

Henrik Ibsen

Ghosts

Summary

Helene Alving, the widow of Captain Alving, is about to dedicate an orphanage she has built in his memory. She reveals to her pastor that she has hidden the evils of her marriage for its duration, and has built the orphanage to deplete her husband's wealth so that their son, Oswald, might not inherit anything from him. Pastor Manders had advised her to return to her husband despite his philandering, and she did so in the belief that her love would reform him. But her husband's philandering continued until his death. Mrs. Alving was unable to leave him because of the constraints of 19th-century morality, and during the action of the play she discovers that her son Oswald (whom she had sent away so that he would not be corrupted by his father) has congenital syphilis, and has fallen in love with Regina Engstrand, Mrs. Alving's maid, who is revealed to be an illegitimate daughter of Captain Alving, and thereby Oswald's half-sister.

The play concludes with Mrs. Alving deciding whether to euthanize her son Oswald in his madness in accordance with his wishes.