

MRS. ELVSTED (*getting up quickly and uneasily*). I beg you, please, Mr. Tesman—be good to Eilert Lovborg 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. Elvsted!

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? Hm?

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. Elvsted?

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?

HEDDA. Didn't you see that I wanted him out of the room?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, to write the letter—

HEDDA. But also to talk with you alone.

MRS. ELVSTED (*confused*). About this same thing?

HEDDA. Precisely.

MRS. ELVSTED (*upset*). But Mrs. Tesman, there's nothing more to say! Nothing!

HEDDA. Oh yes, but there is. There's a great deal more—I can see that. Come, sit here—and let's speak openly now, the two of us. (*She forces MRS. ELVSTED down into the armchair by the stove and sits on one of the taborets.*)

MRS. ELVSTED (*anxiously glancing at her watch*). But Mrs. Tesman, dear—I was just planning to leave.

HEDDA. Oh, you can't be in such a rush— Now! Tell me a little about how things are going at home.

MRS. ELVSTED. Oh, that's the last thing I'd ever want to discuss.

HEDDA. But with me, dear—? After all, we were in school together.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, but you were a class ahead of me. Oh, I was terribly afraid of you then!

HEDDA. Afraid of me?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, terribly. Because whenever we met on the stairs, you'd always pull my hair.

HEDDA. Did I really?

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, and once you said you would burn it off.

HEDDA. Oh, that was just foolish talk, you know.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes, but I was so stupid then. And, anyway, since then—we've drifted so far—far apart from each other. We've moved in such different circles.

HEDDA. Well, let's try now to come closer again. Listen, at school we were quite good friends, and we called each other by our first names—

MRS. ELVSTED. No, I'm sure you're mistaken.

HEDDA. Oh, I couldn't be! I remember it clearly. And that's why we have to be perfectly open, just as we were. (*Moves the stool nearer MRS. ELVSTED.*) There now! (*Kissing her cheek.*) You have to call me Hedda.

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 Elvsteds?

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

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 everything 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 everything 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 himself—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. What! Your husband never knew—

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

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 redheaded 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 trim, 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.

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, asking 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! (*Smiling.*) It's the serious part of the banquet we're coming to, eh?

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—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?