

The Lady From The Sea

by

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Doctor Wangel.

Ellida Wangel, his second wife.

Bolette,

Hilde (not yet grown up), his daughters by his first wife.

Arnholm (second master at a college).

Lyngstrand.

Ballested.

A Stranger.

Young People of the Town.

Tourists.

Visitors.

(The action takes place in small fjord town, Northern Norway.)

ACT I

(SCENE.--DOCTOR WANGEL'S house, with a large verandah garden in front of and around the house. Under the verandah a flagstaff. In the garden an arbour, with table and chairs. Hedge, with small gate at the back. Beyond, a road along the seashore. An avenue of trees along the road. Between the trees are seen the fjord, high mountain ranges and peaks. A warm and brilliantly clear summer morning.)

BALLESTED, middle-aged, wearing an old velvet jacket, and a broad-brimmed artist's hat, stands under the flagstaff, arranging the ropes. The flag is lying on the ground. A little way from him is an easel, with an outspread canvas. By the easel on a camp-stool, brushes, a palette, and box of colours.

BOLETTE WANGEL comes from the room opening on the verandah. She carries a large vase with flowers, which she puts down on the table.)

Bolette. Well, Ballested, does it work smoothly?

Ballested. Certainly, Miss Bolette, that's easy enough. May I ask--do you expect any visitors today?

Bolette. Yes, we're expecting Mr. Arnholm this morning. He got to town in the night.

Ballested. Arnholm? Wait a minute--wasn't Arnholm the man who was tutor here several years ago?

Bolette. Yes, it is he.

Ballested. Oh, really! Is he coming into these parts again?

Bolette. That's why we want to have the flag up.

Ballested. Well, that's reasonable enough.

(BOLETTE goes into the room again. A little after LYNGSTRAND enters from the road and stands still, interested by the easel and painting gear. He is a slender youth, poorly but carefully dressed, and looks delicate.)

Lyngstrand (on the other side of the hedge). Good-morning.

Ballested (turning round). Hallo! Good-morning. (Hoists up flag). That's it! Up goes the balloon. (Fastens the ropes, and then busies himself about the easel.) Good-morning, my dear sir. I really don't think I've the pleasure of--Lyngstrand. I'm sure you're a painter.

Ballested. Of course I am. Why shouldn't I be?

Lyngstrand. Yes, I can see you are. May I take the liberty of coming in a moment?

Ballested. Would you like to come in and see?

Lyngstrand. I should like to immensely.

Ballested. Oh! there's nothing much to see yet. But come in. Come a little closer.

Lyngstrand. Many thanks. (Comes in through the garden gate.)

Ballested (painting). It's the fjord there between the islands I'm working at.

Lyngstrand. So I see.

Ballested. But the figure is still wanting. There's not a model to be got in this town.

Lyngstrand. Is there to be a figure, too?

Ballested. Yes. Here by the rocks in the foreground a mermaid is to lie, half-dead.

Lyngstrand. Why is she to be half-dead?

Ballested. She has wandered hither from the sea, and can't find her way out again. And so, you see, she lies there dying in the brackish water.

Lyngstrand. Ah, I see.

Ballested. The mistress of this house put it into my head to do something of the kind.

Lyngstrand. What shall you call the picture when it's finished?

Ballested. I think of calling it "The Mermaid's End."

Lyngstrand. That's capital! You're sure to make something fine of it.

Ballested (looking at him). In the profession too, perhaps?

Lyngstrand. Do you mean a painter?

Ballested. Yes.

Lyngstrand. No, I'm not that; but I'm going to be a sculptor. My name is Hans Lyngstrand.

Ballested. So you're to be a sculptor? Yes, yes; the art of sculpture is a nice, pretty art in its way. I fancy I've seen you in the street once or twice. Have you been staying here long?

Lyngstrand. No; I've only been here a fortnight. But I shall try to stop till the end of the summer.

