

HEDDA GABLER

HENRIK IBSEN*

PLAY IN FOUR ACTS.

CHARACTERS.

GEORGE TESMAN.

HEDDA TESMAN, his wife.

MISS JULIANA TESMAN, his aunt.

MRS. ELVSTED.

JUDGE BRACK.

EILERT LOVBORG.

BERTA, servant at the Tesmans.

Tesman, whose Christian name in the original is "Jorgen," is described as "stipendiat i kulturhistorie"—that is to say, the holder of a scholarship for purposes of research into the History of Civilisation.

In the original "Assessor."

The scene of the action is Tesman's villa, in the west end of Christiania.

ACT FIRST.

A spacious, handsome, and tastefully furnished drawing room, decorated in dark colours. In the back, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back, leading into a smaller room decorated in the same style as the drawing-room. In the right-hand wall of the front room, a folding door leading out to the hall. In the opposite wall, on the left, a glass door, also with curtains drawn back. Through the panes can be seen part of a verandah outside, and trees covered with autumn foliage. An oval table, with a cover on it, and surrounded by chairs, stands well forward. In front, by the wall on the right, a wide stove of dark porcelain, a high-backed arm-chair, a cushioned foot-rest, and two footstools. A

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settee, with a small round table in front of it, fills the upper right-hand corner. In front, on the left, a little way from the wall, a sofa. Further back than the glass door, a piano. On either side of the doorway at the back a whatnot with terra-cotta and majolica ornaments.—Against the back wall of the inner room a sofa, with a table, and one or two chairs. Over the sofa hangs the portrait of a handsome elderly man in a General's uniform. Over the table a hanging lamp, with an opal glass shade.—A number of bouquets are arranged about the drawing-room, in vases and glasses. Others lie upon 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, with her bonnet on a carrying a parasol, comes in from the hall, followed by BERTA, who carries a bouquet wrapped in paper. MISS TESMAN is a comely and pleasant-looking lady of about sixty-five. She is nicely but simply dressed in a grey walking-costume. BERTA is a middle-aged woman of plain and rather countrified appearance.

MISS TESMAN.

[Stops close to the door, listens, and says softly:] Upon my word, I don't believe they are stirring yet!

BERTA.

[Also softly.] I told you so, Miss. Remember how late the steamboat got in last night. And then, when they got home!—good Lord, what a lot the young mistress had to unpack before she could get to bed.

MISS TESMAN.

Well well—let them have their sleep out. But let us see that they get a good breath of the fresh morning air when they do appear.

[She goes to the glass door and throws it open.

BERTA.

[Beside the table, at a loss what to do with the bouquet in her hand.]

I declare there isn't a bit of room left. I think I'll put it down

here, Miss. [She places it on the piano.

MISS TESMAN.

So you've got a new mistress now, my dear Berta. Heaven knows it was a wrench to me to part with you.

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BERTA.

[On the point of weeping.] And do you think it wasn't hard for me, too, Miss? After all the blessed years I've been with you and Miss Rina. (1)

MISS TESMAN.

We must make the best of it, Berta. There was nothing else to be done. George can't do without you, you see—he absolutely can't.

He has had you to look after him ever since he was a little boy.

BERTA.

Ah but, Miss Julia, I can't help thinking of Miss Rina lying helpless at home there, poor thing. And with only that new girl too! She'll never learn to take proper care of an invalid.

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, I shall manage to train her. And of course, you know, I shall take most of it upon myself. You needn't be uneasy about my poor sister, my dear Berta.

BERTA.

Well, but there's another thing, Miss. I'm so mortally afraid I shan't be able to suit the young mistress.

MISS TESMAN.

Oh well—just at first there may be one or two things—

BERTA.

Most like she'll be terrible grand in her ways.

MISS TESMAN.

Well, you can't wonder at that—General Gabler's daughter! Think of the sort of life she was accustomed to in her father's time. Don't you remember how we used to see her riding down the road along with the General? In that long black habit—and with feathers in her hat?

BERTA.

Yes, indeed—I remember well enough!—But, good Lord, I should never have dreamt in those days that she and Master George would make a match of it.

