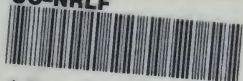


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THE BORZOI PLAYS

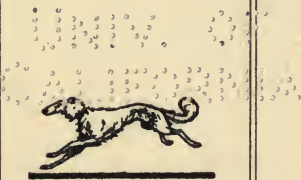
- I WAR
By Michael Artzibashef
- II MOLOCH
By Beulah Marie Dix
- III "MORAL"
By Ludwig Thoma
- IV THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL
By Nicolay Gogol
- V HADDA PADDA
By Godmundur Kamban
- VI NJU
By Ossip Dymow

The Borzoi Plays VI

NJU

*An everyday tragedy translated by
Rosalind Ivan from the Russian of*

Ossip
Dymow



New York • Alfred A Knopf • 1917

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Published, September, 1917

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PG 3460
D9 N51
1917
MAIN

NJU
CHARACTERS

NJU.

THE HUSBAND.

HE.

MARIE. (The nursemaid.)

KOSTJA.

THE FATHER.

THE MOTHER.

MESSENGER. (From a florist.)

A STUDENT.

A GUEST AT THE BALL.

PORTER.

GUESTS — SERVANTS.

The scene is laid in a large city.

Time: Present.



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FIRST PART

N J U

FIRST PART

SCENE: *The corner of a ball room.*

AT RISE: *Music. From time to time couples appear dancing.*

Some elderly ladies sit by the wall, looking bored.

Nju discovered in a cream colored ball dress. She has just been dancing. He is standing near her.

NJU. How hot it is! (*She fans herself*)

I've seen you once before at the theatre.

HE. At the theatre?

NJU. I sat exactly three rows behind you —

HE. Yes?

NJU. And I wanted you to turn 'round. Didn't you notice it?

HE. At the theatre? When was that?

NJU. You turned 'round and looked at me!

HE. Did I? I don't remember. (*He smiles*)

I know one oughtn't to say such things — it isn't polite. But really I don't remember. I mean, if

I'd really looked at you. I'm sure I should have remembered.

NJU. Sure?

HE. I've never seen you before.

NJU. And I thought you looked 'round because I was wishing it.

HE. What do you mean?

NJU. I stared hard at the back of your head and kept saying to myself, "Turn 'round, dear!" "Turn 'round, dear!"

HE. Dear?

NJU. We didn't know each other then.

HE. Of course! I must have looked pretty stupid. All men look stupid from behind.

NJU. But all the same, you did turn 'round and look. Why don't you remember? I sat next to —

(A young man appears, stands before Nju, and makes a bow. Nju rises and takes up her train.)

(To him)

Take my fan.

(They disappear together. He watches them. Nju comes back. She laughs exhaustedly. The young man conducts her to her chair, bows and withdraws.)

HE. Next to whom were you sitting on that occasion?

NJU. Eh?

HE. You said just now you were sitting in the theatre next to — well, next to whom?

NJU. Oh! then! — I —

(At this moment, a dancer hurries in, sliding over the polished floor. He bows to Nju, puts his arm around her waist and disappears with her, dancing. He watches her distractedly.)

(A student comes running in, breathless, and seizes Nju's chair, intending to take it away with him.)

HE. This chair is engaged.

STUDENT. For a lady?

HE. Engaged.

STUDENT. A lady is asking for the chair.

HE. But it's engaged.

STUDENT. That's queer. *(He goes off)*

(Nju comes back with Dancer.)

THE DANCER. I'm terribly sorry! Really I am! Oh, do, do please forgive me!

NJU *(Holding torn lace of her dress in her hand)*. I told you that wasn't the Viennese waltz that you were dancing.

THE DANCER. A Viennese waltz in six steps. It certainly was. Good Heavens!

NJU. Have you a pin?

THE DANCER. A pin? No. (*He hands her a pin*)

NJU. Thank you. Now we shall quarrel.

(*She fastens the torn place. The Dancer tries to help her.*)

THE DANCER. It isn't noticeable. Allow me to introduce myself.

(*He murmurs something ununderstandable and takes her hand.*)

Viennese waltz, six steps. Certainly.

(*In making his bow, he bumps into another person and turns around quickly.*)

I'm so sorry! I beg your pardon! A thousand pardons! (*He exits*)

HE. Well? Whom were you with on that occasion?

NJU. Such a bore! — At the theatre? — With my husband.

HE. You're married?

NJU (*Raising her eyebrows*). Why, certainly.

(*There is a pause in the dancing. Nju and He are silent. The music stops, and it seems as if this made their silence more marked.*)

Then you thought that I was — still a girl?

HE. No — not — a girl. One can tell that at once.

But I thought that you — were free.

NJU. Am I not free?

HE. Well, your husband?

NJU. Does that matter?

HE. You think — ?

(Pause)

NJU. Tell me about yourself.

HE. You read me.

NJU. That's not the same thing —

HE. What can I talk to you about? A week ago a woman left me. *(He watches her)* There, you see! It's strange how all women drop their eyes at those words.

NJU. What? Did I?

HE. Oh, yes. Indeed! It always seems to be as if secretly among yourselves, you're all in league against us men. And if any one of you makes us suffer, you all know about it; yes, I believe it happens by agreement, or by orders from headquarters.

NJU. You're mistaken. I didn't drop my eyes at all.

HE. Give in. You knew about it, too.

NJU. About what?

HE. That she left me — that she was leaving. You knew it. You were forbidden by headquarters to speak about it. Own up!

NJU. How funny you are!

HE. Aha! You're concealing it.

NJU. Has it upset you?

HE. It's sad; yet I like this sadness. It seems to me as if I heard time gliding softly by —

NJU. Time?

HE. Time — le temps. I love this sadness. Now I only glide over the surface of things — I barely touch them and pass on — and on. I pay gold for the smallest thing that life offers me. Nobody knows about it. I just glide by — That is the right thing to do. It is the only thing to do —

NJU. So you believe in life after death. I don't believe in it. How could it be possible that after death —

HE. It's much more complicated than it appears. I believe in a cosmic life.

(Nju does not understand, but does not show it. Confetti and balloons are thrown on. Paper-ribbon streamers fall in front of Nju. She tears off a piece and hands it to him.)

NJU. Write me a story on it.

HE. Good.

NJU. Is there enough?

HE. Quite. There are five yards.

NJU. Write the story and dedicate it to me in remembrance of our meeting tonight.

HE (*Writing with a pencil on the paper*). Yes.

NJU (*Looks over and reads*). It was in January —

HE. Don't look. It distracts me.

NJU. Will you have it published later on?

HE. Yes.

NJU. How interesting. You'll have to finish up exactly where the paper ends.

HE. I'll try to.

NJU (*Laughing*). That's very interesting.

HE. That is how the woman treats the poet. She forces him to concentrate his thoughts, throw aside superfluous ones and keep only those that are important. She says, "Here are five yards of my life. I make you a present of them. Write a fairy tale on them and dedicate them to me." And the poet has to fill the five yards of her life with everything that he possesses, and at the right moment find an appropriate ending because the paper has given out and the husband approaches.

NJU. The husband?

HE. Or — somebody else. I've finished.

NJU (*Looks up*). Oh, there you are! Will you allow me to introduce you to my husband!

(*The Husband enters. They bow.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Room in the husband's house. Night, going on toward morning. Nju is half lying on a chaise lounge.

Her ball dress is crumpled, her fur wrap and hat are lying on the floor.

Behind the scenes one hears the voice of the husband. He is saying "Nju, little Nju!" Nju does not answer. Her eyes are closed.

VOICE OF THE HUSBAND. Isn't it wonderful, Nju?

(Pause)

You are beautiful. I love you, Nju. Have they left anything out for us, Nju?

(Nju says something softly to herself, which is not distinguishable.)

VOICE OF THE HUSBAND. — Have they left anything out for us?

NJU. Are you hungry, then?

HUSBAND *(Appearing in the doorway)*. Are you?

NJU. I'm tired.

HUSBAND. You danced a great deal. *(He looks at the clock)*

I feel like a cup of tea.

NJU (*Absent-mindedly*). Is there any there?

HUSBAND. No. Even if it were cold — Why don't you undress?

NJU. You should have told the maid before we went out.

HUSBAND. I'm asking you why you don't undress.

NJU. I'm tired.

HUSBAND. You're so beautiful, my Nju. Your white dress is so becoming, you —

NJU. It isn't white.

HUSBAND. What is it, then?

NJU. Cream.

HUSBAND. All right, cream. These dear little hands — I love you. When you dance you look like a young girl.

NJU (*Bitterly*). But when we come home, I'm not like a young girl any longer.

HUSBAND (*Laughs*). No. You're so dear, little Nju.

NJU. Where were you all the time?

HUSBAND. I was watching you dance. (*He laughs*)

NJU. What are you laughing at?

HUSBAND. I'll tell you. It's so funny.

NJU. You're crushing my dress.

HUSBAND. Oh, this lace! Forgive me. I was

watching you at a distance, and I was thinking, "All these people are working so hard for my benefit —" You understand me, don't you?

NJU. I don't understand.

HUSBAND. These attentions, flowers, these hand-pressures —

NJU. What nonsense. What hand-pressures?

HUSBAND. Well, this whole atmosphere works on the nerves rather — doesn't it?

NJU. Yes. What then?

HUSBAND. The woman is excited; her eyes sparkle; her movements become charming and fascinating. Then the ball comes to an end. The men kiss the ladies' hands, gaze into their eyes and take their departure. At this moment, the husband appears on the scene and —

NJU. And? —

HUSBAND. And her whole excitement seems to come as a gift to him. Really, one could go to all these people and thank them — Oh, Lord, if I only had a cup of tea! (*He yawns*)

NJU. Why did you do it? . . . We are scarcely inside the house when you force yourself upon me. Leave me alone . . . Every time, every time it's the same thing —

HUSBAND. Is it my fault that you are so beautiful?

