and Tordis. The will to live—there was a voice that called those words. Whose voice was it?

ANDRÉ:

Mine.

ISABELLA:

It gave me certainty.

ANDRÉ:

Certainty? Don't you understand that I have no power.

ISABELLA:

You do! You come from life.

ANDRÉ:

Isabella de Creuith, you don't know me.

ISABELLA:

Not the facts about you, no. I know *one* thing about you though, or rather recognize it from others: your inimitable ability to find a detour that ends in a blind alley—your own blind self.

ANDRÉ:

Myself, myself—no, I can't find myself.

ISABELLA:

You loved her once.

ANDRÉ:

As a boy can love, before he knows what love means.

ISABELLA:

When you came here this evening—?

ANDRÉ:

I came like someone who jumps without thinking headfirst into the canal to save a drowning person. Without thinking? No, without a thought. We are formed by rules. And we act accordingly.

ISABELLA:

Yes, by them—and the last sweet remnants of a youthful love.

ANDRÉ:

No! Whatever was left, whatever may have been left, I could have shown her this summer. But I didn't. I let her stand against the darkness in that loneliness she "claimed" to love. A claim she hoped would spark some resistance from me. A hope, a prayer to be opposed. But I did not take up the gauntlet.

ISABELLA:

Your voice in the darkness followed me on my way up over the heath—if I were a poet—

ANDRÉ:

Yes, if! There lies the escape, the escape from human responsibility. You catch a glimpse of the invisible circle. The circle that connects the others and yourself. You feel a need to grasp it in your hands. But just as you grasp it, you look back. You look back. You see the chair where you sat so safely, so safely. As a spectator. Where is your parachute? That one word "if." Then you hide your face, float calmly and safely down into your own world. Cut yourself off from everything. Become yourself again. Yourself?

*[He stops speaking suddenly.]*

But without an answer. I don't have one. I didn't have one. Not to myself, not to her. I jumped into the canal. My arms grasped a drowning woman's shoulders, but when she opened her eyes—what could I answer? I saw only the world she had left behind and would be forced back into again; saw it side by side with the world I call mine. Tordis, you were right. I sit on a corner of Marianne's calm. She *is*, she's alive, her calm is my world. Take that world from me and I would be hovering free over empty space, over a chaos of worlds, moving into each other, out of each other, in thousands of permutations, each with its own calendar, its own sense of time. *There* just round the corner lie deserts and kingdoms that seem to predate the writing of the bible. Children are born, children die, from disease, from hunger, while others must listen patiently to stories about millions of wretched people who would be happy to eat their porridge, their cold leftovers. People are force fed, people starve, burn witches on the front pages, keep old people alive with the most sophisticated means, but slaughter the young, command them to slaughter others. On Sunday morning the ten commandments are polished up to organ music. On Monday they check out the air-raid sirens. What are lies, what is truth? Who is fooling whom? Is everyone fooling each other? From Sunday to Monday. A couple of centimeters on a globe. A couple of steps

across a landing to the neighbour's door. Staircase above staircase, a chaos of worlds, a chaos of destinies, of blind eyes that only stare into themselves.

ISABELLA:

*[She crushes her cigarette with her foot.]*

If I were the drowning woman, I would drown on the spot, drown alone—while you looked on. The neighbour of eternity. No, the eternal forgetful spectator, who, to hide what he has forgotten sets himself the highest of goals, so high, so distant, so perfect in their beauty, that they can never be reached. It's also enough to live in the reflected glory of other people's lives, standing on a corner of another's repose. But is it enough for her?

ANDRÉ:

Enough for Marianne?

ISABELLA:

I saw her face that evening on the terrace. It seemed she was sitting outside the circle, but one glance at her mouth, her silence, her eyes, and anyone could see that it was you on your sofa, Tordis against her darkness, yes even my old friend the doctor, who stood outside so helplessly. The smile on her lips. A woman, a mother. Woman, who in her very being is the whole of life, passes life on without giving the invisible circle a single thought, she has it in her soul, in her hands. Those hands that teach children to walk. Learn to walk first of all. Is there anything so lovely as walking, simply walking on the earth? The other plants, a flower, a bush, the coarse stand of matweed, must stay where they are, stay obediently with their roots, while we put down roots swiftly at every step, pull them up again, walk on and on, with a feeling of belonging everywhere, everywhere is *here* where we grow and bloom. But then suddenly it happens. It happens to all of us. To Esmond in a little while. We are cut, gathered, and put in a vase. By women's hands? No, by the hands of men! The eternal male that owns his wife, owns his children, owns the world, he alone is in charge of. The earth we walked on becomes a cabinet we stand on. Your cabinet. And we remain standing there, until in the end we are in the end just a vase enjoying our hand-painted flower motifs—or breaking into pieces.

