THE CHARACTERS

GEORGE TESMAN, research fellow in cultural history
HEDDA TESMAN, his wife
MISS JULIANA TESMAN, his aunt
MRS. ELVSTED
JUDGE BRACK
EILERT LØVBORG
BERTA, the TESMANS' maid

The action takes place in TESMAN's residence in the fashionable part of town.
ACT ONE

A large, attractively furnished drawing room, decorated in dark colors. In the rear wall, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back. The doorway opens into a smaller room in the same style as the drawing room. In the right wall of the front room, a folding door that leads to the hall. In the left wall opposite, a glass door, with curtains similarly drawn back. Through the panes one can see part of an overhanging veranda and trees in autumn colors.

In the foreground is an oval table with tablecloth and chairs around it. By the right wall, a wide, dark porcelain stove, a high-backed armchair, a cushioned footstool, and two taborets. In the right-hand corner, a settee with a small round table in front. Nearer, on the left and slightly out from the wall, a piano. On either side of the doorway in back, étagères with terra-cotta and majolica ornaments. Against the back wall of the inner room, a sofa, a table, and a couple of chairs can be seen. Above this sofa hangs a portrait of a handsome, elderly man in a general's uniform. Over the table, a hanging lamp with an opalescent glass shade. A number of bouquets of flowers are placed about the drawing room in vases and glasses. Others lie on the tables. The floors in both rooms are covered with thick carpets. Morning light. The sun shines in through the glass door.

MISS JULIANA TESMAN, wearing a hat and carrying a parasol, comes in from the hall, followed by BERTA, who holds a bouquet wrapped in paper. MISS TESMAN is a lady around sixty-five with a kind and good-natured look, nicely but simply dressed in a gray tailored suit. BERTA is a maid somewhat past middle age, with a plain and rather provincial appearance.

MISS TESMAN (stops close by the door, listens, and says softly). Goodness, I don’t think they’re even up yet!
BERTA (also softly). That’s just what I said, Miss Juliana. Remember how late the steamer got in last night. Yes,
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and afterward! My gracious, how much the young bride had to unpack before she could get to bed.

MISS TESMAN. Well, then—let them enjoy a good rest. But they must have some of this fresh morning air when they do come down. (She goes to the glass door and opens it wide.)

BERTA (by the table, perplexed, with the bouquet in her hand). I swear there isn’t a bit of space left. I think I’ll have to put it here, miss. (Places the bouquet on the piano.)

MISS TESMAN. So now you have a new mistress, Berta dear. Lord knows it was misery for me to give you up.

BERTA (on the verge of tears). And for me, miss! What can I say? All those many blessed years I’ve been in your service, you and Miss Rina.

MISS TESMAN. We must take it calmly, Berta. There’s really nothing else to do. George needs you here in this house, you know that. You’ve looked after him since he was a little boy.

BERTA. Yes, but miss, I’m all the time thinking of her, lying at home. Poor thing—completely helpless. And with that new maid! She’ll never take proper care of an invalid, that one.

MISS TESMAN. Oh, I’ll manage to teach her. And most of it, you know, I’ll do myself. So you mustn’t be worrying over my poor sister.

BERTA. Well, but there’s something else too, miss. I’m really so afraid I won’t please the young mistress.

MISS TESMAN. Oh, well—there might be something or other at first—

BERTA. Because she’s so very particular.

MISS TESMAN. Well, of course. General Gabler’s daughter. What a life she had in the general’s day! Remember seeing her out with her father—how she’d go galloping past in that long black riding outfit, with a feather in her hat?

BERTA. Oh yes—I remember! But I never would have dreamed then that she and George Tesman would make a match of it.

MISS TESMAN. Nor I either. But now, Berta—before I forget: from now on, you mustn’t say George Tesman. You must call him Doctor Tesman.

BERTA. Yes, the young mistress said the same thing—last night, right after they came in the door. Is that true then, miss?

MISS TESMAN. Yes, absolutely. Think of it, Berta—they gave him his doctor’s degree. Abroad, that is—on this trip, you know. I hadn’t heard one word about it, till he told me down on the pier.

BERTA. Well, he’s clever enough to be anything. But I never thought he’d go in for curing people.

MISS TESMAN. No, he wasn’t made that kind of doctor. (Nods significantly.) But as a matter of fact, you may soon now have something still greater to call him.

BERTA. Oh, really! What’s that, miss?

MISS TESMAN (smiling). Hm, wouldn’t you like to know! (Moved.) Ah, dear God—if only my poor brother could look up from his grave and see what his little boy has become! (Glancing about.) But what’s this, Berta? Why, you’ve taken all the slipcovers off the furniture—?

BERTA. Madam told me to. She doesn’t like covers on chairs, she said.

MISS TESMAN. Are they going to make this their regular living room, then?

BERTA. It seems so—with her. For his part—the doctor—he said nothing.

(George Tesman enters the inner room from the right, singing to himself and carrying an empty, unstrapped suitcase. He is a youngish-looking man of thirty-three, medium sized, with an open, round, cheerful face, blond hair and beard. He wears glasses and is somewhat carelessly dressed in comfortable lounging clothes.)

MISS TESMAN. Good morning, good morning, George! (TESMAN (in the doorway). Aunt Julie! Dear Aunt Julie! (Goes over and warmly shakes her hand.) Way out here—so early in the day—uh?

MISS TESMAN. Yes, you know I simply had to look in on you a moment.

TESMAN. And that without a decent night’s sleep.

MISS TESMAN. Oh, that’s nothing at all to me.

TESMAN. Well, then you did get home all right from the pier? Uff?
MISS TESMAN. Well, that big fellowship, you know—it took us a good part of the way.

TESMAN. No, that’s not so easy to see—uh?

MISS TESMAN. And especially traveling with a lady. For I hear tell that’s much more expensive.

TESMAN. Yes, of course—it’s a bit more expensive. But Hedda just had to have that trip. She had to. There was nothing else to be done.

MISS TESMAN. No, no, I guess not. A honeymoon abroad seems to be the thing nowadays. But tell me—have you had a good look around your house?

TESMAN. You can bet I have! I’ve been up since daybreak.

MISS TESMAN. And how does it strike you; all in all?

TESMAN. First-rate! Absolutely first-rate! Only I don’t know what we’ll do with the two empty rooms between the back parlor and Hedda’s bedroom.

MISS TESMAN (laughing again). Oh, my dear George, I think you can use them—as time goes on.

TESMAN. Yes, you’re quite right about that, Aunt Julie! In time, as I build up my library—uh?

MISS TESMAN. Of course, my dear boy. It was your library I meant.

TESMAN. I’m happiest now for Hedda’s sake. Before we were engaged, she used to say so many times there was no place she’d rather live than here, in Secretary Falk’s town house.

MISS TESMAN. Yes, and then to have it come on the market just after you’d sailed.

TESMAN. We really have had luck, haven’t we?

MISS TESMAN. But expensive, George dear! You’ll find it expensive, all this here.

TESMAN (looks at her, somewhat crestfallen). Yes, I suppose I will.

MISS TESMAN. Oh, Lord, yes!

TESMAN. How much do you think? Approximately?

Hm?
TESMAN. What's that? Eilert Lovborg? Just recently, uh?

MISS TESMAN. So they say. But considering everything, it can hardly amount to much. Ah, but when your new book comes out—it'll be a different story, George! What will it be about?

TESMAN. It's going to treat the domestic handicrafts of Brabant in the Middle Ages.

MISS TESMAN. Just imagine—that you can write about things like that!

TESMAN. Actually, the book may take quite a while yet. I have this tremendous collection of material to put in order, you know.

MISS TESMAN. Yes, collecting and ordering—you do that so well. You're not my brother's son for nothing.

TESMAN. I look forward so much to getting started. Especially now, with a comfortable home of my own to work in.

MISS TESMAN. And most of all, dear, now that you've won her, the wife of your heart.

TESMAN (embracing her). Yes, yes, Aunt Julie! Hedda—that's the most beautiful part of it all! (Glancing toward the doorway.) But I think she's coming—uh?

(HEDDA enters from the left through the inner room. She is a woman of twenty-nine. Her face and figure show breeding and distinction; her complexion is pallid and opaque. Her steel gray eyes express a cool, unruffled calm. Her hair is an attractive medium brown, but not particularly abundant. She wears a tasteful, rather loose-fitting gown.)

MISS TESMAN (going to meet HEDDA). Good morning, Hedda dear—how good to see you!

HEDDA (holding out her hand). Good morning, my dear Miss Tesman! Calling so early? This is kind of you.

MISS TESMAN (slightly embarrassed). Well—did the bride sleep well in her new home?

HEDDA. Oh yes, thanks. Quite adequately.

TESMAN. Adequately! Oh, I like that, Hedda! You were sleeping like a stone when I got up.

HEDDA. Fortunately. But of course one has to grow ac-

customed to anything new, Miss Tesman—little by little. (Looking toward the left.) Oh! That maid has left the door open—and the sunlight's just flooding in.

MISS TESMAN (going toward the door). Well, we can close it.

HEDDA. No, no—don't! (To TESMAN.) There, dear, draw the curtains. It gives a softer light.

TESMAN (by the glass door). All right—all right. Look, Hedda—now you have shade and fresh air both.

HEDDA. Yes, we really need some fresh air here, with all these piles of flowers—But—won't you sit down, Miss Tesman?

MISS TESMAN. Oh no, thank you. Now that I know that everything's fine—thank goodness—I will have to run along home. My sister's lying there waiting, poor thing.

TESMAN. Give her my very, very best, won't you? And say I'll be looking in on her later today.

MISS TESMAN. Oh, you can be sure I will. But what do you know, George—(Searching in her bag.)—I nearly forgot. I have something here for you.

TESMAN. What's that, Aunt Julie? Hm?

MISS TESMAN (brings out a flat package wrapped in newspaper and hands it to him). There, dear. Look.

TESMAN (opening it). Oh, my—you kept them for me, Aunt Julie! Hedda! That's really touching! Uh!

HEDDA (by the étage ré on the right). Yes, dear, what is it?

TESMAN. My old bedroom slippers! My slippers!

HEDDA. Oh yes. I remember how often you spoke of them during the trip.

TESMAN. Yes, I missed them terribly. (Going over to her.) Now you can see them, Hedda!

HEDDA (moves toward the stove). Thanks, but I really don't care to.

TESMAN (following her). Imagine—Auntie Rina lay and embroidered them, sick as she was. Oh, you couldn't believe how many memories are bound up in them.

HEDDA (at the table). But not for me.

MISS TESMAN. I think Hedda is right, George.

TESMAN. Yes, but I only thought, now that she's part of the family—
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HEDDA (interrupting). We're never going to manage with this maid, Tesman.

MISS TESMAN. Not manage with Berta?

TESMAN. But dear—why do you say that? Uh?

HEDDA (pointing). See there! She's left her old hat lying out on a chair.

TESMAN (shocked; dropping the slippers). But Hedda—!

HEDDA. Suppose someone came in and saw it.

TESMAN. Hedda—that's Aunt Julie's hat!

HEDDA. Really?

MISS TESMAN (picking it up). That's right, it's mine. And what's more, it certainly is not old—Mrs. Tesman.

HEDDA. I really hadn't looked closely at it, Miss Tesman.

MISS TESMAN (putting on the hat). It's actually the first time I've had it on. The very first time.

TESMAN. And it's lovely, too. Most attractive!

MISS TESMAN. Oh, it's hardly all that, George. (Looks about.) My parasol—? Ah, here. (Takes it.) For that's mine too. (Murmurs.) Not Berta's.

TESMAN. New hat and new parasol! Just imagine, Hedda!

HEDDA. Quite charming, really.

TESMAN. Yes, aren't they, uh? But Auntie, take a good look at Hedda before you leave. See how charming she is!

MISS TESMAN. But George dear, there's nothing new in that. Hedda's been lovely all her life. (She nods and starts out, right.)

TESMAN (following her). But have you noticed how plump and buxom she's grown? How much she's filled out on the trip?

HEDDA (crossing the room). Oh, do be quiet—!

MISS TESMAN (who has stopped and turned). Filled out?

TESMAN. Of course, you can't see it so well when she has that dressing gown on. But I, who have the opportunity to—

HEDDA (by the glass door, impatiently). Oh, you have no opportunity for anything!

TESMAN. It must have been the mountain air, down in the Tyrol—

HEDDA (brusquely interrupting). I'm exactly as I was when I left.

TENMAN. Yes, that's your claim. But you certainly are not. Auntie, don't you agree?

MISS TESMAN (gazing at her with folded hands). Hedda is lovely—lovely—lovely. (Goes up to her, takes her head in both hands, bends it down and kisses her hair.) God bless and keep Hedda Tesman—for George's sake.

HEDDA (gently freeing herself). Oh—! Let me go.

MISS TESMAN (with quiet feeling). I won't let a day go by without looking in on you two.

TESMAN. Yes, please do that, Aunt Julie! Uh?

MISS TESMAN. Good-bye—good-bye!

(She goes out by the hall door. TESMAN accompanies her, leaving the door half open. He can be heard reiterating his greetings to Aunt Rina and his thanks for the slippers. At the same time, HEDDA moves about the room, raising her arms and clenching her fists as if in a frenzy. Then she flings back the curtains from the glass door and stands there, looking out. A moment later TESMAN comes back, closing the door after him.)

TESMAN (retrieving the slippers from the floor). What are you standing and looking at, Hedda?

HEDDA (again calm and controlled). I'm just looking at the leaves—they're so yellow—and so withered.

TESMAN (wraps up the slippers and puts them on the table). Yes, well, we're into September now.

HEDDA (once more restless). Yes, to think—that already we're in—in September.

TESMAN. Didn't Aunt Julie seem a bit strange? A little—almost formal? What do you suppose was bothering her? Hm?

HEDDA. I hardly know her at all. Isn't that how she usually is?

TESMAN. No, not like this, today.

HEDDA (leaving the glass door). Do you think this thing with the hat upset her?

TESMAN. Oh, not very much. A little, just at the moment, perhaps—

HEDDA. But really, what kind of manners has she—to
HEDDA. Exactly. The one with the irritating hair that she was always showing off. An old flame of yours, I've heard.

TESMAN (laughing). Oh, that wasn't for long. And it was before I knew you, Hedda. But imagine—that she's here in town.

HEDDA. It's odd that she calls on us. I've hardly seen her since we were in school.

TESMAN. Yes, I haven't seen her either—since God knows when. I wonder how she can stand living in such an out-of-the-way place. Hm?

