

**A DESPERATE NEED FOR SUCCESS IN EXCESS**  
or  
**AN ACTOR PREPARES . . . NOT**

by Sandra Merimo

A Desperate Need for Success in Excess (or: An Actor Prepares ... Not)  
Original title: Ett desperat behov av gränslös framgång  
(eller: En skådespelares icke-arbete med sig själv)  
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# A DESPERATE NEED FOR SUCCESS IN EXCESS

OR  
AN ACTOR PREPARES . . . NOT

Copyright: Sandra Merimo 1998

Place: A rented room used as a rehearsal room. (The stage directions are suggestions.)

Time: The present, a Monday morning in January. (The play was written in 1998.)

Characters (Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental):

## **DORA**

- 39 years, a freelance producer who has given herself the leading role as The Mother, Elise, in "The Pelican" by August Strindberg.

## **PHILIP**

- 37 years, an old friend of Dora's and an actor. He is going to act The Son-In-Law, Axel.

## **MARIA**

- 26 years, a friend of Sophie's and an actress. She is going to act The Daughter, Gerda and has also been Dora's production assistant for the last four months.

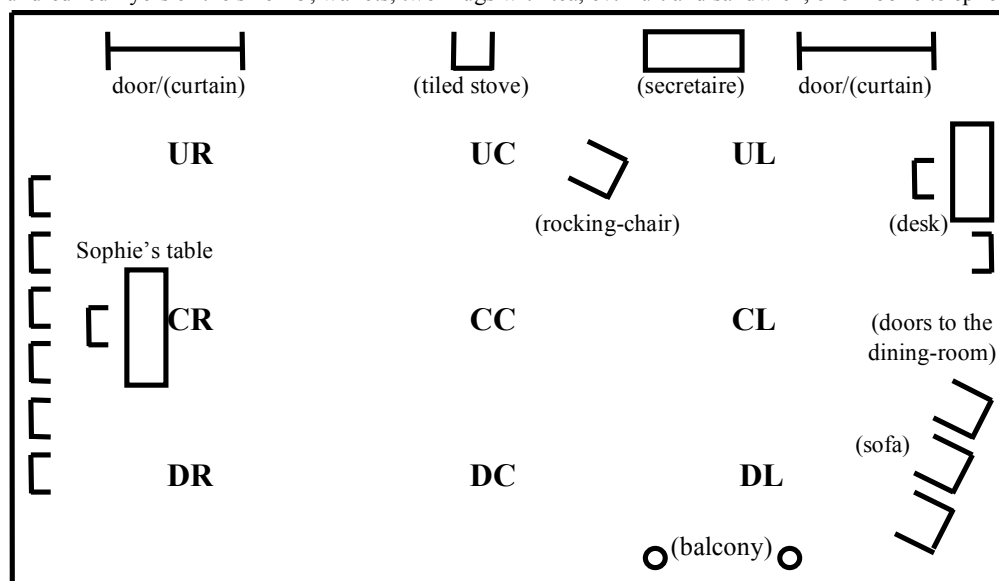
## **JAMES**

- 28 years, an actor who is going to act The Son, Fredrik.

## **SOPHIE**

- 34 years, a director employed by Dora. She is also going to act The Servant, Margret.

outer garments, bags, five manuscripts and four folders, one notebook, pencils and rubbers, one ruler, five hundred red flyers of the size A5, wallets, two mugs with tea, ev. fruit and sandwich, one mobile telephone



*Sophie, the director, comes (UR) into the room, which has been rented as a rehearsal room. The three tables with the chairs on top of them, are standing along the walls. She puts down her bag and takes down the chairs from one of the tables, which she then places where she wants it (CR). From the bag she takes out her thick folder, which contents are the play "The Pelican" by August Strindberg, her notes plus pictures and photographs which are being used during the rehearsals. She also takes out a pencil, a rubber and a notebook and sits down by the table. She opens the folder and starts to read at the end of the play and makes notes at the same time. Maria comes in (UR), followed by James:*

MARIA

Good morning, Pelican!

SOPHIE *laughs*

No, please, don't call me that...

JAMES

Are we early?

SOPHIE

They're going to be a bit late this morning... but we can start anyway.

JAMES

How did it go yesterday?

SOPHIE *sighs*

Don't ask... If I'd known it was going to be like this, I'd never taken this job.

MARIA

Did she have another outburst?...

SOPHIE

Of course, what else do you expect?...

*James and Maria take one chair each and sit down.*

JAMES

What happened?

SOPHIE

They rehearsed the scene where Axel forces the Mother to make a fire in the stove and I asked Dora what she was thinking in that scene. I could see that she was thinking her own thoughts instead of the Mother's... but then she got angry and said that I didn't know anything about acting...

MARIA

So what did you say?

SOPHIE

Nothing. I gave up... I was just trying to help her... I want us to build this together, bit by bit... She doesn't seem to understand how important it is that we talk about the play and the characters... and about the relationships between the characters...

JAMES

When we drew that floor plan of how we thought the apartment looked like, then she sat in a corner, boiling with anger...

SOPHIE

I want it to be a good production where all the parts hang together, but I don't think she takes acting seriously. She wants something else...

MARIA

...and what can that be?...

JAMES

Her breakthrough! The headlines reading: "A new star is born"...

SOPHIE

...and I've been hired to make it happen, I can see that now.

JAMES

Take it easy. It's not that bad. She'll only decapitate you if you don't succeed. Anyway, I guess we've all been hired for the same purpose: to be the wall paper behind Dora... and Philip, of course...

SOPHIE

I don't understand why she's chosen "The Pelican" and the part as The Mother?... She just wants to change the character into being more like herself... or rather into how she wants to see herself... and she definitely don't want a director interfering. I think she's used to manipulating directors and I guess she thought I'd be an easy conquest.

*James starts doing "shadow boxing" and Sophie laughs and ducks:*

When she hired me she didn't say a word about having any demands on *how* she wanted me to direct. She must have counted on the fact that I wouldn't have any views on my own and now she's sulking because I don't always agree with her...

MARIA *teasing*

You don't?...

SOPHIE (*smiles back to Maria*)

...I don't mind listening to her suggestions, but if I think some of them would weaken the performance, then I have to say no and she takes that personally. She doesn't understand that I'm working to make the performance as good as possible - *her* performance. I have artistic responsibility for this production and it would help so very much if she could only respect that.

MARIA

Maybe she'd rather have directed this herself...

SOPHIE

So why doesn't she? Then she can do exactly what she wants.

JAMES

She'd have to write a play first... about her own life...

SOPHIE

Just so I don't have to direct that play. I really thought I was going to direct a play by Strindberg...

MARIA

Anyway, we'll make it! There's more than a week left.

SOPHIE

Of course we'll make it... and I'm very pleased with your work. It's just that it feels like we're always taking one step forward and two steps back. I wish she could understand that I'm not against her. She's her own enemy.

MARIA

She once said that she thought other people were out to get her...

SOPHIE

That explains a lot... Oh, well, shall we start... We have to get through the end of the play.

*They rise and place out the chairs and the tables to mark out how the stage is going to look like at the theatre they are going to perform the play, according to the "drawing" on page 2:*

JAMES

What are you going to do after this?

SOPHIE

I've found a play I want to direct, but so far I've got no money...

MARIA

What is it about?

SOPHIE

*Love...* It's about a couple and their relationship. They start to doubt each other, but in the end they decide to stay together. The plot might be a bit unoriginal, but I like the play...

JAMES

Do you have any actors lined up?

SOPHIE

No, but on the other hand I don't have any money either...

MARIA

How do you want the rocking-chair?

JAMES

I can do it.

*James puts a chair on the spot, which according to the "drawing" marks where the rocking-chair is going to be on the stage.*

SOPHIE

I have to prepare for Margret too. Can one of you watch me next time we rehearse that scene?

MARIA

Sure.

SOPHIE

I think I'm beginning to find her, but I still need someone to see what I'm doing...

MARIA *to James*

Can I borrow these?

JAMES

Of course.

*Maria puts James's gloves on the floor to mark the balcony door (ca. DL). During the following conversation they all have their own folder with "The Pelican" close by. Sometimes they sit on the chairs on "stage" and sometimes they walk around. They make notes if and when they need to do so:*

SOPHIE

We have to go through the end. Have you had any time to think about it?

JAMES

I'm not clear about what happens when I start the fire... but I think I've found a purpose...

SOPHIE

What about you?

MARIA

I haven't found out why I change my mind so quickly from wanting to escape into deciding to stay and die...

SOPHIE

Good. I have some questions myself... Shall we begin with you when you start the fire?...

JAMES

Yes... I've talked to mother and I walk out of the drawing-room into the dining-room where you're still sitting and eating?...

MARIA

No. Axel has gone out and I'm clearing the table... since Margret has left...

JAMES

Okay... Anyway, I go to the kitchen and this is where I'm not sure what I do... First I thought I had some time before I set fire to the kitchen, but then I realized that I'm sitting and playing the piano *before* you carry the tray with the porridge from the kitchen to the drawing-room, which means that I have much less time than I thought...

SOPHIE

That's true. I haven't thought about that... we have the music on tape...

MARIA

Maybe you take a candlestick from the table in the dining-room to the kitchen... I can ask you to do that... because I'm going to change the candles which have almost burned down...

JAMES

...and you take the dishes with you to the kitchen... and when we're there I scream desperately... That's when I thought that I'd set fire to the kitchen... but you're still there then?...

SOPHIE

...that can be when you get the idea to do it...

MARIA

...we hear mother scream in the drawing-room and I think about bringing the porridge to her...

JAMES

Do I hear what she's screaming?

SOPHIE

I think so, but none of you have opened a window in the dining-room...

