

Miro Gavran

**Nora in Our Time**  
(play)

(English transl. by Marie - Elise Zovko)

[www.mirogavran.com](http://www.mirogavran.com)

Email: [miro.gavran@zg.t-com.hr](mailto:miro.gavran@zg.t-com.hr)

*Nora in Our Time* was awarded the Marin Držić prize of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. It premiered on December 9, 2007 in the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin, Croatia with the following performers:

NORA.....Ines Bojanić  
TONY.....Kristijan Potočki  
CARL....Stojan Matavulj  
LYDIA.....Ljiljana Bogojević  
RANKO....Zvonko Zečević  
MAYA.....Beti Lučić  
JANA.....Gordana Slivka

Director: Georgij Paro  
Dramaturge: Mladen Martić  
Sets: Dinka Jeričević  
Costumes: Marija Žarak  
Music: Davor Rocco  
Assistant director: Gordana Slivka

### **Nora in Our Time**

*Characters from „the play“*

NORA, enterprising, upwardly mobile businesswomen .....	38
TONY, her husband.....	40
CARL, formerly wealthy and powerful, now ruined.....	50
LYDIA, Nora's friend.....	40
RANKO, psychiatrist.....	41
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JANA, housekeeper to Nora and Tony.....	60

*„Real – life“ characters*

ACTOR, who wants to be playwright  
ACTRESS, tired of acting

## FIRST ACT

### SCENE 1

*(living room)*

*(Nora, Jana, Tony, Lydia, Ranko)*

*(When the curtain rises we view a fashionable, contemporarily designed living area. All of the furnishings and all the objects in the room are new. One senses the desire of the owner to demonstrate his wealth. Nora enters dressed in a formal black dress. She is an attractive woman of around thirty-eight with a decisive look about her. Nora examines one of the tables. She runs her index finger across the surface of the table, then examines her finger closely. A look of annoyance passes over her face. She approaches another table and repeats the same procedure. Her dissatisfaction grows even more apparent. She takes a deep breath and begins to call in a loud voice.)*

Nora: Jana! Jaanaa!

*(Jana, the housekeeper, appears in the doorway.)*

Jana: Yes, ma'am?

Nora: The guests are due to arrive any minute and the tables are covered with dust!

Jana: But ma'am, I dusted them twice today.

*(Nora runs her finger across the surface of one of the tables, then holds it up for Jana to see.)*

Nora: Just look! Do you call that dusted?

Jana: How can that be? I don't understand...

Nora: No time for explanations. Take a dustcloth and dust them again!

*(Tony, Nora's husband, enters. He looks to be around forty years old. He is wearing a dress shirt and just putting on his jacket as he enters the room.)*

Tony: There, now I'm all set for company, for a celebration, for anything...

Nora: And your tie?

Tony: What tie?

*(Jana leaves the room.)*

Nora: Where's your tie?

Tony: What do I need a tie for?

Nora: You didn't think you could get up in front of all our guests on a day like today without a tie?

Tony: As a matter of fact, I did. You know how I hate wearing a tie. Why I should torture myself, when I feel better without a tie than with one?

Nora: *(in a conciliatory tone)* Tony, dear, today is a special day. All of our friends are coming and my most important business partners. At least today, you ought to be able to put aside your likes and dislikes. Don't you think I'd rather be wearing a sweatsuit and slippers, than this dress and shoes? I can't allow myself that liberty which you take for yourself simply because you are too lazy to make the effort or just to cause trouble. Please, put on a tie and behave as people expect you to.

Tony: I'm sorry, Nora, but I find it stupid to have to wear a tie in my own home. I'm the host and not a guest. What normal person wears a tie in his own home?

Nora: Please, dear, don't be ridiculous. Go put on a tie. All the men coming to our celebration this evening will be wearing a tie. How could you even consider going without?

*(Jana comes back into the room carrying a dustcloth, goes up to the nearest table and begins to dust it)*

Tony: Alright, alright. If it's that important to you, I'll go put on a stupid tie, even if it bothers the heck out of me to have to wear one.

*(Tony exits.)*

Nora: It drives me insane that I have to constantly to explain to everyone what each person has to do, who has to do what. As if I feel like doing everything I have to do. I never question what it is I have to do, because I don't have anyone to ask.

*(Jana goes over to another table and starts dusting.)*

Jana: Will the guests take their cocktail here or in the dining room, ma'am?

Nora: Here, here. Afterwards we'll move to the dining room. Did you put the drinks in the refrigerator?

Jana: Yes, ma'am.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

Nora: Someone's here already. And whoever it is is ten minutes early. Please go and open the door. And get that rag out of sight!

*(Jana exists. A moment later Lydia enters the room. She is around forty years old, modest in her appearance and her gestures. In her hand she carries a gift-wrapped package).*

Lydia: Good evening, Madam director!

Nora: Hello, darling! You gave me such a fright! I thought it was one of the other guests already.

Lydia: I came a little early, in case you need any help.

Nora: Everything is ready, but still, I'm glad you got here before the others.

*(Lydia presents her with the gift).*

Lydia: Here! Something for your new flat.

Nora: Thank you!

*(Nora unwraps the present and takes out a vase.)*

Nora: It's beautiful! Thank you very much!

Lydia: I'm glad you like it!

Nora: I think I'll need it tonight, when they begin to shower me with bouquets. I'm so excited!

Lydia: So you're going to hold a speech?

Nora: I'm sure everyone will expect me to.

Lydia: No doubt. It's the seventh anniversary of the founding of the agency, and what's more you've just moved into this luxurious new apartment. For your friends, that's even more important maybe than the anniversary of your business.

Nora: If it weren't for the agency, there wouldn't be this apartment either. It's the money from the agency we live on, and you know yourself how much my husband earns. What you earn your bread from deserves more respect than bread itself!

*(Tony comes into the room. He has put on a tie.)*

Tony: Good evening, Lydia!

Lydia: Good evening!

Tony: Is this alright?

Nora: But dear, why didn't you take a lighter-colored tie? A light-colored tie would go well with that suit.

Tony: *I think that this tie goes well with it. I want to be unobtrusive. It's your evening after all*

Nora: To be unobtrusive requires taste. Tonight is a celebration, not a funeral. When you put a dark tie on with that suit, you look like a pall-bearer – and we're not at a funeral.

Tony: I feel just fine like this.

Nora: And I feel awful when I look at you. Please dear, put on another tie.

Tony: Aw' com' on, leave me alone, will you? I didn't even want to put this one on. I only did it to please you.

Nora: Please, Tony, change the tie. Please. Don't make me look at you the whole evening the way you are now, please.

Tony: I really don't feel like it.

Nora: Please. Do it for me, since I'm asking you.

Tony: Is she like that toward you in the agency?

Lydia: Even worse. Only I don't put up any resistance. It's much simpler that way.

Tony: I guess it would be smarter for me to give in right away than to lose any more time trying to convince her.

Lydia: Absolutely! Everything has to be just as Nora says it should.

Nora: Just keep on criticizing me – as long as *I* let you. It's your democratic right, after all.

Lydia: Where's your daughter?

Tony: That's what I'd like to know.

Nora: She went to a movie with her boyfriend.

Lydia: Then she won't be at the celebration?

Nora: Unfortunately, no.

Tony: I think she's too young to have a boyfriend. She's still a child.

Nora: She's fifteen. Her boyfriend is just fine.

Tony: That's what I say: she's only fifteen.

Nora: She's a young woman. She looks like she's twenty.

Tony: Inside she's still a little girl.

Nora: A lot of people still behave like teenagers when they're forty. The boy is two years older than she is. He's responsible. A good student, like she is. They care about

each other. It's better she grows up as quickly as possible than that she spends all her time locked up in her room brooding over some teenage imaginings about the meaning of life.

Tony: I disagree.

Nora: The guests will be here any minute. Will you finally go and change that tie or am I going to have to...

Tony: I guess I have no choice.

*(Tony leaves the room.)*

Nora: Sometimes I think you single women have it ten times easier than we married women.

Lydia: And we always think it's easier for you than for us.

Nora: It's as though I have two children. It's harder for me to manage with him than with my own daughter.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

Nora: Jana, open the door for the guests!

Lydia: They're here!

Nora: And he still hasn't got a tie on.

*(Ranko enters the room. In one hand he is carrying a bouquet of flowers, in the other a bottle of wine.)*

Ranko: Good evening!

Nora: Good evening!

Ranko: I barely found a place to park. This city has really gotten to be... Excuse me, please. Here, this is for you.

*(He offers Nora the flowers.)*

Nora: Why, thank you. They're lovely.

Ranko: Hey, where's my buddy?

Nora: In his closet somewhere, looking for a tie.

Ranko: The wine is for him...but since he isn't here yet, I can give it to you.

*(He gives her the bottle of wine.)*

Nora: Allow me to introduce you. Lydia is my co-worker in the travel agency. My right *and* my left hand. And this is Dr. Ranko, a well-known psychiatrist and a friend of Tony's.

*(Ranko and Lydia shake hands.)*

Ranko: Pleased to meet you.

Lydia: Pleased to meet you.

Ranko: This apartment is truly amazing! It's enormous! And what a great location!...Really, it's fantastic!

Nora: Wait till you see the dining room!

Ranko: How big did you say it was?

Nora: 520 square feet.

Ranko: Unbelievable! What luxury! Hey, I saw your picture the other day in the newspapers with your statement about the Ministry of Tourism. You really gave it to them with that remark about them ignoring the smaller travel agencies and failing to recognize their importance for the tourism industry in this country.

Nora: Well, as president of the trade union I can't afford to beat around the bush. And the Ministry of Tourism really deserves it; they're always thinking only of themselves and their own advantage. Instead of supporting us and trying to make our lives easier, they spend their time making our lives from day to day more difficult with their stupid regulations.

*(Tony enters. He is wearing a new tie.)*

Tony: Hey, who's that I see?

Ranko: Hey, old man!

*(Tony and Ranko shake hands.)*

Tony: I'm glad you came.

Ranko: I haven't seen you in ages.... How are you?

Tony: Uh, I don't know... alright, I guess.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

Nora: Jana, open the door!

## SCENE 2

(A psychiatrist's office)

*(Tony, Ranko)*

*(Tony and Ranko stand facing each other in silence for what seems like a long time. The tension is rising.)*

Ranko: Was there something you wanted to say?

Tony: No, nothing.

*(Tony sits down. A long silence ensues.)*

Ranko: If there's something you want to say, I'll be glad to listen. I'm right here, old man.

Tony: It's nothing, really.

*(Silence.)*

Ranko: I'm glad you came.

*(Silence.)*

Ranko: Is something bothering you?

Tony: No, nothing.

*(Silence.)*

Ranko: Something must be bothering you. Why else would you be here?

Tony: I'm just here as a friend. I just wanted some friendly conversation.

*(Silence.)*

Ranko: Then why aren't you talking?

Tony: How do you mean?

Ranko: If you're here for some friendly conversation, then go ahead and say something!

*(Silence.)*

Tony: Relax, will you?

*(Silence)*

Ranko: Besides, you've come to see me in my practice, not at home. And you only come to see me in my office when you've got some kind of a problem.

*(Silence)*

Ranko: So, what's up?

Tony: There isn't any problem.

Ranko: Yes, there is.

Tony: No there's not.

Ranko: I'm certain there's some problem.

Tony: When I say there isn't any, there isn't!

Ranko: Out with it, Tony!

*(Silence)*

Tony: I'm not well.

Ranko: I'm listening.

Tony: I'm sick of everything.

Ranko: Explain.

Tony: You know I don't like to talk about things. I hate to explain things. Sometimes, we say things we don't mean to. And then we try to talk about it, the words just get mixed up with whatever it is we're trying to explain and everything just gets worse than it was before. Do you know what I mean?

Ranko: I can't really say I agree...

Tony: When people try to confide in each other, when they go on pilgrimages to psychiatrists – there is something detestable, something disgusting about it... Don't take it personally. I know it's your profession. How else would you make a living? But that's the way I see it.... I would never be able to go see someone I didn't know, pay him for an hour or two of his time and then tell him the story of my life. Now do you get my point?

Ranko: I understand.

Tony: It makes me sick when people want to confide in someone. People who want to reveal their most intimate secrets to another person make me sick. My private life concerns me alone. No psychiatrist has a right to know about it. Don't you agree?

Ranko: I know what you mean...for the most part.

Tony: I'm glad I have you as a friend. To me a friend is the only person to whom I can speak openly about myself. In fact, you're the only friend I have. Really, the only one... You know, when all those things happened – everyone fled from me like the plague. Sometimes, at the beginning, some of the people I thought were my friends would call Nora and ask how I was. Later, they didn't even bother to do that. I'm not complaining, not even about the fact that those things had to happen. The world we live in, this age of hypocrisy, this city full of empty, dissimulating people... I would never have seen any of that in its true light if I hadn't gone through what I went through. If all those things hadn't happened, I would still be a part of that senseless rat race, I'd still believe that it all made sense and that their sickening contest served some higher purpose. Only now am I able to see how senseless and unnecessary it all is. People don't have any idea what life is really about, what true happiness is.... Everything has always gone against me.

