

GHOSTS

A Dramatic Reading

by
Henrik Ibsen



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From the three-act prose drama.

The scene is the living room of the Alving home in Norway. Through the windows, one catches a glimpse of a gloomy fjord-landscape, veiled by steady rain.

Oswald Alving, a young artist, has recently returned from Paris and now is alone with his mother.

OSWALD: (Stops beside her chair) Tell me, Mother: does it really make you so very happy to have me home again?

MRS. ALVING: Does it make me happy!

OSWALD: I should have thought it must be pretty much the same to you whether I was in existence or not.

MRS. A.: Have you the heart to say that to your mother, Oswald?

OSWALD: But you've got on very well without me all this time. (Pauses) I'm going to tell you something, Mother. (Looks fixedly before him) I can't go on hiding it any longer.

MRS. A.: Hiding what? (Seizes his arm) Oswald, what is the matter?

OSWALD: (As before) I've tried to put the thoughts away from me--to get free from them; but it won't do--sit still and I'll try to tell you. I complained of fatigue after my journey--But it isn't that that's the matter with me; it isn't any ordinary fatigue--

MRS. A.: (Startled) You're not ill, Oswald?

OSWALD: Do sit still, Mother. I'm not ill, either; not what's commonly called "ill." (Clasps his hands to his head) Mother, my mind is broken down--ruined--I shall never be able to work again. (With his hands before face, he breaks into bitter sobbing.)

MRS. A.: Oswald! Look at me! No, no; it isn't true.

OSWALD: (Looks up with despair) Never to be able to work again!--It will be living death! Mother, can you imagine anything so horrible?

MRS. A.: My poor boy! How has this terrible thing come over you?

OSWALD: (Straightens) That's just what I can't understand! I've never led a dissipated life, Mother!

MRS. A.: I'm sure you haven't, Oswald. It will pass away, my dear, blessed boy. It's nothing but overwork. Tell me, when did you first notice it, Oswald?

OSWALD: It was directly after I had been home last time. I began to feel the most violent pains in the back of my head. It was as though a tight iron ring was being screwed round my neck and upwards. At first I thought it was nothing but an ordinary headache--But it wasn't that. I soon found that out. I couldn't work. I wanted to begin upon a big new picture, but my powers seemed to fail me; everything swam before me--whirling round and round. At last I sent for a doctor, and from him I learned the truth--the incomprehensible truth!

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