HEDDA (thinks a moment, then bursts out). But wait—isn't it somewhere up in those parts that he—that Eilert Løvborg lives?

TESMAN. Yes, it's someplace right around there. (BERTA enters by the hall door.)

BERTA. She's back again, ma'am—that lady who stopped by and left the flowers an hour ago. (Pointing) The ones you have in your hand, ma'am.

HEDDA. Oh, is she? Good. Would you ask her to come in.

(BERTA opens the door for MRS. ELVSTED and goes out. MRS. ELVSTED is a slender woman with soft, pretty features. Her eyes are light blue, large, round, and somewhat prominent, with a startled, questioning look. Her hair is remarkably light, almost a white-gold, and unusually abundant and wavy. She is a couple of years younger than HEDDA. She wears a dark visiting dress, tasteful, but not quite in the latest fashion.)

HEDDA (going to greet her warmly). Good morning, my dear Mrs. Elvsted. How delightful to see you again! MRS. ELVSTED (nervously; struggling to control herself). Yes, it's a very long time since we last met.

TESMAN (gives her his hand). Or since we met, uh?

HEDDA. Thank you for your beautiful flowers—MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, that's nothing—I would have come straight out here yesterday afternoon, but then I heard you weren't at home—

TESMAN. Have you just now come to town? Uh?
MRS. ELVSTED. I got in yesterday toward noon. Oh, I was in desperation when I heard that you weren't at home.

HEDDA. Desperation! Why?

TESMAN. But my dear Mrs. Rysing—Mrs. Elvsted, I mean—

HEDDA. You're not in some kind of trouble?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, I am. And I don't know another living soul down here I can turn to.

HEDDA (putting the bouquet down on the table). Come, then—let's sit here on the sofa—

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, I can't sit down. I'm really too much on edge!

HEDDA. Why, of course you can. Come here.

(She draws MRS. ELVSTED down on the sofa and sits beside her.)

TESMAN. Well? What is it, Mrs. Elvsted?

HEDDA. Has anything particular happened at home?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, that's both it—and not it. Oh, I do want so much that you don't misunderstand me—

HEDDA. But then the best thing, Mrs. Elvsted, is simply to speak your mind.

TESMAN. Because I suppose that's why you've come. Hm?

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh yes, that's why. Well, then, I have to tell you—if you don't already know—that Eilert Løvborg's also in town.

HEDDA. Løvborg—!

TESMAN. What! Is Eilert Løvborg back! Just think, Hedda!

HEDDA. Good Lord, I can hear.

MRS. ELVSTED. He's been back all of a week's time now. A whole week—in this dangerous town! Alone! With all the bad company that's around.

HEDDA. But my dear Mrs. Elvsted, what does he have to do with you?

MRS. ELVSTED (glances anxiously at her and says quickly). He was the children's tutor.

HEDDA. Your children's?

MRS. ELVSTED. My husband's. I have none.

HEDDA. Your stepchildren's, then.

MRS. ELVSTED. (somewhat hesitantly). But was he—I don't know quite how to put it—was he sufficiently—responsible in his habits for such a job? Uh?

MRS. ELVSTED. In these last two years, there wasn't a word to be said against him.

TESMAN. Not a word? Just think of that, Hedda!

HEDDA. I heard it.

MRS. ELVSTED. Not even a murmur, I can assure you! Nothing. But anyway—now that I know he's here—in this big city—and with so much money in his hands—then I'm just frightened to death for him.

TESMAN. But why didn't he stay up there where he was? With you and your husband? Uh?

MRS. ELVSTED. After the book came out, he just couldn't rest content with us.

TESMAN. Yes, that's right—Aunt Julie was saying he'd published a new book.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, a great new book, on the course of civilization—in all its stages. It's been out two weeks. And now it's been bought and read so much—and it's made a tremendous stir—

TESMAN. Has it really? It must be something he's had lying around from his better days.

MRS. ELVSTED. Years back, you mean?

TESMAN. I suppose.

MRS. ELVSTED. No, he's written it all up there with us. Now—in this last year.

TESMAN. That's marvelous to hear. Hedda! Just imagine!

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, if only it can go on like this!

HEDDA. Have you seen him here in town?

MRS. ELVSTED. No, not yet. I had such trouble finding out his address. But this morning I got it at last.

HEDDA (looks searchingly at her). I must say it seems rather odd of your husband—

MRS. ELVSTED (with a nervous start). Of my husband—! What?

HEDDA. To send you to town on this sort of errand. Not to come and look after his friend himself.

MRS. ELVSTED. No, no, my husband hasn't the time for that. And then I had—some shopping to do.

HEDDA (with a slight smile). Oh, that's different.
MRS. ELVSTED (getting up quickly and uneasily). I beg you, please, Mr. Tesman—be good to Eilert Løvborg if he comes to you. And he will, I'm sure. You know—you were such good friends in the old days. And you're both doing the same kind of work. The same type of research—from what I can gather.

TESMAN. We were once, at any rate.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, and that's why I'm asking you, please—you too—to keep an eye on him. Oh, you will do that, Mr. Tesman—promise me that?

TESMAN. I'll be only too glad to, Mrs. Rysing—

HEDDA. Elsted.

TESMAN. I'll certainly do everything in my power for Eilert. You can depend on that.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, how terribly kind of you! (Pressing his hands.) Many, many thanks! (Frightened.) He means so much to my husband, you know.

HEDDA (rising). You ought to write him, dear. He might not come by on his own.

TESMAN. Yes, that probably would be the best, Hedda? Him?

HEDDA. And the sooner the better. Right now, I'd say.

MRS. ELVSTED (imploringly). Oh yes, if you could!

TESMAN. I'll write him this very moment. Have you got his address, Mrs.—Mrs. Elsted?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes. (Takes a slip of paper from her pocket and hands it to him.) Here it is.

TESMAN. Good, good. Then I'll go in— (Looking about.) But wait—my slippers? Ah! Here. (Takes the package and starts to leave.)

HEDDA. Write him a really warm, friendly letter. Nice and long, too.

TESMAN. Don't worry, I will.

MRS. ELVSTED. But please, not a word that I asked you to!

TESMAN. No, that goes without saying. Uh? (Leaves by the inner room, to the right.)

HEDDA (goes over to MRS. ELVSTED, smiles, and speaks softly). How's that! Now we've killed two birds with one stone.

MRS. ELVSTED. What do you mean?
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was tutoring the children, you know. Because, in the long
run, I couldn't do it all myself.

HEDDA. No, that's obvious. And your husband—? I
suppose he often has to be away?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, you can imagine, as sheriff, how
much traveling he does around in the district.

HEDDA (leaning against the chair arm). Thea—my
poor, sweet Thea—now you must tell me everything—just
as it is.

MRS. ELVSTED. Well, then you have to ask the questions.

HEDDA. What sort of man is your husband, Thea? I
mean—you know—to be with. Is he good to you?

MRS. ELVSTED (evasively). He believes he does every-
thing for the best.

HEDDA. I only think he must be much too old for you.
More than twenty years older, isn't he?

MRS. ELVSTED (irritated). That's true. Along with every-
thing else. I just can't stand him! We haven't a single
thought in common. Nothing at all—he and I.

HEDDA. But doesn't he care for you all the same—in
his own way?

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, I don't know what he feels. I'm no
more than useful to him. And then it doesn't cost much
to keep me. I'm inexpensive.

HEDDA. That's stupid of you.

MRS. ELVSTED (shaking her head). It can't be otherwise.
Not with him. He really doesn't care for anyone but him-
self—and maybe a little for the children.

HEDDA. And for Eilert Løvborg, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED (looking at her). Eilert Løvborg! Why do
you think so?

HEDDA. But my dear—it seems to me, when he sends
you all the way into town to look after him—(Smiles almost
imperceptibly.) Besides, it's what you told my husband.

MRS. ELVSTED (with a little nervous shudder). Really?
Yes, I suppose I did. (In a quiet outburst.) No—I might as
well tell you here and now! It's bound to come out in time.

HEDDA. But my dear Thea—?

MRS. ELVSTED. All right, then! My husband never knew
I was coming here.

HEDDA. But! Your husband never knew—

MRS. ELVSTED. Of course not. Anyway, he wasn't at

MRS. ELVSTED (pressing and patting her hands). Oh,
you're so good and kind—! It's not at all what I'm used to.

HEDDA. There, there! And I'm going to call you my
own dear Thora.

MRS. ELVSTED. My name is Thea.

HEDDA. Oh yes, of course. I meant Thea. (Looks at her
compassionately.) So you're not much used to goodness or
kindness, Thea? In your own home?

MRS. ELVSTED. If only I had a home! But I don't. I
never have.

HEDDA (glances quickly at her). I thought it had to be
something like that.

MRS. ELVSTED (gazing helplessly into space). Yes—yes—
yes.

HEDDA. I can't quite remember now—but wasn't it as a
housekeeper that you first came up to the Elvsted?

MRS. ELVSTED. Actually as a governess. But his wife—
his first wife—she was an invalid and mostly kept to her
bed. So I had to take care of the house too.

HEDDA. But finally you became mistress of the house
yourself.

MRS. ELVSTED (heavily). Yes, I did.

HEDDA. Let me see—about how long ago was that?

MRS. ELVSTED. That I was married?

HEDDA. Yes.

MRS. ELVSTED. It's five years now.

HEDDA. That's right. It must be.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, these five years—! Or the last two
or three, anyway. Oh, if you only knew, Mrs. Tesman—

HEDDA (gives her hand a little slap). Mrs. Tesman! Now,
Thea!

MRS. ELVSTED. I'm sorry; I'll try—Yes, if you could
only understand—Hedda—

HEDDA (casually). Eilert Løvborg has lived up there
about three years too, hasn't he?

MRS. ELVSTED (looks at her doubtfully). Eilert Løvborg?
Yes—he has.

HEDDA. Had you already known him here in town?

MRS. ELVSTED. Hardly at all. Well, I mean—by name,
of course..

HEDDA. But up there—I suppose he'd visit you both?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, he came to see us every day. He
home. Off traveling somewhere. Oh, I couldn’t bear it any longer, Hedda. It was impossible! I would have been so alone up there now.

HEDDA. Well? What then?

MRS. ELVSTED. So I packed a few of my things together—the barest necessities—without saying a word. And I slipped away from the house.

HEDDA. Right then and there?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, and took the train straight into town.

HEDDA. But my dearest girl—that you could dare to do such a thing!

MRS. ELVSTED (rising and walking about the room). What else could I possibly do!

HEDDA. But what do you think your husband will say when you go back home?

MRS. ELVSTED (by the table, looking at her). Back to him?

HEDDA. Yes, of course.

MRS. ELVSTED. I’ll never go back to him.

HEDDA (rising and approaching her). You mean you’ve left, in dead earnest, for good?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes. There didn’t seem anything else to do.

HEDDA. But—to go away so openly.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, you can’t keep a thing like that secret.

HEDDA. But what do you think people will say about you, Thea?

MRS. ELVSTED. God knows they’ll say what they please. (Sitting wearily and sadly on the sofa.) I only did what I had to do.

HEDDA (after a short silence). What do you plan on now? What kind of work?

MRS. ELVSTED. I don’t know yet. I only know I have to live here, where Eilert Løvborg is—if I’m going to live at all.

HEDDA (moves a chair over from the table, sits beside her, and strokes her hands). Thea dear—how did this—this friendship—between you and Eilert Løvborg come about?

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, it happened little by little. I got some kind of power, almost, over him.

HEDDA. Really?

MRS. ELVSTED. He gave up his old habits. Not because I’d asked him to. I never dared do that. But he could tell they upset me, and so he dropped them.

HEDDA (hiding an involuntary, scornful smile). My dear little Thea—just as they say—you rehabilitated him.

MRS. ELVSTED. Well, he says so, at any rate. And he—on his part—he’s made a real human being out of me. Taught me to think—and understand so many things.

HEDDA. You mean, he tutored you also?

MRS. ELVSTED. No, not exactly. But he’d talk to me—talk endlessly on about one thing after another. And then came the wonderful, happy time when I could share in his work! When I could help him!

HEDDA. Could you really?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes! Whenever he wrote anything, we’d always work on it together.

HEDDA. Like two true companions.

MRS. ELVSTED (eagerly). Companions! You know, Hedda—that’s what he said too! Oh, I ought to feel so happy—but I can’t. I just don’t know if it’s going to last.

HEDDA. You’re no more sure of him than that?

MRS. ELVSTED (despondently). There’s a woman’s shadow between Eilert Løvborg and me.

HEDDA (looks at her intently). Who could that be?

MRS. ELVSTED. I don’t know. Someone out of his—his past. Someone he’s really never forgotten.

HEDDA. What has he said—about this?

MRS. ELVSTED. It’s only once—and just vaguely—that he touched on it.

HEDDA. Well! And what did he say?

MRS. ELVSTED. He said that when they broke off she was going to shoot him with a pistol.

HEDDA (with cold constraint). That’s nonsense! Nobody behaves that way around here.

MRS. ELVSTED. No. And that’s why I think it must have been that redhead singer that at one time he—

HEDDA. Yes, quite likely.

MRS. ELVSTED. I remember they used to say about her that she carried loaded weapons.

HEDDA. Ah—then of course it must have been her.

MRS. ELVSTED (wringing her hands). But you know
what, Hedda—I've heard that this singer—that she's in town again! Oh, it has me out of my mind—

HEDDA (glancing toward the inner room). Shh! Tesman's coming. (Gets up and whispers.) Thea—keep all this just between us.

MRS. ELVSTED (jumping up). Oh yes! In heaven's name—!

(GEORGE TESMAN, with a letter in his hand, enters from the right through the inner room.)

TESMAN. There, now—the letter's signed and sealed.

HEDDA. That's fine. I think Mrs. Elvsted was just leaving. Wait a minute. I'll go with you to the garden gate.

TESMAN. Hedda, dear—could Berta maybe look after this?

HEDDA (taking the letter). I'll tell her to.

(BERTA enters from the hall.)

BERTA. Judge Brack is here and says he'd like to greet you and the Doctor, ma'am.

HEDDA. Yes, ask Judge Brack to come in. And, here—put this letter in the mail.

BERTA (takes the letter). Yes, ma'am.

