

Brian Friel

**HEDDA
GABLER**

after Ibsen



Gallery Books

Hedda Gabler

was first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on the day of its première
30 September 2008.

The Gallery Press

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Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

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Characters

HEDDA GABLER (29), daughter of General Gabler and George
Tesman's wife
GEORGE TESMAN (33), research graduate in cultural history
JULIANA TESMAN (65), George's aunt
BERTHA (60), Juliana's maid
EILERT LOEBORG (33), writer and sociologist
THEA ELVSTED (26), wife of a resident magistrate
JUDGE BRACK (45)

Place

The Tesman house in a fashionable part of the city.

Time

The year 1890.

Act One — early morning in September.

Act Two — that afternoon.

Act Three — dawn, the following day.

Act Four — that evening.

Set

A large drawing room decorated in dark colours and carefully furnished — a round table, chairs, an armchair, a footstool, a porcelain stove, an upright piano.

In the left hand wall (left and right from the point of view of the audience) a door leads to the hall. In the right hand wall a French window with the curtains pulled back. Through this window we see part of a verandah and autumn trees.

In the back wall of the drawing room a wide doorway with its curtains pulled back. Through it we see a smaller room with decor and furnishings similar to the drawing room — round table, sofa, chairs, terracotta ornaments. Clearly visible on a wall in this smaller room is a large portrait of an elderly General Gabler, Hedda's father, resplendent and formidable in full military uniform.

There are several bunches of fresh flowers on the drawing-room table, on top of the piano and in vases around both rooms.

Hedda Gabler was first performed in the Gate Theatre, Dublin, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, on Tuesday, 30 September 2008, with the following cast:

HEDDA GABLER	Justine Mitchell
GEORGE TESMAN	Peter Hanly
JULIANA TESMAN	Susan FitzGerald
BERTHA	Billie Traynor
EILERT LOEVborg	John Light
THEA ELVSTED	Andrea Irvine
JUDGE BRACK	Andrew Woodall

Director

Anna Mackmin

Designer

Lez Brotherston

Lighting designer

Oliver Fenwick

Music

Denis Clohessy

ACT ONE

for Cassandra Fusco

JULIANA TESMAN *comes in from the hall. She is a pleasant, kindly spinster in her mid-sixties. In outdoor clothes, wearing a hat, carrying a parasol. She pauses and looks round the silent drawing room.*

JULIANA *(Softly to herself)* I was afraid of that.

BERTHA *(Off)* What's that, Miss?

JULIANA Shhhh!

BERTHA enters. She is a few years younger than JULIANA. She is carrying a bunch of flowers.

BERTHA What did you say, Miss Juliana?

JULIANA Keep your voice down, Bertha. We're too early. They're not up yet.

BERTHA He must be exhausted.

JULIANA They both must be exhausted.

BERTHA Why wouldn't he be? It was all hours before the steamer berthed. And then, when she got up here, nothing would do her but she'd unpack everything *before* she went to bed.

JULIANA She's a very efficient young woman.

BERTHA Why does she call me Berna then?

JULIANA She just misheard your name.

BERTHA Huh! She must have had a dozen trunks of stuff.

JULIANA Four, Bertha; just four.

BERTHA And nine boxes — I counted them.

JULIANA *(Ironically)* Good for you.

JULIANA throws open the French windows.

Well, let them have a good lie in. And put those flowers down somewhere.

BERTHA Where?
JULIANA There — anywhere. And when they do come down they can fill their lungs with good Norwegian air.
BERTHA Where will I put — ?
JULIANA Give them to me.

JULIANA takes the flowers brusquely out of BERTHA'S hand and puts them on top of the piano.

BERTHA I'm never going to get the hang of this house, Miss Juliana.
JULIANA Don't be silly.
BERTHA (*Close to tears*) It's not going to work out. I know it's not. And I'm afraid —

JULIANA puts her arms around her.

JULIANA We'll have none of that, Bertha. You're going to be very happy here. Do you think I would have parted with you to anybody but Miss Hedda? And you'll have George, won't you? — our darling Georgie that you have taken care of since he was a baby. But what am I going to do without *you*?
BERTHA You're the only family I've ever known, you and Master George and lovely Miss Rena.
JULIANA Very little will change. You'll just carry on looking after George in this house as you've always done all your life — and Mrs George, too, of course. And I'll drop in as often as I can.
BERTHA But that new maid you've got, she won't be able to look after Miss Rena. A big, rough lump like that, she wouldn't know how to handle an invalid.
JULIANA She'll learn, Berna.
BERTHA (*Cautioning*) Miss!
JULIANA Sorry. And I'll be there. We'll manage.
BERTHA And Miss Hedda — Mrs George — I just know she doesn't like me.
JULIANA (*Wearily*) 'Doesn't like — ' What nonsense is that!

