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Hedda Gabler

A play by

Henrik Ibsen

A version by

Christopher Hampton

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood

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CHARACTERS

Miss Juliane Tesman
Berte
George Tesman
Hedda Gabler
Mrs Elvsted
Judge Brack
Eilert Lovborg

The action takes place in Tesman's villa in the fashionable part of town

ACT I. Early morning
ACT II. Afternoon
ACT III. The next day at dawn
ACT IV. Evening

HEDDA GABLER

This version was presented by the National Theatre Company in the Olivier Auditorium of the National Theatre, London, on 2nd February, 1989, with the following cast:

Miss Juliane Tesman	Bridget Turner
Berte	Janet Whiteside
George Tesman	Paul Shelley
Hedda Gabler	Juliet Stevenson
Mrs Elvsted	Suzanne Burden
Judge Brack	Norman Rodway
Eilert Lovborg	Paul Jesson

Directed by Howard Davies
Designed by Bob Crowley

ACT I

Tesman's drawing-room. Early morning

A spacious, attractive and tastefully furnished drawing-room, decorated in dark colours. At the back, a wide doorway, which leads, as we can see through the open curtains, into a smaller room decorated in the same style as the drawing-room. In the R *wall of the front room, a double door, which leads out into the hall, is partly visible. In the opposite wall, on the* L*, a glass door, also with open curtains. Through this door we can see a covered verandah and trees in autumn colours. In the foreground, an oval table with a cover and a number of chairs. Downstage, on the* R *wall, a large dark porcelain stove, a high-backed armchair, a footstool with a cushion, and two other stools. Upstage, in the* R *corner, a sofa and small round table. Another sofa* DL*, a little way from the wall. Above the sofa, the portrait of a handsome, elderly man in a general's uniform. Upstage of the glass door, a grand piano. Whatnots, with terracotta and majolica ornaments, on either side of the doorway at the back. Against the back wall of the inner room, a table and a couple of chairs. Above the table, a hanging lamp with an opaque, milk-white glass shade. Around the drawing-room, a number of vases and glasses with flowers in them. More flowers lying on the tables. The floors in both rooms are thickly carpeted*

The sun streams in through the glass door

Miss Juliane Tesman, wearing a hat and carrying her parasol, comes in from the hall, followed by Berte, who carries a bunch of flowers wrapped in paper. Miss Tesman is about sixty-five; she looks pleasant and kindly and is dressed neatly but simply in a grey outdoor suit. Berte, the maid, is getting on in years; she looks plain and somewhat rustic. Miss Tesman stops just inside the door, listens and speaks quietly

Miss Tesman My goodness, they must still be in bed.

Berte (*also quietly*) That's what I was telling you, Miss. You know how late the steamer got in last night. And then there was all that unpacking the young lady wanted done before she would go to bed, I don't know.

Miss Tesman Oh, well, let them have a good sleep. But they'll be glad of some nice fresh air when they do get up. (*She goes over to the glass door and throws it wide open*)

Berte (*by the table, not knowing where to put the flowers*) There doesn't seem to be any room anywhere. I think I'll just leave them over here, Miss. (*She puts the flowers on the piano*)

Miss Tesman Well, Berte dear, you've got a new mistress now. God knows, parting with you was almost more than I could bear.

Berte (*close to tears*) What do you think it's like for me, Miss? It's years and years I've been working for you.

Miss Tesman We'll have to make the best of it, Berte. There's nothing else we can do. George depends on you, you see: completely. After all, you have looked after him since he was a little boy.

Berte Yes, but I can't stop thinking about Miss Rina, Miss. Lying at home there, absolutely helpless, poor thing. And that new maid. She'll never learn how to look after an invalid properly, never.

Miss Tesman Oh, it won't take me long to teach her. Anyway, I shall see to most of the work myself, you know that. You needn't worry about my poor sister, Berte dear.

Berte But that's not the only thing, Miss. I'm so frightened Mrs Tesman will think I'm not suitable.

Miss Tesman Oh, well, there might be one or two things when you first start . . .

Berte She does seem a bit superior.

Miss Tesman Well, that's only to be expected. She is General Gabler's daughter. Think what sort of a life she must have had when the general was alive. Do you remember how she used to go out riding with her father? That long, black riding outfit? And the feather in her hat?

Berte Yes, oh yes, I do. But I never thought then she would finish up marrying our little student.

Miss Tesman No, I didn't either. Not that George is a student any more, Berte. From now on, you'll have to call him Dr Tesman.

Berte So Mrs Tesman was saying last night, soon as they set foot in the house. Is that really true, Miss?

Miss Tesman Certainly. It's wonderful, isn't it, Berte. They made him a doctor when he was abroad, you know, on his tour. First thing I heard about it was when he told me last night on the quay.

Berte Well, I don't know, I'm sure he's clever enough to do anything. But I never thought he'd take up medicine.

Miss Tesman No, no, no, he's not that kind of doctor. (*She nods meaningfully*) You might have to call him something even more important soon.

Berte And what might that be, Miss?

Miss Tesman (*smiling*) Aha, wouldn't you like to know? (*Moved*) Oh, dear, oh, dear, if only poor Jochum could come back from the dead and see what's happened to his little boy. (*She looks around*) Just a minute, Berte, what have you done? Why have you taken the loose covers off the furniture?

