

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.)

HEDDA (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—

HEDDA. 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—

HEDDA. 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?

HEDDA. 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.

HEDDA. Illusion?

BRACK. One that, in any case, you'd soon be deprived of.

HEDDA. And what's that?

BRACK. He didn't shoot himself—of his own free will.

HEDDA. He didn't—!

BRACK. No. This whole affair didn't go off quite the way I described it.

HEDDA (in suspense). You've hidden something? What is it?

BRACK. For poor Mrs. Elvsted's sake, I did a little editing here and there.

HEDDA. Where?

BRACK. First, the fact that he's already dead.

HEDDA. In the hospital?

BRACK. Yes. Without regaining consciousness.

HEDDA. What else did you hide?

BRACK. That the incident didn't occur in his room.

HEDDA. Well, that's rather unimportant.

BRACK. Not entirely. Suppose I were to tell you that Eilert Løvborg was found shot in—in Mademoiselle Diana's boudoir.

HEDDA (half rises, then sinks back again). That's impossible, Judge! He wouldn't have gone there again today!

BRACK. He was there this afternoon. He went there, demanding something he said they'd stolen from him. Kept raving about a lost child—

HEDDA. Ah—so that was it—

BRACK. I thought perhaps that might be his manuscript. But, I hear now, he destroyed that himself. So it must have been his wallet.

HEDDA. I suppose so. Then, there—that's where they found him.

BRACK. Yes, there. With a discharged pistol in his breast pocket. The bullet had wounded him fatally.

HEDDA. In the chest—yes.

BRACK. No—in the stomach—more or less.

HEDDA (stares up at him with a look of revulsion). That tool! What is it, this—this curse—that everything I touch turns ridiculous and vile?

BRACK. There's something else, Mrs. Hedda. Another ugly aspect to the case.

HEDDA. What's that?

BRACK. The pistol he was carrying—

HEDDA (breathlessly). Well! What about it!

BRACK. He must have stolen it.

HEDDA (springs up). Stolen! That's not true! He didn't!

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 set 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 taborets. 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. Because every other explanation would seem impossible, Mrs. Hedda.

HEDDA. I see.

BRACK (glancing at her). Of course, Eilert Løvborg was here this morning. Wasn't he?

HEDDA. Yes.

BRACK. Were you alone with him?

HEDDA. Yes, briefly.

BRACK. Did you leave the room while he was here?

HEDDA. No.

BRACK. Consider. You didn't leave, even for a moment.

HEDDA. Well, yes, perhaps, just for a moment—into the hall.

BRACK. And where did you have your pistol case?

HEDDA. I had it put away in—

BRACK. Yes, Mrs. Hedda?

HEDDA. It was lying over there, on the writing table.

BRACK. Have you looked since to see if both pistols are there?

HEDDA. No.

BRACK. No need to. I saw the pistol. Løvborg had it on him. I knew it immediately, from yesterday. And other days too.

HEDDA. Do you have it, maybe?

BRACK. No, the police have it.

HEDDA. What will they do with it?

BRACK. Try to trace it to the owner.

HEDDA. Do you think they'll succeed?

BRACK (bending over her and whispering). No, Hedda Gabler—as long as I keep quiet.

HEDDA (looking at him anxiously). And if you don't keep quiet—then what?

BRACK (with a shrug). Counsel could always claim that the pistol was stolen.

HEDDA (decisively). I'd rather die!

BRACK (smiling). People say such things. But they don't do them.

HEDDA (without answering). And what, then, if the pistol wasn't stolen. And they found the owner. What would happen?

BRACK. Well, Hedda—there'd be a scandal.

HEDDA. A scandal!

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 powerful woman, 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 Eilert 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 I 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 impetuously.*) 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, Thea? Here you are, sitting now beside Tesman—just as you used to sit with Eilert 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 need from me now?

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 Eilert, 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. 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*). I couldn't miss an evening, Mrs. Tesman! We'll have great times here together, the two of us!

HEDDA (*in a clear, ringing voice*). Yes, you can hope so, Judge, can't you? 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. HEDDA 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!

THE MASTER BUILDER