*[She points to a spot on the ground in front of her.]*

Her vase is lying *there*. Tordis' vase. Smashed to pieces. And among the pieces—her will to live.

ANDRÉ:

Does she have the will? Has she ever had it?

ISABELLA:

*[Looks keenly at ANDRÉ.]*

It's odd, that sofa. In my day there was never a sofa at the steps leading up to the terrace. Or here on the beach. But I seem to see a sofa all the time. Where are you sitting? In a rather old-fashioned café. You've been sitting there a long time. One glass became several. You order another one. André, André, why don't you just leave and let thoughts be thoughts? It's no use. You can't do anything.

ANDRÉ:

Yes, I can!

ISABELLA:

Why now so suddenly?

ANDRÉ:

I don't know. I don't know. Yet somehow I do.

ISABELLA:

André—do you play bridge?

ANDRÉ:

Bridge—?

ISABELLA:

Nor do I. I only played to amuse the doctor. He thought he could, but he never learned what cards were trumps. What are tricks? What are tricks? And *there* he would sit, with the most bewildered expression, although we all knew that he had the card that would decide the game. You are like him. You are like my doctor. He too forgot that women almost always lead with the jack and not the king.

*[Looks into the distance.]*

There's Esmond. Dressed again. And Tordis has her shawl.

*[She picks up her rifle and turns towards ANDRÉ.]*

No, no, pretend I've said nothing. She musn't suspect that there's more between us than the clear air over Iselø's beach. Such weather, such weather—

ANDRE:

But there's darkness over there—

ISABELLA:

Which we must pass through before the ball is over. My last, my last.

*[We hear laughter and bells. The waltz can be heard far away, but coming nearer and nearer.]*

ESMOND:

*[He comes running in from the left, followed by the bells. He has no tie and carries his jacket in his hand.]*

There's a ship—

*[He stops suddenly, listening.]*

Who the hell's playing music? Someone's playing.

*[He bends down suddenly and picks up an invisible stone.]*

No, I'm damned if I'm going to dancing classes.

*[He throws the stone with all his strength in the direction of the waltz—there is a sudden silence.]*

That's better.

*[He turns.]*

Come, Dicky, come. My beautiful ship. We're going for a sail.

*[He throws his jacket away and sits astride the boat. The bells dance happily round him.]*

Sail and sail to the end of the world. In fair weather and storm. We'll sail away from all those people on the beach. Just let them jump up and down waving their arms. What do I care? Reef the sails. All hands to the wheel. Here comes a breaker. Well done, shipmate, you cleared it. We'll leave Iselø behind and



all the old women who can't tell the difference between a man and a girl. Heigh, watch your head, the boom! Well, what's a few bruises matter? See, now the sea's calm again. We can lie idle. No, I'll be damned if we can. The ship needs a thorough painting. It looks like some damned old coffin ship. What colour shall it have? No, believe me old friend, it won't be white. That's what Aunt Emily has dreamed about: a little white boat. A sugar-swan on a moonlit sea. Good God, no. It's going to be blue. Blue as the sky. Blue as your coat, old friend. It's a damned fine colour.

TORDIS:

*[Enters from the left. She has picked Esmond's jacket up and stands with it in her hand.]*

Esmond—

ESMOND:

What are you grumbling about?

TORDIS:

I'm not grumbling.

ESMOND:

We're sailors. Haven't I the right to say what I damn well please? I don't mind, you'll say, but what if other people heard you—other people!

*[He jumps down from the boat.]*

Thanks, it's from before my grandmother's time.

*[Snatches the jacket from her.]*

To hell with you women.

*[The bells jump up at him. He bends down as to pet the invisible Dicky.]*

Well, old fellow, the voyage is over. They always find us, even in the middle of the sea.

*[He begins to put his jacket on.]*

ISABELLA:

Tordis—!

ESMOND:

*[He whirls round.]*

Tordis—!

ISABELLA:

But Esmond dear—

ESMOND:

The lady from the villa—!

ISABELLA:

You're not afraid of Tordis?

ESMOND:

The lady who's going to—No—!

*[He turns to escape but is stopped by ANDRÉ.]*

Let me go. Let me go.

TORDIS:

Esmond—!

ESMOND:

Don't touch me—you least of all!