JAMES

...you walk out and I'm alone... so this is when I start the fire... I guess the easiest way would be if I overturn the candlestick so that the table cloth catches fire... According to the text I'm now supposed to go and play the piano, but I think I stay and watch for a while...

SOPHIE

I agree.

JAMES

...I think about father and how he'll get his vindication... and when I see that the fire's spreading I go to play the waltz...

SOPHIE

"Il me disait"... That title is well chosen... Do you want everyone to die in the fire?

JAMES

I don't think so... I do go and warn them...

SOPHIE

...but by that time it's too late to get out...

JAMES

I know, but I still don't think that I've wanted to kill them on purpose... especially not Gerda... I've been thinking that we have to start new lives... free from our old ones... but then the fire spreads faster than I've expected...



SOPHIE

What's your purpose?

JAMES

First I thought that I want to lose myself... but then I changed my mind: now I think I want to be free... it's definitely a relief to watch the fire...

*For a short while Sophie compares what James is saying with what she thinks. Then she accepts and writes notes:*

SOPHIE

Okay... Let's try it. We can always change it if it doesn't work. You had a question too?

MARIA

Yes... Everything goes so quickly: my spontaneous reaction when I realize that there's a fire is to escape... and then mother jumps off the balcony and I get a shock... I think I regret saying I wanted to hurt her... and directly after that you tell me that you started the fire, but what I don't understand is why I change my mind so quickly and suddenly decide to face death together with you?...

JAMES

Because I'm such cheerful company?...

MARIA

Sure... I think it's still possible to get out of the apartment...

SOPHIE

What possibilities do you have?

MARIA

I could shout for help, down into the street... or tie the curtains together and climb out...

SOPHIE

You say in the previous scene that you don't want to live...

MARIA

I know... I have many reasons for being unhappy: my husband, who's the only man I've ever loved has never loved me, but instead has been in love with my mother... my mother's just killed herself and Axel will grieve for her... and we can't have children... and besides that, he beats me... I don't have many friends... and I think people know and talk about my humiliation... And I'm also ashamed of how I treated my father...

JAMES

Don't forget that your brother is an arsonist...

SOPHIE *teasing*

It sounds as if you have enough reasons...

MARIA

I guess I should have... I'm so scared in the end?...

SOPHIE

Maybe you see death as a relief, although you're scared of the actual moment?...

MARIA

Yes, maybe... I haven't found any purpose which'll take me through the end of the scene...

JAMES

Think about how you will be remembered...

MARIA

That could work... I'll think about that...

*Sophie and Maria erase and make notes, and at the same time Sophie continues to talk:*

SOPHIE

That can fit with your superpurpose... I have a problem with this scene which I hope you can help me with: the balcony door is open and I wonder if you really can die or faint from the smoke, when there's fresh air coming in from the other side the whole time?...

JAMES

Are we going to have smoke on stage?

SOPHIE

There's supposed to be a smoke machine, but we haven't tried it...

MARIA

What if I close the balcony door?

SOPHIE

Yes, but why?...

MARIA

Maybe I go there and look down. I have to see if mother has survived... and then I can close the door behind me...

SOPHIE

I can see that you go there and look down, but I can't understand why you'd close the balcony door afterwards?... It wouldn't be because of the cold, since there's a fire...

MARIA

I might not think about it and close the door out of habit. We're always freezing.

SOPHIE

Let's test it. It'll be great if it works. Is there anything else we should talk about?

MARIA

...I can't think of anything right now...

JAMES

What are we going to do today?

SOPHIE

When Dora and Philip arrive, she wants to go through the scene where she's alone...

JAMES

She seems to like that scene...

SOPHIE

She forgets from one day to another what we've agreed... She doesn't go through the scene between the rehearsals, so it's always like starting from the beginning. And then she's having difficulty imagining the situation. I want to help her, but every time I use the word "think" she gets angry...

MARIA

Why?

SOPHIE

She doesn't want to think... When I say "think" I mean using our imagination... thinking in pictures and impressions... I'm glad you're so efficient when you're working, otherwise we'd get nowhere... Later today when Dora's left, I'd like to go through your purposes, actions and events, for these last episodes...

JAMES

Are we going to stand up?

SOPHIE

Yes, that's what I'd planned... You've never acted the end of the scene... we stopped when mother jumped out from the balcony...

MARIA

I'd like to do it now...

SOPHIE

Fine by me...

MARIA *(to James)*

What about you?

JAMES

Sure... we've got enough to stand up for a first time...

*Sophie goes to sit down (CR) at the table (if she is not already there):*

SOPHIE

Good. From where mother jumps out?...

MARIA

Yeah...

SOPHIE

Where are you just before?

*James sits down in the "rocking-chair" and Maria goes to stand before him:*

JAMES

I've just sat down.

MARIA

I follow Fredrik when he sits down... and I want to drag him out of the rocking-chair... I see mother when she gets up on the rail and jumps down and I can't stop her...

SOPHIE

Okay. Let's take it from there...

*Maria and James use their imagination to create their character's subconsciousness and later they let it manifest itself through their subconsciousnesses. During the rehearsal period they keep their attention on what they are thinking. They strive to think the character's thoughts, which also leads to feeling the character's feelings. Later they "check" their thoughts before and after the performances. When they are on stage during the performances, they have to "let go" and let the body "think for itself" as it has been "programmed", otherwise the acting can look stiff.*

*A short and incomplete summary of their work can be described as follows: they have first found out and later been thinking (in pictures/impressions) about their character's superpurpose (= the purpose the character most often wants to achieve, consciously or subconsciously), and they have created memory pictures of the life they have "lived" as the character, plus dreams for the future.*

*In this production they have together arrived at the decision that Gerda/Maria has the superpurpose "Happiness is to be right (/ I want to be right)" and that Fredrik/James has the superpurpose "Happiness is to lose myself (/ I want to lose myself)".*

*They are also aware of their own purposes as actors, and see to it that those purposes do not influence their work with the characters. In other words: they are professionals.*

*Maria and James now look at their folders and read their notes:*

SOPHIE

The first episode is so short, it'll be good if you look at the next one too...

*Earlier they have all together divided the play into episodes ( - new episode when the characters' purposes change ) and within each episode they have with a few words written down their character's*

*superpurpose and (character) "germ", plus*

*the objective (= a mental picture of what you want to achieve),*

*the purpose (= what you want to achieve if/when the objective is fulfilled; a mental picture and/or impression, which also includes "sense data": smells, touch, sounds etc.),*

*the action (= a mental action, which in the episode is the action most frequently used to achieve the purpose) and*

*the event / events (= intensified thinking; what occupies one's attention, regardless of if it has happened, is happening or eventually will happen in the future) for that particular episode. "The objective / the purpose / the action / the event" is decided in relation to the superpurpose.*

*Maria and James put away their folders outside of the "stage area" and go back to their positions:*

SOPHIE

Take the time you need...

*It is quiet for a while, but not an empty silence. They stand still and prepare themselves: they imagine the situation by thinking (in pictures/impressions) of the superpurpose (and character "germ") plus "the objective / the purpose / the action / the event" which they have in the episode starting with the Mother jumping out from the balcony. They do not look at Sophie when she speaks:*

SOPHIE

Don't worry about your lines... check the text afterwards instead... And take your time... it doesn't matter if it goes slowly, as it's the first time we're doing it... If you get an impulse to move, then do so...

*When they are ready to start, it is shown by raising one hand. They start acting when both of them have showed that they are ready: they take their time, which leads to a little slower movements and speech. The important thing right now is to experience the situation from the character's consciousness. They strive to think the character's thoughts more often than their own thoughts. Gerda sees her mother sitting up on the rail and jumping out. She wants her mother to survive and she walks to the open "balcony door" (a bit inwards the room, since the wall starts where the stage area ends) and looks down. She sees her mother lying still in a strange position down there on the pavement and she slowly looks up again:*

GERDA (/ MARIA)

Oh, my God,...

*She moves backwards and closes the balcony door slowly:*

GERDA (/ MARIA)

...help us!

*Fredrik stays sitting in the rocking-chair:*

THE SON, FREDRIK (/ JAMES)

It was the only thing I could do!

*Sophie speaks calmly as not to disturb them:*

SOPHIE

...Thank you! ...now we'll do the next one...

*Maria and James stay where they are, without looking at Sophie. They prepare for the next episode, in the same way as just described:*

JAMES (/FREDRIK)

What's my action?

SOPHIE *looks quickly in her notes*

"I contemplate."

*It's quiet for a while. When both of them have showed that they are ready, they start. Gerda walks towards Fredrik in the rocking-chair:*

GERDA (/ MARIA)

You've done this!

THE SON, FREDRIK (/ JAMES)

Yes, what could I do?...

*Philip comes in (UR) and interrupts:*

PHILIP

Hi there...

*Sophie makes a "stop sign" with her hand towards Philip. (Maria and James stay where they are and keep their attention on their characters' thoughts):*

PHILIP

...I'm a bit later than I thought I'd be... I hope it doesn't matter...

SOPHIE *calmly and decisively*

Quiet!

PHILIP

Oh... were you rehearsing?...

SOPHIE

Sit down.

*Philip sits down on one of the chairs behind Sophie:*

SOPHIE

Maybe it's better we stop here... Take some time and think back on the first episode...

*James stays sitting in the "rocking-chair" and Maria sits down on a chair:*

PHILIP

Well, as I said, I'm a bit later than expected...

SOPHIE

Wait a minute, Philip... How did it go?

JAMES

I thought it went pretty well... but I'm not sure we've chosen the right "Action"?...

SOPHIE

Okay... Do you have any suggestion?...

JAMES

Not right now... I need to think about it some more...

SOPHIE

How was your "Event"?...