NJU. Every time. I thought I'd come home and dream away the whole night. I'd lock the door and sit all alone in my room. Dressed!

HUSBAND. You silly little girl!

NJU. Yes, like a silly girl. Then I wanted to write a letter; I didn't know myself to whom. To you perhaps. I wanted to lock myself in, and you were not to know.

HUSBAND. Can't you still do it? I'm not preventing you — am I?

NJU. Now it's all over. Everything has gone — gone! I'm tired, I can't think of anything. I only want to sleep — I'm limp. Why did you do it?

HUSBAND. Oh, God! I love you so.

NJU. Thief! You're a thief! You take other people's property!

HUSBAND. Um — that sounds like the poet, your — new acquaintance.

NJU. Leave him alone. You're like a cold shower. You extinguish every spark that's in me.

HUSBAND. And you'd like — Well, what would you like then?

NJU. Go away. I'd like to sleep.

(Husband walks up and down the room.)

HUSBAND. I don't understand you. If —

NJU. Go. Good night. (*Husband exits*)

(Nju gets up, turns off the electric light, as it is getting lighter outside, and begins slowly to undress. She takes something out of her pocket and goes to the window. What she holds is the strip of paper-ribbon. She slowly unrolls it, and first reads it softly to herself, then aloud. From outside the reflection from the dazzling snow, which lights up the window, streams in upon her tired face. She reads:

“It was in January. A faint glow of spring appeared over the earth. Nobody knew it. Only the women guessed it. — They stood, at a dance in winter with a snow-storm outside, and tore off five yards from a long paper streamer that came flying by, and said to the poet, ‘Write me a fairy tale.’ From their youth that was flying by they tore off a five-yard strip, and stretched out their hands — and handed the strip to the poet and said, ‘Write a fairy tale on it and dedicate it —’ ”

(She breaks off. Her hands which are holding the paper drop by her side. It is as if something held her chained.)

(The Husband comes in.)

HUSBAND. Njura!

(He is silent for a moment. Then he speaks, deeply moved, almost prophetically.)

Njure, I feel as if something has happened. I don't know — Something *has* happened.

(Nju stands without moving, without turning her head. The paper streamer falls to the ground and unrolls itself.)

CURTAIN

SCENE III

A room in the husband's house.

HE. You've comfortable quarters here.

HUSBAND (*Showing him some embroidery*). She embroidered this.

HE. Who?

HUSBAND. She, Njura. You embroidered this, didn't you dear?

HE. Very interesting.

NJU. Oh, do stop. That's all nonsense.

HUSBAND. She can draw too.

HE. What, you draw?

NJU. Now really why should that interest any one?

HE. Well, why not?

HUSBAND. If you only knew in what a curious way we got to know each other! Did she tell you? Did you tell him?

NJU. N-no.

HUSBAND. Well, it was at a summer bathing place. I was at a concert and suddenly I saw Nju with her Mother. I didn't know who she was and still I said to myself, "She or none."

HE. I envy you.

HUSBAND. What?

HE. To know at the first glance it is she or none, that is happiness!

HUSBAND. Yes, you know we corresponded for over six months without knowing each other. Here are all our letters. (*He points to a handsome chest*)

HE. What letters?

HUSBAND. Our letters. Hers and mine.

NJU. Over four pounds.

HUSBAND. How do you know?

NJU. I weighed them.

HUSBAND. When did you do that?

NJU. I weighed them.

HUSBAND. What a joke! Whatever for?

HE. How remarkable.

HUSBAND (*Taking the chest*). Yes. But why? What is there to laugh at?

HE. It is so remarkable that these letters lie quietly side by side and that you are talking about them. Do you know I have never believed it possible. I've never pictured such a thing to myself. I was absolutely convinced that such letters could never meet . . . and lie side by side.

NJU. How do you mean?

HE. I don't know. I've never written anything on this theme.

NJU. In your opinion what should be done with such letters?

HE. I don't know. Tear them up, burn them! I see this sort of thing for the first time.

NJU. Over four pounds!

HUSBAND. No, we shall save them. When Kostja is grown up, we shall give them to him.

(A pile of letters is lying on the table.)

HE *(After a pause)*. Oh, yes, of course, your son.

NJU. How curious it is to touch them.

(She looks through the letters and reads.)

Do you know, my handwriting has changed.

HE. Handwriting changes with the color of the hair.

NJU *(Reddening)*. When did I write this to you? Did I write this to you?

HUSBAND. Show me.

(He takes the letter roughly from his wife's hand without apologizing for his rudeness or noticing it — he reads it and laughs over it.)

You certainly did.

NJU. No.

HUSBAND. Do you suppose I have added anything?

NJU. I can't have written that. That's nonsense.

HUSBAND. We've decided to give these letters to our son when he is grown up.

HE. It must be painful to read these letters over again.

HUSBAND. Painful? On the contrary, it's very interesting. I often ask her what she thinks about this or that sentence. I read them over in the evenings.

NJU. They're dead and done with.

HUSBAND. Another new interest came in their place.

NJU. A read letter is dead.

HUSBAND. Yes, something came in their place.

HE. They can rise again.

HUSBAND. How can letters rise again? Something new, better came in their place. Get married and then you'll know.

(Nju reads quietly to herself and hurriedly hides the letter.)

What's that?

NJU. This . . . Oh, the concert!

HUSBAND. What concert!

NJU. *The* concert in the Autumn.

HUSBAND. Oh, yes, I remember. Tell me, how can letters rise again?

NJU *(Glancing at the letter)*. No, that's really good.
(Reads)

“I lay my youth in your hands. Take care of it. Some day I shall ask you for it back.” That’s good isn’t it?

HE. Yes, it is. Who wrote that, your husband, or . . .

NJU. I, of course. I couldn’t write like that now.

HUSBAND. She’s done a couple of drawings. Some of them are very good. Show them, won’t you? (*He goes to the door*)

NJU. Don’t dare. I don’t want you to. I’ll tear them up.

HUSBAND. They please me. (*He exits*)

NJU (*Calling after him*). Don’t please!

HE. I must go. I’ve been here since noon and now it is . . .

(*He looks at his watch and snaps the gold lid.*)

Oh!

NJU. No, wait until my husband comes back. It would be noticeable. When shall I see you again, tomorrow?

HE. Tomorrow I am —

NJU. I want to.

HE. Very well then, tomorrow.

NJU. Oh God, what am I doing?

HE. It has to be.

NJU. For whom? For what?

HE. It has to be. We may as well give in.

NJU. Only not to think! Do you know I suffer from hallucinations! It seems as if a hand-organ were constantly playing near me.

HE. Perhaps one really is playing.

NJU. No, but directly I begin to think the hand-organ is there.

HE. That is nerves. (*Long pause*)

NJU (*Reads a letter in a low voice with peculiar emphasis and watches Him at the same time*).

"I am obstinate, moody. I want attention from everyone. I can't live without being petted."

(*The Husband appears in the door, holding his wife's drawings in his hand. He smiles, remains standing and listens.*)

NJU (*Reading*). "I lay my youth in your hands. Take care of it. Some day I shall ask you for it back."

HUSBAND (*Drops the drawings, his face is distorted, he tears the letter out of her hand, his voice gets sharp and begins to show irritation*). Stop that reading!

(*Long pause. The ticking of the clock which was not noticeable before can be heard distinctly now. The*

Husband puts the letters back in the chest, and replaces it where it belongs.)

NJU (*Hastily — hypocritically*). My head aches.

(Everyone is silent. The clock ticks.)

HUSBAND (*Turns to Him and looks Him straight in the face*). Yes, letters can rise again!

CURTAIN

PART TWO

PART TWO

SCENE IV

In the husband's house. The interior of the room is indistinguishable because the light is out. The light of a large street lamp shines in at the window. At first it is not quite clear who is talking, because the occupants are not speaking in their usual tones.

NJU. My beloved, my dear one. Oh, how happy I am with you.

HE. You, my dear little girl.

NJU. How happy I am. I've been married eight years, I have a child, and yet I've never known this.

HE. What?

NJU. Love. I didn't know love.

HE. My little girl!

NJU. Beloved, dearest!

HE. What's the matter? You're crying.

NJU. No.

HE. Your eyes are wet. You're crying.

NJU. I don't know why. All the tears I've kept back are breaking out now. They're coming of themselves. Is that love? Yes! That is love.

HE. I feel somehow depressed. Whenever I come near a woman — (*Nju kisses Him*)

Whenever I come near a woman —

NJU (*Kissing Him*). Don't. You mustn't —

HE. What mustn't I?

NJU. I don't want you to talk of other women.

HE. No, I'm simply saying that such moments are always sad, so beautifully sad. Do you understand that?

NJU. Yes. Like a death-warning.

HE. As before death?

NJU. I see only your eyes.

HE. I feel as though years and years ago we had quarreled, and now we're reconciled. All ugly things and all past suffering are forgiven. Do you feel that? Our enmity was so strong that even our bodies hated each other. And now we are so close, close together. We have forgiven every grievance utterly. Doesn't it seem that way to you, too?

NJU. To die — both —

HE. When I talk with you, it's like thinking aloud. These dear, still hands. Your hands are so poetic.

NJU. Why is it all beautiful, so beautiful?

HE. When I was seventeen, I was once staying with a friend in the country.