Berte Mrs Tesman said. She said she can't stand loose covers on the chairs.

Miss Tesman They're not going to use this room for everyday, are they?

Berte Yes, I think so. That's what Mrs Tesman said, anyway. He, er, the doctor, I mean, didn't open his mouth.

George Tesman enters through the inner room, humming and carrying an empty, open suitcase. He is a young-looking man of average height, about thirty-three, quite plump, with a round, open, cheerful face and blond hair and beard. He wears glasses and comfortable, somewhat shabby indoor clothes

Miss Tesman Good-morning, George, good-morning!

Tesman (*in the doorway*) Auntie Julia! (*He goes over to her and shakes her hand enthusiastically*) Dear Auntie Julia. All this way. At this hour of the morning, mm?

Miss Tesman Well, I wanted to come and see how you were getting on.

Tesman But you can't have had a proper night's sleep.

Miss Tesman Oh, that doesn't matter at all.

Tesman Well. You . . . er . . . got home all right from the quay. Mm?
Miss Tesman Yes, quite all right, thank goodness. Judge Brack was kind enough to see me all the way to my door.
Tesman We were terribly sorry there wasn't room for you in our carriage. But you could see what a lot of luggage Hedda had with her, couldn't you?
Miss Tesman Yes, she certainly had a great deal of luggage.
Berte (*to Tesman*) Shall I go and ask Mrs Tesman if there's anything I can do to help?
Tesman No, thank you, Berte, never mind. She said she'd ring if she wanted anything.
Berte (*moving towards the* R) All right, then.
Tesman One thing, look, could you just put this suitcase away somewhere?
Berte (*taking it*) I'll put it in the attic.

Berte goes out through the hall door

Tesman Can you imagine, Auntie, that suitcase was absolutely bursting with copies I made of various documents. All those archives I looked at, I made the most incredible discoveries. Strange forgotten details nobody else knows anything about.
Miss Tesman Well, you don't seem to have wasted any time on your honeymoon, George.
Tesman No, I haven't, no, no. Why don't you take your bonnet off, Auntie? May I undo the bow, mm?
Miss Tesman (*as he does so*) Dear, oh, dear, it's just as if you'd never left home.
Tesman (*turning the hat around in his hand*) What a lovely smart hat you've bought yourself.
Miss Tesman I bought it because of Hedda.
Tesman Mm? Because of Hedda?
Miss Tesman Yes, so Hedda wouldn't be ashamed of me if we went out for a walk.
Tesman (*stroking her cheek*) Really, you think of everything, Auntie Julia. (*He puts the hat down on a chair by the table*) Now. Look. Why don't we sit down on the sofa and have a little chat before Hedda joins us?

They sit down. She puts her parasol in a corner on the sofa

Miss Tesman (*taking both his hands and looking at him*) It's marvellous to see you again, George, sitting there large as life. Poor Jochum's little boy.
Tesman And for me, Auntie Julia, to see you. I mean, to me, you've always seemed like a mother and a father.
Miss Tesman Yes, I'm sure you'll go on being fond of your old aunt.
Tesman And how's Auntie Rina? Is there any improvement, mm?
Miss Tesman Oh, no, poor thing, I don't think we can hope for any improvement. There she is, lying there just as helpless as she has been all these years. I only hope God lets me keep her for a little bit longer. Otherwise, I wouldn't know what to do with my life, George. Especially now I haven't got you to look after any more.

Tesman (*patting her on the back*) Now then, there, there.

Miss Tesman (*a sudden change of tone*) I can't get over the fact that you're married now, George. And to Hedda Gabler of all people, the beautiful Hedda Gabler. It's extraordinary, when you think of how many admirers she used to have.

Tesman (*humming a little and smiling; complacently*) Yes, I should think quite a few of my friends in town must be pretty jealous, don't you think, mm?

Miss Tesman And you had such a lovely long honeymoon—five, no more than that, nearly six months.

Tesman Well, I did have a lot of research to do. Investigating all those archives and ploughing through mountains of books.

Miss Tesman Yes, I know you did. (*Lowering her voice confidentially*) Listen, George, you haven't—you haven't anything special to tell me, have you?

Tesman About the tour?

Miss Tesman Yes.

Tesman No, I don't think there was anything except what I told you in my letters. I took my doctor's degree abroad, but I told you about that yesterday.

Miss Tesman Yes, yes, I know about that. What I meant was I was wondering if you had any . . . expectations.

Tesman Expectations?

Miss Tesman Oh, George, I am your auntie after all.

Tesman Well, of course I've got expectations.

Miss Tesman You have?

Tesman Yes, I expect to be made a professor before very long. That's my main expectation.

Miss Tesman Yes, to be made a professor, but . . .

Tesman Yes, I might even say it's a certainty. But, Auntie, you know about that already, dear.

Miss Tesman (*chuckling*) Yes, you're right, I do, yes. (*Changing the subject*) But your tour must have cost an awful lot of money, George.

Tesman Yes, well, the grant was very generous, that went quite a long way towards it.

Miss Tesman Yes, but what I can't understand is how you stretched it out to pay for both of you.