JAMES

...I think it'll work, but now it's a bit unclear...

SOPHIE

That's good... And how did it go?

MARIA

I lost my "Superpurpose" for a while... and I think my own affinities to my "Action" comes through...

SOPHIE

Okay... I can see that...

MARIA

I was "acting the result" when I looked down to see if mother had made it... I know... I should expect to see something different from what I do see... I knew she was dead even before I looked down... Otherwise I think the balcony door can work...

SOPHIE

Good. Thank you... At the end of this rehearsal we've got time to do it again and also to act the rest of the scene... Hi, Philip! Sorry that I interrupted you, but we were in the middle of the scene...

PHILIP

Oh, well... It was nothing...

*James stays sitting and continues to think through how it went and what he can improve. Maria sits or lies down and relaxes.*

SOPHIE

How are you?

PHILIP

Oh, I'm just fine... Well, I thought about something... The scene we did yesterday... I'd like to do it in uniform...

SOPHIE

I think we agreed that you don't wear a uniform...

PHILIP

I know what I say in the play, but...

SOPHIE

Why would you?...

*Now Dora comes in. She carries five hundred newly printed flyers. They are red and of size A5 and she lays them down on Sophie's table:*

DORA

Good morning... Read these... and if there's anything you want to change, just say so...



*Dora goes to the bathroom and all the others take a flyer each and read it through. The coming performance is presented in the following way:*

*"A black comedy about a Almodóvar-esque family in Sweden around the turn of the century. About a mother with fading attraction, an anorectic daughter who's deeply in love with her husband who's a lieutenant by the way, a lesbian servant who's obsessed with dirty laundry, a drunk son who wants more food from his mother who wants to be admired and her friend Axel."*

*As they read on they become more and more puzzled:*

JAMES

I had no idea I was acting in a comedy...

SOPHIE

Can someone explain what Almodóvar's movies have to do with our performance?...

MARIA

Where in the text does it say that Gerda has anorexia?...

SOPHIE

...and I didn't have a clue that Margret is a lesbian?... when did she become that?...

PHILIP

It's not good English... I'd be embarrassed to hand them out...

*Dora is flushing the toilet:*

JAMES

We have to talk to her...

SOPHIE

She said we should tell her if there was anything we wanted to change...

*Dora comes back into the room. She looks happy and is full of energy:*

DORA

Shall we start? We're going to do the scene where the Mother is going to kill herself, right?

SOPHIE

Yes, we are... but first we wanted to talk a bit about the flyers if that's okay...

DORA

Oh?... Why?

SOPHIE

We have some questions...

*The ones who are standing sit down. Dora becomes a little tense, prepared to defend herself:*

DORA

So... What's this about?

SOPHIE

First of all I want to say that it's a really nice layout, with the heart and the drop of blood... I think we all agree on that?...

*The others mumble their positive answers:*

...but we have some questions regarding the presentation of our performance...

*The others expect Sophie to begin:*

Me, for example, I don't understand what Almodóvar has to do with our performance... and this bit about Margret, that she's a lesbian... there's nothing in the text to suggest that...

*Sophie looks inquiringly at the others and wonders if they want to say something, but no one dares to:*

...and also about Gerda being an anorectic... The play is not about that... Gerda hasn't wanted or strived to become skinny...

DORA

Thank you, that's enough!

*Dora rises and "warms up". She starts to breathe deeply and heavily and swings her arms from side to side:*

SOPHIE

Dora, you said we could talk to you if there was something we wanted to change...

DORA

You can't criticize that text.

*Dora continues with her "warming up" and the others realize that this matter will not go any further. They feel downhearted, but still prepare for the rehearsal:*

JAMES *to Sophie*  
Where do we start from? Am I on stage?...

DORA  
Are we going to start, or what?!...

SOPHIE  
Yes... Where do you want to start from?

DORA  
From "You're right!".

*James goes to stand close to the "doors to the dining-room":*

SOPHIE  
Take some time on your own before you start...

*James prepares as before, while Dora is irritated to have to wait for James:*

SOPHIE  
Start when you're ready...

*Dora starts immediately without looking to see if James is ready. She speaks in a "dramatic" way:*

DORA (/ THE MOTHER, ELISE)  
You're right! I shall go, out!

THE SON, FREDRIK (/ JAMES)  
Poor mother!

DORA (/ THE MOTHER, ELISE)  
Do you feel pity for me?

THE SON, FREDRIK (/ JAMES)  
Yes, of course I do!... I often used to say about you: She's so evil that I feel pity for her!

*On the word "go" Dora pushes Fredrik so that he almost loses his balance:*

DORA (/ THE MOTHER, ELISE)  
Thank you, my dear! - Go now, Fredrik!

*James looks at Sophie who looks back at him. Both are slightly shocked. Sophie interrupts:*

SOPHIE  
Excuse me... why do you push Fredrik?

*Dora is "stirred up" and full of energy:*

DORA

Because I'm *angry*!

SOPHIE

Why?

DORA

I *feel* it. I feel *anger* coming up inside of me...

SOPHIE

I don't think you're angry here... You feel guilty because of what you've done and you think suicide is the solution to get rid of the guilt...

*Dora does not know what to answer.*

We've discussed this before... Together we agreed on what is happening in this scene... I don't understand why you'd be angry with Fredrik?

DORA *"attacking" James*

You don't *give* anything! I have to do everything myself...

SOPHIE

Dora, I don't want you to blame James if you think that it didn't go well... You know that you rehearse in different ways and I want you to take responsibility for your own acting. Why would you be angry with Fredrik?

DORA

Maybe I'm not angry... I might pretend to be...

SOPHIE

And why would you pretend to be angry?

DORA

What does it matter? Does the audience have to understand *everything*!

SOPHIE

It's not about the audience... I'm talking about that *you* as an actor should know why. The character might not know why she's angry, the reason might be subconscious... but you as an actor have to look for the reason and find it... otherwise, how're you going to act?

DORA

This is just a waste of time. Can we move on now?...

SOPHIE

I want you to think about it...

DORA

Can we move on!

SOPHIE

...From where?

DORA

From where I'm alone.

*James walks away from the "stage area" (and sits down on a chair behind Sophie):*

SOPHIE

Are you okay?

JAMES

I'm fine.

*Dora prepares for her "solo". She bends forward from her hips and hangs down with her upper body:*

SOPHIE

Take the time you need to prepare and start when you're ready...

*Dora rises and starts to "hyperventilate" (- breathe fast and heavily -) for a while. Then she starts walking around the "stage area". When she has walked a few rounds and gained speed, she walks to the "balcony door", which she "opens" with a jerk. She inhales "the chilly air" in deep breaths. At the same time Philip sneaks to the corner (UL) and stays standing there. (He carries the script folded under his arm and holds a ruler in one hand.) Dora takes a few steps backwards from the "balcony door" and at the same time she strains herself to "feel a tragic feeling". She takes a step towards the "balcony door", when Philip interrupts by knocking three times on the wall:*

DORA (/ THE MOTHER, ELISE)

Who is it? What was that?

*She "closes the balcony door":*

Come in!

*Now Philip tiptoes to the place (CL) where the "doors to the dining-room" are:*

Is anyone there?

*Philip pretends to open the two doors. Then he stays standing there and with his right hand he holds the "stick" (the ruler) and beats it into his left palm:*

SOPHIE

Sorry to interrupt: are you going to stand there?

PHILIP

Yes, I know we haven't talked about it, but Dora and I came up with this yesterday...

DORA

I guess I forgot to tell you... I think it's ridiculous to act with an invisible "spirit", so I'd rather that Philip comes on stage...

SOPHIE (*second sentence to Philip*)

...but we said that your feelings of guilt make you think that your husband is haunting you... and you're not even in the play anymore...

PHILIP

...I was thinking I could add some lines...

SOPHIE

...to Strindberg's words... what lines?

PHILIP

...well, I haven't come up with them yet... I was going to *improvise* them...

DORA

May we continue this rehearsal. You interrupted us!

SOPHIE

I don't think it's a good idea to have Axel come on stage...

DORA

I need someone to *react* to...

SOPHIE

We'll have a rocking-chair that'll rock by itself... it's just that we can't have it here...

PHILIP

Why can't we?... I think this is *ludicrous!*... You don't seem to understand how important it is to have that rocking-chair here *now*...

SOPHIE

I *do* understand, but you know I've got nothing to do with it... it's a matter of expenses...

DORA

...besides, we won't have any wind blowing...

SOPHIE

We'll have the *sound* of the wind... I'd like us to rehearse as we decided earlier...

PHILIP *irritated to Sophie*

Furthermore: I'm not *the Son-In-Law* or *Axel*! My name is *Philip*!

*Philip walks away from the "stage area". (Sophie does not answer. She knows he takes it personally; he has to act e.g. "the King", if he is to be called by his character name.)*

DORA (*covers up enjoying Philip's "attack"*)

Right... then I'll have to change the situation...

SOPHIE

What's wrong with the situation?...

DORA

*I* have never been scared of ghosts...

SOPHIE

And?...

PHILIP

You can pretend it's an *earthquake*...

DORA

...that's actually quite good...

SOPHIE

Earthquake?! What's that got to do with it?...

DORA

I could explain, but you wouldn't understand...

*Sophie, Maria and James understand very well that Dora has to change the situation, because she has not imagined the Mother's way of thinking and perceiving herself and her life. At the same time they realize that there is no point in arguing with her:*

SOPHIE

Earthquake... All right... Do you want to take it from the top?

DORA

I can start from where the doors open...

*Dora prepares. She closes her eyes and stands still for a while:*

SOPHIE

Start when you're ready...