(Long pause)

It was night. In one of the large, uninhabited rooms I had a meeting with his sister — I don't remember her face. The moon shone brightly. It was full moon. And even today I cannot forget her white cold, transparent hands . . . When I think how my youth has slipped by, then I look back, through the gray mist and see this maiden's delicate bare hands — I kissed them over and over again, for many hours. I couldn't see enough of them. I've never lived through anything more beautiful. — Isn't it strange, it all lies so far behind me. Fifteen years; and yet it doesn't seem as if it were behind, but rather ahead, in the future, and as if the pale, cool hands were waiting for me in the greenish mist and the moonlight. — Somewhere there is an empty, uninhabited room waiting for me. The moon is shining in at the window, black shadows cover the floor, and I only need to enter — Your hands are splendid, but hers were cool — the curious coolness of May in the moonlight. I kissed her and never let go of her hands, but I couldn't warm them — Perhaps it only seems that way to me now —

NJU. Yes, it only seems that way to you now!

HE. And now I have met her again.

(Pause)

I have met her again.

(Pause)

Yes, it is like a death-warning.

NJU. Tell me that you only love me.

HE. Only you, only your cool exquisite, girl's hands in the gray mist.

NJU. Why is it I met you so late? Oh! the time I've had to live without you, my dear one, my lover!

HE. Every beginning in life seems delayed.

NJU. How could I live without you in the darkness?

HE. What a distance lies behind us! What a long lane of enmity! I remember only those wonderful hands. I've waited for them — And you, what do you remember?

NJU. I still think of how you once kissed my hands, in the empty room one night, by the light of the moon.

HE. Yes. Yes. — The same hands

NJU. They burn because they love you so.

HE. Because they love me so.

NJU. My heart is like them.

HE. Don't ever demand anything of me. Never ask anything of me.

NJU *(Softly)*. I demand nothing.

HE. The woman always makes some demand.

NJU. No. I don't want anything from you. I only want to love you.

HE. I can't give myself to you entirely; for then I should be a beggar and you would turn away from me.

NJU. I shall only go on loving you more.

HE. I know that. But I beg of you, not to demand anything of me. Don't exhaust me — otherwise I should —

NJU. I will accept everything from you — everything that comes to me from you — every sorrow; yes, even death. We won't ever part.

HE. We won't ever part, my dear little girl, my splendid friend! I won't call you to life; no, to a fairy tale.

NJU. I will bear everything for you.

HE. We will live a fairy tale, the fairy tale of the primeval enemies, Man and Woman, who have made peace and shaken hands.

(There is repeated knocking at the door.)

NJU *(Anxiously)*. What is it?

MARIE *(Opens the door a little)*. He is coming. *(She disappears)*

(Nju hurries to the table and turns on the electric light. Now one can see that this is all taking place in the husband's home.)

NJU (*To Him*). Please go.

HE. Where should I go? Why? Don't do anything.

NJU. I can settle things alone.

HE. No. I shan't go.

(They are silent. They neither look at the door nor at each other — Pause.)

How disgusting!

NJU. I beg you to go.

(The door opens and the Husband comes in. Without turning his head, he takes in the whole situation at a glance. He is pale. He sits down. One sees, without actually hearing, that he is breathing heavily. Nju does not turn around and behaves as though she has not seen him. He, on the contrary, looks the Husband straight in the eyes.)

HE (*In a perfectly controlled voice*). You didn't find him in?

HUSBAND (*Just as quietly*). No. He wasn't in.

NJU. My head aches.

(He and Nju speak together, ignoring the Husband. Her voice seems somewhat strained. The Husband does not look at her.)

HE. You have a headache?

NJU. Yes.

HE. How did you get it?

NJU. I don't know.

HE. Don't leave flowers in your room at night. It's bad for you to breathe carbonic acid.

NJU. Oh, yes! Thank you for the flowers. I'm so fond of flowers.

HE. I'm glad that you — that you — Don't you think it wiser to lie down, as you have a headache?

NJU. Yes. I'll lie down.

HE (*Taking out his watch*). You know it isn't very early. You may think it is, but it's after ten o'clock. Yes, and my watch is fast. (*To the Husband*)

What does yours say?

HUSBAND (*Taking out his watch*). Half — twenty-five minutes after ten.

HE (*Rising*). There, I ought to have left some time ago. I wish you —

(*He takes his leave of Nju.*)

NJU. Till tomorrow, then?

HE. Good. Till tomorrow.

NJU (*To her Husband*) Oh, will you see Mr. —?

HUSBAND (*Rising, controlling himself*). Yes. (*Nju exits*)

(He says good night, and goes to the door.)

HE. Do you know the story of the Jew who was travelling on the Continent and —?

HUSBAND. What story?

(They go into the ante-room, where the conversation is continued.)

HE. Well, a Jew was travelling with his wife on the Continent —

HUSBAND. I should like to ask you —

HE. With pleasure.

HUSBAND. — not to come here tomorrow —

HE. What do you mean by that? Not to come — not to come to see you?

HUSBAND. Yes. Not to come to see us.

HE *(Coming back into the room)*. Why not?

(He has half put on his overcoat, one sleeve of which is hanging down.)

Is it your wish, or your wife's?

HUSBAND. My wife! My wife would rather you never went away.

HE. Now we're in for it! I congratulate you. A little scene of jealousy.

HUSBAND. We must talk this over man to man.

HE. Talk over what?

HUSBAND. That's not nice. You know very well it isn't.

HE. You're nervous.

HUSBAND. I think any man would be nervous in my position. This is getting worse and worse, until I really don't know what to do. When we're alone together you never make any attempt to be straightforward and clear matters up, but instead you begin to tell me stories about an Armenian who's travelling on the Continent.

HE. About a Jew.

HUSBAND. Yes, you may well laugh.

HE. I'm not laughing.

HUSBAND. Well, we'll see whether you'll laugh later on. As long as you don't have occasion to cry —

(His voice, which until now has been quite quiet, becomes sharp, shrill and nervous.)

As long as there's nothing to cry about.

HE. Don't shout so. You — a well-bred man!

HUSBAND. I'm at home, and here I can shout as loud as I choose.

HE. All right. But your wife is lying down. She's ill.

HUSBAND. You don't need to worry yourself about my wife any more than I do. I beg you most earnestly — Forget — Oh, don't come here again, *please*. Never again.

HE. Now what good would it do you. Supposing I discontinue my visits?

HUSBAND. She will forget you.

HE. Are you sure then that we shouldn't see each other any more? You want to get back your peace of mind, that's all.

HUSBAND. I want to preserve my family. I have a son.

HE. Who wants to take your son away from you?

HUSBAND. She is the mother of my child.

HE. She was.

HUSBAND. She shan't disgrace my name.

HE. Listen — dear friend.

HUSBAND. I am not your dear friend.

HE. Why not? I am very fond of you. You're a clever man. God knows all this is a lot of useless talk. "Mother of child — honour my name" — That's all old fashioned. Such a thing as being dishonoured doesn't exist at all — Rubbish.

HUSBAND. She'll not see you again.

HE. But you'll admit — it is too trivial—

All this is nothing but useless talk —

(Husband takes out a revolver and holds it by his side. In talking he shakes his head violently.)

HUSBAND. No, sir — not too trivial for me — Now, that's quite enough.

HE. Oho!

HUSBAND. We'll see whether you'll sneer later on.

HE. You consider yourself a well-bred man and go through all this nonsense —

HUSBAND. Well-bred man indeed! — And you? What are you? I make this stipulation — I give you until tomorrow — if you —

HE. I don't want to hear your stipulation —

HUSBAND. I give you until tomorrow — if you —

HE. I'm sorry for you. I like you — There's nothing dishonorable in that, is there? This might happen to anyone — I myself have lived through a similar experience and also clutched the revolver — A woman who has left me is not to be won back.

HUSBAND. I don't want to be the deceived — one.

HE *(Beginning to get excited)*. Who's deceiving you? No one is deceiving you!

HUSBAND *(Looks at him — it comes into his mind that perhaps his suspicion and jealousy may be without foundation)*.

You mean — no — one?

HE. Am I deceiving you then? The affair is quite clear —

(What happens now is hard to understand — scuffling, shuffling take place. The table and lamp are overturned and the lamp is extinguished. One can't tell who has upset it. The crash of the breaking of the globe is heard — Then there is a weird silence. Both men wrestle in the dark — they seem to be struggling together on the floor.)

A VOICE. You — a well-bred man!

(There is a sound like a box on the ears.)

A VOICE. Hell! That's my eyes!

(Suddenly four loud shots are fired — one after another. Then there is quiet. Nju and Marie rush in from the dining room.)

VOICES. What has happened? Why is it dark? Why is it so dark? Who fired here? My God — who is there?

HE. Calm yourself — I am unhurt.

NJU. Why is it so dark? Who fired?

HE. Your husband — Are you still alive?

(Pause)

MARIE. The master has been shot!

NJU (*Interrupts her angrily — The lover's instinct awakens in her and she feels herself a partner in the crime.*)

Be quiet!

MARIE. Oh! Our master — The poor master!

NJU. Be quiet!

(*To Him*)

Where is he?

HE. Here somewhere.

HUSBAND. I — here.

HE. Then you're not wounded?

HUSBAND. No.

HE. Ah, God be thanked. Everybody's all right.

NJU. Turn on the light. (*Marie exits*)

HE. The lamp has fallen over.

HUSBAND. You thank God?

HE. Certainly we can thank God that everything has turned out like this.

(*Marie enters with a light — She has Kostja who is crying in her arms.*)

KOSTJA. Mama, why are the soldiers shooting? I can't sleep.

MARIE. Nice goings on! God save us!

NJU. Where's the revolver? Give it to me at once.