She scarcely knows you yet.

BERTHA She's a cold woman.
JULIANA And when you get to know each other you'll grow to love her — and not only because she's George's wife.
BERTHA And a very bossy woman.
JULIANA She's a determined young woman, yes. Isn't she the daughter of General Gabler? And brought up with a household of orderlies to boss around? Remember, we used to see her out riding with her father on an enormous black horse; in this elegant black riding dress?
BERTHA And a feather in her hat, kind of defiant. Who would have thought that herself and our Georgie would ever have made a — ?
JULIANA Not simply 'our Georgie' any more, Bertha. They made him a doctor when he was away in Germany. Our Georgie is now Doctor George Tesman.
BERTHA I know.
JULIANA And he is *so* thrilled by it: blurted it out last night before we were at the foot of the gangway. (*Realizing*) How did you know?
BERTHA It was her first instruction when she stepped into this house. 'From now on you'll address Mr Tesman as Doctor Tesman.'
JULIANA Imagine if poor Joachim had lived to see his precious little boy grow into such an accomplished man. And there may be an even more important title coming his way soon.
BERTHA Bigger than Doctor?
JULIANA Bigger than Doctor.
BERTHA What would be bigger than Doctor?
JULIANA Guess.
BERTHA They're going to make a vet out of him!
JULIANA He's not that kind of doctor, Bertha. He's an academic doctor. But when the other title comes along, as he would say himself, 'My goodness. Oh my goodness.' Anyhow . . . Why did you take the loose

covers off the chairs?

BERTHA She told me to — Miss Hedda. They remind her of shrouds, she said.

JULIANA So they must be going to make this their living room then.

GEORGE TESMAN *enters from the back room. He is thirty-three, genial, open, very enthusiastic. JUDGE BRACK describes him as 'decent, credulous, trusting' — in other words he can be simultaneously admirable and infuriating. He is carrying an empty suitcase.*

Good morning, George.

GEORGE Auntie Juju! (*He embraces her excitedly*) Well, isn't this a wonderful surprise first thing in the morning!

JULIANA I'm afraid it is a bit early to —

GEORGE Early? Not a bit! The earlier the better! And Bertha! (*He embraces her with equal enthusiasm*) How are you, Bertha?

JULIANA She hasn't slept for three nights waiting for you to come home.

BERTHA It was the toothache really.

GEORGE My very own Bertha! Look at the two of you! My goodness. Oh my goodness. I'm so glad to see you both. What a great joy to come down to this! And thank you for meeting us off the tender last night. That wasn't at all necessary.

JULIANA I just dropped by to see that you're settled in.

GEORGE As if we had lived here all our lives. We were so sorry we couldn't squeeze you into the carriage last night, Auntie Juju. But there was scarcely room for me with all darling Hedda's luggage.

BERTHA A dozen trunks and nine boxes.

GEORGE At least, Bertha! How did you get home?

JULIANA Judge Brack saw me right up to my door.

GEORGE Good for him. Well, what an unqualified joy to come down to this! As if I'd never left home! All we need now is lovely Auntie Rena and we'd be a complete family again. How is she?

JULIANA I'm afraid my darling sister is slipping away slowly and very quietly.

GEORGE Oh, Auntie Juju.

JULIANA It's not easy to watch.

GEORGE Must be awful.

JULIANA I really think Bertha keeps her alive.

BERTHA I wish I could.

GEORGE I'm sure that's true.

JULIANA You'll see a big change.

GEORGE I'll go over today.

JULIANA But if she weren't there — and now with you gone — my life would be hollow — wouldn't it?

GEORGE I'm not gone, Auntie Juju! I'm very much here! (*She kisses his cheek*) And I'll always be here!

BERTHA Is there anything I can do for Miss Hedda?

GEORGE Not a thing, Bertha, thank you. We'll let her sleep a little longer. You can do something for me, though: put this (*case*) in the attic, would you?

BERTHA Certainly, 'Doctor'.

GEORGE 'Doctor'! Is Miss Bertha being saucy with me?

BERTHA (*Coyly, as she exits*) And maybe a vet soon!

GEORGE (*Puzzled*) Vet?

JULIANA We are all so very proud of you, Georgie.

GEORGE And isn't it a shocking thing to admit — no, not shocking, embarrassing, no, not embarrassing, pathetic, really pathetic — I'm very proud of myself! You saw that case? Packed with the material for my new book. You wouldn't believe what I unearthed all over Europe — in archives, museums, private libraries — stuff people had completely forgotten was there. Absolutely incredible material!

JULIANA So your honeymoon wasn't all gadding about and pleasure then?

GEORGE Certainly not! And I want another hug! (*He hugs her*) Sit down beside me before Hedda appears and tell me all the gossip I've missed in the past six months. Here, take your hat off. No, that was always my job, wasn't it?