Tesman Ah, that is rather extraordinary, isn't it, mm?

Miss Tesman Not only that, but they always say travelling with a lady is inordinately expensive.

Tesman Yes, that's to be expected, it does mean a little extra expense. But Hedda had to have that trip, Auntie. Really, she had to. Nothing else would have done.

Miss Tesman No, I suppose not. People always seem to insist on a honeymoon abroad nowadays. Now, what I want to know is whether you've had a proper look round the house yet.

Tesman Oh, yes, I've been up and about since dawn.

Miss Tesman And what do you think of it?

Tesman It's marvellous. Absolutely marvellous. The only thing I'm not sure about is what we're going to do with those two empty rooms between the back room there and Hedda's bedroom.

Miss Tesman (*chuckling*) Ah, George, dear, I expect you'll find some use for them, sooner or later.

Tesman Yes, Auntie, I'm sure you're right. Somewhere to put all those extra books.

Miss Tesman Yes, dear, books, yes, that's what I meant.

Tesman Anyway, it's because of Hedda that I'm really pleased about the house. Before we were engaged, she always used to say the only place she really wanted to live was Secretary Falk's villa.

Miss Tesman Amazing that it should have come up for sale just after you went away.

Tesman Yes, Auntie, the luck's really been on our side, hasn't it, mm?

Miss Tesman But it's expensive, isn't it, George? It's all going to be very expensive.

Tesman (*somewhat crestfallen*) Yes, I suppose it is.

Miss Tesman Of course it is.

Tesman How much would you say? I mean approximately? Mm?

Miss Tesman Won't be able to tell until I see all the bills.

Tesman Well, luckily Judge Brack has managed to get me the very best terms. He wrote to Hedda about it.

Miss Tesman There's no need to worry about it, dear. I've given a guarantee for the furniture and all the carpets.

Tesman Guarantee? You have? But how could you, Auntie? What kind of guarantee?

Miss Tesman I've taken out a mortgage on our annuity.

Tesman (*jumping to his feet*) What? You mean on the annuity you and Auntie Rina . . .

Miss Tesman Well, I couldn't think what else to do.

Tesman (*standing in front of her*) But, Auntie, have you gone mad? Mm? That annuity is the only thing you and Auntie Rina have to live on.

Miss Tesman Now, don't upset yourself. It's only a formality, you know. That's what Judge Brack said. He was kind enough to make all the arrangements for me. And he said it was only a formality.

Tesman Yes, that's as may be. All the same . . .

Miss Tesman Anyway, from now on you'll have your salary coming in. And, good Lord, what if it does cost us a bit? A little something to start you off with, you know we'd be only too pleased.

Tesman Oh, Auntie, you're always ready to make sacrifices for me.

Miss Tesman (*getting up and putting her hand on his shoulder*) My dear boy, what other pleasures do I have in this world, besides helping to smooth your way? After all, you've had no father or mother to turn to. And we've got what we were aiming for now. Sometimes things have seemed very black. But, thank God, George, you've come through it all.

Tesman Yes, strange, isn't it, how everything has worked out for the best?

Miss Tesman Yes, and the people who stood in your way and tried to hold you back have come to grief, George, and fallen by the wayside. The biggest threat of all is the one who fell the hardest. And as he made his bed, so he must lie on it, poor misguided wretch.

Tesman Erm, have you had any more news about Eilert? Since I went away, I mean?

Miss Tesman No. Except he's supposed to have published some new book.

Tesman Really? What, Eilert Lovborg? Recent, is that, mm?

Miss Tesman Yes, apparently. Goodness knows whether it's any good. Now when your new book comes out, George, that'll be a different matter. What's it about?

Tesman Medieval husbandry in Brabant.

Miss Tesman Fancy you being able to write about that sort of thing!

Tesman Mind you, it'll probably be some time before it comes out. I've got all those papers to sort through and catalogue first, you see.

Miss Tesman Yes, sorting and cataloguing, you know all about that. You're Jochum's son, all right.

Tesman Anyway, I'm certainly looking forward to getting down to work. Especially now I've got my own home to work in.

Miss Tesman And now you've got the wife you set your heart on, George dear, that's the most important thing of all.

Tesman (*putting his arms round her*) Oh, yes, Auntie, yes. Hedda. She's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. (*He looks over to the doorway*) That's her now, isn't it, mm?

Hedda enters from the L *through the back room. She is a woman of twenty-nine. Her face and figure are refined and distinguished. Her complexion is pale and lustreless. Her eyes are steel-grey, cold, clear and calm. Her medium brown hair is beautiful, without being particularly abundant. She wears a tasteful, loose-fitting morning gown*

Miss Tesman (*going to meet Hedda*) Good-morning, Hedda, my dear. How are you, good-morning.

Hedda Good-morning, Miss Tesman. How kind of you to call. And so early.

Miss Tesman (*somewhat embarrassed*) Well, and ... er ... did the bride sleep well in her new home?

Hedda Yes, thank you. Tolerably.

Tesman (*laughing*) Tolerably? Come on, Hedda, you were sleeping like a log when I got up.

