

A scene from
WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN

by HENRIK IBSEN

adapted for the stage by WALTER WYKES

CHARACTERS

RUBEK: A sculptor

IRENE: A former model

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WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN

RUBEK

Irene?

[Pause.]

Is it ... is it really you?

[Pause.]

Don't you recognize me?

[Pause.]

It's me. Arnold.

[Pause.]

IRENE

Who was that woman—there at the table?

RUBEK

[Reluctantly.]

My ... my wife. Maia.

[Pause. IRENE stares at him.]

IRENE

She does not concern me.

RUBEK

No—

IRENE

She was taken after my lifetime.

RUBEK

After your—?

IRENE

And the child? I hear the child is prospering.

RUBEK

Oh, yes. The child ... our child has become famous the world over. I suppose you've read about it.

IRENE

It has made its father famous as well. That was your dream.

RUBEK

I suppose so ... yes ... at the time.

IRENE

I should have killed that child.

RUBEK

What—?

IRENE

Killed it before I went away! Crushed it into dust!

RUBEK

I ... I don't understand. Why would you want to harm the ... it was as much a part of you as—

IRENE

More! More me than anything!

RUBEK

Yes. All right. More. You're right, of course. I ... I didn't mean to upset you.

[Pause. He moves closer.]

I can't believe you're really here—sitting right in front of me. I've often wondered what happened to you. You disappeared so suddenly ... left no trace. I searched for you, but—

IRENE

[A bitter laugh.]

Why?

RUBEK

Why?

IRENE

You no longer had any use for me.

RUBEK

No use for you?

IRENE

Your masterpiece was complete. Your great work! The child stood transfigured in the light. And I slipped into darkness. My work was done. What need could you possibly have had for me then?

RUBEK

How can you ask that?

[No response.]

Surely you don't think I would have just ... abandoned you? Do you? Irene?

[No response.]

Surely you know me better than that.

[She ignores him. Pause.]

Where did you go? When you left—

IRENE

What does it matter?

RUBEK

I want to know.

IRENE

I've traveled many lands.

RUBEK

How did you survive?

IRENE

A woman can never go hungry if she is willing to make use of her body. You taught me that. I turned the heads of all sorts of men. I did more than that. Much more than I could ever do with you, Arnold. You always kept such a tight lid on yourself.

RUBEK

You married?

IRENE

Yes. I married one of them. A distinguished diplomat. I managed to drive him quite out of his mind. It was great sport.

RUBEK

Where is he now?

IRENE

In a churchyard somewhere. With a fine monument over him and a bullet rattling in his skull.

RUBEK

He killed himself?

[No response.]

I'm so sorry.

IRENE

For what?

RUBEK

The loss. Your husband.

IRENE

[Shrugs.]

There were others to take his place.

RUBEK

Others?

IRENE

My second husband, for one. The Russian.

RUBEK

Satow?

IRENE

Yes.

RUBEK

And where is he?

IRENE

In one of his gold mines.

RUBEK

Ahh. Still living, then?

IRENE

Not exactly—no.

RUBEK

Not exactly?

IRENE

I killed him.

RUBEK

Killed—?

IRENE

Killed him with a fine sharp dagger which I always keep under my pillow.

RUBEK

[Laughs.]

You're trying to frighten me, Irene. I know you better than that—you're not capable of such a thing.

IRENE

No?

RUBEK

No. I wouldn't believe it for a second.

[Pause.]

Did you have any children?

IRENE

I've had many children. With many men.

RUBEK

And where are they—your children?

IRENE

I killed them too.

RUBEK

Preposterous! Now you've gone too far!

IRENE

I killed them, I tell you! Murdered them, one by one, as soon as they came into the world! Slit their little throats with that same sharp dagger! Put them in the ground before they could dirty their lungs on this black air!

[Pause.]

RUBEK

There is something hidden behind everything you say.

IRENE

How can I help that when every word I say is whispered in my ear?!

RUBEK

More riddles. But riddles are meant to be solved, Irene. And I believe I am just the man to divine your meaning. Now, let me have a good look at you.

[He rests his hands on the table and stares at her intently.]

Some of the strings of your nature have been broken.

IRENE

That always happens when a young warm-blooded woman dies.

RUBEK

Dies?

IRENE

Yes. Dies.

RUBEK

So you—

IRENE

I have been dead for many years.

RUBEK

Strange. You appear quite lifelike.

IRENE

Your senses deceive you.

RUBEK

You've a fine complexion for a dead woman. Let me feel your pulse.

IRENE

No! Don't touch me!

RUBEK

Irene ... stop this foolishness.

IRENE

I could no more stop the moon in its tracks or pluck the stars from the sky. Some things are simply beyond one's control, Arnold. Just as it was beyond my control that night—

RUBEK

What night?

IRENE

—when they came for me—

RUBEK

Who? Who came?

IRENE

—when they bound me ... laced my arms together ... lowered me into a grave ... a dark hole in the ground with iron bars and padded walls ... and no one on the earth above could hear my screams.

RUBEK

I don't understand. Padded walls? They locked you away? In ... in an asylum?

IRENE

No! In a grave!

RUBEK

Irene ... my god ... if I ... if I'd only known, I—

IRENE

[Sharply.]

What?! What would you have done?! Come to my rescue?

RUBEK

Yes!

IRENE

You? The very cause of my ...

[Laughs incredulously.]

You forced me into the grave, Arnold! It was your doing!

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NOTE: The full text of this play can be purchased at:

<http://www.amazon.com/When-Dead-Awaken-Walter-Wykes/dp/1425731384/>