

Yours, devoted

Working manuscript

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Roles; (in order of appearance)

Vicky
Ellen
Victor
Irma

Writer's notes

Throughout the play, the atmosphere in the rooms changes. This is a deliberate choice, highlighting the brutality that goes hand in hand with an interest in the different stages of dealing with shame, faith and forgiveness in

the play. Every scene contains a ritual and a poetic note that must be honoured.

Prologue

Vicky, a woman in her early thirties, is standing in her study room. The time is late morning.

In her study, there are lots of books spread out and a laptop left wide open.

There is also a couch in the centre of the room, a desk with everything necessary to keep up as a writer, an armchair in the corner, lovely paintings on the walls, a mirror, a door that goes into the kitchen, one half-opened moving box with some valuables in it; a ring binder, an old teddy, some books of Irma Tollelund's poetry with notes in them.

Vicky takes the ring binder full of documents written by Vicky's mother Ellen out of the moving box. She looks at it for a second. Discovers the title of the ring binder "secrets". She holds it away from her body, and firmly puts it on her office desk as if it were a ticking bomb.

Vicky: I found you.

Act One

Scene one – A Record of my mother's Darkness

Vicky: Secrets.

Vicky walks around, avoiding a closer look at the ring binder. Vicky walks intensely out of the room and the sound of a kettle is being turned on from the kitchen. Vicky comes back into the study with an intense look, and a purpose, clinging to an empty mug with a teabag in it. Vicky is looking for paper and a pen, but she finally gives up finding it and sits down at her desk and opens a Word document on her computer. Vicky starts typing at her computer and reads out loud as she goes along.

Vicky:

To understand my mother. It was to chase waves and swim with no motion in dark water. With no way of finding a way home. She kept her person from the public and she remained a mystery to me. But these... secrets. They have been given to me to find out what happened that we never could talk about.

And then she takes a look again at the ring binder: "Secrets". She starts writing like her life depended on it.

Vicky:

I fear finding... no. I... Hrmmm. Yes... I fear finding out what she has written. She must have written... oh god... something about me. Do I want to know? Actually... I need to know what she never could just say to me. And I need... I don't expect knowing will be any easier. But it is... better than being left in the dark.

When the kettle has boiled, she walks out to pour hot water into the mug. There is a loud sound of water being poured into a mug, and she comes back into the room with a cup of tea in her hands. She takes a sip and burns herself.

Vicky: Ah, hot.

Vicky: What have you written?

Vicky takes a heavy breath and sighs.

Vicky sips at her tea, conscious of the fact that it's still very hot. She looks at the ring binder again, picks it up, feels the weight of it, and breathes in the familiar smell of tobacco, reminding her strongly of her mother.

A woman enters the room and stands in the doorway. Vicky freezes in shock to see that the woman is her mother, Ellen.

Ellen: You can open it darling, but it is at your own risk.

Vicky: You speak?

Vicky tries to walk closer to Ellen who is in her early fifties, who then disappears.

Vicky:

This can't be real. I didn't just see... No.

Mother? Are you here with me?

I don't know what I just saw... Shit

She sits quietly for a moment, sipping her tea, taking it all into account. Vicky finds her mobile phone and calls Jonathan, her fiancé.

Vicky:

Hi Joe, I'm holding the ring binder in my hands now. I don't know if this is right really... What was I thinking? Something is off and I can't explain it... Okay, are you sure you have time? Thank you. I love you. Now, okay.

Vicky takes a deep breath and her shoulders, that have gotten very tense, loosen a bit. Vicky opens the ring binder of secrets with Joe on the phone by her side.

Scene two – The three letters

Vicky tells Joe what she finds.

Vicky:

I see three letters and all of them are... that is weird.
Yes, I'm still there. It's just. They are all from Victor and addressed to my mother, Ellen. Victor was my mother's stepdad. My Granny's fourth husband. Listen to this...

Vicky reads quietly out loud and slowly the process of reading the letters appears as a man's voice that reads the letters Vicky holds.

Victor:

Dear Ellen,
Happy 15th birthday. You are turning into a beautiful woman,

Vicky:

Who says that to a 15-year-old girl?

