

Petra & Hovstad

HOVSTAD: What! Is it you? Here?

PETRA: Please excuse me—

HOVSTAD: (*offering her an arm chair*) Won't you sit down?

PETRA: No, thank you; I can only stay a minute.

HOVSTAD: I suppose it's something from your father—

PETRA: No. I've come on my own account. (*taking a book from the pocket of her cloak*) Here's that English story.

HOVSTAD: Why have you brought it back?

PETRA: Because I'm not going to translate it.

HOVSTAD: But you promised—

PETRA: Yes; but I hadn't read it. And you must not have read it either.

HOVSTAD: Of course not; you know I can't read that language.

PETRA: Yes, and that's why I want you to find something else. (*putting the book on the table*) This book can't be printed in the Messenger.

HOVSTAD: Why not?

PETRA: Because it directly contradicts your own opinions and positions.

HOVSTAD: Well, what does that matter?

PETRA: You don't understand. The story is all about a divine power that looks after the so-called good people on earth, and in the end turns all things to the advantage of the good, and all the bad people are punished and in the end evil fails. The universe is ethical in this book.

HOVSTAD: That's wonderful. It's the very universe the public loves.

PETRA: And you would offer such stuff to the public? You yourself don't believe it. You know life and the world don't work according to that plan.

HOVSTAD: You're right but an editor is not always free to do what he wishes. In small matters, one has to compromise with the opinions of the public. After all, politics is the most important thing in life—at any rate, it is for a newspaper; and if you want to lead the public along the path of freedom and progress, I must be careful not to drive them away. If they find a sweet moral story in the back pages of the paper, they'd be much more willing to accept what appears on the front pages—they'd feel secure and untroubled.

PETRA: That's disgusting! You would be a hypocrite and weave such a web to ensnare the public like some sort of spider.

HOVSTAD: (*smiling*) Thank you for expressing such a fine opinion of me. Actually, it's Billing's idea, not mine.

PETRA: Billing's!

HOVSTAD: Yes. At least he said so the other day. Billing was the one who was so anxious to get the story into print; I know nothing about the book.

PETRA: But how could Billing with his progressive views—

HOVSTAD: Well, Billing is a complex individual. He's running for the post of secretary of the magistracy.

PETRA: Mr. Hovstad, I can't believe that. How could he stoop to do such a thing?

HOVSTAD: Well, why don't you ask him?

PETRA: I would never have thought that of Billing.

HOVSTAD: (*looking fixedly at her*) No? Does this come as some sort of revelation to you?

PETRA: Yes...but perhaps not...oh, I don't know.

HOVSTAD: We journalists aren't worth much, Miss Stockmann.

PETRA: Do you honestly believe that?

HOVSTAD: Often, I do.

PETRA: Perhaps in trivial matters—I can understand that. But now you have taken up a serious cause—

HOVSTAD: Do you mean your father's?

PETRA: Yes, and I should think you must feel you have no ordinary position or vocation.

HOVSTAD: Today, I do feel a bit like that.

PETRA: I'm sure you must! What a wonderful vocation you've chosen—creating a clear way for feared truths and new ideas—to stand without flinching by the side of a man who has suffered injustice...a great wrong.

HOVSTAD: Particularly when this suffering man is—h'm—I hardly know how to put it.

PETRA: You mean when such a man is so true and honest?

HOVSTAD: (*in a low voice*) I mean when he happens to be your father—

PETRA: (*as if she had received a blow*) What!

HOVSTAD: Yes, Petra—Miss Petra.

PETRA: Is that what you first think of—not the cause itself? Not what's true? Not my father's concern for the public?

HOVSTAD: Of course, all that as well.

PETRA: No, thank you; you've just shown me what you are, Mr. Hovstad. I'll never trust you again.

HOVSTAD: Why do you take it like that when I did it for your sake?

PETRA: I'm angry with you because you have not treated my father fairly and honestly. You assured him you were solely interested in the truth and the welfare of the public. You have deceived both my father and me. You are not the person you show to the outside. I shall never forgive you—never.

HOVSTAD: I shouldn't say this to me just now—Miss Petra—not now.

PETRA: And why not?

HOVSTAD: Because your father can't do without my help.

PETRA: *(looking scornfully at him)* So that's how it is! God!

HOVSTAD: No, no, I spoke out of turn. You mustn't believe that of me.

PETRA: I know what to believe and what not to believe. Good day.

(Aslaksen enters from the printing room, hurriedly and with an air of secrecy.)

ASLAKSEN: Ah, Mr. Hovstad... *(sees Petra)* Oh, excuse me...

PETRA: There's the book—give it to someone else *(going towards left door)*.

HOVSTAD: *(following her)* But, Miss Stockmann—

PETRA: Goodbye. *(She exits.)*

ASLAKSEN: Mr. Hovstad!

HOVSTAD: What is it?

ASLAKSEN" The mayor is out in the printing office.

HOVSTAD: The mayor?

ASLAKSEN: Yes, and he wants to speak to you; he came in by the back door—he didn't want to be seen.

HOVSTAD: What does he want? No, wait here, I'll go myself—

(He goes towards the printing room, opens the door, and bows as the mayor enters.)

HOVSTAD: Take care, Aslaksen, that—

ASLAKSEN: I understand *(exits into the printing room)*.

MAYOR: I don't suppose you were expecting me, Mr. Hovstad?

HOVSTAD: No, I wasn't.

MAYOR: *(looking around him)* You've arranged everything comfortably here—it's quite pleasant!

HOVSTAD: Oh!

MAYOR: I've come here to take up your time—without any notice beforehand.

