

Ibsen Revisited

BY FLOYD DELL
A PIECE OF FOOLISHNESS

TO LOUIS UNTERMEYER

"Ibsen Revisited" was first produced at the Liberal Club, in 1914, with the following cast:

The Maid Jo Gotsch
The Stranger..... Floyd Dell

A middle-class interior. The parlour-maid is dusting the furniture.

THE MAID. Oh, how dull it is here! Nobody to talk to, nobody to flirt with. . . . Flirt! The men that come to this house don't even know the meaning of the word. I never worked in such a place. Life is just one long funeral. I wish something would happen. (*A knock at the door.*) Ah! if it were only in the old days, one might hope that that was a reporter. But nothing like that now!

She opens the door. A stranger enters.

THE STRANGER. Is--ah--Miss Gabler in?

THE MAID. You mean--Mrs. Lovberg?

THE STRANGER. Yes--but . . . I'm not mistaken, am I? Mrs. Lovberg is-- or was--Hedda Gabler. Isn't that true?

THE MAID. Oh, yes, it's Hedda. But she prefers to be called by her husband's name. Did you wish to see her? She is busy just now.

THE STRANGER. Busy?

THE MAID. Yes--she is conducting her class in Modern Adolescence.

THE STRANGER. How like Hedda! Always experimenting with something or other! What is she teaching them?

THE MAID. She's teaching them what she calls "sex-unconsciousness."

THE STRANGER. Dear me! *What* is sex-unconsciousness?

THE MAID. I'm sure *I* don't know, sir.

THE STRANGER. Dear, delightful Hedda! Ever in pursuit of the new sensation!

THE MAID. You are an old friend of hers, I suppose?

THE STRANGER. Well, no, not exactly. The fact is--

THE MAID. You're not a reporter, are you? Hedda doesn't talk to reporters--any more.

THE STRANGER. No. I'm not a reporter.

THE MAID. What are you, then?

THE STRANGER. I am the representative of the International Ibsen Society. You know who Ibsen was, of course?

THE MAID. Yes--he was that nasty man who wrote plays about everybody's private affairs.

THE STRANGER. There *is* that point of view, of course. I'm sorry to intrude--

THE MAID. I should think you would be! Now that she and Lovberg are happily married--

THE STRANGER. That's precisely it. You see, we've just discovered that instead of committing suicide, as Ibsen made them do in the play, they eloped and were eventually married. You can't imagine how

delighted we all are to discover that Hedda is still alive. As soon as we found that out, I was sent here immediately--

THE MAID. What did you think you would see?

THE STRANGER. See? I shall see a woman whose soul burns with an unquenchable flame of divine adventurousness. I shall see the most ardent, impatient, eager, restless, impetuous, and insatiably romantic woman in the world.

THE MAID. (*pointing to the door*) You mean--her?

THE STRANGER. Yes--why, there is the very sofa upon which she and Lovberg used to sit, in the old days, discussing his past. There he would sit and tell her of his escapades, his affairs, everything. Tell me, does she insist on Lovberg's being polygamous, whether he wants to or not?

THE MAID. Evidently you don't know the new Hedda. Or the new Lovberg either. The only thing they talk about is what they call "the monogamist ideal."

THE STRANGER. There is some mistake. I will find out when I see her. Surely she is still interested in adventure--the free life--vine-leaves--beauty--! I will remind her of her own past--

THE MAID. No you won't. She won't let you. She will tell you that too much attention is paid to such foolishness nowadays.

THE STRANGER. She! who was interested in nothing else! But then--what is she interested in, now?

THE MAID. In "co-operation."

THE STRANGER, Has she then turned into a mere sociologist? Oh, you are deceiving me!

THE MAID. If you don't believe me--I'll just open the door an inch, and you can hear her talking.

THE STRANGER. Oh, it cannot be true!

The maid quietly opens the door a little way. He listens.

A VOICE. (*heard through the aperture*) We must all learn to function socially. . . .

The maid shuts the door again.

THE MAID. Do you believe it now?

THE STRANGER. (*sadly*) It is too true!

THE MAID. Didn't I tell you?

THE STRANGER. So Hedda has become--a reformer!

THE MAID. Yes.

THE STRANGER. And Lovberg--what does he do?

THE MAID. He is rewriting his book--you know, the one Hedda burned up-- for use as a text-book in the public schools. And Hedda is helping him.

THE STRANGER. No more adventure--no more beauty--the flame . . .
. gone out! My God!

He staggers toward the wall, where a pistol is hanging, and puts his hand on it.

THE MAID. Look out! That's Hedda's pistol. You never can tell when an old piece of junk like that is loaded.

THE STRANGER. Yes--I know. (*He takes it down and aims it at his heart.*) The old Hedda is gone. I cannot bear the new. It would be too--(*The maid screams*)--too dull.

He fires, and falls.

THE MAID. (*going over and looking down at him*) But--people don't do such things!