KOSTJA. Papa, did the soldiers fire at you?

HE (*To Kostja*). Nobody has fired here. You were only dreaming.

KOSTJA. Go away, go away. I don't like you!

NJU. Marie, take the child away.

MARIE. I wish I could take him away altogether — What on earth is the matter here? Frightening the child like that!

HUSBAND (*To Kostja*). My dear boy, my precious child —

KOSTJA. You mustn't shoot any more.

NJU. Take the child away, Marie. I've already told you once.

(*Marie goes with Kostja to the door.*)

(*Excitedly to the Husband.*)

You have no consideration for me whatsoever — All the servants know it by now all over the house. I won't endure living with such a man any longer.

HE. Just see where the bullets hit. Now isn't that remarkable —?

NJU. I won't endure this life any longer — If only you had shot me! I can't stand it any longer —

HUSBAND. Nor I —

NJU. Tomorrow you'll strangle me. It's down-right hell for both of us.

HUSBAND. But I tell you one thing — if you go — you go for good —

NJU. I shall certainly not come back again —

HUSBAND. And Kostja stays with me.

KOSTJA. Mother, where are you going?

NJU. My God, what's that?

HUSBAND (*In a monotone*). Then we part —?

NJU. There's nothing so frightful about that. Look around, it happens every day — Every day —

KOSTJA (*Restless*). Where are you going, Mama?

NJU (*To the Husband*). I dare say it will be hard on you to let me go and not see me again — you must forget me —

HUSBAND. I'll travel abroad with the child. I'm in the way here anyhow.

NJU. It will be hard for me not to see Kostja again —

HUSBAND. I never thought — that it would come so soon. Ten years!

NJU. It was bound to come.

HUSBAND. Think it over, Njura. Perhaps you're making a mistake.

NJU. No, no, no, I am leaving you — Everything is at an end.

HUSBAND. And if —

NJU. And if he turns me out, I shall not come back to you. I shall lie in wait for him at the door — I shall never come back to you. Don't expect me. Don't have the faintest hope.

HUSBAND. Why?

NJU. I don't want you to imagine that you have any right over me — We are strangers —

HE. How can you be so cruel — without a spark of goodness.

NJU. Do I say I'm good? I'm bad — I'm a bad mother and an even worse wife. I'm not worthy of being loved —

HUSBAND. I never thought that it would come so soon —

(Suddenly the bell rings at the front door.)

NJU *(Whispering)*. Who is that? — So late — Marie, see who it is.

MARIE *(Has given the child to him and goes to the door)*. Who is there?

(Pause)

What? What do you want?

(Pause)

(Voices are heard the other side of the door.)

The family are asleep.

NJU. What is the matter —?

MARIE (*Frightened — quite quickly*). The superintendent and the porter are there.

HE. Congratulations — The porter! Nice story! Wait a moment, Marie — don't open yet. Where is the revolver? Give it to me here. Now the table — that's it.

(*He puts everything in order.*)

Marie — go — Oh, no, you stay. There! The lamp has fallen over — that is all — only keep cool —

(*The bell rings again.*)

That you should — only keep cool! (*To the Husband*)

Don't look around so wildly — that gives it away. Nothing has happened. The lamp has just fallen over. Look cheerful, as they say. There — now you can open the door.

(*His face wears an unnatural expression.*)

You understand, don't you — A Jew is travelling on the Continent with his wife and they go to the theatre —

NJU. What's that? To the theatre?

(*Marie opens the door.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE V

A room in the husband's house. Nju is sleeping. The window is lighted by the moon. The black shadows of the cross bars of the window-pane appear on the floor as a parallelogram; during the scene it takes on the form of a right angle. Articles of clothing are lying about untidily. Some one tries the door from the outside. Nju gets up and stares frightened toward the door. Her heart seems to stand still. Suddenly the door crashes open, because the lock has been burst. Nju gives a horrified cry and puts her head quickly under the cover. The Husband comes in and sinks on his knees before Nju.

HUSBAND. Njura, Njura! What shall I do, I love you so? I couldn't sleep. I've been lying two hours without being able to sleep. I won't do anything to hurt you — Why are you afraid of me? Don't be frightened. I won't do anything to him. I am your friend, Njura, not your husband, only a friend, friend to you both — Why won't you talk to me any more, why do you avoid me, as if I were a useless dirty rag? I am friend to you both — This can't go on as it is — Something must be done. Do you hear me? Why don't you answer — Ah — 'tis the same to me — I

kiss your coverlet. You have left me — You love someone else — I kiss your coverlet — I only want the best for you. I'll go away and not disturb you. Far away — I know — the third is always in the way. I'll take Kostja with me and live with him. We'll wait for you. And if you will, you can come back to us at any time. If only your pride does not hold you back — Don't be afraid — Come back to us. I want to thank you for the ten years, which you have given me. You were always merry, and sang like a little bird. You were like the sun and lighted my life. You are mother — yes, you are the mother of my child. Isn't that enough? For everything — that you have given me — and you didn't deceive me — told me everything like a friend. You have a sincere, proud heart. Your whole life is beautiful.

NJU. I shall never come back to you.

HUSBAND. He will leave you Njura. Then where will you go? He doesn't love you.

NJU. Oh, don't . . .

HUSBAND. He will leave you. I'm sorry for you — What are you going to do? You're blind — the world will —

NJU. What does that matter to me?

HUSBAND. You're blind. What you are doing with

yourself is too terrible. In about a year he will leave you. Why destroy your whole life?

NJU. I love him — I love him!

HUSBAND. But he doesn't love you —

NJU. I shan't answer you any more.

HUSBAND. You are the most beautiful woman I know. Everything about you is beautiful. There's nothing lovelier than your hands — I love it when you come in to breakfast in the morning — and your hair is still damp on the temples — You're much prettier than the youngest Birinski — When you go from one room to another. You carry yourself like a queen. I shall have a portrait made from your picture and it shall hang over my writing table. You are more beautiful than you were then — when you were still a girl. You shouldn't wear that black dress, it doesn't suit you. Now you should dress entirely in white because you're in love. Your dress, your hat, the sunshade and stockings must all be white. You still have the long white openwork stockings you wore at the ball, do you remember, on the seventh of January?

NJU. Why do you torture me?

HUSBAND. We'll go out tomorrow and order everything. Will you? — Why not? Even if we are no longer man and wife, can't I be with you any more?

That would be too stupid? I shall get some money tomorrow and then we will make our purchases. Don't worry about money — I will give you as much as you want.

NJU. Don't talk of it — Be quiet.

HUSBAND. All right, I won't say any more. Only this — you are not to suffer want and get worried. Oh, if you only knew how I love you! It's enough for me if you will live under the same roof, where I can see you and know you are near me — Only don't leave me — Don't go away from me —

NJU. Why do you torture me so?

HUSBAND. Why couldn't we all three live together? Where is it written that that is not possible? We're all intelligent people. We have no prejudices. Where is it written that it is not possible?

NJU. My God! Do leave me alone.

HUSBAND. We can all three live together and that would be the most circumspect arrangement and nobody would be deceived by it. The question must be solved somehow. It is impossible to go on like this. One of the two things — I can't stand it any more — I can't stand it any more. I'm a human being, too. You both torture me without a shred of pity, as though

I were not a human being . . . without a shred of pity. You sneer at me.

NJU. Nobody sneers at you. You know everything. Am I hiding anything?

HUSBAND. Where were you today? Why did you come home so late? Why were you so excited that you locked yourself in here? You were running around with him in some hotel, or restaurant, or the devil only knows where — you vile thing — I'll strike you dead! You're sleeping in another room in order to lock yourself in. I'll strike you dead.

NJU. Strike me! Strike me! Please!

HUSBAND (*Seizing her arm*). Get up. What do you mean by lying down when I'm standing? I won't allow you to flop around in this way. Get up! On your knees. Get up! So!

NJU. You strike me!

HUSBAND. You should be struck across the face with a riding whip — I — who is the master —?

CURTAIN

SCENE VI

Room in the Husband's house. A telephone is on the wall. Kostja is standing on a chair in front of the telephone. The husband stands next to him.

HUSBAND. Well, did you understand, Kostja?

KOSTJA. Yes, Papa.

HUSBAND (*In the telephone*). Thanks.

(*Pause*)

Yes. Yes.

KOSTJA. Papa, may I cough into the telephone?

HUSBAND. Take the receiver. You mustn't cough.

There . . .

KOSTJA. I'm not afraid, Papa.

HUSBAND. You needn't be afraid. You'll hear at once, that someone is talking to you and you must answer.

KOSTJA. How can I hear, if my ear is stopped up?

HUSBAND. Hush! Now, listen!

(*The Husband's face expresses expectation and intensity. Some minutes go by. Four flights downstairs the banging of an outer door is heard.*)

Don't you hear anything?

KOSTJA (*Astonished and happy*). Mama! Mama!

(He drops the receiver and looks around astonished.)

Where are you?

HUSBAND. Don't drop the receiver, do you hear?

KOSTJA. Mama, is that you? — Why do I hear you and yet I can't see you? No. I'm not crying. I have a gun and a balloon. A large red balloon.

(Makes an expressive gesture)

I was ill, Mama. Why didn't you come to me?

(The Husband makes a movement. Kostja gives him a sign not to disturb him.)

Now, I'm all right again. *(Marie enters)*

I'm not allowed to go out for a walk yet. The policeman will get me if I go out.

MARIE. Who are you speaking to?

HUSBAND. With Madame.

MARIE. If it weren't for the child, I wouldn't stay another minute in this house. I can't look on at this sort of thing.