Ranko: You can't exactly say that. You were by far the best economy student in your class, in your whole generation. After you graduated, you landed an excellent position. And don't forget you were made head of commercial affairs after just a few years. Every month you travelled to other countries on business. For all of us you were the image of success and happiness. You can't claim that everything always went against you.

Tony: Yes, but at the acme of that miserable, apparently successful life, my factory was ruined overnight. I fought to rescue the company, to rescue the workers who were left without pay. I didn't want to send those people out onto the street. It took me a while to realize that the head manager was conspiring with the mayor to intentionally destroy the company, so that the value of the factory would fall and so that they could sell it to foreign investors they had chosen ahead of time, with the single intention that they make money off the sale of the lucrative factory property.

Ranko: They already knew a posh five-star hotel was going to be built there.

Tony: They rigged the confrontation between me and the trade union, blamed me for the business' failure and had me demoted to the position of porter. I, who was third from the top of my company, became an ordinary doorman in a factory doomed to bankruptcy and ruin. I had to take the position, since our daughter had just started elementary school and Nora lost her job in the bank. Everything was collapsing all around me. And I just lost it... I thought that Nora and our daughter would have it easier in life without me than with me in the state I was in...

Ranko: You should have thought of the fact that they loved you and tried...

Tony: I just wanted everything to stop, wanted to run away from everything, so that I would never have to see those bastards who ruined me, who intentionally buried me again... It was horrible in the hospital. Two whole excruciatingly long months, surrounded by people who were even worse off than I was... Luckily, Nora thought of calling you and.... You helped me to put things back in their proper place. Thanks to you I regained the strength and the will to start again. Without you, I don't know what would have become of me.

Ranko: You give me too much credit. We psychiatrists can only help those who want to be helped and who are able to help themselves.

Tony: Do you remember when I told you I had always wanted to go to the academy of art but had never had the nerve to tell my father because he was so strict, how you brought me a palette, paints and canvas and encouraged me to start painting? After thirteen years I suddenly found myself holding a paintbrush, I returned to the days of my youth, to a world full of color. I really believe it was the smell of paint that put me back on my feet. You really were a smart doctor then.

Ranko: I suspected that only the things you once loved and that once made you happy could cure you. The things you once dreamed about, before you started studying economics, before all your successes and failures as a businessman.

Tony: You did much more for me than you could have ever imagined at the time. You helped me to realize how important the world of art still is to me and how much the world of so-called successful businessmen and –women disgusts me. It's true, I recognized, too, that I was a coward, a man who didn't even have the courage to believe in his own dreams and to attempt to realize them. All through high school I was obsessed with art, with painting. My older brother, who's been living in Paris since he finished his studies, has been inviting me for ages to come and spend a month or two in that city, a city where a person who loves art and painting has something to see. But me? I never managed to find the opportunity to take him up on it. I always found some excuse, some reason why I couldn't go that year. I was a coward conscious of his own cowardice- a person not daring enough for the world of art. And now matter how much I loved painting back then, my fear that someone looking at my paintings might find fault with them was greater. I was afraid of negative criticism and being made fun of... Art is not for cowards and I am a coward.

Ranko: You can't talk that way about yourself. Besides, you're exposed to criticism and judgement now, too.

Tony: It's not the same. Now, the number of people I communicate with on a daily basis is limited, and most of them don't even know what my name is. Besides, I don't show them my own pictures. I only choose pictures for them and frame other people's pictures. That's hardly the work of an original artist. I've really hit rock bottom, and the funny thing about it is, that it doesn't even bother me any more, because the empty world of those pitiful creatures at the top, who kill each other as they compete for a profit, disgusts me even more.

Ranko: It's too bad you never went to Paris.

Tony: Yeah. Too bad.

Ranko: But you could go now. Without any pressure, without being burdened by anything.

Tony: I can't say to my wife: "I'm going to Paris." She has the stupid idea that she's slaving away for my sake and for the sake of our daughter. I can't just pick up and walk out... That would be like abandoning my own family. And I could never abandon my

family. That city is too enticing and I... Besides, I still feel the same kind of pressure I used to feel... I don't know who to explain it.

*(Tony sits down on a chair. For a moment he says nothing.)*

Ranko: Go ahead, I'm listening.

Tony: I think Nora is overdoing it.

Ranko: In what sense?

Tony: That huge apartment – we don't even need it. We haven't even paid off the place on the coast, or the Audi she bought on the company account... She doesn't see that it just doesn't make any sense...besides – I know it bothers her that I don't agree with her or support her decisions, that all her insatiable business ambitions just get on my nerves. Money can't buy happiness and neither can a successful business... Don't you agree?

Ranko: Well, I don't know – If there's one thing I've learned as a psychiatrist it's that there aren't two human beings in this world who would agree on what constitutes happiness and how a person should live.

Tony: She's always at work. She never stands still. I took care of our daughter all these years, read her bedtime stories when she was small, measured her temperature when she was sick, took her to the doctor, helped her with her homework and took her to the theatre and to movies. And now, all at once, overnight, since this boyfriend of hers appeared, I get on her nerves. I'm superfluous again. Do you think I'm exaggerating?

Ranko: A little. Your daughter looks like a young woman and it's logical that she can't have the same relationship with you that she had when she was a little girl. You have to build a new, different relationship.

Tony: Yes, I know, I know. But how? When I never have the opportunity... and when my wife doesn't understand me. She's even ashamed that I work in a framing shop. I sense that she looks upon it as my little form of betrayal.

Ranko: She's never said anything like that to me.

Tony: Nor to me, but you can feel it in the air. The most important things are those that are left unsaid. And there's a lot of that between us.

Ranko: Then there's something else you want to say to me? Something important?

Tony: There is, but... I've already told you too much. In fact, on the way over here I really didn't intend to say anything concrete. I only wanted to talk a little. But there you have it – one thing led to another. Nora and I live in two completely different worlds. We experience life differently. I don't know how to start a serious conversation with her. I think that even if she wanted to, she wouldn't be able to hear what I'm saying to her. She just keeps sinking further and further into that senseless world which I left behind me forever.

Ranko: Take it easy. Everything will be alright.

### SCENE 3

#### (Living room)

*(Jana and Tony are alone in the living room.)*

Tony: But I should have left already.

Jana: She told me to tell you not to leave for work before she gets back.

Tony: I've got a pile of work waiting for me. We're getting on to Christmas and it's already insane – everyone wants to frame a picture at the last minute. Noone can wait.

Jana: She said under no circumstances should you leave before her return. I had the feeling that it was something very important. Wait just another ten minutes.

Tony: She can call me in the workshop when she comes and we'll talk on the phone.

Jana: I think it has to do with a matter which she would rather discuss with you in person and not on the phone. She was very excited. Something very important must have happened.

Tony: I hope it's nothing bad.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

Jana: You'll soon find out. That must be her. I'll let her in and then I have to leave. I'll be back tomorrow at nine. Goodbye.

Tony: Goodbye.

*(Jana leaves. Soon thereafter Nora enters.)*

Nora: Thank God you're home.

Tony: I'm already late. I have to leave at once.

Nora: Postpone going to work today.

Tony: I can't. It's impossible. We have a mountain of pictures to frame.

Nora: Today you're not going anywhere. I have important news. The most important news of our...of my life! I have to tell you. We have to talk.

Tony: What are you talking about?

Nora: This morning, when I arrived at the travel agency, the telephone rang. It was the head of cabinet of the minister of tourism. She said the minister wanted to talk to me right

away, today, in private. She asked if I could come to the ministry. When I said yes she told me to come at eleven o'clock. I thought it had something to do with recent demands of the Syndicate of Touristic Workers, which I sent to the minister last week. I had heard that he wasn't too pleased about the demands and I was expecting a rather unpleasant meeting with him, but something wonderful happened, something I never dreamed of.

Tony: Keep going! What happened?

Nora: You know I've only spoken to the minister a few times in my life, and that always from the point of view of the opposition, always as a representative of the trade union. He admitted, too, that I was always getting on his nerves because of my strong opinions. But when he heard my presentation at the tourism fair in Frankfurt, when I spoke from the point of view of a small travel agency, he saw that I was the sort of person who could really understand the nature of tourism today. He recognized in me a capable woman with her own point of view, her own vision. He said that at that moment he realized that he needed a person of my qualities - so he offered me the position of deputy minister.

Tony: Deputy minister?!

Nora: Exactly. He offered me the position of Deputy Minister for Tourism. The present deputy got himself involved in an affair concerning the illegal sale of hotels to foreigners, so that the Premier yesterday decided to relieve him of his duties. That's why the minister was given the task of proposing someone new to take his place. He thought of me. If I agree, I'll begin working after the New Year. I think you'll agree that this is the chance of a lifetime and that you'll support me. If you're in agreement, then at tomorrow's cabinet meeting, when they announce the demission of the present Deputy Minister, they'll announce that I am to take his place as the new Deputy Minister as well.

Tony: You can't accept!

Nora: Why?!

Tony: Because you're the president of the Union of Tourism Workers, and because you are a sharp critic of the Ministry. If you agree to be Deputy Minister everyone will say that you have betrayed your friends in the trade union.

Nora: Excuse me, but this is an opportunity not to be missed. I have to think of us and of our family. This position will allow me to accomplish much more in that respect.

Tony: We already have enough, even too much.

Nora: We don't have anything, nothing at all. We have a travel agency that is drowning in debt. We have an apartment with a mortgage and a loan we'll need fifteen more years to pay off, and a flat on the coast in the same situation, and we have a car whose lease lasts another four years. To top it off the bookings for the ski season all well below anything we expected. The bigger agencies have joined forces and cut their prices. We

smaller agencies can't compete anymore, don't you understand? What I was offered today was a gift from heaven, a sliver of hope. I can't possibly turn it down.

Tony: You have to turn it down for two reasons: first of all, as president of the trade union you can't join the ministry; and second of all, because if you start working in the ministry, you'll have even less time for your family, for me. The last few years you've done nothing but work. You're never home, day or night. I talk to the housekeeper more than I talk to you.

Nora: That was the only way I could achieve all this.

Tony: We didn't need this enormous apartment, nor such a big weekend house, which is almost always empty anyhow, nor any of those things you chanced upon running around like a chicken with its head off.

Nora: Sooo! That's what you think! It's easy now to be circumspect! Eight years ago, when you and I found ourselves on the street without a job, and afterwards, when you landed in the hospital, *that* was another story. *I* had to go work in a hotel on the coast – as the miserablest of chamber maids! Don't forget *that*. That's when I hit rock bottom. I don't ever want to clean rooms for strangers again! I want someone else to clean *my* room. *I* don't want to shut myself up in a workshop like you and entertain myself by framing other people's pictures....You, of course, can allow yourself the liberty of dabbling around in that sort of underpaid eccentric hobby, because you know *I'll* be out there earning real money.

Tony: But we don't need any of those things!

Nora: Maybe *you* don't, but *we* do, *I* do and your daughter does. Otherwise how would we ever pay for the best private high school in the city, in the country at that? How would we manage to pay for her college education, here or outside the country at some elite college or university she dreams of going to? It's all or nothing now. Our country has entered on the path to a capitalist economy. Now there are only the capitalists and the proletariat, there isn't any middle way, and I don't want to be a member of the proletariat. That's why I can't and why I don't want to reject the minister's offer.

Tony: You have to reject it because of us. In the past year you haven't spent longer than an hour or two at a stretch with our daughter or with me.

*(Both are silent for a moment.)*

Nora: I already accepted the offer.

Tony: You did what?!

Nora: I said, I already told the minister I accept.

Tony: And you didn't even wait to talk it over with me?!

Nora: I was certain you would agree with the idea. I thought you would be happy for me!

Tony: You only think of yourself.

Nora: *I only think of myself?! I only think of myself?! How dare you say something like that after everything I've done for you, for us?! Remember how you were after that... You reduced me to working as a hotel maid for a bunch of repulsive, arrogant, crude and uncultivated tourists. I didn't pull myself out of that mud in order to slide back into it again. Now you're trying to talk me into rejecting a position in the Ministry. Ten years ago, when you were at the pinnacle of your career, if someone had offered you a position as deputy minister, you would have grabbed it with both hands, without a second thought. Isn't that right?*

Tony: Yes, it's true. I admit. Once I looked at my life and at my career differently. But after the crisis I passed through, I came to my senses. Since then system of values has become different from yours and that's why in the last few years we've been having a harder and harder time agreeing about anything. That's why we disagree on even the most banal things.

Nora: Your subjective system of values and my subjective system of values, my dear, don't interest anyone in the least. The are very objective rules to the game in this brutal country we live in, where there is ever more poverty and where only the fittest and most successful who master those merciless rules can succeed and achieve something for themselves.

Tony: Once again, you either can't or you don't want to hear what I'm saying.

Nora: Just like *you* either can't or don't want to hear what *I'm* saying. Only *I* haven't run away from life. *I'm* not afraid of joining the race only the best and the most capable can win.

