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HEDDA IN THE HEIGHTS

A MODERN RETELLING OF HENRIK IBSEN'S
"HEDDA GABLER"

BY

ROBERT THOMAS NOLL

&

PAMELA V. NOLL

FROM A LITERAL 1890 TRANSLATION
BY EDMUND GOSSE

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Hedda in the Heights

by Robert Thomas Noll & Pamela V. Noll

CHARACTERS

4W/3M

GEORGE TESMAN, *in his late 30s, early 40s, Hedda's husband.*

HEDDA TESMAN (Born GABLER), *in her mid-30s, his beautiful wife.*

JULIA TESMAN, *his aunt who is in her late 60s or early 70s.*

THEA ELVSTED, *in her mid-30s.*

JUDGE DAVID BRACK, *in his late-40s, early 50s.*

EILERT LOVBERG, *in his late 30s, early 40s.*

BERTA, *maid to the Tesmans.*

TIME AND PLACE

The present. Fall. The entire action of the play takes place in the beautiful and comfortable home of George and Hedda Tesman in the wealthy section of Shaker Heights, Ohio.

SCENES

Act I, Scene 1: Morning.

Act I, Scene 2: Early evening.

Act II, Scene 1: The next day at dawn.

Act II, Scene 2: Evening.

EARLY PRODUCTION HISTORY

"Hedda in the Heights" had its first public performance, a staged reading, on March 7, 2011 at The Alcazar in Cleveland, Ohio, under the direction of Jean Cummins, with the following cast:

George Tesman.....Joe Verciglio
Julia Tesman.....Roni Bernenson
Judge David Brack.....Dana Hart

Hedda Tesman..... Laurel Johnson
Thea Elvsted..... Laurel Johnson
Berta..... Lori Berenson

Hedda in the Heights

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ACT I SCENE 1

SETTING: *Early morning; the home of George and Hedda Tesman. Downstage, a spacious, tastefully furnished living room and Upstage, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back, leading into a dining room decorated in the same style as the living room. Thick carpets are spread on the floors of both rooms.*

In the right-hand wall of the front room, a door leads out to the hall. In the opposite wall, on the left, is a glass door, also with curtains drawn back.

Through a window can be seen part of an outside garden with trees covered with autumn foliage. Light shines through the window.

There is a fireplace on stage as well as a piano. The living room features a modern sofa with a small round table in front of it. There is also a handsome desk, a couple comfortable chairs, a footstool and a large arm-chair that until the middle-of-the last scene is only used by Hedda— it is her "throne." Over the sofa hangs the portrait of a handsome middle-aged man, Henry Gabler, in a hunter's outfit with a rifle in his hand.

AT RISE: *JULIA TESMAN, wearing a plastic rain bonnet, enters through the hall door followed by BERTA, the maid. JULIA is a good-natured-looking lady. She holds a small, old-fashioned satchel bag.*

JULIA

So they're not up yet! Still in bed.

BERTA

That's what I said, Miss Julia. Just think how late their plane landed last night. And what did Mrs. Tesman do when she got home? She had me unpack every one of her suitcases before going to bed.

JULIA

We better let them sleep in. But when they wake up, let's give them plenty of fresh air, shall we?

JULIA goes to the glass door, and throws it wide open.

JULIA

So now, Berta, you have a new household to run. How much we're going to miss you.

BERTA

(Tearfully)

And how much I'll miss taking care of you and Miss Renee – all those happy years we had together. How will you two manage without my help, Miss Julia?

JULIA

We'll manage. I'm glad to tell you how relieved I am you'll still be looking after our dear Georgie.

BERTA

And his wife. I don't think she likes me. She's so hard to please.

JULIA

You can't be too surprised by that, can you? *(In front of portrait Henry Gabler)* Henry Gabler's only child. How he spoiled her. She was veritable princess -- of course, he was king in finance. And she ran with the horse set.

BERTA

Who would have thought your nephew would end up marrying her?

JULIA

Not I. Not in a million years.

BERTA

But she's not rich now, is she?

JULIA

Bad investments – he lost everything in a finance scheme.

BERTA

(Whispering)

And he killed himself at home, didn't he?

JULIA

(Pointing two fingers into her mouth)

He ended bankruptcy with a shotgun. Made a real mess of the game-room.

BERTA

How horrible for Hedda. You know how she is.

JULIA

She ran the estate—

BERTA

—in Hunting Valley—

JULIA

—like a medieval queen.

BERTA

Wednesdays and Saturdays at the hunt.

JULIA

Hedda does three things well: riding, parties—

BERTA

—spending—

JULIA

—and looking beautiful. He didn't do her any favors by dying. The horses were the first to go.

GEORGE enters, humming and in great spirits, from the Upstage dining room, carrying a large backpack.

JULIA

And here he is, the man of the hour!

GEORGE

Dear Aunt Julia! What are you doing here so early?

JULIA

Oh, you know me. I had to see how you liked your new home.

BERTA exits.

GEORGE

But you were up so late last night.

JULIA

Who needs sleep at my age?

GEORGE

Well, I'm glad you got home safely from the airport.

JULIA

Thanks to Judge Brack driving me home.

GEORGE

I'm sorry we couldn't take you. Hedda's luggage and all.

JULIA

(Not happy about what she saw)

Yes, I've never seen so much luggage in my life.

GEORGE holds his backpack up.

GEORGE

This was the only suitcase I needed. My computer and flashdrives. I scanned more archives than ever before. I don't know where I got the energy. Oh Auntie, I can't tell you what a great trip we had.

JULIA

It looks like you made the most of your time away, George.

GEORGE taps his backpack proudly.

GEORGE

That I certainly did.

JULIA starts to remove her rain hat.

GEORGE, *Continued*

Was it raining?

JULIA

Always be prepared, I say.

GEORGE

Especially if you live in Cleveland.

GEORGE puts the plastic hat on the sofa near the table. THEY sit down on chairs nearby.

JULIA

George. How I missed you!

GEORGE

It's wonderful to be back with you, Auntie. You know you've been like a mother to me.

JULIA

You aren't going to forget your old aunts now that you're a married man.

GEORGE

No way, dear. And how is Auntie Renee?

JULIA

(Fighting back tears)

No better. The poor dear just lies there. Thank goodness for hospice services.

GEORGE

Hospice?

JULIA

They are a godsend. I don't know how I'll live without her, George. Especially now.

GEORGE and JULIA hug each other.

GEORGE

There, there, dear!

JULIA

I can't believe you're a married man now—and to the beautiful Hedda. To think of all the men she's known.

GEORGE

I never thought I'd be envied for my wife.

JULIA

I just hope you're happy – and how do you like this place?

GEORGE

I love it, Auntie. But it's awfully big, for just us two.

JULIA

(Laughing)

I'm sure in time you and Hedda will find a use for the rooms.

GEORGE pats his bag and scopes out the room.

GEORGE

Yes, somewhere to put all my extra books.

JULIA

Uh... sure.

GEORGE

I must confess I always wanted to live in this neighborhood. Judge Brack lives right down the street.

JULIA

So many of these old houses are going empty now. People strapped for cash. All the foreclosures.

GEORGE

That's why we got such a great deal on this house. A bargain.

JULIA

It's going to be expensive to run.

GEORGE

We'll be fine. We got a great mortgage rate.

JULIA

So silly of me to worry. But soon you'll get that Mather Philosophy Chair—cha ching, I'm sure. That's security.

GEORGE

Security.

JULIA

And, of course, when your book is released –

GEORGE

My book –

JULIA

When is that anyway?

GEORGE

I still have much more research to do – data to collect. Then, I have to actually sit down and—

JULIA

You're good at collecting things.

GEORGE

I can't wait to get back to it.

JULIA

And with the wife you've always wanted.

GEORGE embraces JULIA again.

GEORGE

Oh, yes, Auntie. Hedda—she is the best thing that ever happened to me. (*Looks toward the doorway*) Ah! Here she comes now.

HEDDA enters from the dining room carrying in a pistol case she puts on a table in front of the painting of her father. She is dressed in expensive, stylish lounge wear. She always looks beautiful and has incredible sex appeal.

JULIA

Good morning, dear Hedda! Good morning.

JULIA moves to HEDDA, arms outstretched.

HEDDA

Good morning, Miss Tesman. Visiting us so early?

JULIA

(Embarrassed)

Not at all. Well, how did the bride sleep in her new home?

HEDDA

How nice of you to be interested –

GEORGE

(Laughs, to HEDDA)

You were sleeping like a log when I got up.

HEDDA

(Notices glass door is wide open)

Oh that idiot! She left the drapes open. All that sunlight pouring in.

JULIA moves to glass door.

JULIA

Well, we'll just close it.

HEDDA

Don't do that! Just draw the drapes. That gives a softer light.

JULIA is at the glass door, arranging the drapes to Hedda's liking.

JULIA

Alright – all right. There, Hedda—now you have both dim light and fresh air.

HEDDA

Heaven knows we need fresh air here. Won't you sit down, Miss Tesman?

JULIA

I really must get back to my sister, the poor thing. Lying there. Waiting for me.

GEORGE

Give her my love and tell her I'll be over this afternoon.

JULIA

She'll be so happy to see you, George.

JULIA fumbles in the pocket of her satchel.

JULIA

Oh, I almost forgot. I have something here for you.

GEORGE

What is it?

JULIA

Here.

JULIA hands him a plastic bag from her satchel. GEORGE opens it.

GEORGE

You saved them for me. Hedda, wasn't that sweet of Auntie Julia?

HEDDA

What is it?

GEORGE holds up worn leather slippers.

GEORGE

My old bedroom slippers – Einstein and Plato!

HEDDA

Oh, yeah. How often you said you missed them – on our honeymoon.

GEORGE

I missed them terribly. Old friends, really.

HEDDA moves away, and notices Julia's rain hat on the chair, and reacts.

HEDDA

(*Angry*) That idiot maid. George.

JULIA

You mean Berta?

HEDDA

She's not working out, George.

GEORGE

What do you mean, dear?

HEDDA

Look here! She's left that ridiculous hat on our sofa.

GEORGE drops the slippers on the floor.

GEORGE

(*Horried*)

Hedda!

HEDDA

Imagine if anyone came in and saw this?

GEORGE

Hedda—it's Aunt Julia's.

HEDDA

Oh...?

JULIA

Yes, it's mine.

JULIA takes the hat and folds it and puts it into satchel, embarrassed.

GEORGE

I'm so glad you came this morning.

JULIA

Yes, George, I'm glad I came, too.

GEORGE

Auntie, wait a moment.

JULIA stops in her tracks.

GEORGE

Isn't Hedda lovely?

JULIA

Yes, dear, she is. Hedda has always been lovely.

*JULIA nods and starts to move away,
followed by GEORGE.*

GEORGE

And hasn't she filled out nicely since we've been away?

*HEDDA crosses the room and joins
GEORGE and JULIA.*

HEDDA

Would you be quiet!

*JULIA reacts suddenly to GEORGE'S
words.*

JULIA

Filled out?

GEORGE

You can't really tell by what she's wearing now, but when I have had the opportunity—

HEDDA

(In denial)

Oh, you have had no opportunity at all.

GEORGE

I think... more feminine.

HEDDA.

(Sharply, interrupting)

I'm exactly as I was when we left.