Hedda Fortunately. It always takes time to get used to anything new, Miss Tesman. It's a gradual business. (*She looks over to the* L) Ah, the maid's left the verandah door open, all that sun pouring in.

Miss Tesman (*moving towards the door*) Well, let's shut it, then.

Hedda No, no, don't. Tesman, draw the curtain instead. Give us a softer light.

Tesman (*at the door*) Of course. (*Closing the curtains*) There we are, Hedda, shade *and* fresh air.

Hedda Yes, we could do with some fresh air. All these wretched flowers. Now, won't you sit down, Miss Tesman?

Miss Tesman No, thank you. Now I know everything's all right here, I'd better be getting along home. My sister will be lying waiting, she misses me very badly when I'm away, poor dear.

Tesman Don't forget to give her my love. And tell her I'll be popping in to see her later on in the day.

Miss Tesman Yes, all right, I will. Oh, by the way, George ... (*She fumbles in the pocket of her dress*) I almost forgot, I've got something for you.

Tesman What? What is it, Auntie? Mm?

Miss Tesman (*pulling out a flat parcel wrapped in newspaper and handing it to him*) Here you are, dear.

Tesman (*opening it*) Ah, Auntie Julia, no, did you save them for me? Hedda! Isn't that really touching, don't you think, mm?

Hedda (*beside the whatnot on the* R) Yes, dear. What is it?

Tesman My old house shoes. You know, my slippers.

Hedda Oh, yes, I remember you talked about them frequently while we were abroad.

Tesman Well, I missed them so much. (*He goes over to her*) Here they are, Hedda, have a look.

Hedda (*crossing to the stove*) No, thanks, I'd really rather not.

Tesman (*following her*) Can you imagine, Auntie Rina embroidered them for me herself, even though she was ill in bed. You can't think how many memories they bring back.

Hedda (*by the table*) Not to me.

Miss Tesman Hedda has a point there, George.

Tesman Yes, but I mean, now she's one of the family——

Hedda (*interrupting*) We'll never be able to put up with that maid, Tesman.

Miss Tesman With Berte?

Tesman Whatever makes you think that, dear? Mm?

Hedda (*pointing*) Well, she's left her old hat on the chair, look.

Tesman (*dropping his slippers on the floor in amazement*) But, Hedda ...

Hedda Anyone could come in and see it.

Tesman But, Hedda, that's Auntie Julia's bonnet.

Hedda Oh, really?

Miss Tesman (*picking up the hat*) Yes, it is mine. And it's not old either, Hedda.

Hedda I really didn't look at it very carefully, Miss Tesman.

Miss Tesman (*tying the hat on*) It's actually the first time I've ever worn it, I can assure you of that.

Tesman Well, and very nice it is too. Beautiful.

Miss Tesman No, George, it's very ordinary. (*She looks around her*) Now, where's that parasol? Ah. (*She picks it up*) That's mine as well. (*Mumbling*) Not Berte's.

Tesman A new hat and a new parasol, can you imagine, Hedda?

Hedda Yes, very pretty, lovely.

Tesman Yes, they are, aren't they? Mm? Auntie, before you go, have a good look at Hedda. Now she is very pretty and lovely.

Miss Tesman Well, my dear, there's nothing surprising about that. Hedda's been beautiful all her life. (*She nods and moves towards the* R)

Tesman (*following*) Yes, but have you noticed how chubby and healthy she looks? She really filled out while we were abroad.

Hedda (*crossing the room*) Oh, that's enough!

Miss Tesman (*stopping and turning round*) Filled out?

Tesman Yes, Auntie, it doesn't show very much when she's got that dress on. But I'm lucky enough——

Hedda (*by the glass door; impatiently*) You're not lucky enough for anything.

Tesman It's probably the mountain air in the Tyrol——

Hedda (*interrupting curtly*) I'm exactly the same now as I was when I went away.

Tesman So you keep saying. But you're not. Don't you agree with me, Auntie?

Miss Tesman (*standing looking at her with folded hands*) Hedda is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. (*She goes up to her, takes her head in both hands, bends it forward and kisses her hair*) God bless you and keep you, Hedda Tesman. For George's sake.

Hedda (*gently freeing herself*) Oh . . . let go of me.

Miss Tesman (*quietly moved*) I shall come and see you both every day.

Tesman Yes, Auntie, you make sure you do, mm?

Miss Tesman Goodbye. Goodbye.

Miss Tesman goes out through the hall door. Tesman follows her, leaving the door ajar

We hear Tesman repeating his good wishes to Auntie Rina and his thanks for the slippers. Meanwhile, Hedda walks across the room and raises her arms, clenching her hands as if in anger. She draws the curtains in front of the glass door and stands there looking out

A moment later, Tesman reappears, closing the door behind him

Tesman (*picking up his slippers from the floor*) What are you looking at, Hedda?

Hedda (*calm and controlled now*) I'm just standing here looking at the leaves. They're so yellow. And dried up.

Tesman (*wrapping up the slippers and putting them down on the table*) Yes, we're well into September now, after all.

Hedda (*restless again*) Yes, we are. Already, in . . . into September.

Tesman Didn't you think Auntie Julia was a bit odd today? Sort of formal? Any idea what was the matter with her? Mm?