(She opens the door for JUDGE BRACK and goes out. BRACK is a man of forty-five, thickset, yet well-built, with supple movements. His face is roundish, with a distinguished profile. His hair is short, still mostly black, and carefully groomed. His eyes are bright and lively. Thick eyebrows; a mustache to match, with neatly clipped ends. He wears a trimly tailored walking suit, a bit too youthful for his age. Uses a monocle, which he now and then lets fall.)

JUDGE BRACK (hat in hand, bowing). May one dare to call so early?

HEDDA. Of course one may.

TESMAN (shakes his hand). You're always welcome here. (Introducing him.) Judge Brack—Miss Rysing—

HEDDA. Ah—!

BRACK (bowing). I'm delighted.

Act 1. HEDDA (looks at him and laughs). It's really a treat to see you by daylight, Judge!

BRACK. You find me—changed?

HEDDA. Yes. A bit younger, I think.

BRACK. Thank you, most kindly.

TESMAN. But what do you say for Hedda, uh? Doesn't she look flourishing? She's actually—

HEDDA. Oh, leave me out of it! You might thank Judge Brack for all the trouble he's gone to—

BRACK. Nonsense—it was a pleasure—

HEDDA. Yes, you're a true friend. But here's Thea, standing here, aching to get away. Excuse me, Judge; I'll be right back.

(Mutual good-byes. MRS. ELVSTED and HEDDA go out by the hall door.)

BRACK. So—is your wife fairly well satisfied, then—?

TESMAN. Yes, we can't thank you enough. Of course—I gather there's some rearrangement called for here and there. And one or two things are lacking. We still have to buy a few minor items.

BRACK. Really?

TESMAN. But that's nothing for you to worry about. Hedda said she'd pick up those things herself. Why don't we sit down, hm?

BRACK. Thanks. Just for a moment. (Sits by the table.) There's something I'd like to discuss with you, Tesman.

TESMAN. What? Oh, I understand! (Sitting.) It's the serious part of the banquet we're coming to, uh?

BRACK. Oh, as far as money matters go, there's no great rush—though I must say I wish we'd managed things a bit more economically.

TESMAN. But that was completely impossible! Think about Hedda, Judge! You, who know her so well—I simply couldn't have her live like a grocer's wife.

BRACK. No, no—that's the trouble, exactly.

TESMAN. And then—fortunately—it can't be long before I get my appointment.

BRACK. Well, you know—these things can often hang fire.

TESMAN. Have you heard something further? Hm?
BRACK. Nothing really definite—(Changing the subject.) But incidentally—I do have one piece of news for you.

TESMAN. Well?

BRACK. Your old friend Eilert Lövborg is back in town.

TESMAN. I already know.

BRACK. Oh? How did you hear?

TESMAN. She told me. The lady that left with Hedda.

BRACK. I see. What was her name again? I didn’t quite catch it—

TESMAN. Mrs. Elvsted.

BRACK. Aha—Sheriff Elvsted’s wife. Yes—it’s up near them he’s been staying.

TESMAN. And, just think—what a pleasure to hear that he’s completely stable again!

BRACK. Yes, that’s what they claim.

TESMAN. And that he’s published a new book, uh?

BRACK. Oh yes!

TESMAN. And it’s created quite a sensation.

BRACK. An extraordinary sensation.

TESMAN. Just imagine—isn’t that marvelous? He, with his remarkable talents—I was so very afraid that he’d really gone down for good.

BRACK. That’s what everyone thought.

TESMAN. But I’ve no idea what he’ll find to do now. How on earth can he ever make a living? Him?

(During the last words, HEDDA comes in by the hall door.)

HEDDA (to BRACK, laughing, with a touch of scorn). Tesman always goes around worrying about how people are going to make a living.

TESMAN. My Lord—it’s poor Eilert Lövborg we’re talking of, dear.

HEDDA (glancing quickly at him). Oh, really? (Sits in the armchair by the stove and asks casually.) What’s the matter with him?

TESMAN. Well—he must have run through his inheritance long ago. And he can’t write a new book every year. Uh? So I was asking, really, what’s going to become of him.

BRACK. Perhaps I can shed some light on that.

TESMAN. Oh?

BRACK. You must remember that he does have relatives with a great deal of influence.

TESMAN. Yes, but they’ve washed their hands of him altogether.

BRACK. They used to call him the family’s white hope.

TESMAN. They used to, yes! But he spoiled all that himself.

HEDDA. Who knows? (With a slight smile.) He’s been rehabilitated up at the Elvsteds—

BRACK. And then this book that he’s published—

TESMAN. Oh, well, let’s hope they really help him some way or other. I just now wrote to him. Hedda dear, I asked him out here this evening.

BRACK. But my dear fellow, you’re coming to my stag party this evening. You promised down on the pier last night.

HEDDA. Had you forgotten, Tesman?

TESMAN. Yes, I absolutely had.

BRACK. For that matter, you can rest assured that he’d never come.

TESMAN. What makes you say that, hm?

BRACK (hesitating, rising and leaning on the back of the chair). My dear Tesman—and you too, Mrs. Tesman—I can’t, in all conscience, let you go on without knowing something that—that—

TESMAN. Something involving Eilert—?

BRACK. Both you and him.

TESMAN. But my dear Judge, then tell us!

BRACK. You must be prepared that your appointment may not come through as quickly as you’ve wished or expected.

TESMAN (jumping up nervously). Has something gone wrong? Uh?

BRACK. It may turn out that there’ll have to be a competition for the post—

TESMAN. A competition! Imagine, Hedda!

HEDDA (leaning further back in the chair). Ah, there—you see!

TESMAN. But with whom! You can’t mean—?

BRACK. Yes, exactly. With Eilert Lövborg.

TESMAN (striking his hands together). No, no—that’s completely unthinkable! It’s impossible! Uh?
Act 1.  

HEDDA GABLER  

BRACK. Hm—but it may come about, all the same.

TESMAN. No, but, Judge Brack—that would just be in-
credibly inconsiderate toward me! (Waving his arms.) Yes,
because—you know—I’m a married man! We married on
my prospects, Hedda and I. We went into debt. And even
borrowed money from Aunt Julie. Because that job—my
Lord, it was as good as promised to me, uh?

BRACK. Easy now—I’m sure you’ll get the appointment.
But you will have to compete for it.

HEDDA (motionless in the armchair). Just think, Tes-
man—it will be like a kind of championship match.

TESMAN. But Hedda dearest, how can you take it so
calmly?

HEDDA (as before). I’m not the least bit calm. I can’t
wait to see how it turns out.

BRACK. In any case, Mrs. Tesman, it’s well that you
know now how things stand. I mean—with respect to those
little purchases I hear you’ve been threatening to make.

HEDDA. This business can’t change anything.

BRACK. I see! Well, that’s another matter. Good-bye.
(To TESMAN.) When I take my afternoon walk, I’ll stop by
and fetch you.

TESMAN. Oh yes, please do—I don’t know where I’m
at.

HEDDA (leaning back and reaching out her hand). Good-
bye, Judge. And come again soon.

BRACK. Many thanks. Good-bye now.

TESMAN (accompanying him to the door). Good-bye,
Judge! You really must excuse me—

(BRACK goes out by the hall door.)

TESMAN (pacing about the room). Oh, Hedda—one
should never go off and lose oneself in dreams, nh?

HEDDA (looks at him and smiles). Do you do that?

TESMAN. No use denying it. It was living in dreams to
go and get married and set up house on nothing but
expectations.

HEDDA. Perhaps you’re right about that.

TESMAN. Well, at least we have our comfortable home.
Hedda! The home that we always wanted. That we both fell
in love with, I could almost say. Hm?

HEDDA (rising slowly and wearily). It was part of our
bargain that we’d live in society—that we’d keep a great
house—

TESMAN. Yes of course—how I’d looked forward to
that! Imagine—seeing you as a hostess—in our own select
circle of friends! Yes, yes—well, for a while, we two will
just have to get on by ourselves, Hedda. Perhaps have Aunt
Julie here now and then. Oh, you—for you I wanted to
have things so—so utterly different—!

HEDDA. Naturally this means I can’t have a butler now.

TESMAN. Oh no—I’m sorry, a butler—we can’t even
talk about that, you know.

HEDDA. And the riding horse I was going to have—

TESMAN (appalled). Riding horse!

HEDDA. I suppose I can’t think of that anymore.

TESMAN. Good Lord, no—that’s obvious!

HEDDA (crossing the room). Well, at least I have one
thing left to amuse myself with.

TESMAN (beaming). Ah, thank heaven for that! What is
it, Hedda? Uh?

HEDDA (in the center doorway, looking at him with veiled
scorn). My pistols, George.

TESMAN (in fright). Your pistols!

HEDDA (her eyes cold). General Gabler’s pistols. (She
goes through the inner room and out to the left.)

TESMAN (runs to the center doorway and calls after
her). No, for heaven’s sake, Hedda darling—don’t touch
those dangerous things! For my sake, Hedda! Uh?
ACT TWO

The rooms at the TESMANS', same as in the first act, except that the piano has been moved out, and an elegant little writing table with a bookcase put in its place. A smaller table stands by the sofa to the left. Most of the flowers have been removed. MRS. ELVSTED's bouquet stands on the large table in the foreground. It is afternoon.

HEDDA, dressed to receive callers, is alone in the room. She stands by the open glass door, loading a revolver. The match to it lies in an open pistol case on the writing table.

HEDDA (looking down into the garden and calling). Good to see you again, Judge!
BRACK (heard from below, at a distance). Likewise, Mrs. Tesman!
HEDDA (raises the pistol and aims). And now, Judge, I'm going to shoot you!
BRACK (shouting from below). No-no-no! Don't point that thing at me!
HEDDA. That's what comes of sneaking in the back way.
(She fires.)
BRACK (nearer). Are you out of your mind—!
HEDDA. Oh, dear—I didn't hit you, did I?
BRACK (still outside). Just stop this nonsense!
HEDDA. All right, you can come in, Judge.

(JUDGE BRACK, dressed for a stag party, enters through the glass door. He carries a light overcoat on his arm.)

BRACK. Good God! Are you still playing such games? Who are you shooting at?
HEDDA. Oh, I was just shooting into the sky.
BRACK (gently taking the pistol out of her hand). Permit me. (Looks at it.) Ah, this one—I know it well. (Glancing around.) Where's the case? Ah, here. (Puts the pistol away.

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and shuts the case.) We'll have no more of that kind of fun today.
HEDDA. Well, what in heaven's name do you want me to do with myself?
BRACK. You haven't had any visitors?
HEDDA (closing the glass door). Not a single one. All of our set are still in the country, I guess.
BRACK. And Tesman isn't home either?
HEDDA (at the writing table, putting the pistol case away in a drawer). No. Right after lunch he ran over to his aunts. He didn't expect you so soon.
BRACK. Hmm—I should have realized. That was stupid of me.
HEDDA (turning her head and looking at him). Why stupid?
BRACK. Because in that case I would have stopped by a little bit—earlier.
HEDDA (crossing the room). Well, you'd have found no one here then at all. I've been up in my room dressing since lunch.
BRACK. And there's not the least little crack in the door we could have conferred through.
HEDDA. You forgot to arrange it.
BRACK. Also stupid of me.
HEDDA. Well, we'll just have to settle down here—and wait. Tesman won't be back for a while.
BRACK. Don't worry, I can be patient.

(HEDDA sits in the corner of the sofa. BRACK lays his coat over the back of the nearest chair and sits down, keeping his hat in his hand. A short pause. They look at each other.)

HEDDA. Well?
BRACK (in the same tone). Well?
HEDDA. I spoke first.
BRACK (leaning slightly forward). Then let's have a nice little cozy chat, Mrs. Hedda.
HEDDA (leaning further back on the sofa). Doesn't it seem like a whole eternity since the last time we talked together? Oh, a few words last night and this morning—but they don't count.
BRACK. You mean, like this—between ourselves? Just the two of us?

HEDDA. Well, more or less.

BRACK. There wasn't a day that I didn't wish you were home again.

HEDDA. And I was wishing exactly the same.

BRACK. You? Really, Mrs. Hedda? And I thought you were having such a marvelous time on this trip.

HEDDA. Oh, you can imagine!

BRACK. But that's what Tesman always wrote.

HEDDA. Oh, him! There's nothing he likes better than grubbing around in libraries and copying out old parchments, or whatever you call them.

BRACK (with a touch of malice). But after all, it's his calling in life. In good part, anyway.

HEDDA. Yes, that's true. So there's nothing wrong with it—But what about me! Oh, Judge, you don't know—I've been so dreadfully bored.

BRACK (sympathetically). You really mean that? In all seriousness?

HEDDA. Well, you can understand—I To go for a whole six months without meeting a soul who knew the least bit about our circle. No one that one could talk to about our kind of things.

BRACK. Ah, yes—I think that would bother me too.

HEDDA. But then the most unbearable thing of all—

BRACK. What?

HEDDA. To be everlastingly together with—with one and the same person—

BRACK (nodding in agreement). Morning, noon, and night—yes. At every conceivable hour.

HEDDA. I said "everlasting." /

BRACK. All right. But with our good friend Tesman, I really should have thought—

HEDDA. My dear Judge, Tesman is—a specialist.

BRACK. Undeniably.

HEDDA. And specialists aren't at all amusing to travel with. Not in the long run, anyway.

BRACK. Not even—the specialist that one loves.

HEDDA. Ugh—don't use that syrupy word!

BRACK (startled). What's that, Mrs. Hedda?

HEDDA (half laughing, half annoyed). Well, just try it yourself! Try listening to the history of civilization morning, noon, and—

BRACK. Everlastingly.

HEDDA. Yes! Yes! And then all this business about domestic crafts in the Middle Ages—! That really is just too revolting!

BRACK (looks searchingly at her). But tell me—I can't see how it ever came about that—? Hm—

HEDDA. That George Tesman and I could make a match?

BRACK. All right, let's put it that way.

HEDDA. Good Lord, does it seem so remarkable?

BRACK. Well, yes—and no, Mrs. Hedda.

HEDDA. I really had danced myself out, Judge. My time was up. (With a slight shudder.) Ugh! No, I don't want to say that. Or think it, either.

BRACK. You certainly have no reason to.

HEDDA. Oh—reasons— (Watching him carefully.) And George Tesman—he is, after all, a thoroughly acceptable choice.

BRACK. Acceptable and dependable, beyond a doubt.

HEDDA. And I don't find anything especially ridiculous about him. Do you?

BRACK. Ridiculous? No-o-o, I wouldn't say that.

HEDDA. Hm. Anyway, he works incredibly hard on his research! There's every chance that, in time, he could still make a name for himself.