GEORGE

That's what you keep saying.

JULIA

(Folds her hands and gazes at her)

Hedda is lovely – lovely – lovely.

JULIA goes to HEDDA, takes her head down with both her hands, and kisses Hedda's hair.

JULIA, *Continued*

God bless and keep you, Hedda Tesman—for George's sake.

HEDDA

(Loudly)

Tsk!

HEDDA gently releases herself.

JULIA

(Quietly warning, to HEDDA)

I shall visit you every day.

HEDDA

Please do.

JULIA

(Softly, almost as a threat)

Oh, I will. Bye-bye, Hedda.

HEDDA

Good-bye.

GEORGE escorts JULIA out. At the same time, HEDDA walks across the room, lifts her arms and clenches her hands. She draws the curtains from the glass door, remains standing there, looking out. She takes a deep breath trying to calm herself. Soon, GEORGE returns and shuts the door behind him.

GEORGE

What are you looking at, Hedda?

HEDDA

(Once more calm)

At the leaves. They are so yellow – so withered.

GEORGE

(Puts slippers on the table)

Well, it is late September.

HEDDA

(Again restless)

All the dark, dreary days ahead.

GEORGE

So then we must enjoy this morning and all this sunshine.

HEDDA

I hope I didn't offend your aunt about that hat.

GEORGE

Possibly. But it's just a hat. You women...

HEDDA

When you visit her later, invite her over for dinner tonight. I'll have Berta made us a nice meal.

GEORGE

That's very kind of you.

HEDDA

It will give me a chance to apologize... If I did offend her.

GEORGE

You are such an angel. Thank you, thank you. Maybe you two could develop a real friendship.

HEDDA

I don't think so, George. I've told you that before.

BERTA appears in the hall door.

BERTA

Thea Elvsted is here.

HEDDA

(Shocked)

I haven't seen her forever! We went to Nan Drews School together. Say, didn't you date her, too?

GEORGE

Well, that was a long time ago. And well, it was long before I met you, Darling.

HEDDA

Then that makes it okay to have her visit today of all days. George, what's going on?

GEORGE

She texted me this morning.

HEDDA

So?

GEORGE

Uh, so I invited her over.

HEDDA

But, still, George.

GEORGE

Please, send her in, Berta.

BERTA

Yes, sir.

BERTA exits.

HEDDA

One of your old girlfriends.

GEORGE

Oops.

HEDDA

"Oops?"

GEORGE

I guess I goofed up.

HEDDA

"Goofed up?"

GEORGE

I mean, it didn't seem very important. Nothing is important compared to having you... and the Mather appointment.

HEDDA

How nice you placed me first.

GEORGE

First? Why of course, my dear. All else pales in comparison to my being married to you.

HEDDA

But we just got back from our honeymoon?

GEORGE

You are secure in the citadel of my heart, so when someone who has no importance to me asks for help... What could I do?

THEA ELVSTED enters. She has a pretty and gentle face, lots of beautiful blonde hair. She is the same age as Hedda.

HEDDA

(Coolly)

Thea.

THEA

(Nervously trying to control herself)

Hedda.

GEORGE

(Gives THEA his hand)

Thea.

THEA

Please forgive me—I know you just got back and all, but this is desperate.

HEDDA

That's quite a greeting.

GEORGE

You asked for my – our help.

THEA

I'm sorry, Hedda. It's been a long time, and you know how George and I—

HEDDA

No need to mention that. It must be urgent if you couldn't even ask about George's honeymoon.

THEA

Of course. How rude of me to forget my manners that way. But this is a desperate situation.

HEDDA

So you said.

GEORGE

How can we help?

THEA

That's a good question. I'm so panicked I... I... (Pauses as she collects her thoughts) I don't want to impose more than I already have.

HEDDA gestures to the sofa.

HEDDA

Once the eggs are broken... C'mon, Thea. Sit down.

THEA

I can't sit still now.

HEDDA

Sure you can... Come.

HEDDA drags THEA down on the sofa and sits at her side.

GEORGE

Well?

HEDDA

Well?

THEA

I just don't want you to misunderstand.

HEDDA

How is it you came to us?

THEA

You know I boarded at school because my parents died... Hedda, I'm all alone in this world.

GEORGE

That is sad.

HEDDA

Then tell us everything. Start from the beginning.

GEORGE

We want to help.

THEA

Did you know that Eilert Lovberg is back in Cleveland?

HEDDA

(Softly)

Eilert?

GEORGE

Eilert Lovberg? Did you hear that, Hedda? This is getting to be Old Home week.

HEDDA

So Thea says.

THEA

A month now.

GEORGE

He hasn't contacted me.

GEORGE takes out his cell phone and checks it.

HEDDA

I don't understand. How does Eilert fit into your desperation?

THEA

Eilert was our tutor for the children.

HEDDA

You have children?

THEA

They're my husband's.

HEDDA

Step-children.

GEORGE

You trusted Eilert for that position?

THEA

He was sober for two years before he took the post.

GEORGE

Well, good for him. Being the Black Sheep of your family puts one in awkward places, doesn't it?

THEA

Things were going well for a while.

HEDDA

Going well?

THEA

The children loved him, My husband had no complaints—

HEDDA

And you?

THEA

We got along fine, until...

GEORGE

Until?

THEA

Until his book got published.

GEORGE

Eilert had a book published? Really? Published?

THEA

Yes.

GEORGE

By golly, we were always neck and neck in school, and only because he drank, did I get ahead of him. Perhaps now he might be able to catch up with me—

HEDDA

George –

GEORGE

This book of his. It must have been something he had lying around from the old days?

THEA

Oh, no. It's a new idea he developed. While he was with us.

GEORGE

What's it about? Kierkegaard? Nietzsche? Metaphysical philosophy was his specialty.

HEDDA

Please, George... What about the book?

THEA

He wrote a success. But I don't think he can handle it.

GEORGE

I don't recall hearing anything about a book by Eilert Lovberg.

THEA

He was afraid to compromise his scholarly integrity, so he used a pseudonym. Have you heard of P. K. Patterson? A featured book on New York Times best-seller list. But word is getting out who really wrote it.

GEORGE

I can't imagine what a philosopher would write about that the average person would care to read.

THEA

Oh, it is about philosophy he explains... but of vampires.

GEORGE

Really? Ha-ha-ha. Did you hear that, Hedda?

HEDDA

I heard.

GEORGE

No, really, Thea. What is the book about?

THEA

Vampires.

GEORGE

Aw, no. Not vampires. How? I mean, what...?

THEA

"The Vampire World as Will and Representation." That's the title.

GEORGE

He ripped off Schopenhauer.

THEA

A development of Schopenhauer's interpretation of will.

GEORGE

But, but... Vampires?

HEDDA

He got it published, George.

THEA

That's just it, Hedda. You see, he felt that philosophy shouldn't be so esoteric, and if he could some way engage the general public...

GEORGE

But Vampires?

HEDDA

Let her finish, dear.

THEA

He was so depressed. His life was going nowhere... home tutoring somebody else's kids. And he wanted to stay sober.

HEDDA

You must have been quite the support to Eilert.

THEA

One night we brainstormed.

HEDDA

Sounds intriguing –

THEA

We were just spitballing, as they say—

HEDDA

Over a cup of hot tea—

THEA

—and he said, "Thea, think about it: if emotional, physical, and sexual desires can never be fulfilled, and if the average person is fascinated by Vampires—"

HEDDA

Like Vampire LeStat?

THEA

He believed it may be that these creatures are archetypes of our base nature. Why not combine the two ideas, and develop it into something readable. Well, the editors loved it, and he got an agent.

GEORGE

An agent! And Vampires. (*To HEDDA*) We have to get a copy. Right dear?

HEDDA

(Ignoring George's question)

Go on, Thea. Why are you so worried about him?

THEA

Not long after finding out there was going to be a book-signing tour, he said he had to return here right away.

HEDDA

Why? Did he say why?

THEA

He gave no reason. And that's the last I've heard from him.

HEDDA

Do you know where he – uh – could be staying?

THEA

I called his agent and got the address and phone number of where he's staying. Have you heard of The Alcazar?

GEORGE

Why that's not two miles from here.

HEDDA

Have you talked to him since he's been back?

THEA

You know, he won't have a cell phone.

GEORGE

That's Eilert. He hates technology. He believes writing by hand is the only way to write anything of value. "The essence of the soul transfers from thought through the pen to paper."

HEDDA

(Gives her a searching look)

Won't your husband be wondering – ?

THEA

(Nervously)

My husband?

HEDDA

Shouldn't your husband be the one to look for his friend, er... tutor?

THEA

My husband travels for business and is much too busy. And anyway, I – uh – I told him the reason was to go the Annual Spring Gathering at Nan Drews.

HEDDA

Oh, yes. The Ann Drews Annual Spring Gathering.

THEA

Are you going? Maybe we could go together?

HEDDA

(Slightly smiling)

Ah, that's a different matter. *(Snotty)* I don't go to class reunions. They're so *recherché*'.

[Pronounced: Reh-share-shay; means: pretentiously affected.]

THEA

(Seriously)

I thought it was *recherché*' to say "*recherché*'."

HEDDA rolls her eyes. THEA rises quickly and uneasily.

THEA, *Continued*

George, I'm sure Eilert will come here to see you now. You were such great friends at Harvard.

GEORGE

Same doctoral program.

THEA

You know, George, Eilert has great respect for your work.

GEORGE

And I for his. Did he ever tell you that we coauthored a journal article before we finished our dissertations?

THEA

I'm asking you, as his old friend, to keep an eye on him. *(Suddenly a frightened expression)* Before something happens.

GEORGE

I'd be happy to keep an eye on him. You can depend on me.

THEA

Oh, thank you. Uh, my husband is so worried about him.

HEDDA rises.

HEDDA

So George, let's not worry Thea's husband. Do you have the number where Eilert's staying?

THEA

Yes.

HEDDA

Give George the phone number and he'll reach out to Eilert now, won't you, dear?

*THEA takes out a piece of paper,
HEDDA takes it from her.*

GEORGE

Of course, as soon as I find... *(Looks around him)*... my slippers. Oh, here they are.

*GEORGE finds slippers, HEDDA hands
him the piece of paper.*

THEA

And please... don't tell him that I asked you to do this.

GEORGE

Not a word.

*GEORGE takes out his cell phone and is
about to start calling.*

HEDDA

Darling, would you kindly do that in another room?

THEA

I'd like to hear—

HEDDA

(Ignoring THEA's words)

Thea and I have things to talk about... woman-to-woman.

THEA

(Quietly)

We do?

GEORGE

Oh, of course. I'll call from my office.

HEDDA

Do that, George. Take your time. We have lots to talk about.

GEORGE exits.

THEA

Hedda.

HEDDA

All in confidence.

THEA

About?

HEDDA

About what's really going on here.

THEA

(Distressed)

Nothing is going on here. I really should be going. I've already taken up enough of your time.

HEDDA

(Very friendly)

Sit down. We need to catch up with each other.

HEDDA ushers THEA to sit.

THEA

I'd rather not—

HEDDA

We are old friends. Nan Drews Academy. The Spring Gathering. Remember?

THEA

And I was afraid of you.

HEDDA

Me?

THEA

You burned my hair.

HEDDA

Oh, come on, did I really do that?