ISABELLA:

Oh, you were playing so happily with her before. You borrowed her shawl.

ESMOND:

Her ice-cold shawl that only brings bad luck.

TORDIS:

Oh, Esmond, Esmond—

ANDRÉ:

The sky is changing colour. The darkness is on the march.

ISABELLA:

Dicky!

ESMOND:

The darkness and the storm. The storm from the sea. Just listen to her song.

*[The sky grows dark. The storm rises threateningly and blends with the waltz and a singing voice.]*

ANDRÉ:

It's as if a voice is reaching us through the storm. Who is singing?

ESMOND:

It's that ugly witch with her coffee pot. She's after me. I've no escape. I'm trapped, imprisoned, between the lady from the villa and the midwife from Vrem. No! I won't enter your world! Never. Never! You can't force me. Let me go, let me go! Her hands are coming nearer, her wicked claws, they're out to grab and throttle me. Her hoarse voice bores through everything like a rusty awl. The midwife from Vrem. Listen to what she's singing. Listen to her song!

*[ISABELLA is now on her feet. Everyone moves in a group to the right. The song comes nearer—on the right a greenish light falls on the suggestion of a kitchen, the corner of a stove, part of a wall hung with lids and saucepans—the MIDWIFE from Vrem stands in the light with a coffee pot in one hand and a cup in the other. She moves in an almost dancelike rhythm and almost sings her words.]*

MIDWIFE:

I am the midwife from Vrem. Come to you my little ones, you little fresh-boiled shrimps in a pool of slimy blood. One slap on your bottom and I give you breath. Yes, scream, scream. You'll have good cause to scream. But oh, it all goes so quickly, even if the bad times seem to creep along. No, no, little fellow in your drenched diaper. The way from the first cry to the last sigh is as short as the snap of a finger. And then we'll meet again when you must be gotten ready and laid in a coffin—a coffin, a coffin—with a hymnbook stuck under your chin to keep the smile in place, the smile you never had. Three shovelfuls of earth—boom tara boom—down into the wet wormy clay, to join the maggots, you who are maggots yourselves. Eaten up by maggots in the midst of life. Heigh-ho. There's dancing tonight. One is coming and the other goes. And up *there* in the sweaty marriage bed she's writhing and gasping with the *pains*, while her husband tends the lamp in the tower. Yes, writhe and groan, my

dear, in your loneliness, push your guts out, clench your teeth. You came here in pain, you will live in pain, the everlasting torment is reborn from pain.

*[A scream is heard from the room above her—she puts the coffee pot down, and drinks, listening—she empties the cup, wipes her fingers on her apron, and turns slowly.]*

Yes, yes. It's time for work.

ESMOND:

No!

*[The light vanishes. The midwife leaves. The sky begins to take on a lighter colour—ISABELLA sits down again on her folding chair.]*

Go to hell with your coffee pot. You'll never get me into the world you've rejected yourselves, never, never!

TORDIS:

Yes, Esmond—yes.

ESMOND:

And you have the nerve to say that—you with your accursed mausoleum of a house.

TORDIS:

*Everything* you just heard—you'll soon forget.

ESMOND:

Forget—?

TORDIS:

You'll grow away from it. You'll forget it all.

ESMOND:

No! My body will remember. My body and my skin. It will lie hidden somewhere. It will follow me like a fear, a fear no one can explain, no one can understand. It will resurface again and again, but people will only say—pull yourself together, Esmond. Healthy boys aren't afraid of the dark. The dark? Do you know the dark? No! No! You'll never get me into your world, never, never!

TORDIS:

Esmond—

ISABELLA:

Don't tell him that life is a gift.

TORDIS:

It is a gift. The most beautiful gift.

ANDRÉ:

Don't believe her!

ESMOND:

I won't cross the threshold.

ANDRÉ:

It should have been a gift for her. But she didn't want it. She wouldn't accept it. An empty packing case to be returned, like the ones in a railway storage room, that fool the other goods into believing that their address leads straight to wonderland. *That* is what she is. No, I'm with Esmond. That's not the game we play.

TORDIS:

You have to be worthy of the gift.

ANDRÉ:

Rubbish! As if he should be worthier than others.

ESMOND:

Me?

TORDIS:

Esmond, don't listen to him.

ANDRÉ:

And you were the one who was tired of excuses, excuses back to Adam and Eve. Look at the piece of straw you stumbled over. What do you call that? A screen for all the real excuses. I hope that young man *there* escapes all that.

TORDIS:

Oh, if only he can.

ESMOND:

Do you mean me?