3

MISS TESMAN.

Nor I.—But by-the-bye, Berta—while I think of it: in future you mustn't say Master George. You must say Dr. Tesman.

BERTA.

Yes, the young mistress spoke of that too—last night—the moment they set foot in the house. Is it true then, Miss?

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, indeed it is. Only think, Berta—some foreign university has made him a doctor—while he has been abroad, you understand. I hadn't heard a word about it, until he told me himself upon the pier.

BERTA.

Well well, he's clever enough for anything, he is. But I didn't think he'd have gone in for doctoring people.

MISS TESMAN.

No no, it's not that sort of doctor he is. [Nods significantly.] But let me tell you, we may have to call him something still grander before long.

BERTA.

You don't day so! What can that be, Miss?

MISS TESMAN.

[Smiling.] H'm—wouldn't you like to know! [With emotion.] Ah, dear dear—if my poor brother could only look up from his grave now, and see what his little boy has grown into! [Looks around.] But bless me, Berta—why have you done this? Taken the chintz covers off all the furniture.

BERTA.

The mistress told me to. She can't abide covers on the chairs, she says.

MISS TESMAN.

Are they going to make this their everyday sitting-room then?

BERTA.

4

Yes, that's what I understood—from the mistress. Master George—the doctor—he said nothing.

GEORGE TESMAN comes from the right into the inner room, humming to himself, and carrying an unstrapped empty portmanteau. He is a middle-sized, young-looking man of thirty-three, rather stout, with a round, open, cheerful face, fair hair and beard. He wears spectacles, and is somewhat carelessly dressed in comfortable indoor clothes.

MISS TESMAN.

Good morning, good morning, George.

TESMAN.

[In the doorway between the rooms.] Aunt Julia! Dear Aunt Julia! [Goes up to her and shakes hands warmly.] Come all this way—so early! Eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Why, of course I had to come and see how you were getting on.

TESMAN.

In spite of your having had no proper night's rest?

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, that makes no difference to me.

TESMAN.

Well, I suppose you got home all right from the pier? Eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, quite safely, thank goodness. Judge Brack was good enough to see me right to my door.

TESMAN.

We were so sorry we couldn't give you a seat in the carriage. But you saw what a pile of boxes Hedda had to bring with her.

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, she had certainly plenty of boxes.

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BERTA.

[To TESMAN.] Shall I go in and see if there's anything I can do for the mistress?

TESMAN.

No thank you, Berta—you needn't. She said she would ring if she wanted anything.

BERTA.

[Going towards the right.] Very well.

TESMAN.

But look here—take this portmanteau with you.

BERTA.

[Taking it.] I'll put it in the attic.

[She goes out by the hall door.]

TESMAN.

Fancy, Auntie—I had the whole of that portmanteau chock full of copies of the documents. You wouldn't believe how much I have picked up from all the archives I have been examining—curious old details that no one has had any idea of—

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, you don't seem to have wasted your time on your wedding trip, George.

TESMAN.

No, that I haven't. But do take off your bonnet, Auntie. Look here!

Let me untie the strings—eh?

MISS TESMAN.

[While he does so.] Well well—this is just as if you were still at home with us.

TESMAN.

[With the bonnet in his hand, looks at it from all sides.] Why, what a gorgeous bonnet you've been investing in!

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MISS TESMAN.

I bought it on Hedda's account.

TESMAN.

On Hedda's account? Eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, so that Hedda needn't be ashamed of me if we happened to go out together.

TESMAN.

[Patting her cheek.] You always think of everything, Aunt Julia.

[Lays the bonnet on a chair beside the table.] And now, look here—suppose we sit comfortably on the sofa and have a little chat, till Hedda comes.

[They seat themselves. She places her parasol in the corner of the sofa.]

MISS TESMAN.

[Takes both his hands and looks at him.] What a delight it is to have you again, as large as life, before my very eyes, George! My George—my poor brother's own boy!

TESMAN.

And it's a delight for me, too, to see you again, Aunt Julia! You, who have been father and mother in one to me.