KOSTJA. Marie, I'm talking through the telephone!

MARIE. Yes, yes!

KOSTJA *(At the telephone)*. And when are you coming to us, Mama? Are you ill? — Why are you always away? Do you know, Mama, I'm speaking through the telephone. How are you speaking? What? Two

telephones? — So many? Can't you see me either? No, I am standing all by myself on a chair . . . Papa is only holding me with one hand. Mama, Mama. Where are you Mama? Why have you gone away?

(He raps excitedly on the receiver. Hurt.)

Mama, why won't you speak to me any more? Mama — Mama —

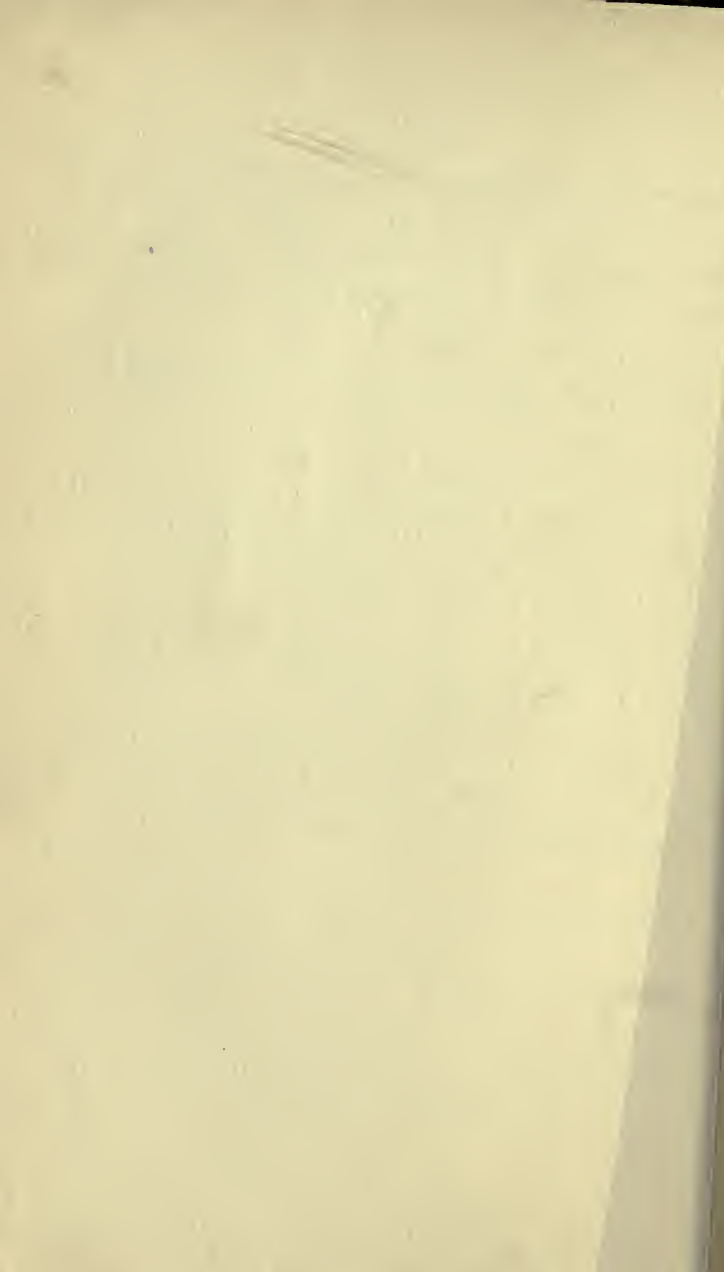
HUSBAND *(Takes the receiver away from him, puts it to his ear, and then hangs it on the hook. He bends over Kostja, kisses him on the forehead and smooths his hair).*

The telephone is out of order, Kostja. We can't hear any more.

MARIE *(Carrying the boy off).* If only I didn't have to look on at such things — *(Exit)*

(The Husband remains alone. He goes quickly to the telephone, takes down the receiver, and puts it to his ear. He listens a moment and hangs it again on the hook.)

CURTAIN



PART THREE

PART THREE

SCENE VII

An ordinary furnished room. It is evening. The Husband stands at the door. He is untidily dressed. His coat collar is turned up. He might be a workman, who had done the repairs in the house and is waiting for a tip.

NJU (*Exhausted rather than excited*). Now go —

HUSBAND. All right. I'm going.

(*Long pause*)

Perhaps you need —

NJU. I need nothing.

(*Pause*)

(HUSBAND (*In a monotone*)). I saw you driving with him yesterday.

(*Pause*)

I saw you drive by.

(*Pause*)

NJU (*Expressionless*). Yes. I went driving with him.

HUSBAND. And you refuse to go with me. You won't drive with me. I can't understand you.

NJU. It's half past eight.

HUSBAND (*As before*). You're expecting him, then?

(*Nju doesn't answer*).

Now, we *have* lived together ten years!

NJU. That's such an old story.

HUSBAND. I don't at all know what has happened so suddenly. There must surely be some way out. This is all stupid. With really good intentions there is always a way of adjusting things. It's only our fault that it doesn't come out right. You, and I and He — we can settle things somehow. Let us all meet and talk the matter over tomorrow if you like. Have you time tomorrow? Or preferably today. Why put it off? Or will you let me wait here — he is likely to come any moment now, and we'll settle the whole thing. Why put it off?

NJU. Go — go.

HUSBAND. I love you.

NJU. I know.

HUSBAND. Just come to me for a week. Try it.

NJU. I've heard that already.

HUSBAND. Do try. If you're not happy, you can go away again. If you wish it, I myself will leave the house.

NJU. I know all about that.

HUSBAND. Let everything remain as it was. He can come and see you as he did before. See, I'm your friend — I am friend of you both.

NJU. Oh, yes, yes . . .

HUSBAND. Let everything remain as it was. I'm only thinking of your good, so that you don't have to live here in a furnished room. I'll leave home and move over to a hotel.

NJU. No.

HUSBAND. Why not? Why not?

MARIE (*Enters*). Good day, sir.

HUSBAND (*Without looking at her*). Good day.

(*He recognizes her.*)

Oh, you're here, Marie?

NJU. She comes to me now and then.

HUSBAND. Well, what's it to be?

NJU (*Goes to him and gives him her hand. She says simply and without irony*). Good-bye.

HUSBAND. Good-bye.

(*He kisses her hand once, then a second and third time and goes out.*)

NJU. Thank God, he's gone!

(*She lies down on the couch and puts up her feet.*)

MARIE. Which slippers would you like to put on, M'am?

NJU. Those.

MARIE (*Bends over Nju's feet and unlaces her shoes*). I've found the receipt for the curtains.

NJU. Did you find it?

MARIE. Yes, this morning. I was looking in the drawer for a serviette for the master, and there I found it behind the mirror.

NJU. Behind the large mirror?

MARIE. Yes. Tomorrow I'll go and fetch the curtains. It's about time we put them up. There's been nothing up at the windows for four weeks.

NJU. That's uncomfortable.

MARIE. Eh? Yes. Oh, there was a telephone message this morning from the lady who lives in Alexander Street.

NJU. Is she back already?

MARIE. Yes, indeed. She telephoned to know whether you were at home.

NJU. Really? (*Laughs*)

And what did you say to her?

MARIE. I said you were away. Then she asked where.

NJU. And what did you say? (*Laughs*)

MARIE (*Smiling*). I answered her that I didn't know where.

(*While she is still down on the floor, she begins suddenly to sob — crying:*)

Oh, Madame! Oh, Madame!

NJU. This is absurd.

(*She covers her face with her hands, remains awhile motionless and then lets her hands fall.*)

Absurd!

(*She makes an impetuous movement with her foot.*)

Oh, do hurry up!

(*Marie is still busy with the unlacing — He comes in. Marie gets up and goes out.*)

HE (*Kissing her hands. Pointing to Marie*). What's the matter with her?

NJU. What does a woman cry about? "He" of course has ceased caring about her. She also has a "He" — turn round.

(*She changes her shoes.*)

HE. Why should I turn round? Why these formalities?

NJU. I don't want you to — look the other way.

HE (*Turning away*). Where's the logic? . . . Always the same old story . . . "he" and "she"; "she" and "he."

NJU (*Still busying herself with the shoes*). Yes, always the same old story, how it tires one!

HE. Do you know what has occurred to me? Listen.

NJU. Y—yes . . .

HE. I'll write a novel about the two axes of the world — day and night — The masculine principle and the feminine — everlastingly uncertain in the balance. Do you understand?

NJU. Hm —

HE. I shall call the novel "The Two Axes" and dedicate it to you. That will be our child. Yes?

NJU (*Suddenly laughs aloud and breaks up the serious, almost solemn atmosphere. She goes behind him and flicks the end of his nose*). Oh, you!

HE (*Astounded*). What's the matter with you?

NJU. Nothing. Yes, that's what it shall be called "The Two Axes."

HE. What's this tone you're using to me?

NJU. My sweetheart, I must change my old tone. I'm not a married woman any more. I'm — only —

HE. Lately you've spoken to me in such a strange way. "My sweetheart —" What does it mean?

NJU. Hm. But you are still my dear — your friend was here today.

HE. Who?

NJU. Your friend. My husband.

HE. Again? What did he want?

NJU. He tried to talk me over into going back.

HE. Why did you see him? I don't understand what you have to say to him. It only upsets you both.

NJU. Remarkable, he speaks quite calmly about you.

HE. When you come down to it — am I to blame?

NJU. Of course not — You're not to blame at all.

HE. Certainly not.

NJU. Of course not. That's what I say.

HE. I ask you — in fact I insist — that you won't see your husband again.

