

HOVSTAD: Which shall be paid in full. But a journalist with such democratic principles as I hold can't let such an opportunity as this slip through his fingers. The fiction of a government's or an authority's infallibility must be exposed as any other superstition.

STOCKMANN: Mr. Hovstad, I couldn't agree more with you. If it's a superstition, away with it.

HOVSTAD: I would regret to have to deal harshly with the mayor...after all he is your brother...but I also know that you stand with me in holding that truth is beyond compromise.

STOCKMANN: Of course... but...but

HOVSTAD: Don't think badly of me...I'm neither more vain nor more ambitious than other men.

STOCKMANN: But who's even suggesting you're vain or ambitious?

HOVSTAD: I came from a poor background as you know. I've had a lot of experience with people of modest means. I know what's needed by them and what they need is a share in the power of directing public affairs. That's what's needed to develop their knowledge, their abilities and their self-respect.

STOCKMANN: I understand that perfectly.

HOVSTAD: And I think that a journalist bears an immense responsibility when he ignores an opportunity of siding with the public, the oppressed, and the poor. I know well enough that the wealthy will call this "outside agitation" and the like, but they can say anything they wish as long as my conscience is clear, I...

STOCKMANN: True! True, Mr. Hovstad. All the same... *(there's a knock at the hall door)* damn it... Come in!

*(Aslaksen, the printer, enters from the hall. He is humbly but neatly dressed in black, wearing a white, slightly crumpled neckerchief and carrying gloves and a felt hat.)*

ASLAKSEN: *(bowing)* Excuse me, Doctor, for intruding like this...

STOCKMANN: *(rising)* Well, here's Mr. Aslaksen!

ASLAKSEN: Yes, Doctor.

HOVSTAD: *(getting up)* Do you want me, Aslaksen?

ASLAKSEN: No. I didn't think I'd meet you here...I'm here for the doctor...

STOCKMANN: What can I do for you?

ASLAKSEN: Is what I've heard from Mr. Billing true...that the doctor is thinking of trying to improve the water?

STOCKMANN: Yes.

ASLAKSEN: If that's true, then, I came to say that I'll back you with everything I have.

HOVSTAD: *(to the Doctor)* There you are, you see!

STOCKMANN: My thanks but...

ASLAKSEN: It won't do you any harm to have the middle class behind you. We form a compact majority in this town...that is, when we make up our minds. And it's always wise to have the majority with you.

STOCKMANN: Yes, that's true but I don't think any special preparation is necessary. I think that the problem is so clear and so serious...

ASLAKSEN: Yes, but all the same, it can't do any harm...I know these local authorities, all too well. They are not inclined to listen to people who have no power. So I think a demonstration is called for.

HOVSTAD: I think so too.

STOCKMANN: Demonstration, you say? But what in God's name do you want to demonstrate about?

ASLAKSEN: A moderate demonstration, Doctor, a moderate demonstration. I am always in favor of moderation; moderation is a citizen's first virtue...at least that's what I think.

STOCKMANN: We all know that about you, Aslaksen.

ASLAKSEN: Yes, I think that's true. And this problem with the water is so very important to the members of the middle class. Those waters may become a kind of gold mine for the town. And it is through those waters that many of us are going to make a living, especially we who own property. And so we shall gladly support you all we can. So, as I am chairman of the Property Owners Association...

STOCKMANN: Yes?

ASLAKSEN: And I also am the agent for the Temperance Society...of course, you know, Doctor, that I always work on behalf of temperance?

STOCKMANN: Yes, to be sure.

ASLAKSEN: Naturally I meet a great many people. And as I am known to be a temperate, law-abiding citizen, as the doctor himself well knows, I have a certain amount of influence in the town, a position, you might say, of some authority...if I may say so myself.

STOCKMANN: I know that very well, Mr. Aslaksen.

ASLAKSEN: If push came to shove, I could easily write a speech.

STOCKMANN: A speech?

ASLAKSEN: Yes, a speech of thanks to you, from the citizens of the town for bringing to light a problem of such magnitude to the attention of the whole town. Of course, I'll make it a temperate speech, a moderate speech, so that the authorities will not take it in the wrong way. If it is composed in a restrained tone, no one will take offense I imagine.

HOVSTAD: Well, even if they did...

ASLAKSEN: No, no, no; nothing to offend anyone in authority...nothing that might antagonize anyone with power or wealth here in town. I've never gone in for that type of thing in my life; no good can come out of that. But no one can object to the thoughtful, free expression of a citizen's opinion.

STOCKMANN: (*shaking his head*) Mr. Aslaksen, I can't tell you how wonderful it is for me to find such support among the townspeople. I am so happy over it! Look here! Won't you take a drop of sherry? Please?

ASLAKSEN: No, thank you, I don't take any alcoholic beverage of that type.

STOCKMANN: Well, then, a glass of beer...what about that?

ASLAKSEN: Thank you but I never take anything so early in the day. Now I'm off to town to talk with the property owners and harness public opinion.

STOCKMANN: That's extremely kind of you, Mr. Aslaksen but I can't really believe that all these preparations are necessary. I'm convinced the matter shall resolve itself.

ASLAKSEN: Public officials are always slow to act but, God forbid I should accuse anyone!

HOVSTAD: Tomorrow we'll stir them up in the paper.

ASLAKSEN: But no violence, Mr. Hovstad. Proceed with restraint or you'll make no impression on them. Take my advice...I've been in the school of life. And now I'll say good morning to the doctor. But you know that we, the members of the middle class, stand behind you like a rock. You have our compact majority's support.

STOCKMANN: Mr. Aslaksen, my thanks (*holds out his hand*). Goodbye.

ASLAKSEN: Mr. Hovstad, are you coming to the printing office?

HOVSTAD. I'll come along presently, first, I've something to see to.

ASLAKSEN: Fine.

(*Bows and goes. Stockmann accompanies him into the hall.*)

HOVSTAD: (*as the Doctor reenters*) Well what do you think, Doctor? Don't you think its high time we weed out all this apathy, this restraint, and this cowardice

STOCKMANN: Are you speaking of Mr. Aslaksen?

HOVSTAD: Exactly. He is one of those individuals in the swamp I mentioned before; though he's a good enough fellow in other ways; in fact, so are most of the people around here; but these people are always seesawing, sliding from one side to the other; they are so cautious and reticent, they never have the courage to commit themselves to anything...even to one step forward.

STOCKMANN: But Mr. Aslaksen seems so well-intentioned.

HOVSTAD: There is something that I value more highly than intentions and that is to stand your ground as a dependable, self-reliant human being...an independent rational animal.

