

***HENRIK
IBSEN***



ROSMERSHOLM

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Henrik Ibsen

Rosmersholm

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

John Rosmer, of Rosmersholm, an ex-clergyman.

Rebecca West, one of his household, originally engaged as companion to the late Mrs. Rosmer.

Kroll, headmaster of the local grammar school, Rosmer's brother-in-law.

Ulrik Brendel.

Peter Mortensgaard.

Mrs. Helseth, Rosmer's housekeeper.

(The action takes place at Rosmersholm, an old manor-house in the neighbourhood of a small town on a fjord in western Norway.)

ACT 1

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(SCENE—The sitting-room at Rosmersholm; a spacious room, comfortably furnished in old-fashioned style. In the foreground, against the right-hand wall, is a stove decorated with sprigs of fresh birch and wild flowers. Farther back, a door. In the back wall folding doors leading into the entrance hall. In the left-hand wall a window, in front of which is a stand filled with flowers and plants. Near the stove stand a table, a couch and an easy-chair. The walls are hung round with portraits, dating from various periods, of clergymen, military officers and other officials in uniform. The window is open, and so are the doors into the lobby and the outer door. Through the latter is seen an avenue of old trees leading to a courtyard. It is a summer evening, after sunset. REBECCA WEST is sitting by the window crocheting a large white woollen shawl, which is nearly completed. From time to time she peeps out of window through the flowers. MRS. HELSETH comes in from the right.)

Mrs. Helseth. Hadn't I better begin and lay the table for supper, miss?

Rebecca. Yes, do. Mr. Rosmer ought to be in directly.

Mrs. Helseth. Isn't there a draught where you are sitting, miss?

Rebecca. There is a little. Will you shut up, please? (MRS. HELSETH goes to the hall door and shuts it. Then she goes to the window, to shut it, and looks out.)

Mrs. Helseth. Isn't that Mr. Rosmer coming there?

Rebecca. Where? (Gets up.) Yes, it is he. (Stands behind the window-curtain.) Stand on one side. Don't let him catch sight of us.

Mrs. Helseth (stepping back). Look, miss—he is beginning to use the mill path again.

Rebecca. He came by the mill path the day before yesterday too. (Peeps out between the curtain and the window-frame). Now we shall see whether—

Mrs. Helseth. Is he going over the wooden bridge?

Rebecca. That is just what I want to see. (After a moment.) No. He has turned aside. He is coming the other way round to-day too. (Comes away from the window.) It is a long way round.

Mrs. Helseth. Yes, of course. One can well understand his shrinking from going over that bridge. The spot where such a thing has happened is—

Rebecca (folding up her work). They cling to their dead a long time at Rosmersholm.

Mrs. Helseth. If you ask me, miss, I should say it is the dead that cling to Rosmersholm a long time.

Rebecca (looking at her). The dead?

Mrs. Helseth. Yes, one might almost say that they don't seem to be able to tear themselves away from those they have left behind.

Rebecca. What puts that idea into your head?

Mrs. Helseth. Well, otherwise I know the White Horses would not be seen here.

Rebecca. Tell me, Mrs. Helseth—what is this superstition about the White Horses?

Mrs. Helseth. Oh, it is not worth talking about. I am sure you don't believe in such things, either.

Rebecca. Do you believe in them?

Mrs. Helseth (goes to the window and shuts it). Oh, I am not going to give you a chance of laughing at me, miss. (Looks out.) See—is that not Mr. Rosmer out on the mill path again?

Rebecca (looking out). That man out there? (Goes to the window.) Why, that is Mr. Kroll, of course!

Mrs. Helseth. So it is, to be sure.

Rebecca. That is delightful, because he is certain to be coming here.

Mrs. Helseth. He actually comes straight over the wooden bridge, he does for all that she was his own sister. Well, I will go in and get the supper laid, miss. (Goes out to the right. REBECCA stands still for a moment, then waves her hand out of the window, nodding and smiling. Darkness is beginning to fall.)

Rebecca (going to the door on the right and calling through it). Mrs. Helseth, I am sure you won't mind preparing something extra nice for supper? You know what dishes Mr. Kroll is especially fond of.

