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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
by Robert Thomas Noll & Pamela V. Noll

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 horsey 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.

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.

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.
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?

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

**HEDDA**
How nice of you to be interested—

**(laughs, to **HEDDA**)**
You were sleeping like a log when I got up.

**(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.
I missed them terribly. Old friends, really.

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

(Angry) That idiot maid. George.

You mean Berta?

She's not working out, George.

What do you mean, dear?

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

_GEOGE drops the slippers on the floor._

(Horrified)

Hedda!

Imagine if anyone came in and saw this?

Hedda—it's Aunt Julia's.

Oh...?

Yes, it's mine.

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

I'm so glad you came this morning.

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

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...
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 stayin'?

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.

Hedda.

THEA

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.

(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.

Confidentially?

THEA

Yes?

HEDDA

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

What are you saying?

THEA rises and crosses the room.

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.

I see...

THEA

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

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

HEDDA

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.

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.
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.

Sounds delightful.

BRACK

HEDDA

See you later, David.

BRACK

Good-bye, Hedda.

HEDDA busses 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.
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: onstage 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.

Oh, put that down. It might go off.

BRACK

Then get in here, right now!

HEDDA

Are you crazy?

BRACK

I'd just love to pull the trigger.

HEDDA

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.

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' be here so soon.

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

(Coyly)
Why?
I could have helped with the zippers.

My bedroom door was locked.

You could have given me a key.

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

I thought that was your type.

So?

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

So I married a good boy.

_HEDDA and BRACK_ stare at each other.

I missed you, Hedda.

That's nice, David.

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

(Pause)

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

Really? Even on your honeymoon?

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

George said you had a great time.
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!

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.

You're still lovely, my dear.

HEDDA

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

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?

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.

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.

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.

Save yourself the trouble.

EILERT

GEORGE

What do you mean?

EILERT

There isn't much to it really.
What I've read so far is—

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

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

It serves its purpose. I sold out.

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

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

You make philosophers sound like heroes—

Or martyrs.

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.

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

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.

George Tesman. I cannot believe what you just said.

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

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.

(To EILERT)
Sounds very clever, Professor.

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.

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.
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.

Oh!

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

Then, I have no choice now, do I?

EILERT
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.

Not even when we're alone?

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

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

(Erases at him and smiles)
There's that word again – How nauseating.

So, you don't love him then?

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

Hedda, answer me this one question.

EILERT
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?
I don't think anyone knew.

Your father knew.

He never knew.

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

We were discreet.

The coward almost destroyed you when the he killed himself.

It wasn't cowardly.

Left you to clean up his mess.

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.

Honorable?

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

But honorable?

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

Hedda, you really do live in your own world.

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.

Still.

I missed on purpose.

HEDDA
You might have killed me.

EILERT
I know.

HEDDA
Your Old Man never approved of me.

EILERT
Watch it, Eilert.

HEDDA
Sorry – your father.

EILERT
(Pause)
You still don't realize we're over.

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

EILERT
I really do?

HEDDA
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.

What?

EILERT

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.

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?
HEDDA
If only "what"?

THEA
If only I had such gumption.

EILERT
Then what?

HEDDA
(Under her breath)
Who says "gumption" today? (Turns suddenly) But now, Thea, you must have a glass of wine.

THEA
No, thank you.

HEDDA
How about you, Mr. Lovberg?

EILERT
No, ah...

THEA
He doesn't drink either!

HEDDA
(Looks firmly at EILERT, but speaks to THEA)
Does he always do what you say?

EILERT
I won't change my mind.

HEDDA
(Laughs)
So I have no power over you at all?

EILERT
Not there.

HEDDA
It's hard to believe one small glass of wine would hurt you.

THEA
Hedda!

HEDDA.
It gives one the impression you lack... self-control.
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.
Don't, Eilert. Please.

Changed your mind, then?

If the invitation still stands?

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

See, Thea, nothing to worry about.

*EILERT rewraps the manuscript and stuffs it under his arm.*

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.

I'm looking forward to it.

*(To EILERT)*

Oh. Do you have to go?

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

I really wish you would –

Eilert is a big boy. He knows his limits.

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

One?

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.

Let's get a move on.

BRACK
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?
His AA sobriety chip.

No wreath in his hair?

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

They say that? What does that mean?

There is truth in wine.

Oh really? What truth did Eilert have to offer?

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

Who is she?

Who else could it be?

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

Thea Elvsted, of course.

Of course.

No surprise, is there?

Where did you leave him?

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.

(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?

Someone has.

BRACK

You?

HEDDA

Sit, Hedda.

BRACK

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

At Eilert?

He accused her of robbing him.

Of what?

Stealing his manuscript.

And then?

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.

The police?

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

Was he arrested?

They took him to jail to sleep it off.

So that's it?

That's it.

Not a laurel wreath on his head?

HEDDA and BRACK lock eyes.

No laurel wreath... No nothing.
Then he's still in jail?

HEDDA

BRACK

Oh, no, I posted bond.

HEDDA

You?

BRACK

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

HEDDA

Why did you post bond?

BRACK

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

HEDDA

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

BRACK

Why, Hedda. Don't you believe me?

HEDDA

Not at all.

BRACK

I wonder why you don't.

HEDDA

I asked what you're really after?

BRACK

The truth.

HEDDA

Truth?

BRACK

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

HEDDA

And where might that be?

BRACK

Right here. To you and George.
Really?

And, I don't like competition.

A threat to your "triple alliance?"

Do the math.

Pretty clever, David.

(Smiling)

I think so.

I thought I was free of your coercion.

(Laughs ambiguously)

Don't you believe I have something on you?

Sounds like a threat.

Relationship's work best when they're voluntary.

Sure... Of course.

Good. You get my meaning.

BRACK starts to leave.

David.

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
(Involuntarily)
I knew it!

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

(Involuntarily)

HEDDA

But that's not –

EILERT

You don't believe me?

HEDDA

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

Believe me, it's true.

EILERT

THEA

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

EILERT

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

THEA

That's what you did last night?

EILERT

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.

THEA

Like a murder!

EILERT

As if I killed my own child.

THEA

Our child.

HEDDA

(To herself)

Ah, "the child" –
I can't take this. My life is over.

THEA moves to leave.

What are you going to do?

THEA

I don't know.

THEA exits through the hall door.

(To EILERT)

Aren't you going to follow her?

EILERT

After what I've done?

(Stoothing)

HEDDA

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.

What did you do?

Thea said I had killed our baby.

She did.

But I did something worse.

What could be worse than that?

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.

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

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

Oh.

So you see there is no future for us together.

What now?

I just want to end it all.

(Hypnotically)

Eilert – now listen to me. If you do... let it be beautiful.
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 armchair 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?

I don't have it.

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

I burned it.

What? No.

Every page. Every word.

(Loudly)
You burned Eilert's manuscript?

Don't yell. Berta might hear.

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

Well, that's what happened.

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

Oh, please, George.

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

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

Hedda.

Then it's best we keep this to ourselves, George.
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 overhead 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-o!

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.

(Hedda)

Not through the temple?

Through the chest, Hedda.

The chest could be a good place.

What's that, Hedda?

Oh. Nothing.

And he's dying from his wound?

Probably dead by now.

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

How did you find out?

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

You posted his bail.

Poor Eilert.

An act of heroism.
(Terrified)

GEORGE
Hedda, what are you saying?

HEDDA
There is something beautiful in this whole affair.

BRACK
What's the matter with you?

GEORGE

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