NJU. All right.

HE. I make my request quite seriously.

NJU. Yes — yes.

HE. Promise me.

NJU. Yes.

HE. Isn't it rather silly? Really in ten years you could have said all you had to say to him. Doesn't it bore you?

NJU. He is good. He is better than both of us.

HE. Very possibly. Why did you leave him then?

NJU. I'm a fool.

HE. Well, it isn't too late to be sensible.

NJU. Don't ever dare to say anything like that.

HE. Everything can be patched up. Then you won't have to go on living in a hole like this.

NJU. You'd better not exasperate me!

HE. Or —

NJU. Or I shall go away from you.

HE. And will you take my picture with you?

NJU. Of course I shall take it with me.

HE. And where will you go?

NJU (*Irritably*). Where? Do you suppose I don't know where?

HE. There, there, that's enough! Let's make it up now, eh?

NJU. Do you believe there is nowhere I can go?

HE. Let's get married, Nju.

NJU. Thank you. I've just got rid of my first husband. Shall I take a second right away? No, thank you kindly!

HE. What shall we do then?

NJU. Nothing. I want to be free.

HE. Aren't you —?

NJU. No, my dear. Let's not talk about that.

HE. You don't love, Njura.

NJU. I love you very much; no, really I love you very much, but there is something that is more than love — something still higher.

HE. What's that? Life?

NJU. I don't know.

HE. Or — death?

NJU. No, there's something ridiculous about the dead.

HE. Ridiculous?

NJU. Why yes, ridiculous. A being lives, reads, writes, goes to the theatre — and suddenly he is lying full length — stretched out with so much ceremony. There's something funny in it. Inwardly every one is more or less laughing at him! No, no, there's something higher than that.

HE. Than life, death and love?

NJU. Than all combined. There must be something undoubtedly; otherwise everything would be senseless.

HE. I really don't understand what you're talking about.

NJU. I learned to know love and thought in the beginning there could be nothing more glorious. That this was happiness.

HE. And?

NJU. You seem to be offended. My friend, the most beautiful girl can only give what she possesses.

HE. So, you weren't happy with me?

NJU. Oh yes, but I want to go still higher, still further.

HE. Above and beyond there is nothing more.

NJU (*Unexpectedly falls on her knees before him*). There is something beyond. There must be something lying on the other side — You're very clever — very sensitive, but you don't know that. It is impossible that there is nothing existing — a something where nothing can harm us — where nothing more can happen to us, and that which we once possess can't be taken away from us. Perhaps it isn't happiness, but something higher, something so high that we no longer ask whether it is happiness or not. When I think really hard, I seem to hear someone whispering: "Yes, there is something." — Won't you have some tea?

HE (*Thoughtfully*). Perhaps life after death —

NJU. Oh no, here on earth: One jokes and chatters, and just there — there where the deepest, truest words are needed, they fail us. How shall I express that? I could cry with vexation that I am so stupid, so clumsy and empty-headed.

HE. You are beautiful.

NJU. Oh, just for once in life to be able to cry out the right word.

HE. What word Nju?

NJU (*Withdrawing her hand from his*). My own, ownest word. Everybody has his own word — It is somewhere in my throat, and yet I can't speak it out.

HE. Here in your throat?

NJU. Don't touch me. Yes, here.

HE. Here? (*Kisses her*)

NJU (*Moving away*). Don't.

HE. Come to me, my Nju, come!

NJU (*Gently warding him off*). No, no — please! When I'm singing to myself in a wood, or sitting by the side of a river, I feel that there must be something that is higher than anything in the world. I sing a strange melody, which I've never heard before, a sad, sad melody without words. Sometimes words fit in with the melody, quite plain, simple words. One would like to recall them afterward, but one never can. This happens to me about twice a year — never oftener.

HE. I've never seen you like this before.

NJU. I wrote a letter to you last night.

HE. To me? But I was with you, last night.

NJU. Yes, after you'd gone. I tore it up again.

HE. You tore it up?

NJU. Yes, it was unnecessary — I said it all to your picture. I even read the letter to it. No, not quite all of it —

HE. And what did my picture say to you?

NJU. It is dear! It is nicer than you.

HE. And nicer than your husband?

NJU. Yes, I tell everything to the picture — it never scolds me, and forgives everything.

(He tries to embrace her. She tears herself away from him.)

No, my dear one — that's over.

HE. Why?

NJU. Because —

HE. How weirdly you're treating me!

NJU. I feel like that sometimes. Come here — I'll kiss you on the forehead, and that's all.

HE. I don't understand all this.

NJU. It's just one of my whimsies.

HE. No, thank you. Women's whimsies! Do you know what I'm going to say to you? Drop it!

NJU. What do you mean?

HE. Everything. It isn't worth while in this province which calls itself the world — Don't you feel it? Happiness and love and work and God knows

what else! It is all so provincial — Even our dreams — let them be what they will — are provincial — yes, even our sufferings.

NJU (*Seriously*). And what is there that isn't provincial?

HE. What? Art and death. No, art is, too! Only death.

NJU. Yes, I understand.

HE (*Goes to her*). You understand it?

NJU. Yes, I understand it.

HE. Just say, "It isn't worth while," and you'll laugh, just as I'm doing. Not with your face — but (*Pointing to his breast*) with the heart, while your eyes remain sad. Why — do you see — your eyes have become quite sad?

NJU. When will it be different — not provincial?

HE (*With conviction*). Never! It will never be different.

NJU. Funny!

HE. Your eyes have become so sad, dear. How lovely you are!

(*Near her — passionately.*)

I want you, close — close —

NJU (*Weakly*). Don't!

HE. What do I care whether you want it? I want it — I want it.

NJU. I implore you — no — not — not —

(He begins to struggle with her, then lets her go.)

No, my dear! Tonight you won't succeed!

HE *(Taking his coat, etc.)*. Good night. You certainly have talent —

NJU. Talent for what? I don't understand you.

HE. For the stage. *(He goes out)*

NJU *(Looks after him)*. Ah!

(Pause)

(Looks at his picture and speaks aloud.)

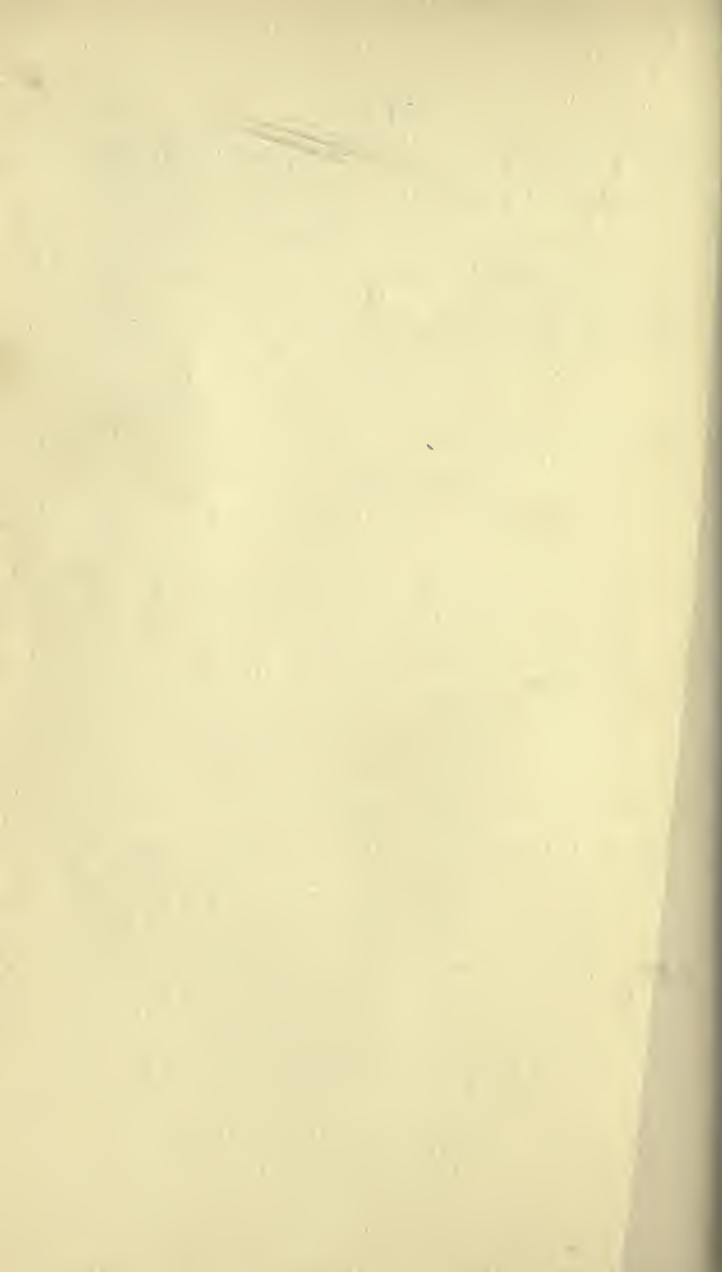
Dear, why are you angry with me? I wanted you to understand my soul, and you understood nothing. Dear foolish thing! You're so clever and so dense! Why did I meet you! You came and woke up my life, and now I've nothing at all. Still I thank you that I met you — thank you for everything — You can't give me more. That is how you are. You'll meet many women but you'll never forget me. You won't, will you? Now you're dear — now you're not angry any more. I'm not guilty towards you at all — I know it — You'll never understand this, nor believe me. Nobody in the whole world will believe me. Dear

foolish man! You are as moody as a child. If you had loved me as I wanted . . . I never . . . No you can't . . .

(The Clock strikes.)

My God! This terrible fear!