MISS TESMAN.

Oh yes, I know you will always keep a place in your heart for your old aunts.

TESMAN.

And what about Aunt Rina? No improvement—eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, no—we can scarcely look for any improvement in her case, poor thing. There she lies, helpless, as she has lain for all these years. But heaven grant I may not lose her yet awhile! For if I did, I don't know what I should make of my life, George—especially now that I haven't you to look after any more.

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TESMAN.

[Patting her back.] There there there—!

MISS TESMAN.

[Suddenly changing her tone.] And to think that here are you a married man, George!—And that you should be the one to carry off Hedda Gabler—the beautiful Hedda Gabler! Only think of it—she, that was so beset with admirers!

TESMAN.

[Hums a little and smiles complacently.] Yes, I fancy I have several good friends about town who would like to stand in my shoes—eh?

MISS TESMAN.

And then this fine long wedding-tour you have had! More than five—nearly six months—

TESMAN.

Well, for me it has been a sort of tour of research as well. I have had to do so much grubbing among old records—and to read no end of books too, Auntie.

MISS TESMAN.

Oh yes, I suppose so. [More confidentially, and lowering her voice a little.] But listen now, George,—have you nothing—nothing special to tell me?

TESMAN.

As to our journey?

MISS TESMAN.

Yes.

TESMAN.

No, I don't know of anything except what I have told you in my letters. I had a doctor's degree conferred on me—but that I told you yesterday.

MISS TESMAN.

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Yes, yes, you did. But what I mean is—haven't you any—any—expectations—?

TESMAN.

Expectations?

MISS TESMAN.

Why you know, George—I'm your old auntie!

TESMAN.

Why, of course I have expectations.

MISS TESMAN.

Ah!

TESMAN.

I have every expectation of being a professor one of these days.

MISS TESMAN.

Oh yes, a professor—

TESMAN.

Indeed, I may say I am certain of it. But my dear Auntie—you know all about that already!

MISS TESMAN.

[Laughing to herself.] Yes, of course I do. You are quite right there. [Changing the subject.] But we were talking about your journey. It must have cost a great deal of money, George?

TESMAN.

Well, you see—my handsome travelling-scholarship went a good way.

MISS TESMAN.

But I can't understand how you can have made it go far enough for two.

TESMAN.

No, that's not easy to understand—eh?

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MISS TESMAN.

And especially travelling with a lady—they tell me that makes it ever so much more expensive.

TESMAN.

Yes, of course—it makes it a little more expensive. But Hedda had to have this trip, Auntie! She really had to. Nothing else would have done.

MISS TESMAN.

No no, I suppose not. A wedding-tour seems to be quite indispensable nowadays.—But tell me now—have you gone thoroughly over the house yet?

TESMAN.

Yes, you may be sure I have. I have been afoot ever since daylight.

MISS TESMAN.

And what do you think of it all?

TESMAN.

I'm delighted! Quite delighted! Only I can't think what we are to do with the two empty rooms between this inner parlour and Hedda's bedroom.

MISS TESMAN.

[Laughing.] Oh my dear George, I daresay you may find some use for them—in the course of time.

TESMAN.

Why of course you are quite right, Aunt Julia! You mean as my library increases—eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, quite so, my dear boy. It was your library I was thinking of.

TESMAN.

I am specially pleased on Hedda's account. Often and often, before we were engaged, she said that she would never care to live anywhere

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but in Secretary Falk's villa.(2)

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, it was lucky that this very house should come into the market, just after you had started.

TESMAN.

Yes, Aunt Julia, the luck was on our side, wasn't it—eh?

MISS TESMAN.

But the expense, my dear George! You will find it very expensive, all this.

TESMAN.

[Looks at her, a little cast down.] Yes, I suppose I shall, Aunt!

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, frightfully!

TESMAN.

How much do you think? In round numbers?—Eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, I can't even guess until all the accounts come in.

TESMAN.

Well, fortunately, Judge Brack has secured the most favourable terms for me, so he said in a letter to Hedda.

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, don't be uneasy, my dear boy.—Besides, I have given security for the furniture and all the carpets.