Victor:

...And I talk proudly of you. How intelligent and beautiful you are. I am glad you have the best features of your mother. You are growing into your own person now and you are becoming a more sincere writer every day. My darling, your future is bright. Remember to keep being curious. Asking me for books to read is a great start to exploring the world of literature. I'd be happy to hear your thoughts. Let us keep discussing more. Stories are nuanced and so are our minds. Let me know what you think of this book. Yours sincerely, Victor.

Vicky:

No no no. Victor was never really anything to me... I don't know what he's implying. The letter is intimate alright. I mean, this was another time so... You never really said what you meant and public speaking wasn't the way.

Ellen never wanted me to be near him, Victor. So, she would always make sure I wasn't alone with him. What are you saying? He passed away after my granny, Irma... Alright. Let's not jump to any conclusions please, okay?

The next letter is... from when my mother was 17.

Victor:

Dear Ellen, I am thrilled you want to escort me on my journey to Rome. So much great history has been built in Rome and I am looking forward to learning more about it with you. This is a great opportunity to explore and see what is there...

Vicky:

She went to Rome with him. Who is he anyway and what does he want from her? What. No, I know. I am not overreacting. I feel it. If it wasn't a big deal. Ellen would not start with these letters from this... Victor. Something happened there in Rome. My gut is telling me, this isn't any trip with your stepdad... I don't think I can read the next bit.

What?.. Breath? I am breathing. Why would you ask me that? Oh. Am I counting my breath? No. Why would I?

Right. And If I count, will you stop saying let's breathe? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. I'll continue reading now.

Victor:

Dear Ellen, I have decided that it is best for all of us, that you don't live in the house anymore. You must be sent away to study. I would like you to consider studying Political Science. I can send you recommendation letters. I am calling you in a favour, so you will be considered for starting at the end of this summer. You can still write outside of school. You are a smart woman now. Don't make this any harder on your mother. You want her to be happy, and I want to see you succeed in life. I am sincerely hoping you will consider my offer. You have till the end of this week to reply to me. Staying in the house simply isn't an option anymore. You must learn to take care of yourself now. Smart girls like you, know how to take care of themselves and others. I know you are capable of making the right decision.

All the best, Victor.

Vicky:

Joe, this is abusive. He never says it. But this. Things between them. The way he's using his words to try and control her, without revealing what's actually going on. It gives me the creeps. He's

unsettling her, messing with her head. He must have, Joe. He did abuse her.

A woman steps into the room and sits down in the armchair in the corner of the room (stage right). The woman reveals herself with a famous poem. It is Irma Tollelund.

Vicky: Joe, I think I need to call you back.

Vicky ends the call and holds the letters to her mom from Victor.

Vicky: Look, Granny.

Give them quietly to her grandmother. Keeping her focus on Irma's appearance. Vicky is speechless looking at her grandmother. Irma reads the poem; Flashing Lights.

Irma:

In the long dark night of childhood
burns a small flashing lights
as a trace, left by memory,
while the heart freezes and flees.
Here, lit up, your wild love shines
lost through misty nights,
and all that you have since loved and suffered
has limits set by the power of the will.
The first sorrow has a thin sheen,
only it will be close to your heart
when all other grief is silenced.
High as a star on a spring night
burns your childish happiness,

you searched for it since but only got hold
of its dappled late summer shade.
Your faith you took with you so far,
for it was the first and the last,
now it stands burning in the dark somewhere,
and there is nothing more to lose.
And someone comes near you,
but can never quite understand you,
for your life, you have lain under the light of the lamp,
and no one shall afterwards reach you.

(Ditlevsen, 1947)

Act two

Scene one – A Feast for the Dead and the Living

Irma: Use your voice, Vicky

Vicky is gasping for breath.

Ellen: Vicky? Vicky?

Vicky: ...It's shit that this is necessary...

Vicky searches the room for her cigarettes and finds them in the desk drawer but is missing a lighter.

Vicky: I can't find my lighter. Where? Aarh this is just... quite.
Frustrating.

Irma: I can't help you with that.

