

A scene from  
**WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN**

by HENRIK IBSEN

adapted for the stage by WALTER WYKES

CHARACTERS

RUBEK: A sculptor

IRENE: A former model

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# WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN

RUBEK

*[With difficulty.]*

When I first found you ... I knew at once I would make use of you for my life's work. You were what I required in every respect. I was young then—with no knowledge of the world—and I thought that The Resurrection would be most beautifully rendered as an innocent young woman, not yet corrupted by life, awakening to light and glory without having to put away from her anything ugly or impure.

IRENE

Yes. And so I stand now—in our work.

RUBEK

Not entirely.

*[Pause.]*

You have said that I cannot expect you to be the same woman I knew all those years ago. Well, I am not the man I once was either, Irene. In the years that followed your departure, I became schooled in the ways of the world. My vision of "The Resurrection Day" evolved—became more ... complex. Your solitary, unsullied figure no longer expressed my conception, and I ... I made modifications.

IRENE

Do I not stand as I always stood for you?

RUBEK

Yes ... yes, but ... there are others.

IRENE

Others?

RUBEK

I looked at the world around me ... and I had no choice but to include what I saw. Women and men as I knew them in real life.

IRENE

Others—with our child?! Strangers?!

RUBEK

At the base of the sculpture, I created fissures in the ground, and from this hell-mouth, there are now men and women with dimly-suggested animal faces, swarming up around the child, pulling her down as she tries to rise up into the heavens.

IRENE

My eternal soul ... you and I ... we ... we and our child ... we lived in that solitary figure!

RUBEK

Yes—we! We! I had to include myself, you see. I had to put a little bit of myself into the girl—that glorious figure who can't quite free herself from this earth—who reaches with her hands for the heavens, for perfection, tortured by the knowledge that she will never attain her goal, never escape, that she will remain forever imprisoned in this ... this hell!

IRENE

Poet! You have killed my soul—the soul of our child—so you model yourself in remorse, and with that you think your account is cleared?!

RUBEK

I am an artist, Irene. And try as I may, I shall never be anything else.

IRENE

Yes ... you are an artist. But I was a human being! I had a life to live, Arnold—a human destiny to fulfill! And I let that slip away to become your ... your slave! Your whore! It was suicide! An unforgivable sin against myself! A sin for which I can never atone! I should have borne children! Many children! Real children! Not clay creatures! Not such children as are hidden away in museums! That was my vocation! To bring life into this world! To be a mother!

*[Pause.]*

I ought never to have served you.

RUBEK

*[Lost in his memories.]*

And yet ... those were beautiful days.

IRENE

*[Looks at him strangely.]*

What?

RUBEK

Beautiful, wondrous days. I would not trade them for anything.

*[Pause.]*

IRENE

Do you remember what you said—the day you finished?

RUBEK

No. What did I say?

IRENE

*[Astonished.]*

You don't remember?

RUBEK

I ... I'm sorry. My mind isn't what it used to be.

IRENE

You took my hands and pressed them to you. And I waited. I waited, Arnold. Breathless. For what seemed like an eternity, I waited! And then you said to me, "Thank you. Thank you, Irene. This has been a priceless episode."

RUBEK

Did I really say that? Episode?

*[Pause.]*

I'm sure I didn't mean—

IRENE

At that word, I left you.

RUBEK

You take everything so painfully to heart.

IRENE

And you take nothing.

RUBEK

That's not true.

*[Pause.]*

Do you recall the summer we spent on the Lake of Taunitz—every weekend?

IRENE

Yes. After our work was done.

RUBEK

We'd take the train out to the lake and sit beside that little peasant hut.

IRENE

It was an episode, Arnold.

RUBEK

You used to take water-lilies, I remember—you'd tell me they were birds and set them swimming in the brook.

*[Pause.]*

IRENE

Swans.

RUBEK

What?

IRENE

Swans. They were white swans.

RUBEK

Yes. Of course. How fond you were of that game! We played it the whole summer. I remember, once, I took a great furry leaf and fastened it to one of the swans—a burdock-leaf, I believe it was—and you said it was Lohengrin's boat, with the swan yoked to it. I said you were the swan that drew my boat.

*[Pause.]*

I bought that little hut—beside the Lake of Taunitz.

IRENE

Did you?

RUBEK

Yes.

IRENE

You often said you would. If you could afford it.

*[Pause.]*

And it still stands—the little hut?

RUBEK

No. I had it pulled down. I couldn't bear to see it standing there—it filled me with such sadness. In its place there is a magnificent villa.

IRENE

And you live there now—with the other one?

RUBEK

When we aren't traveling. Yes.

*[Pause.]*

IRENE

Life was beautiful by the Lake of Taunitz. But we let it slip away—that life and all its beauty.

RUBEK

You could come and live with us—in the villa.

IRENE

With the two of you?

RUBEK

With me. You can set your swans swimming in the brook ... we can talk of old times ... you can open all that is locked up in me—as you did in our days of creation.

IRENE

I no longer have the key to you, Arnold.

RUBEK

You do! You and no one else! I beg of you, Irene—give me this one chance to live my life over again. Help me undo my greatest mistake.

IRENE

There is no resurrection for the life we once led, you and I. Time moves forward only.

RUBEK

Then ... let us pretend! Let us pretend we are still on that lake! That we never left!

IRENE

It would only be an illusion.

RUBEK

I don't care! Better to live an illusion than to continue with this ... this darkness! When you left, Irene ... when you disappeared ... I cannot express to you ... I was filled with such regret. I became painfully aware of all that I had left unsaid ... all

the moments I had allowed to pass ... without ... without grasping them ... without ... I had come to think of you as something sacred, you see ... something holy ... a gift from God ... a creature of innocence not to be touched save in adoring thoughts. A superstition took hold of me that if I touched you ... if I desired you with my senses ... my soul would be desecrated, and I would not be able to finish my work. I was a fool! An idealistic young fool! I should have taken you in my arms right then and there—on the floor of my studio, I should have taken you! With the clay still on my fingers! It would only have added to the beauty of the child—to the depth and complexity of her meaning—of her mystery.

*[Pause.]*

I can't lose you again, Irene—I don't think I could survive it.

*[Pause.]*

IRENE

Perhaps ... we can arrange some sort of ... compromise.

RUBEK

Compromise?

IRENE

Yes.

RUBEK

What do you mean?

IRENE

One night together. One last night. I can't promise anything more.

RUBEK

Yes! Yes! Do you really mean it?

IRENE

On one condition.

RUBEK

Anything!

IRENE

You must never sculpt again.

*[RUBEK stares at her, dumbfounded.]*

RUBEK

Never?

IRENE

You mustn't even speak of it.  
*[Pause.]*

RUBEK

You ... you want me to give up my life's work? Give it up entirely?

IRENE

It's a small price to pay—don't you think? For one night of real happiness. For the chance to relive your fondest memories.

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NOTE: The full text of this play can be purchased at:  
<http://www.amazon.com/When-Dead-Awaken-Walter-Wykes/dp/1425731384/>