TESMAN.

Security? You? My dear Aunt Julia—what sort of security could you give?

MISS TESMAN.

11

I have given a mortgage on our annuity.

TESMAN.

[Jumps up.] What! On your—and Aunt Rina's annuity!

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, I knew of no other plan, you see.

TESMAN.

[Placing himself before her.] Have you gone out of your senses, Auntie? Your annuity—it's all that you and Aunt Rina have to live upon.

MISS TESMAN.

Well well—don't get so excited about it. It's only a matter of form you know—Judge Brack assured me of that. It was he that was kind enough to arrange the whole affair for me. A mere matter of form, he said.

TESMAN.

Yes, that may be all very well. But nevertheless—

MISS TESMAN.

You will have your own salary to depend upon now. And, good heavens, even if we did have to pay up a little—! To eke things out a bit at the start—! Why, it would be nothing but a pleasure to us.

TESMAN.

Oh Auntie—will you never be tired of making sacrifices for me!

MISS TESMAN.

[Rises and lays her hand on his shoulders.] Have I any other happiness in this world except to smooth your way for you, my dear boy. You, who have had neither father nor mother to depend on. And now we have reached the goal, George! Things have looked black enough for us, sometimes; but, thank heaven, now you have nothing to fear.

TESMAN.

Yes, it is really marvellous how every thing has turned out for the best.

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MISS TESMAN.

And the people who opposed you—who wanted to bar the way for you—now you have them at your feet. They have fallen, George. Your most dangerous rival—his fall was the worst.—And now he has to lie on the bed he has made for himself—poor misguided creature.

TESMAN.

Have you heard anything of Eilert? Since I went away, I mean.

MISS TESMAN.

Only that he is said to have published a new book.

TESMAN.

What! Eilert Lovborg! Recently—eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, so they say. Heaven knows whether it can be worth anything! Ah, when your new book appears—that will be another story, George! What is it to be about?

TESMAN.

It will deal with the domestic industries of Brabant during the Middle Ages.

MISS TESMAN.

Fancy—to be able to write on such a subject as that!

TESMAN.

However, it may be some time before the book is ready. I have all these collections to arrange first, you see.

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, collecting and arranging—no one can beat you at that. There you are my poor brother's own son.

TESMAN.

I am looking forward eagerly to setting to work at it; especially now that I have my own delightful home to work in.

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MISS TESMAN.

And, most of all, now that you have got the wife of your heart, my dear George.

TESMAN.

[Embracing her.] Oh yes, yes, Aunt Julia! Hedda—she is the best part of it all! I believe I hear her coming—eh?

HEDDA enters from the left through the inner room. Her face and figure show refinement and distinction. Her complexion is pale and opaque. Her steel-grey eyes express a cold, unruffled repose. Her hair is of an agreeable brown, but not particularly abundant. She is dressed in a tasteful, somewhat loose-fitting morning gown.

MISS TESMAN.

[Going to meet HEDDA.] Good morning, my dear Hedda! Good morning, and a hearty welcome!

HEDDA.

[Holds out her hand.] Good morning, dear Miss Tesman! So early a call! That is kind of you.

MISS TESMAN.

[With some embarrassment.] Well—has the bride slept well in her new home?

HEDDA.

Oh yes, thanks. Passably.

TESMAN.

[Laughing.] Passably! Come, that's good, Hedda! You were sleeping like a stone when I got up.

HEDDA.

Fortunately. Of course one has always to accustom one's self to new surroundings, Miss Tesman—little by little. [Looking towards the left.] Oh, there the servant has gone and opened the veranda door, and let in a whole flood of sunshine.

MISS TESMAN.

14

[Going towards the door.] Well, then we will shut it.

HEDDA.

No no, not that! Tesman, please draw the curtains. That will give a

softer light.

TESMAN.

[At the door.] All right—all right.—There now, Hedda, now you have both shade and fresh air.

HEDDA.

Yes, fresh air we certainly must have, with all these stacks of flowers—. But—won't you sit down, Miss Tesman?

MISS TESMAN.