Vicky:

I need to smoke. I haven't needed to smoke so badly since... I was pregnant with Louise. And the only reason I quit was for my baby's sake. It wasn't for me, you see. Do not look at me like that... I must have thrown it somewhere. Oh, what a wicked project this is... Oh (snorts)

Vicky walks frustrated around looking and when she looks back her mother sits patiently waiting on the couch in the centre of the study.

Ellen: Shall we sit down?

Vicky:

No, I don't want to sit down. I'm feeling a bit thirsty. Maybe I'm hungry too. I have bread and olives we can eat. And we need water.

Ellen:

Remember when I used to bring you a glass of water whenever you were feeling overwhelmed.

Vicky nodding

Vicky: Uhuh, I'll go get it for us.

Vicky walks out of the room and makes a Tapas plate in the kitchen. Irma and Ellen are small-talking.

Irma:

I remember when I once gave Vicky...

Ellen:

Don't remind me. You made me so mad. And why on earth would you think of that?

Irma:

Oh, will you give me a break? A drop of whisky in the milk gets the baby to sleep just fine. That was what my mother taught me.

Ellen: Well, not my child you won't.

Irma:

That baby has never slept better. And you turned out just fine too.

Ellen: Mother, please. You sound so old-fashioned.

Irma: Call me a nun, and you will crack me up!

Vicky is back with a tapas board and finds a good mood to please her guests.

Silence.

Ellen: I won't have anything to eat anyway.

Vicky breaks the bread

Vicky: What?

Ellen: I say, I won't have anything to eat.

Vicky: Why?

Ellen: I don't think I can hold anything down anymore.

Vicky takes a sip of her glass of water

Irma: A wee bit won't hurt you, my dear.

Vicky:

I understand how incredibly hard it was for you to keep going, Ellen. I was afraid that something bad would happen to you. We never had a simple mother-daughter relationship. I always wanted a mother, and then I wanted so badly to become one.

It wasn't a choice to distance yourself from me. And I hear your reasons, it's all in here. The fact that you never had a mother figure in Irma and that she didn't take care of you the way a mother should.

I'm sorry.

I have never been angry with you. I couldn't. I always felt loved and I told you this once, but you didn't want to hear it.

Maybe you didn't love me as your daughter but more as a sister. And that's fine.

I just wish you knew that I don't blame you for not being my mother.

It's okay.

But you see, I never got to understand why you were so distant with me, and I would have liked it. No. I would have loved it. If you had told me this when you were alive.

Vicky holds the ring binder of secrets from her mother, Ellen. Vicky laughs out of discomfort.

Ellen:

I won't apologise for what I did.

Vicky is disappointed for not getting an apology from Ellen and she therefore decides to continue talking

Vicky:

You know, I remember I used to fear your death.

The first time I knew about your death wish

I was nine and I've sort of been prepared for it since.

I believe you must have forgotten that I was coming over... Or else I know you wouldn't be like... luckily, dad was there with

me... Because I wanted to bring my new books and show you...
Do you remember how tiny I was? Jeez. I was tiny as a child....
So that was why Dad had to walk with me. He had to carry my
books for me and I knocked on your door but...
Nothing happened.
No sound of your heels stepping toward us.
So I tried to open the door but it was locked. I knew where you
kept your spare key so I didn't hesitate for a second to find it from
under the mat and slowly....

Vicky mimics opening a door.

There you were. Lying in the entrance on your new red carpet... I
couldn't stop looking at your hands, and your facial expression.
You have never been greyer.
I wanted you to wake up. You were laying there as if you just...

Ellen: Just what, darling?

Vicky: As if you just decided to take a nap – on the floor.
You needed to feel comforted, right? You needed to feel safe
when you weren't.
It wasn't the first time you tried to end it all, was it?

Silence.

Vicky:
All I wanted from that day was to shield you from harm.... And
now I don't know what to do... What would you have wanted me
to do? Is there something I can do for you? I feel so sad knowing
this. Cause I have so much to ask you. If you were here. Like

actually here. I would like to ask you... I'm not sure what to say anymore...

Ellen smiles, and Vicky smiles back looking at her mother.

Ellen: We look good, don't we?

Vicky:

Suddenly, we can have a good time, it's not that nice after all.
Well, I think... It's because it is always there. All the time!

Ellen: You probably have to explain it to me a little more.