ANDRÉ:

*[to ESMOND]*

Dare you go through all that?

ISABELLA:

Dicky—

*[a faint sound of fawning bells]*

Oh thank heavens, there you are.

TORDIS:

Esmond—

*[She falls on her knees in front of the boy who shrinks back in fear.]*

If you had been my son—

ESMOND:

No, I don't want to be a son. Not anybody's son. Don't speak of it.

TORDIS:

—I'd have told you about life that opens up visions far into eternity at the snap of a finger, eternities of endless beauty, richness, and warmth. I have felt it myself, Esmond, but I dared not turn that feeling into reality.

ESMOND:

Another dream. It's all dreams. Everyone wades in dreams. Before you are born, you are forced to live in other people's idiotic dreams; but we have hardly come into the world before we have to perpetuate the dream our parents never realized. We only become ourselves when we're so old we can sit down and dream on in our children, demand of them that they keep dreaming on for us.

ANDRÉ:

And you'll let them do that to you?

ESMOND:

Me?

ISABELLA:

Ah, thank God, the blessed spirit of contradiction.

ESMOND:

Did you say me?

*[We hear the fawning bells again. He seems to be trying to stop a dog from jumping up at him.]*

No, Dicky, no—it's not playtime now. This is serious. I could turn a somersault in anger. Who do they think I am? What the hell do they take me for? A sissy, a coward? Well, they can think again.

*[He turns quickly towards ANDRÉ.]*

What did you mean—let them tell that to you?

TORDIS:

Oh, Esmond, Esmond—

ANDRÉ:

I meant—well, it doesn't matter. You won't enter the world you call ours anyway. When it comes down to it, you don't have the will to live.

ESMOND:

The will? The will to live? What about you?

*[with reference to TORDIS]*

And her?

*[with reference to ISABELLA]*

And her? You're like three shipwrecked souls on a raft, who I can bring safely to land as easily as falling off a log. Will, did you say will? That wreck of a tent you've left behind you, that could bloody well, pardon my language, be raised again with fresh hands. Look at my hands—why couldn't they ignite a living

flame that could pierce the darkness along with other flames, a sea of little flames, push back the darkness, turn it into light, the light of human freedom? Yes, you three shipwrecked souls on your raft with your hands full of broken hopes, your own hopes, only your own. A hope can never be broken, a hope can be handed on, on to the next, the next in the chain, a chain of runners on their way through space, through light, the light above mankind. I'm talking like a book, damn it, I know that. But there's a spark in every living being that can set whole worlds on fire. We are here to live, to make ourselves worthy of life—life, life with other people!

TORDIS:

Life with other people. Oh, Esmond—my hope—

ESMOND:

Your hope, Tordis? You're out of the race. The unknown relay runner. That's not your role. You made yourself redundant in a sea of living flames. You never felt their heat, Tordis. It's too late.

TORDIS:

Too late—

ISABELLA:

The lighthouse lamp is turning—turning and turning. We'll soon be at the second when our ways must part.

ESMOND:

All of a sudden you look so strange, all of you. The darkness, the storm, that witch of a midwife. There are walls around me of hate and power, but no—no! No power on earth can hold me back. I can make it. I can make it. Without conditions. I can make it alone.

*[to TORDIS]*

You lady from the villa, stay in your nothingness. That's all you've ever known. You were given everything, everything. What untold millions have fought for and still fight for, you received as a gift, an undeserved gift. You didn't have to raise a finger. You only had one gift my dear: to bring death to everything around you in the very midst of life. An empty container marked return. Empty containers have no value. How could you go on living anyway, when you have never lived?



TORDIS:

No, I'll begin, begin—begin again, Esmond. My nothingness was my hiding place where I tried to hide the fact that I had cancelled my subscription to life, but never really lived. My empty hands were afraid to take the gift. They had no right. I stood outside. Life, life with other people—now for the first time I understand what “with” means. But it's too late. André, it's too late.

ANDRÉ:

No! It is not. The light on the window blind, the doctor, the doctor, your old friend, the doctor—can you hear his voice?

TORDIS:

Far, far away. He's bending over me.

ANDRÉ:

His voice, Tordis. What is he saying? What is he asking? The will to live? Does she have the will to live?

TORDIS:

I have it, Doctor. I have it, yes. Life, life with others. I was given it by Esmond. Doctor, Doctor, don't let go of my hands. I'm on the way back.