Tony: You know that it isn't always the most capable or the best who win. And the most honest almost never win... You want to do so much for me and I know that eight years ago I got you into a pretty bad situation, but... I wouldn't want you to be subjected to the kind of pressure I was subjected to. I wouldn't want them to break you the way they broke me. Nothing is worth that.

Nora: Don't worry. I'm a strong woman. Nothing and noone can break me.

Tony: That's a sort of naivete most people suffer from at one time or another. A lot of peopler are convinced of their own invulnerability just before a catastrophe strikes.

## **FIRST INTERLUDE**

*The lighting changes, dimming to darkness upstage and leaving downstage meagerly lit. An Actor steps onto the proscenium – the same actor who plays Tony. A moment later an Actress enters from the other side of the proscenium. It is the same person who plays Nora. Each of them speaks directly to the audience, as though the other one doesn't exist.*

Actor: I'd like to request your attention for a moment, because I'd like to say a few words about myself. About myself as a man of flesh and blood. I am employed as an Actor in

Gavella Theatre in Zagreb. Unfortunately, my wife is also an actress and is employed in the same establishment.

Actress: I work as an actress in Gavella Theatre. My husband is also an actor. We're quite fortunate to work at the same theatre, since that means when we're in the same production we can leave for work together and then return home again together when work is over.

Actor: The worst part of it is that it often happens that we appear in the same production; then we end up leaving for work together and returning home together when work is done. That's not very idyllic

Actress: It's very practical, it brings us closer together.

Actor: It drives us crazy and makes us sick of each other. Last season was such a strain that I could hardly wait to go on vacation. The year before last we bought a little flat down at the coast and we made a resolution never to take part in the Dubrovnik Summer Festival or the Split Summer Festival. We made a firm resolve to take the holidays to relax and recover from Zagreb and theatre life.

Actress. Ever since we bought a flat at the coast, my husband is not the same. He's started acting like a typical middle-aged male, who's traded in his former ambitions for trivial pleasures, getting "back to nature", and just plain lazing around.

Actor: Before we left for the seacoast, my wife received an offer to play the lead role in some stupid series in twenty half-hour episodes called *Love is Eternal!* When we read through the mumbo-jumbo script of that home-baked crap of a soap opera, I was sure she would be intelligent enough to turn it down. But lust for fame and popularity outweighed reason. She accepted the role! Even though she knew she'd have to give up her vacation in order to spend the whole summer in our illustrious capital day in day out at over 35 degrees Celsius taping that garbage from morning to night.

Actress: The script was... O.K. My husband tried to talk me into rejecting the offer. I was furious. Everyone knows only a third as many roles are written for women as for men. I couldn't allow myself the luxury of turning down a famous director who respects me. And I don't think any of my female colleagues approaching forty would turn down a role in a series in twenty episodes!

Actor: I was furious at her for that little piece of treason.

Actress: He ranted and raged because we wouldn't be spending the summer together, and I was angry that he didn't offer me any support. I expected him to stay in town for at least the first few days of filming. But, noo! He just packed up and went to the seacoast – and left me alone to fend for myself.

Actor: I thought it was stupid I had to spend the whole summer on the coast by myself. So I didn't even bother calling her the first few days.

Actress: We didn't even kiss goodbye. I was right to be angry with him. That's why I didn't even try to call him the first few days.

Actor: In the little fishing village where we have our flat, where you can't even buy a newspaper, I was finally able to rest up and after a few days I started to feel bored. I started to wish for company and conversation. I started reading books and ran across Ibsen's *Nora*. I read it again for the first time in years and started writing a play on the same theme. I wrote about a relationship between a man and woman in today's society. The idea came to me in a flash and I immediately threw myself into writing. It took me the whole summer to finish it. Two days before I came back from the coast, I sent the script to my wife. I thought she would read it the same evening and call me before she went to bed to tell me her impressions. To be honest, I expected her to praise it, and to say she wanted to play the lead role. But no! She didn't even call me. Not then, and not later, while I was driving back. I was the first to call her, on my cell phone from the car to tell her I was coming home.

Actress: The last day of filming was so exhausting that I collapsed into bed as soon as I came home and slept for twelve hours straight. Right up to the moment when he called me on his cell phone to tell me he was almost home.

#### Scene 4

(office of a travel agency)

(Lydia, Nora, Maya)

(Lydia is holding a telephone in her hand and talking)

Lydia: O.K. I'll tell her...She'll be pleased to hear you send your personal congratulations... Thank you very much. Goodbye.

(As soon as Lydia hangs up the phone, Nora enters.)

Nora: Hi!

Lydia: Hi! It's a madhouse around here! The entire morning the phone has been ringing off the hook! There's no end to the line of well-wishers! As if there weren't a person in the country who wasn't watching television last night when they announced it on the news. Here's a list of all the people who send their congratulations.

(Lydia gives Nora a piece of paper with a list of names on it. Nora studies it carefully.)

Nora: Uh huh! Some of the people on this list have been owed me money for months. I hope they'll at least pay up now!.

Lydia: I think you don't need to worry about that!

Nora: I'm so excited! My life has changed from the bottom up. I just spoke to the minister a little while ago. He's going to let me work out a new strategy for the development of tourism in Croatia. I'm going to come up with something the whole country will talk about. Something fantastic. Yesterday, a half an hour after the news were over, a

reporter from the magazine *Modern Woman* called me. She asked for an interview with me, she's going to be here any minute.

Lydia: Ah haah! I guess that means you'll be in all the beauty salons.

Nora: What do you mean by that – I'll be in all the beauty salons?!

Lydia: All beauty salons have *Modern Woman*.

Nora: Ahh sooo. Now I get it. Anyway, about an hour ago I got a call from *Working Woman*, and they want an interview, too.

Lydia: You've become a overnight celebrity! The young successful Ms. Deputy Minister!

*(The telephone rings. Lydia picks up the receiver.)*

Lydia: Hello?... Yes? May I help you... No, she's not in right now.... Yes. I'll tell her... She'll be very pleased... Yes, of course. Thank you very much. Goodbye.

*(Lydia puts down the receiver.)*

Nora: Who was that?

Lydia: That dreadful manager from the Park Hotel.

Nora: You could have let me speak to him for a moment.

Lydia: I'm sorry. I thought it was getting on your nerves.

Nora: It's a shame this is all happening now, just before Christmas and New Year's. In the heart of the winter season. I can't really even enjoy it. Lydia, I'm going to need your help.

Lydia: You can count on me. Just as you've always been able to, by the way. I'll work around the clock if need be – I've got nothing else to think about anyway.

Nora: The agency can't stay in my name. I can't be registered as the owner of it.

Lydia: Why not?

Nora: It would be a conflict of interest. Before the start of the new year I'll have to have the ownership of the company transferred to Tony.

Lydia: Well, that shouldn't be too difficult.

Nora: On paper, no, only... Tony doesn't like the idea... He isn't happy I've accepted the minister's offer. I still haven't told him I have to transfer ownership of the company to his name. I know that he has no interest whatsoever in this business. Because of his emotional state he shouldn't be under any sort of stress, otherwise he could end up in the same situation he was in before. The travel agency will only formally be in his

name. I want you to run the business. I need to find a young and capable assistant. If you know of anyone you can recommend, let me know please.

Lydia: Alright. I'll see if I can come up with someone.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

Lydia: Come in!

*(A woman reporter enters)*

Maya: Hello!

Nora: Hello!

Maya: I'm here from *Modern Woman*.

Nora: I've been expecting you. Please come in.

*(They shake hands.)*

Maya: My name is Maya.

Nora: Nice to meet you. This is my coworker Lydia. We've been in business together since this agency was founded.

Maya: Nice to meet you.

Lydia: Would you care for some coffee? Tea? Juice?

Maya: No thank you. I'm fine. I already had two cups of coffee at the office. The deadline for the next edition is today, which is why I don't have very much time. We'd better start the interview right away. In a half-hour the photographer will be here to take your picture.

*(Maya takes a tape recorder out of her purse.)*

Maya: Can we hold the interview here?

Nora: There isn't anywhere else. This is all the space we have, not counting the kitchenette. Lydia won't bother us. If need be, we can disconnect the phone.

Maya: If it's alright with you. And if you could please turn off your cell phones so that we can talk without being interrupted...

Nora: Of course, no problem.

*(Nora and Lydia turn off their phones.)*

Maya: I suggest we talk about everything. First, I'll ask you where you buy your clothes, what restaurants you go to, whether you have any hobbies. Then I'll ask you to say something about politics and the tourist industry. It would be best if we could speak to each other like a couple of friends having coffee together. Afterwards, I'll make a selection of the most interesting parts from the tape.

Nora: O.K.

Maya: Can we start?

Nora: You mean, right now?

Maya: Yes, well... I'd like to start right away, if you don't mind. Are you ready?

Nora: Yes. I'm ready.

*(Maya turns on the tape recorder.)*

Maya: To start with, can you tell us, please: how did you feel when you found out you'd been named Deputy Minister for Tourism?

Nora: To be honest, at first, I was overcome by conflicting feelings. It's a big responsibility. I'm extremely conscious of that fact. I know what the tourist industry means to our country. On the other hand, it's a unique opportunity to do a lot of good for the development of tourism here.

Maya: As president of the Union of Tourism Workers you were the present minister's most vocal critic. Has he bought the voice of his sharpest critic and opponent with this nomination? And how do you aim to cooperate with him in the future?

Nora: It was the minister who personally proposed that I should become Deputy Minister, because he considers me to be an exceptionally capable individual. Besides, regardless of whether we are employed ourselves in the tourist industry, whether we work for the union or in the Ministry of Tourism – our goal is always the same: to promote and improve our services and the quality of our services in the area of tourism.

Maya: I've heard that you worked as a hotel maid until eight years ago. And now, after New Year's you'll be Deputy Minister. Isn't that a bit of a shock? Isn't it a little risky for the Minister of Tourism, to put someone in a position like that who has no experience working in the ministry?

Nora: This dynamic age demands fresh, young faces, dynamic individuals with new ideas. Don't forget that Russian president Putin once worked as a chauffeur, later became vice mayor of St. Petersburg and is now the successful president of the great superpower Russia. I'm convinced the confidence that has been placed in me won't be disappointed.

## **SECOND INTERLUDE**

*(The lighting alters again to illuminate only the area downstage. The Actor and Actress take up the same positions as in the First Interlude.)*

Actress: The last day of filming was so exhausting that I collapsed into bed as soon as I came home and slept for twelve hours straight. Right up to the moment when he called me on his cell phone to tell me he was almost home.

Actor: Right when I got home, about four hours ago, I jumped in the shower, and then I threw myself into bed with my darling wife. She welcomed me with open arms, like Penelope did Odysseus after twenty years of abstinence. We made love better than we ever have before. Our passion exploded like a display of fireworks! We *had* planned to spend the summer together, by the way, in order to get pregnant! Eight years ago, namely, when we finally realised it was getting on time to start a family, she premiered in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, and we put it off... After that, I got cast in that big TV series. The following year, we were both invited to take part in the Dubrovnik Summer Festival... In short, whenever we decided it was time to have a baby, the Devil himself it seemed would offer us a little tidbit of fame for our careers we couldn't and didn't want to refuse. And now that my darling spouse has reached the age of thirty-eight, I was convinced that this summer would be devoted to starting a family. But history repeats itself, and she unfortunately accepted the role in that stupid TV series.

Actress: I was glad to see him after such a long time. I only hoped he wouldn't forget what it's like to have to be on the set continuously for forty days and that we could ease into conviviality with a little conversation. But no! He'd hardly gotten out of the shower when he threw me on the bed and jumped on top of me. I had no choice but to demonstrate pleasure and satisfaction. Acoustically and otherwise.

Actor: She and I had a great time of it.

Actress: He had a great time of it.

Actor: Anyway, to make a long story short, she didn't even mention my play, not while we were having sex and not afterwards either; and that started to get under my skin.

Actress: The worst thing of all was that I could feel in the air how he was just waiting for me to say something about his play. He'd only been home for a few hours and already he could barely refrain from asking me for my opinion.

Actor: I couldn't believe it! Even hours after my arrival she hadn't once mentioned my play! When it meant so much to me! It was really unpleasant that I had to be the first to bring it up.

*(Suddenly, the Actor turns to the Actress, and from this moment on they continue in a dialogue with each other.)*

Actor: Darling, I'll take you to dinner downtown.

Actress: Where? What restaurant?

Actor: I haven't made up my mind yet. Let's go downtown first and walk around a little. I've really been wishing for a little civilisation, people, acquaintances.

Actress: Before you left for the seacoast you said you could stay in that little fishing village till Christmas.

Actor: That's how I felt then. I had had enough of everything. Three leading roles last season, all those theatre festivals and being on the road all the time. Now that I'm rested up I already miss the city; I miss all the people and the excitement.

Actress: And I'm fed up with it. I slept until noon today. I'm suffering from chronic fatigue at this point.

Actor: A little earlier you didn't give that impression. You were so full of energy, so dynamic.

