Relling What the hell does demonic mean? It is utter nonsense I invented to save his life. But if I hadn't done it, the poor bastard would have collapsed through self-hatred and despair years ago. And well — the old lieutenant? He's certainly found his own cure.

Gregers Lieutenant Ekdal?

Relling What do you think about the bear-hunter wandering around up in the loft, hunting rabbits? There's no more content a hunter in the world than the old man when he's fooling around amongst all the rubbish. The four or five old Christmas trees are the forest at Høydal. The hens are the game in the pine-tree tops and the rabbits are the bears which he challenges—the mighty man of the outdoors!

Gregers Lieutenant Ekdal has certainly compromised the ideals of his youth.

Relling Don't use that foreign word: ideals. We've our own good Norwegian word: lies.

Gregers Do you think the two are related?

Relling Like typhus and putrid fever.

Gregers I won't give up until I've saved Hjalmar from your claws, Dr Relling!

Relling The worst thing for him. If you take the life-lie from an ordinary man then you take away his happiness as well.

Hedvig enters.

Relling Hello, little duck-mother— I'll go downstairs and see if your father's still lying there thinking about his invention.

He goes out through the front door.

Gregers I can tell from looking at you it's not been done.

Hedvig No.

Gregers You let yourself down when you started to do it, I expect?

Hedvig No, but when I woke up early this morning and I remembered what we'd talked about I thought it was strange.

Gregers Strange?

Hedvig Yesterday when we talked about it I thought it was lovely but when I had a sleep and remembered, I didn't think much of it.

Gregers You can't help being spoiled by growing up here.

Hedvig I don't care, if only Father would come upstairs.

Gregers If only you could see the things that make life worth living—the courageous sense of sacrifice—but I still believe in you, Hedvig.

He goes out. Hedvig wanders about on the floor. There's a knock from inside the loft. Hedvig goes up and opens the door a little. Old Ekdal comes out.

Ekdal Hum—it's not much fun going for a morning walk on my own.

Hedvig Didn't you feel like going hunting?

Ekdal It's not the weather for hunting today. It's so dark in there you can hardly see where you're going.

Hedvig Don't you ever feel like shooting something else apart from rabbits?

Ekdal Don't you think the rabbits good enough?

Hedvig What about the wild duck?

Ekdal Are you frightened I'll shoot your duck? Never—never in the world, Hedvig, never.

Hedvig I don't suppose you could. I think it's probably very hard to shoot.

Ekdal Couldn't? I could.
Hedvig But how would you do it? Not my duck — another wild duck.

Ekdal Below the breast, you see, that's the best place. And they have to be shot against the feathers — you understand — not with them.

Hedvig Do they die then?

Ekdal Of course they die — if you shoot them properly. I've got to go and clean myself up. Hum — you understand? Hum.

He goes into his room. Hedvig waits a little and takes the double-barrelled pistol and looks at it. Gina enters from the parlour with brush and duster. Hedvig puts the pistol down quickly and unnoticed.

Gina Don’t touch his things, Hedvig.

Hedvig moves away from the bookcase.

Hedvig I wanted to help tidy up.

Gina Go into the kitchen instead and see if the coffee’s still warm, and I'll take a tray when I go downstairs.

Hedvig goes out. Gina begins to sweep and tidy up in the studio. After a while, the door to the hall is opened reluctantly and Hjalmar Ekdal looks in. He’s wearing an overcoat but no hat, is unshaved and his hair is messy and not combed; his eyes are dull and tired.

Gina remains standing with the brush in her hands looking at him.

Gina Ekdal, you're here?

Hjalmar I'm not staying.

Gina I understand. But look at you!

Hjalmar What?

Gina That's your nice winter coat done for.

Hedvig appears in the door to the kitchen.

Hedvig Mama —

She sees Hjalmar, screams loudly with joy and runs towards him.

Hedvig Papa, Papa!

Hjalmar turns away and holds out his hand.

Hjalmar Away! Away from me!

Gina Go to the parlour, Hedvig.

Hedvig goes. Hjalmar hurries and pulls out the drawer under the table.

Hjalmar I need my books. Where are my books?

Gina What books?

Hjalmar My scientific books and technical magazines — I need them for my invention.

Gina (looking in the bookcase) Are they these ones without any covers?

Hjalmar Yes.

Gina puts a pile of magazines on the table.

Gina Why don’t I get Hedvig to cut them for you?

Hjalmar I don’t want them cut.

A slight pause.

Gina Have you decided to leave us, Ekdal?

Hjalmar is rummaging around his books.

Hjalmar I think that is self-evident.

Gina Yes.

Hjalmar I can’t stay here to have my heart pricked every hour of the day!

Gina God forgive you for thinking so poorly of me.

Hjalmar Proof!

Gina You’re the one who needs to find proof.

Hjalmar With a past like yours?