Hedda I hardly know her. Isn't she usually like that?

Tesman No, not as a rule.

Hedda (*moving away from the glass door*) Was she upset by what I said about her hat, do you think?

Tesman Oh, not particularly. Perhaps at the time she was a little.

Hedda But fancy leaving your hat lying around like that in the drawing-room. It's just not done.

Tesman Well, I'm sure Auntie Julia won't do it again.

Hedda Anyway, I shall try to make it up with her.

Tesman Yes, Hedda, if you could, dear, that would be nice.

Hedda When you go and see them this afternoon why don't you ask her over for the evening?

Tesman Yes, I will, I will. And there's one other thing you could do that would really make her happy.

Hedda What?

Tesman If you could perhaps stop calling her Miss Tesman, mm? For my sake.

Hedda No, Tesman, I couldn't. You mustn't keep asking me, we've discussed this before. If you like I'll try to call her aunt, all right? But that's the best I can do.

Tesman It's just that now you're one of the family . . .

Hedda I can't see what . . . (*She crosses over to the door*)

Tesman (*after a pause*) Is anything the matter? Mm?

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

Tesman Well, as soon as I start getting my salary, we'll see about having it exchanged.

Hedda Exchanged? That's not what I meant, I don't want to get rid of it. I thought we could move it into the back room there, and get another one to put here in its place. I mean, as soon as we can manage it.

Tesman (*slightly dejected*) Oh. Yes, well, why not?

Hedda (*picking the bouquet up from the piano*) These flowers weren't here when we got in last night.

Tesman Auntie Julia probably brought them for you.

Hedda (*examining the bouquet*) Here's a visiting card. (*She takes it out and reads it*) "Will call in again later on today". Guess who it's from.

Tesman I don't know. Who? Mm?

Hedda It says "Mrs Elvsted".

Tesman Really? Wasn't she Miss Rysing? Before she married the magistrate?

Hedda Yes, that's right. She had that irritating hair she was always flaunting. I was told she was an old flame of yours.

Tesman (*laughing*) Oh, that didn't last long. And it was before I met you, Hedda. But what's she doing in town? It's extraordinary.

Hedda It's strange she should want to call on us. I haven't seen her since I left school.

Tesman Yes, it's God knows how long since I've seen her. I don't know how she puts up with it, living up there in that out-of-the-way hole, do you? Mm?

Hedda considers a moment

Hedda (*suddenly*) Listen, Tesman, isn't he . . . doesn't he live somewhere up round there . . .? Eilert Lovborg?

Tesman Yes, somewhere in that area.

Berte appears in the hall doorway

Berte That lady who called a while ago and left some flowers is here again, madam. (*Pointing to the flowers*) Those flowers you're holding.

Hedda Oh, is she? Would you show her in, please?

Berte opens the door for Mrs Elvsted and goes out herself. Mrs Elvsted is a fragile-looking woman with beautiful, soft features. Her eyes are pale blue, large, round and somewhat protruding, with a frightened and puzzled expression. Her hair is remarkably fair, almost flaxen, abundant and wavy. She

is a few years younger than Hedda. She wears a dark morning suit, tasteful, but not quite in the latest fashion

(*Approaching her warmly*) How are you, Mrs Elvsted? It's lovely to see you again.

Mrs Elvsted (*trying to control her nervousness*) Well, it's been a very long time . . .

Tesman (*stretching out his hand*) Yes, it has, hasn't it? Mm?

Hedda Thank you for the beautiful flowers.

Mrs Elvsted Oh, that's all right . . . I wanted to come straight here yesterday afternoon, but I heard you were still away . . .

Tesman You've only just arrived in town, have you? Mm?

Mrs Elvsted Yesterday afternoon. I got quite desperate when I heard that you weren't at home.

Hedda Desperate? Why?

Tesman But, my dear Mrs Rysing . . . I mean, Mrs Elvsted.

Hedda I hope there's nothing wrong.

Mrs Elvsted Yes, there is. And I don't know a single person here I can turn to, except for you.

Hedda (*putting the bouquet down on the table*) Come on, let's sit down here on the sofa.

Mrs Elvsted Oh, no, I feel much too restless to sit down.

Hedda No you don't. Come on. (*She pushes Mrs Elvsted down on the sofa and sits next to her*)

Tesman Now, what's the matter, Mrs erm . . .?

Hedda Is there something wrong at home?

Mrs Elvsted Yes, well, there is and there isn't. The thing is, I don't want you to misunderstand me.

Hedda Well then, you'd better tell us everything as plainly as possible.

Tesman After all, I expect that's why you came, isn't it, mm?

Mrs Elvsted Yes, of course it is . . . well . . . I should tell you, if you don't already know, that Eilert Lovborg is here in town.

Hedda Lovborg . . .

Tesman No, really, has Eilert Lovborg come back? Did you hear that, Hedda? Extraordinary!

Hedda Of course I heard, my God.

Mrs Elvsted He's been here about a week already. A whole week. In this dangerous town. Alone. Mixing in all that bad company.

Hedda But, my dear Mrs Elvsted, what's he got to do with you?

Frightened, Mrs Elvsted looks up at Hedda

Mrs Elvsted (*quickly*) Oh, well, he used to be the children's tutor.