Vicky:

It will always be a part of you. It's in the way you always keep your arms close to your body. The way your neck tenses when someone is behind you. I don't blame you.

Ellen: What is?

Vicky:

That darkness of yours.
It clings to you. It sucks all the mother-character out of you.
It probably just feels like talk, of no importance. And because we are not... because we can't get to the bottom of it all.... And until we can, it's hard to just be bloody near you...

Ellen: Then we have to do something to get to the bottom of it.

Vicky stands up and walks over to her computer and back and forth across the room.

Vicky:

Yes. Yes... But (*sigh) I have a hard time understanding how all those years could go by... How could Victor get away with abusing you and also with your suicide attempts... Granny must have known that something wasn't right.

Irma:

I don't understand it either.

Vicky:

You can read a room, right Granny?

Irma:

I would say so myself, yes.

Vicky:

So? Did you know about this? Granny isn't stupid for Christ's sake.

Ellen:

You are not listening to me. I wrote it down because it is that.

Vicky:

No. No, It seems completely unrealistic. How to... How... I'm (*speechless)

Ellen:

I'm not going to embarrass your grandmother. I am telling you what I have. Stop implying that it isn't right. Just listen.

Vicky:

This is me listening!
Okay.

Ellen reads more of her secrets; An opening to her postpartum depression.

Ellen looks at Vicky with disgust. A look Vicky remembers.

Ellen:

This little screaming lump. Of hair and skin. Covered in yellow shit and vomit. Is a monster. It is sucking the life out of me. And I feel nothing. I feel nothing when I look at it.

Vicky: Nothing at all!?

Ellen:

You hear motherhood is glorious, but when I looked at you lying there, being this loud little lifesucker... I felt an urge to make the screaming stop for good. I wanted it to stop. Stop needing me. I never wanted you and I don't want you in my life. You, little creature, are pure evil, and I am starting to think the devil has made me suffer. The devil has made you torture me for good. I can't sleep anymore. Why won't you stop crying? Stop bloody crying so I can think. I can't fucking think of any thoughts of my own for all the crying.

I stopped breastfeeding you, so you could suffer too. It bloody pleases me. To have you suffer too and lose that fatty lumpy look of yours. You little creature. You're getting smaller, and I'm starting to think you would be better off dead. You could have a happy death. I close my eyes happily at the thought of you little devilish creature sleeping and never waking up again.

Vicky:

Fuck. I need to sit down for a bit. Was that how you felt about me? This isn't you. I don't know what to say. I am not a monster, I am...

Vicky holds back anger.

Ellen:

No, shall I read more to you? Or we can read one of Irma's poems.

Irma:

Wonderful. I was starting to feel like air. It's lovely to see that you do need me after all.

Vicky:

What are you implying granny? Of course, she needs you. I need you.

Scene Two – A Mother's Touch and the Art of Forgiveness

This scene opens with a ritual. It serves as a performative element, a ritual cleansing the guilt of childhood and womanhood trauma: Ellen walks behind Vicky and touches Vicky on the forehead with water on her hands, water falls on Vicky's face and smears out Vicky's makeup. Vicky takes a breath to be held. Vicky now walks behind Ellen and touches Ellen on the forehead with water on her hands, water falls on Ellen's face. The touch of Ellen, the hand on the forehead and the smearing of any guilt while Irma watches and doesn't participate. The ritual stops when Vicky picks up the ring binder of secrets and reads a little more on her own. Looks at Irma with her face smeared.

Irma looks at Vicky, then at Ellen. Irma walks over to the mirror and looks up and down. Irma reads the poem; Woman's mind.

Irma:

You had a girlish dream of a child and a man,
and you got what you pointed to, but were still alone,
then you were left in the wonderland of childhood,
while I walk around and exist in a stony-hearted world.
And it is your strength and comfort that you are not dead,
but live somewhere like a weak and shrunken shadow,
although I have sold your dreams for a house and bread,
and pulled you down in pain that resembles happiness.
And it is my salvation that I can sense your voice
like waves in my blood's ponderous wandering -
you are my defence, my anxiety and my deepest comfort,
constant and good through the years of life and change.
There's a young girl inside me that can't die,
before I get tired of thinking I was once her,
she stares at me from the mirror, in the lake of eyes,
for something that is all too often hard to find.

