

*carefully dressed. His eyebrows thick. His moustaches are also thick, with short-cut ends. He wears a well-cut walking-suit, a little too youthful for his age. He uses an eye-glass, which he now and then lets drop.*

JUDGE BRACK: (*With his hat in his hand, bowing.*) May one venture to call so early in the day?

HEDDA: Of course, one may.

TESMAN: (*Presses his hand.*) You are welcome at any time. (*Introducing him.*) Judge Brack—Miss Rysing—

HEDDA: Oh—!

BRACK: (*Bowing.*) Ah—delighted—

HEDDA: (*Looks at him and laughs.*) It's nice to have a look at you by daylight, Judge!

BRACK: So you find me—altered?

HEDDA: A little younger, I think.

BRACK: Thank you so much.

TESMAN: But what do you think of Hedda—eh? Doesn't she look flourishing?

HEDDA: Oh, do leave me alone. You haven't thanked Judge Brack for all the trouble he has taken—

BRACK: Oh, nonsense—it was a pleasure to me—

HEDDA: You are a friend indeed. But here stands Thea all impatience to be off—so au revoir Judge. I shall be back presently.

*Mutual salutations. MRS. ELVSTED and HEDDA go out by the hall door.*

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BRACK: Well,—is your wife tolerably satisfied—

TESMAN: Yes, we can't thank you sufficiently. Of course, she talks of a little re-arrangement here and there; and one or two things are still wanting.

BRACK: Indeed!

TESMAN: But we won't trouble you about these things.

BRACK: There is something I wanted to speak to about, my dear Tesman.

TESMAN: I suppose it's the serious part of the frolic that is coming now. Eh?

BRACK: Oh, the money question is not so pressing; though I wish we had gone a little more economically to work.

TESMAN: But think of Hedda! You, who know her so well—! I couldn't possibly ask her to put up with a shabby style of living!

BRACK: That is just the difficulty.

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

BRACK: Well, you see—I have one piece of news for you. Your old friend, Eilert Lovborg, has returned to town.

TESMAN: I know that already. I'm delighted to hear that he is quite a reformed character.

BRACK: So they say.

TESMAN: And then he has published a new book—eh?

BRACK: Quite an unusual sensation.

TESMAN: Isn't that good news! A man of such extraordinary talents—I felt so grieved to think that he had gone irretrievably to ruin. But I cannot imagine how in the world will he be able to make his living? Eh?

*During the last words, HEDDA has entered by the hall door.*

HEDDA: (*To BRACK, laughing with a touch of scorn.*) Tesman is forever worrying about how people are to make their living.

TESMAN: We were talking about poor Eilert Lovborg.

HEDDA: (*Glancing at him rapidly.*) Oh, indeed? (*Sets herself in the arm-chair beside the stove.*)

BRACK: Perhaps I can give you some information on that point.

TESMAN: Indeed!

BRACK: His relations have a good deal of influence.

TESMAN: His relations have entirely washed their hands of him.

BRACK: At one time they called him the hope of the family.

TESMAN: At one time, yes! But he has put an end to all that.

HEDDA: Who knows? (*With a slight smile.*) I hear they have reclaimed him up at Sheriff Elvsted's—

BRACK: And then this book that he has published—

TESMAN: Well, I hope to goodness they may find something for him to do. I have just written and asked him to come and see us this evening.

BRACK: But you are booked for my bachelor's party this evening.

TESMAN: I had utterly forgotten.

BRACK: But it doesn't matter, for you may be sure he won't come.

TESMAN: What makes you think that?

BRACK: (*With a little hesitation, rising and resting his hands on the back of his chair.*) My dear Tesman—and you too, Mrs. Tesman—I think I ought not to keep you in the dark about something. You must be prepared to find your appointment deferred longer than you expected.

TESMAN: (*Jumping up uneasily.*) Is there some hitch about it?

BRACK: The nomination may be made conditional on a competition—

TESMAN: Competition!

HEDDA: (*Leans further back in the chair.*) Aha!

TESMAN: But who can my competitor be? Surely not—?

BRACK: Yes, precisely—Eilert Lovborg.

TESMAN: (*Clasping his hands.*) Quite impossible! Eh?

BRACK: H'm—that is what it may come to, all the same.

TESMAN: Judge Brack—it would show the most incredible lack of consideration for me. (*Gesticulates with his arms.*) I'm a married man! We have married on the strength of these prospects, Hedda and I; and run deep into debt; and borrowed money from Aunt Julia

too. Good heavens, they had as good as promised me the appointment. Eh?

BRACK: No doubt you will get it in the end; only after a contest.

HEDDA: (*Immovable in her arm-chair.*) Fancy, Tesman, there will be a sort of sporting interest in that.

TESMAN: Why, Hedda, how can you be so indifferent about it?

HEDDA: (*As before.*) I am not at all indifferent. I am most eager to see who wins.

BRACK: In any case, Mrs. Tesman, it is best that you should know how matters stand. I mean—before you set about the little purchases I hear you are threatening.

HEDDA: This can make no difference.

BRACK: Then I have no more to say. Good-bye! (*To TESMAN.*) I shall look in on my way back from my afternoon walk.

TESMAN: Oh, your news has quite upset me.

HEDDA: (*Reclining, holds out her hand.*) Good-bye, Judge.

BRACK: Good-bye, good-bye!

TESMAN: (*Accompanying him to the door.*) Good-bye my dear Judge! You must really excuse me—

JUDGE BRACK *goes out by the hall door.*

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TESMAN: (*Crosses the room.*) Oh Hedda—one should never rush into adventures. Eh?

HEDDA: (*Looks at him, smiling.*) Do you do that?

TESMAN: It was adventurous to go and marry and set up house upon mere expectations. Well, we have our delightful home! The home we both dreamed of.

HEDDA: (*Rising slowly and wearily.*) It was part of our compact that we were to go into society—to keep open house.