*From a complete stand-still, Dora starts jumping around as if the floor is hot and she screams hysterically:*

DORA (/ THE MOTHER, ELISE)

It's him, in the tobacco field! Isn't he *dead*?

*Sophie, Maria and James "brace themselves" so as not to break out in fits of laughing. (They "sneak" looks at each other and hide any laughs by clearing their throats and/or hushed coughing). Philip admires Dora's acting:*

What shall I do, where shall I go? Shut the window,  
Fredrik! I'm *freeeezing* to death!

*Dora falls down and forms a heap in the middle of the floor. She has completely drained herself of energy:*

SOPHIE

Thank you...

*Dora looks up slowly. She is convinced that she has produced a serious and impressive character interpretation and she expects to be commended:*

It was very *interesting*...

PHILIP *admiring*

What an incredible *intensity* you've got... such *energy*!

DORA *happy*

Thank you, Philip.

SOPHIE

Maybe you want to rest for a while?...

DORA (*covers up her exhaustion*)

Oh, no... not at all...

SOPHIE

How do you think it went?...

DORA

I'd say it's the best I've done...

SOPHIE

Okay... Hmm... You forgot to turn on the lights... and I thought you were going to lie down in the sofa...

*Dora rises in a demonstrative way and walks to the "sofa":*



SOPHIE

You don't have to lie down in the sofa if you don't want to... but it's good if you remember to turn on the lights...

DORA *constrained*

Sure.

SOPHIE

Do you want to do it again?...

DORA

No, I'd rather move on...

*Maria walks to stand by the "doors to the dining-room". (She has her folder with her):*

SOPHIE

Take the time you need...

*Maria prepares (as earlier) and she holds the folder as a "tray" (with an invisible plate with porridge). Dora lies down on the "sofa" as well as possible, with her head towards where the "balcony" is. (She is irritated that Sophie did not commend her acting, but she does not say anything):*

Gerda, you begin...

*It is quiet for a while. Then Gerda walks through the "open doors" and puts down the tray on the "desk". She sees an invisible electric lamp standing on the "desk" and turns it off. (She has not learnt mime, but instead she "sees" what she is doing.) Then she walks to the wall, from her point of view to the right of the "balcony door" (DC), to turn off an invisible electric lamp fixed to the wall. Dora interrupts:*

DORA

I can't say my lines when she's walking in front of me like that...

SOPHIE

She's only there for a short time... It'll be fine.

DORA

*I* am important in this scene...

SOPHIE

What does that mean?... that Gerda is *not* important? *All* the characters are important for the performance...

DORA

I want to stop and take a break!

SOPHIE

Of course you can?...

*Dora is angry and walks away from the "stage area":*

DORA *to Sophie*

I want to talk to you.

SOPHIE

Yes?...

DORA

Not now... When we're on our own.

*Dora waits for the others to take what they need (their wallets, outer garments...) so that they can leave:*

MARIA *to Sophie*

Do you want me to get you something?

SOPHIE

Oh, no... I'll be right with you...

*Philip, James and Maria leave the room (UR).*

SOPHIE

Yes?... What do you want?

DORA

I have decided to remove you from this production!

*When working with Dora, Sophie has become used to expect "catastrophes" and "crises", but she had not expected this:*

SOPHIE

What?!?... Why?...

DORA

I'm going to start afresh with a new director. As a producer I can't use your production. It's such bad quality that I've had to take the difficult decision to fire you!

SOPHIE

Dora, we've talked about this before... We have different ways of working! You said nothing about your demands when you hired me... and then when you started talking, I've listened to you... and I've said that I don't believe in your way of working. I don't think it leads to a good performance... And despite this you wanted me to continue directing up until the first night... We actually have an *agreement!*...

DORA

I've changed my mind. Last Friday when we did the run-through the scenes didn't stick together.

SOPHIE

But Dora... I never said that what we did last Friday would be the *finished* production! I explained more than once that we did a run-through too *early*, since next Friday would be too *late* for a first run-through... I adapt myself to when you say you can come... and Fridays have so far been the day when you all *know* that you can rehearse...

DORA

I risk being laughed at and that's *your* fault! You're a *bad* director... completely *incompetent*!

SOPHIE

Dora... when we made the agreement you said that you and Philip were going to work on your characters on your own and I've let you do that...

DORA

Well, we haven't had that much time...

SOPHIE

If you're worried I can work with you as much as you want... that's why I'm here... The problem has been that you haven't *wanted* to work with me. There's over a week left and there's a lot we can do in that time...

DORA

You don't seem to understand that I'm the **p r o d u c e r** !

SOPHIE

Oh yes, I've understood that...

DORA

**I** decide *what* you'll do and *how* you'll work!

SOPHIE

Normally the producer has the *economic* responsibility, while the director has the *artistic* responsibility...

DORA

You're *insensitive* and shouldn't even be working with people...

SOPHIE

I think that's an exaggeration...

DORA

How *dare* you criticize the flyers!!!

SOPHIE

Is that what this is about?... You said yourself that we should talk to you if there was something we wanted to change...

DORA

I didn't mean that text!

SOPHIE

I wasn't the only one who wanted to say something... but the others didn't dare to, because you get so angry... I wish you'd showed us the text before you printed it...

DORA

What am I supposed to do if I can't even do the flyers?!!!

SOPHIE

We didn't mean to hurt your feelings... Dora, we've already recognized that we have different views, but can't we still finish *this* production?... Dora, we can work this out...

DORA

I don't think you hear what I'm saying. I've made up my mind! It doesn't matter what you say!

SOPHIE

Really..... Well, then I want my pay!... according to the contract!

DORA *upset*

That's the only thing you think about... **m o n e y** .

SOPHIE

Do I?... when I've agreed to a salary that is a *fifth* of the minimum salary for a director... Then I'm only thinking about *money*?... Try: *charity*!

DORA *still upset*

You don't seem to understand how *difficult* it's been for me to take this decision. I've been completely *alone* and I haven't had *anyone* to talk to...

*Dora does not want to pay and feels sorry for herself:*

You'll get your money... but I don't have it now...

SOPHIE  
When?

DORA  
The 26:th.

SOPHIE  
If you don't pay I'll go further with this.

DORA  
We have a contract. Why wouldn't you get paid?!...

SOPHIE  
Who's going to act Margret?

DORA  
It's none of your business! I want you to be gone when  
I come back...

*Dora goes to the door (UR):*

*...I really hope you have friends...*

SOPHIE  
Oh... is that wish *well-meant*?...

*Dora storms out (UR). Sophie is on her own and sits down on a chair:*

SOPHIE *to herself*  
Oh, fu... demons should be directors...

*She sits still for a while, sighs, relaxes, is irritated... she might shake her head... She thinks about what she has done wrong, and at the same time she is irritated because of Dora's decision... She does not care if Dora comes back right now... she has too much to think about... (Maybe she rises and walks around the room for a while...)*

*James and Maria come back. They each have a cup of tea and something to eat. (Maria might later give Sophie something, for example a fruit):*

MARIA  
You didn't come... What did she want? We saw her...  
she looked angry...

JAMES *joking*  
As usual...

SOPHIE  
I've been fired.

MARIA

What?!...

*There is silence for a moment.*

...but can she *do* that?

SOPHIE

Not properly, but she's done it anyway...

MARIA

But are you sure?... Maybe she's just having one of her fits... She might change her mind when she's calmed down...

SOPHIE

I don't think so... It seemed to be definite... She said she's made up her mind and that it doesn't matter what I say...

JAMES

I probably should have said something... I saw this coming...

SOPHIE

Did you?... It was a surprise to me... I knew there'd be new "catastrophes" and "crises", but I wasn't prepared for this... The only time I thought I was going to get fired was in the first week when she had the "huge volcano eruption"... but that's when we made our *agreement*... and I've complied with it...

JAMES

That doesn't matter.

SOPHIE

But I'm sure it must?...

JAMES

Not in her case.

SOPHIE

I actually trusted her word... Call me stupid, but I really did... I feel *deceived*. I had no chance to save my job... Why hasn't she said anything before?... It's only a week left... why can't we go on when we're so close?...

MARIA

Who's going to act Margret?

SOPHIE

Well, it won't be me... I asked the same question...

MARIA

Will you get paid?

SOPHIE

I *will* get paid... I'm sure she'll stall it, but if so, then I'll take it further...

MARIA

She hasn't paid me anything... I've been her assistant since September and now she doesn't even want to speak to me...

SOPHIE

I had this eerie feeling that she had planned this... that she thought she needed me up until now and that it was time to get rid of me?...

JAMES

What happens now?...

SOPHIE

I don't know... I guess I'll go home and lick my wounds...

JAMES

I'd like to help you, but I can't... You know what she's like...

SOPHIE

Of course... I understand... Well, you're still left...

JAMES

You'll come and see us, won't you?...

SOPHIE

I can't think about that now... but I'm sure I will.

MARIA

Did she say who's going to replace you?

SOPHIE

She didn't say... and I didn't think of asking...

JAMES

I know a director I could suggest... Can I take your notes?... Well, you don't need them anymore, do you?...

SOPHIE

What do you mean?...

JAMES

Well, I mean since you've been fired... Then you don't need your notes?...

SOPHIE

Mm... I don't know what to say...

JAMES

I need the notes if I'm going to give the play to the director...

SOPHIE

I can do it.

JAMES

Dora would never agree to that...

SOPHIE

It can be done at a private meeting?...

JAMES

That could be difficult... Why can't you just give them to me? I don't understand?...

MARIA

James!...

SOPHIE

Please, listen... I could consider giving away my notes... but I'd want to give them in person and you don't seem to want me to do that...

JAMES

I just thought it would go smoother... we've got so little time left before the first night...

SOPHIE

If the new director is interested, then he or she can ask me directly...