*[The storm rises to a howl and blends with the waltz. ISABELLA is now standing. For a moment everyone stands motionless. Then the storm fades into the background.]*

ISABELLA:

When you said son—oh, that was what I once wanted to have said, would have given my life to say. But heaven be praised, today I've been given a daughter, a living daughter. My ball is over, my last, my last, and I can walk up over the heath with Dicky, keep on walking, until the past fades into the sunset, fades, and is gone.

*[The bells make their fawning sound. She bends down to pet her invisible dog.]*

Dicky, your coat has never been so beautiful as it is this evening.

ISABELLA:

Forgive me, André. I found comfort, an invisible strength, in the inexplicable strangeness I once tried to deny. The island weather, the clear sky over Iselø, the sky that stands above us all like a dome—

TORDIS:

Dicky could have never have had a different colour.

ESMOND:

No, blue as my boat. Get it painted. Remember.

ISABELLA:

And remember, André, when you meet her—

ANDRÉ:

When I meet Marianne—

ISABELLA:

Tell her what you told me.

TORDIS:

A corner of her calm strength. One day that will be mine.

ISABELLA:

Ah, Tordis, Tordis, my darling Tordis, my heir to everything except my fate, never, never my fate. You heard it that way. How else could you hear it? That was the piece of straw I stumbled over. That evening you came up to the figurehead in your little sandals. Your father had been tormenting me at dinner with that pedantic rubbish of his that sounded like some ministerial agenda. I had a glass of port. I had another glass, and my thirst for revenge grew wings. And it struck you, the very last person I wanted it to strike. Oh, how difficult it can sometimes be to live.

ANDRÉ:

Miss de Creuith, Isabella—

ESMOND:

Look—the lighthouse lamp.

TORDIS:

It stopped suddenly.

ISABELLA:

Then it's time. No, no goodbyes. Just a farewell as a new greeting to the life we love.

TORDIS:

Must learn to love again.

ESMOND:

Damn it all—let's roll up our sleeves, then.

ISABELLA:

Dicky. En avant!

*[The storm and the waltz rise to a roar.]*

TORDIS:

I'm coming, Doctor. I'm coming, I'm coming.

*[ISABELLA has turned and begins to walk towards the background, while TORDIS walks slowly down to the foreground on the left, and ESMOND down to the foreground on the left. Only ANDRÉ is left standing alone in the middle of the stage—everything is growing dark and drowning in the storm and the waltz—A light falls slowly on ANDRÉ—the café reappears and the island fades. The storm sounds and the waltz fades away. The setting is as it was at the beginning of the play. The telephone rings in the booth. ANDRÉ walks quickly towards the booth, but stops and turns—MARIANNE comes in from the entrance and looks around to find ANDRÉ.]*

GENTLEMAN:

*[The Preisler's anniversary man comes quickly in from the side room, goes into the booth, picks up the receiver, opens the door, and calls out.]*

It's for you!

ANDRÉ:

Marianne!

[He runs over to her, picks her up, and carries her in his arms out of the café—the waltz builds to a fanfare, and beyond the café we see the blue summer sky over Iselø.]

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

#### NOTES

1. I am indebted to Karen Lee of Cengage Learning and Mike Tyrkus, the present editor of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, for their kind permission to reprint the entry. Special thanks to: Karen Dinesen; the Kjeld Abell Estate; Emma Russell; Nordiska Strakosch Teaterförlaget.
2. The Café Bern has been identified by Nils Kjærulf as à Porta, one of the theatre cafés on Kongens Nytorv in the centre of Copenhagen (1970a, 147).
3. It is more than probable that Abell is remembering a famous Danish painting—*Summer Evening on the South Beach at Skagen* by Peter Severin Skøyer (1851-1900). The painting shows two women in light dresses walking arm-in-arm along a white sandy beach close to the sea. They are clearly in conversation. The painting, housed in Skagen Museum, is reproduced in Gunnarsson 197.
4. Sadi Carnot was a French president who was killed by an anarchist in 1894. The reference tells us how old Isabella de Creuith is. I do not know if Abell intended the reference to have a thematic connection to the play (Kjærulf 1970a, 147).
5. *Introduction to the Dance*. This is a popular Romantic concert piece by the German composer Anton von Weber (Kjærulf 1970a, 147). André means that Isabella's remark is a challenge to which Tordis does not respond.
6. Det, der før var glem, rykker pludselig nær. This sentence may be an echo of the last lines (31-32) of the "Zueignung" [Dedication] to Goethe's *Faust*:

Was ich besitze, seh ich wie im Weiten,  
Und was verschwand, wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

[What I possess, seems far away to me,  
And what is gone becomes reality.]  
(Goethe 66)

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