

HEDDA: Well then, we must try to drift together again. At school we called each other by our Christian names—

MRS. ELVSTED: I am sure you must be mistaken.

HEDDA: Not at all! (*Draws the footstool closer to MRS. ELVSTED.*) There now! (*Kisses her cheek.*) You must call me Hedda.

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Presses and pats her hands.*) How good and kind you are! I am not used to such kindness.

HEDDA: There, there! And I shall call you my dear Thora.

MRS. ELVSTED: My name is Thea.<sup>3</sup>

HEDDA: Why, of course! I meant Thea. (*Looks at her compassionately.*) So you are not accustomed to goodness and kindness, Thea? Not in your own home?

MRS. ELVSTED: Oh, if I only had a home!

HEDDA: Was it not as housekeeper that you first went to Mr. Elvsted's?

MRS. ELVSTED: I really went as governess. But his wife—his late wife—was an invalid. So I had to look after the housekeeping as well.

HEDDA: And—at last—you became mistress of the house.

MRS. ELVSTED: Five years ago.

HEDDA: (*Lightly.*) Eilert Lovborg has been in your neighbourhood about three years, hasn't he?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Looks at her doubtfully.*) Eilert Lovborg? Yes.

HEDDA: You saw a good deal of him?

MRS. ELVSTED: He came to us every day. You see, he gave the children lessons.

HEDDA: And your husband—? I suppose he is often away from home?

MRS. ELVSTED: Being sheriff, you know, he has to travel.

HEDDA: (*Leaning against the arm of the chair.*) My poor, sweet Thea—now you must tell me everything. What sort of a man is your husband, Thea? Is he kind to you?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Evasively.*) I am sure he means well.

HEDDA: There is at least twenty years' difference between you?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Irritably.*) Yes. Everything about him is repellent to me! We have not a thought in common.

HEDDA: But is he not fond of you?

MRS. ELVSTED: Oh, I think he regards me simply as a useful property. And then it doesn't cost much to keep me.

HEDDA: That is stupid of you.

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Shakes her head.*) I don't think ~~he~~ really cares for anyone but himself—and perhaps a little for the children.

HEDDA: And for Eilert Lovborg?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Looking at her.*) For Eilert Lovborg?

HEDDA: Well, my dear—I should say, when he sends you after him all the way to town—(*Smiling almost imperceptibly.*)

MRS. ELVSTED: I may just as well make a clean breast of it at once! My husband did not know that I was coming.

HEDDA: What!

MRS. ELVSTED: He was away from home himself—Oh, I could bear it no longer, Hedda!—so utterly alone as I should have been in future. So I put together some of my things—And then I left the house. And took the train to town.

HEDDA: Why, my dear, good Thea—to think of you daring to do it!

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Rises and moves about the room.*) What else could I possibly do?

HEDDA: But what do you think your husband will say?

MRS. ELVSTED: I shall never go back to him again.

HEDDA: But what do you think people will say of you, Thea?

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced "Tora" and "Taya" [Translator's Note]

MRS. ELVSTED: They may say what they like, for aught I care. (*Sits herself wearily and sadly on the sofa.*) I only know this, that I must live here, where Eilert Lovborg is—.

HEDDA: (*Takes a chair from the table, seats herself beside her, and strokes her hands.*) How did this—this friendship—between you and Eilert Lovborg come about?

MRS. ELVSTED: Gradually. I gained a sort of influence over him.

HEDDA: Indeed?

MRS. ELVSTED: He gave up his old habits. He saw how repulsive they were to me.

HEDDA: (*Concealing an involuntary smile of scorn.*) Then you have reclaimed him—as the saying goes.

MRS. ELVSTED: So he says himself, at any rate. And he, on his side, has taught me to think, and to understand so many things. He talked to me—talked about such an infinity of things. And then came the lovely, happy time when I began to share in his work—when he allowed me to help him!

HEDDA: Did he?

MRS. ELVSTED: He never wrote anything without my assistance.

HEDDA: You were two good comrades?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Eagerly.*) Comrades! Yes, fancy, Hedda—that is the very word he used!—Oh, I ought to feel perfectly happy; and yet I don't know how long it will last.

HEDDA: Are you no surer of him than that?

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Gloomily.*) A woman's shadow stands between Eilert Lovborg and me. Someone he knew in his—in his past. Someone he has never been able wholly to forget.

HEDDA: What has he told you—about this?

MRS. ELVSTED: He has only once—quite vaguely—alluded to it.

HEDDA: And what did he say?

MRS. ELVSTED: He said that when they parted, she threatened to shoot him with a pistol.

HEDDA: (*With cold composure.*) Oh nonsense! No one does that sort of thing here.

MRS. ELVSTED: I think it must have been that red-haired singing-woman whom he once—

HEDDA: Yes, very likely.

MRS. ELVSTED: I remember they used to say of her that she carried loaded firearms.

HEDDA: It must have been she.

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Wringing her hands.*) And now Hedda—I hear that this singing-woman—that she is in town again! I don't know what to do—

HEDDA: (*Glancing towards the inner room.*) Hush! Here comes Tesman. (*Rises and whispers.*) Thea—all this must remain between you and me.

MRS. ELVSTED: (*Springing up.*) Oh yes—yes! For heaven's sake—!

[6]

GEORGE TESMAN, *with a letter in his hand, comes from the right through the inner room.*

TESMAN: The epistle is finished.

HEDDA: And now Mrs. Elvsted is just going. I'll go with you to the garden gate.

TESMAN: Do you think Berta could post the letter, Hedda dear?

HEDDA: (*Takes it.*) I will tell her to.

*BERTA enters from the hall.*

BERTA: Judge Brack wishes to know if Mrs. Tesman will receive him.

HEDDA: Ask Judge Brack to come in. And look here—put this letter in the post.

BERTA: (*Taking the letter.*) Yes, ma'am.

*She opens the door for JUDGE BRACK and goes out herself. Brack is a man of forty-five; thick set, but well-built and elastic in his movements. His face is roundish with an aristocratic profile. His hair is short, still almost black, and*