MARIA

It's okay, Sophie... I think it would be stupid if we started fighting now...

SOPHIE

Yes, I agree...



MARIA

I'm sure Dora has hired a new director already... I wonder who it'll be?... She's got a friend who's a director, and he works in the same way that she does... but she didn't choose him, because he didn't like the play... I wonder if he'll be the one?...

SOPHIE

Maria, there's one thing I've been wondering about... you were there when I got hired: why didn't she state her demands then?... why did she wait for almost a week?...

MARIA

Well, as I understood it she wouldn't get any money if she didn't find a director very fast...

SOPHIE

Oh?... well, that explains a lot...

*A short pause.*

JAMES

This production is draining my energy...

SOPHIE

You could say that again... I never thought the problems would be this big... She said she was working according to Stanislavski...

JAMES

Doesn't everybody say that...

SOPHIE *smiling*

No... not *everybody*...

MARIA

*What* in her work goes back to the teachings of Stanislavski?...

SOPHIE

I don't know... but I wasn't worried at first. When we talked about the characters I could see that she sometimes saw through the Mother's eyes... I haven't told you this before, but when I saw her act for the first time I had a shock... I had no idea she was *that* bad... *Then* I got worried... I knew that the only way she'd "look good" would be if *you*'d do some good acting around her, so that she'd have something to *react* to, as she says...

JAMES

I liked her "earthquake scene"... It was absolutely fabulous...

*They all (finally) laugh:*

I didn't know if I should laugh or cry...

SOPHIE

She makes things complicated... She doesn't use her common sense to look for the solution she can find in the text: the Mother is afraid of ghosts... and it's possible she's afraid of earthquakes too, but not in *that* scene... not even in this play... She changes things and situations at random, which leads us to suddenly being in another play and telling something completely different from what we'd agreed on... The worst thing is that I know she wanted me to commend her... but I *couldn't*... She must have known what I was thinking when I asked if she wanted to do it again...

*James imitates Dora as he perceives she was acting. Sophie and Maria laugh:*

JAMES

"Shut the window, Fredrik! I'm *freeeezing* to death!"

*He ends up like she did in a "heap" on the floor. Sophie catches on:*

SOPHIE

But Dora... what's an earthquake got to do with *this* scene?...

JAMES

"I *could* explain, but you wouldn't *understand*..."

SOPHIE

What's the answer to that one?

MARIA

She can't explain... She doesn't know what she's doing...

SOPHIE

She told me once that she didn't take responsibility for her actions... I think that's the most incredible thing I've ever heard... You always have to do that...

MARIA

Did she really say that?

SOPHIE

Yes... I didn't know how to interpret it?... I've thought about it since...

MARIA  
Is she coming back soon?...

SOPHIE  
I don't care...

JAMES  
Maybe she's eavesdropping by the door?...

SOPHIE  
I think she's sitting in the cafeteria, waiting to see me  
leave... I don't think she wants to see me right now...

MARIA  
Hey... I have to work right after the rehearsal, but can't  
we meet at my place later?

SOPHIE  
Yeah... I'd love to...

MARIA  
How about you?

JAMES  
What time?

MARIA  
Eight o'clock?...

SOPHIE  
That's fine by me.

JAMES  
Mmm.

MARIA  
...you'll get the latest news and we can drink some wine...

SOPHIE  
I think I need that...

MARIA  
Maybe you can tell us about that play... I've become a  
bit curious...

SOPHIE  
Yes... sure..... Well, I guess I should be getting home...

*Sophie gets her bag and starts packing down her (thick) folder and her notebook.  
James picks up a flyer:*

JAMES

I still don't want to hand these out...

SOPHIE

She was really upset that we had criticized the text...

JAMES

"A black comedy about a Almodóvar-esque family in Sweden around the turn of the century. About a mother with fading attraction, an anorectic daughter who's deeply in love with her husband who's a lieutenant by the way, a lesbian servant who's obsessed with dirty laundry, a drunk son who wants more food from his mother who wants to be admired and her friend Axel." First of all it's not very well written, but the worst thing is that if someone comes to see the performance because of this text, they'll probably be disappointed... The performance is *not* about anorexia... or homosexuality... and why has she included Almodóvar?...

MARIA

What was the name of that movie?

SOPHIE

?... Oh, you mean "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown"...

JAMES *joking*

She must be referring to herself...

SOPHIE

It's so difficult to work with people who have aggressive fits all the time... She collects offences, true or imagined... and then she waits for a "suitable" occasion when she can *explode*...

JAMES

When she isn't having an eruption she's walking around like a living volcano waiting for the next one...

SOPHIE

I think it would be easier to accept if she calmed down afterwards, so that you could talk and sort out what's gone wrong... but she never calms down... She walks around "boiling" the whole time...

*James amuses the others by walking around "boiling":*

People are scared of her... I admit that I've been scared of her...

MARIA

I *am* scared of her...

SOPHIE

She thrives on it... Everyone is tiptoeing around her...  
We've all done it...

JAMES (*reference to Maria*)

...and *we* must go on doing it...

SOPHIE

Good luck!

*Sophie starts putting on her outer garments:*

MARIA

Philip had an outburst today... what was that all about?...

SOPHIE

He takes it personally if you call him the "Son-In-Law" for example... Maybe he's disappointed with his part... or else he has to act "the King" for someone to be allowed to call him by his character name..... So far I've always seen actors as grown-ups and responsible people, but here I've sometimes felt like I'm a nanny with two children going through their obstinate phase... and they're *older* than I am!...

MARIA *joking*

I *also* want to have fits all the time...

*James starts to act like a "small child" and Maria acts with him:*

JAMES

Me to: *Sophie's bad!!!*

MARIA

I 'm going to be the centre of attention *all* the time through the *whole* performance!

SOPHIE *laughs*

But please Maria... we work *together*... The other characters are also important...

MARIA

*No!* Only *my* character is important!

JAMES

And *mine!*

*James starts (playfully) pushing and making trouble for Maria. Sophie "intervenes":*

SOPHIE

No James... no pushing...

JAMES (*stops acting like a small child*)

I wasn't prepared today when Dora pushed me...

MARIA

She lets her *own* feelings go into the character the whole time...

SOPHIE

She takes her chance to let out some steam... but she doesn't seem to be aware that she's doing it... If *Dora's* angry the character'll be angry... and Dora is always angry... But I also think she believes that it's *good* to be aggressive on stage: that it's more "dramatic"...

JAMES

It had nothing to do with the situation...

SOPHIE

I know. It doesn't matter that we together agree on what is happening in the scenes... She says she wants to explore the character *physically*, but she never arrives at anything... she changes her mind from day to day...

JAMES *teasing*

...but isn't that *creative*...

SOPHIE

It's *very* creative... If it could only lead to good acting, then I wouldn't say anything... She wants to feel safe by knowing how to move and how to say her lines, but she also realizes that it won't be very spontaneous, so then she changes her mind the whole time... She tries to act the *result* instead of acting the *causes*... She reads the text, but she doesn't find out what's behind it... We're influenced by different events, whether they're in the past, present or in our future, the same goes for the characters... And our purposes cause our actions...

MARIA

She says she knows about purposes...

SOPHIE

Yes, but it seems to be something she might write down on a piece of paper... She doesn't use her imagination to work with them... I've wanted her to think the Mother's purposes in pictures and impressions... and that, of course, would lead to her also feeling the Mother's feelings... and then she wouldn't have to worry about how to move and how to speak... That would work itself out in a natural way... But she doesn't even want to try... she says she doesn't want to think at all...

JAMES

Maybe she's scared of discovering her own thoughts...

SOPHIE *joking*

I know *I* would be...

MARIA

You can see her own purposes shining through the character when she acts...

SOPHIE

Exactly. That's what happens, when you're not working on the *character's* purposes... She's not aware of her own purposes or else she thinks no one can see them...

JAMES *amused*

But we can...

MARIA

She could too if she wanted... *Everyone* can perceive purposes... it's just that sometimes we do it subconsciously and then we can't put them into words...

SOPHIE

To arrive at a good performance lasting night after night you need to find the superpurposes for the characters... and also to find a direction for the whole performance... It has to be thought-through, otherwise it won't be good, it's as simple as that, all the details have to stick together... But, of course, you can only reach that if *everybody* is cooperating...

MARIA *teasing*

Hasn't everybody cooperated?...

SOPHIE

Oh... sure... I get the sack because she says my production is of "such bad quality"... She doesn't think about the fact that she's part of it and that she's done everything in her power to work against me...

JAMES

She told me that I don't *give* anything...

SOPHIE

Don't worry about it... She doesn't want to take responsibility for her own acting... If *she's* bad, then it's *your* fault...

MARIA

She blames her own incompetence on others...

SOPHIE

Deep inside she doubts herself as an actress and I'm not surprised, since she relies on chance... If she's to improve her acting, then she needs help and I've actually wanted to help her... I've explained that it's important that she's aware of what she's thinking when we're rehearsing, but also that the *point* of it all is to let go of her thoughts once she's on stage...

MARIA

...and let the body think for itself... I used to have stage fright, but it has disappeared. Now I'm better prepared, it's like my body knows what to do...

SOPHIE

It's only when we feel safe that we're spontaneous... That's what I've wanted her to experience... when it's *easy* to act... She's *struggling* so much...

MARIA

...but doesn't get anywhere...

JAMES *joking*

I think it sounds practical... to just learn the text by heart and stress the words in interesting ways... then you can make the text mean anything you want... And then you decide how to move... then you're ready to walk on to the stage and act in whatever way, depending on your mood that day...

SOPHIE *laughs*

Don't forget to blame the audience if it sucks... No actors do that, do they?...

