

[Scene: Vår Frelzers gravlund, a cemetery in the capital city of Norway, mid-November 1918. Under cloudy, gray skies, fallen leaves are covering the ground. The temperature is slightly above 0 degrees, and there's a hint of rain in the air. Edvard Munch, a famous and notoriously reclusive painter, aged 54, walks slowly among the graves. He is dressed in a thick overcoat with a wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes. Every once in a while, he pauses to read the stones. Deep in thought, he doesn't notice that another person is approaching him from behind. It is Munch's rival colleague, the 49-year old sculptor Gustav Vigeland, dressed only in a buttoned down shirt. Vigeland carries a walking stick, but does not use it for support. Rather, he spins it around like a baton].

Vigeland:

Ha! [Slaps Munch jovially on the back] Edvard?

Munch:

[Startled] Huh? [Then coldly] Vigeland...

Vigeland:

Fancy catching you out and about. Especially now, with this flu-thing going around!

Munch:

[Clearing his throat] Ahem, well...

Vigeland:

Thought you'd be barricaded behind closed shutters on that farm of yours! What's going on?

Munch:

[Annoyed by the disruption] Even I have to get out of the house every once in a while, you know. To get a breath of fresh air. But as far as socializing goes, I prefer the company of my friends here at the cemetery. I tend to find people much more agreeable when they're down below. And far less prone to spread diseases. Anyway, I was hoping not to be disturbed...

Vigeland:

[Interrupts] Well, you certainly did a good job disguising yourself with that overcoat. And the big hat! Barely recognized you myself.

Munch:

As I was saying: I was hoping not to be disturbed...

Vigeland:

[Ignoring the hint] Oh boy, I hear you! I come to the graveyard for the exact same reason. A precious moment of privacy... Fame is a double-edged sword, isn't it? All of a sudden everybody think themselves entitled to approach you. *I* don't bother disguising myself by putting on silly costumes, though.

Munch:

[Capitulating] *Sigh*. So I see. [A little more welcoming] But look, you really ought to put on some more clothes. Walking around in your shirtsleeves in these low temperatures? You're bound to catch a cold! And the thin fabric certainly won't offer much protection against the... pestilence.

Vigeland:

Catch a cold? *Ha!* Let me tell you, I've never been sick a day in my *life!* No sir, no snugly fur coats for me. I welcome the winter. It fortifies the body *and* the spirit [inhales deeply, then exhales]. As for the so-called "Spanish Flu?" Between us, I think it's 99 percent hype, cooked up by the press to sell more newspapers. *Natural selection*, that's all it is, weeding out the weakest links. Good riddance, I say.

Munch:

[Coughs]

Vigeland:

No, the only "pestilence" *I'm* worried about are people stealing my precious time, bleeding me of my creative energies. Surely you can relate?

Munch:

[Relating] Mmm.

Vigeland:

Damned leaches, right? That's why I carry this walking stick [knocks his wooden cane against a gravestone]. I even had it customized with a *needle-sharp* metal tip. See this? Whenever some annoying fool gets too close: [shouts] "En Garde!" and that's the end of that. You should get one yourself – to keep nuisances away.

Munch:

Yes... yes, I suppose I should.

Vigeland:

Only problem is of course that a *walking stick* can be misinterpreted as a sign of ailing health. Needless to say, in *my* case nothing could be further from the truth. It's one of the benefits of being a sculptor, I guess. Hauling clay, bronze and stone all day. It's great exercise. Builds muscle! Unlike you painters with your little brushes... Feel my overarm, Edvard!

Munch:

What? N-no, I have no desire to touch your arm!

Vigeland:

Come on, Edvard, don't be such a pansy, give me your hand [forcefully grabs Munch's hand and places it on his overarm, then flexes his bicep]. Do you feel it? Hard as granite rock. Not bad for a man pushing 50, eh?

Munch:

Stop it! [wrings back his hand].

Vigeland:

Ha-ha, uptight as always. Relax my friend, no need to feel threatened. We strongmen aren't what we used to be. As you may have noticed, athletic figures have fallen terribly [makes silly voice] “out of fashion” in the arts lately.

Munch:

Out of fashion? How do you mean?