BRACK (looking at her with some uncertainty). I thought you believed, like everyone else, that he was going to be quite famous some day.

HEDDA (wearily). Yes, so I did. And then when he kept pressing and pleading to be allowed to take care of me—I didn't see why I ought to resist.

BRACK. No. From that point of view, of course not—

HEDDA. It was certainly more than my other admirers were willing to do for me, Judge.

BRACK (laughing). Well, I can't exactly answer for all the others. But as far as I'm concerned, you know that I've always cherished a—a certain respect for the marriage bond. Generally speaking, that is.

HEDDA (bantering). Oh, I never really held out any hopes for you.
BRACK. All I want is to have a warm circle of intimate friends, where I can be of use one way or another, with the freedom to come and go as—as a trusted friend—

HEDDA. Of the man of the house, you mean?

BRACK (with a bow). Frankly—I prefer the lady. But the man, too, of course, in his place. That kind of—let's say, triangular arrangement—you can’t imagine how satisfying it can be all around.

HEDDA. Yes, I must say I longed for some third person so many times on that trip. Oh—those endless tête-à-têtes in railway compartments!

BRACK. Fortunately the wedding trip’s over now.

HEDDA (shaking her head). The trip will go on—and on. I’ve only come to one stop on the line.

BRACK. Well, then what you do is jump out—and stretch yourself a little, Mrs. Hedda.

HEDDA. I’ll never jump out.

BRACK. Never?

HEDDA. No. Because there’s always someone on the platform who—

BRACK (with a laugh): Who looks at your legs, is that it?

HEDDA. Precisely.

BRACK. Yes, but after all—

HEDDA (with a disdainful gesture). I’m not interested. I’d rather keep my seat—right here, where I am. Tête-à-tête.

BRACK. Well, but suppose a third person came on board and joined the couple.

HEDDA. Ah! That’s entirely different.

BRACK. A trusted friend, who understands—

HEDDA. And can talk about all kinds of lively things—

BRACK. Who’s not in the least a specialist.

HEDDA (with an audible sigh). Yes, that would be a relief.

BRACK (hearing the front door open and glancing toward it). The triangle is complete.

HEDDA (lowering her voice). And the train goes on.

(George Tesman, in a gray walking suit and a soft felt hat, enters from the hall. He has a good number of unbound books under his arm and in his pockets.)

TESMAN (going up to the table by the corner settee). Phew! Let me tell you, that’s hot work—carrying all these. Setting the books down.) I’m actually sweating, Hedda. And what’s this—you’re already here, Judge? Hm? Herta didn’t tell me.

BRACK (rising). I came in through the garden.

HEDDA. What are all these books you’ve gotten?

TESMAN (stands leafing through them). They’re new publications in my special field. I absolutely need them.

HEDDA. Your special field?

BRACK. Of course. Books in his special field, Mrs. Tesman.

(They exchange a knowing smile.)

HEDDA. You need still more books in your special field?

TESMAN. Hedda, my dear, it’s impossible ever to have too many. You have to keep up with what’s written and published.

HEDDA. Oh, I suppose so.

TESMAN (searching among the books). And look—I picked up Eilert Lövborg’s new book too. (Offering it to her.) Maybe you’d like to have a look at it? Uh?

HEDDA. No, thank you. Or—well, perhaps later.

TESMAN. I skimmed through some of it on the way home.

BRACK. Well, what do you think of it—as a specialist?

TESMAN. I think it’s amazing how well it holds up. He’s never written like this before. (Gathers up the books.) But I’ll take these into the study now. I can’t wait to cut the pages! And then I better dress up a bit. (To Brack.) We don’t have to rush right off, do we? Hm?

BRACK. No, not at all. There’s ample time.

TESMAN. Ah, then I’ll be at my leisure. (Starts out with the books, but pauses and turns in the doorway.) Oh, incidentally, Hedda—Aunt Julie won’t be by to see you this evening.

HEDDA. She won’t? I suppose it’s that business with the hat?

TESMAN. Not at all. How can you think that of Aunt Julie? Imagine! No, it’s Auntie Rina—she’s very ill.

HEDDA. She always is.
TESMAN. Yes, but today she really took a turn for the worse.

HEDDA. Well, then it's only sensible for her sister to stay with her. I'll have to bear with it.

TESMAN. But you can't imagine how delighted Aunt Julie was all the same—because you'd filled out so nicely on the trip!

HEDDA (under her breath; rising). Oh, these eternal aunts!

TESMAN. What?

HEDDA (going over to the glass door). Nothing.

TESMAN. All right, then. (He goes through the inner room and out, right.)

BRACK. What were you saying about a hat?

HEDDA. Oh, it's something that happened with Miss Tesman this morning. She'd put her hat down over there on the chair. (Looks at him and smiles.) And I pretended I thought it was the maid's.

BRACK (shaking his head). But my dear Mrs. Hedda, how could you do that! Hurt that nice old lady!

HEDDA (nervously, pacing the room). Well, it's—these things come over me, just like that, suddenly. And I can't hold back. (Throws herself down in the armchair by the stove.) Oh, I don't know myself how to explain it.

BRACK (behind the armchair). You're not really happy—that's the heart of it.

HEDDA (gazing straight ahead). And I don't know why I ought to be—happy. Or maybe you can tell me why?

BRACK. Yes—among other things, because you've gotten just the home you've always wanted.

HEDDA (looks up at him and laughs). You believe that story too?

BRACK. You mean there's nothing to it?

HEDDA. Oh yes—there's something to it.

BRACK. Well?

HEDDA. There's this much to it, that I used Tesman as my escort home from parties last summer—

BRACK. Unfortunately—I was headed quite a different way.

HEDDA. How true. Yes, you went several different ways last summer.
HEDDA. God only knows what that could be. I often wonder if— (Breaks off.) But that’s impossible too.

BRACK. Who knows? Tell me.

HEDDA. I was thinking—if I could get Tesman to go into politics.

BRACK (laughing). Tesman! No, I can promise you—politics is absolutely out of his line.

HEDDA. No, I can believe you. But even so, I wonder if I could get him into it?

BRACK. Well, what satisfaction would you have in that? If he can’t succeed? Why push him in that direction?

HEDDA. Because, I’ve told you, I’m bored! (After a pause.) Then you think it’s really out of the question that he could ever be a cabinet minister?

BRACK. Hm—you see, Mrs. Hedd——to be anything like that, he’d have to be fairly wealthy to start with.

HEDDA (rising impatiently). Yes, there it is! It’s this tight little world I’ve stumbled into— (CROSSING THE ROOM.) That’s what makes life so miserable! So utterly ludicrous! Because that’s what it is.

BRACK. I’d say the fault lies elsewhere.

HEDDA. Where?

BRACK. You’ve never experienced anything that’s really stirred you.

HEDDA. Anything serious, you mean.

BRACK. Well, you can call it that, if you like. But now perhaps it’s on the way.

HEDDA (tossing her head). Oh, you mean all the fuss over that wretched professorship? But that’s Tesman’s problem. I’m not going to give it a single thought.

BRACK. No, that isn’t—ah, never mind. But suppose you were to be confronted now by what—in rather elegant language—is called your most solemn responsibility. (Smiling.) A new responsibility, Mrs. Hedda.

HEDDA (angrily). Be quiet! You’ll never see me like that!

BRACK (delicately). We’ll discuss it again in a year or time—at the latest.

HEDDA (curtly). I have no talent for such things, Judge. I won’t have responsibilities!

BRACK. Don’t you think you’ve a talent for what almost every woman finds the most meaningful—

HEDDA (over the glass door). Oh, I told you, be quiet! I often think I have talent for only one thing in life.

BRACK (moving closer). And what, may I ask, is that?

HEDDA (stands looking out). Boring myself to death. And that’s the truth. (Turns, looks toward the inner room, and laughs.) See what I mean! Here comes the professor.

BRACK (in a low tone of warning). Ah-ah-ah, Mrs. Hedda!

(George Tesman, dressed for the party, with hat and gloves in hand, enters from the right through the inner room.)

TESMAN. Hedda—there’s been no word from Eilert Løvborg, has there? Him?

HEDDA. No.

TESMAN. Well, he’s bound to be here soon then. You’ll see.

BRACK. You really believe he’ll come?

TESMAN. Yes, I’m almost positive of it. Because I’m sure they’re nothing but rumors, what you told us this morning.

BRACK. Oh?

TESMAN. Yes. At least Aunt Julie said she couldn’t for the world believe that he’d stand in my way again. Can you imagine that!

BRACK. So, then everything’s well and good.

TESMAN (putting his hat with the gloves inside on a chair to the right). Yes, but I really would like to wait for him as long as possible.

BRACK. We have plenty of time for that. There’s no one due at my place till seven or half past.

TESMAN. Why, then we can keep Hedda company for a while. And see what turns up. Uh?

HEDDA (taking BRACK’s hat and coat over to the settee). And if worst comes to worst, Mr. Løvborg can sit and talk with me.

BRACK (trying to take his things himself). Ah, please, Mrs. Tesman—! What do you mean by “worst,” in this case?

HEDDA. If he won’t go with you and Tesman.

TESMAN (looks doubtfully at her). But Hedda dear—is
it quite right that he stays with you here? Uh? Remember that Aunt Julie isn’t coming.

HEDDA. No, but Mrs. Elvsted is. The three of us can have tea together.

TESMAN. Oh, well, that’s all right.

BRACK (smiling). And that might be the soundest plan for him too.

HEDDA. Why?

BRACK. Well, really, Mrs. Tesman, you’ve made enough pointed remarks about my little bachelor parties. You’ve always said they’re only fit for men of the strictest principles.

HEDDA. But Mr. Løvborg is surely a man of principle now. After all, a reformed sinner—

(BERTA appears at the hall door.)

BERTA. Ma’am, there’s a gentleman here who’d like to see you—

HEDDA. Yes, show him in.

TESMAN (softly). I’m sure it’s him! Just think!

(EILERT LØVBORG enters from the hall. He is lean and gaunt, the same age as TESMAN, but looks older and somewhat run-down. His hair and beard are dark brown, his face long and pale, but with reddish patches over the cheekbones. He is dressed in a trim black suit, quite new, and holds dark gloves and a top hat in his hand. He hesitates by the door and bows abruptly. He seems somewhat embarrassed.)

TESMAN (crosses over and shakes his hand). Ah, my dear Eilert—so at last we meet again!

EILERT LØVBORG (speaking in a hushed voice). Thanks for your letter, George! (Approaching HEDDA.) May I shake hands with you too, Mrs. Tesman?

HEDDA (taking his hand). So glad to see you, Mr. Løvborg. (Gesturing with her hand.) I don’t know if you two gentlemen—

LØVBORG (bowing slightly). Judge Brack, I believe.

BRACK (reciprocating). Of course. It’s been some years—

TESMAN (to LØVBORG, with his hands on his shoul-
script.) It's divided into two sections. The first is about the forces shaping the civilization of the future. And the second part, here—(Paging further on.) suggests what lines of development it's likely to take.

TESMAN. How extraordinary! It never would have occurred to me to write about anything like that.

HEDDA (at the glass door, drumming on the pane). Hm—no, of course not.

LÖVBORG (puts the manuscript back in its wrapping and lays it on the table). I brought it along because I thought I might read you a bit of it this evening.

TESMAN. Ah, that's very good of you, Eilert; but this evening—(Glancing at BRACK.) I'm really not sure that it's possible—

LÖVBORG. Well, some other time, then. There's no hurry.

BRACK. I should explain, Mr. Lövborg—there's a little party at my place tonight. Mostly for Tesman, you understand.

LÖVBORG (looking at his hat). Ah—then I won't stay—

BRACK. No, listen—won't you give me the pleasure of having you join us?

LÖVBORG (sharply and decisively). No, I can't. Thanks very much.

BRACK. Oh, nonsense! Do that. We'll be a small, select group. And you can bet we'll have it "lively," as Mrs. Hed—Mrs. Tesman says.

LÖVBORG. I don't doubt it. But nevertheless—

BRACK. You could bring your manuscript with you and read it to Tesman there, at my place. I have plenty of rooms.

TESMAN. Why, of course, Eilert—you could do that, couldn't you? Uh?

HEDDA (intervening). But dear, if Mr. Lövborg simply doesn't want to! I'm sure Mr. Lövborg would much prefer to settle down here and have supper with me.

LÖVBORG (looking at her). With you, Mrs. Tesman!

HEDDA. And with Mrs. Elvsted.

LÖVBORG. Ah. (Casually.) I saw her a moment this afternoon.

HEDDA. Oh, did you? Well, she'll be here soon. So it's almost essential for you to stay, Mr. Lövborg. Otherwise, she'll have no one to see her home.

LÖVBORG. That's true. Yes, thank you, Mrs. Tesman—I'll be staying, then.

HEDDA. Then let me just tell the maid—

(She goes to the hall door and rings. BERTA enters. HEDDA talks to her quietly and points toward the inner room. BERTA nods and goes out again.)

TESMAN (at the same time, to LÖVBORG). Tell me, Eilert—is it this new material—about the future—that you're going to be lecturing on?

LÖVBORG. Yes.

TESMAN. Because I heard at the bookstore that you'll be giving a lecture series here this autumn.

LÖVBORG. I intend to. I hope you won't be offended, Tesman.

TESMAN. Why, of course not! But—?

LÖVBORG. I can easily understand that it makes things rather difficult for you.

TESMAN (dispiritely). Oh, I could hardly expect that for my sake you'd—

LÖVBORG. But I'm going to wait till you have your appointment.

TESMAN. You'll wait! Yes, but—but—you're not competing for it, then? Uh?

LÖVBORG. No. I only want to win in the eyes of the world.

TESMAN. But, my Lord—then Aunt Julie was right after all! Oh yes—I knew it all along! Hedda! Can you imagine—Eilert Lövborg won't stand in our way!

HEDDA (brusquely). Our way? Leave me out of it.

(She goes up toward the inner room where BERTA is putting a tray with decanters and glasses on the table. HEDDA nods her approval and comes back again. BERTA goes out.)

TESMAN (at the same time). But you, Judge—what do you say to all this? Uh?

BRACK. Well, I'd say that victory and honor—hm—after all, they're very sweet—
TESMAN. Yes, of course. But still—

HEDDA (regarding TESMAN with a cold smile). You look as if you’d been struck by lightning.

TESMAN. Yes—something like it—I guess—

BRACK. That’s because a thunderstorm just passed over us, Mrs. Tesman.