(Ditlevsen. 1955)

Scene three – Teddy and the first reflective notes

Irma finds the old teddy from the box and starts walking towards Ellen with the teddy behind her back as if the teddy is a surprise.

Irma: I was in town the other day.

Ellen: Yes?

Irma: And I bought you a little thing.

Ellen: Oh, did you now?

Irma hands Ellen the old teddy.

Ellen: Oh my. You bought me a teddy.

Irma: Try scratching it on the stomach.

Ellen: No... does it play a sound? I'm afraid it doesn't say much.

A sound comes out of the teddy and they all laugh hard, Vicky admires her mother's free laugh. Ellen looks back at her daughter.

Ellen: Then we can start it there

Vicky: Yes

Irma sits down on the couch beside Ellen. Vicky walks over to her desk, sits and types on her computer.

Vicky:

What, my mother and my grandmother share is... that we did not have a mother.

Ellen: Wow, it's nice. It's cute, and it can make sounds!

Ellen hands Vicky the old teddy and shows Vicky how to get the teddy to make the sound. They smile and both look at Irma. Irma reads the poem; Street of Your Childhood.

Irma:

I am the street of your childhood
I am the ground of your being
I am the beating rhythm
In everything you long for
I am your mother's grey hands
And your father's worrying mind
I am your earliest dreams
Light, misty web
I gave you my great seriousness
A day when you were wildly lost
I sprinkled into your mind, a bit of sadness
A driving rainy night
I once knocked you to the ground
To make your heart hard
But I lifted you back up gently
And wiped away those tears of yours,
I am the one who taught you to hate
I taught you toughness and teasing
I gave you the strongest weapon
You need to know how to use them well
I gave you the watchful eyes
On which you shall be known again
If you meet one with the same look in their eyes
You will know that he is your friend.

(Ditlevsen, 1942)

The phone rings and Vicky panics for a second till she gets where the sound comes from. She picks up the phone. Vicky is alone in her study. Vicky has the old teddy with her that belonged to Ellen.

Vicky:

Yes. Oh okay, and is she hurt? Okay? Let me speak to her (...) Hi sweetpea. Yes, I've heard. Can you tell where you saw Mr. Teddy the last time... Harrison? Yes of course it is named Harrison. He, yes it is a he. My mistake... No, he isn't lost. We will find him... So you gave him a name today. That was nice of you. Yes, he has wanted a name for a long time, hasn't he? (...) Well, you know what sweetpea. I have a Mrs. Harrison you can have tomorrow when we meet. How does that sound? Okay, sweetpea. No, I don't think so. You have to stay with Daddy Joe tonight, and I will see you both tomorrow. I promise. Would you like me to sing a song for you? No? Okay, love. Night night sweetheart. Do me a favour, baby, and give the phone back to Daddy, yeah? I Love you too sweetpea. Bye-bye (...) Joe, you there? Yes. No, I honestly don't know... It has been a really really wild day here. I can't seem to write a clear sentence anymore. I don't know how I'm supposed to walk out of here before I make sense of it all. (...) No, I don't think sleep helps me understand my family.... Joe, this might have been naive, but I didn't expect to find such violent secrets... Maybe it's this space, where I'm working, or it's the smell itself of these things...all the papers in that ring binder of secrets. It smells of Ellen. I mean the ring binder smells like my mother. It's too much. All of it. I can't take it. (...) No, Joe. Stay, stay okay. Please, take care of both of you. That will help me so much. No, we can talk more later, and now look, she is going to be fine without finding her teddy for the night. You need to sing to her and then she will be just fine. Yes, she loves singing (laugh) yeah... Okay. Yeah. You too.

Vicky types down on her computer.

Vicky:

Something as simple as forgiveness must be received to move on... We are all humans and humans make mistakes... Absolute bullshit.

Irma and Ellen enter the study.

Irma: Is the kettle on?

Ellen: Yes?

Irma: I need some coffee, tea isn't enough. Make it strong.

Vicky: Just a moment.

Irma: Are you satisfied with how today went?

Ellen: Yes... no, I'm not. Are you?