No, thank you. Now that I have seen that everything is all right here—thank heaven!—I must be getting home again. My sister is lying longing for me, poor thing.

TESMAN.

Give her my very best love, Auntie; and say I shall look in and see her later in the day.

MISS TESMAN.

Yes, yes, I'll be sure to tell her. But by-the-bye, George—[Feeling in her dress pocket]—I had almost forgotten—I have something for you here.

TESMAN.

What is it, Auntie? Eh?

MISS TESMAN.

[Produces a flat parcel wrapped in newspaper and hands it to him.]

Look here, my dear boy.

TESMAN.

[Opening the parcel.] Well, I declare!—Have you really saved them for me, Aunt Julia! Hedda! isn't this touching—eh?

HEDDA.

15

[Beside the whatnot on the right.] Well, what is it?

TESMAN.

My old morning-shoes! My slippers.

HEDDA.

Indeed. I remember you often spoke of them while we were abroad.

TESMAN.

Yes, I missed them terribly. [Goes up to her.] Now you shall see them, Hedda!

HEDDA.

[Going towards the stove.] Thanks, I really don't care about it.

TESMAN.

[Following her.] Only think—ill as she was, Aunt Rina embroidered these for me. Oh you can't think how many associations cling to them.

HEDDA.

[At the table.] Scarcely for me.

MISS TESMAN.

Of course not for Hedda, George.

TESMAN.

Well, but now that she belongs to the family, I thought—

HEDDA.

[Interrupting.] We shall never get on with this servant, Tesman.

MISS TESMAN.

Not get on with Berta?

TESMAN.

Why, dear, what puts that in your head? Eh?

HEDDA.

16

[Pointing.] Look there! She has left her old bonnet lying about on

a chair.

TESMAN.

[In consternation, drops the slippers on the floor.] Why, Hedda—

HEDDA.

Just fancy, if any one should come in and see it!

TESMAN.

But Hedda—that's Aunt Julia's bonnet.

HEDDA.

Is it!

MISS TESMAN.

[Taking up the bonnet.] Yes, indeed it's mine. And, what's more, it's not old, Madam Hedda.

HEDDA.

I really did not look closely at it, Miss Tesman.

MISS TESMAN.

[Trying on the bonnet.] Let me tell you it's the first time I have worn it—the very first time.

TESMAN.

And a very nice bonnet it is too—quite a beauty!

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, it's no such great things, George. [Looks around her.] My parasol—? Ah, here. [Takes it.] For this is mine too—[mutters]—not Berta's.

TESMAN.

A new bonnet and a new parasol! Only think, Hedda.

HEDDA.

17

Very handsome indeed.

TESMAN.

Yes, isn't it? Eh? But Auntie, take a good look at Hedda before you go! See how handsome she is!

MISS TESMAN.

Oh, my dear boy, there's nothing new in that. Hedda was always lovely.

[She nods and goes toward the right.

TESMAN.

[Following.] Yes, but have you noticed what splendid condition she is in? How she has filled out on the journey?

HEDDA.

[Crossing the room.] Oh, do be quiet—!

MISS TESMAN.

[Who has stopped and turned.] Filled out?

TESMAN.

Of course you don't notice it so much now that she has that dress on.

But I, who can see—

HEDDA.

[At the glass door, impatiently.] Oh, you can't see anything.

TESMAN.

It must be the mountain air in the Tyrol—

HEDDA.

[Curtly, interrupting.] I am exactly as I was when I started.

TESMAN.

So you insist; but I'm quite certain you are not. Don't you agree with me, Auntie?

MISS TESMAN.

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[Who has been gazing at her with folded hands.] Hedda is lovely—

lovely—lovely. [Goes up to her, takes her head between both hands, draws it downwards, and kisses her hair.] God bless and preserve Hedda Tesman—for George's sake.

HEDDA.

[Gently freeing herself.] Oh—! Let me go.

MISS TESMAN.

[In quiet emotion.] I shall not let a day pass without coming to see you.

TESMAN.

No you won't, will you, Auntie? Eh?

MISS TESMAN.