*(He embraces her tenderly).*

Actress: That's because I missed you so much. So much...I wish I had a month just to lie around and that I didn't have to start with rehearsals right away next week at the theatre. It's awful! A half an hour before you arrived I spoke with our managing director and asked him when rehearsals begin for the Shakespeare production. He said there had been a slight change of plans and that we probably wouldn't be putting on Shakespeare, but some other play, and that we two would be divvying up the main roles. When I asked him which play it was, he said that he was keeping it a secret for now, and that it would have to stay a secret for a little while still.

Actor: That's great!

Actress: Why is it great?!

Actor: It's great that we both have a role right at the start of the season. It's best we start the season with a role in the first premiere.

Actress: If you had just finished forty days of taping you wouldn't feel that way.

*(Silence)*

Actor: Did you read my play?

*(Silence)*

Actress: Yes, I did.

Actor: What do you think?

Actress: I think that my opinion is irrelevant. After all, I'm your wife and therefore my opinion is subjective.

Actor: Regardless. Your opinion is important to me.

Actress: It's pretty good on the whole, though I have a few minor objections...but...considering that you're an actor, a successful actor, isn't writing just a waste of time for you?

Actor: What are you trying to say?

Actress: To date you have written seven plays, and not one of them has been produced.

Actor: Two of them were published in magazines.

Actress: But not one director, not one theatre director has wanted to produce any of them.

Actor: One day, when my first play is produced, they'll want to put on all the rest as well. But that doesn't matter right now. I asked you what *you* think of my *new* play. Don't you think it is better and more mature than the ones I have written up till now?

Actress: It's good. Although I think you get a little carried away.

Actor: How do you mean?

Actress: You distance yourself too much from Ibsen. You turn all his ideas upside down. Your play is much too radical, and I'm not sure it will go over well with the critics and your audiences.

Actor: Why not?

Actress: I don't like the way you show Nora. It's as though it were written by some misogynist!

Actor: You're afraid of what your friends from the Women's Autonomous Initiative will think. You haven't maybe fallen under their radical influence? You haven't become a member, have you?

Actress: You know I read women's poetry at their meetings and nothing more. I'm not talking about them. I think other people might object to you showing Nora in that light. Even men.

Actor: I'm sorry, but the kind of woman my heroine is really exist. They're all around us. Besides, I'm not interested what anyone says or thinks about my play. I'm only interested in what you think about it. Of all the people on this earth, your opinion means the most to me. Your opinion is the most important to me. That's why I'm asking you, please, tell me honestly what you think of my play.

*(Silence)*

Actress: Do you really want my honest opinion?

Actor: Absolutely.

Actress: I like it...even though there are a few minor points I object to.

Actor: Would you act in it if you had the chance?

Actress: Which role?

Actor: The lead role. Nora.

(Silence)

Actress: Well...of course I would, but I don't believe anyone will want to produce it as a season performance. Obviously, the play is too radical. And Croatia's theatres today prefer to put on lukewarm performances of incomprehensible imbecility. In contemporary Croatian theatre only boring classics or adolescent experimental garbage that gets its kicks from wallowing in the lower instincts are welcome – and the audience doesn't really like either.

Actor: Then you accept?

Actress: Accept what?

Actor: The lead role in my play.

Actress: Of course – if anyone ever decides to put it on the program. But don't forget what happened to your last seven plays. How is it you don't recall their fate? Haven't you grasped that your "labour of love" is in vain? You're just wasting your time.

Actor: Rehearsals start next week.

Actress: What rehearsals?

Actor: I e-mailed the script of *Nora* to our manager at the theatre. He read it and he liked it. He liked it so much that he decided to take Shakespeare off the season program and put my play on it instead. The city Agency for Culture was putting pressure on him to reduce costs for the season and since Shakespeare had twenty roles and mine only seven, my script was a godsend. There'll be thirteen less costumes to have made.

Actress: Wait a minute! Are you telling me that he really wants to put on your play?!

Actor: Yes, he does. But only on condition that you play Nora and I her husband.

Actress: That's the condition?

Actor: Yes, that's the condition.

Actress: But everyone will think that it's our life's story, and you and I don't have any similarity to those characters.

Actor: Only people with no culture identify actors and actresses with the characters they play. Our friends will know that it's not us, and we just won't pay any attention to anyone else. So you accept?

Actress: Hold on a second! I didn't say that. I need to think things over still.

Actor: But five minutes ago when I asked if you would accept a role in my play you said 'yes'.

Actress: That was a hypothetical question.

Actor: I thought you were saying what you really think. I thought you would keep your word.

Actress: Let me think it over.

Actor: Listen: Tomorrow I have to tell our manager your decision. If you don't accept, then there will be no production of my play. That's the agreement. The one condition under which my play can be produced is if you and I play the leading parts. You're not going to take away my one chance that after all, at the age of forty, I make my debut as a playwright? My own wife wouldn't stand in my way when I'm being presented with this unique opportunity, would she?

*(Silence)*

Actress: And who's going to be the director?

Actor: I'm going to direct it myself. My script means too much to me to allow some other director to ruin it.

Actress: Typical phobia for a beginner playwright.

Actor: So are you with me or are you going to leave me in the lurch?

Actress: That isn't fair! You can't put it that way!

## **SCENE FIVE**

**(Office of the travel agency)**

*(Lydia, Nora, Carl)*

*(In the office are Lydia and Nora. They putting some papers in order.)*

Nora: I'm sorry, but it really isn't good. You can't go on like this your whole life.

Lydia: Why not?

Nora: You've been a widow for ten years now. You don't have any children, you have no other obligations, and you behave as though you were a nun.

Lydia: And what am I supposed to do about it?

Nora: You can't go through life alone. You can't stay single forever.

Lydia: I don't have the strength for a new beginning. I shudder to think of starting all over again with someone new. Getting to know someone new, getting used to having someone in my life again, and everything else that goes along with it.... I think I wouldn't be capable of doing all that all over again.

*(The telephone rings. Lydia picks up the receiver.)*

Lydia: Travel agency...Speaking... Yes... From the hotel to the ski slopes it's only a seven- or eight-minute walk... The weather forecast is good. They're expecting snow and low enough temperatures. It shouldn't melt... and if by chance there isn't enough snow for a day or two, there are plenty of things to do, in the hotel itself: there are two swimming pools, an ice-skating rink, a fitness studio, a playroom for small children... a night there are three bars to choose from, a bowling alley and a casino... The price of the lifts isn't included... It'd be good if you could let us know as soon as possible. Don't forget, Christmas is only ten days away... Alright. Goodbye.

*(Lydia puts down the receiver.)*

Lydia: The worst thing is when I notice that a man wants to dominate me... I immediately lose any desire to have a relationship with him. It's better to be alone than in a relationship where someone oppresses you. When I remember... I loved my husband, but he had to have his say in everything. I was always forced into a corner, left with no room to maneuver. Men who have a need to dominate repel me. I'm not a masochist. Do you know what I mean?

Nora: I do. But don't forget that everyone in this world has a need to dominate, regardless of sex and ability. That's not the main problem. Every creature in this world needs a partner. Loneliness never brought anyone any good, only dismal thoughts and depression. You need a husband, too, and a family. Everything is transitory and irrelevant except for family. My family is the most important thing of all to me. It's the oasis I return to from all the struggle and stress of daily life. My mother died when I was just a girl. From that time on I was almost obsessed with dreams of having a family of my own. When I finally had a family of my own, I invested all my strength and effort in protecting and preserving it, in ensuring our future and our security. A woman really needs a partner in order to be complete. Besides, society values us women more if we're not single...

Lydia: But I'm satisfied with my life. I do as I please. And I have my friends.

Nora: It won't do. In our country, in this society, they accept you only if you're man and wife and only if you are more or less integrated into some sort of family.

*(The doorbell rings)*

Lydia: Come in!

*(Carl enters the room. At the sight of him, both women jump up and stare at him as if they were seeing a ghost.)*

Nora: Carl!? What are you doing here?!

Carl: Hello!

*(Carl looks around him.)*

Carl: Everything is just the same as it was four years ago.

Lydia: Aren't you still...?

Carl: The President of the Republic signed twelve pardons on the occasion of the Christmas season. As you can see, I was one of them. I thought you would be happy to see me.

Nora: I...you see...I am happy. I'm glad to see you. I'm glad they released you. When did you get to town?

Carl: Two days ago.

Nora: How are you?

Carl: I feel a little strange, confused. I thought that when I got out I'd jump for joy, but somehow I feel empty, sad. I don't know where I go from here. I called a few friends, but not one of them had time to get together with me. They all said they were busy, but in fact they just don't want anyone to see them with me... I don't blame them... When the trial was taking place, there were pictures of me in all the papers and so, of course, I'm undesirable company. How's business?

Lydia: Good.

Nora: Mediocre. Bad.

Lydia: But things are going alright?

Nora: Well, now... People complain that they don't have enough money to go skiing, to travel to other countries. You can feel we're in an economic crisis. Business is worse than last season.

Carl: So it is. "Travel is for the rich. prison is for the naive." And so – I myself turned out to be naive and stupid. The politicians managed to get themselves off the hook. Only I ended up behind bars, because the business was in my name. They handed me more than I deserved. Overnight I went from being a successful manager to being a financial criminal. I realised too late that they had the media and the courts under their thumbs... I payed for their crimes, for a lot of people's crimes. Even those journalists who had themselves committed greater and more immoral crimes than I, indulged their perverse lust for mudraking by victimising me. I helped so many people... And when the smear campaign against me started, nobody stood up for me, nobody wanted to help me. ... The day I was indited they all just scattered. As though I'd been struck by leprosy. And if I'd been a little more fortunate, I could have gotten off without serving a day in jail. Like so many others.

*(Silence)*

Carl: I read in the papers that you've been named Deputy Minister.

Nora: Well, yes.

Carl: Congratulations. I mean it. I'm proud of you. I always knew you could do it. When you worked for me. I taught you a lot about the trade, about everything. I really am happy for you. You were always so ambitious. I know it means a lot to you.

*(Silence)*

Nora: Lydia, you have to take those papers to the district court.

Lydia: I'm just leaving.

*(Lydia stands up and picks up a folder)*

Lydia: I hope it won't be too crowded. I should be back in a couple of hours.

Nora: Give my regards to the auditor.

Lydia: I will. Goodbye to you both!

Carl: Goodbye!

Nora: Goodbye!

*(Lydia exits. Nora and Carl are alone. Silence.)*

Carl: It's good that you sent her away. I wanted to talk to you alone. To talk about everything. About you, about me...about us.

Nora: I had to send her, because the Commercial Affairs Court only works until two.

*(Silence)*

Carl: You haven't changed a bit. You're just as beautiful as you used to be.

*(Silence. Carl goes over to Nora's desk and picks up a framed photo on which can be seen Nora, Tony and their daughter. He examines it closely.)*

Carl: How is your husband?

Nora: Fine. The same as usual.

Carl: And your daughter?

Nora: She's alright. She just signed up for an excellent secondary school.

Carl: She's like her mother. Smart, pretty, ambitious.

*(Silence)*

Carl: I thought about you. A lot. Often. Intensely.

*(Silence)*

Carl: I know that you thought about me, too.

Nora: How can you be so sure?

Carl: Because you sent me those letters. Your letters helped me to persevere.

Nora: I didn't send you any letters.

Carl: Oh come on. Don't make me laugh. I know now you don't want anyone to connect you with me. I don't blame you. Don't worry, I won't show up any place you might frequent. Because of the new circumstances you find yourself in. I admit, it was smart of you not to sign those letters.

Nora: I tell you, I didn't send you any letters.

Carl: If you want me to pretend it is so, I will. But in those letters there were a lot of things that only someone close to me could know and if...

Nora: Why are you here?

Carl: Why am I here? Do I sense a certain coldness in your voice? Or did it only seem to me that you were being unfriendly?

Nora: Why are you here? I know that you never did anything in your life without there being some design, some clear purpose behind it.

Carl: You used to like that about me.

*(Silence)*

Carl: When you got rid of Lydia, I thought you wanted to be alone with me.

*(Carl takes a step towards Nora. Nora raises her voice.)*

Nora: Please, don't come near me!

*(Carl stops in his tracks. Silence.)*

Carl: A fine welcome, esteemed Ms. Minister! I don't know why, but I somehow imagined a different sort of reception.

Nora: Please, Carl, let what there once was between us to be forgotten.

Carl: You want me to forget everything?

Nora: That's right.

Carl: And how am I to forget that it was I who pulled you out of the garbage heap and put you to work in the hotel, and that soon after you found your way into my bed. That after that I gave you a job as head of reception, and after only a few months gave you the money to open a travel agency. How am I to forget all the nights you spent in my arms as my mistress?! Because of you I did all those stupid things. Because of you my wife left me. Because of you I got mixed up in all that shady business because of which in the end I landed in prison.

Nora: I didn't try to talk you into that.

Carl: Maybe not. But you always pushed me to do more, to grab everything I could from life. To believe I was invincible. In the end, all that ambition and insatiable greed came crashing down on me.

Nora: Your ambition.