Vigeland:

Nah, you know what I'm talking about. Haven't you heard what's stirring on the continent? I mean, if you thought *cubism* was deranged, wait till you see what some of these young “colleagues” of ours are spewing up now. It's a complete loony bin! And mind you, not the *elevated* type of madness like Strindberg and yourself were dabbling with back in the day. I tell you, it's like the war has made everyone loose their wits.

Munch:

[Genuinely upset] Yes, the war... Dreadful. *Truly* dreadful! Thanks God it's finally over!

Vigeland:

Yeah, nasty stuff. But I'll give it to you, Edvard, as always you were one step ahead of the bunch. The decorations you did at the University – when did you complete those? Two years ago?

Munch:

Yes, 1916.

Vigeland:

That's my point! Bloodiest year of the war. Verdun: 300,000 soldiers cut down in their prime. The Somme: 20,000 boys killed – on the first day of battle alone! You remember the proposal my brother pitched, right?

Munch:

How could I forget...

Vigeland:

Chiseled warriors on horseback slaying dragons with spears? Even I have to admit that his choice of

subject-matter looks a bit... *off* in light of recent events [chuckles]. Emanuel is still a bit sore, by the way... for losing that commission.

Munch:

[Obviously pleased] You don't say?

Vigeland:

But *you* nailed it, Edvard. Warmth – sunny landscapes – motherly comfort – feel-good celebrations of *life* – *that's* what audiences are craving now, after four years of destruction and misery. My poor brother will just have to bide his time until the next war comes along – which I reckon should happen soon enough, judging from the bloody mess over in Russia. And now the Germans have booted the Kaiser! By the way, how is business for you these days? Wasn't Germany your biggest market?

Munch:

[Aggravated] Vigeland, please! You know how I hate to discuss business. [Awkward pause]. But since you ask, things are actually not looking all that bad. To be honest, I even think there are reasons to believe in a new *springtime* for Germany.

Vigeland:

Really? How so?

Munch:

Well, think about it: with the rigid Prussian militarism gone – and with all that imperial pomp and ornamentation peeled away – the rich German culture can at last burst into full blossom!

Vigeland:

Whoa, am I hearing this right? An *optimistic Edvard Munch*? I'll be damned!

Munch:

Let's not get carried away. What I mean is that the voices of *freedom* and *progress* can finally be heard. Do you know Rathenau?

Vigeland:

Hm, no, don't think I do.

Munch:

Ah, Walther Rathenau! A fine man. Made his fortune in the electrical industry – but he's nothing like those other millionaire types. A visionary politician and a true intellectual. And a passionate art collector, who has generously supported my work. With people like him at the helm then, yes, I do foresee a bright future for Germany – as well as for my own livelihood.

Vigeland:

This friend of yours, is he a socialist?

Munch:

Well, sort of, but not the radical kind...

Vigeland:

Still, sounds a bit *too* progressive if you ask me. Germans need strong leadership. Always have, always will. Anyway, if the German economy is anything like the Norwegian, I wouldn't place too much trust in them big shots. They quickly go from riches to rags, you know. Did you hear about Prime Minister Knudsen? During these past four years of so-called "neutrality" he was literally *raking* in cash, supplying the allies through his shipping company. Then, as soon as the peace was announced: "poof!" His shares dropped like a merchant ship sunk by a torpedo. As you can imagine, my brother is panicking as well.

Munch:

Why is that?

Vigeland:

Why, because the Prime Minister is one of Emanuel's biggest patrons! Did stained-glass windows for him, portraits, you name it. No, Edvard, as you are well aware: *public art*, that's where the *safe* income's at.

Munch:

Now, the University decorations weren't exactly a *goldmine*...

Vigeland:

Word on the street says you pocketed 80 000?

Munch:

[Uncomfortable] Yes... well, no... well, maybe, I haven't kept track of the numbers. My art is my heart's blood, my paintings are my children, and on them I spare no expense. With the price of oils these days...

Vigeland:

What, those cheap, store-bought tubes you use? Gimme a break.

Munch:

OK, so I'm not *Leonardo*, b-but canvas, hundreds of square meters of it! And don't get me started on the work hours... Even if the amount you mention *is* correct, I assure you, there's not much left of it.

Vigeland:

Really? Then you're not playing your cards right. [Lowering his voice] I'll let you in on a little secret. You know the huge piece of land at Frogner – the one that's been standing vacant since 1914?

Munch:

Yes, what about it?