Good-bye—good-bye!

[She goes out by the hall door. TESMAN accompanies her. The door remains half open. TESMAN can be heard repeating his message to Aunt Rina and his thanks for the slippers.

[In the meantime, HEDDA walks about the room, raising her arms and clenching her hands as if in desperation. Then she flings back the curtains from the glass door, and stands there looking out.

[Presently, TESMAN returns and closes the door behind him.

TESMAN.

[Picks up the slippers from the floor.] What are you looking at, Hedda?

HEDDA.

[Once more calm and mistress of herself.] I am only looking at the leaves. They are so yellow—so withered.

TESMAN.

[Wraps up the slippers and lays them on the table.] Well, you see, we are well into September now.

HEDDA.

[Again restless.] Yes, to think of it!—already in—in September.

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TESMAN.

Don't you think Aunt Julia's manner was strange, dear? Almost solemn?

Can you imagine what was the matter with her? Eh?

HEDDA.

I scarcely know her, you see. Is she not often like that?

TESMAN.

No, not as she was to-day.

HEDDA.

[Leaving the glass door.] Do you think she was annoyed about the bonnet?

TESMAN.

Oh, scarcely at all. Perhaps a little, just at the moment—

HEDDA.

But what an idea, to pitch her bonnet about in the drawing-room! No one does that sort of thing.

TESMAN.

Well you may be sure Aunt Julia won't do it again.

HEDDA.

In any case, I shall manage to make my peace with her.

TESMAN.

Yes, my dear, good Hedda, if you only would.

HEDDA.

When you call this afternoon, you might invite her to spend the evening here.

TESMAN.

Yes, that I will. And there's one thing more you could do that would delight her heart.

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HEDDA.

What is it?

TESMAN.

If you could only prevail on yourself to say *du* (3) to her. For my sake, Hedda? Eh?

HEDDA.

No, no, Tesman—you really mustn't ask that of me. I have told you so already. I shall try to call her "Aunt"; and you must be satisfied with that.

TESMAN.

Well well. Only I think now that you belong to the family, you—

HEDDA.

H'm—I can't in the least see why—

[She goes up towards the middle doorway.]

TESMAN.

[After a pause.] Is there anything the matter with you, Hedda? Eh?

HEDDA.

I'm only looking at my old piano. It doesn't go at all well with all the other things.

TESMAN.

The first time I draw my salary, we'll see about exchanging it.

HEDDA.

No, no—no exchanging. I don't want to part with it. Suppose we put it there in the inner room, and then get another here in its place.

When it's convenient, I mean.

TESMAN.

[A little taken aback.] Yes—of course we could do that.

HEDDA.

21

[Takes up the bouquet from the piano.] These flowers were not here last night when we arrived.

TESMAN.

Aunt Julia must have brought them for you.

HEDDA.

[Examining the bouquet.] A visiting-card. [Takes it out and reads:] "Shall return later in the day." Can you guess whose card it is?

TESMAN.

No. Whose? Eh?

HEDDA.

The name is "Mrs. Elvsted."

TESMAN.

Is it really? Sheriff Elvsted's wife? Miss Rysing that was.

HEDDA.

Exactly. The girl with the irritating hair, that she was always showing off. An old flame of yours I've been told.

TESMAN.

[Laughing.] Oh, that didn't last long; and it was before I met you, Hedda. But fancy her being in town!

HEDDA.

It's odd that she should call upon us. I have scarcely seen her since we left school.

TESMAN.

I haven't see her either for—heaven knows how long. I wonder how she can endure to live in such an out-of-the way hole—eh?

HEDDA.

[After a moment's thought, says suddenly.] Tell me, Tesman—isn't it somewhere near there that he—that—Eilert Lovborg is living?

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TESMAN.

Yes, he is somewhere in that part of the country.

BERTA enters by the hall door.

BERTA.

That lady, ma'am, that brought some flowers a little while ago, is here again. [Pointing.] The flowers you have in your hand, ma'am.

HEDDA.

Ah, is she? Well, please show her in.

BERTA opens the door for MRS. ELVSTED, and goes out herself.