Carl: Our ambition. You weren't only my mistress. You were my soul-mate. We experienced life in the same way. How many times did you tell me that your husband meant nothing to you, that he didn't understand you, that he had given up on life. You justified not leaving him because of the precarious emotional condition he was in after having his nervous breakdown, because of his lability and his attempted suicide. How many times did you say we should have met sooner in life, that we two were made of the same stuff... Have you forgotten your own words, your own feelings?! Have you forgotten all we once meant to each other?!

*(Silence)*

Nora: That's the past. The distant past. You know we can't bring back those emotions. No single love can ever repeat itself. We're mature enough to know that. You didn't end up in jail because of me, but because of your own stupidity and lack of caution. When that happened, I felt only anger toward you – no sympathy or love. I can only feel anger toward those who by their stupidity cause their own downfall.

*(Silence)*

Carl: May I kiss you?

Nora: No.

Carl: Embrace you, at least?

Nora: No.

*(Silence)*

Nora: Why did you come?

Carl: To see you.

Nora: I know that can't be the only reason. Tell me – why are you here?

*(Silence)*

Carl: You certainly know me well. And you know me well, because we are alike. We two are alike in every way. Built of the same stuff. That's why I won't waste any more time on emotions, on evoking the past – you always were and always will be a creature of the present and of the future. A woman who on the wings of her ambition thinks only of that which she can conquer tomorrow.

Nora: So? Say what it is.

Carl: My son graduated from the faculty of law a year ago. He put in an application for several job offers – but...when people see my name...they all turn him down. It doesn't help a bit that he had excellent grades as a student. I have ruined his life. Because of me he had to be ashamed when he was a student. I have to try to help him. I'm going to help him.

Nora: How?

Carl: You're going to give him a job in your ministry.

Nora: You're out of your mind!

Carl: You owe me that much. I did so much for you. This agency was started with my money. Money for which I neither sought nor got a receipt. I payed for your husband's treatment. I took care of your father's debts when he died. I pulled you out of the mess you were in and put you on your feet. I introduced you to the business. You owe me.

Nora: I don't owe you anything. What you got from me can't be bought with money and you know it. I couldn't hire your son if he were the most capable man on earth, because when people hear I hired him, I'll lose my job. The journalists are just waiting for something like that.

Carl: I owe it to my son, after everything he had to go through because of me. You have to do this for me.

Nora: I can't do it. Now, please, go away. I have work to do and I don't have time to waste on former criminals, not even white-collar criminals.

Carl: Don't speak to me in that shameless manner!

Nora: I'm going to call the police if you don't get out.

Carl: You're throwing me out of the travel agency you started with my money?! I'm going. But first, I'm going to speak your language. The language of an uncultivated slut,

because only now do I see that you weren't my mistress you were only a prostitute. Since that is the only language you understand, then answer just one question for me: will you give my son a job in your ministry or would you rather have your husband, your Premier and all the papers in this country find out in whose bed you got your first lessons in the tourist industry?

Nora: You wouldn't dare. You could end up back in jail for blackmail.

*(Carl holds out a slip of paper to Nora.)*

Carl: I have a new cell phone. There's my number. If you don't wise up by the day after tomorrow and don't find a position for my son, your husband will find out about everything, the Prime minister will find out about everything, the whole country will find out that you were my mistress. You have two days to think about it.

Nora: You bastard.

Carl: Sir, if you please. In politics you have to choose your words carefully. Watch whom you're insulting. Besides, it's better to be a bastard than a whore. I'll be waiting for your call.

*(Carl exits without saying goodbye. Nora angrily shoves a sheath of papers off the desk)*

### **THIRD INTERLUDE**

*(The lighting changes again, leaving upstage dark. Only the proscenium is illuminated. Enter Actor and Actress.)*

Actress: Carl's demand that Nora find a job for his son doesn't really convince me. It's too contrived.

Actor: I had to establish some sort of parallel between Karl's attempt at blackmail and Krogstad's.

Actress: Nevertheless it seems a bit naive to me. Besides, you keep insisting that your *Nora* stands on its own, that it can be understood even by those who haven't seen or read Ibsen's, and because of that you can allow yourself to depart from the original.

Actor: It does stand on its own as far as the story is concerned, but it will also have a special interest for those who can read and observe between the lines where it refers to Ibsen's drama.

*(Silence)*

Actress: I'm so happy that the rehearsals are coming along so well. I sense that we're going to have a great performance. Everything is going according to plan. I think the rest of the cast feels, too, that they are doing something really exceptional. I feel great – as an actor, as a writer, and as a director.

*(Silence)*

Actress: Listen...the way you described the maid and the journalist...that was so superficial. Those aren't complete characters, they're just fulfilling a function.

Actor: Those are episodes. And they need to be and stay episodic. I don't see where the problem is.

Actress: The problem is that my dear colleagues complain every day that their parts should be expanded. That the script should be rewritten.

Actor: Come on. After years of not being cast in anything, they finally get a chance to be on stage and they're still dissatisfied. They're playing episodic characters that aren't essential for the development of the plot and I don't intend to waste any time on them. Why don't they tell me to my face if they don't like something.

Actress: Because you behave like a vain writer and a vain, self-absorbed director preoccupied with his own script and his own interpretation of it. It's easier for them to brainwash me. They know that I'll communicate their dissatisfaction.

Actor: I don't give a whit about their dissatisfaction. It only matters whether the rest of the actors are satisfied with their roles.

Actress: I can't say I really like my role either. It's never been more difficult for me to work. Yesterday I was nauseous. And today I was nauseous, too.

Actor: That's because you're exhausted. That's because of that stupid series. You shouldn't have spent the whole summer...

Actress: Please don't tell me what I should or shouldn't have done this summer. Don't forget that we bought a new car with the money from that series. And the series isn't the reason I don't feel good about working on this production.

Actor: Then what, may I ask, is?! You're not trying to say you don't believe in the script?

Actress: I'm trying to say that it's pretty perverse that in this production you are my partner, playwright and director. You're only going to make other writers and directors hate you. You know that no one likes to direct an actor who's himself a director.

Actor: Calm down. Rest up a bit. Everything is going to turn out alright.

Actress: I'm not entirely sure that everything is going to be alright. A lot about your play is questionable and you won't take any criticism.

Actor: I won't take criticism?! Go on! Tell me what's wrong with my script, so we can talk about it. If need be, I'll fix it.

Actress: It seems too me pretty improbable that their fifteen-year-old daughter hasn't even appeared yet. That would be pretty relevant for understanding the relationship between the mother and the father.

Actor: You've got to be kidding! What, am I supposed to maybe put a fifteen-year-old heroine on stage. Who would play her? If I cast an actress who really is fifteen years old, she won't know how to act. If I cast an acting student, she'll look seven or eight years older than the part.

Actress: My own role is a bit problematic, too.

Actor: Why is that?

Actress: She's too evil, too ambitious and career-minded. It's insupportable. I would never behave like that.

Actor: You can't look at the character exclusively from your own perspective. You can't judge her by your own experience. I justified her behaviour by the story about her past, about her sacrificing everything for her family. You have to admit that there are women like that today who adopt the "male principle". Who become obsessed with their careers and end up sacrificing everything for their careers instead. The "manager syndrome" doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender. Both men and women can catch it. And men like Tony aren't a rarity in today's world. The big problem with today's world is that men don't want to be men and women don't want to be women.

Actress. All the same. You got carried away in every respect. She's much too calculating, cold, coarse. I see Nora as something completely different.

Actor: Damn it. Try to see it with my eyes. I'm the one who wrote this play. A writer whom you, it's true, don't think too highly of. But a writer in whose play after all you decided to perform, and whose idea you ought to be able to try to understand and to play the role in a manner that most nearly conveys the writer's intention. The problem with theatre today is that actors and directors when they pick up a new play no longer try to penetrate what it was the writer was trying to say, but think instead how they would have written about that theme if they knew how to write.

Actress: You really are hard-headed and incorrigible. You don't even hear what I'm saying. You don't want a creative dialogue. You have your vision of your own script and on account of your one-sidedness we all have to suffer. Because of you I'm suffering from headaches, nausea, vomiting. Because of you I always have a cramp in my stomach at rehearsals.

Actor: And I'm feeling nauseated because of your lack of trust and confidence in me. You who should be my greatest supporter, have become my biggest opponent. As if you deliberately want to keep my play from succeeding.

Actress: You really are disgusting and contemptible. You're a narrow-minded biggot. Insolent and uncaring.

Actress: You took the words right out of my mouth. I just wanted to tell you the same thing.

Actor: Get out of my sight!

## SCENE 6

(living room)

*(Jana, Tony, Nora, Lydia)*

*(Jana and Tony finish decorating the Christmas tree. Jana gives Tony a star which he puts on the tree. Tony is standing on a chair.)*

Jana: Be careful you don't fall.

Tony: Don't worry, I'm being careful. Just one more thing. There.

Jana: It's even prettier than last year.

Tony: I agree.

*(Tony gets down from the chair and goes over to the switch. He switches it on and all the lights come on.)*

Tony: There it is! Bethlehem!

Jana: It's beautiful!

*(Nora enters the room.)*

Nora: Good evening! I see the children are playing.

Tony: I'm as excited as a ten-year-old. Whenever Christmas draws near, I feel as though I could explode just thinking about the tree, the holidays, everything...It's my favorite time of year.

Nora: And for me it's the most insane, because I have to think about the gifts, the cards, the bill!

Tony: Now that you mention it – this year you haven't written a single Christmas card! In the past few years it was always you who wrote the Christmas cards.

Nora: I can't think about that now. You know that they are all waiting for me to arrive in the ministry. This year you'll have to write the Christmas cards and I'll just sign them.

Tony: aHaah! So now we are already playing the part of Ms. Deputy Minister?

Nora: Sweetheart, you have to help me.

Tony: Alright. I'll sit down and write some tonight.

*(The doorbell rings)*

Nora: Can someone please see who that is?

Jana: I'll go.

*(Jana exits.)*

Tony: Are you expecting someone?

Nora: Lydia called to say we have to talk about the yearly balance. It's probably her.

Tony: Do you have to work at night, too?

Nora: You know I don't have any choice.

*(Lydia enters the living room.)*

Lydia: Good evening everyone!

Tony: Good evening.

Lydia: Your tree is lovely!

Tony: Do you like it?

Lydia: Very much.

Tony: Jana and I decorated it.

Lydia: It really is beautiful. I'll have to decorate a little one myself at home. To get into the holiday spirit.

Nora: You called to say we needed to talk about the balance of payments. What's up?

Lydia: When you left, I stayed to check the books and I found that some of the numbers don't add up.

Nora: Really?

Tony: Would you like some coffee or something else to drink?

Lydia: No thanks. I don't feel like anything. Until this year is over, I can't even enjoy coffee. I simply can't relax, not even for a moment.

Tony: Then I'll leave you two alone with your affairs, your calculations and your yearly balance. I'm going to write some Christmas cards. I hope I won't have to send you Christmas greetings, too.

Lydia: No, you don't have to. We'll say Merry Christmas to each other in person!

Tony: Thank goodness! One less card to write!

Lydia: Anyway, I sent about fifty Christmas cards from the agency, to all our major business partners.

Tony: I'm left with all our friends and relatives, and there are a lot more of them.

Lydia: My sympathy.

Tony: Thank you! Bye, girls!

*(Tony exits.)*

Nora: So? What's the real reason for your coming?

Lydia: Carl called. He asked for you. When I said you had gone home, he told me to tell you that time is running out, and for you to hurry, otherwise tomorrow, he'll take action.

Nora: He can go to hell.

*(Silence.)*

Lydia: What's this all about?

Nora: He wants me to find a job for his son in the Ministry. Otherwise he's going to tell my husband, the Prime minister and all the papers that we were once... that we were once very close.

Lydia: So, blackmail?

Nora: A classic case of blackmail. Do you remember back when we worked in his hotel...the situation I was in – jobless, in debt, with a suicidal husband. Carl seemed to me like a man from another world. Successful, decisive. I needed comforting, someone I could lean on. He was a reputable businessman. He really did help me. But that doesn't give him any right to destroy me now.

Lydia: What will you do?

Nora: I'm not sure. I have a few ideas, but they are all very risky. I have to fight back. I can't allow him to drag me under, to put me back on the street. I wanted to ask your advice. You're the only person I can talk to about it. You're the only person who knows what was between us. You're the only one who knows what I've been through the past few years with my husband and at work. You've got to help me find a way out of this nightmare.

Lydia: I'm here to help you. Just like always.

Nora: Thank you.

Lydia: Have you got any ideas? Have you got a solution?

Nora: Well.... Do you remember that police inspector we worked with last year? The one for whose people we organized that ski trip? The one who was so forward with you. I know he liked you.

Lydia: Yes. He even invited me to dinner and to the movies. I turned him down several times.

Nora: He was strikingly handsome, really a good-looking man. I was surprised you put him off. Anyway, I thought you could call him and get him to talk to Carl. Get him to explain to Carl that he's just gotten out of jail and that if he continues trying to blackmail people he could end up in jail again. Blackmail is a crime, after all.

Lydia: But how am I supposed to ask him to do that?