HEDDA (pointing toward the inner room). Won’t you gentlemen please help yourselves to a glass of cold punch?

BRACK (looking at his watch). A parting cup? That’s not such a bad idea.

TESMAN. Marvelous, Hedda! Simply marvelous! This way I feel now, with this weight off my mind—

HEDDA. Please, Mr. Løvborg, you too, LØVBORG (with a gesture of refusal). No, thank you. Not for me.

BRACK. Good Lord, cold punch—it isn’t poison, you know.

LØVBORG. Perhaps not for everyone.

HEDDA. I’ll keep Mr. Løvborg company a while.

TESMAN. All right, Hedda dear, you do that.

(He and BRACK go into the inner room, sit down, drink punch, smoke cigarettes, and talk animatedly during the following. LØVBORG remains standing by the stove. HEDDA goes to the writing table.)

HEDDA (slightly raising her voice). I can show you some photographs, if you like. Tesman and I traveled through the Tyrol on our way home.

(She brings over an album and lays it on the table by the sofa, seating herself in the farthest corner. EILERT LØVBORG comes closer, stops and looks at her. Then he takes a chair and sits down on her left, his back toward the inner room.)

HEDDA (opening the album). You see this view of the mountains, Mr. Løvborg. That’s the Ortler group. Tesman labeled them underneath. Here it is: “The Ortler group near Meran.”

LØVBORG (whose eyes have never left her, speaking in a low, soft voice). Hedda—Gabler!
HEDDA (apparently immersed in the album). If you keep on saying Hedda like that to me, I won’t talk to you.

LOVBORG. Can’t I say Hedda even when we’re alone?

HEDDA. No. You can think it, but you mustn’t say it like that.

LOVBORG. Ah, I understand. It offends your—love for George Tesman.

HEDDA (glances at him and smiles). Love? You are absurd!

LOVBORG. Then you don’t love him!

HEDDA. I don’t expect to be unfaithful, either. I’m not having any of that!

LOVBORG. Hedda, just answer me one thing—

HEDDA. Shh!

(TESMAN, carrying a tray, enters from the inner room.)

TESMAN. Look out! Here come the goodies. (He sets the tray on the table.)

HEDDA. Why do you do the serving?

TESMAN (filling the glasses). Because I think it’s such fun to wait on you, Hedda.

HEDDA. But now you’ve poured out two glasses. And you know Mr. Lovborg doesn’t want—

TESMAN. Well, but Mrs. Elvsted will be along soon.

HEDDA. Yes, that’s right—Mrs. Elvsted—

TESMAN. Had you forgotten her? Uh?

HEDDA. We’ve been so caught up in these. (Showing him a picture.) Do you remember this little village?

TESMAN. Oh, that’s the one just below the Brenner Pass! It was there that we stayed overnight—

HEDDA. And met all those lively summer people.

TESMAN. Yes, that’s the place. Just think—if we could have had you with us, Eilert! My! (He goes back and sits beside Brack.)

LOVBORG. Answer me just one thing, Hedda—

HEDDA. Yes?

LOVBORG. Was there no love with respect to me, either? Not a spark—not one glimmer of love at all?

HEDDA. I wonder, really, was there? To me it was as if we were two true companions—two very close friends. (Smiling.) You, especially, were so open with me.

LOVBORG. You wanted it that way.

HEDDA. When I look back on it now, there was really something beautiful and fascinating—and daring, it seems to me, about—about our secret closeness—our companionship that no one, not a soul, suspected.

LOVBORG. Yes, Hedda, that’s true! Wasn’t there? When I’d come over to your father’s in the afternoon—and the general sat by the window reading his papers—with his back to us—

HEDDA. And we’d sit on the corner sofa—

LOVBORG. Always with the same illustrated magazine in front of us—

HEDDA. Yes, for the lack of an album.

LOVBORG. Yes, Hedda—and the confessions I used to make—telling you things about myself that no one else knew of then. About the way I’d go out, the drinking, the madness that went on day and night, for days at a time. Ah, what power was it in you, Hedda, that made me tell you such things?

HEDDA. You think it was some kind of power in me?

LOVBORG. How else can I explain it? And all those—those devious questions you asked me—

HEDDA. That you understood so remarkably well—

LOVBORG. To think you could sit there and ask such questions! So boldly.

HEDDA. Deviously, please.

LOVBORG. Yes, but boldly, all the same. Interrogating me about—all that kind of thing!

HEDDA. And to think you could answer, Mr. Lovborg.

LOVBORG. Yes, that’s exactly what I don’t understand—now, looking back. But tell me, Hedda—the root of that bond between us, wasn’t it love? Didn’t you feel, on your part, as if you wanted to cleanse and absolve me—when I brought those confessions to you? Wasn’t that it?

HEDDA. No, not quite.

LOVBORG. What made you do it, then?

HEDDA. Do you find it so very surprising that a young girl—if there’s no chance of anyone knowing—

LOVBORG. Yes?

HEDDA. That she’d like some glimpse of a world that—

LOVBORG. That—?

HEDDA. That she’s forbidden to know anything about.
LOVBORG. So that was it?
HEDDA. Partly. Partly that, I guess.
LOVBORG. Companionship in a thirst for life. But why, then, couldn't it have gone on?
HEDDA. But that was your fault.
LOVBORG. You broke it off.
HEDDA. Yes, when that closeness of ours threatened to grow more serious. Shame on you, Eilert Løvborg! How could you violate my trust when I'd been so—so bold with my friendship?
LOVBORG (clenching his fists). Oh, why didn't you do what you said! Why didn't you shoot me down?
HEDDA. I'm—much too afraid of scandal.
LOVBORG. Yes, Hedda, you're a coward at heart.
HEDDA. A terrible coward. (Changing her tone.) But that was lucky for you. And now you're so nicely consoled at the Elvsted's.
LOVBORG. I know what Thea's been telling you.
HEDDA. And perhaps you've been telling her all about us?
LOVBORG. Not a word. She's too stupid for that sort of thing.
HEDDA. Stupid?
LOVBORG. When it comes to those things, she's stupid.
HEDDA. And I'm a coward. (Leans closer, without looking him in the eyes, and speaks softly.) But there is something now that I can tell you.
LOVBORG (intently). What?
HEDDA. When I didn't dare shoot you—
LOVBORG. Yes?
HEDDA. That wasn't my worst cowardice—that night.
LOVBORG (looks at her a moment, understands, and whispers passionately). Oh, Hedda! Hedda Gabler! Now I begin to see it, the hidden reason why we've been so close! You and I—! It was the hunger for life in you—
HEDDA (quietly, with a sharp glance). Careful! That's no way to think!

(It has begun to grow dark. The hall door is opened from without by BERTA.)

HEDDA (clapping the album shut and calling out with a smile). Well, at last! Thea dear—please come in!

Act 2.

(MRS. ELVSTED enters from the hall. She is in evening dress. The door is closed behind her.)

HEDDA (on the sofa, stretching her arms out toward her). Thea, my sweet—I thought you were never coming!

(In passing, MRS. ELVSTED exchanges light greetings with the gentlemen in the inner room, then comes over to the table and extends her hand to HEDDA. LØVBORG has gotten up. He and MRS. ELVSTED greet each other with a silent nod.)

MRS. ELVSTED. Perhaps I ought to go in and talk a bit with your husband?
HEDDA. Oh, nonsense. Let them be. They're leaving soon.
MRS. ELVSTED. They're leaving?
HEDDA. Yes, for a drinking party.
MRS. ELVSTED (quickly, to LOVBORG). But you're not?
LOVBORG. No.
HEDDA. Mr. Løvborg—is staying with us.
MRS. ELVSTED (taking a chair, about to sit down beside him). Oh, it's so good to be here!
HEDDA. No, no, Thea dear! Not there! You have to come over here by me. I want to be in the middle.
MRS. ELVSTED. Any way you please.

(She goes around the table and sits on the sofa to HEDDA'S right. LØVBORG resumes his seat.)

LOVBORG (after a brief pause, to HEDDA). Isn't she lovely to look at?
HEDDA (lightly stroking her hair). Only to look at?
LOVBORG. Yes. Because we two—she and I—we really are true companions. We trust each other completely. We can talk things out together without any reservations—
HEDDA. Never anything devious, Mr. Løvborg?
LOVBORG. Well—
MRS. ELVSTED (quietly, leaning close to HEDDA). Oh, Hedda, you don't know how happy I am! Just think—he says that I've inspired him.
HEDDA (regarding her with a smile). Really, dear; did he say that?
LÖVBORG. And then the courage she has; Mrs. Tesman, when it’s put to the test.
MRS. ELVSTED. Good heavens, me! Courage!
LÖVBORG. Enormous courage—where I'm concerned.
HEDDA. Yes, courage—yes! If one only had that.
LÖVBORG. Then what?
HEDDA. Then life might still be bearable. (Suddenly changing her tone.) But now, Thea dearest—you really must have a nice glass of cold punch.
MRS. ELVSTED. No, thank you. I never drink that sort of thing.
HEDDA. Well, then you, Mr. Løvborg.
LÖVBORG. Thanks, not for me either.
MRS. ELVSTED. No, not for him either!
HEDDA (looking intently at him). But if I insist?
LÖVBORG. Makes no difference.
HEDDA (with a laugh). Poor me, then I have no power over you at all?
LÖVBORG. Not in that area.
HEDDA. But seriously, I think you ought to, all the same. For your own sake.
MRS. ELVSTED. But Hedda—I—
LÖVBORG. Why do you think so?
HEDDA. Or, to be more exact, for others’ sakes.
LÖVBORG. Oh?
HEDDA. Otherwise, people might get the idea that you're not very bold at heart. That you're not really sure of yourself at all.
MRS. ELVSTED (softly). Oh, Hedda, don’t—!
LÖVBORG. People can think whatever they like, for all I care.
MRS. ELVSTED (happily). Yes, that’s right!
HEDDA. I saw it so clearly in Judge Brack a moment ago.
LÖVBORG. What did you see?
HEDDA. The contempt in his smile when you didn’t dare join them for a drink.
LÖVBORG. Didn’t dare! Obviously I’d rather stay here and talk with you.
MRS. ELVSTED. That’s only reasonable, Hedda.
HEDDA. But how could the judge know that? And besides, I noticed him smile and glance at Tesman when you couldn’t bring yourself to go to their wretched little party.
LÖVBORG. Couldn’t! Are you saying I couldn’t?
HEDDA. I’m not. But that’s the way Judge Brack sees it.
LÖVBORG. All right, let him.
HEDDA. Then you won’t go along?
LÖVBORG. I’m staying here with you and Thea.
MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, Hedda—you can be sure he is!
HEDDA (smiles and nods approvingly at LÖVBORG). I see. Firm as a rock. True to principle, to the end of time.
LÖVBORG (surprised). Distraught?
MRS. ELVSTED (terrified). Hedda—! But Hedda—!
HEDDA. Can’t you see for yourself? There’s no need at all for your going around so deathly afraid that—(Changing her tone.) There! Now we can all enjoy ourselves!
LÖVBORG (shaken). What is all this, Mrs. Tesman?
MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, God, oh, God, Hedda! What are you saying! What are you doing!
HEDDA. Not so loud. That disgusting judge is watching you.
LÖVBORG. So deathly afraid? For my sake?
MRS. ELVSTED (in a low moan). Oh, Hedda, you’ve made me so miserable!
LÖVBORG (looks intently at her a moment, his face drawn). So that’s how completely you trusted me.
MRS. ELVSTED (imploringly). Oh, my dearest—if you’ll only listen—!
LÖVBORG (takes one of the glasses of punch, raises it, and says in a low, hoarse voice). Your health, Thea! (He empties the glass, puts it down, and takes the other.)
MRS. ELVSTED (softly). Oh, Hedda, Hedda—how could you want such a thing!
HEDDA. Want it? I? Are you crazy?
LÖVBORG. And your health too, Mrs. Tesman. Thanks for the truth. Long live truth! (Drains the glass and starts to refill it.)
HEDDA (laying her hand on his arm). All right—no more for now. Remember, you’re going to a party.
MRS. ELVSTED. No, no, no!

HEDDA. Shh! They're watching you.

LÖVBORG (putting down his glass). Now, Thea—tell me honestly—

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes!

LÖVBORG. Did your husband know that you followed me?

MRS. ELVSTED (wringing her hands). Oh, Hedda—listen to him!

LÖVBORG. Did you have it arranged, you and he, that you should come down into town and spy on me? Or maybe he got you to do it himself? Ah, yes—I'm sure he needed me back in the office! Or maybe he missed my hand at cards?

MRS. ELVSTED (softly, in anguish). Oh, Eilert, Eilert—!

LÖVBORG (seizing his glass to fill it). Skoal to the old sheriff, too!

HEDDA (stopping him). That's enough. Don't forget, you're giving a reading for Tesman.

LÖVBORG (calmly, setting down his glass). That was stupid of me, Thea. I mean, taking it like this. Don't be angry at me, dearest. You'll see—you and all the others—that if I stumbled and fell—I'm back on my feet again now! With your help, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED (radiant with joy). Oh, thank God—!

(BRACK, in the meantime, has looked at his watch. He and TESMAN stand up and enter the drawing room.)

BRACK (takes his hat and overcoat). Well, Mrs. Tesman, our time is up.

HEDDA. I suppose it is.

LÖVBORG (rising). Mine too, Judge.

MRS. ELVSTED (softly pleading). Oh, Eilert—don't!

HEDDA (pinching her arm). They can hear you!

MRS. ELVSTED (with a small cry). Ow!

LÖVBORG (to BRACK). You were kind enough to ask me along.

BRACK. Oh, then you are coming, after all?

LÖVBORG. Yes, thank you.

BRACK. I'm delighted—

LÖVBORG (putting the packet back in his pocket, to TESMAN). I'd like to show you one or two things before I turn this in.

TESMAN. Just think—how exciting! But Hedda dear, how will Mrs. Elvsted get home? Uh?

HEDDA. Oh, we'll hit on something.

LÖVBORG (glancing toward the ladies). Mrs. Elvsted? Don't worry, I'll stop back and fetch her. (Coming nearer.) Say about ten o'clock, Mrs. Tesman? Will that do?

HEDDA. Yes. That will do very nicely.

TESMAN. Well, then everything's all set. But you mustn't expect me that early, Hedda.

HEDDA. Dear, you stay as long—just as long as you like.

MRS. ELVSTED (with suppressed anxiety). Mr. Løvborg—I'll be waiting here till you come.