CURTAIN



PART FOUR

PART FOUR

SCENE VIII

The same room as in Scene VII. It is in great disorder. The windows are wide open. He in a fur overcoat and rubbers. Marie, Kostja.

HE. What do you say Marie? Dead? It's not possible.

MARIE. Just as we all will die.

HE. Only last night I was . . .

MARIE. Um — And today she is dead!

KOSTJA (*Sits indifferent in the corner*). My Mama's dead.

HE. Tell me that this is only a joke.

MARIE. It would be a good joke! She was taken ill in the night and towards morning we took her to the hospital and there she died.

HE. Who took her to the hospital? Why didn't someone notify me?

MARIE. I sent for the master and he took her there. Don't go to her. Probably she has been taken home by now. Master sent the boy over here.

KOSTJA. My Mama died tonight.

HE. Didn't she leave me . . . Surely she left a letter for me or some message!

MARIE. No, there's no letter. There's nothing for you.

HE. Marie, what does it mean? How frightfully stupid it all is!

MARIE. Yes, we were not asked. (*Cries*)

That is "freedom." Left her husband in the lurch . . . Oh God, oh God. . . (*Takes Kostja in her arms.*)

My poor little orphan . . . you haven't any mother.

KOSTJA. Marie, why are you crying? If you cry, the policeman will get you.

HE. How frightfully stupid it all is.

(*The Husband comes in with his hat and coat on.*)

MARIE. Well, sir?

(*Pause*)

HUSBAND. Has the boy had anything to eat?

MARIE. Yes.

KOSTJA. Yes, daddy. I've had something to eat. Why have you got your hat on! You mustn't do that.

HUSBAND (*Takes his hat off mechanically and speaks to Marie meanwhile turning his back on Him, perhaps without noticing Him, and speaks in an indifferent almost a business-like tone*).

I've just been over there and got the death certificate. I have ordered a white coffin, all white . . . What else is there? . . .

MARIE. White . . . Yes, white is beautiful . . .

HUSBAND. I've ordered the grave.

MARIE. And who is at home?

HUSBAND. At home? The lady who lives in Alexander street and . . . and . . . Has the boy had anything to eat?

KOSTJA. Why don't you believe me Papa when I tell you something?

HUSBAND (*Strokes his hair without paying any attention*). Yes . . . Hm, hm. Yes . . . What else is there! We must put the notice in the paper. . . . Who could drive over? I have no time.

HE. I'll do it. I'll drive over.

HUSBAND (*Without turning towards Him and without giving any indication that he has heard*). What else is there? Oh yes, pack up all the things.

MARIE. What things?

HUSBAND. Her things, madame's.

MARIE. That's soon done. (*Points to a small pile lying on the sofa*)

HUSBAND (*Looking at it seriously*). Just these . . . Yes . . . (*Points to the shoes*)

The coat. There . . . is that all! (*Irritated*)

MARIE, what are you doing with that hat! Look how you've bent it.

MARIE. That's all . . . (*With an evasive gesture*)

HUSBAND. You've bent it all up. And this . . .
(*Holding up His picture*)

MARIE (*Wants to take it from him, somewhat embarrassed*). Oh, this! . . . You can't leave this here.

HUSBAND (*Holding it in his hand, simply*). Yes, of course.

(*He puts it with the other things.*)

Pack everything together and take them to the cab. One is waiting outside.

THE CHAMBER-MAID (*Comes in and begins to sweep*).

MARIE. I'll pack them up right away.

HUSBAND. The hat you must be particularly . . .
What else? Yes, where is my black coat?

MARIE. In the cupboard, sir.

HUSBAND. Drive home with the boy, Marie.

(*A piece of soap falls out of the bundle, he picks it up.*)

Her soap.

(*He holds it to his face in both hands and smells it.*)

Her soap.

(*His mouth quivers, he cries.*)

THE CHAMBER-MAID (*Stoops and picks up a roll of paper-ribbon*). Is this something you want?

MARIE (*Looks at the paper*). No, throw the thing away.

HE (*Takes the ribbon, his voice trembling*). How like a flower she has faded. Like a reckless thoughtless bird . . . (*His voice breaks, he cries*)

And why should I not cry, why should I be ashamed? A tender heart, a woman's heart, is broken. Faded like a flower . . . The world will lose in beauty . . . In the night, all alone, forlorn, without a soul, no one by who could have said to her . . . No one — in a hospital — among strangers . . .

CURTAIN

SCENE IX

In the Husband's home all the doors are thrown open, the rooms are thrown into one. Not one thing stands in its customary place. Every thing is in great disorder as is usual in a house of mourning. The coffin itself is not to be seen but is evidently in the room which would be nearest the audience. The white coffin cover is leaning against the door. On account of it everyone goes around nervously and this white spot which dominates the entire picture forces itself persistently upon the vision. The mass for the dead is not yet begun. A few ladies and gentlemen stand motionless in the doorways in street costume. The ladies wear smart hats. Their faces can't be recognized as everyone is looking at the coffin. From time to time new guests appear among whom are people who were seen at the Ball in the first act. A messenger from the florist's enters. He carries two large wreaths covered with wrapping paper. He looks from side to side and apparently does not know to whom he should give the wreaths.

He appears in an expensive fur coat and top hat. The messenger recognizes him and goes toward him.

MESSENGER. Here, please.

HE. What is it?

MESSENGER. What you ordered yesterday. (*Uncovers the wreath*)

HE. Oh yes, quite right. (*Looking at it*)

But that's not at all what I wanted.

MESSENGER. How! You ordered a large wreath, two palms branches with ribbons and the inscription — "To the white flower, which faded." After "flower" — a comma.

HE. But I expressly told you to use only white roses.

MESSENGER. No, you said . . .

HE. I repeated it several times.

MESSENGER. You said, "Send a wreath with two palm branches for someone who is dead, a lady," and paid 5 rubles on account. Forget-me-nots are even more appropriate. We could still change it, it won't take long.

HE. How can you? The mass begins immediately.

MESSENGER. Besides whether red, or white, or blue, or any other color, that is — so to speak — comparatively speaking — its all the same — that is to say, it's all alike to the dead, — ribbons, flowers and everything. (*Points to the wreath and the streamers*)

HE. How much more do I owe you? Ten rubles?
(*He takes out his purse*)

MESSENGER. No indeed, thirteen.

HE. What's the matter with you? Yesterday you said the wreath would only cost fifteen.

MESSENGER. Impossible, sir. Why good heavens, the streamers and the inscription alone cost me five rubles. And then add to that two palm branches . . .

HE. You are taking advantage of your opportunity.

MESSENGER. We meet our customers half way, whenever we can, but in this case it's impossible. I assure you the roses alone cost a ruble apiece. All right then, I'll let you have the wreath for seventeen. Shall I carry it into the drawing room and lay it on the coffin?

HE. How do you know?

MESSENGER. Why sir? I've brought bouquets and flowers and potted plants here often enough, that you've been kind enough to order. I know this house very well. For a lady?

HE. Yes, for the lady.

MESSENGER. You don't say so. How dreadful. A very charming lady. She poisoned herself, didn't she?

HE (*Very taken aback*). Poisoned herself? How . . . poisoned?

MESSENGER. It was so sudden . . . and there was ^mno autopsy.

(The young man with whom Nju danced at the ball enters followed by the Husband.)

THE YOUNG MAN *(Excitedly)*. Unheard of, not to have a satin cushion for her head!

HUSBAND. Please drive at once to the office and ask for the cushion. Tell them I sent you.

THE YOUNG MAN. Unheard of. *(Exits)*

MESSENGER *(Recognizing the Husband)*. Here you are, sir! *(Hands him the wreath)*

HUSBAND. Oh! all right. *(Taking out his purse)*

MESSENGER *(Uncovering second wreath)*. A wreath with the inscription "To my wife who will never be forgotten — From her disconsolate husband." Please, sir. *(Handing him the bill)*

HUSBAND. Why white flowers? I ordered . . .
(Sees Him)

It's all the same anyway. Quick.

MESSENGER. I beg your pardon, you ordered forget-me-nots. I see now. It was a mistake. One moment. I beg your pardon. Allow me, sir. *(Takes the wreath from Him)*

The boy changed the ribbons. One minute.
(Changes the ribbons)

HUSBAND. It doesn't matter.

MESSENGER. No, it does matter. The gentleman

over there was complaining and we must consider our firm . . . a little oversight . . . it escaped attention in the rush. I beg your pardon. Now then, here it is, "The white flower, comma . . . which" . . . (*To Him*)

Now, you knew the lady, you won't make a fuss over a ruble.

All right, seventeen then. (*Hands Him the wreath*)

Here, thank you, sir. Now that's right. Kindly pardon us, please?

(*Both men pay and come forward with their wreaths. Each wants the other to go ahead of him. Thus they keep turning around in the same place.*)

HUSBAND. After you . . .

(*The Husband goes into the next room, He comes back.*)

(*To the messenger who is gathering up the paper.*)

What makes you think she poisoned herself?

(*They both turn away. Outside a hand-organ starts to play. New guests arrive. A tall, thin man, in a smart overcoat, polishes his eye glasses. He goes up to a lady who is standing in a corner, crying.*)

THE TALL, THIN MAN. Dusja, why didn't you come yesterday?

THE LADY (*Looks up quickly, recognizes him and begins to sob*). I couldn't. Don't look at me.

THE TALL, THIN MAN. I saw it in the paper. I noticed the announcement at once. How disagreeable. I can't stand that sort of thing.

THE LADY. Yes, and now it's over. Too bad.

(New guests arrive. People greet one another. And occasional disconnected sentences are heard.)