Hedda You have children?

Mrs Elvsted No, no, I don't. They're my husband's.

Hedda Oh, your stepchildren.

Mrs Elvsted Yes.

Tesman (*groping for the words*) But was he sufficiently . . . er . . . I don't quite know how to put this . . . was he, um, sufficiently regular in his way of life to be suitable for a job like that? Mm?

Mrs Elvsted In the last two years his behaviour has been impeccable.
Tesman Really? Extraordinary. Did you hear that, Hedda?
Hedda Yes, I did.
Mrs Elvsted Impeccable. I promise you. In every way. But even so, now I know he's here in a big town, with all that money on him . . . I'm terrified of what might happen to him.
Tesman But why didn't he stay where he was? With you and your husband? Mm?
Mrs Elvsted Since his book was published, he's been far too restless to settle down at home.
Tesman Yes, that's right. Auntie Julia told me he'd published a new book.
Mrs Elvsted Yes, it's a wonderful new book about the history of civilization, sort of a general outline. It's been out about a fortnight. It's sold very well, a lot of people have read it, it's caused something of a sensation . . .
Tesman Has it? I suppose it must be something he's been saving since . . . happier days.
Mrs Elvsted Do you mean some time ago?
Tesman Yes.
Mrs Elvsted Oh, no, he's written it all since he came to us . . . over the last year.
Tesman Well, that's good tidings, isn't it, Hedda? Extraordinary.
Mrs Elvsted Yes, if only it would last.
Hedda Have you found him yet?
Mrs Elvsted No, not yet. I had the greatest difficulty tracking down his address. But I finally managed to this morning.
Hedda (*looking inquiringly at her*) Actually, I think it's a bit strange that your husband . . . ah . . .
Mrs Elvsted (*starting nervously*) My husband? What do you mean?
Hedda Well, that he should send you into town to run his errands. And not come in himself to look after his friend.
Mrs Elvsted Oh, no, my husband hasn't the time for that kind of thing. Anyway, I had some shopping to do.
Hedda (*ghost of a smile*) Oh, well, then . . .
Mrs Elvsted (*getting up hastily and rather uneasily*) I just wanted to ask you, Mr Tesman, please be kind to Eilert Lovborg if he comes to see you, please. Because I'm sure he will. After all, you used to be very close friends. And aren't you both studying the same subject? You're in the same faculty, aren't you? As far as I can remember.
Tesman Used to be, anyway, yes.
Mrs Elvsted Well then, please, can I ask you very seriously to keep a sharp eye on him, as well? Will you promise me that, Mr Tesman, will you?
Tesman Of course, it'll be a pleasure, Mrs Rysing . . .
Hedda Elvsted.
Tesman I'll do anything I can for Eilert, I promise. You can rely on me.
Mrs Elvsted That's terribly kind of you. (*She presses his hands*) Thank you, thank you, thank you. (*Frightened*) It's my husband, you see, he thinks such a lot of him.

Hedda (*getting up*) You ought to write to him, Tesman. He might not come to see you of his own accord.
Tesman Yes, Hedda, perhaps that might be the best way of going about things, do you think? Mm?
Hedda The sooner the better. Now, I'd say.
Mrs Elvsted (*imploringly*) Oh, why don't you?
Tesman I'll write to him now, Mrs erm, this minute. Have you got his address, Mrs . . . Elvsted?
Mrs Elvsted Yes. (*She takes a small piece of paper out of her pocket and gives it to him*) Here.
Tesman Good, well done. I'll go and do it now then. (*Casting about him*) Just a minute. Where are my slippers? Oh, yes. (*He picks up the packet and is on his way out*)
Hedda Make it a warm, friendly letter, will you? And long.
Tesman Right.
Mrs Elvsted But don't tell him I asked you, please, will you?
Tesman Of course not, that goes without saying, doesn't it? Mm?

Tesman exits through the back room

Hedda (*going over to Mrs Elvsted, smiling; in a low voice*) That is killing two birds with one stone.
Mrs Elvsted What do you mean?
Hedda Couldn't you tell I was trying to get rid of him?
Mrs Elvsted Well, yes, to write the letter . . .
Hedda And because I wanted to talk to you alone.
Mrs Elvsted (*confused*) About the same thing?
Hedda Exactly.
Mrs Elvsted (*apprehensively*) But there's nothing more to say about it, Mrs Tesman. Honestly, nothing.
Hedda Oh, yes, there is. A lot. I can tell. Come here. Come and sit down and we can have a nice, private conversation.

She forces Mrs Elvsted to sit in the armchair by the stove and then sits on one of the stools

Mrs Elvsted (*looking nervously at her watch*) But, Mrs Tesman, I really think it's time I was on my way.
Hedda I'm sure you can't be in that much of a hurry. Now. Tell me something about what sort of life you lead at home.
Mrs Elvsted That's the last thing I want to talk about.
Hedda Even to me? After all, dear, we were at school together.
Mrs Elvsted Yes, but you were in the class above me. And I was terribly frightened of you in those days.
Hedda Frightened? Of me?
Mrs Elvsted Yes. Terribly frightened. When we passed on the stairs you always used to pull my hair.
Hedda I didn't, did I?
Mrs Elvsted Yes, and one day you said you wanted to set fire to it.
Hedda Yes, but that was just fooling about, you must know that.
Mrs Elvsted Yes, but I was so stupid in those days. And since then, I mean

since we left school, we seem to have drifted such a long . . . such a long way away from each other. We've moved in completely different circles.