LÖVBORG (his hat in his hand). Yes, I understand.

BRACK. So, gentlemen—the excursion train is leaving! I hope it's going to be lively, as a certain fair lady puts it.

HEDDA. Ah, if only that fair lady could be there, invisible—

BRACK. Why invisible?

HEDDA. To hear a little of your unadulterated liveliness, Judge.

BRACK (laughs). I wouldn't advise the fair lady to try.

TESMAN (also laughing). Oh, Hedda, that's a good one! Just imagine!

BRACK. Well, good night. Good night, ladies.

LÖVBORG (bowing). About ten o'clock, then.

(BRACK, LØVBORG, and TESMAN go out the hall door. At the same time, BERTA enters from the inner room with a lighted lamp, which she sets on the drawing room table, then goes out the same way.)

MRS. ELVSTED (having risen, moving restlessy about the room). Hedda—Hedda—what's going to come of all this?

HEDDA. At ten o'clock—he'll be here. I can see him now—with vine leaves in his hair—fiery and bold—

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, how good that would be!

HEDDA. And then, you'll see—he'll be back in control of himself. He'll be a free man, then, for the rest of his days.
ACT THREE

The same rooms at the TESMANS'. The curtains are down across the doorway to the inner room, and also across the glass door. The lamp, shaded and turned down low, is burning on the table. The door to the stove stands open; the fire has nearly gone out.

MRS. ELVSTED, wrapped in a large shawl, with her feet up on a footstool, lies back in the armchair close by the stove. HEDDA, fully dressed, is asleep on the sofa, with a blanket over her. After a pause, MRS. ELVSTED suddenly sits straight up in the chair, listening tensely. Then she sinks wearily back again.

MRS. ELVSTED (in a low moan). Not yet—oh, God—oh, God—not yet!

(BERTA slips cautiously by the hall door. She holds a letter in her hand.)

MRS. ELVSTED (turns and whispers anxiously). Yes? Has anyone come?
BERTA (softly). Yes, a girl just now stopped by with this letter.
MRS. ELVSTED (quickly, reaching out her hand). A letter! Give it to me!
BERTA. No, it’s for the Doctor, ma’am.
MRS. ELVSTED. Oh.
BERTA. It was Miss Tesman’s maid that brought it. I’ll leave it here on the table.
MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, do.
BERTA (putting the letter down). I think I’d best put out the lamp. It’s smoking.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, put it out. It’ll be daylight soon.
BERTA (does so). It’s broad daylight already, ma’am.
MRS. ELVSTED. It’s daylight! And still no one’s come—!
BERTA. Oh, mercy—I knew it would go like this.
MRS. ELVSTED. You knew?
BERTA. Yes, when I saw that a certain gentleman was
back here in town—and that he went off with them. We've heard plenty about that gentleman over the years.

MRS. EULVSTED. Don't talk so loud. You'll wake Mrs. Tesman.

BERTA (looks toward the sofa and sighs). Goodness me—yes, let her sleep, poor thing. Should I put a bit more coal on the fire?

MRS. EULVSTED. Thanks, not for me.

BERTA. All right. (She goes quietly out the hall door.)

HEIDDA (wakes as the door shuts and looks up). What's that?

MRS. EULVSTED. It was just the maid—

HEIDDA (glancing about). In here—? Oh yes, I remember now. (Sits up on the sofa, stretches, and rubs her eyes.) What time is it, Thea?

MRS. EULVSTED (looking at her watch). It's after seven.

HEIDDA. When did Tesman get in?

MRS. EULVSTED. He isn't back.

HEIDDA. Not back yet?

MRS. EULVSTED (getting up). No one's come in.

HEIDDA. And we sat here and waited up for them till four o'clock—

MRS. EULVSTED (wringing her hands). And how I've waited for him!

HEIDDA (yawns, and speaks with her hand in front of her mouth). Oh, dear—we could have saved ourselves the trouble.

MRS. EULVSTED. Did you get any sleep?

HEIDDA. Oh yes. I slept quite well, I think. Didn't you?

MRS. EULVSTED. No, not at all. I couldn't, Hedda! It was just impossible.

HEIDDA (rising and going toward her). There, there! There's nothing to worry about. It's not hard to guess what happened.

MRS. EULVSTED. Oh, what? Tell me!

HEIDDA. Well, it's clear that the party must have gone on till all hours—

MRS. EULVSTED. Oh, Lord, yes—it must have. But even so—

HEIDDA. And then, of course, Tesman didn't want to come home and make a commotion in the middle of the night. (Laughs.) Probably didn't care to show himself, either—so full of his party spirits.

MRS. EULVSTED. But where else could he have gone?

HEIDDA. He must have gone up to his aunts' to sleep. They keep his old room ready.

MRS. EULVSTED. No, he can't be with them. Because he just now got a letter from Miss Tesman. It's over there.

HEIDDA. Oh? (Looking at the address.) Yes, that's Aunt Julie's handwriting, all right. Well, then he must have stayed over at Judge Brack's. And Eiillt Løvborg—he's sitting with vine leaves in his hair, reading away.

MRS. EULVSTED. Oh, Hedda, you say these things, and you really don't believe them at all.

HEIDDA. You're such a little fool, Thea.

MRS. EULVSTED. That's true; I guess I am.

HEIDDA. And you really look dead tired.

MRS. EULVSTED. Yes, I feel dead tired.

HEIDDA. Well, you just do as I say, then. Go in my room and stretch out on the bed for a while.

MRS. EULVSTED. No, no—I still wouldn't get any sleep.

HEIDDA. Why, of course you would.

MRS. EULVSTED. Well, but your husband's sure to be home now soon. And I've got to know right away—

HEIDDA. I'll call you the moment he comes.

MRS. EULVSTED. Yes? Promise me, Hedda?

HEIDDA. You can count on it. Just go and get some sleep.

MRS. EULVSTED. Thanks. I'll try. (She goes out through the inner room.)

(HEIDDA goes over to the glass door and draws the curtains back. Bright daylight streams into the room. She goes over to the writing table, takes out a small hand mirror, regards herself and arranges her hair. She then goes to the hall door and presses the bell. After a moment, BERTA enters.)

BERTA. Did you want something, ma'am?

HEIDDA. Yes, you can build up the fire. I'm freezing in here.

BERTA. Why, my goodness—we'll have it warm in no
time. (She raises the embers together and puts some wood on, then stops and listens.) There's the front doorbell, ma'am.

HEDDA. Go see who it is. I'll take care of the stove.

BERTA. It'll be burning soon. (She goes out of the hall door.)

(HEDDA kneels on the footstool and lays more wood on the fire. After a moment, GEORGE TESMAN comes in from the hall. He looks tired and rather serious. He tiptoes toward the doorway to the inner room and is about to slip through the curtains.)

HEDDA (at the stove, without looking up). Good morning.

TESMAN (turns). Hedda! (Approaching her.) But what on earth—! You're up so early? Uh?

HEDDA. Yes, I'm up quite early today.

TESMAN. And I was so sure you were still in bed sleeping. Isn't that something, Hedda!

HEDDA. Not so loud. Mrs. Elvsted's resting in my room.

TESMAN. Was Mrs. Elvsted here all night?

HEDDA. Well, no one returned to take her home.

TESMAN. No, I guess that's right.

HEDDA (shuts the door to the stove and gets up). So—did you enjoy your party?

TESMAN. Were you worried about me? Hm?

HEDDA. No, that never occurred to me. I just asked if you'd had a good time.

TESMAN. Oh yes, I really did, for once. But more at the beginning, I'd say—when Eilert read to me out of his book. We got there more than an hour too soon—imagine! And Brack had so much to get ready. But then Eilert read to me.

HEDDA (sitting at the right-hand side of the table). Well?

Tell me about it—

TESMAN (sitting on a footstool by the stove). Really, Hedda—you can't imagine what a book that's going to be! I do believe it's one of the most remarkable things ever written. Just think!

HEDDA. Yes, yes, I don't care about that—

TESMAN. But I have to make a confession, Hedda. When he'd finished reading—I had such a nasty feeling—

HEDDA. Nasty?

TESMAN. I found myself envying Eilert, that he was able to write such a book. Can you imagine, Hedda?

HEDDA. Oh yes, I can imagine!

TESMAN. And then how sad to see—that with all his gifts—his is still quite irreclaimable.

HEDDA. Don't you mean that he has more courage to lose than the others?

TESMAN. Good Lord, no—I mean, he simply can't take his pleasures in moderation.

HEDDA. Well, what happened then—at the end?

TESMAN. I suppose I'd have to say it turned into an argy, Hedda.

HEDDA. Were there vine leaves in his hair?

TESMAN. Vine leaves? Not that I noticed. But he gave me a long, muddled speech in honor of the woman who'd inspired his work. Yes, that was his phrase for it.

HEDDA. Did he give her name?

TESMAN. No, he didn't. But it seems to me it has to be Mrs. Elvsted. Wait and see!

HEDDA. Oh? Where did you leave him?

TESMAN. On the way here. We broke up—the last of us—all together. And Brack came along with us too, to get a little fresh air. And then we did want to make sure that Eilert got home safe. Because he really had a load on, you know.

HEDDA. He must have.

TESMAN. But here's the curious part of it, Hedda. Or perhaps I should say, the distressing part. Oh, I'm almost ashamed to speak of it—for Eilert's sake—

HEDDA. Yes, go on—

TESMAN. Well, as we were walking toward town, you know, I happened to drop back a little behind the others. Only for a minute or two—you follow me?

HEDDA. Yes, yes, so—?

TESMAN. And then when I was catching up with the rest of them, what do you think I found on the sidewalk? Uh?

HEDDA. Oh, how should I know!

TESMAN. You mustn't breathe a word to anyone, Hedda—you hear me? Promise me that, for Eilert's sake. (Takes a manila envelope out of his coat pocket.) Just think—I found this.
HEDDA. Isn't that what he had with him yesterday?
TESMAN. That's right. It's the whole of his precious, irreplaceable manuscript. And he went and lost it—without even noticing. Can you imagine, Hedda! How distressing—it in—
HEDDA. But why didn't you give it right back to him?
TESMAN. No, I didn't dare do that—in the state he was in—
HEDDA. And you didn't tell any of the others you'd found it?
TESMAN. Of course not. I'd never do that, you know, for Eilert's sake.
HEDDA. Then there's no one who knows you have Eilert Løvborg's manuscript?
TESMAN. No. And no one must ever know, either.
HEDDA. What did you say to him afterwards?
TESMAN. I had no chance at all to speak with him. As soon as we reached the edge of town, he and a couple of others got away from us and disappeared. Imagine!
HEDDA. Oh! I expect they saw him home.
TESMAN. Yes, they probably did, I suppose. And also Brack went home.
HEDDA. And where've you been carrying on since then?
TESMAN. Well, I and some of the others—we were invited up by one of the fellows and had morning coffee at his place. Or a post-midnight snack, maybe—uh? But as soon as I've had a little rest—and given poor Eilert time to sleep it off, then I've got to take this back to him.
HEDDA (reaching out for the envelope). No—don't give it back! Not yet, I mean. Let me read it first.
TESMAN. Hedda dearest, no. My Lord, I can't do that.
HEDDA. You can't?
TESMAN. No. Why, you can just imagine the anguish he'll feel when he wakes up and misses the manuscript. He hasn't any copy of it, you know. He told me that himself.
HEDDA (looks searchingly at him). Can't such a work be rewritten? I mean, over again?
TESMAN. Oh, I don't see how it could. Because the inspiration, you know—
HEDDA. Yes, yes—that's the thing, I suppose. (Casually.) Oh, by the way—there's a letter for you.
TESMAN. No, really?
HEDDA (handing it to him). It came early this morning.

TESMAN. Dear, from Aunt Julie! What could that be? (Sets the envelope on the other taboret, opens the letter, skims through it, and springs to his feet.) Oh, Hedda—she says poor Auntie Rina's dying!
HEDDA. It's no more than we've been expecting.
TESMAN. And if I want to see her one last time, I've got to hurry. I'll have to hop right over.
HEDDA (suppressing a smile). Hop?
TESMAN. Oh, Hedda dearest, if you could only bring yourself to come with me! Think of it!
HEDDA (rises and dismisses the thought wearily). No, no, don't ask me to do such things. I don't want to look on sickness and death. I want to be free of everything ugly.
TESMAN. Yes, all right, then— (Dashing about.) My hat—? My overcoat—? Oh, in the hall—I do hope I'm not there too late, Hedda! HM?
HEDDA. Oh, if you just hop to it—

BERTA. Judge Brack's outside, asking if he might stop in.
TESMAN. At a time like this! No, I can't possibly see him now.
HEDDA. But I can. (To BERTA.) Ask the judge to come in.

(BERTA goes out.)

HEDDA (quickly, in a whisper). Tesman, the manuscript! (She snatches it from the taboret.)
TESMAN. Yes, give it here!
HEDDA. No, no, I'll keep it till you're back.

(She moves over to the writing table and slips it in the bookcase. TESMAN stands flustered, unable to get his gloves on. BRACK enters from the hall.)

HEDDA. Well, aren't you the early bird.
BRACK. Yes, wouldn't you say so? (To TESMAN.) Are you off and away too?
TESMAN. Yes, I absolutely have to get over to my aunts'. Just think—the invalid one, she's dying.
BRACK. Good Lord, she is? But then you mustn't let me detain you. Not at a moment like this—
TESMAN. Yes, I really must run—Good-bye! Good-bye!
(He goes hurriedly out the hall door.)
HEDDA. It would seem you had quite a time of it last night, Judge.
BRACK. I've not been out of my clothes yet, Mrs. Hedda.
HEDDA. Not you, either?
BRACK. No, as you can see. But what's Tesman been telling you about our night's adventures?
HEDDA. Oh, some tedious tale. Something about stopping somewhere for coffee.
BRACK. Yes, I know all about the coffee party. Eilert Løvborg wasn't with them, I expect?
HEDDA. No, they'd already taken him home.
BRACK. Tesman, as well.
HEDDA. No, but he said some others had.
BRACK (smiles). George Tesman is really a simple soul, Mrs. Hedda.
HEDDA. God knows he's that. But was there something else that went on?
BRACK. Oh, you might say so.
HEDDA. Well, now! Let's sit down, Judge; you'll talk more easily then.