Ballested. For the bathing?

Lyngstrand. Yes; I wanted to see if I could get a little stronger.

Ballested. Not delicate, surely?

Lyngstrand. Yes, perhaps I am a little delicate; but it's nothing dangerous. Just a little tightness on the chest.

Ballested. Tush!--a bagatelle! You should consult a good doctor.

Lyngstrand. Yes, I thought of speaking to Doctor Wangel one of these times.

Ballested. You should. (Looks out to the left.) There's another steamer, crowded with passengers. It's really marvellous how travelling has increased here of late years.

Lyngstrand. Yes, there's a good deal of traffic here, I think.

Ballested. And lots of summer visitors come here too. I often hear our good town will lose its individuality with all these foreign goings on.

Lyngstrand. Were you born in the town?

Ballested. No; but I have accla--acclimatised myself. I feel united to the place by the bonds of time and habit.

Lyngstrand. Then you've lived here a long time?

Ballested. Well--about seventeen or eighteen years. I came here with Skive's Dramatic Company. But then we got into difficulties, and so the company broke up and dispersed in all directions.

Lyngstrand. But you yourself remained here?

Ballested. I remained, and I've done very well. I was then working chiefly as decorative artist, don't you know.

(BOLETTE comes out with a rocking-chair, which she places on the verandah.)

Bolette (speaking into the room). Hilde, see if you can find the embroidered footstool for father.

Lyngstrand (going up to the verandah, bows). Good-morning, Miss Wangel.

Bolette (by the balustrade). What! Is it you, Mr. Lyngstrand? Good-morning. Excuse me one moment, I'm only--(Goes into room.)

Ballested. Do you know the family?

Lyngstrand. Not well. I've only met the young ladies now and again in company; and I had a chat with Mrs. Wangel the last time we had music up at the "View." She said I might come and see them.

Ballested. Now, do you know, you ought to cultivate their acquaintance.

Lyngstrand. Yes; I'd been thinking of paying a visit. Just a sort of call. If only I could find some excuse--

Ballested. Excuse! Nonsense! (Looking out to the left.) Damn it! (Gathering his things.) The steamer's by the pier already. I must get off to the hotel. Perhaps some of the new arrivals may want me. For I'm a hairdresser, too, don't you know.

Lyngstrand. You are certainly very many-sided, sir.

Ballested. In small towns one has to try to acclam--acclimatise Oneself in various branches. If you should require anything in the hair line--a little pomatum or such like--you've only to ask for Dancing-master Ballested.

Lyngstrand. Dancing master!

Ballested. President of the "Wind Band Society," by your leave. We've a concert on this evening up at the "View." Goodbye, goodbye!

(He goes out with his painting gear through the garden gate.)

HILDE comes out with the footstool. **BOLETTE** brings more flowers. **LYNGSTRAND** bows to **HILDE** from the garden below.)

Hilde (by the balustrade, not returning his bow). Bolette said you had ventured in today.

Lyngstrand. Yes; I took the liberty of coming in for a moment.

Hilde. Have you been out for a morning walk?

Lyngstrand. Oh, no! nothing came of the walk this morning.

Hilde. Have you been bathing, then?

Lyngstrand. Yes; I've been in the water a little while. I saw your mother down there. She was going into her bathing-machine.

Hilde. Who was?

Lyngstrand. Your mother.

Hilde. Oh! I see. (She puts the stool in front of the rocking- chair.)

Bolette (interrupting). Didn't you see anything of father's boat out on the fjord?

Lyngstrand. Yes; I thought I saw a sailing-boat that was steering inland.

Bolette. I'm sure that was father. He's been to visit patients on the islands. (She is arranging things on the table.)

Lyngstrand (taking a step up the stairs to the verandah). Why, how everything's decorated here with flowers!

Bolette. Yes; doesn't it look nice?

Lyngstrand. It looks lovely! It looks as if it were some festival day in the house.