Vigeland:

I'm currently in talks with the city council about making a public sculpture park. Covering the *entire area!*

Munch:

Hmm. Only Norwegian sculptors then? Or international artists as well?

Vigeland:

That's the brilliant part, Edvard. It's going to be *all my work!* The city is going to pay for the whole thing. Can you believe it? They're even going to build me a big beautiful studio as part of the deal. I hate to rub it in, old boy, but when my new place is finished, it's going to dwarf that farm house you have out in the suburbs.

Munch:

[Upset] Is that so? Well, Vigeland, I'm glad you also have a cause for optimism. I wish you the best of luck with your enterprises, but now I really have to get going...

Vigeland:

[Teasing] Ooh, a little envious, are we? Don't worry, I'm sure the city will fund a little museum for you as well at some point. I'll talk to some people – put in a word.

Munch:

[Offended] Thank you, but I'm doing very well without your help. If you will please excuse me, I have an appointment to see Ibsen, over at the honorary section.

Vigeland:

Ibsen? What a coincidence! As a matter of fact I was on my way to visit his grave myself. Let's walk together!

Munch:

[Grudgingly] Grrr... [They begin walking in silence].

Vigeland:

[In contemplative manner] Ibsen... Ibsen... Ibsen... [Arriving at the grave] So here we are. The final resting place of the greatest Norwegian that ever lived.

Munch:

Yes, an unrivaled master.

Vigeland:

A giant among men!

Both:

[Emotionally, in unison] *A genius!*

Vigeland:

He was profoundly gripped by my depiction of *Hell*, you know, in that bronze relief I made in '94. Some say it inspired him to write *When We Dead Awaken*.

Munch:

What, that Rodin pastiche? Hah, stop fantasizing. Everybody knows that *my* work inspired Ibsen to write *When We Dead*. To be precise: it happened a year later, in 1895, after I had given him a *private* tour of my show at Blomqvist. Upon *his* request, I might add.

Vigeland:

Pfft, of course you'd believe that, considering how you were going out of your way to win his favors, making set-designs. Posters even! Flattering him with portraits like a fawning little fan-boy.

Munch:

[Indignantly] I *beg* your *pardon*?! Need I remind you of that tacky... *thing* that *you* proposed as his *grave memorial*? Depicting *Ibsen* – the inventor of *realism* – as a lounging adonis, like some *Greek god from antiquity*? Thankfully those in charge had the good sense to turn it down.

Vigeland:

You mean my sarcophagus? Let the record state that I stand *firmly* behind my creation. What better way to honor a true national hero – a national icon! And what do they choose to put up instead? A naked obelisk with no inscription whatsoever? With only an engraved *hammer*? I'm convinced they put it up just to spite me. Oh, the *pettiness* of our countrymen... Wouldn't know greatness if it bit them in the ass.

A voice:

[Faintly singing]
Beetling rock, with roar and smoke
Break before my hammer-stroke!
Deeper I must thrust and lower
Till I hear the ring of ore.

Munch:

[Astounded] Wait – what was that?

A voice:

[Singing louder]
There is peace within the deep—
Peace and immemorial sleep;
Heavy hammer, burst as bidden,
To the heart-nook of the hidden!

Vigeland:

What the... A voice coming from the grave?

Munch:

It's... it's like someone is speaking from *inside the stone!*

Both:

[Exuberantly] Gasp! Ibsen!

A dark voice:

[Mumbling slowly] Ibsen? Ibsen? Why do everyone keep calling me Ibsen, like I have that name written across my forehead?

Vigeland:

[Bewildered] I've never bought into any psychic mumbo jumbo, but...

The stone:

Aaah, it appears that my guests have never encountered a talking stone before. Is it really so hard to believe that I possess the gift of speech? I have been on this planet since its creation, patiently metamorphosing from molten magma, to crude limestone, to smooth marble perfection. Of course I picked up a few words along the way! If only humans learned to listen.

Vigeland:

Our discussion about *When We Dead Awaken* must have stirred him from his sleep. Ibsen did have a thing for ghosts...

Munch:

[Hushing] Shh, quiet, I can hardly make out what he is saying.

The stone:

Oh, the things I have heard through the years. Through centuries – millennia – the moans of workers – first slaves, then quarrymen – toiling, day in and day out, chipping away pieces of my

bedrock to decorate the houses of the wealthy and to make... [disdainful] *art*.