(She sits at the left-hand side of the table, with BRACK at the long side, near her.)
HEDDA. So?
BRACK. I had particular reasons for keeping track of my guests—or, I should say, certain of my guests, last night.
HEDDA. And among them Eilert Løvborg, perhaps?
BRACK. To be frank—yes.
HEDDA. Now you really have me curious—
BRACK. You know where he and a couple of the others spent the rest of the night, Mrs. Hedda?
HEDDA. Tell me—if it's fit to be told.
BRACK. Oh, it's very much fit to be told. Well, it seems they showed up at a quite animated soirée.
HEDDA. Of the lively sort.
BRACK. Of the liveliest.
HEDDA. Do go on, Judge—
BRACK. He apparently made violent resistance. Struck one of the officers on the side of the head and ripped his coat. So they took him along to the station house.

HEDDA. Where did you hear all this?

BRACK. From the police themselves.

HEDDA (gazing straight ahead). So that’s how it went. Then he had no vine leaves in his hair.

BRACK. Vine leaves, Mrs. Hedda?

HEDDA (changing her tone). But tell me, Judge—just why do you go around like this, spying on Eilert Lövborg?

BRACK. In the first place, it’s hardly a matter of no concern to me, if it’s brought out during the investigation that he’d come direct from my house.

HEDDA. There’ll be an investigation—?

BRACK. Naturally. Anyway, that takes care of itself. But I felt that as a friend of the family I owed you and Tesman a full account of his nocturnal exploits.

HEDDA. Why, exactly?

BRACK. Well, because I have a strong suspicion that he’ll try to use you as a kind of screen.

HEDDA. Oh, how could you ever think such a thing?

BRACK. Good Lord—we’re really not blind, Mrs. Hedda. You’ll see! This Mrs. Elvsted, she won’t be going home now so quickly.

HEDDA. Well, even supposing there were something between them, there are plenty of other places where they could meet.

BRACK. Not one single home. From now on, every decent house will be closed to Eilert Lövborg.

HEDDA. So mine ought to be too, is that what you mean?

BRACK. Yes. I’ll admit I’d find it more than annoying if that gentleman were to have free access here. If he came like an intruder, an irrelevancy, forcing his way into—

HEDDA. Into the triangle?

BRACK. Precisely. It would almost be like turning me out of my home.

HEDDA (looks at him with a smile). I see. The one cock of the walk—that’s what you want to be.

BRACK (nodding slowly and lowering his voice). Yes, that’s what I want to be. And that’s what I’ll fight for—with every means at my disposal.

HEDDA (her smile vanishing). You can be a dangerous person, can’t you—in a tight corner.

BRACK. Do you think so?

HEDDA. Yes, now I’m beginning to think so. And I’m thoroughly grateful—that you have no kind of hold over me.

BRACK (with an ambiguous laugh). Ah, yes, Mrs. Hedda—perhaps you’re right about that. If I had, then who knows just what I might do?

HEDDA. Now you listen here, Judge! That sounds too much like a threat.

BRACK (rising). Oh, nothing of the kind! A triangle, after all—is best fortified and defended by volunteers.

HEDDA. There we’re agreed.

BRACK. Well, now that I’ve said all I have to say, I’d better get back to town. Good-bye, Mrs. Hedda. (He goes toward the glass door.)

HEDDA (rising). Are you going through the garden?

BRACK. Yes, I find it’s shorter.

HEDDA. Yes, and then it’s the back way, too.

BRACK. How true. I have nothing against back ways. At certain times they can be rather piquant.

HEDDA. You mean, when somebody’s sharpshooting?

BRACK (in the doorway, laughing). Oh, people don’t shoot their tame roosters!

HEDDA (also laughing). I guess not. Not when there’s only one—

(Still laughing, they nod good-bye to each other. He goes. She shuts the door after him, then stands for a moment, quite serious, looking out. She then goes over and glances through the curtains to the inner room. Moves to the writing table, takes Lövborg’s envelope from the bookcase, and is about to page through it, when Berta’s voice is heard loudly in the hall. Hedda turns and listens. She hurriedly locks the envelope in the drawer and lays the key on the desk. Eilert Lövborg, with his overcoat on and his hat in his hand, throws open the hall door. He looks confused and excited.)

LÖVBORG (turned toward the hall). And I’m telling you, I have to go in! I will, you hear me! (He shuts the door,
MRS. ELVSTED. But I tell you, I don’t want to hear anything!

LØVBORG. It’s nothing about last night.

MRS. ELVSTED. What is it, then—?

LØVBORG. It’s simply this, that from now on, we separate.

MRS. ELVSTED. Separate!

HEDDA (involutarily). I knew it!

LØVBORG. Because I have no more use for you, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED. And you can stand there and say that!

LØVBORG. No more use for me! Then I’m not going to help you now, I have? We’re not going to go on working together?

LØVBORG. I have no plans for any more work.

MRS. ELVSTED (in desperation). Then what will I do with my life?

LØVBORG. You must try to go on living as if you’d never known me.

MRS. ELVSTED. But I can’t do that!

LØVBORG. You must try to, Thea. You’ll have to go home again—

MRS. ELVSTED (in a fury of protest). Never! No! Where you are, that’s where I want to be! I won’t be driven away like this! I’m going to stay right here—and be together with you when the book comes out.

HEDDA (in a tense whisper). Ah, yes—the book!

LØVBORG (looks at her). My book and Thea’s—for that’s what it is.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, that’s what I feel it is. And that’s why I have the right, as well, to be with you when it comes out. I want to see you covered with honor and respect again. And the joy—I want to share the joy of it with you too.

LØVBORG. Thea—our book’s never coming out.

HEDDA. Ah!

MRS. ELVSTED. Never coming out!

LØVBORG. Can never come out.

MRS. ELVSTED (with anguish foreboding). Eilert—what have you done with the manuscript?

HEDDA (watching him intently). Yes, the manuscript—?

MRS. ELVSTED. Where is it!

LØVBORG. Oh, Thea—don’t ask me that.
MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, yes, I have to know. I’ve got a right to know, this minute!

LOVBORG. The manuscript—well, you see—I tore the manuscript into a thousand pieces.

MRS. ELVSTED (screams). Oh no, no—!

HEDDA (involuntarily). But that just isn’t—!

LOVBORG (looks at her). Isn’t so, you think?

HEDDA (composing herself). All right. Of course; if you say it yourself. But it sounds so incredible—

LOVBORG. It’s true, all the same.

MRS. ELVSTED (wringing her hands). Oh, God—oh, God, Hedda—to tear his own work to bits!

LOVBORG. I’ve torn my own life to bits. So why not tear up my life’s work as well—

MRS. ELVSTED. And you did this thing last night?

LOVBORG. Yes, you heard me. In a thousand pieces.

And scattered them into the fjord. Far out. At least there’s clean salt water. Let them drift out to sea—drift with the tide and the wind. And after a while, they’ll sink deeper and deeper. As I will, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED. Do you know, Eilert, this thing you’ve done with the book—for the rest of my life it will seem to me as if you’d killed a little child.

LOVBORG. You’re right. It was like murdering a child.

MRS. ELVSTED. But how could you do it—! It was my child too.

HEDDA (almost inaudible). Ah, the child—

MRS. ELVSTED (breathe heavily). Then it is all over.

Yes, yes, I’m going now, Hedda.

HEDDA. But you’re not leaving town, are you?

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, I don’t know myself what I’ll do.

Everything’s dark for me now. (She goes out the hall door.)

HEDDA (stands waiting a moment). You’re not going to take her home, then; Mr. Lovborg?

LOVBORG. I? Through the streets? So people could see that she’d been with me?

HEDDA. I don’t know what else may have happened last night. But is it so completely irredeemable?

LOVBORG. It won’t just end with last night—I know that well enough. But the thing is, I’ve lost all desire for that kind of life. I don’t want to start it again, not now. It’s the courage and daring for life—that’s what she’s broken in me.

HEDDA. (standing straight ahead). To think that pretty little fool could have a man’s fate in her hands. (Looks at him.) But still, how could you treat her so heartlessly?

LOVBORG. Oh, don’t say it was heartless!

HEDDA. To go ahead and destroy what’s filled her whole being for months and years! That’s not heartless?

LOVBORG. To you, Hedda—I can tell the truth.

HEDDA. The truth?

LOVBORG. Promise me first—give me your word that what I tell you now, you’ll never let Thea know.

HEDDA. You have my word.

LOVBORG. Good. I can tell you, then, that what I said there just now isn’t true.

HEDDA. About the manuscript?

LOVBORG. Yes. I didn’t tear it up—or throw it in the fjord.

HEDDA. No, but—where is it, then?

LOVBORG. I’ve destroyed it all the same, Hedda. Utterly destroyed it.

HEDDA. I don’t understand.

LOVBORG. Thea said that what I’ve done, for her was like killing a child.

HEDDA. Yes—that’s what she said.

LOVBORG. But killing his child—that’s not the worst thing a father can do.

HEDDA. That’s not the worst?

LOVBORG. No. I wanted to spare Thea the worst.

HEDDA. And what’s that—the worst?

LOVBORG. Suppose now, Hedda, that a man—in the early morning hours—say—after a wild, drunken night, comes home to his child’s mother and says: “Listen—I’ve been out to this place and that—and here and there. And I had your child with me. In this place and that. And I lost the child. Just lost it. God only knows what hands it’s come into. Or who’s got hold of it.”

HEDDA. Well—but when all’s said and done—it was only a book—

LOVBORG. Thea’s pure soul was in that book.

HEDDA. Yes, I understand.

LOVBORG. Well, then you can understand that for her and me there’s no future possible any more.

HEDDA. What do you intend to do?
Løvborg. Nothing. Just put an end to it all. The sooner the better.

Hedda (coming a step closer). Eilert Løvborg—listen to me. Couldn't you arrange that—that it's done beautifully?

Løvborg. Beautifully? (Smiles.) With vine leaves in my hair, as you used to dream in the old days—

Hedda. No. I don't believe in vine leaves any more. But beautifully, all the same. For this once! Good-bye! You must go now—and never come here again.

Løvborg. Good-bye, then. And give my best to George Tesman. (He turns to leave.)

Hedda. No, wait. I want you to have a souvenir from me.

(She goes to the writing desk and opens the drawer and the pistol case, then comes back to Løvborg with one of the pistols.)

Løvborg (looks at her). That? Is that the souvenir?

Hedda (nods slowly). Do you recognize it? It was aimed at you once.

Løvborg. You should have used it then.

Hedda. Here! Use it now.

Løvborg (puts the pistol in his breast pocket). Thanks, Hedda. And beautifully, Eilert Løvborg. Promise me that!

Løvborg. Good-bye, Hedda Gabler.

(He goes out the hall door. Hedda listens a moment at the door. Then she goes over to the writing table, takes out the envelope with the manuscript, glances inside, pulls some of the sheets half out and looks at them. She then goes over to the armchair by the stove and sits, with the envelope in her lap. After a moment, she opens the stove door, then brings out the manuscript.)

Hedda (throwing some of the sheets into the fire and whispering to herself). Now I'm burning your child, Thea! You, with your curly hair! (Throwing another sheet in the stove.) Your child and Eilert Løvborg's. (Throwing in the rest.) Now I'm burning—I'm burning the child.

ACT FOUR

The same rooms at the Tesmans'. It is evening. The drawing room is in darkness. The inner room is lit by the hanging lamp over the table. The curtains are drawn across the glass door. Hedda, dressed in black, is pacing back and forth in the dark room. She then enters the inner room, moving out of sight toward the left. Several chords are heard on the piano. She comes in view again, returning into the drawing room. Berta enters from the right through the inner room with a lighted lamp, which she puts on the table in front of the sitter in the drawing room. Her eyes are red from crying, and she has black ribbons on her cap. She goes quietly and discreetly out to the right. Hedda moves to the glass door, lifts the curtains aside slightly, and gazes out into the darkness.

Shortly after, Miss Tesman, in mourning, with a hat and veil, comes in from the hall. Hedda goes toward her, extending her hand.

Miss Tesman. Well, Hedda, here I am, all dressed in mourning. My poor sister's ordeal is finally over.

Hedda. As you see, I've already heard. Tesman sent me a note.

Miss Tesman. Yes, he promised he would. But all the same I thought that, to Hedda—here in the house of life—I ought to bear the news of death myself.

Hedda. That was very kind of you.

Miss Tesman. Ah, Rina ought not to have passed on just now. This is no time for grief in Hedda's house.

Hedda (changing the subject). She had a peaceful death, then, Miss Tesman?

Miss Tesman. Oh, she went so calmly, so beautifully. And so inexpressibly happy that she could see George once again. And say good-bye to him properly. Is it possible that he's still not home?

Hedda. No, he wrote that I shouldn't expect him too early. But won't you sit down?
MISS TESMAN. No, thank you, my dear—blessed Hedda! I’d love to, but I have so little time. I want to see her dressed and made ready as best as I can. She should go to her grave looking her finest.

HEDDA. Can’t I help you with something?

MISS TESMAN. Oh, you mustn’t think of it. This is nothing for Hedda Tesman to put her hands to. Or let her thoughts dwell on, either. Not at a time like this, no.

HEDDA. Ah, thoughts—they’re not so easy to control.

MISS TESMAN (continuing). Well, there’s life for you. A few, my house now we’ll be sewing a shroud for Rina. And here, too, there’ll be sewing soon, I imagine. But a far different kind, praise God!

(GEORGE TESMAN enters from the hall.)

HEDDA. Well, at last! It’s about time.

TESMAN. Are you here, Aunt Julie? With Hedda? Think of that!

MISS TESMAN. I was just this minute leaving, dear boy. Well, did you get done all you promised you would?

TESMAN. No, I’m really afraid I’ve forgotten half. I’ll have to run over and see you tomorrow. My brain’s completely in a whirl today. I can’t keep my thoughts together.

MISS TESMAN. But George dear, you mustn’t take it that way.

TESMAN. Oh? Well, how should I, then?

MISS TESMAN. You should rejoice in your grief. Rejoice in everything that’s happened, as I do.

TESMAN. Oh yes, of course. You’re thinking of Aunt Rina.

HEDDA. It’s going to be lonely for you, Miss Tesman.

MISS TESMAN. For the first few days, yes. But it won’t be for long, I hope. I won’t let dear Rina’s little room stand empty.

TESMAN. No? Who would you want to have in it? Hm?

MISS TESMAN. Oh, there’s always some poor invalid in need of care and attention.

HEDDA. Would you really take another burden like that on yourself?

MISS TESMAN. Burden! Mercy on you, child—it’s been no burden for me.