Irma: I don't know... It's been eventful.

Vicky: (*snort)

Ellen: I think the water's boiled.

Vicky: Cool. Well, it is your water too.

Vicky walks out of the room and makes coffee.

Ellen:

I'm ashamed. It's horrible.

My postpartum depression isn't serving anyone. I love Vicky.
She's everything to me.

Irma:

You're only human. Us women can have postpartum depression. Men too for that matter. You're allowed to feel whatever you are feeling. Not for the fun of it, but because it's a part of you. It's in our genetics to be melancholic, my darling. You know, I actually admire your writing. You really get the worst out of the details. That's the work of a true writer.

Ellen is laughing it off. Vicky comes back into the study room with coffee for three.

Irma: Well, it looks quite nice...

Vicky: It's just coffee.

Irma:

Dear Ellen,
I worry about you. I haven't heard from you since you left to study. Is your school any good? I think writing is the pleasure of life. It's my purpose, and I notice that you have taken on the pleasure of writing yourself. You can come visit me. Victor is speaking nicely of your studying, but my interest lies with your being. And if you don't like studying, whatever it is called nowadays, drop out and come back immediately. I will find a room for you in the city. I published my book and it paid me well. If you need money, then say it. I will help you. Don't stay in school because of money. Anything that isn't in your interest isn't worth your time. You stopped writing to me. I have a sense that you aren't well, and I

don't know what you are thinking. I want you to write back to me. I need you to tell me about how you are getting along.
Sincerest, Irma.

Vicky: Honestly...

Ellen: Huh?

Vicky:
I didn't buy it there, I say: I can't understand that, and then you say: I can't understand that either. And then we just sit there.

Irma:
Then I'll come up with something. How about – I thought about it, but then I just couldn't tell you anything about it. Would that make you happier?

Vicky: Yes, I believe it more. I'm sorry. But I believe it more.

Ellen:
But it doesn't fit. It doesn't fit. It doesn't fit. It wasn't like that.

Vicky: (sigh)

Irma:
I can make up a lie, I can easily lie for you if it will do you good. But I don't think it's honest. I didn't know, it never crossed my mind. And it won't be any different if we talk about it for ten more days.

Vicky: I know it won't. I know. I just wish it hadn't happened.

Irma:

No later experience can ever erase the influences of childhood.
What you missed in your childhood, you never get enough of.

(Ditlevsen.1971).

Ellen:

Vicky. It's what you do with the truth. And if you can't use that explanation, I don't know what to do.

Vicky:

I get that. But I have no idea what to do with it! Tell me what to do and I'll do it.

Ellen:

I don't know what more to say to you.

Vicky:

Nah, but I guess we have to do something with all of this.

Ellen:

That's a really good idea. So, what are we supposed to do?

Vicky:

You're the one who kept your distance from me.

Ellen:

I am not distant from you. I don't need to distance myself from you anymore.

Vicky:

Yes, you do need to. And I'm telling you that's okay. Why can you not just make this... I am... I really am trying my best not... You chose to distance yourself from me. I could never be mad at you. And I am really trying here. But I feel so bloody awful! Irma was

not much of a mother to you. You were far from one half of a mother to me, and it makes sense, cos Irma's mother couldn't figure it out for her either, and so on. We are rotten. You see it too. Don't you see it? I can't stop thinking about it. It's a hell of a lot to ask me to take all of this in and... I can't be like you. I am not going to give my daughter what you gave to me. I am not passing on what you've given me. Oh, my sweet daughter. Tell me if I'm awful. No? It makes me sick to my stomach. But I see... There is this rotten structure repeating itself in this family. I don't want my daughter to have this on her...I can't... let this go on.

Ellen: And what exactly is that supposed to mean?

Vicky:

For fuck sake, I'm so fucking tired of letting on that this is Okay when it really isn't. I can't continue like this. I tried really hard to be the daughter you could bear to be around but no daughter deserves any of this. This isn't about you anymore. You know what? Fuck this. Fuck you, mother. I have a daughter. I have a responsibility to her.

I care about what happens to my daughter because she is mine and she is alive and I want none of this. A child needs to feel seen and to be heard.