Vigeland:

[Knocks his cane against the stone] Excuse me, mister Ibsen, can you please speak up?

The stone:

Knock-knock... knock-knock... Oh, it takes me back. The steady thumps of hammers, like a heartbeat pulsating through my mountainous mass. I blame them not, the ragged laborers who broke their backs breaking my stone – whose life force was extracted by greedy masters, until their spirits were depleted, like hollowed-out quarry pits. Why was no memorial ever built in *their* honor? I don't mind watching over the bones of the man they call Ibsen. Judging by the number of visitors, he must have been a decent fellow. But it is not for *his* sake that I wear the symbol of the hammer with pride.

Munch:

I think he said something about a hammer...

Vigeland:

The hammer on the tombstone! He must *hate* it, just like I said. [Knocks his cane against the stone again] Mister Ibsen, could you please elaborate? Tell me what you'd like to have instead, and I'll pass it on to my contacts in the city council. I take it you have already heard about my proposed sarcophagus? Or would you find a full-scale mausoleum more dignified?

The stone:

Oh, foolish, self-conceited humans! Buildings and statues they erect to glorify themselves, thinking that a chunk of my... *gravity* will allow them to cheat death. Sure, some are remembered longer than others thanks to my efforts, like Trajan and Aurelius in the old country, with their columns cut from my fine material. But mark my words you vain mortals: forever is a *looong* time. In the end you will all be forgotten. Of your “great empires,” like that of Rome, only *I*, the stone, will remain.

Munch:

Did he say Rome?

Vigeland:

That makes sense! Ibsen loved Rome, his refuge from Norwegian small-mindedness. Perhaps he wishes to have his remains moved to the Eternal City? After all, Italy was his safe haven, where he lived in self-imposed exile before our nation finally acknowledged his...

Both:

[In unison] *Genius!*

The stone:

Oh, Italia! Why couldn't you just have left me there, instead of dragging me to *Norway*, where even stones complain about the cold. What a cruel fate to be posted in this godforsaken place... fashioned into an *Egyptian obelisk*, designed to stand among palm trees in the North African sun! What I wouldn't give to go back to my home in Carrara!

Munch:

Carrara?

The stone:

[Sobbing, while voice is fading out] Carrara...

Vigeland:

Yes, Carrara marble! Not only does he hate the hammer, Ibsen must also object to the choice of material. Too soft a stone for his headstrong character, I'd imagine. The Ibsen I know would have preferred something more solid, like granite! [Knocks his cane against the stone] Am I right?

[Silence]

Munch:

[Annoyed] Great, now you've scared him off...

Vigeland:

Scared him off? On the contrary, he just needs some time to contemplate my suggestions. If there was ever any doubt: the business of tombstones is *deathly serious*. Emanuel and I have discussed the topic at length, and we've agreed not to take any chances in that department. We will both build our *own* memorials, ready in good time before we go. That's the only way to be absolutely certain that no incompetent bureaucrats mess up our legacies. You should consider it too, Edvard!

Munch:

Not to alarm you – with your plans for a sculpture park and all – but what if those “avant-garde” youngsters are right? That the era of giant statues and monuments is over? Chapter closed, off to the scrapheap of history, together with the empires, Kaisers and Tsars. Besides: a monument to me, Edvard Munch? What on earth would that look like? I suppose they would just have to copy my *Human Mountain*, you know, the only sculpture I ever made? [Giggling, amused by his own suggestion] A totem of tortured human bodies, half-dead, half-living, struggling upwards, towards the light. Yes, I suppose that might be a fitting monument to Edvard Munch.

Vigeland:

[Just struck by a good idea] Hmmm...

Munch:

[Sharply] Now don't get any funny ideas, Vigeland!

Vigeland:

[Snaps back, as if awoken from a slumber] Hmm?

Munch:

No, honestly: I say enough with the pissing contests. I wouldn't dare to rob death of its most charming quality: that of being the ultimate equalizer. I'll entrust my paintings to speak for themselves when I'm gone. So as far as resting places go, any six feet of soil will do for me. Perhaps some place near here? Next to Ibsen, that would be nice.

Vigeland:

[Drily] Yeah, wouldn't you just *love* that. [Short pause] You'll still need a grave marker, though. Stop by my studio sometime, and I'll show you what I have in storage. I do all sizes, you see, not just Extra Large. How about a cute little bronze bust – like the one I made of Aasta Hansteen a little while ago? I'll throw in a discount for old time's sake!