Nora: I know he won't turn you down. He really did like you a lot. I know some people in the police force, but I can't get mixed up in this now.

Lydia: Do you really think it would work?

Nora: I'm convinced it would. Carl's just gotten out of prison. If a police inspector comes to see him at home, any police inspector, he won't say a word.

Lydia: I know. But how on earth am I supposed to explain this...

Nora: You've got to help me. You have to save me. It's only a matter of hours now. He's so vulnerable, so reckless and impulsive. He's lost all sense of reality. His son is the last person on earth I could find a job for in the Ministry. Think of the consequences! The papers would tear me to bits. You have to help me get out of this mess. You've got to talk to that inspector tonight. Persuade him to talk to Carl, to intimidate him.

Lydia: What if I talk to Carl? What if I try to bring him to his senses?

Nora: I don't think it would help. We have to try to intimidate Carl, give him a good scare. Or else make him powerless, neutralize him – before he neutralizes me. This is a race against time. One I have to win – whatever the cost.

## **ACT TWO**

### **SCENE 7**

**(Office of the travel agency.)**

*(Lydia, Carl)*

*(Lydia is in the office, typing on a calculator. The doorbell rings.)*

Lydia: Come in!

*(Carl enters the office.)*

Carl: Hello!

Lydia: Hello! Thank you for coming.

Carl: What is it that's so urgent? Do you have a message for me from your boss...?

Lydia: No. I wanted to talk to you.

Carl: Alone?! Without Nora's blessing?

Lydia: Does that matter?

Carl: I think it does.

*(Lydia gestures toward the chair.)*

Lydia: Please, have a seat.

Carl: Thank you.

Lydia: Would you like something to drink?

Carl: I quit drinking when I was in prison. Not only that. I quit doing a lot of stupid things I used to be hooked on.

Lydia: You talk as though prison had a positive effect on you.

Carl: In a sense, it did. A person learns to tell the difference between what is important and what isn't. Learns to appreciate the little things that make one happy. Learns not to give too much importance to outward appearances and to the kind of stupidities we're likely to become enslaved to.

Lydia: Is this the same person who once tried to incorporate the entire country into his business empire?

Carl: It's a person who's come to his senses. I see things differently now. My life. Fortune – and misfortune.

Lydia: But, after all. In many respects, you're still the old Carl. A man who isn't choosy about the means when he wants to achieve his goals.

Carl: She told you everything then?

Lydia: Who?

Carl: Nora.

Lydia: What makes you think that?

Carl: She told you what I want from her? She told you about my son?

Lydia: Yes....She told me.

Carl: I guess you can understand my motives.

Lydia: Well, I suppose...maybe it's not the right way to go about things. Even if she wanted to, she couldn't do you that favour. Don't you think you're asking too much?

*(Silence)*

Carl: I've done some stupid things in my life, but I was exploited by politicians. I admit, I went too far; but never, never, did I steal, abduct, or deliberately betray someone. Here and there I circumvented the law; but even the most respected multinational corporations do that, if they're sure they won't be sanctioned, if they're sure they won't be found out. Or if they know that with the help of good lawyers and weak judges they'll get the sort of justice that suits them... I've helped innumerable people and I was always good to Nora. More than that: I liked her competitive spirit, her fast thinking. She had good ideas and she knew how to fight for them. During my first few months in prison I fell into such a depression I thought about committing suicide. And then, in my desperation, I got a letter. Nora sent me a letter. It was unsigned and written as though it was by someone I didn't know. She wrote that she esteemed and respected me. That she was sorry about the way the media had lynched me, that she knew I didn't deserve what had happened. She wrote that I was a man whom any woman would admire, that I was brave, full of self-confidence, a man with a clear vision and good business sense, a man in whose company people like to be, who radiated a kind of positive energy, and who left nobody indifferent. She begged me to persevere and not to allow myself be broken. ...That first letter restored my self-confidence. After that, every few months, she sent me another, wonderful letter, full of encouragement. Only thanks to those letters was I able to endure my time in prison. It was thanks to them only that I didn't end up losing my mind behind bars like that, locked up with a bunch of criminals and psychopaths...When they let me out, I came here to thank Nora for everything... I had to ask her help for my son, because I hurt him the most. I wanted to redeem myself somehow. I wanted to help him. My former wife, his mother, remarried; and she doesn't want to have anything to do with him or me. She thinks I should help him, that she did enough for him while I was in prison. And now, when I show up here to see Nora, instead of finding help, understanding, instead of being embraced by her, she gives me the cold shoulder, bluntly refuses me, covers me with her scorn. She even denied she sent me those letters. She's probably afraid I could use them against her. She can't blame me for returning her rough manner in kind.

Lydia: You responded with threats and blackmail.

Carl: What alternative did I have?

Lydia: You forget that you can't allow yourself to get mixed up in any more illegal activities. The consequences would be too grave now.

Karl: Did she tell you to say that to me? To warn me?

Lydia: No, she didn't say for me to warn you. She wanted me to get a police inspektor to talk to you and to have him warn you.

Karl: And did you speak to the police inspector?

Lydia: No.

*(Silence)*

Carl: Nora thought up the inspector then, and had you try to intimidate me with an imaginary police agent.

Lydia: No! You've got it all wrong. I was the one who decided to talk to you myself.

Carl: Why?

Lydia: Because I think Nora isn't worth your freedom! She's dangerous, and hungry for fame. I just think after everything you've been through that it's a shame for you to start your new life on the wrong foot. It's a shame you want to take a path that in no time will put you right back where you came from.

Carl: You sound like I matter to you. But I know behind every word you're saying there's a hidden agenda, that you're acting in the interest of your boss and to ensure that she can do whatever she likes and at the same time climb up the social ladder. She's a liar and a fraud. She lied to me. She managed to pull the wool over the eyes of that minister of hers apparently, too, when she got involved with him at the fair in Frankfurt.

Lydia: Where on earth did you get that idea?!

Carl: They're talking about it all over town.

Lydia: I don't believe you.

Carl: She's playing a double game. She tells her husband a tale about opening her own travel agency with money she inherited from her father after his death. The truth is that her father left her nothing but debts – debts I paid off with my money. I not only gave her the money she needed to open the travel agency, I also settled her family's debts so she could play the part of the girl from a respectable family in front of her husband. The fact is, her father was an alcoholic and a gambler who lost the apartment he lived in playing cards. I think her husband ought to know at least that little piece of the truth about his wife.

*(Silence)*

Carl: She is exploiting you, too, by getting you to talk to me in her name.

Lydia: No, she isn't! Believe me. I wanted to talk to you myself. Because of you.

Carl: Because of me?! Come on, now, please! I don't believe anyone is capable of doing anything for me. If you hadn't been put up to it, you wouldn't waste your time with me. Doubtless, you disdain me as much as your boss does.

*(Silence)*

Lydia: Listen. Those letters you got.... I wrote them.

Carl: That's impossible!

Lydia: Those were my letters.

Carl: But... Why didn't you sign them?

Lydia: I knew about your relationship with Nora. I was afraid you might be corresponding with Nora. I felt embarrassed... I feel embarrassed even now telling you this.

Carl: Hold on a second. I don't get it. I was convinced it was Nora who was writing me.

*(Lydia takes two pieces of paper off the table and hands them to Carl.)*

Lydia: Look. This is Nora's signature, and this is mine. Do you recognize now the handwriting of the person who sent you all those letters while you were in prison?

*(Carl studies the papers carefully.)*

Carl: That's ... that's.... You mean, the whole time it was you?! You're the one who sent me all those letters. You're the one who tried to boost my spirits, restore my self-confidence, and my will to live. God, why didn't I think of you?!

Lydia: That's because no one can be noticed who's standing in Nora's shadow. Besides, I didn't want you to know it was me. I wanted to help you to hang on and I wanted you to hear a warm word now and then. I remember how you always tried to help others to succeed, to realise their potential, to attain happiness – without ever thinking of yourself. And it was those people who exploited you and your unselfishness.

Carl: That...that's unbelievable! It was really you?!

Lydia: I guess now you must recognize that I not here to protect Nora's interests, but yours. It's for your own sake that I'm convinced you shouldn't go to war with that woman. It's your own sake I think you shouldn't try to take revenge on her or say anything to her husband.

Carl: Too late. A couple of hours ago I sent her husband a message about Nora, her father, and how it was she was able to found this travel agency. I also wrote that I'd make the information public, if she didn't manage to find a job for my son.

Lydia: Oh my God! No! I only hope he hasn't been online yet. I've got to call right away..

*(Lydia picks up the phone and starts to type in Nora's number.)*

## **SCENE 8**

**(A psychiatrist's office.)**

*(Nora, Ranko)*

*(Nora and Ranko are making love on the floor of the psychiatrist's office. They are wrapped in a blanket, which rises and falls in tandem with their passionate embrace, as they roll about on the floor. Their panting and heaving reaches a climax in a single ecstatic moment. Then they become still.)*

Nora: I could use a drink.

Ranko: So could I.

*(Ranko extracts himself from beneath the blanket, wraps himself in a lounging robe and goes to a small bar. He pours some wine into two glasses. Nora dresses swiftly. Ranko offers her a glass.)*

Ranko: Here you are.

Nora: Thank you.

Ranko: Cheers!

Nora: Cheers, love!

*(They clink glasses and then take a sip of wine.)*

Ranko: I never slept with a politician before.

Nora: Are you disappointed?

Ranko: Not in the least. You're even better now that you've been named Deputy Minister than you were when you were an ordinary citizen.

Nora: So you see why everyone wants to get into politics. It gives you a kind of adrenalin – and not just the politicians, but those in their vicinity.

*(Nora empties her glass in a single draught .)*

Nora: I've needed you. I've really needed you a lot the last few days. I was so tense, under so much stress. So much has been happening. There have been so many problems at work. All those interviews and everything that's been going on in connection with my being named for the post at the ministry. Everything happened so suddenly.

Ranko: I've missed you, too.

*(Silence)*

Nora: Tony told me he came to see you yesterday.

Ranko: That's right.

Nora: He's recently started coming to see you again. What do you talk about?

Ranko: You know that's confidential.

Nora: Rubbish. You know there aren't any secrets between lovers.

Ranko: You think so?

Nora: That's how it should be.

*(Silence)*

Ranko: It upsets him everything that's been going on with you. It's thrown him off balance.

Nora: And what about me?!

Ranko: He senses that he's losing you. He said that you rarely sleep together anymore, that you're cold, totally preoccupied with your career. And the fact that your daughter is in love and has a boyfriend she spends all her free time with makes him feel unneeded and superfluous. I'm afraid he isn't becoming depressed again. Maybe you should spend more time with him.

Nora: Wait a minute. Is it possible my lover is criticizing me for neglecting my husband?

Ranko: Pardon me, but that's pretty obvious.

Nora: I think you're the last person who could take that liberty.

Ranko: What makes you think that? Tony has been my patient and my friend from way back when we were both students.

Nora: I presume I take first place in your affections, however.

Ranko: Of course. But I can't disregard his problems. I do care about him.

Nora: Get lost. You make me sick.

*(Silence.)*

Ranko: Why makes you want to insult me?! You don't want him to fall into depression again, do you? You don't want him cutting his wrists and a bathtub full of blood and for both of us to have to go through all that crap with him again.

*(Silence.)*

Nora: Of course not.

Ranko: Well then, why are you angry with me?

Nora: I'm not angry, it's just that....

Ranko: Say it!

Nora: It's not important.

Ranko: Out with it! Now that you've started.

Nora: Well...Sometimes it seems as though you care more about him than you do about me.

*(Silence.)*

Ranko: That's because he needs me more than you do. You've noticed it before. It's just the noticeable effect of my professional deformation.

Nora: You really are a shitty psychiatrist. I don't know why I ever got involved with you.

Ranko: I think I know the answer to that question.

Nora: Tell me!

Ranko: You like the way I fuck. In some perverse way it arouses you that I don't respect you as a person. You like it that in my eyes you are nothing but a common whore.

Nora: You're repulsive.

Ranko: Not nearly as repulsive as you are.

*(Nora comes over to him and slaps him across the face. He slaps her back even harder. She starts to punch him in the chest. He grabs her arms. They start to wrestle with each other and fall on the floor. In the end, he overcomes her and starts to kiss her. Nora lets him. The cell phone on the desk rings. Nora wrestles free from his embrace and answers the phone.)*

Nora: Yes...What!?! Impossible! That's horrible...I'll go straight home.

## **SCENE 9**

**(living room)**

*(Tony, Nora)*

*(The living room is brightly lit. Tony comes in from the dining area. He turns off one light, then another, then a third. Only the light from the Christmas tree illuminates the room, which is now in semi-darkness. Tony walks over to the stereo and puts on a CD. The agitated sound of Wagner's Flight of the Dutchman resounds through the room. Tony sits down in an armchair and listens to the music for a long time. All at once Nora enters the room.)*

Nora: Good evening, sweetheart? Why is it so dark in here?

*(Nora turns on one light. Then she goes over to the stereo and turns down the music. She takes off her coat and starts toward the other door.)*

Tony: Where are you going?