—MRS. ELVSTED is a woman of fragile figure, with pretty, soft features. Her eyes are light blue, large, round, and somewhat prominent, with a startled, inquiring expression. Her hair is remarkably light, almost flaxen, 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.

[Receives her warmly.] How do you do, my dear Mrs. Elvsted? It's delightful to see you again.

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Nervously, struggling for self-control.] Yes, it's a very long time since we met.

TESMAN.

[Gives her his hand.] And we too—eh?

HEDDA.

Thanks for your lovely flowers—

MRS. ELVSTED.

Oh, not at all—. I would have come straight here yesterday afternoon; but I heard that you were away—

TESMAN.

23

Have you just come to town? Eh?

MRS. ELVSTED.

I arrived yesterday, about midday. Oh, I was quite in despair when I heard that you were not at home.

HEDDA.

In despair! How so?

TESMAN.

Why, my dear Mrs. Rysing—I mean Mrs. Elvsted—

HEDDA.

I hope that you are not in any trouble?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, I am. And I don't know another living creature here that I can turn to.

HEDDA.

[Laying the bouquet on the table.] Come—let us sit here on the sofa—

MRS. ELVSTED.

Oh, I am too restless to sit down.

HEDDA.

Oh no, you're not. Come here.

[She draws MRS. ELVSTED down upon the sofa and sits at her side.

TESMAN.

Well? What is it, Mrs. Elvsted—?

HEDDA.

Has anything particular happened to you at home?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes—and no. Oh—I am so anxious you should not misunderstand me—

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HEDDA.

Then your best plan is to tell us the whole story, Mrs. Elvsted.

TESMAN.

I suppose that's what you have come for—eh?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, yes—of course it is. Well then, I must tell you—if you don't already know—that Eilert Lovborg is in town, too.

HEDDA.

Lovborg—!

TESMAN.

What! Has Eilert Lovborg come back? Fancy that, Hedda!

HEDDA.

Well well—I hear it.

MRS. ELVSTED.

He has been here a week already. Just fancy—a whole week! In this terrible town, alone! With so many temptations on all sides.

HEDDA.

But, my dear Mrs. Elvsted—how does he concern you so much?

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Looks at her with a startled air, and says rapidly.] He was the children's tutor.

HEDDA.

Your children's?

MRS. ELVSTED.

My husband's. I have none.

HEDDA.

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Your step-children's, then?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes.

TESMAN.

[Somewhat hesitatingly.] Then was he—I don't know how to express it—was he—regular enough in his habits to be fit for the post? Eh?

MRS. ELVSTED.

For the last two years his conduct has been irreproachable.

TESMAN.

Has it indeed? Fancy that, Hedda!

HEDDA.

I hear it.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Perfectly irreproachable, I assure you! In every respect. But all the same—now that I know he is here—in this great town—and with a large sum of money in his hands—I can't help being in mortal fear for him.

TESMAN.

Why did he not remain where he was? With you and your husband? Eh?

MRS. ELVSTED.

After his book was published he was too restless and unsettled to remain with us.

TESMAN.

Yes, by-the-bye, Aunt Julia told me he had published a new book.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, a big book, dealing with the march of civilisation—in broad outline, as it were. It came out about a fortnight ago. And since it has sold so well, and been so much read—and made such a sensation—

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TESMAN.

Has it indeed? It must be something he has had lying by since his better days.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Long ago, you mean?

TESMAN.

Yes.

MRS. ELVSTED.

No, he has written it all since he has been with us—within the last year.

TESMAN.

Isn't that good news, Hedda? Think of that.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Ah yes, if only it would last!

HEDDA.

Have you seen him here in town?

MRS. ELVSTED.

No, not yet. I have had the greatest difficulty in finding out his address. But this morning I discovered it at last.

HEDDA.

[Looks searchingly at her.] Do you know, it seems to me a little odd of your husband—h'm—

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Starting nervously.] Of my husband! What?

HEDDA.

That he should send you to town on such an errand—that he does not come himself and look after his friend.

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MRS. ELVSTED.