Mrs. Helseth. Certainly, miss. I will.

Rebecca (opening the door into the lobby). At last, Mr. Kroll! I am so glad to see you!

Kroll (coming into the lobby and putting down his stick). Thank you. Are you sure I am not disturbing you?

Rebecca. You? How can you say such a thing?

Kroll (coming into the room). You are always so kind. (Looks round the room.) Is John up in his room?

Rebecca. No, he has gone out for a walk. He is later than usual of coming in, but he is sure to be back directly. (Points to the sofa.) Do sit down and wait for him.

Kroll (putting down his hat). Thank you. (Sits down and looks about him.) How charmingly pretty you have made the old room look! Flowers everywhere!

Rebecca. Mr. Rosmer is so fond of having fresh flowers about him.

Kroll. And so are you, I should say.

Rebecca. Yes, I am. I think their scent has such a delicious effect on one—and till lately we had to deny ourselves that pleasure, you know.

Kroll (nodding slowly). Poor Beata could not stand the scent of them.

Rebecca. Nor their colours either. They made her feel dazed.

Kroll. Yes, I remember. (Continues in a more cheerful tone of voice). Well, and how are things going here?

Rebecca. Oh, everything goes on in the same quiet, placid way. One day is exactly like another. And how are things with you? Is your wife—?

Kroll. Oh, my dear Miss West, don't let us talk about my affairs. In a family there is always something or other going awry—especially in such times as we live in now.

Rebecca (after a short pause, sitting down in an easy-chair near the sofa). Why have you never once been near us during the whole of your holidays?

Kroll. Oh, it doesn't do to be importunate, you know.

Rebecca. If you only knew how we have missed you.

Kroll. And, besides, I have been away, you know.

Rebecca. Yes, for a fortnight or so. I suppose you have been going the round of the public meetings?

Kroll (nods). Yes, what do you say to that? Would you ever have thought I would become a political agitator in my old age—eh?

Rebecca (smilingly). You have always been a little bit of an agitator, Mr. Kroll.

Kroll. Oh, yes; just for my own amusement. But for the future it is going to be in real earnest. Do you ever read the Radical newspapers?

Rebecca. Yes, I won't deny that!

Kroll. My dear Miss West, there is no objection to that—not as far as you are concerned.

Rebecca. No, that is just what I think. I must follow the course of events—keep up with what is happening.

Kroll. Well, under any circumstances, I should never expect you, as a woman, to side actively with either party in the civic dispute—indeed one might more properly call it the civil war—that is raging here. I dare say you have read, then, the abuse these "nature's gentlemen" are pleased to shower upon me, and the scandalous coarseness they consider they are entitled to make use of?

Rebecca. Yes, but I think you have held your own pretty forcibly.

Kroll. That I have—though I say it. I have tasted blood now, and I will make them realise that I am not the sort of man to take it lying down—. (Checks himself.) No, no, do not let us get upon that sad and distressing topic this evening.

Rebecca. No, my dear Mr. Kroll, certainly not.

Kroll. Tell me, instead, how you find you get on at Rosmersholm, now that you are alone here—I mean, since our poor Beata—

Rebecca. Oh, thanks—I get on very well here. Her death has made a great gap in the house in many ways, of course—and one misses her and grieves for her, naturally. But in other respects—

Kroll. Do you think you will remain here?—permanently, I mean?

Rebecca. Dear Mr. Kroll, I really never think about it at all. The fact is that I have become so thoroughly domesticated here that I almost feel as if I belonged to the place too.

Kroll. You? I should think you did!

Rebecca. And as long as Mr. Rosmer finds I can be any comfort or any use to him, I will gladly remain here, undoubtedly.

Kroll (looking at her, with some emotion). You know, there is something splendid about a woman's sacrificing the whole of her youth for others.

Rebecca. What else have I had to live for?

Kroll. At first when you came here there was your perpetual worry with that unreasonable cripple of a foster-father of yours—

Rebecca. You mustn't think that Dr. West was as unreasonable as that when we lived in Finmark. It was the