Nora: I just wanted to check something.

Tony: Something on the computer?

*(Nora stops.)*

Nora: Well...yes, as a matter of fact. I'm expecting something.

Tony: You don't need to go. I checked my mail an hour ago. Is this what you're looking for?  
*(He picks up a piece of paper with an e-mail on it from the table.)*

Nora: Let me explain...

Tony: Don't!

Nora: I was only...

Tony: Please, don't try to explain anything to me.

Nora: I only wanted to say...

Tony: Damn it! Can't you hold your tongue for a minute?! After this? Can't you?!

*(Silence. Nora stands there and doesn't know what to do with herself. She's not entirely sure what is in the e-mail. The spell of her dumbness and immobility seems to last a long time.)*

Tony: Sit down... We need to talk. For once in our lives we need to really talk to each other.

*(Fearfully, Nora takes two or three steps until she is standing opposite Tony, but she doesn't sit down.)*

Nora: I have had so many enemies in my life. You have to understand...

Tony: Is what's written in the letter true?

Nora: What?

Tony: That your father left debts and that Carl used his own money to help you open the travel agency?

*(Silence)*

Nora: You know that that man helped us.

Tony: "Us"! You say he helped "us"?! He always disgusted me, and I never, ever asked him for any help.

*(Silence)*

Tony: So that means you lied to me when you said you used your father's money to open the travel agency.

Nora: Yes, I lied. I lied because of you. You were very sick at the time. On the brink. You had just gotten out of the hospital. My father died suddenly. The whole family, everything was resting on my shoulders. I knew I had to do something in order to be able to come back to this city, in order to be with you and our daughter. I had to find a way to make a living for all of us.

Tony: How detestable! You mean you took money from that tycoon? From a man who ended up behind bars?

Nora: You would have done the same in my position.

Tony: I would not! Believe me, I wouldn't.

Nora: I had to do something because of you.

Tony: Please be quiet. Don't say a word! You are always right. For everything you find an excuse.. I'd like to know what you have to say about what that tycoon wrote about you're having an affair with him. He wrote that we are indebted to him for all he did for us and that he expects you to find a job for his son, that otherwise he'll tell all the papers that you were his mistress, that he made you.

*(Silence.)*

Tony: Disgusting! You were unfaithful to me with that crook, that tycoon!

Nora: I wasn't! Believe me!

Tony: Yes, you were. Today I finally put all the pieces of the puzzle together. Your sudden climb to success from a hotel maid, to head of reception, and all the way to the owner of a travel agency. It's sickening. All the time you were only thinking of yourself and your success.

Nora: It isn't true! Everything I did, I did for love of you, only for love of you and our child.

Tony: Aren't you ashamed of yourself?! How can you so shamelessly seek to justify yourself? You whore! You disgusting ambitious whore!

Nora: How dare you speak to me that way! You who ran away from life, from everything, like a coward! You, who escaped into your illness, leaving me and our little girl in the

lurch, without even the basic conditions for subsistence. Because of your weakness, because of your stupid illness which you embraced like some great life philosophy, because of you I went to work as a maid, because of you I had to wash filthy toilets and clean other strangers' hair out of the sinks until it turned my stomach! Because of you I did what I did, so that I could pay for your treatment, your inactivity, your capriciousness and your parasitic behaviour. To save you, I demeaned myself and was reduced to the level of a miserable wretch. Because of you I fawned on a man who disgusts me even more than you. For love of you and out of sympathy for you! You selfish disgusting bastard! Because of you I was degraded, because of you I crawled around scrubbing floors – just to have you look down upon me from some moralizing heights, from your shitty clean untouchable world.

*(Silence.)*

Tony: I'd rather you had left me to die than helped me in that manner.

*(Silence.)*

Tony: I think it must be clear to you that after all this I no longer wish to live in this grotesquely huge apartment... I spoke with my brother. I'm going to Paris to stay with him.... I'll work in his workshop for the beginning. I have to distance myself from you. From all the lies and deception our relationship is built upon.

Nora: You can't do that to me!

Tony: Why not?

Nora: You'll destroy me. Now when I've finally been given the opportunity to do something for myself, to escape from mediocrity, to assert myself. You want to take it all away from me, you want to prevent me.

Tony: Again you're thinking of your cruddy career. Phooey! You make me sick.

*(Silence. Nora suddenly seems to remember something.)*

Nora: Does our daughter know about all this?

Tony: No. She's downtown. I'm going to go pack my things.

Nora: Wait!

Tony: What is it?

Nora: Christmas is in four days. Please, stay these four more days, not for me, but for our little girl. Stay until Midnight Mass and Christmas dinner. Don't take our last Christmas together away from our child.

*(Long silence.)*

Tony: O.K. I'll stay four more days, but only four. I hope I'll have the strength to hide my repulsion.

#### FOURTH INTERLUDE

*(The lighting changes. The Actor and Actress come onto the proscenium.)*

Actress: I have one good suggestion.

Actor: Say it.

Actress: I think that the title of the play *Nora in Our Time* puts too much of a burden on it. It's too pretentious. If it were called *Nora Here and Now*, that would ease some of the tension. It wouldn't seem so pretentious. Then if you put in some humourous elements...so that the feminists wouldn't say you'd gotten carried away. That way everything would be transported into the sphere of diversion, a playing on Ibsen's theme.

Actor: I can see you're afraid how your friends from the Women's Association are going to react.

Actress: Oh, come on. Please don't try to foist that on me.

Actor: That is, their opinion is very important to you.

Actress: I only want your play – our production – to have the necessary breadth of vision. I don't want it to seem one-dimensional, like some manifesto on how women are today.

Actor: Don't worry. There's the other character. There's my Lydia. Ibsen's Linde, a character who is completely different from Nora.

*(Silence.)*

Actress: So, what do you think of my proposal?

Actor: What proposal?

Actress: What do you think of the title: *Nora Here and Now*?

Actor: It's out of the question. The programs and the posters have already been sent to the printer. Personally, I like the title: *Nora in Our Time*

*(Silence.)*

Actress: You really are...From the first rehearsal on until this moment: it's as though you don't want to hear what I'm saying. This is the first time I've seen you in this light. The worst thing is that the whole time you seem not to care how I feel at all.

Actor: You're exagerrating.

Actress: You don't just not care how I feel but you don't even seem to notice what's up with me. You don't seem to notice that I'm physically and emotionally on the brink.

Actor: Oh come on. You're just imagining it.

*(Silence.)*

Actress: I'm sorry, but I have to tell you: working on this performance, on your script, your directing and having you as my partner – all that is beginning to threaten everything that is most important to us. It's starting to jeopardize our marriage. Don't forget that we're husband and wife. Don't forget how important our love and our relationship always were to you and me. And now all that is being jeopardized.

Actor: Excuse me, but what are you talking about?

Actress: I'm talking about the first serious crisis of our marriage. I'm talking about how drastically you have changed since you wrote that stupid play and I'm saying that the best thing for our marriage would be to drop this production. Find someone else to take my place. Let somebody else play my role.

*(Silence.)*

Actor: You're must be joking!

Actress: Not in the least. For you and for me the best thing would be to get out of this production.

Actor: You can't do this to me.

Actress: I can too, for us.

Actor: My whole life I've been writing. You know how important writing and acting are to me. I never admitted it to anyone, because I was afraid of being ridiculed. And now, at the age of forty, when for the first time I have a chance to see my plan put on stage, you want to foil me. You spit on my script from the start. You don't want to accept that this play means more to me than any role I've ever played. How would you feel if I badmouthed your Madame Bovary from last year's season, when it was so important to you? What if I said I didn't like it? And that the part was horrible, not just the performance and its wretched adaptation?

Actress: You hypocrite! You congratulated me after the premiere and said it was one of the best roles I ever played and it gave my career a new boost.

Actor: I saw you were lacking self-confidence and felt insecure, and I wanted to offer you some support.

Actress: That's revolting! You know I hate dishonesty. I could never lie to you like that, and that's exactly why I'm telling you right to your face that I don't like my part in your *Nora*, that I feel awful and that I'm going to quit the production in order to save our marriage.

Actor: You're out of your mind. You don't know what you're saying. If you do this, if you quit my production, if you sell me out as a writer, then you really are going to have to find a new husband, and I'll start shopping around for a new wife.

Actress: Oh, really? Your stupid play is more important to you than I am. Now you have definitely sunk beneath my respect. I thought we two were more than...It's blackmail. It makes me sick to think that your play is more important to you than your wife of fifteen years who...

*(Silence.)*

Actress: I can't take it anymore. The pressure of having a husband, director, writer all in one and sharing the lead with him in his own production. I can tell the production is more important to you than I am, and I really don't have the energy to continue to be the quadruple object of your ambition and manipulation. That's why I'm moving into a hotel, right here and now. That's my condition for continuing with rehearsals.

Actor: You're crazy! What will people say when they hear you've moved into a hotel?

Actress: I was expecting that statement! You see that nothing has changed from Ibsen's day to the present. I don't give a whit what anyone says: tonight I'm not going to be sleeping with you under one roof!

Actor: You can't do this to me.

Actress: I'm going to do it – to save the production that means more to you than I do.

## **SCENE 10**

**(Office of the travel agency.)**

*(Lydia Nora)*

Nora: Do you understand now what I'm saying? If he leaves me, if he leaves now, at the very moment when I'm supposed to start working as Deputy Minister, that could be the end of me. In all those interviews, I talked about how I had a wonderful husband, a wonderful marriage, how he is my main supporter and other such bullcrap. Two of those interviews won't be published until after Christmas. Besides, my minister made it perfectly clear that the Prime Minister expects that noone commits anymore imbecilities as far as his or her private life is concerned. On account of the recent divorce of the Minister of Agriculture and affair the Minister of Finance was having, the government's ratings in the polls has fallen by fiver percent. We're both invited to the New Year's cocktail at the Prime Minister's. You can imagine what will happen if I show up alone, when they ask me where the husband I so lavishly extolled in the papers. It's just awful!

*(Silence.)*

Lydia: There isn't a thing you can do about it.

Nora: There is. I have to do something. I can't allow him to destroy my life. I can't allow him to destroy my career, on account of his injured vanity. I've done so much for him and because of him. Shameless ingrate!

Lydia: Do you want me to try to talk to him?

Nora: Under no condition! I know it wouldn't help. I have to act quickly. I have to make some tough moves. And I need your help.

Lydia: What do you have in mind?

Nora: Hang on a second. I'll explain. I just want to remind you before I do what my nomination means for you and your opportunities. I won't forget about you, just like I didn't forget you when we worked together as maids in the hotel. Both of us maids with a college education. As soon as I was in a position to start my own travel agency, I hired you as my co-worker. I didn't forget about you, I didn't leave you in that hotel.

Lydia: I won't ever forget that. I'm greatly indebted to you.

Nora: I'll do much more for you than that. You only have to help me get out of this mess I'm in. I've come up with a plan. I know it will sound a bit drastic to you...but... I can't think of anything else.

Lydia: I'm curious.

Nora: You see...it isn't easy to say it...but...I know you can keep a secret and this has to remain our secret... When we were working in the hotel, do you remember how those guys from the underworld used to come around sometimes? I got to know one of them. He was kind of nice... and not too long ago we went out for a drink together. He gave me his telephone number. He bought a big house on the outskirts of the city and he and his boys, from what he tells me, like to show off in front of the ladies, get drunk and boast. Convicts and criminals hang out with them, out-of-work security men...his people work as debt collectors. For a thousand Euros they'll send a threat, for two thousand they'll give someone a scare, and for three to five thousand the guy they're supposed to work over gets his leg or his arm in a cast. There's one price for breaking a leg and another for breaking an arm.

Lydia: You're joking.

Nora: Not in the least.

Lydia: Why are you telling me all this?

Nora: If someone...some stranger, broke Tony's legs, he wouldn't be able to go to Paris. He'd be in the hospital. He'd be tied to a bed for months. I would take care of him, nurse him. Every day after a hard day's work in the ministry I'd rush off to the hospital to take care of him. I'd make sure the papers wrote a few heartbreaking accounts of my

sacrifice and my noble efforts. And if after all that when he recovers, he leaves me to go live with his brother in Paris, I'll be the victim – the poor, abandoned wife left by her ungrateful husband. Believe me: I'll work my way up to the post of minister sooner or later.

Lydia: But, how can you...you can't do that to him...If anyone finds out that you...It would be horrible.

Nora: That's why I have to be extremely careful. I know that my every step is being watched. I daren't call that guy, not to mention meet up with him somewhere. That's why you'll have to do it.

Lydia: Me?!

Nora: Yes, you. Only you can help me out of this mess. You're the only one I can send to arrange the job. I withdrew the money: 10,000 Euros. It's right here!

*(She tosses an envelope with 10,000 Euros in it onto the table in front of Lydia.)*

Nora: You have to do this for me. He won't refuse you and won't do a check on you, if you tell him I sent you. And just so there won't be any doubt it was me who sent you, give him this lighter together with the envelope. He gave it to me and...well, we won't talk about when and where. Just tell him not to call me on the phone under any circumstances.