Hilde. That's exactly what it is.

Lyngstrand. I might have guessed it! I'm sure it's your father's birthday.

Bolette (warningly to HILDE). Hm--hm!

Hilde (taking no notice of her). No, mother's.

Lyngstrand. Oh! Your mother's!

Bolette (in low voice, angrily). Really, Hilde!

Hilde (the same). Let me be! (To LYNGSTRAND.) I suppose you're going home to breakfast now?

Lyngstrand (going down steps). Yes, I suppose I must go and get something to eat.

Hilde. I'm sure you find the living very good at the hotel!

Lyngstrand. I'm not staying at the hotel now. It was too expensive for me.

Hilde. Where are you staying, then?

Lyngstrand. I'm staying up at Mrs. Jensen's.

Hilde. What Mrs. Jensen's?

Lyngstrand. The midwife.

Hilde. Excuse me, Mr. Lyngstrand, but I really have other matters to attend to-

Lyngstrand. Oh! I'm sure I ought not to have said that.

Hilde. Said what?

Lyngstrand. What I said.

Hilde (looking contemptuously at him). I don't understand you in the least.

Lyngstrand. No, no. But I must say goodbye for the present.

Bolette (comes forward to the steps). Good-bye, good-bye, Mr. Lyngstrand. You must excuse us now. But another day--when you've plenty of time--and inclination--you really must come in and see father and the rest of us.

Lyngstrand. Yes; thanks, very much. I shall be delighted. (Bows, and goes out through the garden gate. As he goes along the road he bows again towards the verandah.)

Hilde (in low voice). Adieu, Monsieur! Please remember me to Mother Jensen.

Bolette (in a low voice, shaking her arm). Hilde! You naughty child! Are you quite crazy? He might have heard you.

Hilde. Pshaw! Do you think I care about that?

Bolette (looking out to the right). Here's father!

(WANGEL, in travelling dress and carrying a small bag, comes from the footpath.)

Wangel. See! I'm back again, little girls! (He enters through the garden gate.)

Bolette (going towards him at the bottom of the garden). Oh! It is delightful that you've come!

Hilde (also going up to him). Now have you got off for the whole day, father?

Wangel. Oh! no. I must go down to the office for a little while presently. I say--do you know if Arnholm has come?

Bolette. Yes; he arrived in the night. We sent to the hotel to enquire.

Wangel. Then you've not seen him yet?

Bolette. No; but he's sure to come here this morning.

Wangel. Yes; he's sure to do that.

Hilde (pulling him). Father, now you must look round.

Wangel (looking towards the verandah). Yes, I see well enough, child. It's quite festive.

Bolette. Now, don't you think we've arranged it nicely?

Wangel. I must say you have. Are--are we alone at home now?

Hilde. Yes; she's gone to--

Bolette (interrupting quickly). Mother has gone to bathe.

Wangel (looks lovingly at BOLETTE, and pats her head. Then he says, hesitating). Look here, little ones. Do you want to keep this up all day? And the flag hoisted, too?

Hilde. Surely you understand that, father!

Wangel. Hm! Yes; but you see--

Bolette (looks at him and nods). Surely you can understand we've been doing all this in honour of Mr. Arnholm. When such a good friend comes to see you for the first time--

Hilde (smiling, and shaking him). Think! he who used to be Bolette's tutor, father!

Wangel (with a half-smile). You're a pair of sly minxes. Well-- good heavens--after all, it's but natural we should remember her who is no more with us. Here, Hilde (Gives her his bag), take that down to the office. No, children. I don't like this--the way, I mean. This habit of every year--well--what can one say? I suppose it can't be managed any other way.

Hilde (about to go out of garden, and, with the bag, stops short, turns, and points out). Look at that gentleman coming up here. I'm sure it's your tutor.

Bolette (looks in that direction). He? (Laughs.) That is good! Do you think that middle-aged fellow is Arnholm?

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