HEDDA. But now, with a stranger—
HEDDA. Don’t shout so. The maid can hear you.

TESMAN. The maid! Oh, Hedda, you’re priceless, really! The maid—but that’s Berta! Why, I’ll go out and tell her myself.

HEDDA (clenching her fists in despair). Oh, I’ll die—I’ll be of all this!

TESMAN. Of what, Hedda? Uh?

HEDDA. Of all these—absurdities—George.

TESMAN. Absurdities? What’s absurd about my being so happy? Well, all right—I guess there’s no point in my saying anything to Berta.

HEDDA. Oh, go ahead—why not that, too?

TESMAN. No, no, not yet. But Aunt Julie will have to hear. And then, that you’ve started to call me George, too! Imagine! Oh, Aunt Julie will be so glad—so glad!

HEDDA. When she hears that I burned Eilert Løvborg’s book—for your sake?

TESMAN. Well, as far as that goes—this thing with the book—of course, no one’s to know about that. But that you have a love that burns for me, Hedda—Aunt Julie can certainly share in that! You know, I wonder, really, if things such as this are common among young wives? Hm?

HEDDA. I think you should ask Aunt Julie about that, too.

TESMAN. Yes, I’ll do it definitely, when I have the chance. (Again looks distressed and preoccupied.) No, but—but the manuscript! My Lord, it’s just terrible to think about poor Eilert.

(MRS. ELVSTED, dressed as on her first visit, with hat and coat, comes in the hall door.)

MRS. ELVSTED (greets them hurriedly and speaks in agitation.) Oh, Hedda dear, don’t be annoyed that I’m back again.

HEDDA. Has something happened, Thea?

TESMAN. Something with Eilert Løvborg? Uh?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, I’m so terribly afraid he’s met with an accident.

HEDDA (seizing her arm). Ah—you think so!

TESMAN. But, Mrs. Elvsted, where did you get that idea?

MRS. ELVSTED. Well, because I heard them speaking of
him at the boardinghouse, just as I came in. Oh, there are the most incredible rumors about him in town today.

TESMAN. Yes, you know, I heard them too! And I could swear that he went right home to bed last night. Imagine!

HEDDA. Well—what did they say at the boardinghouse?

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, I couldn’t get anything clearly. They either didn’t know much themselves, or else—They stopped talking when they saw me. And I didn’t dare to ask.

TESMAN (restlessly moving about). Let’s hope—let’s hope you misunderstood them, Mrs. Elvsted!

MRS. ELVSTED. No, no, I’m sure they were talking about him. And then I heard them say something or other about the hospital, or—

TESMAN. The hospital!

HEDDA. No—but that’s impossible!

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, I’m so deathly afraid for him now. And later I went up to his lodging to ask about him.

HEDDA. But was that very wise, Theo?

MRS. ELVSTED. What else could I do? I couldn’t bear the uncertainty any longer.

TESMAN. But didn’t you find him there either? Hm?

MRS. ELVSTED. No. And no one had any word of him.

He hadn’t been in since yesterday afternoon, they said. TESMAN. Yesterday! Imagine them saying that!

MRS. ELVSTED. I think there can only be one reason—something terrible must have happened to him!

TESMAN. Hedda dear—suppose I went over and made a few inquiries—?

HEDDA. No, no—don’t you get mixed up in this business.

(JUDGE BRACK, with hat in hand, enters from the hall, BERTA letting him in and shutting the door after him. He looks grave and bows silently.)

TESMAN. Oh, is that you, Judge? Uh?

BRACK. Yes, it’s imperative that I see you this evening.

TESMAN. I can see that you’ve heard the news from Aunt Julie.

BRACK. Among other things, yes.

TESMAN. It’s sad, isn’t it? Uh?

BRACK. Well, my dear Tesman, that depends on how you look at it.

TESMAN (eyes him doubtfully). Has anything else happened?

BRACK. Yes, as a matter of fact.

HEDDA (intently). Something distressing, Judge?

BRACK. Again, that depends on how you look at it, Mrs. Tesman.

MRS. ELVSTED (in an uncontrollable outburst). Oh, it’s something about Eilert Løvborg!

BRACK (glancing at her). Now how did you hit upon that, Mrs. Elvsted? Have you, perhaps, heard something already—?

MRS. ELVSTED (in confusion). No, no, nothing like that—but—

TESMAN. Oh, for heaven’s sake, tell us!

BRACK (with a shrug). Well—I’m sorry, but—Eilert Løvborg’s been taken to the hospital. He’s dying.

MRS. ELVSTED (crying out). Oh, God, oh, God—!

TESMAN. To the hospital! And dying!

HEDDA (involuntarily). All so soon—!

MRS. ELVSTED (crying out). And we parted in anger, Hedda!

HEDDA (in a whisper). Theo—be careful, Theo!

MRS. ELVSTED (ignoring her). I have to see him! I have to see him alive!

BRACK. No use, Mrs. Elvsted. No one’s allowed in to see him.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, but tell me, at least, what happened to him! What is it?

TESMAN. Don’t tell me he tried to—! Uh?

HEDDA. Yes, he did, I’m sure of it.

TESMAN. Hedda—how can you say—!

BRACK (his eyes steadily on her). Unhappily, you’ve pressed exactly right, Mrs. Tesman.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, how horrible!

TESMAN. Did it himself! Imagine!

HEDDA. Shot himself!

BRACK. Again, exactly right, Mrs. Tesman.

MRS. ELVSTED (trying to control herself). When did it happen, Mr. Brack?

BRACK. This afternoon. Between three and four.
MRS. ELVSTED. But he was! In delirium! The way he was when he tore up our book.

BRACK (startled). The book? His manuscript, you mean? He tore it up?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes. Last night.

TESMAN (in a low whisper). Oh, Hedda, we’ll never come clear of all this.

BRACK. Hm, that’s very strange.

TESMAN (walking about the room). To think Eilert could have been like that! And then not to have left behind the one thing that could have made his name live on.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, if it could only be put together again!

TESMAN. Yes, imagine if that were possible! I don’t know what I wouldn’t give—

MRS. ELVSTED. Perhaps it can, Mr. Tesman.

TESMAN. What do you mean?

MRS. ELVSTED (searching in the pockets of her dress). Look here. I’ve kept all these notes that he used to dictate from.

TESMAN (coming a step closer). Ah—!

MRS. ELVSTED. You’ve kept them, Mrs. Elvsted! Uh?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, here they are. I took them along when I left home. And they’ve stayed right here in my pocket—

TESMAN. Oh, let me look!

MRS. ELVSTED (hands him a sheaf of small papers). But they’re in such a mess. All mixed up.

TESMAN. But just think, if we could decipher them, even so! Maybe the two of us could help each other—

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh yes! At least, we could try—

TESMAN. We can do it! We must! I’ll give my whole life to this!

HEDDA. You, George. Your life?

TESMAN. Yes. Or, let’s say, all the time I can spare. My own research will have to wait. You can understand, Hedda. Hm! It’s something I owe to Eilert’s memory.

HEDDA. Perhaps.

TESMAN. And so, my dear Mrs. Elvsted, let’s pull ourselves together. Good Lord, there’s no use brooding over what’s gone by. Uh? We must try to compose our thoughts as much as we can, in order that—
MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, yes, Mr. Tesman, I'll do the best I can.

TESMAN. Come on, then. Let's look over these notes right away. Where shall we sit? Here? No, in there, in the back room. Excuse us, Judge. You come with me, Mrs. Elvsted.

MRS. ELVSTED. Dear God—if only we can do this!

(TESMAN and MRS. ELVSTED go into the inner room. She takes off her hat and coat. They both sit at the table under the hanging lamp and become totally immersed in examining the papers. HEDDA goes toward the stove and sits in the armchair. After a moment, BRACK goes over by her.)

HEEDDA (her voice lowered). Ah, Judge—what a liberation it is, this act of Eilert Løvborg's.

BRACK. Liberation, Mrs. Hedda? Well, yes, for him; you could certainly say he's been liberated—

HEEDDA. I mean for me. It's liberating to know that there can still actually be a free and courageous action in this world. Something that shimmers with spontaneous beauty.

BRACK (smiling). Hm—my dear Mrs. Hedda—

HEEDDA. Oh, I already know what you're going to say. Because you're a kind of specialist too, you know, just like—Oh, well!

BRACK (looking fixedly at her). Eilert Løvborg meant more to you than you're willing to admit, perhaps even to yourself. Or am I wrong about that?

HEEDDA. I won't answer that sort of question. I simply know that Eilert Løvborg's had the courage to live life after his own mind. And now—this last great act, filled with beauty! That he had the strength and the will to break away from the banquet of life—so young.

BRACK. It grieves me, Mrs. Hedda—but I'm afraid I have to disburden you of this beautiful illusion.

HEEDDA. Illusion?

BRACK. One that, in any case, you'd soon be deprived of.

HEEDDA. And what's that?

BRACK. He didn't shoot himself—of his own free will.
BRACK. It seems impossible otherwise. He must have stolen it—shh!

(TESMAN and MRS. ELVSTED have gotten up from the table in the inner room and come into the drawing room.)

TESMAN (with both hands full of papers). Hedda dear—it's nearly impossible to see in there under that overhead lamp. You know?

HEDDA. Yes, I know.

TESMAN. Do you think it would be all right if we used your table for a while? Hm?

HEDDA. Yes, I don't mind. (Quickly.) Wait! No, let me clear it off first.

TESMAN. Oh, don't bother, Hedda. There's plenty of room.

HEDDA. No, no, let me just clear it off, can't you? I'll put all this in by the piano. There!

(She has pulled out an object covered with sheet music from under the bookcase, adds more music to it, and carries the whole thing into the inner room and off left. TESMAN puts the scraps of paper on the writing table and moves the lamp over from the corner table. He and MRS. ELVSTED sit down and go on with their work. HEDDA comes back.)

HEDDA (behind MRS. ELVSTED'S chair, gently ruffling her hair). Well, my sweet little Thea—how is it going with Eilert Løvborg's monument?

MRS. ELVSTED (looking despondently up at her). Oh dear—it's going to be terribly hard to get these in order.

TESMAN. It's got to be done. There's just no alternative. Besides, setting other people's papers in order—it's exactly what I can do best.

(HEDDA goes over by the stove and sits on one of the taboets. BRACK stands over her, leaning on the armchair.)

HEDDA (whispering). What did you say about the pistol? BRACK (softly). That he must have stolen it.

HEDDA. Why, necessarily, that?
BRACK. A scandal, yes—the kind you’re so deathly afraid of. Naturally, you’d appear in court—you and Mademoiselle Diana. She’d have to explain how the whole thing occurred. Whether it was an accident or homicide. Was he trying to pull the pistol out of his pocket to threaten her? Is that why it went off? Or had she torn the pistol out of his hand, shot him, and slipped it back in his pocket again? It’s rather like her to do that, you know. She’s a solid piece of work, this Mademoiselle Diana.

HEDDA. But all that sordid business is no concern of mine.

BRACK. No. But you’ll have to answer the question: why did you give Ellert Løvborg the pistol? And what conclusions will people draw from the fact that you did give it to him?

HEDDA (her head sinking). That’s true. I hadn’t thought of that.

BRACK. Well, luckily there’s no danger, as long as you keep quiet.

HEDDA. So I’m in your power, Judge. You have your hold over me from now on.

BRACK (whispers more softly). My dearest Hedda—believe me—I won’t abuse my position.

HEDDA. All the same, I’m in your power. Tied to your will and desire. Not free. Not free, then! (Rises angrily) No—I can’t bear the thought of it. Never!

BRACK (looks at her half mockingly). One usually manages to adjust to the inevitable.

HEDDA (returning his look). Yes, perhaps so. (She goes over to the writing table. Suppressing an involuntary smile, she imitates TESMAN’s intonation.) Well? Getting on with it? George? Uh?

TESMAN. Goodness knows, dear. It’s going to mean months and months of work, in any case.

HEDDA (as before). Imagine that! (Runs her hand lightly through MRS. ELVSTED’s hair.). Don’t you find it strange? Here you are, sitting now beside Tesman—just as you used to sit with Ellert Løvborg.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, if I could only inspire your husband in the same way.

HEDDA. Oh, that will surely come—in time.

TESMAN. Yes, you know what, Hedda—I really think I’m beginning to feel something of the kind. But you go back and sit with Judge Brack.

HEDDA. Is there nothing the two of you can use me for here?

TESMAN. No, nothing in the world. (Turning his head.) From now on, Judge, you’ll have to be good enough to keep Hedda company.

BRACK (with a glance at HEDDA). I’ll take the greatest pleasure in that.

HEDDA. Thanks. But I’m tired this evening. I want to rest a while in there on the sofa.

TESMAN. Yes, do that, dear. Uh?

(HEDDA goes into the inner room, pulling the curtains closed after her. Short pause. Suddenly she is heard playing a wild dance melody on the piano.)

MRS. ELVSTED (starting up from her chair). Oh—what’s that?

TESMAN (running to the center doorway). But Hedda—dearest—don’t go playing dance music tonight! Think of Auntie Rina! And Ellert, too!

HEDDA (putting her head out between the curtains). And Auntie Julie. And all the rest of them. From now on I’ll be quiet. (She closes the curtains again.)

TESMAN (at the writing table). She can’t feel very happy seeing us do this melancholy work. You know what, Mrs. Elvsted—you must move in with Aunt Julie. Then I can come over evenings. And then we can sit and work there. Uh?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, perhaps that would be best—

HEDDA (from the inner room) I can hear everything you say, Tesman. But what will I do evenings over here?

TESMAN (leafing through the notes). Oh, I’m sure Judge Brack will be good enough to stop by and see you.

BRACK (in the armchair, calling out gaily). Gladly, every blessed evening, Mrs. Tesman! We’ll have great times here together, the two of us!

HEDDA (in a clear, ringing voice). Yes, don’t you hope so, Judge? You, the one cock of the walk—

(A shot is heard within. TESMAN, MRS. ELVSTED, and BRACK start from their chairs.)
TESMAN. Oh, now she's fooling with those pistols again!

(He throws the curtains back and runs in.
MRS. ELVSTED follows. HEIDDA lies, lifeless,
stretched out on the sofa. Confusion and cries.
BERTA comes in, bewildered, from the right.)

TESMAN (shrieking to BRACK). Shot herself! Shot herself in the temple! Can you imagine!
BRACK (in the armchair, prostrated). But good God! People don't do such things!