*(Nora places the lighter on the table.)*

Nora: The plan is like this: I'll go to midnight mass at that little church outside of town with my husband and daughter. Behind the church is the grave where my father is buried. After mass, I'll suggest to Tony that we go light a candle on my father's grave. The men are to be there with iron rods to carry out their orders. They'll jump Tony. I'll scream and run away with our daughter in fright. Their job is to make sure Tony ends up in the hospital, and not for too short a stay. In panic, I'll get into the car and drive home. On top of that, I'll make sure to forget my cell phone, so that I can't call the police until I get home. Just tell them not to injure any vital organs and - God forbid - not to hit him in the face.

*(Silence.)*

Nora: Isn't that a great plan?

Lydia: Forgive me, but... You're putting me in a very awkward position.

Nora: Don't worry. Noone will ever find out.

*(Silence)*

Nora: Well?

Lydia: What if I refuse?

Nora: If you refuse, you'll lose this job and all further support on my part. That would be very stupid, when it is only now that I'll really be able to help you.

Lydia: Apparently, I have no choice.

Nora: You know that I never give people the opportunity to decide for themselves. Besides, for my co-workers it is best to listen to what I say, because I know things always go best when they go the way I think they should . It's all for the best. Not just for me.

## SCENE 11

**(Office of the travel agency.)**

*(Lydia is ordering papers on the desk. Carl enters.)*

Carl: Hi!

Lydia: Hi!

Carl: I'm glad you're here. I was afraid you might not be working on Christmas Eve.

Lydia: For me there's no such thing as a holiday. Maybe it's good that way, because I don't know what I'd do with free time if by some chance I happened to have some.

Carl: Am I disturbing you?

Lydia: Not at all.

Carl: This is my first Christmas Eve as a free man in four years. I have to admit, I imagined it differently.

Lydia: It's seldom that our dreams correspond to reality. Still, we all keep stubbornly dreaming our vain and unrealistic dreams. That's how we get ourselves prepared for fresh disappointments.

Carl: It's not entirely like that... Sometimes we have nothing left but dreams and, as you'd put it, "vain hope". ...Since I the last time we saw each other, I haven't stopped thinking about what you said. About all the things I found out and the way the knowledge of them casts my life into a completely different perspective.

Lydia: What are you talking about?

Carl: About your letters. I read through them all again. Even now they mean so immeasurably much to me. Just like they did when I was in prison. In those letters I found you – your soul, your goodness. I found in them a reason to strike out on a new path through life. Those letters express not only caring and support of me, but love.

*(Silence. Lydia looks away.)*

Carl: You know that I've tried my whole life to dominate others, to run the show, when I needed to as well as when I didn't need to. And then, all at once, those letters of yours...all of those emotions. Everything you wrote...turned everything inside my head topsy-turvy, my thoughts, my feelings ... To put it simply, I understood that everything I'd done, the way I'd been living up to now was mistaken... and that I didn't want to live that way anymore. That's why I decided... You helped me....thanks to you I became convinced that things could be different...I decided I didn't want to be ashamed anymore of my actions. I didn't want to hurt anyone anymore. I thought about the hate and scorn that take hold of me whenever I think of Nora. I thought about the pain I caused her husband with that e-mail. Before I came here, I called him and apologized. I said that his wife hadn't been my mistress, that it was only out of revenge that I slandered her in that letter, because she wouldn't find a job for my son. He accepted my apology. And, even if it was a lie, I hope that that lie will help to save their shaky marriage, and limit the damage I've caused.

Lydia: You really called Tony?

Carl: Yes, I did. And I talked to my son last night and told him I was sorry for all the things he had to suffer on account of me. I told him about trying to get him a job in the Ministry of Tourism, but that I had to give up the idea because I couldn't make it happen without causing a disaster. He said that the fact I had decided to change my ways was more important to him than any opportunity to advance in his career and that he would never want to become employed by dishonourable means. He made me ashamed of myself. He's had to swallow so much because of me. I'm sorry that I can give him nothing but a surname that will only hinder him and not help him in life. He's decided to take a job as secretary of a school in one of the suburbs.

Lydia: What will you live from? What will you do?

Carl: I'm going to start a travel agency. My sister is going to lend me some money. I have experience in the trade. It'll be hard at the beginning, but I'm sure I can succeed.

Lydia: If you need an industrious helper, I'd be glad to work for you.

Carl: You don't mean it?! You have a well-established position here and everything...

Lydia: I do mean it. I'm just packing my things. I already wrote Nora a letter to tell her I can't and don't want to work for her any more. I've been thinking about everything the past few days as well and I've made some big decisions.

Carl: What are you talking about? What do you mean?

Lydia: Nora wanted me to engage some shady figures for her to literally break her husband's legs using iron rods. She said, if I didn't do it, she'd fire me. And I have no intention of doing it. I'd rather end up on the street.

Carl: But, what ever possessed her to want to commit such a brutality? Whatever for?

Lydia: Tony told her that he was going to leave her after Christmas and go to apriis to live. She doesn't want to lose her position as Deputy Minister and she's willing to pay any price to prevent it. I guess you know her by now.

Carl: Yes, unfortunately, I do.

*(Silence.)*

Carl: Do you maye have the telephone number or the fax number of the Ministry?

Lydia: I have the fax number for the Minister's office.

Carl: Great. I think we have to stop that monster, before she takes out somebody else. If she goes into politics, she's going to crush a lot of people underfoot. And there's only one way we can stop her.

Lydia: How?

Carl: I'll write a letter personally to her minister. I'll brag about her as my devoted co-worker and let him know that it was thanks to my support that she was able to establish herself in the tourist trade. Considering my reputation, I don't doubt that will spell the end of her political career.

*(Lydia smiles.)*

Lydia: You'll be doing a good deed.

Carl: That's all I want to do in life from now on. And one more thing: I don't know whether or not you were joking when you said you were willing to work for me. It's true, I'm not very well situated financially. My social status and my reputation are lower than low. But if you really want to work for me, you'll make me a happy man, because every day I'll look forward to coming to work, knowing that you'll be there. Up till now, I haven't been a good man, and I don't deserve your...

Lydia: No, Carl! Don't put yourself down any longer. Don't talk about the past. I always believed in your character. I'm prepared to work for you and to fight for you. On one condition – that we forget the past and that we don't let it ruin the future I really believe in.

## **SCENE 12**

**(The living room of Nora's apartment.)**

*(Tony, Nora)*

*(Tony carries his suitcase into the living room. Then he returns to the bedroom and comes out again with another big suitcase. Nora enters by the other door. She's wearing a winter coat.)*

Nora: What are you doing?

Tony: Packing my things. I'm leaving.

Nora: Didn't you promise to go to Midnight mass with our daughter?

Tony: I just spoke to her. She said she's spending Christmas with her boyfriend and his parents...Forgive me, but if all of us aren't going to be here, there's no sense in us two playacting...I don't have any reason to go to midnight mass with you.

Nora: But you promised.

Tony: And you promised me a lot of things in our life together. My train leaves in an hour for Paris. The taxi will be here in fifteen minutes.

Nora: But just for tonight...

Tony: And one more thing – I owe you an apology. Today Carl called me and said he wrote all that slander in the e-mail because you wouldn't help him by finding a job for his son in the ministry. He said you'd never had an affair with him and that he was sorry about the lies and intrigues. I don't know if what he says is the truth or not...but it doesn't matter anymore anyway.

Nora: Why doesn't it matter?! That's the very reason you shouldn't leave me after all, that we shouldn't separate but stay together. You can't just live like me like this.

Tony: All these years I've been a coward and a weakling. I've finally grasped that the way I am I can't mean anything to a woman like you. Not to our daughter, either. That's why I'm leaving. I'm not equal to you and I don't deserve you.

Nora: But, I'll help you. We can start over again from the beginning.

Tony: No, Nora, no! I have to find myself. I have to believe in myself, if I'm going to regain your respect.

Nora: You mean, there's hope that you'll come back to me, that we'll be together again...

Tony: I don't know, sweetheart, I don't know. It depends on me. It depends on you. It depends on what life brings us and whether I'll succeed in finding my place under the sun. Without your help and without your protection. If I succeed in regaining my self-respect, if I can find a firm foundation within myself, maybe as another man I'll be able to build a relationship with you again. But on the basis of equality and mutual respect... I'm afraid to think what lies in store for me, but – if I give up now, I know I'll regret it for the rest of my life and that I'll never forgive myself. It's seven hours to midnight. The taxi is waiting for me. I have to go now.

Nora: Won't you even kiss me goodbye?

Tony: No! Forgive me, but we don't deserve to kiss each other goodbye. Not you, and not I... and, there's something else – this e-mail arrived from your would-be minister.

Nora: Why "would-be"?

Tony: He writes that he's withdrawn your nomination to the post of Deputy Minister. He and the Prime Minister got news that Carl was the one who introduced you to tourism. And since he was convicted for corruption and is otherwise a man of ill repute, they think that stories from your past could damage the government's reputation.

Nora: Bastards! How could they?! And you're just telling me this now?!

Tony: Maybe it's better for you this way. Politics would have taken hold of you completely and probably destroyed you.

Nora: That's ridiculous! This is going to ruin me! Someone will pay for this! Someone will pay dearly for this! Damned intriguers, now I'll be written off by the union, too.

Tony: One more thing. I read the interview with you in the papers today. Thank you for your kind words about me. I don't know why you said I was a painter when I have never had an exhibition – maybe I'll become one, after all. Thank you, all the same.

Nora: Go to hell!

**FIFTH INTERLUDE**  
**or**  
**EPILOG**

*(The lighting changes. The Actress comes onto the proscenium carrying a chair. She puts the chair down and then sits down on it. The Actor appears carrying four different newspapers.)*

Actor: May I come in?

Actress: You already came in.

Actor: I thought that you'd come home after the premier. You disappeared after the cocktail. I didn't even get to congratulating you, and I wanted to say that that was one of the best roles you've ever played in your life. After this role, your career has taken a new turn. It wasn't very nice of you to just evaporate like that.

Actress: I had an appointment at the doctor's yesterday morning.

Actor: Everyone wanted me to talk about you. Have you seen the reviews?

Actress: I have.

Actor: They all say you were great. You got off better than I did. You put up such a fight. You had so many objections to that role, and in the end you were a big success. I scraped by as a playwright, but they buried me as a director.

Actress: That's not surprising. The whole time you so jealously guarded your text, that you couldn't direct it the way it needed to be. And as a playwright you really got carried away with the idea about the iron stakes and having them break his legs. Even people who liked your play criticized you for that. I warned you they would, right from the start.

Actor: After the battle's over everyone knows how to be a good general.

*(Silence)*

Actor: Why didn't you come home... now the premiere is over?

Actress: Because I was angry at you. Because you saw fit to walk all over me because of your play and for the sake of your career as a writer. And because you didn't apologize to me.

Actor: Oh come on. You're not a tender little flower that I could trample you underfoot. Let's go home.

Actress: I'm not going until you say you're sorry for everything I had to go through in the past two and a half months because of you.

Actor: No way am I going to apologize. You said all kinds of things to me, too. I had to swallow a lot of crap from you, too, and it wasn't any easier for me to put up with you than it was for you to put up with me.

Actress: Then never mind. You know the way out.

*(The Actor starts toward an imaginary exit, then stops.)*

Actor: Today is the first repeat performance.

Actress: Don't worry. I'll be there. I got better reviews than you did. Everybody praised me. I'd be crazy not to keep playing in this production. Besides, I've acted much more difficult parts in my life than yours...But after New Year's you'll have to find a new leading lady for your *Nora*.

*(Silence.)*

Actor: Why is that?

Actress: Yesterday, I was at the doctor's. When I mentioned that before, you didn't even ask me why I needed to go. You're so preoccupied with your debut as an author that you don't even care about your wife's health.

Actor: You're not sick, are you?

Actress: No, I'm not sick... I'm pregnant. I'm in my second month. In a few days, I'll be in my third.

Actor: Really? Sweetheart! Darling! Now I understand – the feeling of weakness, the irritability, the nausea. Boy, am I stupid! I have to give you a hug. That's fantastic!

*(He goes over to embrace her, but she stretches out her arm in front of her to stop him.)*

Actress: Just one minute! First, apologize!

*(Silence.)*

Actor: But, I only want to give you a kiss.

Actress: No chance. Not until you say you're sorry for all the abuse your pregnant wife and actress had to put up with.

Actor: I'm sorry, darling. A thousand times over, forgive me. How could I have guessed...If I had only known, I never would have acted that way towards you. Forgive me.

Actress: I accept your apology. Now, you forgive me, too, for doubting your ability as a playwright and director. You offered me a good script and the material for making a good role. It was great fun to beat you at your own game. I guess you forgot that playing a strong character is more rewarding than playing a weakling.

*(They embrace one another and kiss.)*

Actress: If it's a boy, we'll name him after your father.

Actor: And if it's a girl, we'll call her Nora.

Actress: To hell with it, there you go again.

*(They break out laughing and embrace each other anew.)*

**THE END**