MARIA

But we change the meanings too sometimes... if we think that the play has a message that we don't want to pass on... Then we sometimes decide to act some of the lines with different meanings from the ones the author meant...



JAMES

Yes, but we're aware of *why* we're doing it... We're responsible for what message the audience receives, so we make those decisions together, discussing and arriving at what we want to say with the performance... It doesn't happen by chance or depending on what mood Dora or Philip happen to be in... And if we want to change too much, then we must have chosen the wrong play, right?...

SOPHIE

The problem has been that she's sitting on two chairs and I've walked a tightrope in between... As a director I want to be honest... and I also need *your* honesty... otherwise I can't do a good job... She wants to see herself as an excellent actress, "world class", and she's wanted me to compliment her the whole time... Well, I haven't... I admit... I guess I *ought* to have done it, but it wouldn't have helped her... Besides, I've never been good at "arse licking"...

JAMES *amused*

"Arse licking"?...

SOPHIE

People in powerful positions... I'm not impressed... I'm angry because she's treated me so badly, but to tell the truth I just feel sorry for her... She's got a desperate need for success in excess...

JAMES

Aren't you exaggerating just a bit?...

SOPHIE *smiles*

Am I?

MARIA

She's talked about the interview she's going to give for our local TV station...

SOPHIE

Oh... I didn't know that...

MARIA

She's the *only* one who's going to be interviewed...

JAMES

Won't Philip be with her?...

MARIA

I guess he could be... if he comes in on a leash...

*They laugh.*

SOPHIE

Well... I should be going... Thank you for spending time with me... It was good to get things off my chest... I feel better now...

MARIA

See you tonight... Take care...

SOPHIE

Sure... I will. Bye.

JAMES

Bye... See you later!

*Sophie walks out (UR). Maria and James are silent for a short while:*

MARIA

This is insane... to fire Sophie this close to the first night...

JAMES

She must have been bored... and thought it was time for some "drama"...

MARIA

She's a better actress in real life than on stage... It's almost entertaining... well, when you're not in the firing line... Sophie and I talked about Dora a few days ago... We thought she was beginning to calm down...

JAMES

Wishful thinking...

MARIA

It must have been... Well, now we'll see who's going to replace Sophie... It wouldn't surprise me if this... her friend comes... I've forgotten his name... I met him when Dora was looking for a director...

JAMES

You said he didn't like the play...

MARIA

He said we'd be laughed at... that it would be artistic suicide to do this play...

JAMES

...so then, why would he want to direct it?...

MARIA

I heard Philip talking about him... He and Dora met him last week... and why did they do that?...

JAMES

To convince him?... You might be right... So what's he like?...

MARIA

Superior... He walked into the room as if he was a "saviour"... I think Dora looks up to him... They seem to like the same type of theatre...

JAMES

...which means actors trying to *impress*... Great, we've never seen that before...

MARIA

If we get him here I'm sure he'll tear down everything we've worked on and start from the beginning...

JAMES

...then I suppose we're going to *improvise* as well...

MARIA

...which Philip keeps nagging about... but have you watched him when we do it... He doesn't dare let go of the script... He holds on to it like it's a lifeline...

JAMES

I think I hear them coming...

MARIA

Shall we put on our poker-faces?...

JAMES

I didn't know you had one?...

MARIA

Now I do...

*Dora comes in (UR) with Philip following. She has talked to her friend, the director Don, on the telephone and been told that he does not want to direct, even though he had said so before. She has then, together with Philip, quickly written down on a piece of paper what they want to change in the performance. Dora is upset and under stress:*

DORA

Well, I guess you've heard what's happened... Sophie has quit and put us in a difficult position...

MARIA

Excuse me... I don't think Sophie has quit?...

DORA

Sophie has refused to work and thereby she has broken her contract.

MARIA

*Refused to work?!...*

DORA

I understand that you have both spoken to her and that she probably says something else, but I'm telling you the truth...

MARIA

I've known Sophie for quite some time and she doesn't lie. You've fired her.

DORA

I don't think it would be wise to question what I say...  
By the way, I'm not happy with your work as a production assistant...

*Maria understands the threat and does not say anything more.*

JAMES

Who will come instead?...

DORA

I was just coming to that. I've done everything I can to find a new director, but it hasn't been possible... Philip then proposed that I'll take over and direct and because we're now in a crisis I've agreed to do that.

PHILIP

...and I'll be assisting.

DORA

Right... Well, we've been sitting in the cafeteria and as you can understand we've had very little time... If I tell you what we've decided, you can write it down in your scripts:

*Dora sits down with the paper at "Sophie's table" and Philip takes a chair and sits down nearby with his script. James and Maria take out their folders and pencils. They make notes as they have been told and do not reveal what they think about the following changes:*

JAMES

Excuse me... who's going to play Margret?

DORA (*reference to James*)

She's been cut. That scene is superfluous. So... are you ready?... Then let's begin: yes, well... the first scene is cut, so we'll start with me on stage and you coming in... We're going to delete some text in that scene... They're talking about a lot of superfluous things... and then you go out and that's when Philip comes in...

PHILIP

Yes, that's when I come in... and we've been talking about extending that scene a bit, haven't we...

DORA

Yes, that's right... Philip is going to add some text there... We're going to improvise it later... and what happens next?...

*Philip is feverishly turning the pages in his script until he finds the right page:*

PHILIP

...it's the Mother and Axel looking for the testament when Gerda knocks on the door...

DORA (*reference to Maria*)

Oh, yes... There we thought that you don't have to be on stage at all... you can talk through the keyhole...

*Philip reads in his script:*

PHILIP

...and then it's us again...

DORA (*reference to Maria and James*)

Right... what were we thinking for that scene?... Oh, well, it'll come back... If we move on: oh, yes, then we come to your scene and that's a long one, you have to admit...

PHILIP

We were thinking of cutting out some of the mean comments you say about Dora... isn't that right?...

DORA

Yes, well, don't worry... We won't cut too much... but we really feel that you're being a bit too negative... Well, that was that scene... Shall we move on...

PHILIP (*reads in the script*)

Then I come in...

DORA

...and this is where we're going to add a fight...

PHILIP

You've been backstabbing us and I've heard what you've said and that makes me angry...

DORA

...and then I come in...

PHILIP

...and then we start to fight, us against you...

*Philip rises and demonstrates his fencing skills with the ruler:*

and I wear my uniform and I'm fencing... and you lose...

MARIA

Excuse me... you said that we've been backstabbing you... but you said that those lines would be cut out?...

*Dora and Philip are still for a few seconds trying to understand what she means:*

PHILIP

Oh, yes... Well... yes, that's true...

DORA

You *understand* what they've meant.

PHILIP

Right. I *understand* what you really mean, although you don't say it directly... Yes... and then you go out and come back with the porridge...

DORA

The porridge, yes... What kind of porridge are we going to have?... I've been thinking about this: wouldn't it be nice if it was Christmas and I come in with a rice pudding...

PHILIP

...and then we can have a Christmas tree on stage...

DORA (*reference to Maria and James*)

No, we can't have that... It wouldn't match *my* furniture... Let's forget the Christmas tree... but we can still have the rice pudding and we can make loads of pudding and serve to the audience... you can walk around and serve it... and then we can have candlelight and sing Christmas songs and so on... I think that would be really appreciated... what do you think, Philip?...

PHILIP

I think it's a wonderful idea... and then you can invite the journalists up on stage...

DORA

That's right, it's an idea we haven't talked about... We're going to change the play to *nowadays*... and then we're going to furnish the stage so that it'll look like my place...

*Dora walks around and shows how she is going to furnish (CC - the bed, UL - the dining table and DL - the clothes rack):*

This is where my bed is going to be... and here I'll put my round dining table... and the chairs to go with it... and here I'll put a clothes rack with my beautiful evening dresses... and then I thought that this will be like a drama documentary about *me*... I don't think that's ever been done before... There have been film documentaries about different people, but this is going to be a theatre documentary... and I hope to be able to interest the *media* with it...

PHILIP

...and I'll also have some of my furniture on stage...

DORA

Yes, it'll be like a shared room, although it's really *my* room...

JAMES

Where's the rocking-chair going to be?

DORA

The rocking-chair?... Oh... No, we're not going to have a rocking-chair... it'll be enough with the other chairs... Well... maybe we should move on...

PHILIP (*reads in the script*)

Then comes the scene with the cook book...

DORA

I've never liked that scene... I think it's a bit boring... Can't we just cut it out?... and take it from where you come in?...

PHILIP

Oh, yes... Sure...

DORA

Here we're going to soften Axel's aggression towards the Mother... and also add a scene from Axel's and Gerda's wedding where we're dancing with each other...

MARIA

Am I going to be in that scene?...

DORA

Oh, no, you're not needed... Well... Hmm... we haven't really decided how to do the end yet... but I think we'll cut out the fire... Have you any objections so far?

JAMES

Well, I was thinking that it might be difficult for the audience to follow what is happening?...

DORA (*reference to Maria and James*)

That's no problem: we'll just write down the story in the programme and if someone wonders about something they can read about it... I think you have a bad attitude... you don't seem to understand that this is *creative* theatre... If you don't like it you can walk away... Oh, yes, there are a few more things: first of all I want you to always keep *behind* me and Philip on stage... Your characters are not very important, I don't agree with Sophie there... and then Philip came up with a very good idea, that Sophie didn't even want to try, but now we can finally do it... You'll be covered with sheets during the whole performance!...

MARIA

Won't that make it difficult to serve the porridge?...

DORA

Oh, no... you'll have holes for your eyes and arms...

*Dora laughs:*

It'll look so funny... and besides, it'll include this idea about ghosts, which you've been talking about... Yes, that's all. Don't forget to bring sheets with you tomorrow so that we can see what it looks like... I'll bring scissors...