THEA

I was ironing it straight. You said you'd help me.

HEDDA

Oh, I was only fooling around. I wasn't goin' to hurt you.

THEA

It was cruel, Hedda.

HEDDA

That was then, this is now—now we can be proper friends.

THEA

What do we have in common – ?

HEDDA

I was a spoiled brat back then. I know that. And, I'm sorry. But believe me, I'm not that way anymore. I hope you could forgive and forget.

THEA

Oh, really?

HEDDA

Come on, give me another chance. Please.

THEA

Well... you and George have already shown me much kindness.

HEDDA

(A look of compassion)

You're not used to being treated with kindness. Is that it?

THEA

Well...

HEDDA

Not even in your own home?

THEA

If I had a home.

HEDDA

(Looking at her for a moment)

I thought so...

THEA

(Staring helplessly before her)

Yes, yes, yes.

HEDDA

If I remember correctly, before you married, weren't you –

THEA

My husband's assistant. Yes. His wife – she was an invalid, so he had me assist him... I ran their household, too.

HEDDA

The woman of the house?

THEA

When she died...

HEDDA

How long ago did you marry?

THEA

Five years.

HEDDA

Five years.

HEDDA

(Casually)

And Eilert was with you for the last three?

THEA

Yes.

HEDDA

So you saw a good deal of him.

THEA

Five days a week. My husband decided the children should be home schooled. He hired Eilert to tutor them.

HEDDA

Your husband designed the lesson plan?

THEA

Oh, no. He was never home. Always working.

HEDDA

Poor sweet Thea with a husband at least twenty years older.

THEA

So you do understand?

HEDDA

We have more in common than you'd imagine, Thea.

THEA

I don't imagine you'd have problems with George, like I do.

HEDDA

If you mean what I think you do, no, not yet.

THEA

That's just one of our problems. Everything about him now makes me sick. We don't have one thing in common.

HEDDA

That means a lot to you, doesn't it?

THEA

Hedda... I'm so lonely. My husband doesn't know I exist.

HEDDA

But, is he good to you? Viagra works wonders, I hear.

THEA

He only thinks of himself... *(Weakly)* Maybe a little about the children.

HEDDA

And, what about Eilert Lovberg?

THEA

(Looking at her)

Why do you keep bringing him up?

HEDDA

I thought your husband sent you all the way here to find him. That's what you told George.

THEA

Confidentially?

HEDDA

Yes?

THEA

He doesn't know I'm here. Anyhow, he's away, and, I was so alone. I couldn't stand it any longer, Hedda.

HEDDA

What are you saying?

THEA rises and crosses the room.

THEA

But what else could I do?

HEDDA

What do you think your husband will do when you go home?

THEA

(Pause)

I'm never going back.

HEDDA

(Rises and approaches her)

You left your husband?

THEA

For good.

HEDDA

What a courageous thing to do.

THEA

Oh, you really think so, Hedda? I'm so confused.

HEDDA

(Stroking THEA's hand)

This... friendship... between you and Eilert—? What happened?

THEA

Gradually. Very gradually – and little by little – I began to have some kind of influence.

HEDDA

I see...

THEA

He didn't just stay sober. He even gave up his other bad habits.

HEDDA

You're quite the Muse, aren't you?

THEA

Well it wasn't because I begged him to, but because he saw how much they upset me. So just like that he gave them up.

HEDDA

(Conceals an involuntary smile)

You reformed Eilert Lovberg?

THEA

That's what he tells me.

HEDDA

So many changes.

THEA

And he's reformed me. Taught me about the world.

HEDDA

Really? That's a big place.

THEA

He taught me to live. And I've assisted with his work.

HEDDA

How convenient.

THEA

After we started working together, he said he wanted me to be part of everything he wrote.

HEDDA

Collaborators?

THEA

Collaborators! Yes, that was the very word he used. I should be very happy. But I'm not.

HEDDA

Oh, no.

THEA

I'm afraid.

HEDDA

That's all the faith you have in him—this changed man?

THEA

There's something between us. The shadow of a woman.

HEDDA

Who is she?

THEA

I don't know, but sometimes he seems haunted. I'm sure it's another lover.

HEDDA

Another, huh? Has he ever talked about her?

THEA

Only once.

HEDDA

What did he say?

THEA

She threatened to shoot him when they broke up.

HEDDA

Oh, come on, who would do something like that?

THEA

I think it's Gloria Rose. She used to run Rosie's.

HEDDA

The Gentlemen's Club?

THEA

On Prospect. Eilert used to go there all the time... before he reformed.

HEDDA

Then, it must be her. I've heard gossip he knew somebody like that. A very beautiful woman who likes guns.

THEA

What if he's with her now?

HEDDA

Don't worry. He's reformed. Remember?

THEA

Oh Hedda, you really are a friend.

HEDDA

I try to be.

GEORGE enters.

HEDDA

Did you get a hold of him?

GEORGE

Yes, and Thea, nothing to worry about. Eilert sounded as sober as a nun and very excited to hear from me.

HEDDA

Really?

THEA

That's wonderful news!

GEORGE

You were right. He was planning to get in touch. He's coming over tonight.

HEDDA

You invited him here?

GEORGE

I should have asked you first.

HEDDA

Yes, you should have.

GEORGE

Sorry. I couldn't help it.

THEA

You didn't tell him I was here, did you?

GEORGE

I didn't mention you at all.

THEA

Thank you! I don't want him to ever think I don't trust him.

HEDDA

No, you don't want him to think that.

THEA rises.

THEA

Well. Now that there's nothing to worry about I think I'll go now.

HEDDA rises and joins THEA.

HEDDA

I'll walk you out the back way. Have you seen the trees? How beautiful their leaves are this year.

THEA

(To GEORGE)

Thanks again for your help. It means everything to me.

GEORGE

Happy to do it. Nice seeing you again, Thea. And it'll be great to see Eilert again!

HEDDA leads THEA out through the dining room and out to the off-stage garden. GEORGE clutches his slippers. BERTA enters from the hall.

BERTA

Mr. George, Judge Brack is here to see you.

GEORGE

Thanks, Berta, send him in, please.

*BERTA opens the door and JUDGE
DAVID BRACK enters and she exits.*

GEORGE, *Continued*

How are you, David? Long time no see.

BRACK

I hope I'm not interrupting. I realize it's early.

GEORGE shakes his hand.

GEORGE

Not at all. People keep streaming in all morning. But, first, I want to thank you for driving Aunt Julia home from the airport last night.

BRACK

No problem, she's a dear. How are you going to the party tonight? Wanna ride with me?

GEORGE

Yeah, sure. Listen, Brack, I also want to thank you for all you've done to get the house ready for us.

BRACK

No need to thank me, George. What are friends for?

GEORGE

I really appreciate it.

BRACK

Is Hedda as pleased as you are?

GEORGE

Oh yes, very.

BRACK

With everything?

GEORGE

Well, she plans to rearrange the furniture... buy a few new things.

BRACK

Let me advise you, George... hold off on any spending for the time being.

GEORGE

Well, you know how Hedda is.

BRACK

I realize how Hedda is. Nonetheless—

GEORGE

That's why it's so important I get the appointment, eh?

BRACK

That's what I need to talk to you about. Your money.

GEORGE

You're our money manager. What's going on?

BRACK

Eilert Lovberg is back in Cleveland.

GEORGE

What does he have to do with my money?

BRACK

More than you think.

GEORGE

You think he's the same old Eilert?

BRACK

Mr. Party?

GEORGE

How he used to get drunk, affairs with his students, mooning the Dean, gambling – shall I go on?

BRACK

He was so out of control his family disinherited him, unless—

GEORGE

Have you read his new book?

BRACK

It's gotten good reviews. A book that bridges academia and popular culture. And that's the problem here.

GEORGE

I don't understand.

HEDDA, during these last few words, has entered through the hall door.

HEDDA

That's my George. Hello, David.

GEORGE

We're talking about Eilert Lovberg, Hedda.

HEDDA

George's old friend.

BRACK

You know his family has old money, and helped the development of the university for generations. They endowed the philosophy chair.

GEORGE

Yet that same family washed their hands of him.

BRACK

Disinherited – conditionally.

GEORGE

He sure screwed that up good.

BRACK

Until the book came out –

GEORGE

I just spoke to him a few minutes ago. He's coming over this evening.

BRACK

This evening? Did you forget about the party tonight? It's in your honor? The bachelor party we owe you. You just said you'd ride with me.

HEDDA

My absent-minded professor.

BRACK

Anyway, I wouldn't count on him coming here.

GEORGE

Why do you say that?

BRACK

He's a candidate for the Philosophy Department Chair. The position you thought was a lock.

GEORGE

What? Unbelievable! Impossible!

BRACK

Or not.

GEORGE

That position was promised to me.

BRACK

Maybe it's just a rumor, but if I were you, George, I'd be prepared for some competition.

GEORGE

Competition! Now! Imagine that, Hedda!

HEDDA

Yes, imagine that...

GEORGE

Competing with Eilert Lovberg.

HEDDA

Your old friend.

GEORGE

This is so unfair to me. (*Gesticulating*) I got married now counting on that position. Our credit cards are maxed out; we traveled in Europe; got this huge house; new furniture... I was promised that appointment.

BRACK

Calm down, George. I'm sure you'll get an appointment. It just might now take a little longer.

HEDDA

It will be almost like a duel. You and Eilert fighting to the death.

GEORGE

You seem pleased.

HEDDA

Well, it's exciting, isn't it? I'm excited to see who wins.

GEORGE

A duel occurs after an affront – this is plain competition.

BRACK

In any case, that's why I'm here. I wanted to warn you before you spend any more money.

HEDDA

Your news won't make any difference.

BRACK

No?

HEDDA

No.

BRACK

Then there's really nothing more for me to say, is there?

HEDDA

No there isn't.

BRACK rises.

BRACK

I gotta run. *(To GEORGE)* So you'll be ready around 8?

GEORGE

Sure. If it's no trouble.

BRACK

No trouble. I'm just down the street now, remember?

GEORGE

Come a little early. We've brought back a special wine. We'll crack open a bottle.

BRACK

Sounds delightful.

HEDDA

See you later, David.

BRACK

Good-bye, Hedda.

HEDDA bussés BRACK, who moves to the hall door with GEORGE, shakes his hand, and exits. HEDDA moves to piano and plays angry music. GEORGE returns, and crosses the room.

GEORGE

Sometimes I think we're living in a fantasy world.

HEDDA

(Looks at him and smiles)

We do?

GEORGE

Yes, dear – there is no denying it. It was a fantasy to think we'd marry and live like this all based on a mere promise.

HEDDA

I don't know about that.

GEORGE

At any rate, we have our dream... for now.

HEDDA suddenly stops playing and rises slowly from the piano, and behaves bored.

HEDDA

You agreed we would entertain. Open house. Always. You promised me parties like the ones I used to have with my father.

GEORGE

I look forward to them. But for the time being we have to watch our spending. I know it wasn't supposed to be like this.

HEDDA

I guess this means I won't be getting my horse any time soon?

GEORGE

Uh... no.

HEDDA

Paris?

GEORGE

Impossible.

HEDDA

Impossible?

GEORGE

For right now.

HEDDA

How did this happen? You promised me. And now I'm controlled by your debts.