Hedda Well, now's our chance to get together again. Listen, we used to be very friendly at school. We used to call each other by our Christian names.

Mrs Elvsted I don't think so. I think you must be mistaken.

Hedda Of course I'm not. No, I remember distinctly. So let's be friends now, as we were in the old days. (*She moves the stool nearer to Mrs Elvsted*) All right? (*She kisses her on the cheek*) And you must call me Hedda.

Mrs Elvsted (*pressing and stroking her hands*) You're very kind to me. I'm not really used to kindness.

Hedda It's all right. I'll be your friend again, as I was before, and call you Thora.

Mrs Elvsted Thea it is, actually.

Hedda Thea, yes, that's right. Of course. That's what I meant. (*She looks at her sympathetically*) So, Thea, you're not really used to kindness? Not even in your own home?

Mrs Elvsted Well, perhaps if I had a home. But I haven't. I never have had.

Hedda (*considering her for a moment*) I thought it might be something like that.

Mrs Elvsted (*looking helplessly in front of her*) Yes . . . yes . . .yes.

Hedda I can't quite remember. But when you first went up to the magistrate's house, didn't you go as housekeeper?

Mrs Elvsted No, governess they took me on as in the first place. But his wife, I mean his first wife, wasn't very well. She was bedridden most of the time. So I had to look after the house as well.

Hedda Until in the end it was your house.

Mrs Elvsted (*sadly*) Yes, that's right.

Hedda Now, let me think. How long is it since you . . .?

Mrs Elvsted Since I got married?

Hedda Yes.

Mrs Elvsted Five years.

Hedda Yes, that's right, it must be.

Mrs Elvsted Those five years! Especially the last two or three of them. You can't imagine what it's been like, Mrs Tesman.

Hedda (*tapping her lightly on the hand*) Mrs Tesman? Now really, Thea.

Mrs Elvsted Yes, I'm sorry. I'll try . . . Hedda. You can't begin to imagine what it's been like . . .

Hedda (*casually*) Eilert Lovborg's been up with you for about three years, hasn't he?

Mrs Elvsted (*looking at her dubiously*) Eilert Lovborg? Yes.

Hedda Did you know him before, when you were living here?

Mrs Elvsted Not really. I mean, I'd heard of him, obviously.

Hedda But when he moved to the country, you saw quite a lot of him?

Mrs Elvsted Yes, he used to come every day. To give the children lessons. In the end I found I couldn't manage everything on my own.

Hedda No, I can understand that. What about your husband? Does he have to do a lot of travelling?

Mrs Elvsted Yes. As a magistrate, he has to travel about quite a bit in his district, well, I'm sure you know that, Mrs . . . er, Hedda.

Hedda (*leaning against the arm of the chair*) Poor Thea. Listen, Thea, dear, you're going to tell me everything now, the whole story.

Mrs Elvsted It's better if you ask the questions.

Hedda What kind of man is your husband, Thea? I mean, you know, what's he like at home? Is he good to you?

Mrs Elvsted (*evasively*) Well, I think he believes that everything he does is for the best.

Hedda It's just I was thinking he's probably rather old for you. More than twenty years older, isn't he?

Mrs Elvsted (*irritably*) Yes, there's that as well. And there are other things. Everything about him disgusts me! I mean, we have nothing in common, neither of us, not a single thought.

Hedda But he cares for you, doesn't he? In his own way?

Mrs Elvsted Oh, I don't know what he feels. I'm useful to him anyway, and that's probably as far as it goes. And I don't cost him very much either. I'm very cheap.

Hedda That's very silly of you.

Mrs Elvsted (*shaking her head*) It will never change. Not with him. I don't think he cares for anyone but himself. Except the children, perhaps.

Hedda And Eilert Lovborg.

Mrs Elvsted (*looking at her*) Eilert Lovborg? What makes you think that?

Hedda Well, if he sends you all this way into town to look for him. (*An almost imperceptible smile*) Anyway, that's what you said to Tesman.

Mrs Elvsted (*a nervous twitch*) Was it? Yes, I suppose it was. (*Quietly, but vehemently*) I might just as well tell you everything. It's bound to come out sooner or later anyway.

Hedda What is, Thea?

Mrs Elvsted Well, to cut a long story short, my husband didn't know I was coming.

Hedda What? Didn't he know anything about it?

Mrs Elvsted Of course he didn't. He wasn't even at home. He's away, travelling. I just couldn't stand it any longer, Hedda! I really couldn't. Spending the rest of my life up there completely on my own.

Hedda So . . .?

Mrs Elvsted So I packed a few of my things. What I needed most. As discreetly as I could. And left the house.

Hedda Without telling anyone?

Mrs Elvsted Yes, and I caught the train into town.

Hedda But, Thea, my dear, I don't know how you dared.

Mrs Elvsted (*getting up and crossing the room*) What else could I have done?