JAMES

This is quite a lot of changes... Are we going to be ready on time?...



DORA

Is there a reason why we wouldn't?...

*Dora picks up the flyers and hands out bundles (of ca. 100 flyers) to the others.  
(Maria and James take them, but they are not enthusiastic and Dora notices that):*

I have to leave in half an hour... I don't think there's any point in starting rehearsing now, so instead I'd like you to go out in the street and hand these out... Do you have any questions?... Otherwise I'll see you in the morning at nine.

PHILIP

Dora, I have to work tomorrow... Maybe you've forgotten that... I finish by two... Can I see you then?...

DORA

That's right... You'd said that. I'd forgotten...

JAMES

I have a dentist appointment at ten.

MARIA

...and I have to start working at half nine tomorrow...

DORA

Why do you tell me now?!

JAMES

We told Sophie... She knew about it...

MARIA

I told her a week ago...

DORA *warning*

This is not a good time to let me down...

JAMES

I can phone and change the time, but this is the third time I'll have done that...

MARIA

I can't do anything about it... I'm sorry...

DORA

You're just *amateurs!*...

PHILIP

I would come if I could... you know that, Dora...

DORA *is hurt by their "apathetic" attitudes*  
This is not going to work out!... I can see that now... It's so  
*typical* that you don't stand up for me when it really matters!

PHILIP

Don't worry, Dora. I only have a problem with tomorrow...

*Dora thinks that everything will be a fiasco and is now on the verge of breaking down:*

DORA *(last sentence to herself)*

I don't think you understand how *difficult* it is to be a  
producer... All of the responsibility lies on *my* shoulders...  
This is not going to work, and it's *your* fault!... You're  
not *involving* yourself in this!... you're just sitting there  
with lots of excuses to why you can't come to the  
rehearsals... I've put *everything* into this... You don't  
understand what kind of pressure I'm under... I'm an  
*artist* and I'm very *sensitive*!... I've invited many critics  
to the first night... and I'm going to be interviewed on  
*television* !... How can you *do* this to me !... Oh... I can  
see it now: I'm *misunderstood* and everybody ***h a t e s*** me !!!...

*Dora starts to cry... and she cannot stop... Philip comes forward and comforts her, but  
it does not help... She just cries even more... Philip runs out (UL) to the bathroom and  
fetches lots of toilet paper which he comes back with. Maria and James are stunned and  
do not know what to do. Dora recovers slowly until she is only sobbing a bit:*

DORA

Can you give me my bag...

*Philip fetches Dora's bag:*

Thank you...

*She takes out a small mirror and touches up her make-up:*

PHILIP

How do you feel?...

DORA

I feel a bit better now...

JAMES

If you think that your work load is too big, then I know  
a director who can help...

DORA

Maybe that would be good... I can't cope with every-  
thing right now...

PHILIP

You're just a bit tired... It'll pass...

DORA

I understand how the Mother feels... Everybody hates her...  
Now I've got those feelings for free...

PHILIP

I admire you, Dora... You really *live* your characters...

JAMES

I can phone and ask if you want to...

PHILIP

I don't think we need a new director... You just need  
to rest a bit...

DORA

But it's probably for the best...

JAMES

Can I borrow your mobile?

DORA (*does not want to lend her telephone to James*)

Yes... Oh, no... the battery's flat.

JAMES

It doesn't matter. I can go to the cafeteria.

*James rises and goes towards the door (UR):*

MARIA

Wait, James! I'll come with you. I need to make a phone  
call, too.

*James and Maria walk out (UR). Dora continues to recover:*

PHILIP

I don't really like this...

DORA

What?

PHILIP

That they are going to bring in another director... What  
did Don really say?...

DORA

Oh... I'm so angry with him... He said he doesn't want  
to be associated with us... He did say he'd do it if I asked  
him to, but now he's *changed* his *mind*...

PHILIP

Can't we persuade him?

DORA

You can try if you want to... I'm not going to...

PHILIP

Dora, I'm glad that you fired Sophie... but if they drag in another director, then it'll only be someone who works in the same way...

DORA

I know, but I'm so tired right now... I can't carry the whole responsibility on my own...

PHILIP

But I don't think I want to be a part of this then...

DORA

What?... You're not thinking of quitting, are you?!...

PHILIP

I'm sorry, Dora... I don't know how to say this... but I won't do it under these circumstances...

DORA

You can't quit now! I *need* you!

PHILIP

I'm sorry, Dora...

DORA

If I refuse their director... I'll say *no!*... Will you change your mind then?...

PHILIP

Well... I guess I *could* change my mind...

DORA

Is there anything else?...

*Philip wants to find a way to avoid handing out the flyers:*

PHILIP

Oh... I'm not sure...

DORA

What?... Say it!... Come on: say it!...

PHILIP

Oh... I was just thinking... If we're to be honest, we haven't got that much time, have we... I feel that my character's not ready...

DORA

Mine isn't either...

PHILIP

...but Dora... This performance has to be *good!* We can't show anything half-baked... Everything has to be perfect!... All the new changes are very good... but we need time to rehearse them...

DORA

I know you're right... but it would mean so many other changes... We've booked the theatre, and it might be difficult to get the critics to come another day...

PHILIP

Well, it's up to you, of course... You don't have to listen to me...

DORA

But of course I listen..... Philip, I agree with you! We'll postpone the first night...

PHILIP

Don't worry... It'll be fantastic... and everybody'll talk about our performance...

DORA

Will one week be enough?...

PHILIP

Shouldn't we say two, just to be on the safe side?... It might be easier to get the journalists there if we tell them well ahead of time...

DORA

You're right about that... So let's say *two* weeks... Then we have three weeks to go... It actually feels like a relief...

PHILIP

I know, it does...

*Philip takes a flyer:*

It's really a shame about these flyers... Now we'll have to make new ones...

DORA

Oh, no, that's not necessary... We'll just cross out the dates for the first two weeks... Of course it'll take some time, but we can still use them...

PHILIP

They're really nice...

DORA

I can't believe that Sophie had the nerve to criticize them... She said that Maria and James felt the same...

PHILIP

Well, what do you know..... Oh, Dora... I just thought of something... Now when we're postponing it for two weeks... Do we really need Maria and James in this performance?...

DORA

What do you mean?... Of course we need them... I'm sorry to say...

PHILIP

...but if you really think about it... Wouldn't it be possible to do *without* them?...

DORA

We can cut out Margret, but we still need two people for the parts of Fredrik and Gerda...

PHILIP

...but this is *our* performance... and you know how easy it is for them to steal the attention...

DORA

That won't happen now... They'll be standing covered in the background...

PHILIP

But the opposite could happen... that everyone becomes interested in them and wants to find out who's under the covers... and then no one'll look at us...

DORA

I'm not worried about that...

*Philip is sulking:*

PHILIP

Really?... Well, I guess you're right... I'm being *ridiculous*...

DORA

No, you're not being ridiculous..... When I'll think about it... It's quite a good idea... Everybody will *expect* to see all the characters on stage and then they won't!... That could turn out quite funny, I can see that now...

PHILIP

It's creative... I bet it's never been done before...

DORA

I think you're right...

PHILIP

Do you think they'll expect to be paid?...

DORA

Oh, no... I can always wriggle my way out of that one...

PHILIP

Then nothing's in the way?... The audience's only coming to see *us* now...

DORA

It's quite tempting... but why didn't we think about this from the start?...

PHILIP

I don't know, but don't you think it's *good*!...

DORA

We can save money if we fire them... It's more than good: it's *brilliant*!... You've convinced me: let's do it!...

PHILIP

They'll probably get angry... How are you going to avoid paying them?... you've already got Sophie's salary to pay...

DORA

She won't get anything... I never gave it to her in writing that she was fired, so there's no proof of it... If she demands her money, then I can claim that *she* has broken her contract... I can even sue *her* for money...

PHILIP *admiring*

That's really smart! Is that the way to do it?...

DORA

You learn a few tricks along the way... I've done it before, so I know that it works...

PHILIP

...but how about Maria and James?...

DORA

They have no written contracts... They've been asking for it, but I've been a bit short of paper lately...

PHILIP *laughing*

Well done, Dora...

DORA

I think I know how we're going to get out of this situation...

PHILIP

Without paying?... I think it's them coming back...

DORA

Just keep quiet and look serious...

*James and Maria come in (UR):*

JAMES

He'll do it!

DORA

James, wait...

JAMES

I suggest that you phone so that you can arrange a meeting...

DORA

James... and Maria..... Philip and I have talked while you were away and I've decided to call off the whole production.

MARIA

What?... Now?!...

JAMES

...when we've just found a new director?!...

DORA

I understand that you're disappointed... and so am I... I've worked so hard for this... but I don't think we'll be ready on time... with all the new changes and so on... and I don't want to put on something half-done...

JAMES

I really don't understand...



MARIA

Call it off?... This is very sudden...

DORA

Yes, but I *feel* this is for the best...

MARIA

Oh... are you calling it off for good?... or do you think you'll be producing the play later on?...

DORA

I can't answer that now... Who knows what'll happen in the future?... I can only say that this feels right for the moment...

MARIA

What do you think, Philip?

PHILIP

Well, obviously I'm very disappointed... but I support Dora in her decision...

MARIA

Aha... What does this mean when it comes to our salaries?...

DORA

I knew you were going to bring that up... I'm sorry to say that I can't give you anything.

JAMES

I want to be paid for the time I've been working for you!

DORA

Well, I'm sorry, but since we won't be doing it, there'll be no money coming in...

MARIA

I've got a contract with you!

DORA

That's just a verbal agreement...

MARIA

You said I'd get a contract in *writing* and then you've been stalling the whole time...