GEORGE

But I promise you things will work out—the money will come and you'll have no worries. But in the meantime...

HEDDA

"But in the meantime..." How dare you!

GEORGE

We just can't spend any more money.

HEDDA

Then I suppose I must be grateful.

GEORGE

(Looking at her with love)

Yes, we must be grateful for what we have now.

HEDDA

I still have one thing with which I might amuse myself.

HEDDA moves to the table.

GEORGE

Tell me, Hedda, what is that one thing you're talking about?

HEDDA takes out key under a vase on table.

HEDDA

My pistol set, George.

GEORGE

Guns!

HEDDA quickly unlocks pistol case and takes out an antique pistol that belonged to her late father.

HEDDA

(With cold eyes)

My father's pistols.

HEDDA moves through the dining room and out to the garden and off.

GEORGE

(Shouts after her)

No, for God sakes, Hedda, don't play with those things! For my sake, Hedda!

Beat. SFX: offstage GUNSHOTS.

Lights fade. END OF SCENE.

ACT I
SCENE 2

SETTING: *The Tesman home, interior; early evening same day.*

AT RISE: *HEDDA stands by the open glass door holding a pistol.*

HEDDA

(Shouting out)
Good evening, David.

BRACK

Good evening, Hedda.

HEDDA

(Lifts pistol and aims)
I'm going to shoot you, David, right between your eyes.

BRACK

(Calling from offstage garden)
Don't aim that gun at me.

HEDDA

But, you're sneaking in... the back way.

BRACK entering from backyard entrance to the dining room with his hands up. She continues pointing the gun at him as he enters the living room.

BRACK

Oh, put that down. It might go off.

HEDDA

Then get in here, right now!

BRACK

Are you crazy?

HEDDA

I'd just love to pull the trigger.

BRACK takes pistol from her hand.

BRACK

(Looks at pistol)

Your father's. *(Looks around)* Where's the case?

BRACK puts pistol into case, and closes it.

BRACK, *Continued*

Enough games for one day... Please?

HEDDA

How else do I amuse myself? This place is a morgue.

BRACK

Where's George?

HEDDA puts gun case back on table in front of the painting of her father.

HEDDA

Right after lunch he hurried off to see his Aunties. I didn't think you'd be here so soon.

BRACK

How stupid of me.

HEDDA

How stupid?

BRACK

Had I thought he'd still be away, I'd have been here sooner.

HEDDA

You wouldn't have found me here. I've been in my bedroom since lunch.

BRACK

Sounds delightful.

HEDDA

I was trying on the clothes I bought in Europe.

BRACK

If only I was here sooner.

HEDDA

(Coily)

Why?

BRACK

I could have helped with the zippers.

HEDDA

My bedroom door was locked.

BRACK

You could have given me a key.

HEDDA

You are a bad boy, David. A bad, bad boy.

BRACK

I thought that was your type.

HEDDA

So?

BRACK

That's why I was so stunned when you married George Tesman.

HEDDA

So I married a good boy.

HEDDA and BRACK stare at each other.

BRACK

I missed you, Hedda.

HEDDA

That's nice, David.

BRACK

Every day while you were gone I imagined you living here.

HEDDA

(Pause)

I thought about you, too, while I was gone.

BRACK

Really? Even on your honeymoon?

HEDDA

I'll bet you've never been as bored as I was.

BRACK

George said you had a great time.

HEDDA

He's got me confused with himself.

BRACK

He had a great time.

HEDDA

If you like rummaging through dark, dirty libraries studying ancient writings. Visiting one dank museum after another in tiny villages out of the Middle-Ages. He calls that a great time. I call it a nightmare.

BRACK

What do you expect? He writes philosophy books, remember?

HEDDA

He bores me to death!

BRACK

Intellectuals.

HEDDA

It's more than that, David.

BRACK

Oh?

HEDDA

It's the same person, 24/7. An eternity of living death.

BRACK

Morning, noon and night.

HEDDA

It's intolerable.

BRACK

How awful can it be if you love him?

HEDDA

"Love" – what a nauseating word.

BRACK

You're serious?

HEDDA

How would you like to be with someone who only talks about philosophy?

BRACK

Morning, noon and... *(Suggestively)*...night.

HEDDA

We visited a Medieval church which sent him into paroxysms of talk about ethics and how one should focus on the priority of concrete reality over abstract thinking... blah, blah, blah. He talked for two days straight on that topic. I could scream!

BRACK

Then why did you...?

HEDDA

Why did I marry him?

BRACK stares at HEDDA and waits patiently.

HEDDA

When Father... er, died... I was broke. Alone. Everyone seemed to have deserted me.

BRACK

You're still lovely, my dear.

HEDDA

And then I met George. Right in the nick of time.

BRACK

Acceptable and dependable.

HEDDA

Nothing especially ridiculous about him is there?

BRACK

Ridiculous? I would never use the word "ridiculous" to describe George Tesman.

HEDDA

He wanted so much to take care of me. He promised me he'd give me everything I wanted. How could I resist?

BRACK

You were desperate.

HEDDA

Yes.

BRACK

(Laughs)

If I were the marrying type, Hedda, I—

HEDDA

David, I never for one minute expected you—

BRACK

All I want in life is some good friends – especially married friends – who I can drop in on every now and then.

HEDDA

To see the husband?

BRACK

To see the wife. Of course, I'll be friends with her husband, too.

HEDDA

Of course.

BRACK

A triangular arrangement like that is so convenient... and comforting to all parties concerned.

HEDDA

I sure wish another man might have travelled with us –

BRACK

On your honeymoon!?

BOTH begin to laugh at the idea.

HEDDA

– especially on those long train trips in those small compartments.

BRACK

You can cheer up. You're home now.

HEDDA

I'm afraid the journey is just beginning.

BRACK

If you're so miserable, why not jump the train?

HEDDA

(Hesitates)

It's too early to talk like that.

BRACK

Really?

HEDDA

And be single and broke again...No.

BRACK

I like train trips, Hedda. And I promise to never talk of philosophy.

HEDDA

Well, that would make a difference.

*SFX: Outer door opens and closes.
BRACK and HEDDA give each other a
knowing look.*

BRACK

Our threesome is complete.

HEDDA

And the train starts up again.

*GEORGE enters from the hall carrying
his backpack.*

GEORGE

Hedda, darling! (*Puts backpack down*) David, you're here early.

HEDDA

Good God, you're like a squaw with her papoose.

GEORGE

False analogy, my dear. Here, I got a copy of Lovberg's book.

*GEORGE hands the book to HEDDA,
who moves away, not glancing at the
book.*

GEORGE, *Continued*

I had time to read the first few chapters.

BRACK

As a philosopher, what do you think?

GEORGE

He's done a masterful job handling such a tricky subject with great clarity and insight. He's never written this well. I'll drop this bag off in my office and change for the party.

BRACK

Take your time – I'm early, remember?

GEORGE

Okay. Maybe I'll read a little more of this. It's very exciting stuff!

GEORGE moves off with the book and his backpack, but pauses in the door and turns to BRACK and HEDDA.

GEORGE, *Continued*

Oh, Hedda, I forgot to tell you Aunt Julia can't make it for dinner tonight.

HEDDA

Still upset about the hat?

GEORGE

Oh, no, it's Auntie Renee. She's very ill.

HEDDA

Isn't she always?

GEORGE

I think she's nearing the end.

HEDDA

(Over sympathetic)

The poor dear. And poor, poor George.

GEORGE moves to kiss HEDDA, who lets him kiss her forehead.

GEORGE

You're so understanding. What a sweetheart!

GEORGE exits to the back room.

HEDDA

(Under her breath, rises)

Those aunts.

BRACK

What was that about Aunt Julia's hat?

HEDDA

Oh, this morning she put her plastic rain hat on the sofa here. *(Laughs)* I pretended it was the maid's.

BRACK

How could you do that to such a nice old lady?

HEDDA

I just don't know what comes over me. I just lose control of what comes out of my mouth. I just can't help it.

HEDDA sits in a chair near the fireplace.

HEDDA

And it's worse when I'm bored.

BRACK

Bored. You're like a cat playing with a mouse.

HEDDA

Meow.

BRACK

Just look around you. Isn't this the house you wanted?

HEDDA

You are so naive.

BRACK

Not true?

HEDDA

I had a little too much to drink at Khaki's birthday party last summer.

BRACK

You've had a little too much to drink on more than one occasion.

HEDDA

I asked George to drive me home, and on the way we drove past this house. He said he loved this place. So...

BRACK

You con –

HEDDA

What?

BRACK

You conniving little minx.

HEDDA

Hey, I felt pity that such an educated man couldn't put two words together with a woman. I made him happy. You should have seen him.

BRACK

So you really couldn't care less about this place?

HEDDA

This place? Remember the house I grew up in?

BRACK

But that part of your life is over and done.

HEDDA

Don't talk about that. I'm depressed enough.

BRACK

Don't you ever think of getting a job?

HEDDA

Oh God!

BRACK

Or going back to school – of finishing college?

HEDDA

David.

BRACK

Then maybe charity work?

HEDDA

I thought about all that.

BRACK

You'd feel so much better. Doing something.

HEDDA

Oh, no. I'd feel worse – all that responsibility.

BRACK gestures toward the piano.

BRACK

You play the piano, don't you?

HEDDA

Poorly. I don't practice. I have no discipline.

BRACK

Daddy's spoiled little girl.

HEDDA

Daddy's bored to death little girl. (*Notices GEORGE upstage entering*) Speaking of boring, here comes the man of the house now.

GEORGE enters the dining room, in a change of clothes.

GEORGE

Hedda, Eilert just pulled in our driveway.

HEDDA

He did come after all.

BRACK

That's a surprise.

BERTA enters.

BERTA

A Mr. Eilert Lovberg here to see you –

HEDDA

Show him in.

BERTA quickly exits.

BRACK

We'll soon find out if the rumor is true...

GEORGE

(Very anxious)

The truth.

GEORGE looks at HEDDA. HEDDA looks away. EILERT LOVBERG enters. GEORGE moves to EILERT and shakes his hand.

GEORGE

Eilert, welcome! It's so good to see you again.

EILERT

Great to see you too, George. I can't tell you how surprised I was to get your invitation.

GEORGE

Surprised? We went to school together. We're both philosophers.

HEDDA

Perhaps you could look at this even philosophically –

GEORGE

Eilert, let me introduce my wife: Hedda Tesman.

EILERT and HEDDA's eyes lock.

EILERT

Uh, how do you do, Mrs. Tesman?

HEDDA stares at EILERT as he takes her limp hand.

HEDDA

So nice to meet you, I've heard so much about you – from George, Mr. Lovberg.

EILERT

Eilert.

HEDDA

Eilert.

GEORGE

You know Judge David Brack here, don't you, Eilert?

EILERT

Of course. Still a trustee?

GEORGE ushers the group to the living room to sit.

BRACK

Yes. Till the end of the year. Nice to see you again, Professor Lovberg.

GEORGE

I bought a copy of your book today. You've never written better. Can't wait to finish it.

EILERT

Save yourself the trouble.

GEORGE

What do you mean?

EILERT

There isn't much to it really.

GEORGE

What I've read so far is—

EILERT

Philosophy written for today's public. Vampires. Can you believe it?

BRACK

You don't sound like you like your baby very much.