. . . No? What do you think about it? So unexpected! . . .

. . . Yes, that's why I say. It came to an end! . . .

. . . So unexpected!

. . . She isn't to blame. That has always been my opinion and I stick to it! . . .

. . . She could have left her husband. I don't mind that. Why not? But today with the one, tomorrow with the other, then back again to her husband, after that again with the lover . . . that doesn't do.

. . . Death levels everything.

. . . I'm sorry . . .

. . . And the child? . . .

. . . Why I don't mind, I only say . . .

. . . Now tell me, is it really true?

. . . Absolutely.

. . . Yes, indeed.

. . . They made no secret of it.

. . . The money . . .

. . . Impossible.

. . . Absolutely.

. . . Where?

. . . Death levels everything!

. . . Oh! I don't mind. I only say . . .

. . . I agree with you and the bare fact that she has
poisoned herself . . .

. . . I have my doubts about that.

. . . There's the child.

*(Marie carries in Kostja. All the ladies surround him
and kiss his little hand.)*

. . . Poor child!

. . . How sweet he is.

. . . Marie, doesn't he cry at all?

KOSTJA *(Looking at the ladies)*. My Mama is dead.
I don't cry.

THE LADY. Good heavens!

. . . You're a good boy. You don't cry . . .

. . . The dear God has taken your Mama to his home.

KOSTJA. There's a man playing on a hand-organ
outside.

*(A lady begins to sob. In the next room the priest can
be heard praying. Everything is silent. The general*

stillness is suddenly broken by His voice. He speaks to a lady. She turns half round to him. She has a beautiful figure.)

HE (*To the lady*). I love this sadness. It seems to me as if I heard time flying by on wings . . . Time.

(He turns round and breaks off suddenly. The mass for the dead has begun. The Porter brings in a wreath. He goes awkwardly through the room on tip-toe and lays it down.)

CURTAIN

SCENE X

A simply furnished parlor of an unpretentious house in a small town. The home of Nju's parents. It is evening.

THE FATHER (*Reading from Nju's diary*). "How terrible death is. Everything around one black and cold. The whole winter long no one will visit my grave. And when the spring comes I shall already be forgotten by many."

THE MOTHER. By many? . . . What does she mean?

THE FATHER. "To be forgotten . . . You too my only one, my beloved, will forget me. I wronged you so frightfully."

THE MOTHER. Whom does she mean by that, her husband?

THE FATHER. No, the other.

THE MOTHER. Oh, she means him, the scoundrel!

THE FATHER. Hush! Let's read on.

THE MOTHER. And after all this she says she wronged him. My daughter! My poor daughter!

THE FATHER. Hush. "I wronged you so frightfully. I dare not confess it to you. The flower you gave me. I trampled it under foot."

THE MOTHER. What kind of flower? And even if she had trampled on a flower!

THE FATHER. There is something behind this.

THE MOTHER. When did she write this?

THE FATHER. On the 27th of March.

THE MOTHER. Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE FATHER (*Reading*). "My poor parents . . . dear, tender Mother . . . gracious lady."

THE MOTHER (*Looking up as if she saw her and wanting to go towards her*). My daughter.

THE FATHER. "Dear gracious lady. Will you always remember this! Oh if I could only see you again, dear little mother with the beautiful white hair! !

THE MOTHER. Yes, she often called me that.

THE FATHER. "And you Father" . . . (*He breaks off with emotion*).

"You, Father . . . "

(*Pause*)

THE MOTHER. Oh, God!

THE FATHER. Now she is speaking of me. "And you, Father, console her. You must not be angry with me."

(*He rises and walks up and down speaking to himself.*)

I be angry with you?

THE MOTHER. Why didn't she write to us?

THE FATHER. Eh?

THE MOTHER. If only she had written us a line.

THE FATHER. She writes to us here in her diary.

THE MOTHER. It is only by chance it has fallen into our hands. She was writing to herself.

THE FATHER (*Reading on*). "You are good simple people, with simple honest hearts, you wouldn't understand it but I can't go on living like this. I must die. I carry a new life within me. I feel myself a mother . . . "

THE MOTHER (*Horried*). What?

THE FATHER. She was expecting a baby.

THE MOTHER. Of the scoundrel! The scoundrel!

THE FATHER. I don't understand it. It's beyond me.

THE MOTHER (*Bending over the diary*). Carry a new life . . .

THE FATHER (*Reads with her. Both voices simultaneously*). ". . . and I don't know by whom I have it."

(*The Father goes on alone.*)

. . . "I don't know by whom I have it, who is the father of my child."

(*He cries out wildly.*)

I don't understand it. Explain it to me! My old brain is stupefied. It can't grasp all this. Explain it to me.

THE MOTHER. You hear. She was carrying a child. He ruined her.

THE FATHER. Who? Who? Read for yourself Mother . . . "I don't know by whom I have it . . . who is the father of my child. Enough hypocrisy. I am low and bad; I must die."

THE MOTHER. How is it she doesn't . . .

(She breaks off and covers her head with her hands. She experiences shame and sorrow.)

THE FATHER. I don't understand the world. Explain it to me.

THE MOTHER. Now she is dead!

THE FATHER. Do you remember, do you remember when she was nine years old and ran around in her bare feet, our little Nju, our darling? Is it really she? How is it possible?

THE MOTHER. She is dead. Let her be.

THE FATHER. We must burn this so that nobody will ever read it. She never loved neither her husband, nor her lover, nor her child, nor you either . . . little mother, little mother. She never loved. This hard heart. Whom did she take after? My daughter, my blood. After whom?

THE MOTHER. I won't allow you to burn it.

THE FATHER. Nobody must ever read it.

THE MOTHER. I won't allow it.

THE FATHER. All you women stand by each other.

THE MOTHER. Oh, let be, let be.

(First reads to herself, then aloud.)

“I see before me our house, the dining room, the clock and the yellow cupboard. I say farewell to you old things. I kiss you. Mother, say goodbye to our dear large table and all the chairs and my room for me.”

(She controls tears and continues.)

“Especially my room, Mother. In the evening, when Papa is sleeping, I shall go in the dark into my room. Don't be afraid and I shall stroke the walls and my window seat. Tell them I am no more and that I wish them well. How many hours I've dreamed away like this and awaited my happiness! Oh, Mother, Mother, I am so lonely. When I am dead I shall come back to you. When you, my dear, gentle old people are quite alone and are weeping over me, then I shall creep quietly behind your chair, Mother! And gently and tenderly I shall stroke your white hair so that you won't notice anything.

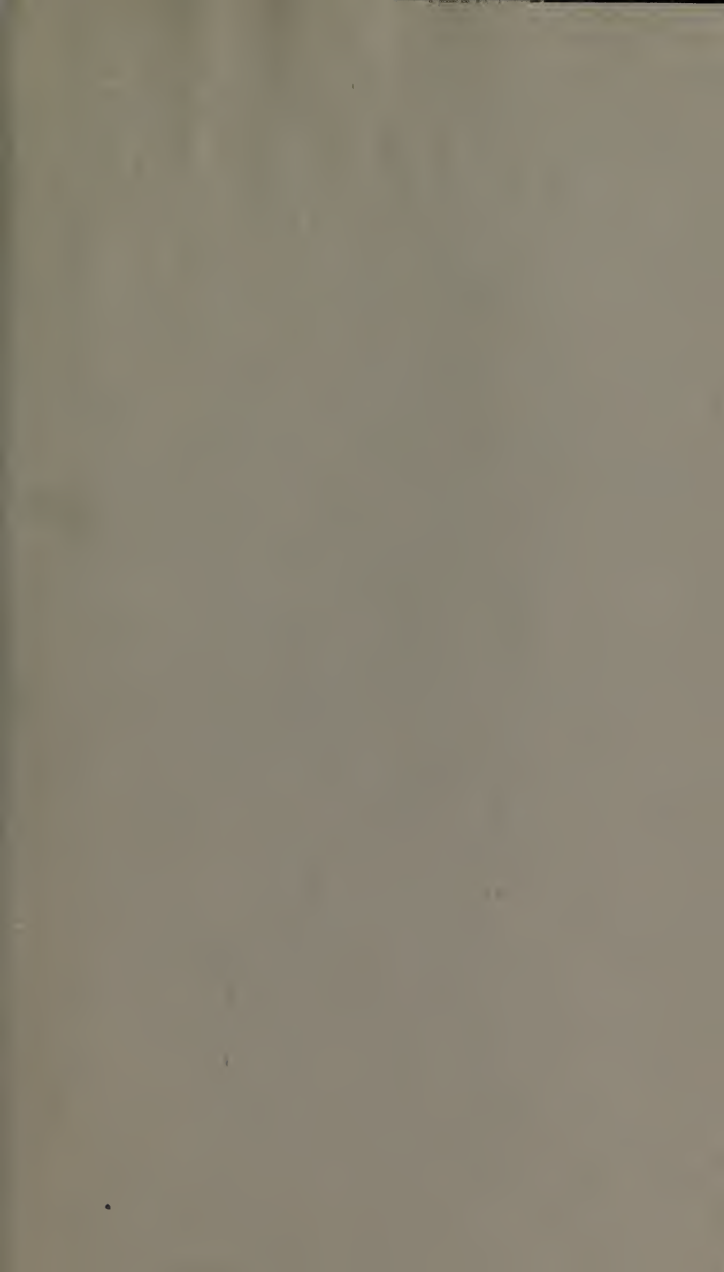
THE FATHER *(Sobbing)*. I don't understand it . . . Explain it all to me.

THE MOTHER. She is here! She is with us . . .

(The clock strikes.)

CURTAIN

61



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