DORA

Maria, I haven't been satisfied with your work as my assistant... I don't think you're worth paying...

JAMES

Let's go, Maria... Let's leave... She's sick!

*James takes his bag and clothes. Dora swallows the humiliation to get rid of them:*

MARIA *to Dora*

That was really *low*...

JAMES *to Maria*

Come on, let's go!...

*James also picks up Maria's bag and clothes and walks towards the door (UR):*

DORA *to Maria*

What are you waiting for?

MARIA

I don't believe that you're going to call this off...

DORA

Believe what you want...

MARIA

Don't you understand that people will find out about what you're doing?...

DORA

Doing what?...

MARIA

Think about all the people standing up for you and how you treat them... James has worked for three weeks and I've worked for *four months!*... For what?...

*Dora does not want to listen and turns away to seek support from Philip:*

...and Sophie, she wasn't given any time to prepare, but she did it anyway...

DORA

I can't help it that you recommended such a bad director... By the way, it's her fault that I have to call the whole thing off...

MARIA

Really?... How is that?...

DORA

It's her fault that we won't be ready on time.

MARIA

...but she hasn't been allowed to *finish* her work... How do you know that we wouldn't have been ready on time?...

DORA

The performance doesn't stick together...

MARIA

The performance sticks together much better than you want to admit... I've never before seen a producer work against a director like you've done...

DORA

I couldn't just stand and watch her destroying my performance!...

MARIA

...so you admit that you fired her?...

DORA

I haven't said that... but she's insensitive and I can't work with her... I'm happy she quit...

MARIA

Sophie's not insensitive... You always talk about how *sensitive* you are... but I've never before met anyone who's so *cold* and *calculating* as you are...

JAMES *at the door (UR)*

Maria!...

MARIA

You *use* other people for your own purposes!

DORA

Have you finished?

MARIA

Yes... I'm leaving!

*Maria walks up to James by the door:*

I'm not scared of you... You're *pathetic*!

*James and Maria leave (UR).*

DORA

Such insolence!...

PHILIP

They'll find out that we're doing the play anyway...

DORA

They can't do anything... It would be their word against mine...

PHILIP

I'm so glad we're rid of them...

DORA

They were bad actors, anyway... I don't even want to think about them... Let's look ahead instead!...

PHILIP

This'll be really good... and we're going to have so much *fun!*...

DORA

...and we can do whatever we want... D'you know what I'm going to wear?... I've decided now... for the finale I'm going to wear my gold lamé dress...

PHILIP

...and I can wear my uniform during the whole performance!...

DORA

We've got so much work to do... Can you meet me tomorrow at two?...

PHILIP

Yes...

DORA

But we can't do it here... I must remember to cancel... Can we rehearse at your place?...

PHILIP

I'll ask Carla... but I'm sure it'll be fine... She's busy on Tuesday afternoons...

DORA

Good... and I have to phone the theatre...

*Philip picks up a bundle of flyers:*

PHILIP

What are we going to do with these?...

DORA

Well, it's a shame... but now we'll have to get new ones...

PHILIP

I could do that... Well, I mean you're going to be so busy doing other things...

DORA

Oh, that's really nice of you... Thanks! We have to go through the play again... and make more cuts...

PHILIP

Yes, that's right...

*Philip takes his script and turns its pages:*

DORA

We'll have to do it tomorrow... We don't have time now...

PHILIP

I guess it'll only be our scenes left... Do you think that the performance might be too short?...

DORA

Oh no, it's better if it goes fast... People are so tired of theatre... It's film and television that matters...

*Philip continues to turn and count the pages:*

and I have to prepare for the interview, too... Oh, that's right, they were going to come to the dress rehearsal... I have to phone and tell them to come another day... Oh, I'm so nervous now... I've got so much to do... I don't know where to start... and I have to call the papers...

*Dora takes out her mobile telephone:*

I think I'll start by phoning the TV station...

*Dora looks among her notes to find the telephone number:*

PHILIP

We've only got thirteen pages together... That might be a bit *too* short, don't you think?...

DORA

We'll have to talk about that tomorrow... I haven't got time right now...

*Dora has found the number and she phones the local TV station:*

PHILIP *enthusiastically*

We can *improvise* and prolong it a bit... and we can use puppets that look like Fredrik and Gerda...

DORA

I'm sure it'll be fine... Yes, good day, I'm calling from Dora Theatre Productions and we have an interview booked for next week... Yes, that's right, we'll be doing "The Pelican" by August Strindberg ...

*The male journalist at the TV-station tells her that because of lack of personnel they will not have time to visit the theatre and he apologizes that they have not informed her about this earlier. (Philip continues to turn pages and plan for the performance):*

Oh?... No, it doesn't matter, because we're postponing the first night anyway... Maybe we can book another time?... in two weeks?... No, I mean in three weeks...

*He says that it will not be possible, because the journalist who was supposed to do the interview is expecting a child and have taken "maternity leave" already last week, earlier than expected. (Philip looks up from the script when he understands that there are problems):*

...but there must be someone else who can do the interview?... Can't you do it?... but I'm happy to come to the studio instead..... what if I interview myself and send you a video tape?... Why not?... I don't think you can do this to me... You *said* that I could be on the show!!...

*He says that they are always happy to receive tips about what is going on and that he looks forward to Dora coming back the next time she has a production going:*

Happy to get *tips*!... Do you think this is some kind of *amateur* theatre!!... You should be *happy* that I've agreed to give an interview! I don't agree to everything!...

*The journalist says that he is very sorry, but that he cannot do anything more about it. He wants to finish the conversation with Dora:*

You're *sorry*!... Sure... I believe that... This is so *typical*... Hey, you, I don't give a *damn* that you're going on air soon!... I think you should compensate me for this... No, I *don't* want to sit in the audience... I want to be *interviewed*, that was the agreement... You think you can treat me exactly how you like, but you have *not* heard the last from me, you can be sure of that!!...

*Dora turns off the phone. She is angry but sad at the same time and the tears are not far away. Philip wants to comfort her:*

Oh, I'm so angry!...

PHILIP

What did they say?...

DORA

That *bloody* journalist who was supposed to interview me is on "maternity leave"?!... and then he claimed that there's no one else who can do the interview... He said it was due to "lack of personnel"... Bullshit!... and they've known this since *last week* without telling me!...

PHILIP

Dora, it's *their* loss!... They don't know what they're missing...

*Dora sobs a little and Philip hugs her:*

I believe in you... I've always thought that you're *phenomenal!*...

DORA

You're the only one who seems to realize that...

PHILIP

Oh no, you'll get your big break... Just wait... With this production we'll be a sensation!... We'll both get our big breaks... and then they'll *crawl* in front of our feet... and *beg* us for interviews...

DORA *smiling*

...and I'm going to give interviews in my home...

PHILIP

...and I'll finally get work at the large theatres...

DORA

...and I'm going to make *loads* of money... and buy a mansion... Oh, I think it's best I phone the theatre, so that we'll know for sure about the dates...

*Dora looks for the phone number, finds it and phones. (Philip is still in his dreams for a while longer):*

Yes, hello... I'm calling from Dora Theatre Productions and we'd need to postpone our dates... Due to indisposition of cast members we won't be able to do the first two weeks...

*Dora is informed that she will have to pay anyway, since she is cancelling too late:*

(*continuance:*) DORA

Oh?... Hmm... but you've never said that before... You should have told me about that... Here we are with two unwell actors and there's no way that we're going to be ready on time... And besides, the director has quit!...

*The female assistant at the theatre does not give in:*

You must be crazy! You can't do that!

*The assistant continues to explain. (Philip starts to get worried that Dora will have another outburst and eventually blame him this time. He feels guilty about them being in this new situation. Without attracting Dora's attention, he walks to his bag and starts to put on his outer garments behind Dora's back):*

You just want the money!... I'm going to request a review of this... No, you listen to me! I want to speak to the Theatre Director!... This is *important*... I don't think you know who you're speaking to... I guess you'll have to go and get him!...

*Dora waits by the phone. Philip has walked to the door (UR):*

PHILIP

I'm sorry, Dora, I have to leave... I'm late for a meeting, I had forgotten all about it... But I'll see you tomorrow...

DORA

What?... Are you leaving now?... D'you know, they're insane!... They say I have to pay anyway...

PHILIP

Dora, I'm sorry but I have to rush...

DORA

No, wait Philip!...

PHILIP

I'll call you!...

*Philip quickly slips out through the door (UR).*

DORA

Yes, hello?... Call back at three!... You really have a nerve!...



*Dora turns off the phone:*

Philip!... Wait!..... Damn... Why was he in such a hurry?...

*She sits still for a while. It is starting to come to her what kind of situation she is in (with another of her theatre productions probably heading for a fiasco and an economic disaster). The more she thinks about this, the more convinced she becomes that her own actions as a producer, in no way have caused this situation:*

I think everybody's out to get me today...

*Dora gets more and more agitated, slowly but inevitably:*

You can't trust people... Why am I always surrounded by idiots?!..... That bloody Sophie... everything's her fault!... *Bloody bitch!*... I'm going to *sue* her... I'm ***bloody*** well going to get her !!!...

*She gets more and more angry until she has an outburst where she screams right out and kicks at things. During the outburst she loses herself in the anger and is not completely aware of what she is doing. It ends with her sinking down and crying like a little child:*

Nobody likes me...

*Dora knows that she'll soon have to leave, to get in time for work where she changes into her prison officer uniform. (Before Maria, James and Sophie she has said that she works as a consultant in "human resources" for a number of large companies.) She rises slowly and goes out (UL) to the bathroom. We hear her vomiting and then she flushes the toilet.*

*(The lights fade out.)*

**the end**