GEORGE

It serves its purpose. I sold out.

HEDDA

What's wrong with marketing a money-making idea?

GEORGE

Integrity, my dear. A philosopher should have the courage of his convictions.

HEDDA

You make philosophers sound like heroes—

BRACK

Or martyrs.

EILERT

Philosophers should live according to their theories. Could you imagine Saint Augustine ridiculing one of his students?

GEORGE laughs heartily at this; BRACK and HEDDA make disparaging faces.

EILERT

It's not funny, George. You of all people should know.

GEORGE

I'm of the opinion that in this era, Greed is a virtue, and so, what you did is quite virtuous. I should envy you.

EILERT

George Tesman. I cannot believe what you just said.

GEORGE

It's true. I wish I had your success. I would have been satisfied just to get the appointment.

HEDDA

Oh, George. That's something to share with Eilert later.

GEORGE

You're right, dear. In any case, congratulations, Eilert.

EILERT

No ethical philosophy would support my motives.

BRACK

(To EILERT)

Sounds very clever, Professor.

EILERT opens the packet he holds and displays a hand-written manuscript.

EILERT

This is the book that will really put me on the map. It's the Holy Grail for philosophy buffs. This is the real thing.

GEORGE

What's it about?

EILERT

I've discovered how to make Occam's razor irrefutable.

GEORGE

No!

HEDDA

I can't imagine how shaving supplies could be a—

EILERT

With all due modesty, it's my masterpiece.

GEORGE

Philosophy, literature and pop culture.

GEORGE takes the manuscript.

EILERT

Triple threat!

GEORGE

Still writing in longhand?

EILERT

Inspiration only comes from the mind to pen to paper.

GEORGE flips through some pages.

GEORGE

This isn't your handwriting.

EILERT

I dictated it.

GEORGE

If this is better than the other book, then I'm only too eager to read it, Eilert.

EILERT

That's why I brought it. I had hoped you wouldn't object to reading through some parts of it.

GEORGE

Let's do it.

EILERT notices GEORGE and BRACK's outfits.

EILERT

I'm anxious to hear what you think, but—am I interrupting something? You're both dressed up.

GEORGE

Damn. Absent-minded me. I forgot I made other plans tonight.

BRACK

I'm throwing a stag party tonight in George's honor.

GEORGE

I'm a little embarrassed, Judge.

EILERT takes the manuscript back from GEORGE.

EILERT

I know what to do, I'll come back another time.

EILERT turns to leave.

BRACK

Eilert, wait! Why don't you join us?

EILERT

No. I can't. But, thank you for asking.

BRACK

Oh, come on! It's just friends. You'll have a good time.

EILERT

I don't doubt that, but all the same –

BRACK

I reserved a suite at the Renaissance Downtown. There's an extra room. Bring your manuscript and read it to George there.

GEORGE

Oh yes, Eilert. We could read it there.

HEDDA

Don't force him, dear. Maybe Professor Lovberg doesn't want to join you tonight. I'm sure he would much rather stay here and have dinner with me.

EILERT

With you, Mrs. Tesman?

HEDDA

Hedda.

EILERT

Hedda.

HEDDA

Thea Elvsted will also be here.

EILERT

Oh!

HEDDA

You'll insult me if you don't stay for dinner.

EILERT

Then, I have no choice now, do I?

HEDDA

I'll let the cook know.

HEDDA exits.

GEORGE

I'm sorry about this envy business.

EILERT

What is it, George?

GEORGE

That book, the appointment –

EILERT

I understand why you might be concerned.

GEORGE

I couldn't expect you to –

EILERT

Don't worry, George, I don't plan to publish it until after you receive your appointment.

GEORGE

You mean you're not going to compete with me?

EILERT

I thought about it, but I decided I won't be a candidate.

GEORGE

But, you're rebuilding your reputation.

EILERT

Exactly. And I must do it in a way I can live with myself. Part of my recovery program, you might say.

HEDDA enters.

GEORGE

Hedda, you just missed the big news.

HEDDA

What?

GEORGE

Wonderful news. Eilert won't compete with me after all.

HEDDA

Keep me out of this, please.

HEDDA crosses to the dining room, where BERTA is standing, with decanters, glasses and a tray of hors d'oeuvres on the dining room table. HEDDA nods approvingly and reenters the living room. BERTA exits.

BRACK

That's magnanimous of you, Eilert. You're a hero.

GEORGE

You are. But, at the same time –

HEDDA

(Looks at GEORGE with a cold smile)

You look thunderstruck, George.

GEORGE

That's exactly how I feel right now.

BRACK

The storm seems to have passed over, Hedda.

HEDDA

Let's have that wine you brought from our trip.

GEORGE

Splendid, Hedda! Perfectly splendid! A drink to celebrate.

BRACK

So many things to celebrate.

HEDDA

Join us, Mr. Lovberg?

EILERT

No thanks. Nothing for me.

BRACK

Good Lord, Nugent, a little glass of wine isn't poison.

EILERT

One drink is too much, and a million aren't enough.

GEORGE

What does that mean?

HEDDA

You two go celebrate. The Professor can join Thea and me for dinner.

GEORGE

Good idea, Hedda. We'll do that, darling!

GEORGE and BRACK go into the dining room where they can be seen drinking wine, nibbling hors d'oeuvres, and cheerfully talking.

HEDDA

(Raising her voice a little)

Would you like to see some pictures from our honeymoon? These are at the Alps.

HEDDA takes out her cell phone, opens the photo album, and offers it up to EILERT, who moves closer, stops, and stares at HEDDA, as HE sits. HEDDA sits.

HEDDA

Look at these mountain—it's part of the Ortler group. It's near Meran.

EILERT

(Slowly in a low voice)

Hedda – Gabler!

HEDDA

(Glances quickly at him)

Quiet!

EILERT

(Repeats softly)

Hedda Gabler!

HEDDA

(Looks at the cell phone screen)

Sh-h-h.

EILERT

How could you?

HEDDA

(Clicking different pictures)

Oh please, Eilert.

EILERT

(Resentful)

How could you marry... that, that –

HEDDA

George Tesman.

EILERT

Oh, Hedda! How could you throw yourself away like that?

HEDDA

(Looks sharply at him)

How can you say that?

EILERT

What do you mean?

*GEORGE enters and approaches
HEDDA and EILERT.*

HEDDA

And take a look at this picture here, this is the Ampezzo Valley. Just look at the peaks there.
(*Looks kindly at GEORGE*) What are these peaks called again, dear?

GEORGE

Oh! Those are the Dolomites.

HEDDA

That's it. The Dolomites.

GEORGE

Hedda, dear, are you sure you wouldn't like me to get you a glass of wine, eh?

HEDDA

Alright. I'll have a glass of the red.

GEORGE

And hors d'oeuvres?

HEDDA

No, thank you.

GEORGE

Eilert?

EILERT

Nothing for me. Thanks.

GEORGE

No cheese?

EILERT

No, thank you.

GEORGE

Very well.

*GEORGE goes back into the dining
room. BRACK observes HEDDA and
EILERT.*

EILERT

(In a low voice, as before)

I never thought you could do that.

HEDDA

(Apparently absorbed in a photograph)

If you don't stop it I won't talk to you.

EILERT

Not even when we're alone?

HEDDA

Think it, but don't say it out loud.

EILERT

Ah! I understand. You're in love with George Tesman, that's why, isn't it?

HEDDA

(Glances at him and smiles)

There's that word again – How nauseating.

EILERT

So, you don't love him then?

HEDDA

That doesn't mean I would ever be unfaithful to him. You need to understand that.

EILERT

Hedda, answer me this one question.

HEDDA

Quiet! He's coming back here.

GEORGE enters with a decanter of red wine and two glasses, and a plate of hors d'oeuvres.

GEORGE

Here we go... wine and hors d'oeuvres for my lovely lady.

GEORGE sets the tray down on the table.

HEDDA

George, we pay Berta to do that. Why are you serving?

GEORGE pours wine into the glasses.

GEORGE

I love waiting on you, Hedda.

HEDDA

You filled two glasses. Mr. Lovberg said he doesn't want any.

GEORGE

Oh. Thea will be here soon, won't she? It can breathe.

HEDDA

In the glass? Whatever. I don't think Thea will notice.

GEORGE

Shouldn't she be here soon?

HEDDA

We were so absorbed in these photos here, I forgot. *(Showing him a picture)* Remember this little mountain village?

GEORGE

Oh, yes, below the Brennan Pass. We stayed there one night.

HEDDA

Yes, and met a group of Chinese tourists.

GEORGE

You would have loved it, Eilert. They were so fascinating.

HEDDA

So much, they talked all night.

*GEORGE goes back to the dining room
and sits down again with BRACK.*

EILERT

Just tell me one thing, Hedda.

HEDDA

What? What do you want to know?

EILERT

Did you ever love me? Even one bit?

HEDDA

I've often wondered that myself. *(Smiles)* We were great in bed, though.

EILERT

Like you and George? *(Pauses)* You never told him about us, did you?

HEDDA

I don't think anyone knew.

EILERT

Your father knew.

HEDDA

He never knew.

EILERT

Come on, Hedda, of course he did. No one could hide anything from The General. You know that.

HEDDA

We were discreet.

EILERT

The coward almost destroyed you when the he killed himself.

HEDDA

It wasn't cowardly.

EILERT

Left you to clean up his mess.

HEDDA

He was the bravest of men. Like an ancient warrior. Rather than admit defeat and surrender, he picked up his weapon and died an honorable death.

EILERT

Honorable?

HEDDA

He would say "a beautiful death is swift, sure and honorable." His was that.

EILERT

But honorable?

HEDDA

I've never met a man yet that could compare to my father.

EILERT

Hedda, you really do live in your own world.

HEDDA

It's the only world I feel comfortable in.

EILERT

You're the most dangerous woman I've ever met.

HEDDA

(Innocently)

Why would you say that about me?

EILERT

You tried to shoot me, remember?

HEDDA

If I was really dangerous you wouldn't be here now.

EILERT

Still.

HEDDA

I missed on purpose.

EILERT

You might have killed me.

HEDDA

I know.

EILERT

Your Old Man never approved of me.

HEDDA

Watch it, Eilert.

EILERT

Sorry – your father.

HEDDA

(Pause)

You still don't realize we're over.

EILERT

I have no choice. You have such power over me.

HEDDA

I really do?

EILERT

Overwhelming power.

EILERT and HEDDA lock eyes. There is an intense animal attraction to each other.

HEDDA

(Subdued passion)

Fearless.

EILERT

But you ended it. Or should I say, your father did.

A sudden change overcomes HEDDA, and she moves away from EILERT slightly, and stiffens.

HEDDA

(Pause)

If I have such power over you, why won't you listen to me? I've told you to leave me alone.

EILERT

I offer you love and passion, but you turn away from me.

HEDDA moves away.

HEDDA

How lucky then for you to have found someone who didn't turn away. Your goddess. Your muse.

EILERT

What?

HEDDA

Thea Elvsted, of course.

EILERT

She confided in you?

HEDDA

Did you tell her about us?

EILERT

She has no interest in my past.

HEDDA

Then I guess she's not as stupid as I thought.

EILERT

Believe me, she's not stupid.

BERTA enters with THEA. HEDDA closes the cell phone pictures, and calls to THEA.

HEDDA

At last, Here you are!