Oh no, no—my husband has no time. And besides, I—had some shopping to do.

HEDDA.

[With a slight smile.] Ah, that is a different matter.

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Rising quickly and uneasily.] And now I beg and implore you, Mr. Tesman—receive Eilert Lovborg kindly if he comes to you! And that he is sure to do. You see you were such great friends in the old days. And then you are interested in the same studies—the same branch of science—so far as I can understand.

TESMAN.

We used to be at any rate.

MRS. ELVSTED.

That is why I beg so earnestly that you—you too—will keep a sharp eye upon him. Oh, you will promise me that, Mr. Tesman—won't you?

TESMAN.

With the greatest of pleasure, Mrs. Rysing—

HEDDA.

Elvsted.

TESMAN.

I assure you I shall do all I possibly can for Eilert. You may rely upon me.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Oh, how very, very kind of you! [Presses his hands.] Thanks, thanks, thanks! [Frightened.] You see, my husband is so very fond of him!

HEDDA.

[Rising.] You ought to write to him, Tesman. Perhaps he may not care to come to you of his own accord.

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TESMAN.

Well, perhaps it would be the right thing to do, Hedda? Eh?

HEDDA.

And the sooner the better. Why not at once?

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Imploringly.] Oh, if you only would!

TESMAN.

I'll write this moment. Have you 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— [Looks about him.] By-the-bye,—my slippers? Oh, here. [Takes the packet and is about to go.]

HEDDA.

Be sure you write him a cordial, friendly letter. And a good long one too.

TESMAN.

Yes, I will.

MRS. ELVSTED.

But please, please don't say a word to show that I have suggested it.

TESMAN.

No, how could you think I would? Eh?

[He goes out to the right, through the inner room.]

HEDDA.

[Goes up to MRS. ELVSTED, smiles, and says in a low voice.] There!

We have killed two birds with one stone.

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MRS. ELVSTED.

What do you mean?

HEDDA.

Could you not see that I wanted him to go?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, to write the letter—

HEDDA.

And that I might speak to you alone.

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Confused.] About the same thing?

HEDDA.

Precisely.

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Apprehensively.] But there is nothing more, Mrs. Tesman! Absolutely nothing!

HEDDA.

Oh yes, but there is. There is a great deal more—I can see that.
Sit here—and we'll have a cosy, confidential chat.

[She forces MRS. ELVSTED to sit in the easy-chair beside the stove, and seats herself on one of the footstools.

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Anxiously, looking at her watch.] But, my dear Mrs. Tesman—I was really on the point of going.

HEDDA.

Oh, you can't be in such a hurry.—Well? Now tell me something about your life at home.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Oh, that is just what I care least to speak about.

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HEDDA.

But to me, dear—? Why, weren't we schoolfellows?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, but you were in the class above me. Oh, how dreadfully afraid of you I was then!

HEDDA.

Afraid of me?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, dreadfully. For when we met on the stairs you used always to pull my hair.

HEDDA.

Did I, really?

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, and once you said you would burn it off my head.

HEDDA.

Oh that was all nonsense, of course.

MRS. ELVSTED.

Yes, but I was so silly in those days.—And since then, too—we have drifted so far—far apart from each other. Our circles have been so entirely different.

HEDDA.

Well then, we must try to drift together again. Now listen. At school we said *du* (4) to each other; and we called each other by our Christian names—

MRS. ELVSTED.

No, I am sure you must be mistaken.

HEDDA.

No, not at all! I can remember quite distinctly. So now we are going to renew our old friendship. [Draws the footstool closer to

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MRS. ELVSTED.] There now! [Kisses her cheek.] You must say *du* to me and call me Hedda.

MRS. ELVSTED.

[Presses and pats her hands.] Oh, how good and kind you are! I am not used to such kindness.

HEDDA.

There, there, there! And I shall say *du* to you, as in the old days, and call you my dear Thora.

MRS. ELVSTED.

My name is Thea.(5)

HEDDA.

Why, of course! I meant Thea. [Looks at her compassionately.] So you are not accustomed to goodness and kindness, Thea? Not in your

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