

GHOSTS

HENRICK IBSEN

MRS. ALVING: None of these things you have been saying about my husband and me and our life together after you had led me back to the path of duty, as you put it—absolutely none of these things do you know from first-hand. From that moment on, you—our closest friend, who regularly used to call every day—you never once set foot in our house.

MANDERS: You and your husband moved out of town immediately afterwards.

MRS. ALVING: Yes. And never once while my husband was alive did you come and see us. It was business that finally forced you to come and visit me, when you had to see about the Orphanage.

MANDERS: (*in a low, uncertain voice*). Helene, if this is meant as a reproach, I must ask you to bear in mind....

MRS. ALVING:... the consideration you owed to your position. Oh, yes! Also that I was a runaway wife. One can never be too careful where such reckless women are concerned.

MANDERS: My dear... Mrs. Alving, that is a gross exaggeration...

MRS. ALVING: All right, all right. I just wanted to say this: that when you pass judgement on my married life, you are simply taking it for granted that popular opinion is right.

MANDERS: Well? What then?

MRS. ALVING: But now, Pastor Manders, now I'm going to tell you the truth. I swore to myself that one day you should know. You and you alone!

MANDERS: And what is the truth, then?

MRS. ALVING: The truth is this: my husband was just as debauched when he died as he had been all his life.

MANDERS: (*fumbling for a chair*), What did you say?

MRS. ALVING: After nineteen years of marriage, just as debauched—in his pleasures, at any rate—as he was before you married us.

MANDERS: Those youthful indiscretions... those irregularities.... excesses, if you like... you call that a debauched life!

MRS. ALVING: That was the expression our doctor used.

MANDERS: I don't understand you.

MRS. ALVING: Nor is it necessary.

MANDERS: I feel quite dazed. Am I to believe that your entire married life... all those years together with your husband ... were nothing but a façade.

MRS. ALVING: Precisely that. Now you know.

MANDERS: This is something . I find very hard to accept. I just don't understand. It's beyond me. How was it possible. . . ? How could a thing like that be kept hidden?

MRS. ALVING: I put up with things, although I knew very well what was going on in secret outside this house. But when it came to scandal within these very walls...

MANDERS: What's that you say! Here!

MRS. ALVING: Yes, here in our own home. In there [points to the first door right] in the dining-room, that's where I first got wind of it. I was doing something in there, and the door was standing ajar. Then I heard our maid come in from the garden with some water for the plants over there.

MANDERS: Well...?

MRS. ALVING: Shortly afterwards I heard my husband come in, too. I heard him say something to her in a low voice. And then I heard... [With a short laugh.] Oh, I can still hear it, so devastating and yet at the time so ludicrous... I heard my own maid whisper: 'Let me go, Mr Alving! Leave me alone!'