Hedda But what's your husband going to say when you get back?

Mrs Elvsted (*by the table, looking across at her*) Back to him?

Hedda Well, yes.

Mrs Elvsted I'm not going back to him. Ever.

Hedda (*getting up and moving towards her*) You mean . . . you've left home now . . . for good?

Mrs Elvsted Yes. There didn't seem to be any alternative.

Hedda What, openly? Just like that?

Mrs Elvsted Well, you can't very well keep a thing like that secret, can you?
Hedda But, Thea, what do you think people are going to say about all this?
Mrs Elvsted I don't know, they can say what they like. (*She sits down sadly and wearily on the sofa*) What I've done, I did because I had to.
Hedda (*after a short silence*) And what are you thinking of doing now? How will you proceed?
Mrs Elvsted I don't know. All I know is, I must live here, where Eilert Lovborg is, if I'm to live at all.
Hedda (*moving a chair from the table, sitting next to her and stroking her hands*) Thea, tell me, how did this . . . friendship develop between you and Eilert Lovborg?
Mrs Elvsted Oh, it happened gradually. And after a bit I found I had a kind of power over him.
Hedda Oh, really?
Mrs Elvsted And he started giving up his old habits. Not that I asked him to, I'd never have dared to do that. But I'm sure he noticed how much they upset me. So he just abandoned them.
Hedda (*concealing an involuntary smile of contempt*) So, little Thea to the rescue, you might say.
Mrs Elvsted Well, that's what he says, anyway. And in return he . . . showed me how to be a real human being. Taught me how to think and how to understand all sorts of things.
Hedda So he gave you lessons as well, did he?
Mrs Elvsted Well, not exactly lessons. He just talked to me. We talked endlessly about everything. And then there was a wonderfully happy time when he let me share in his work. And help him.
Hedda He let you do that?
Mrs Elvsted Oh, yes! Whenever he wrote anything, we always worked at it together.
Hedda Soulmates, were you?
Mrs Elvsted (*enthusiastically*) Soulmates! It's funny, Hedda, that's what he used to say. I ought to feel gloriously happy. But I can't, because I don't know how long it's going to last.
Hedda Don't you trust him any more than that?
Mrs Elvsted (*sadly*) There's still something between Eilert Lovborg and me. The shadow of a woman.
Hedda (*looking at her in suspense*) Who?
Mrs Elvsted I don't know. Someone in his . . . in the past. Someone he's never quite been able to forget.
Hedda What has he told you about her?
Mrs Elvsted He's only ever made one casual reference to her.
Hedda And what did he say?
Mrs Elvsted He said that when they had to part, she threatened to shoot him with her pistol.
Hedda (*cold, composed*) Oh, nonsense, people never behave like that.
Mrs Elvsted No. That's why I think it must be that red-headed singer he used to——
Hedda Yes, very probably.

Mrs Elvsted I remember hearing about her; apparently she used to carry loaded guns.
Hedda Oh, well then, it must have been her.
Mrs Elvsted (*wringing her hands*) Yes, but the thing is, Hedda, I've just heard that the singer is here in town. Oh, I feel so desperate . . .
Hedda (*glancing towards the back room*) Sh! Here's Tesman. (*She gets up. Whispering*) Thea, all this is between you and me.
Mrs Elvsted (*jumping up*) Oh, yes, please, for God's sake . . .

George Tesman comes in from R, *through the back room, holding a letter*

Tesman Well, here's my missive. All signed and sealed.
Hedda Good. I think Mrs Elvsted has to be going now. Wait a minute, I'll just see her to the garden gate.
Tesman Hedda, perhaps Berte could take care of this, could she?
Hedda (*taking the letter*) Yes, I'll tell her.

Berte comes into the front room

Berte Judge Brack is here. He says he'd like to see you.
Hedda Yes, show him in, would you? And listen, could you put this letter in the post?
Berte (*taking the letter*) Yes, madam.

Berte opens the door for Judge Brack, and then goes out. The Judge is a man of about forty-five—thickset, but well-built and supple in his movements. A roundish face with a distinguished profile. His hair is cut short, still almost black, and meticulously groomed. His eyes are lively and alert. His eyebrows are luxuriant, as is his moustache, with the ends clipped short. He wears an elegant walking suit, which is a little too young for him. He uses a monocle, which now and then he lets drop

Brack (*hat in hand, bowing*) You don't mind my calling so early in the day?
Hedda Not in the least.
Tesman (*shaking his hand*) You're always welcome. (*Introducing him*) Judge Brack, Miss Rysing . . .
Hedda Oh . . .
Brack (*bowing*) Pleased to meet you.
Hedda (*looking at him and smiling*) I'm not used to seeing you in daylight, Judge.
Brack Do I look different?
Hedda A little younger, I think.
Brack Thank you kindly.
Tesman And what about Hedda, mm? Doesn't she look healthy? She's actually——
Hedda Oh, don't keep on about me. You'd do better to thank Judge Brack for all the trouble he's taken.
Brack But that was my pleasure.
Hedda You're very devoted. Look, my friend here's dying to get away. I'll see you in a minute, Judge. I won't be long.

General salutations. Mrs Elvsted and Hedda go out through the hall door