Munch:

Now, wouldn't *that* be ironic. Remember how you hurled a bust at me back when we were living in Berlin? Because of that girl we were quarreling over? Damn near killed me! Wait... did you say *Aasta Hansteen*? The *suffragette*?

Vigeland:

Yup, the one and only. Bless her soul, crazy old hag.

Munch:

[Fascinated] Did she really sit for you? She *hated* men...

Vigeland:

Not me! You know I've always had a way with women. She even wrote a poem in my praise! Guess she identified with my “outsider position” or something. Going against the flow and all that...

Munch:

Wow...

Vigeland:

Of course, as a precaution I kept my cane within reach whenever she was over. I'm sure you've heard the stories of her attacking men on the street, for no apparent reason.

Munch:

Yes, with her umbrella! Rumor had it she also used to carry a riding whip!

Vigeland:

Oh, but it's true! She even flashed it once, when I was thoughtless enough to share my views on “women's liberation.” You know how I feel about that nonsense... But I quickly learned my lesson,

and I've been living by the rule ever since: Never discuss politics with a woman!

Munch:

Hear, hear! Well, at least she got her way in the end – with the women's vote five years ago.

Vigeland:

Too bad she didn't live to see it. And just imagine how excited she'd be today. Those ideas of hers are really catching like wildfire all across the world. Did you hear, last year the Reds in Russia even chose a woman to be a member of government!

Munch:

Yes, I read about it in the papers. Makes you wonder where it's going to end. Women state leaders?

Vigeland:

Ha!

Munch:

I'm all for voting rights, b-but... before you know it, they'll be coming for our jobs too! Out of the kitchens and into the studios. They'll put us out of work!

Vigeland:

Speaking of which, doesn't your sister dabble in painting?

Munch:

Inger? Yes, poor thing. She means well... but rest assured, she won't pose any threat to us *real* artists. I've been doing my bit by discouraging anyone from buying her pictures. She is so excitable, you see, it would only go to her head. In any case, I think it's just a phase. Her latest whim is taking photographs – no doubt influenced by my habit of shooting self-portraits.

Vigeland:

Photographic self-portraits?

Munch:

Indeed! With a handheld camera. *Selfies* I call them. It's something I do for my own amusement. But it's an inferior medium of course...

Vigeland:

Of course!

Munch:

As I once so eloquently phrased it: “photographs will never compete with the brush and the palette, until such time as photographs can be taken in Heaven or Hell.”

Vigeland:

Well put!

Munch:

Not that Inger would have the faintest ideas about concepts such as Hell. As you know, she is a rather... *simple* character.

Vigeland:

Like most women, eh? Now, come, I'll show you Hansteen's bust!

Munch:

[Reluctantly] Is her grave far away?

Vigeland:

Not too far. But obviously not *here*, in the *honorary section*.



THE MINER

by: Henrik Ibsen

BEETLING rock, with roar and smoke
Break before my hammer-stroke!
Deeper I must thrust and lower
Till I hear the ring of ore.

From the mountain's unplumbed night,
Deep amid the gold-veins bright,
Diamonds lure me, rubies beckon,
Treasure-hoard that none may reckon.

There is peace within the deep--
Peace and immemorial sleep;
Heavy hammer, burst as bidden,
To the heart-nook of the hidden!

Once I, too, a careless lad,
Under starry heavens was glad,
Trod the primrose paths of summer,
Child-like knew not care nor cummer.

But I lost the sense of light
In the poring womb of night;
Woodland songs, when earth rejoiced her,
Breathed not down my hollow cloister.

Fondly did I cry, when first
Into the dark place I burst:
"Answer spirits of the middle
Earth, my life's unending riddle!--"

Still the spirits of the deep
Unrevealed their answer keep;
Still no beam from out the gloomy
Cavern rises to illumine me.

Have I erred? Does this way lead
Not to clarity indeed?
If above I seek to find it,
By the glare my eyes are blinded.

Downward, then! the depths are best;
There is immemorial rest.
Heavy hammer burst as bidden
To the heart-nook of the hidden!--

Hammer-blow on hammer-blow
Till the lamp of life is low.
Not a ray of hope's fore-warning;
Not a glimmer of the morning.