It was your job to love me, Ellen. As your daughter, and not a fucking sister. Get me out! Of this rotten... No daughter wants to be their mother's best friend.

That is shitty and there is your truth.

Daughters need a mother, a fucking parent who cares and who worries. It was your job to be around... You couldn't do that, so just fuck off. I refuse to love the same way as both of you did.

Your pain is torture and granny made so damn sure that you

could never be even somewhat close to a mother to me. So, Ellen, your mother was an arse. So fucking what, I needed You. But you know what? You were just too depressed to be...

Irma: Are you done?

Ellen: Mother, you can fuck off.

Irma: I won't let you talk to me like that.

Vicky pushes things down from her desk and pushes her chair away.

Ellen: So fuck you for doing this to me.

Vicky holds back her tears and is trying to get herself together.

Irma:

It happened to all of us. It marked us all not just you, dear. I kept your secret hidden. I kept it safe.

Ellen: No mother. This only happened to me. Why can't you say it?

Irma: It happened to you. But it's hurting all of us.

Vicky:

Ellen, listen. All I care about is what you are to me, and the way you talk about me. I am not okay. You know, when you want to be, you can be so amazing to be around. You are solitary, you have a beautiful smile and lovely curls. You are strong-minded and can move mountains. Stubborn and an activist.

I admire you at your best. I knew you loved me without needing to hear it. You must understand that I felt loved. But you could have said it. I love you so much. But You could have chosen me. Loved me as a daughter. I'm glad that you got to meet my daughter. I truly am.

There is much about this... I. I resent every fibre within me that is not good. The thought of my daughter ever feeling this way... and I am not. I won't let it happen. I'm not putting my daughter through the pain of having no mother. It has to stop.

Ellen: I have nothing else to give

Silence.

Ellen shares an unsent letter to Vicky. Vicky listens and is in agony.

Ellen: Dear Vicky,

Suddenly, I see clearly. Morality is dead. For me, death is now the final reconciliation with everything and everyone. It is my desire for peace of mind. I will probably never get to see more. I'm a bit sad that my death has to happen so shamefully, concealed and lonely. And that there is nothing, my darling, that I can do to ease your grief. But you see, my sorrows have become too heavy to bear. I hope you fight... I don't want to write anymore, only to say goodbye. I have been waiting for a promising time when I can be sure to be alone for a few days. If you find this letter, this is your answer to my final call for peace. I want you to look through my things and take what you find as your own. Please understand that I did everything I possibly could with my meagre means.

Yours, Ellen.

Act three

Scene one – A break in structure

Irma reads the poem; So take my heart

Irma:

So take my heart in your hands,
but take it carefully, and take it gently,
the red heart – now it's yours.
It beats so peacefully, it beats so softly,
because it has loved and it has hurt,
now it is still – now it is yours.
And it can hurt, and it can heal,
and it can forget, and forget often,
but never forget, that it is yours.
It was so strong and so proud, my heart,
It slept and dreamt in pleasure and play,
now it can be broken – but only by you.
(Ditlevsen, 1942)

Scene two – What you do with the truth is entirely yours

Ellen denies responsibility.

Ellen:

Sorry, darling, that you have to find out this way. It has been your choice to do so. What you do with the truth is entirely yours.

Vicky:

Give me strength Mother, to write and mark out all of the shame,
our strength and our faith, I forgive the women before me and I

will break the structure once and for all. I write to tell the world, Ellen. This is not just my story, but the story of countless others.

EPILOGUE

Vicky:

The good mother is a fantasy, an illusion, a construction, a dream that has been interpreted culturally and in art for as long as anyone can remember. The good mother is both a retention, an emotional need, a longing and fear, a demand, and a cult. The good mother figure is difficult to concretise and live up to. It both glorifies and oppresses women and men. Perhaps we should rather talk about being a good parent. And define it as a person who takes good care of their children's physical and mental health. Being able to create a stable and safe environment for them and to love them. One can talk about skills such as tenderness and understanding. Reliability, showing the way is human. To support the formation of the child's own identity. Ideally, we encounter the skills of both our parents growing up. If we don't, and here I am an example, an imbalance occurs which, depending on your composition and upbringing, you seek to nurture or suppress in different ways.

The end.

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Poem

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