

FREDRIK They told me where to find you at the theatre.

DESIREE Fredrik!

FREDRIK Hello, Desiree.

DESIREE So it *was* you! I peered and peered and said: “Is it...? Can it be...? Is it possible?” And then, of course, when you walked out after five minutes, I was sure.

FREDRIK Was my record that bad?

DESIREE Terrible. You walked out on my Hedda in Helsingborg. And on my sensational Phaedra in Ekilstuna.

FREDRIK *(Standing, looking at her)* Fourteen years!

DESIREE Fourteen years!

FREDRIK No rancor?

DESIREE Rancor? For a while, a little. But now—no rancor, not a trace. *(Indicating a plate of sandwiches)* Sandwich?

FREDRIK *(Declining)* Hungry as ever after a performance, I see.

DESIREE Worse. I’m a wolf. Sit down. *(Pouring him a glass of schnapps)* Here. You never said no to schnapps.

FREDRIK About *this* walking out! I’d like to explain.

DESIREE The girl in the pink dress, I imagine.

FREDRIK You still don’t miss a thing, do you?

DESIREE Your wife?

FREDRIK For the past eleven months. She was so looking forward to the play, she got a little overexcited. She’s only eighteen, still almost a child. *(A pause)* I’m waiting.

DESIREE For what?

FREDRIK For you to tell me what an old fool I’ve become to have fallen under the spell of youth, beginnings, the blank page.

(Very coolly, DESIREE opens the robe, revealing her naked body to him)

DESIREE The page that has been written on—and rewritten.

FREDRIK *(Looking, admiring)* With great style. Some things—schnapps, for example—improve with age.

DESIREE Let us hope that proves true of your little bride. So you took her home and tucked her up in her cot with her rattle and her wooly penguin.

FREDRIK Figuratively speaking

DESIREE And then you came to me.

FREDRIK I wish you'd ask me why.

DESIREE *(Dead pan)* Why did you come to me?

FREDRIK For old times' sake? For curiosity? To boast about my wife? To complain about her? Perhaps—hell, why am I being such a lawyer about it? *(Pause)* This afternoon when I was taking my nap...

DESIREE So you take afternoon naps now!

FREDRIK Hush! ...I had the most delightful dream.

DESIREE About...?

FREDRIK ...you.

DESIREE Ah! What did we do?

FREDRIK Well, as a matter of fact, we were in that little hotel in Malmo. We'd been basking in the sun all day.

DESIREE *(Suddenly picking it up)* When my back got so burned it was an agony to lie down so you...?

FREDRIK As vivid as... Well, very vivid! So you see. My motives for coming here are what might be called—mixed.

DESIREE *(suddenly bursts into laughter)*

FREDRIK *(Tentative)* Funny?

DESIREE *(Controlling the laughter, very mock solemn)* No. Not at all.

(There is a pause, distinctly charged with unadmitted sex)

FREDRIK *(Looking around, slightly uncomfortable)* How familiar all this is.

DESIREE Oh yes, nothing's changed. Uppsala one week. Orebro the next. The same old inevitable routine.

FREDRIK You must, at least at times, be lonely.

DESIREE *(Smiling)* Dear Fredrik, if you're inquiring about my love life, rest assured. It's quite satisfactory.

FREDRIK I see. And—if I may ask—at the moment?

DESIREE A dragoon. A very handsome, very married dragoon with, I'm afraid, the vanity of a peacock, the brain of a pea, but the physical proportions...

FREDRIK Don't specify the vegetable, please. I'm easily deflated.

(They both burst into spontaneous laughter)

Oh, Desiree!

DESIREE Fredrick!