THEA moves to HEDDA, who holds out her hand. EILERT rises. He and THEA greet one another with a silent nod.

THEA

(Motions to the dining room)

Shouldn't I first say "hello" to Mr. Tesman – George – and the Judge?

HEDDA

Oh, don't bother. They'll be leaving us.

THEA

They won't be joining us for dinner?

HEDDA

They're off to a party. Just the boys.

THEA

(Suddenly alarmed, rapidly to EILERT)

You're not going with them, are you?

EILERT

(Softly)

No.

HEDDA

Eilert's staying with us this evening. Lucky him.

EILERT

Lucky me.

THEA takes a chair and moves to sit at Eilert's side.

THEA

How nice it is to be here by the nice warm fire on such a chilly fall night with my friends.

HEDDA

No, not there, Thea. I'll sit between you.

THEA

Oh, alright. Wherever.

*HEDDA now squeezes in between
EILERT and THEA.*

EILERT

(After a short pause, to HEDDA)

Isn't she lovely to sit and look at?

HEDDA

(Strokes her hair lightly)

Just look?

EILERT

Thea and I have become best friends. Friends who trust one another completely. Isn't that right, Thea?

HEDDA

How nice to be so trusting.

EILERT

It means everything to me... You see—

THEA

Eilert tells me I inspire his work.

HEDDA

(Looks at her with a smile)

He really says that?

THEA

You do, don't you, Eilert?

EILERT

And, she has the courage of her convictions.

THEA

Me? Courage? What do you mean?

EILERT

In trusting me to change.

HEDDA

Oh, if only.

EILERT

If only?

THEA

Hedda! Don't.

EILERT

What is the problem?

THEA

All right. Eilert is his own man.

HEDDA

You should have seen the Judge's face when you turned down his invitation. He just looked at you and saw this pathetic weak man with no confidence in his ability to control himself. For even one evening. *(To EILERT)* Then you really aren't going?

EILERT

I'm planning to stay here. With you and Thea.

HEDDA

(Smiles and nods with approval to EILERT)

See Thea, that was a test. The man does have self-control after all. *(Turns to THEA and pats her)* Isn't that what I told you this morning when you came running here in a panic? Didn't I tell you not to be so frightened by what Eilert might do?

THEA

Oh, Hedda, please.

HEDDA

And didn't I tell you, you could trust Eilert Lovberg to not get into any trouble, now that he's back here?

EILERT

What is this about?

HEDDA

Now we can enjoy ourselves. See how unfair you were, Thea. How could you doubt him?

THEA

What are you doing?

EILERT

(Looks steadily at her for a little while; his face gloomy)

You were so concerned about me? Why?

THEA

It's not what you think, Eilert.

HEDDA

She was worried you might slip back to your old habits. She begged my George to keep an eye on you.

EILERT

Did she now?

THEA

Eilert, I—

EILERT

So that's all the faith you have in me, my trusted friend?

THEA

Please Eilert, listen. I couldn't help myself. You were all alone in the city where you got into so much trouble before.

EILERT

Oh, then you admit it. You feared any little stress could throw me off the wagon.

HEDDA

Why do they say "off the wagon?" Does it mean one had too much to drink and lost their balance?

EILERT stares at THEA, while he responds to HEDDA.

EILERT

Before Prohibition, people who took the pledge to quit drinking booze would jump up and ride a temperance wagon through the streets. If they relapsed people would call that "falling off the temperance wagon."

EILERT takes a glass of wine, and lifts it to his lips, still staring at THEA. HEDDA smiles mischievously.

EILERT, Continued

Eventually people stopped saying "temperance." (*Sourly*) To your health, Thea!

EILERT empties the glass, puts it down, and pours another from decanter.

THEA

Hedda... How could you do this to me?

HEDDA

Do "what" to you, Thea dear?

EILERT

(Toasts)

And to your good health, Hedda Gabler.

THEA

Hedda Tesman.

EILERT

Thank you for telling me the truth.

EILERT drinks, and moves to refill his glass. HEDDA puts her hand on his arm.

HEDDA

No more for now. You're going to the party, remember?

THEA

No, no, no! This is all wrong.

HEDDA

You're creating a scene, Thea.

EILERT downs the glass of wine.

EILERT

Tell me the truth.

THEA

About what?

EILERT

Does your husband know you followed me?

THEA

Do you hear what he's asking me?

EILERT

So your husband sent you to spy on me. Did he think I stole something when I left?

THEA

Oh, Eilert—

EILERT snatches a glass and tries to fill it.

EILERT

And now, a toast to your husband!

EILERT offers to pour HEDDA another drink. HEDDA gestures her refusal.

HEDDA

Eilert, aren't you going out, and you're going to read your manuscript to George.

EILERT pushes the decanter away.

EILERT

(Quietly)

Don't be angry with me. I'm behaving like a fool. You'll see that Eilert Lovberg is back on his feet. *(To THEA)* And really, it's all because of you, my dear.

THEA

(Beaming with delight)

Thank you!

Meanwhile, BRACK has looked at his watch. He and GEORGE rise and move into the living room.

GEORGE

David, you met Ms. Thea Elvsted this morning.

BRACK

Nice to see you again.

THEA

I hope you'll have a pleasant evening, Judge.

BRACK

Well, Hedda, it's time we were on our way.

HEDDA

Have a good time.

BRACK and GEORGE head for the door.

EILERT

Wait!

BRACK and GEORGE stop.

EILERT, *Continued*

(Rises)

I'm coming with you.

THEA

Don't, Eilert. Please.

BRACK

Changed your mind, then?

EILERT

If the invitation still stands?

BRACK

Of course. And we'll have plenty of soft drinks on hand.

HEDDA

See, Thea, nothing to worry about.

EILERT rewraps the manuscript and stuffs it under his arm.

EILERT

George, there's a couple sections I'm eager to run past you before I send it to my publisher. I haven't shown him a page yet.

GEORGE

I'm looking forward to it.

THEA

(To EILERT)

Oh. Do you have to go?

EILERT

Don't worry, honey. That was the last drop I'll have tonight... I promise.

THEA

I really wish you would –

HEDDA

Eilert is a big boy. He knows his limits.

EILERT

Of course I promise I'll be back by midnight... one o'clock at the latest.

THEA

One?

EILERT

Not a minute later. Maybe 1:30.

GEORGE

Then everything is settled. *(To HEDDA)* Dear, I'll try to be back early.

HEDDA

George dear, you stay out as long as you like.

THEA

(In concealed agony)

I'll be waiting, Eilert.

BRACK

Let's get a move on.

EILERT

(Waving grimly)

Later, ladies.

BRACK, EILERT and GEORGE go out through the hall door. THEA rises and walks around uneasily.

THEA

What's going to happen now?

HEDDA

He'll return to you triumphant. A laurel wreath on his head, and filled with confidence.

THEA

I hope so.

HEDDA

When he returns sober tonight he'll have proven to himself that he has finally defeated his demons. He'll be a free man for the rest of his life.

THEA

I hope to God you're right

HEDDA

Everything will turn out exactly as I predict. *(Rises and approaches her)* You can doubt him all you want, but I believe in him.

THEA

What are you up to, Hedda?

HEDDA

Up to? For once in my life I want to influence the fate of another human being.

THEA

For once?

HEDDA

(Scornful glance)
I've never had this opportunity.

THEA

What about your husband?

HEDDA

Do you really think I could improve George? *(Looks passionately at her)* And anyway... what about your husband?

HEDDA grabs THEA's arm.

THEA

Let me go! Let me go! I am afraid of you, Hedda.

BERTA enters and stops at doorway.

BERTA

Dinner is served in the dining room, ma'am.

HEDDA

Very well. We are coming.

THEA

No, no, no! I'm going home. Right now!

HEDDA

No you're not, you silly little school girl. We'll have a nice dinner. Watch a movie, and wait for Eilert Lovberg to return with his laurel wreath.

HEDDA practically drags THEA to the doorway of the dining room.

LIGHTS FADE. END OF ACT I.

ACT II
SCENE I

SETTING: *The Tesman home, interior; the next day at dawn.*

AT RISE: *In dim light HEDDA is seated by the fireplace drinking a cup of coffee and talking on the phone.*

HEDDA

(On her phone)

Yes, I promise. As soon as he comes in. Again, my condolences.

HEDDA sips coffee. GEORGE enters from the garden. He looks tired and serious. He walks on tip toes toward the interior of the room, slipping in between the curtains.

HEDDA, *Continued*

(Without looking up)

Good-morning, George.

GEORGE

Hedda. What are you doing up so early?

HEDDA

I couldn't sleep.

GEORGE

Worrying about me? Oh, Hedda, darling!

HEDDA

Sh-sh-sh-sh! *(Whispering)* Thea is asleep in the other room.

GEORGE

She spent the night?

HEDDA

We waited for Eilert.

GEORGE

We got busy. You couldn't sleep... worrying about me?

HEDDA

Not a bit... How was your party? What did you boys do?

GEORGE

It was better than I thought it would be. Especially before the others arrived. Eilert read his manuscript to me.

HEDDA

How was it?

GEORGE

Oh, Hedda, you can't imagine what a great book he's written. It's brilliant – filled with one amazing idea after another. He wasn't bragging when he said he had written a masterpiece: commercial and academic.

HEDDA

Great. That's more than I need to know.

GEORGE

I'm ashamed to admit this but... when he finished – something truly ugly came over me.

HEDDA

You? Something ugly?

GEORGE

Envy... I was envious of Eilert. Very envious.

HEDDA

I can see how you could feel that way.

GEORGE

And then I think that a man with that talent could live such... a... a... screwed-up life.

HEDDA

Maybe you mean "exciting and adventurous"?

GEORGE

I mean, he simply can't do anything in moderation.

HEDDA

What happened when the party was over?

GEORGE

Well... Eilert flipped his chip.

HEDDA

Chip?

GEORGE
His AA sobriety chip.

HEDDA
No wreath in his hair?

GEORGE
Just the fruit of the vine. And you know what they say-- In Vino Veritas.

HEDDA
They say that? What does that mean?

GEORGE
There is truth in wine.

HEDDA
Oh really? What truth did Eilert have to offer?

GEORGE
He told us a story about his Muse... A woman who was responsible for his redemption. He used the word "inspired."

HEDDA
Who is she?

GEORGE
Who else could it be?

HEDDA
That's what I asked. "Who," George?

GEORGE
Thea Elvsted, of course.

HEDDA
Of course.

GEORGE
No surprise, is there?

HEDDA
Where did you leave him?

GEORGE
We were all pretty drunk – so we all decided to walk down to the Science Museum Pier to get some fresh air. Eilert was in no condition to join us so we left him in the hotel.

HEDDA

His old ways...

GEORGE

Well, the fresh air did wonders. I know I felt better.

HEDDA

So Eilert spent the night at the hotel?

GEORGE

Actually, when we returned to the room he was gone.

HEDDA

Where did he go?

GEORGE

We didn't know. So we split up and roamed the streets of downtown looking for him.

HEDDA

Didn't you find him?

GEORGE

Hedda, you mustn't tell anyone for Eilert's sake. (*Takes the manuscript from out of his coat pocket*) He "lost" this.

HEDDA

His manuscript?

GEORGE

He must have dropped it on the sidewalk without even knowing it. Hedda, isn't that pathetic?

