

MISS TESMAN: A burden! Heaven forgive you, child—it has been no burden.

HEDDA: But a total stranger—

MISS TESMAN: One soon makes friends with sick folk; and it's a necessity for me to have someone to live for. Heaven be praised, there may soon be something in this house to keep an old aunt busy.

HEDDA: Oh, don't trouble about anything here.

TESMAN: Yes, what a nice time we three might have, if—?

HEDDA: If—?

TESMAN: (*Uneasily.*) Oh nothing. It will all come right.

MISS TESMAN: Well, you two want to talk. (*Smiling.*) And Hedda may have something to tell you, George. Good-bye! (*Turning at the door.*) How strange to think that now Rina is with me and with my poor brother as well!

TESMAN: Fancy that, Aunt Julia!

MISS TESMAN *goes out by the hall door.*

[2]

HEDDA: (*Follows TESMAN coldly and searchingly with her eyes.*) Your Aunt Rina's death affects you more than it does your Aunt Julia.

TESMAN: It's not that. It's Eilert.

HEDDA: (*Quickly.*) Is there news?

TESMAN: I looked in at his rooms, to tell him the manuscript was safe. He wasn't at home. But I met Mrs. Elvsted, and she told me that he said he had torn his manuscript to pieces.

HEDDA: Yes.

TESMAN: He must have been out of his mind! Of course, you told him we had it?

HEDDA: No. (*Quickly.*) Did you tell Mrs. Elvsted?

TESMAN: No. But you ought to have told him. Fancy, if he should go and do himself some injury! Let me have the manuscript, Hedda! I will take it to him at once.

HEDDA: (*Cold and immovable, leaning on the arm-chair.*) I have not got it.

TESMAN: What do you mean?

HEDDA: I have burned it.

TESMAN: (*With a violent movement of terror.*) Burned! Eilert's manuscript!

HEDDA: Don't scream so.

TESMAN: No, no, it's impossible!

HEDDA: It is so, nevertheless.

TESMAN: Do you know what you have done, Hedda? It's unlawful appropriation of lost property. Just ask Judge Brack...

HEDDA: I advise you not to speak of it—to Judge Brack or anyone else.

TESMAN: But how could you? What possessed you?

HEDDA: (*Suppressing an almost imperceptible smile.*) I did it for your sake, George.

TESMAN: For my sake!

HEDDA: This morning, when you told me that you envied him.

TESMAN: I didn't mean that literally.

HEDDA: I could not bear the idea any one should throw you into the shade.

TESMAN: (*In an outburst of mingled doubt and joy.*) Hedda! I never knew you to show your love like that before.

HEDDA: I may as well tell you—at this time—(*Impatiently breaking off.*) No, Aunt Julia will tell you, fast enough.

TESMAN: I almost think I understand you, Hedda! (*Clasps his hands together.*) Great heavens!

HEDDA: The servant might hear.

TESMAN: (*Laughing in irrepressible glee.*) The servant! It's only my old Berta!

HEDDA: (*Clenching her hands together in desperation.*) Oh, it is killing me, killing me, all this!

TESMAN: What?

HEDDA: (*Coldly, controlling herself.*) All this—absurdity—George.

TESMAN: Absurdity! In my being overjoyed at the news! Perhaps I better not say anything to Berta.

HEDDA: Why not that too?

TESMAN: But I must tell Aunt Julia. And you have begun to call me George! Oh, Aunt Julia will be so happy!

HEDDA: That I have burned Eilert Lovborg's manuscript for your sake?

TESMAN: Nobody must know about that. But that you love me so much!⁷ I wonder, whether this sort of thing is usual in young wives? Eh?

HEDDA: Ask Aunt Julia.

TESMAN: And yet the manuscript! To think what will become of poor Eilert.

[3]

MRS. ELVSTED, *dressed as in the first Act, with hat and cloak, enters by the hall door.*

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Greets them hurriedly, and says in evident agitation.*) Dear Hedda, forgive my coming again.

HEDDA: What is the matter, Thea?

TESMAN: Something about Eilert Lovborg?

MRS. ELVSTED: Yes! I heard them talking of him at my boarding-house. The most incredible rumours.

TESMAN: Yes, so I heard too!

HEDDA: What did they say?

⁷ Literally, "That you burn for me." [Translator's Note]

MRS. ELVSTED: I couldn't make out clearly. Either they knew nothing definite, or they stopped talking when they saw me. I heard something about the hospital or—

TESMAN: The hospital?

HEDDA: No—that cannot be!

MRS. ELVSTED: I am sure something terrible must have happened to him.

TESMAN: Hedda dear—what if I were to go and make inquiries—?

HEDDA: No, don't mix yourself up in this.

JUDGE BRACK, with his hat in his hand, enters by the hall door, which BERTA opens, and closes behind him. He looks grave and bows in silence.

TESMAN: My dear Judge. You have heard the news about Aunt Rina?

BRACK: Yes, among other things.

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Unable to restrain her anxiety.*) Oh! it is something about Eilert Lovborg!

BRACK: Perhaps you have already heard—?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*In confusion.*) No, but—

TESMAN: For heaven's sake, tell us!

BRACK: (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) Well, I regret to say Eilert Lovborg has been taken to the hospital. He is lying at the point of death.

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Shrieks.*) Oh God! oh God—!

TESMAN: At the point of death!

HEDDA: (*Involuntarily.*) So soon then—

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Wailing.*) And we parted in anger, Hedda!

HEDDA: (*Whispers.*) Thea—be careful!

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Not heeding her.*) I must go to him!

BRACK: It is useless, Madam. No one will be admitted.

MRS. ELVSTED: Tell me what has happened to him?

TESMAN: You don't mean to say that he has—?

HEDDA: Shot himself!