HEDDA

You kept it?

GEORGE

I couldn't find him. None of us could. Except the Judge, we all returned to the hotel. I don't know what happened to him either.

HEDDA

Did you tell anyone about this?

GEORGE

Of course not. I didn't want to embarrass Eilert further. I hid it in my topcoat here.

HEDDA

So nobody knows you have this?

GEORGE

No one. And nobody must know – it would humiliate him.

HEDDA

Did you go to Eilert's apartment?

GEORGE

I called, but no answer. Thea was right, he doesn't even have an answering machine.

HEDDA

It's actually sort of selfish, you know. That way, he controls who he talks to.

GEORGE

Can you imagine what he'll feel like when he finds his manuscript missing? It's the only copy.

HEDDA

With all this technology—

GEORGE

I know, I know. It's unbelievable, isn't it?

HEDDA

Let me see –

GEORGE hands HEDDA manuscript.

HEDDA, *Continued*

(Looking at it)

There's no name or address on it.

GEORGE

How stupid.

HEDDA

But it's brilliant?

GEORGE

Oh, sure. The book may be brilliant, but he's a fool. A first class fool.

GEORGE smiles, evilly, then quickly stops, looking guilty.

HEDDA

Tell me, how hard would it be to rewrite it?

GEORGE

I don't think it can be rewritten. It's come from...

HEDDA

I know, I know... *(Singsong)* "Inspiration."

GEORGE

(Looks knowing and envious)

The kind that conceives a masterpiece.

HEDDA

(Casually)

Oh, oops, George. I'm sorry.

GEORGE

What?

HEDDA

With all this happening – I completely forgot to tell you –

GEORGE

What? What is it?

HEDDA

Julia's been calling... *(Under her breath)*... all morning.

GEORGE

Is must be about Auntie Renee!

HEDDA

Yes, that's it. The nurse was there all night.

GEORGE

It's really happening.

HEDDA

Oh, come on, you can't be surprised... Julia says you should hurry over if you want to say good-bye.

GEORGE grabs his jacket and moves to the door.

GEORGE

I'll call.

HEDDA

Run! Hurry, dear. *(Suppresses a smile)* On your mark, get set – go!

GEORGE is about to exit, then stops.

GEORGE

Oh? Hedda, do you want to come with me?

HEDDA rises and slumps wearily.

HEDDA

Trust me, George, you don't want me there. I'm no good at that stuff.

GEORGE

Oh, yes, of course.

HEDDA

You should hurry, dear—what if she dies while we're chatting?

GEORGE quickly exits; HEDDA immediately starts paging through the manuscript.

BRACK, unnoticed by HEDDA, quietly enters from Upstage dining room and observes.

BRACK

Good morning.

HEDDA

You startled me.

HEDDA quickly slides the manuscript into the desk.

BRACK

You really should lock your back door. This is Shaker Heights not Hunting Valley.

HEDDA

George says you all had a delightful party.

BRACK

(Hinting)

What else did George say about last night?

HEDDA

Not too much. You all got drunk; walked around downtown... in the middle of the night like some frat boy fools.

BRACK

He said "fools"?

HEDDA

That very word before he left here.

BRACK

Did he say anything about Eilert?

HEDDA

Only that you left him at the hotel, and when you got back he was gone. And so were you.

BRACK

(Smiles)

True enough.

HEDDA

Has anyone found out what happened to him?

BRACK

Someone has.

HEDDA

You?

BRACK

Sit, Hedda.

THEY sit a few feet apart.

HEDDA

What else happened?

BRACK

I had a feeling where he'd go.

HEDDA

Then you found him?

BRACK

Yes, I found him...

HEDDA

Go on. Where was he?

BRACK

At the Gentleman's Club.

HEDDA

Gloria Rose's place.

BRACK

By the time I got there, Eilert and Rose were the middle of a real fight. He was still drunk, and she was screaming.

HEDDA

At Eilert?

BRACK

He accused her of robbing him.

HEDDA

Of what?

BRACK

Stealing his manuscript.

HEDDA

And then?

BRACK

Gloria called the bouncer, and Eilert began to fight him. After he got thrown out, he took a brick to her Mercedes – ergo they called the cops.

HEDDA

The police?

BRACK

It turned out to be one costly party for Eilert Lovberg.

HEDDA

Was he arrested?

BRACK

They took him to jail to sleep it off.

HEDDA

So that's it?

BRACK

That's it.

HEDDA

Not a laurel wreath on his head?

HEDDA and BRACK lock eyes.

BRACK

No laurel wreath... No nothing.

Then he's still in jail?
HEDDA

Oh, no, I posted bond.
BRACK

You?
HEDDA

I offered to drive him home, but he refused. He just ran off.
BRACK

Why did you post bond?
HEDDA

That's the least I could do. I blame myself for inviting him in the first place.
BRACK

Oh, please. What are you really after, Brack?
HEDDA

Why, Hedda. Don't you believe me?
BRACK

Not at all.
HEDDA

I wonder why you don't.
BRACK

I asked what you're really after?
HEDDA

The truth.
BRACK

Truth?
HEDDA

If Eilert's homeless, there's only one place he'll go?
BRACK

And where might that be?
HEDDA

Right here. To you and George.
BRACK

Really? HEDDA

And, I don't like competition. BRACK

A threat to your "triple alliance?" HEDDA

Do the math. BRACK

Pretty clever, David. HEDDA

I think so. *(Smiling)* BRACK

I thought I was free of your coercion. HEDDA

Don't you believe I have something on you? *(Laughs ambiguously)* BRACK

Sounds like a threat. HEDDA

Relationship's work best when they're voluntary. BRACK

Sure... Of course. HEDDA

Good. You get my meaning. BRACK

BRACK starts to leave.

David. HEDDA

BRACK stops, but doesn't face HEDDA.

HEDDA, *Continued*
You'll never win with me. You know that.

BRACK slowly turns to face HEDDA.

BRACK

I know this: I've never lost any game I play.

HEDDA

You can't beat the hand of someone who has nothing to lose.

BRACK turns and exits through dining room toward the garden.

HEDDA

Through the garden again?

BRACK

My short-cut to home.

HEDDA

A regular back-door man, aren't you?

BRACK

Call it my hobby.

HEDDA

Could be a dangerous one.

BRACK

Dangerous?

HEDDA

Intruders have been shot coming in the back door.

BRACK turns in the doorway, laughing.

BRACK

Oh! Please. You wouldn't shoot the only hard one around here?

HEDDA

(Laughs also)

Touché!

THEY nod, as THEY laugh. Suddenly, BRACK gives her a sudden, forceful kiss, and rapidly exits.

HEDDA slams the door after him, then wipes her mouth, then moves to the desk, removes the manuscript, and begins to turn the pages.

BERTA's voice is heard in the hall. HEDDA turns and listens. She then quickly replaces the manuscript in the desk.

BERTA, *Off*

Mr. Lovberg! Mr. Lovberg! Wait! Wait here until I—

EILERT, *Off*

And I tell you I will come in! Get out of my way!

EILERT bursts into living room. He looks somewhat confused and excited; shuts the door, turns, and sees HEDDA at the desk.

HEDDA

You're late. What's your excuse?

EILERT

Forgive me.

HEDDA

Why ask my forgiveness? You should do that to Thea.

EILERT

Her car is still in your drive. Where is she?

THEA enters, looking bedraggled and just awakened; sees EILERT and moves to him.

THEA

Eilert!

EILERT

It's too late.

THEA

What's too late?

EILERT

Everything. Everything is too late. We're done for, Thea.

THEA
No—don't say that!

EILERT
Wait 'til you hear.

THEA
No! Don't tell me!

HEDDA
Maybe I should leave you two alone?

EILERT
No, stay. I want you to hear this, too.

THEA
I don't want to hear anything about last night.

EILERT
Nothing about last night.

THEA
What?

EILERT
We can't see each other again.

THEA
But, why?

HEDDA
I knew it! *(Involuntarily)*

EILERT
Because I have no more use for you, Thea.

THEA
How can you say that?

EILERT
Because—I'm never working again.

THEA
Then what do I have to live for? I left my home for you.

EILERT
You must live as if you had never met me.

THEA

That's impossible.

EILERT

You have to. Now please, go home and forget me.

THEA

You can't do this to me! I'm your inspiration... remember?

EILERT

That'll never happen now.

THEA

I want to spend the rest of my life by your side. I want to be with you when the book is published.

HEDDA

Ah, yes! The book—

THEA

Our book. We worked on it for years. Together.

EILERT

Our book will never be published.

HEDDA

Ah!

THEA

Never be published?

EILERT

It's gone.

THEA

Eilert, what happened? What's happened to the manuscript?

HEDDA

(Excitedly)

Yes, the manuscript? Your masterpiece.

THEA

Where is it?

EILERT

Oh, Thea – don't ask me that.

I have a right to know.

THEA

I've destroyed it.

EILERT

Oh, no, no!

THEA

But that's not –

(*Involuntarily*)

HEDDA

You don't believe me?

EILERT

Ah, yes – It just seems so hard to believe.

HEDDA

Believe me, it's true.

EILERT

Oh God! God! Hedda—he destroyed our creation.

THEA

I have torn my whole life to pieces, so why shouldn't I tear up my work as well?

EILERT

That's what you did last night?

THEA

Ripped it into a thousand pieces and scattered them piece by piece into the Lake. They blew away like my life. Like I am doing now, Thea.

EILERT

Like a murder!

THEA

As if I killed my own child.

EILERT

Our child.

THEA

Ah, "the child" –

(*To herself*)

HEDDA

I can't take this. My life is over.

THEA

THEA moves to leave.

What are you going to do?

HEDDA

I don't know.

THEA

THEA exits through the hall door.

(To EILERT)

Aren't you going to follow her?

HEDDA

After what I've done?

EILERT

HEDDA

(Soothing)

What else happened? Something must have for you to end it this way... Tell me, Eilert. Tell Hedda, what really happened.

EILERT

First, give me your word that you'll never tell Thea.

HEDDA

Of course.

EILERT

Say it.

HEDDA

I give you my word.

EILERT

I lied.

HEDDA

About the manuscript?

EILERT

I didn't rip it to pieces.

HEDDA

No? I'm confused now.

I destroyed it just the same.

EILERT

What did you do?

HEDDA

Thea said I had killed our baby.

EILERT

She did.

HEDDA

But I did something worse.

EILERT

What could be worse than that?

HEDDA

Suppose, Hedda, that a father comes home after a night of drinking, and says to his wife:
"Listen, I've been here and there – in this place and that. And, uh, I've taken our child along –
everywhere I went last night. And... And, I have lost our child. Lost it! Only the devil knows
what's happened to it.

EILERT

Oh, come on, it wasn't a child—no more than a book.

HEDDA

But her soul was in that book. And mine, too.

EILERT

Oh.

HEDDA

So you see there is no future for us together.

EILERT

What now?

HEDDA

I just want to end it all.

EILERT

(Hypnotically)
Eilert – now listen to me. If you do... let it be beautiful.

HEDDA

EILERT

(Surprised)

Beautiful? *(Smiles)* Do I still need a laurel wreath?

HEDDA

I'm serious, Eilert. That is, if you are.

EILERT

Deadly.

HEDDA

Then let it be beautiful. Now go. And don't come back.

EILERT

How, Hedda, how?

HEDDA

With "swiftness, sureness and honor. That is beauty."

EILERT

Swift – Sure –

HEDDA

Swiftly—now!

EILERT

Good-bye, Hedda. Oh and, congratulate George on his appointment.

EILERT starts to leave.

HEDDA

Wait! I have something for you to take as a memento.

*HEDDA goes to pistol-case on the table,
takes out a pistol and hands it to
EILERT.*

EILERT

This? This is a memento?

HEDDA

Familiar? It's the same one I once aimed at you.

EILERT

You should have aimed at my heart.

HEDDA

Take it.

EILERT puts the pistol in his coat pocket.

EILERT

Thank you.

HEDDA

And, do it beautifully. Promise me that, Eilert.

EILERT

Good-bye... Hedda.

EILERT exits through the hall door. She then goes to the desk and takes out the manuscript and quickly pages through it once more. She then takes the whole manuscript and sits down in the arm-chair by the fireplace. She holds it in her lap. After a pause, she moves to the gas fireplace and lights it. HEDDA throws one of the pages into the fire.

HEDDA

I believe I am inspired. Few people know how creative I can be.

HEDDA scans a page, then throws it on the fire.

HEDDA, Continued

I tonight... performance art!

HEDDA scans another page, then throws it on the fire.

HEDDA, Continued

Oh, Thea, if only you should see what I can create when I am inspired. Ha-ha-ha-ha.

HEDDA throws several pages into the fire.

HEDDA, Continued

These pages make the most beautiful flames I've ever created.

LIGHTS FADE. END SCENE 1.

ACT II, SCENE 2

SETTING: *The Tesman home, interior; later that evening.*

AT RISE: *HEDDA sits at piano playing some chords. BERTA, weeping, enters from the hall with JULIA. HEDDA moves to JULIA with her hands outstretched.*

HEDDA

I am so sorry, Miss Tesman.

JULIA

Don't be. I know Renee has found rest at last.

HEDDA

(Insincerely)

Forgive me for not coming with George to say good-bye. I really didn't know the old girl. I'd have just been a nuisance.

JULIA

(Coldly)

Oh, I understand... Believe me.

HEDDA

(Diverting her)

She died peacefully. I hope.

JULIA

Oh, yes. It was calm. Actually beautiful.

HEDDA

(Scornfully)

Beautiful?

JULIA

I'm so glad George made it in time to say good-bye. Isn't he home yet?

HEDDA

No. I expect him any minute now... Won't you sit down?

JULIA

No, thank you. I only stopped by to check on George. I have to there when hospice comes to pick up their equipment.

HEDDA

Can I help with anything?

JULIA

Hedda, at this time in your life you don't need to think about death.

HEDDA

Sometimes it's hard to control one's thought.

JULIA

That's how life is... Today I'm mourning the death of dear Renee but tomorrow – who knows? – I might be celebrating a new life. Am I right, Hedda?

GEORGE enters through the hall-door.

HEDDA

At last. Where were you?

GEORGE

My only aunt, and you're here with Hedda.

JULIA

I was just leaving, George. Have you done as promised?

GEORGE

(Fighting back tears)

Not everything. I've been such a wreck today. I'll have to come visit you later.

HEDDA

Death proves who is a man.

JULIA

She was my only sister... It would be nice, George, if you will visit me.

GEORGE

This is just so hard.

JULIA

Oh, George, dear. I wish you didn't suffer so.

GEORGE

What do you mean?

JULIA

You must feel happiness as well as grief. That's how I feel.

GEORGE

About Auntie Renee?

HEDDA

You'll be quite lonely, won't you Miss Tesman?

JULIA

Fortunately I have you and George close by. Goodness knows, I need a reason to live. If you ever need my help, Hedda, please—

HEDDA

If I ever should need your help, I'll let you know.

GEORGE

Can you imagine what great times the three of us could have together, after... when –

HEDDA

When – ?

GEORGE

– Oh, nothing. Things will work out in time... I hope.

JULIA

(Knowingly)

I'm sure you and Hedda have things to talk about. Hedda might have something to tell you, George. Bye-bye, my dears.

JULIA hugs GEORGE and moves to hug HEDDA, who moves away. JULIA goes out through the hall-door. GEORGE fights back tears.

HEDDA

(Following GEORGE coldly and critically with her eyes)

I almost think you're more upset about Renee's death than her sister is.

GEORGE

It's more than my Aunt dying—I'm worried about Eilert.

HEDDA

(Quickly)

What have you heard?

GEORGE

I called his apartment, I don't know how many times, but no answer. I got hold of Thea, but she was incoherent.

HEDDA

What does that mean?

GEORGE

She said Eilert told her he tore up the only copy of their manuscript and threw all the pieces away... into the wind.

HEDDA

Into the wind? Sounds poetic.

GEORGE

She gave me Eilert's address. She also said Eilert was here this morning. You didn't tell me that, Hedda.

HEDDA

Oh yes, I forgot with all that's been going on. He came just after you left.

GEORGE

Did he tell you he tore up his manuscript?

HEDDA

He said that. Yes.

GEORGE

He must be out of his mind. You didn't dare give it to him, did you?

HEDDA

I didn't dare.

GEORGE

Did you tell him it's here?

HEDDA

No. *(Quickly)* Did you tell Thea?

GEORGE

No. I didn't think of it. *(Takes out cell phone)* I'll phone her right now – she'll be so relieved.

HEDDA grabs his cell phone.

HEDDA

She can wait a minute or two longer.

GEORGE

I wish you had told Eilert. Just think what must be going through his mind right now? If you give me the manuscript I'll get it to him.

HEDDA

I don't have it.

What? GEORGE

I don't have it. HEDDA

Eilert's book? I'm not kidding, Hedda. Where is it? GEORGE

I burned it. HEDDA

What? No. GEORGE

Every page. Every word. HEDDA

(Loudly) GEORGE
You burned Eilert's manuscript?

Don't yell. Berta might hear. HEDDA

You really burned it? How could you do such a thing? GEORGE

Well, that's what happened. HEDDA

Do you know what you've done? It's a crime, Hedda. GEORGE

Oh, please, George. HEDDA

Unlawful treatment of lost property. Ask Brack. He's a lawyer. GEORGE

He's a judge. And if it's a crime, why would I tell him? HEDDA

Hedda. GEORGE

Then it's best we keep this to ourselves, George. HEDDA

*HEDDA hands cell phone back to
GEORGE.*

GEORGE

Why did you burn the book? What's the matter with you? Answer me!

HEDDA

It was for your sake, George.

GEORGE

My sake?

HEDDA

You came home this morning drooling about what he read to you.

GEORGE

Yes, yes, well?

HEDDA

You were envious of his book. And that he was getting the university appointment. You distinctly said, "I could just kill him."

GEORGE

Oh, my goodness, I didn't mean it literally.

HEDDA

All the same. I couldn't bear the thought that anyone should take your place.

GEORGE

(Hopefully)

Hedda, is this true? Well... well, I never realized until now just how much you love me. Imagine that!

HEDDA

You should believe that, since, after all, we'll soon be... uh... *(Wincing)* ...raising a child together.

GEORGE

(Laughing in excess of joy)

I had hoped so!! And Aunt Julie thought you might be. I can't wait to tell her the news. *(Loudly)* She'll be so happy. So happy!

HEDDA

Must you be so loud!

GEORGE

Sorry.

GEORGE takes out cell phone, HEDDA takes it from him.

HEDDA

You don't plan to tell her about the manuscript, do you?

GEORGE

Oh, the book – I forgot about that. You're right. We'll never mention it again... Poor Eilert, how I feel for him.

BERTA enters.

BERTA

Mrs. Elsted is here to see you.

THEA, comes charging through the hall-door. BERTA exits.

THEA

Hedda, please don't be angry with me for coming back.

HEDDA

What's the matter, Thea?

GEORGE

What's happened?

THEA

It's Eilert.

HEDDA

(Grabs Thea's arm)
Calm down, please.

THEA

Something awful—

GEORGE

How do you know?

THEA

When I went to his apartment—police were there. I couldn't get in. And they wouldn't tell me anything.

GEORGE

Maybe he was robbed... or something?

THEA

As I was leaving, I overheard them say something about the hospital –

GEORGE

Hospital?

HEDDA

No, that's not possible.

THEA

Something terrible must have happened to him.

BRACK comes in through the hall-door, which BERTA opens and closes behind him. He looks grave.

GEORGE

Judge?

BRACK

I hate to intrude, but this is serious.

GEORGE

What's wrong?

THEA

Something terrible, isn't it? What happened to Eilert!

BRACK

I'm afraid so, dear. He's at University Hospital. He's dying.

THEA

Oh God! God!

GEORGE

Dying?

HEDDA

(Involuntarily)

So quickly, too.

THEA

(Paying no attention to her)

I must see him right away!

BRACK

He's in critical condition. No visitors allowed.

THEA

What happened, Judge? Tell me! What happened?

EVERYONE waits, pregnant pause.

HEDDA

I bet he tried to kill himself.

GEORGE

Hedda! What a terrible thing to say.

BRACK

(Keeps his eyes fixed upon her)

Hedda is right.

THEA

(Anguished)

Ooh—no-o-o!

GEORGE

Killing himself – can you imagine?

HEDDA

Let me guess... He shot himself.

BRACK

Right again, Hedda.

THEA

(Tries to calm down)

When did it happen?

BRACK

This afternoon... between three and four.

GEORGE

Where was he?

BRACK

(Hesitates)

I don't know. Just that he shot himself in the chest.

THEA

It's too horrible to think of. Why would he do such a thing?

HEDDA

In the chest?

That's what I said. BRACK

(*Incredulous*)
Not through the temple? HEDDA

HEDDA holds her index finger to her own temple, gesturing pulling the trigger of an imaginary gun.

Through the chest, Hedda. BRACK

The chest could be a good place. HEDDA

What's that, Hedda? BRACK

Oh. Nothing. HEDDA

And he's dying from his wound? GEORGE

Probably dead by now. BRACK

He has... I feel that. It's all over! Oh, Hedda. THEA

How did you find out? GEORGE

Contact at the police department. My name came up when they ran his name through the system. BRACK

You posted his bail. HEDDA

Poor Eilert. GEORGE

An act of heroism. HEDDA

GEORGE

(Terrified)

Hedda, what are you saying?

HEDDA

There is something beautiful in this whole affair.

BRACK

What's the matter with you?

GEORGE

Beautiful? No! Ugly. Very ugly.

THEA

Hedda, how can you call what he's done beautiful?

HEDDA

"Swiftly, surely, honorably."

GEORGE, BRACK, and THEA look at her as if she were insane.

THEA

No, no, I don't believe that. It was the liquor.

GEORGE

He despaired. He had destroyed his magnum opus.

HEDDA

I'm certain that wasn't the reason.

THEA

He got drunk... and that's when he tore up the only copy of his manuscript. When he sobered up he must have realized what he had done.

GEORGE

You think he'd believe—

HEDDA

—turning a gun on himself—

GEORGE

—he couldn't ever rewrite the book?

BRACK

(Starting)

He tore up the manuscript?!

THEA

Yes, last night.

GEORGE

(Whispers softly)

Oh, Hedda, how will we ever get over this?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes